

Using Group Improvisation and Imaginative
Listening to Nurture Creative Autonomy
in A-Level Music Students:
Teaching Composition for Examination
Purposes in England



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As I type, my cat, Koshka, keeps me company, as she has done for the majority of this PhD. She cares not one bit about the following 400 pages, but she constantly makes me smile and reminds me, when I am exercised by the complexities of human behaviour and interpretative data analysis, of an alternative and much simpler attitude to existence.

Abstract

This thesis examines the effects of group improvisation and imaginative listening on teaching and learning in the composing component of A-level Music in one school in England. Problems with teaching composition in schools have long been acknowledged, with the same issues raised across studies spanning several years: how to teach it, and how to interpret assessment criteria. In that context, this action research project developed in response to a perceived association between students' behaviours in composition and listening, with cautious, teacher-reliant composers also struggling to listen constructively to music that presented new aesthetic challenges.

As studies with A-level Music students are rare and there is no research connecting listening, improvising, and composing in this context, a wide range of literature, educational and otherwise, was consulted. This scholarship underpins two central studies in this project, undertaken in the academic year 2020-21. The first study aimed to enable students to participate in group improvisation, addressing preconceptions about genre, skills, and expectations. Thematic analysis of data revealed a correlation between reduced self-consciousness and improved expression of observations and interaction when improvising, the latter supporting a view that positive self-constructs and creativity are linked. The second study used group improvisation alongside imaginative listening tasks as part of a developing composition curriculum. Characterful playing in improvisation, curiosity in listening, and a healthy dimension of perfectionism in composition were found to be connected by the attribute of risk-taking. Significant links emerged between behaviours in improvising, composing, and listening, indicating possible ways of indirectly nurturing creative autonomy and positive creative self-concept.

This research informs a potential A-level composition curriculum that interweaves group improvising, listening, and composing. Rather than focussing on skills development, product assessment, or devising a model of the compositional process, this thesis recommends ways to nurture “unteachable” inner attributes such as intuition, self-trust, and aesthetic awareness, essential qualities in critical and autonomous composers.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

A-level Music comprises study and assessment of three components: appraising (listening and analysis), composing, and performing. Two of these – appraising and composing – are at the heart of this PhD's inception. This action research project began as an enquiry into the potential of group improvisation to address two problems that I had encountered in my teaching of A-level Music and considered to be connected in some way: a cautious, teacher-reliant creative process in composition, overshadowed by anxiety about favourable judgement and good marks, and a corresponding difficulty in understanding and appreciating some of the modern and contemporary music in the appraisal unit. Several components of musicianship were highlighted by these connected observations, including aural processing, critical listening, articulacy, and creativity. Various studies address these areas with younger pupils, analysing their informal responses to music (e.g., Herbert & Dibben, 2017) or their group composition work (e.g., Fautley et al., 2014). Some research highlighting problems with composition teaching and assessment with slightly older students (Berkley, 2001; Devaney, 2018) led me to consider the role of assessment criteria in my own lessons. Other studies place listening in the context of the composition process (Kennedy, 2002; Preston, 1994) or link articulacy and observation with creativity (Major, 2007), and prompted me to probe further into the connected behaviours that I had observed in composition and appraisal lessons.

While I had not discovered any research dealing with either group improvisation or critical listening in the A-level classroom, I began to use the former in my own lessons, at first as a precursor to studying the modern and contemporary set works in the appraisal unit. I

hoped that it might facilitate students' reception of these pieces if they had been actively involved in playing music without an attempt to control harmonic language or pre-plan the structure. I also observed the benefits of the group improvisations to expressivity and pacing, and considered that this could be useful not only in understanding contemporary music, but also in composition. The research therefore originally intended to investigate the potential of group improvisation to inform both my students' compositional process and their understanding of the more challenging repertoire in their A-level appraisal component. This focus changed in response to factors described below in Section 1.5.

1.2 Musical Background of the Researcher

Although I have never left the education system, my musical background has not always been connected with it. I learned the piano out of school from the age of five, adding various other instruments over the years, and I was involved as an instrumentalist and singer in school and church ensembles until I left for university. I did not plan to pursue Music beyond school and had no A level in Music when I left, intending to study Law. A change of heart can be attributed to two very important new figures in my musical life: a new Head of Music in my last year at school who opened my eyes to the academic aspects of the subject, and a new piano teacher at the same time. Both of these people were inspirational. I withdrew from my university place and did Music A level in one year before going on to a BA Hons in Music, following this with a PGCE in Secondary Music and Creative Arts, both at Cambridge University.

I have been teaching Music in secondary schools for 24 years, and I began to compose for theatre and dance in collaboration with the Theatre Arts department at the school where I was Head of Music for the majority of my 19 years there. This expanded to composing for the school choir and orchestra and then for other organisations, an experience that

positively informed my composition teaching. I completed my MA on the topic of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony some twenty years after the BA, and, likewise, found that my experience as a researcher and analyst had benefits for the precision and clarity of my teaching in the appraisal unit.

Two areas of particular interest remained with me after completing the MA, namely the matters of audience reception and aesthetic judgement, both being relevant in the context of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony, which was received by some with bemusement and by others with hostility. Reception and aesthetic judgement resurfaced in my mind as I saw, alongside some of my A-level students' difficulty in understanding and listening to modern pieces, an inhibiting concern with other people's judgements about their own music. It became clear that my next research project should address those issues in the context of my life's work in music education.

1.3 A-level Music: Context and Problems

In England and Wales, students aged 16-18 have the option to choose subjects to study at Advanced Level (A level). This is the last Key Stage in the education system, which I have summarised in Table 1, meaning that the two academic years in which A-level subjects are studied and examined constitute Key Stage 5 (KS5). Most KS5 students doing A levels choose three or four subjects, Music being one possibility, depending on the school. Currently, A-level Music faces problems, not only as highlighted by recent studies showing a sharp decline in uptake (Daubney et al., 2019; Bath et al., 2020), but also in terms of the accessibility, delivery, and assessment of its content (Whittaker, 2019; Devaney, 2018).

Table 1.1*Key Stages in English and Welsh Schools*

Key Stage	School years	Age-range	Curriculum
KS1	Reception, 1, 2	4-7	National curriculum, following a broad range of mandatory subjects.
KS2	3-6	7-11	
KS3	7-9	11-14	
KS4	10-11	14-16	Mandatory core curriculum with a few additional optional subjects, of which Music is one. GCSE ¹ courses may also be substituted with vocational qualifications.
KS5	12-13	16-18	All students choose a curriculum consisting of either A levels ² or equivalent vocational courses.

The A-level Music curriculum comprises components in appraisal (listening and analysis), performance, and composition, of which teachers perceive appraisal and composition to pose the biggest challenges to students (Whittaker, 2021). In a conference presentation on this topic, Whittaker (2019) cited teachers' reasons for feeling that the listening/appraising unit was the hardest for students, including the "unreal expectations of wider contextual knowledge", "the sheer volume of content", "[knowing] how to write about music beyond a description", and "interpreting/understanding the questions" (Whittaker, 2019). Many were also concerned about the composing unit, for reasons that are familiar from decades of research into the teaching of composition: "fear of getting it wrong"; "not knowing where to start"; "they (and we) don't know what the examiners are looking for, and don't

¹ General Certificate of Secondary Education, usually a 2-year course studied in Years 10-11 (ages 14-16)

² Advanced Level courses are usually studied in Years 12-13 (ages 16-18)

understand the rationale behind the marks awarded”; “they constantly worry about whether their piece meets criteria” (Whittaker, 2019). These reasons are in a different category from the appraisal-related concerns; the latter refer to volume of content, amount of knowledge, and examination technique, whereas the comments about composition paint a picture of apprehension and mistrust.

My own experience of teaching both of these units at A level broadly aligned with what the teachers in Whittaker’s study had reported. I knew other teachers who had been frustrated by the composition grading at A level, and I wanted to encourage my own students to feel less apprehensive about the assessment system and more confident in their own compositions. This seemed to me to be a question of understanding the aesthetic language used in the current assessment criteria, such as “sense of wholeness” (Edexcel A level) or “musical journey” (AQA A level), as well as developing trust in their own aesthetic decisions. When I began to teach the composition unit, the new appraisal unit included some quite challenging modern and contemporary study pieces (set works) which I noticed the teacher-reliant, cautious composers found particularly hard to access. Again, this was a matter of aesthetic understanding, and finding ways to experience the music without relying on harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic cues that they might expect in more familiar styles. As stated above, it was this observation about students’ ability to access, or make sense of, the aesthetically challenging study pieces that led to the engagement of my A-level classes in free group improvisation.

The recognition of the connection between the problems I was encountering as an A-level Music teacher was one part of the context in which this research began; the wider picture of teachers’ reported unease with the appraisal and composition units in A-level Music was another. With my own research eventually focussing on the compositional process, not

only in relation to listening and group improvisation but also in the context of an examination course, a very important part of the background is the wealth of research discussed below, that examines the problematic nature of teaching composition to examination classes in schools.

1.4 Perceived Problems with Teaching Composition

1.4.1 Teaching to the Test

The research by Whittaker (2019, 2021) cited above stands slightly apart from other studies pertaining to examination classes in Music in that it reveals anxieties about the appraisal component, while other studies often centre on composition. Whittaker reports respondents' perceptions of what their *students* found most challenging in the A-level Music course, but many responses revealed challenges to teachers themselves, often couched in terms of time-pressures and assessment expectations. Whereas a broad musical experience is beneficial to students at this level, concerns like these often lead to a focus on assessment to the extent that gaining marks overtakes acquiring knowledge, both propositional and practical. Perhaps because it is more likely to be accepted as normal to teach to the test in the appraisal unit, which is assessed via a listening and written examination, this approach is viewed as especially problematic in composition (Berkley, 2001; Devaney, 2018).

Devaney (2018) explores how the assessment of composition affects teaching and learning, finding that many composition teachers have a product-focussed approach that results in "teaching to the test" (p. 52) and replaces dialogic feedback with direct instruction, thus engendering more teacher-dependence in students. Berkley (2001) likewise notes a tendency for examination classes to spend a large amount of time working towards the

final product. This is presented as a constraint on teaching composition, both in terms of time and in terms of a resulting tendency to base what is taught on the marking criteria.

Berkley warns that the assessment system “exerts control over the way the teacher structures and manages students’ learning” (Berkley, 2004, p. 243). According to Fautley et al. (2014), this bias in favour of the product is also present amongst younger students at Key Stage 3, with one practitioner questioning whether the “final performance” (the product, in this case study) of a group composition “dominated their thinking” at the expense of “the listening and improvisational and compositional development” (p. 11). This suggests that the problematic product-centric view of composition in schools is not confined to examination classes, but is embedded earlier in pupils’ experiences.

1.4.2 Teachers’ Preconceptions

In a survey of teachers’ opinions regarding composition at GCSE (KS4), Berkley (2001) found that many teachers experienced a complex of concerns that were not confined to time-pressures as described above, but included their own lack of confidence to teach effectively, with many feeling that they lacked training or specialist knowledge in the area (Berkley, 2001). Stauffer (2013) agrees that the beliefs about self and composition that teachers bring to the classroom can determine how and what they teach, but acknowledges that this can generate another kind of problem in that a wealth of experience in composition might foster preconceptions about right and wrong and adherence to set models or standards. Kaschub (2013) addresses a lack of experience and confidence in composing through the lens of teacher training, as those who teach the teachers might themselves not identify as composers. She identifies two possible detrimental attitudes to composing that can arise from its absence in a majority of music teachers’ own education or practice: either it is perceived as “too specialised”, or it is not afforded equal importance

to the more prominent factors of their own musical experiences (Kaschub, p. 324). In other words, it suffers from being both over- and underestimated.

Berkley (2001) finds a further common preconception among teachers, in that some considered composition to be inaccessible to some students, who “just can’t compose” (p. 123). This rather dismissive endorsement of the myth that composition is a gift is identified by Viig (2015) as one of several challenges for people educating composers in schools, alongside “insufficient teacher training”, “muddy conceptions of creativity and the notion of ‘composition’” and “vague curriculum descriptions” (p. 235). Berkley (2004) likewise points out that “GCSE specifications list the expected outcomes of students’ work but do not provide a curriculum for the teacher to follow” (p. 242). Kaschub and Smith (2013) raise a similar issue in stating that, despite “hundreds of years of documented compositional practice, no single pedagogy of composition has emerged” (p. 11). This is still true in 2023. Although they embrace this as offering teachers possibilities rather than uncertainties, an alternative viewpoint is that it is unhelpful for those teachers who are inexperienced composers themselves. The absence of either a standard pedagogical approach or a recommended curriculum from exam boards may inevitably lead to an overreliance on assessment criteria to guide composition teaching in schools, or “teaching to the test”, as was discussed above.

1.4.3 Assessment as Problematic

When considering a lack of curriculum guidance in conjunction with the other two factors emerging in the previous section – teachers’ own self-concept as composers or composition teachers, and the question of whether composition is teachable or is simply a gift – it is easy to understand how assessment has become problematic in A-level composition. Many of the above concerns are shared by the British Education Research

Association (BERA) Music Education Review Group. They observe a “tension between the assessment of action and the assessment of learning” and the difficulties posed to teachers, acting as assessors, by their own lack of experience in composition (Welch et al., 2004, p. 263). The impact of so-called ‘backwash’ (teaching to the test) on teaching and learning also arises here. There is a longstanding tension surrounding the nature of composition assessment: Berkley (2001) states that teachers feel confused by the assessment criteria, seeing them as “either too vague to allow for specific application or too specific to apply to all students’ work” (p. 134); Whittaker’s (2019) survey contains several expressions of concern about marking criteria. Similarly, trust in the assessment of composition by examination boards is identified by Devaney (2018) as an underlying problem affecting teaching and learning, citing “significant concerns regarding reliability, subjectivity and bias in the assessment of composing at KS4 [GCSE] and KS5 [A level]” (p. 4).

A comparison of the A-level composition assessment criteria of four examination boards (see Appendix 2) reveals that they all broadly seek the same qualities in compositions, including control of musical or technical elements, development, stylistically appropriate or idiomatic writing, and, in most cases, variety or contrast. Much of this is possible to understand and teach. In my experience in conversing with other teachers and students, problems regarding assessment criteria are more likely to arise in relation to the aesthetic language that is open to interpretation, such as these from the current descriptors: “a compelling musical experience” and “musical journey” (AQA); “strong and creative shaping of ideas” (CIE); “sense of wholeness [and] a sophisticated sense of fluency” (Edexcel); “sophisticated use of musical elements in combination” (OCR). The same could be said of the terms creative, innovative, and inventive, which also carry connotations of novelty and originality and may therefore inadvertently propagate the genius myth.

Sound and Music's 2019 CanCompose survey showed that the assessment of composing in examination courses continues to be problematic and to impact on teaching. Linked to low levels of confidence among teachers as composers or composition teachers, this suggests that they doubt not only their own ability but also their judgement of what makes a composition successful. In the light of this, it is significant that an additional recommendation by CanCompose (2019) concerns judgement by *external* assessors: "Ofqual and exam boards should develop improved criteria to assess creative composing skills, and examiners should be better supported to develop their skills and confidence in understanding what makes for 'good composing'" (p. 23).

The first problem discussed above – teaching to the test – is concerned with over-reliance on assessment criteria and over-emphasising the final product, often at the expense of a development of the compositional process. The second – teachers' preconceptions and experiences – explains over-reliance on the assessment criteria in terms of low confidence and a lack of programmes of study for composition. The third – concerning assessment process and criteria – closes this circle by showing that teaching to the test cannot work if the test cannot be trusted, and this only serves to fuel a lack of self-trust in composition teachers, who might then rely even more closely on the assessment criteria.

1.5 Aims of this Study

The above research spans two decades, yet the themes have remained very much the same, with teacher confidence and assessment being two recurrent concerns, and 'backwash' or overemphasis on the product being another. These researchers have been concerned with the product, and, to the best of my knowledge, there is no research that addresses the challenges of focussing on the composition *process* in A-level examination classes. My research therefore integrates group improvisation and specially designed

listening tasks into a composition programme for A-level students, using the former to explore possibilities and model the creative process, and the latter to develop perception and articulacy. Both have the potential to foster self-awareness and make the creative process a critical one.

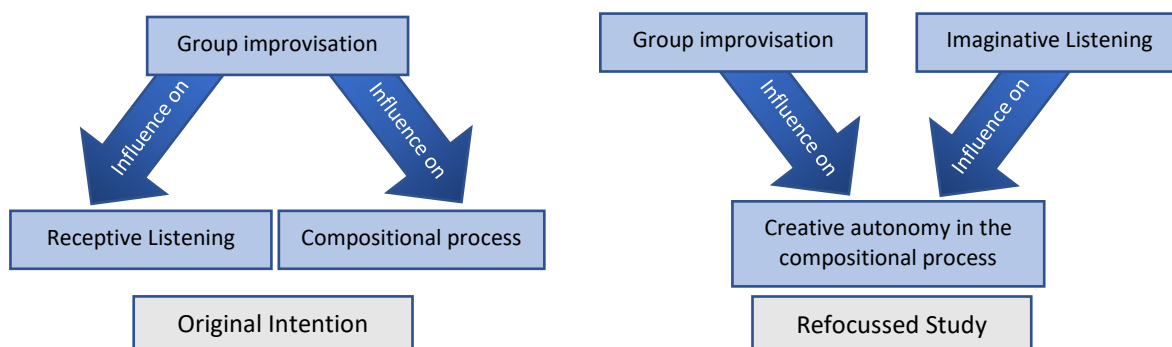
Although I did discuss assessment criteria with the student-participants, the matter of good or bad was not a planned focus of my research, as it is superseded by a concern with self-trust, which is the simplest term I use to define creative autonomy. My research did not aim to create composers who could meet all A-level assessment criteria, nor to see all my students enthusing about every challenging piece they studied for the appraisal unit. Its goal was to find ways to use group improvising and listening activities to nurture aspects of the *self* in each young composer: self-confidence in the context of group improvisation; a sense of self in relation to others in those sessions; positive self-efficacy as demonstrated by confident and characterful playing in improvisation and, by extension, convincing compositions; self-awareness when making decisions during the compositional process; self-trust when explaining those decisions articulately and demonstrating conviction in their music; and self-expression both in composition and in personalised listening that draws on analytical and affective responses. This study addresses the problem of the product-focus in A-level teaching in that it has what Sandel (2020) calls a “processual focus” which “places a high value on the relationship of the individual with their craft” (p. 4). As Sandel also points out, in the end, the quality of the product reflects not a fixation on marking criteria, but “a robust investment in the process” (p. 3).

There was a change of focus during the course of this study, which saw the emphasis on group improvisation and its potential benefits to appraisal and composition migrate towards the compositional process itself. Listening and group improvising still completed

the triangle of connected skills, but the study became an investigation into creative autonomy in the compositional process, as shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

The Changing Focus of my Study



This change reflected my realisation that, of the two original problems that I had deemed to be connected (unreceptive listening and cautious composing), only one could be the focus of this study within the given timeframe. That in itself was a response to two factors: my work with A-level groups predating the participant group, and a global pandemic that curtailed the amount of data collection I could do. Both incited a change of research design and resulted in my revising the focus of my study.

1.6 Planning the Research: Two Pilot Groups and a Pandemic

I worked with a pilot group in 2018-19, prior to embarking on the formal study. That group consisted of five very capable performers who demonstrated no fear of improvising and no preconceptions about it as being confined to one particular style. They played very responsively to each other and listened appreciatively to recordings of their improvisations. Individual composition tasks were greeted with enthusiasm and several pieces tried new things – contrapuntal speech, simultaneous opposing time signatures, and body percussion, for example – and we were able to play and sing these pieces in lessons. Thus,

the group became used to having their work-in-progress performed and receiving feedback during that process. The way they listened to the challenging modern repertoire in our appraisal lessons was much more open than it had been in previous groups, and they spoke about it in different terms – how instruments interacted, what the effect of a cacophonous crescendo was, and so on. In fact, their compositions still tended to be tonal, but they worked much more quickly, more independently, and more confidently, and my feedback was usually a discussion of possibilities with the occasional suggestion, rather than a set of instructions that they waited to receive. They were more inclined to let their compositions emerge rather than work to a planned structure. Their marks for those A-level compositions were mostly outstanding, with two scoring full marks.

When I tried to repeat this with a subsequent A-level group in 2019-20, I found the experience completely different, although they, too, gained some excellent marks for their final compositions. This slightly larger group also contained very experienced, accomplished performers, but there were some less confident musicians who at one point confessed their feelings of inferiority. Only two students approached the activity with the openness I had experienced in the previous year. Some students were very anxious about improvising, to the point of tears; one student was capable but defensive because it made her feel unskilled; others were so used to equating “improvising” with soloing in a jazz band that they could not easily engage in the kind of improvising I had done with the first pilot group and tended to dominate rather than playing responsively. This was a turning point in my research design, as I realised that most students would need some time dedicated to preparing them to engage in the kind of improvising I wanted them to do. The series of sessions I designed in order to enable students to participate in group improvisation became an additional research cycle, entitled “Preparing to Improvise”, and led to the emergence of the first Research Question:

RQ1: How can I, as an A-level Music teacher, best engage students in group improvisation in their composition lessons?

Specific to the “Preparing to Improvise” study were the two sub-questions shown below:

1. How have these sessions affected students’ perceptions of improvisation?
2. How have these sessions affected students’ participation in improvisation?

A further change of plan happened as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Schools were closed during a national lockdown to contain the spread of the virus in March-July 2020, and reopened in September 2021 with restrictions in place.³ At a time when schools across the country were teaching year groups in separate “zones” and most practical lessons were suspended in all subjects, including Music, I was fortunate to gain permission to proceed with the “Preparing to Improvise” sessions, subject to a thorough risk-assessment and special arrangement of the room (see Appendix 1). The plan had been to conduct two further research cycles, one concerned with imaginative listening in relation to composition, and the other with group improvisation. A second lockdown in January-March 2021 saw nationwide closure of schools and a return to online teaching, during which time I could not proceed as planned with data collection. This left time for only one further research cycle in the summer term (April-July 2021), meaning that I had to conflate the plans and redesign a series of lessons that incorporated all three disciplines of improvising, listening, and composing. Far from being a disadvantage, the interweaving of those activities exposed some connected behaviours which are discussed below in Chapter 5, “Developing a Multi-skill Curriculum for A-level Composition”. From this emerged the second Research Question:

³ For details of guidelines to schools, visit [Schools and colleges to reopen in full in September - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

RQ2: How do group improvisation and imaginative listening influence the compositional process of A-level Music students?

Again, this study addressed two sub-questions, shown below:

1. How have improvisation sessions related to students' composition process and output?
2. How have listening tasks related to students' composition process and output?

1.7 Chapter Overview

This introduction has provided the context for this study in terms of my own teaching experience, where it was conceived, and in terms of the wider picture regarding A-level Music and the challenges it poses to teachers and students, especially in composition.

In the following chapter, the research is placed in the context of literature pertaining to improvisation, group-work and play, listening, and the creative process. Chapter 3 then provides a background to action research before proceeding to examine its application in education and its suitability to my own study. The chapter also describes data collection and analysis methods and gives more detail about the change to the original research questions. Chapters 4 and 5 present detailed findings of the thematic analyses of the two data sets, under the headings "Preparing to Improvise" and "Developing a Multi-skill Composition Programme". Detailed Participant Profiles are presented before Chapters 4 and 5, and at the end of Chapter 5, in order to allow a reader to track the progress of all students or one particular case, navigating easily between sections. Chapter 6 consists of reflections on outcomes for my students and my own teaching practice, and Chapter 7 answers the research questions based on findings in each of Chapters 4 and 5, and presents conclusions and recommendations.

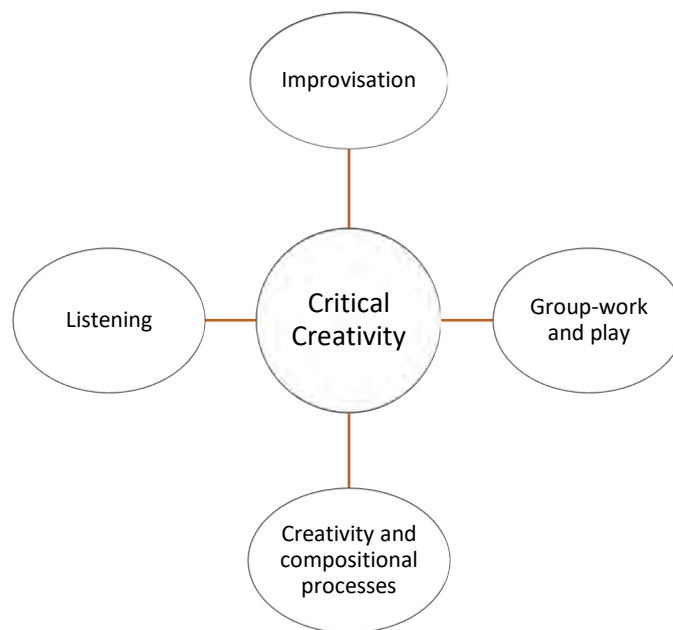
Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In preparation for undertaking this study into the potential influence of group improvisation and critical listening on the compositional processes of my A-level Music students, an extensive review of literature was carried out, covering the range of fields shown below in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

Present Study Positioned in Relation to Surrounding Literature



My research is concerned with students aged 16-18 who are in their last two years of secondary-school education, and how group improvisation and critical, imaginative listening relate to their individual composition. The connection in my own research between improvising, composing, and listening led to reading about listening both in and out of the context of composition. Given my intention to incorporate improvisation into

lessons as a group activity, the search widened to include topics pertaining to group work, such as collaborative creativity, early-years play, and community music.

It is already recognised that improvisation forms part of the creative process from early years to professional composing (Burnard & Younker, 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Paynter, 2002; Kratus, 2012; Higgins & Mantie, 2013; Raines, 2015). The place of creative thinking in listening is also well documented, being referred to as imaginative response (Baroni, 2006; Deliège, 2006; Lehmann, Sloboda & Woody, 2006) or even improvisatory listening (Bertinetto, 2012). The majority of studies conducted with school children focus on younger years (e.g., Preston, 1994; Fautley et al., 2014), involving students who engage in listening and composing at a less advanced level than the participants in the present study. Group composition in these contexts entails invention and revision towards eventual performance; improvisation is normally within given parameters; listening activities are either structured and focussed on analytical details, or they invite emotional or analogous responses, such as comparing the effect of a piece of music to non-musical experiences.

The ensuing review of literature begins by discussing improvisation in theory, education, and practice, focussing in particular on its place in the classroom and in musical practice more widely. It proceeds to examine the merits and dynamics of exploratory play and group-work before turning to research about listening, highlighting publications that describe modes of imaginative or creative listening as well as those that place listening in the context of developing compositional skills. The final section covers a number of studies in creativity, incorporating several models of the compositional process.

2.2 Improvisation in Theory, Practice, and Education

2.2.1 *Improvisation: Definitions and Contexts in Musicology*

While there exists a large body of scholarship pertaining to improvisation in the field of music education, where this study is positioned, it is also a topic of interest for musicologists and music psychologists. Kenny and Gellrich (2002) note that the term is applied to myriad forms of musical practice and behaviours, but that in each case performers make creative decisions within real-time performance. Sarath (1993) has a rather more all-inclusive view of it as simultaneously composing, performing, theorising, and reflecting on music. This represents creative, technical, assimilative, and evaluative skills. Nettl (2016) likewise considers a broad range of musical activities or processes when discussing improvisation, although he casts doubt on the usefulness of the term “improvisation” when it is applied to too diverse a range of musical practices or “unnotated music-making” (p. 169). He offers a familiar-sounding definition of improvisation as “the creation of music in the course of performance” (p. 170), but also gives a number of ways in which the term has been commonly used with differing implications:

- one of three types of music-making, the others being performing and composing;
- a “variable in a continuum” in which improvisation is present in every type of music-making;
- a type of composition which is unrefined or unpreserved or in some other way “inferior”;
- a way of characterising “composition in oral traditions”

(Nettl, 2016, p. 170).

This could be read as describing, respectively, musical *practice*, musical *behaviour*, musical *process*, and musical *transmission*, and as such presents various ways of understanding and possibly demystifying the concept of improvisation. When improvisation is so often defined

in terms such as “real-time creative performance of novel music” and “inventing music extemporaneously” (Biasutti, 2017, p. 1), the offer of alternatives to this vision of improvisation as effortlessly making things up on the spot is potentially of great value to students who find this a daunting prospect.

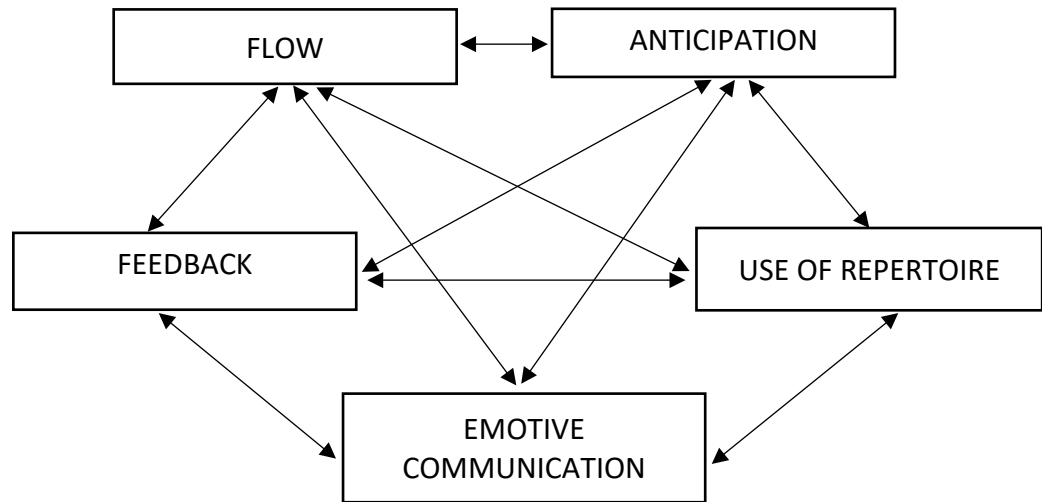
Nettl (2016) also touches on the educational merit of improvisation as a means of developing musicianship, and concludes by expressing the view that how people learn to improvise and “what they actually do creatively with a given model” should be of principal interest in (ethno)musicological studies into improvisation (p. 178). He effectively calls for more investigation into methods of learning to improvise and the musical thought-processes involved, which this section will now address.

2.2.2 The Processes Involved in Improvisation

As pointed out by Kenny and Gellrich (2002), it is almost impossible to study what is happening mentally when people improvise, as they are unable to provide a commentary at the moment of creation. The authors provide a model based on levels of short-, medium- and long-term anticipation and recall, which, although it is presented in the context of jazz and thus assumes that the improviser is drawing on familiarity with the genre, could also be a useful concept in free improvisation. There is overlap here with a more recent model by Biasutti (2015) in which anticipation and feedback – understood to be similar to “recall” – also play a part (see Figure 2.2). Based on previous research undertaken by Biasutti and Frezza (2009), this model acknowledges that improvisation can be understood as a number of musical behaviours, and, since it involves multiple competencies and abilities simultaneously, it should be taught with an awareness of how those connect during the act of improvising.

Figure 2.2

The Dimensions of Musical Improvisation (Biasutti, 2015, p. 4, from Biasutti & Frezza, 2009)



“Use of repertoire” refers to the way an improviser might draw on stylistic gestures and clichés, thus implying application of a genre-specific knowledge base, a term also used by Kenny and Gellrich (2002). Another way of conceptualising the same musical behaviour is offered by Sarath (1993), who couches improvisation in terms of drawing on long- and short-term influences. Among the former are “musical training ... inherited traits, and culture” (p. 23), seeming less like a *knowledge base* and more akin to the kind of musical *general knowledge* that would be utilised during the act of improvisation. A certain amount of retrieval from known music is inevitable; players are certain to use scales, arpeggios, ornaments, and motifs or figures that they know and enjoy performing, or can reproduce automatically.

In the short-term, as a spontaneous group performance unfolds, its prevailing style becomes apparent. This leads to another form of “repertoire”-use, and can be dissociated from a specific genre such as jazz. In a similar way, the stimulus for an improvisation might suggest a musical gesture to a player, and *use of repertoire* could be termed *use of stimulus*. The concepts of anticipation and recall/feedback are what Sarath (1993) refers to as “short-

term influences” (p. 23). While these dimensions are considered here as part of an individual’s improvisation, they are equally applicable to group improvisation, and, in terms of feedback, anticipation, and communication, perhaps more so.

These authors’ representations of improvisation as a network of action, interaction, and reaction form a useful foundation for the vision of what can be asked of students in a group improvisation context, particularly when some may lack access to the kind of knowledge base that musicians are expected to access in a genre-specific improvisation. In other words, the emphasis on process alleviates the pressure for content of a specific kind. The knowledge base is variously termed repertoire, as seen above, as well as “models”, “patterns” and “motifs” (Alder, 2012, p. 6), and even “grammar” (Biasutti, 2015, p. 4), but some also speak more generally in terms of “flow” (Kenny & Gellrich, 2002, p. 119; Biasutti, p. 5) and language (Alder, 2012). Alder’s analogy, based on Berkowitz (2010), is that native speakers do not think “word-by-word” to construct sentences according to grammatical rules, but rather generate them innately. It is enough to know the “overall direction of the statement” (Alder, p. 9). Transferring this to musical improvisation – understanding it as a kind of natural conversation – could provide an alternative set of expectations for improvisers, drawing attention away from knowledge-based, genre-specific notions of the practice. This is an important acknowledgment in teaching improvisation in the context of my research, given the range of experience and confidence encountered with pilot groups, as described above in Chapter 1. Accommodating novice improvisers in the research activities required an understanding of how people can learn to improvise.

2.2.3 Learning to Improvise: Musical Development from Infant to Expert

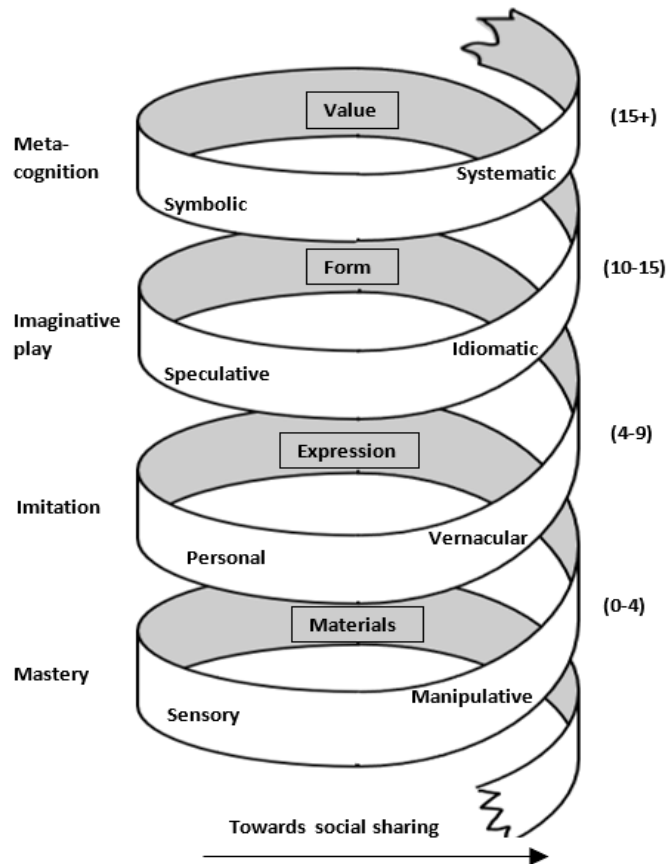
Improvisation has been observed to be not only part of musical development but also part of human development. Writing about composition and improvisation, Lehmann, Sloboda

and Woody (2006) observe that children's play includes uninhibited vocal improvisations or modifications of songs. Labelling this as innate "generative" behaviour (p. 127) implies subconscious and playful improvisation, and can be considered distinct from more conscious intentionality or awareness of the process that might develop later and be termed "creative". The "generative" behaviours of infants are documented in an advisory publication by Burke (2018), aimed at adults engaging with children's early musical development. Burke charts observations of typical infant behaviour from birth to 60 months, including babbling and vocalising, improvising movements to music, and later inventing or adapting songs in play and exploring sounds on instruments. They may also begin to create their own patterns and experiment with dynamics and tempo.

The notion that improvisation forms a naturally occurring part of early communication and play is important to remember as children grow older and their creative music-making becomes more conscious or externally structured. Despite including no references to supporting research, Burke's timelines of progressive musical behaviours and responses form a useful practical companion to the early stages in Swanwick and Tillman's spiral model (1986), presented in an article seeking to model the sequence of musical development in children aged 0-15 (Figure 2.3). Swanwick and Tillman's spiral shows, at the lowest level, children developing what the authors refer to elsewhere as "mastery of sound materials" by sensory and manipulative means. According to this model, we can expect children as young as 4 years old to start imitating and reproducing what they hear, and children from 9 or 10 upwards to be inventive. This "speculative" stage is aligned with "imaginative play" and implies the capacity to be independently creative in an exploratory or improvisatory manner.

Figure 2.3

Spiral Sequence of Musical Development (Swanwick & Tillman, 1986, p. 331)



A similar progressive model is presented in tabular form by Hargreaves (1996), representing the development of musical competence (Table 2.1). This employs similar age ranges to Swanwick and Tillman's (1986) spiral, and gives examples of how early exploratory behaviour might develop into an understanding and application of tonal and metric systems. In this table, Hargreaves appears to suggest that improvisatory behaviours (babbling, spontaneous songs) are in the domain of the youngest and least experienced musicians, and that the element of spontaneity diminishes with the acquisition of "rule systems", as the creativity and perception elements of this development become more conscious. This is significant for the present study because it suggests that the spontaneity in group improvisation is a skill or freedom in need of rediscovery.

Table 2.1

Five Phases of Musical Development (Hargreaves, 1996, adapted from Hargreaves & Galton, 1992)

Phase	Age (years)	Singing	Graphic representation	Melodic perception	Composition
Professional	15+				Enactive and reflective strategies
Rule systems	8-15	Intervals, scales	Formal-metric	Analytic recognition of intervals, key stability	'Idiomatic' conventions
Schematic	5-8	'First draft' songs	Figural-metric: more than one dimension	Conservation of melodic properties	'Vernacular' conventions
Figural	2-5	'Outline' songs; coalescences between spontaneous and cultural songs	Figural: single dimension	Global features: pitch, contour	Assimilation of cultural music
Sensorimotor	0-2	Babbling, rhythmic dancing	Scribbling: 'action equivalents'	Recognition of melodic contours	Sensory, manipulative

2.2.4 Improvisation in Music Education

While exploratory, spontaneous creative behaviours are written out of the above developmental models towards the upper years, improvisation has in fact been integral to composition in music education in England and Wales for many years, albeit only up to the end of Key Stage 3 (age 14). In line with the trend towards more formalised or systematic, rules-based music-making shown above, improvisation ceases to be part of the curriculum

at the point where Music becomes an optional examination course, for which, as outlined in Chapter 1, there is no standard programme for teaching composition at all.

A broad picture of how classroom music evolved to include creative exploration is given by Pitts (1998) in a discussion of the practices of Yorke Trotter (1854-1934), Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), Carl Orff (1895-1982), John Paynter (1931-2010) and Murray Schafer (1933-). With the exception of Schafer, these practices tend to concern younger age-groups, reinforcing the misconception that exploration and improvisation are naturally superseded by more formal music-making as children mature. Nonetheless, they are an important part of the development of creativity within the curriculum.

Over a century ago, Trotter (1914) recognised children's need for intuitive music-making, writing that "the first means of self-expression are to be found in music" (p. 1), and "every normal child loves to make things for himself, and this instinct is of much importance in musical education" (p. 19). These claims resonate with Swanwick and Tillman's (1986) "personal-expressive" phase, aged 4-9 (p. 332), and Lehmann et al.'s (2006) reference to children's spontaneous vocal improvisations during play. Trotter urged his peers (in vain) to engage children in exploratory music-making, decades before influential figures such as Paynter and Schafer began to change the face of music education.

Pitts (1998) goes on to examine the practices of Orff and Kodály, focussing on their widespread impact rather than their content. They are important names in the narrative of her article about innovation in music teaching, because they represent two practical systems that could be introduced to classrooms relatively easily. The author might also have included a third leading figure whose earlier work predates Trotter's 1914 publication, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. In the 1890s, Jaques-Dalcroze promoted a system of musical learning that placed emphasis on the physical response to music, singing, and the inner ear,

developing three branches of musicianship: rhythmic, solfège, and improvisation, which foster “the development of the student’s interpretation *and* creative skills” (Smith, 2014, p. 1-2). Thirty years later, in the 1920s, Orff formed a system of teaching related to child’s play, starting with percussion instruments, where all musical concepts are taught practically (Shamrock, 1997); in the 1930s, Kodály developed an approach that focussed on singing, listening, movement, and rhythm syllables (Eöszé, Houlahan & Tacka, 2001). Whether encouraging children to respond to music through improvised movement or involving them in creating music through improvisation, these approaches all use improvisation in conjunction with imaginative listening as a route to compositional fluency, which is highly relevant to my work with older students. Not only could they offer some practical insight into how to regain the spontaneity of expression that Hargreaves’s (1996) model suggests may be lost as music students grow older, but they also evince the longstanding presence of improvisation and imaginative response in European music education.

Jaques-Dalcroze, Orff, and Kodály provide an historical background to the work of another leading figure in music education, John Paynter. Paynter had a far-reaching impact on music education in England, seeking to “offer something akin to the creative opportunities of the visual arts” (Finney, 2011, p. 14). Finney places Paynter in the context of half a century of curriculum changes, from “undifferentiated approaches to whole-class singing and playing” through a time of conflict between flexibility and self-expression and more traditionalist “precision and sustained application” (pp. 12-13), up to the emergence of a National Curriculum for music in the early 1990s. Working as a teacher and composer in England, Paynter championed an exploratory style of teaching, “engaging with music from the inside, rather than receiving a defined repertoire of works” (Pitts, 1998, p. 32). In *Sound and Silence*, Paynter and Aston (1970) promoted listening, perception, and the ability to

articulate observations, alongside strongly advocating creative music in schools. Some thirty years after *Sound and Silence*, Paynter was still promoting creative music-making as the way to allow children to manifest their inherent musicality (Paynter, 2002). He viewed listening as integral to this creative process: pupils create by experiment and improvisation, then confirm ideas through repetition, until they can be remembered. “This is as it should be because it places the emphasis on what is heard rather than what is seen on paper” (Paynter, 2002, p. 224).

In this, he was in agreement with his contemporary on the opposite side of the Atlantic, the Canadian composer and teacher Murray Schafer. Schafer’s delivery is rather more evangelical and less refined than Paynter’s, but his message is similarly motivated: *making* music is essential to learning about its function, facts, and elements. Neither dismisses aural acuity, of course, but Schafer in particular is adamant that it must not exist as a discrete skill, nor should teachers act as “disc jockey to the great, invariably dead, composers... one learns about sound only by making sound, about music only by making music” (Schafer, 1967, p. 1). Schafer linked all skills inherent in musical engagement: listening, performing, creating. He approached composition through improvisation, and improvisation through experimenting with the potential of instruments. His belief that “the class must become an hour of a thousand discoveries” (Schafer, 1973, p. 8) led to a non-didactic approach, asking students to listen in ways they had not done before (“let five sounds inhabit two minutes”; “place a single sound in a profound container of silence”), and beginning composing courses with the instruction: “Get acquainted with the instruments. I’ll be back tomorrow to see what you have discovered” (Schafer, 1973, pp. 8-9).

Schafer is something of an outlier in this group of music educators, being the only one working with older students. Young children are the target of seminal practitioners such as Jaques-Dalcroze, Orff, Kodály, and Paynter, who sought to include playful exploration, movement, and imagination in music education, and developmental models increasingly understate the importance of exploratory improvisation in musical engagement as children mature towards adolescence. Music's place in the curriculum in England and Wales lasts only until the end of KS3 (age 14), at which point it becomes optional. Schafer's efforts to reignite the spirit of discovery in his undergraduate musicians endorse my conviction that group improvisation has a central place within a composition programme for students aged 16-18, as a creative pursuit that is valuable in its own right.

2.2.5 Levels of Improvisation: A Developmental Model

The research pertaining to improvisation in music education encompasses a wide age range, from infancy in the models of Swanwick and Tillman (1986) and Hargreaves (1996), early years of schooling as addressed by Orff, Kodály, and Paynter, and the much older students working with Schafer. The question of what happens in the intervening years, when many teachers ask their young students to improvise alone or in groups in order to devise and participate in music-making, is addressed by Kratus (1991, 1996). He acknowledges the need for a method of teaching improvisation in stages between novice and expert improvisation, and devises a seven-stage model of development, charting the kinds of behaviour we can expect at each level (Kratus, 1991). He begins by articulating two polar views of what is understood by "improvisation": "Some educators believe that improvisation is a highly sophisticated, technically demanding behaviour and should be taught only after a student has developed his or her musicianship and performance skills to an advanced level. Others see improvisation as a natural, intuitive behaviour that can be

part of preschool music instruction” (Kratus, 1991, p. 35). Kratus notes three essential shared qualities at all levels of improvisation, namely:

1. All improvisers aim to make sounds in time through “purposeful movement”;
2. Unlike in composition, the sounds produced in improvisation cannot be revised, and therefore all sounds produced form part of the final product;
3. All improvisers are free to choose their rhythms and pitches

(Kratus, 1991, p. 36).

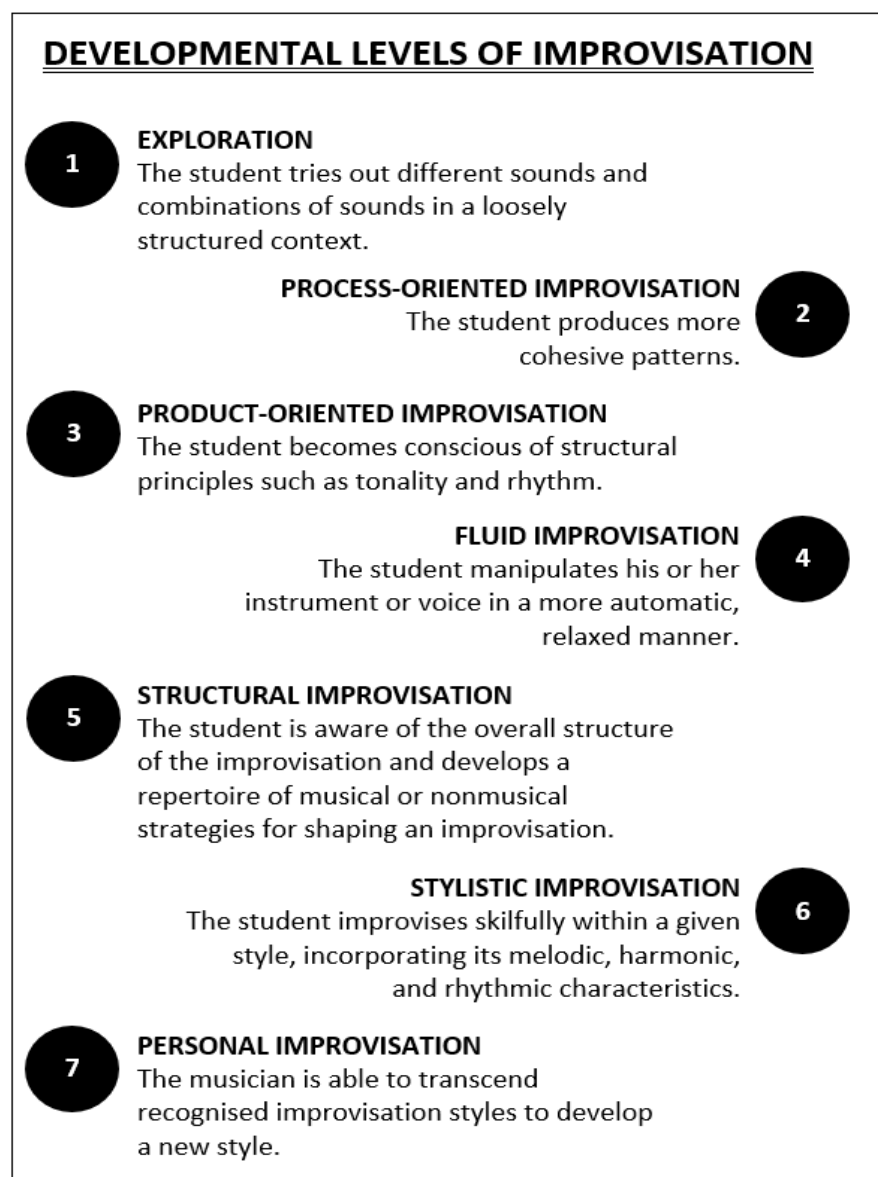
Building on previous research into young children’s improvisation, Kratus concludes that “young children are capable of improvising music that uses simple structural elements. These findings support the use of improvisational activities as a meaningful part of early-childhood music education” (Kratus, 1991, p. 37). They also concur with the recommendations and practices of Orff, Kodály, and Paynter. He goes on to summarise research into more advanced improvisation (much of it in the context of jazz), and gleans from it a list of skills and knowledge that an “expert” improviser should possess, from which he constructs the seven-level developmental model shown in Figure 2.4.

Unlike the more general developmental models discussed above, these levels appear not to begin with infant babbling and continue through early years to adolescence, but rather to assume an amount of prior skill at level 1. Nonetheless, there is some marked similarity of language between the models of Swanwick and Tillman (1986), Hargreaves (1996), and Kratus (1991). Concurrence is obvious in the lowest levels of each model, with the terms “exploration”, “babbling”, and “manipulative” describing early experimentation with the potential of sounds, whether instrumental or vocal. This similarity continues into the next two levels, where Kratus’s “cohesive patterns” map onto Hargreaves’s “outline songs” and Swanwick and Tillman’s picture of children imitating and personalising learnt musical sounds, and, at level 3, each model presents a mode of creative behaviour that shows some

awareness of eventual outcome or product. There is less correspondence further up the skill levels, although Kratus's fluid, structural, and stylistic improvisation all seem to coincide with the notion of "idiomatic", as appears in both of the other models.

Figure 2.4

Levels of Improvisation (Kratus, 1991, p. 39)



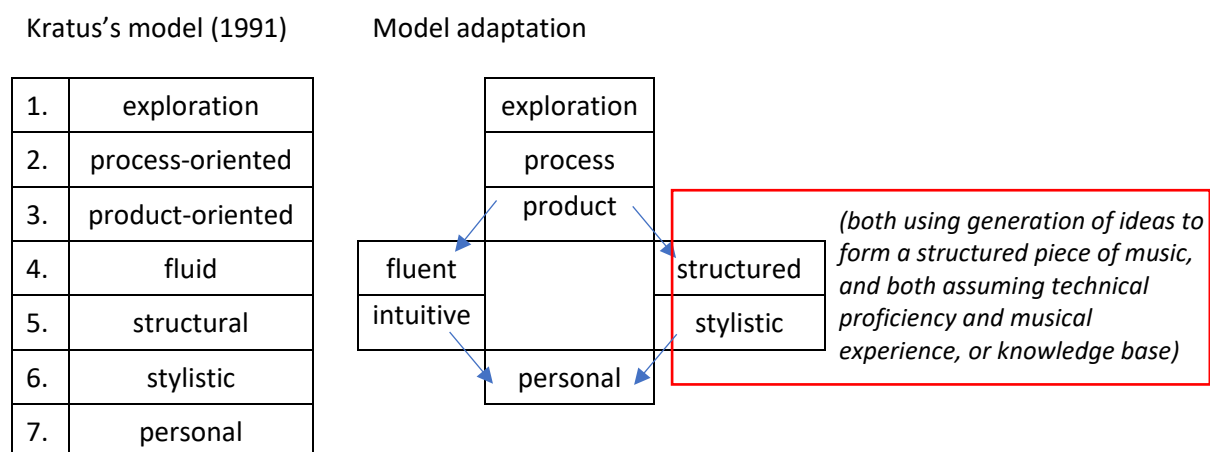
There are two important factors here in the context of my own research: one is that improvisation is conceptualised not just as an innate behaviour that is gradually superseded by more sophisticated and mature musicianship, but as a musical activity with attainable progressive stages; another is that, in appearing to start at an age some way above infancy

and reach a level of originality and expertise that Kratus (1991) says very few ever achieve, this model is applicable to the age range of the participants in my study. My own work with A-level students could be placed at levels 4-5, where a point of interest is the use of the words “fluid” and “structural”. Kratus (1996) defines “fluid” as “technically correct yet inexpressive and mechanical” and “structural” as “technically well played and ... musically well structured” (pp. 34-35). So “fluid” does not mean *fluent*, but rather denotes a level of attainment on an instrument that allows access to higher levels of improvisation (hence the term “automatic” at level 4). Similarly, “structural” might imply a scaffolded improvisation, but Kratus (1996) describes this as more intuitive than methodical.

It appears, from an example of Miles Davis’s practice, among others, that Kratus’s (1991) model has been created with jazz improvisation in mind, meaning that the notions of structural and stylistic awareness are essential in this developmental model. This aspect of the model is unhelpful for my purposes, given my aim to avoid all genre-specific expectations associated with improvisation. However, if we instead seek to apply the levels in a context which does not stipulate stylistic rules or structure, the model might diverge, as shown in Figure 2.5, using slightly different language to describe the levels.

Figure 2.5

Adaptation of Kratus’s (1991) Developmental Levels of Improvisation



My aim was to engage my research participants in what I have termed fluent and intuitive levels of improvisation, where they play responsively as the group's music unfolds in time. To my mind, these levels are on a par with structured and stylistic, where the demands are not greater but simply different. An improvisation may be scaffolded according to given parameters – a 12-bar harmonic progression, for example, or a drone and given scale – and this may be followed, at the next level, by using stylistic features within the same genre. In other words, certain musical features are internalised to form a “knowledge base” (Kenny & Gellrich, 2002, p. 118), and it is exactly this which I wished *not* to ask of students. Instead, I wanted them to interact spontaneously in group exploration, finding ways to participate that do not include learning a set of rules or the grammar of a prescribed style. In this way, I hoped their group improvisation would be akin to the innate human interaction that is conversation, and to the shared explorations of group play.

2.3 Group-work and the Value of Exploratory Play

2.3.1 Sharing the Load

In a chapter dedicated to an examination of the cognitive processes involved in group improvisation, MacDonald and Wilson (2016) comment that many studies, by concentrating on brain activity in the expert individual, overlook the social interactions at play alongside the creative practice (p. 104). Like composition, improvisation comes with the baggage of the “genius” myth, compounded by the expectation that it will happen as spontaneous, fluent performance. The authors suggest that neither the presentation of improvisation as “high art” nor its opposite, that it is a “parlour trick” that anyone can do (p. 103), is helpful in understanding or accessing improvisation. Their premise is that there is a “universality” to improvisation, in the sense that it constitutes a “defining feature of our humanity” (p. 105). Citing a number of proponents of improvisation as a social activity,

they argue that aspects of life such as conversation and everyday interactions contain subtle negotiation and sophisticated split-second decision-making which demonstrate that improvisation is an aspect of innate behaviour.

Encouragingly for novice – and possibly nervous – improvisers, the expectation is thus redirected from musical content towards response and interaction; in the authors' words, improvisation "in this sense is not about developing advanced music skills but rather it is about borrowing from everyday life" (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016, p. 105). This invites an approach that fosters creative musical conversation rather than trying to teach skills, focussing not on *what* to play but on *how* to play. Accompanying this is a further insight into the nature of improvisation as an exploration, unencumbered by "notions of "correct" or "incorrect" musical practice and conventional judgements of aesthetic beauty" (p. 105). The inhibiting impact on young composers, and their teachers, of wanting to "get it right" and know if something will be judged as "good" has been documented in studies of composition with secondary-school age groups (Berkley, 2001; Devaney, 2018; CanCompose, 2019). If students engage in group improvisation with the mindset suggested by MacDonald and Wilson (2016), this activity has the potential to alleviate some of those aesthetic anxieties.

Creative group-work is common in younger students' music lessons, but tends to "give way to the serious business of producing the fully edited, notated and recorded pieces" that individual students need to submit for examination courses (Berkley, 2001, p. 120). Potential benefits are lost with the abandonment of group-work, not least relief from the pressure of aesthetic judgement (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016). Collaborative creativity, explored by Sawyer and de Zutter (2009) in an article aiming to apply interaction analysis to group creative processes, can make visible the stages involved in arriving at a finished

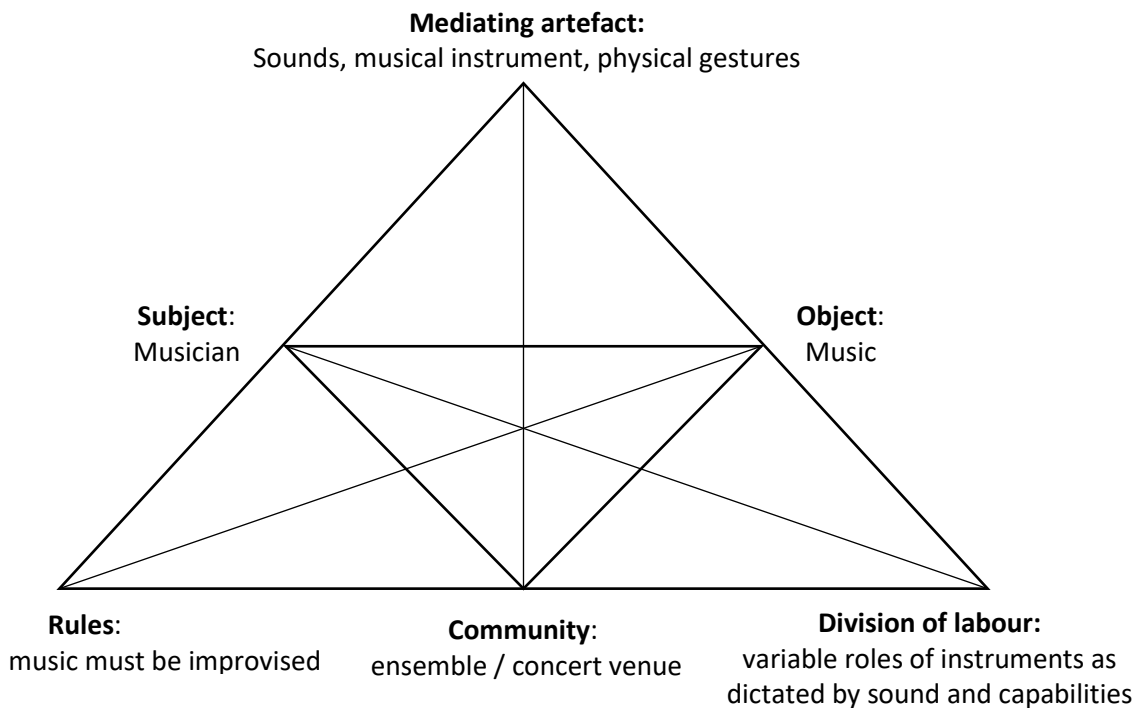
product, with these interactions becoming “a more substantial source of creativity than the inner mental processes of any one participating individual” (pp. 81-83). This is especially the case, they argue, when the endpoint is unpredictable and there is “moment-to-moment contingency” (p. 82), as is the case in free group improvisation. Such benefit has also been documented in the context of young students’ education, where engaging in practical group-work accelerates learning as they interact with more experienced peers and distribute the creative and cognitive load (Fautley, 2005; Fautley & Savage, 2007). In other words, group-work represents distribution of creative responsibility *and* enhancement of outcome.

2.3.2 Activity Theory

Burrows (2004) applies the concept of cognitive distribution to the process of group improvising, alongside Engeström et al.’s (1999) activity theory model, using them as the basis for an analysis of his own experience as a group improviser. Activity theory links thoughts with physical acts, and is presented by Engeström et al. (1999) as a network of connections between subject, object, community, rules, division of labour, and mediating artefact. Burrows’s adaptation of this as a representation of group improvisation shows the musician as the subject, music as the object, the ensemble and, by extension, concert audience as the “community”, and the instrument as the “mediating artefact” which enables communication between the musician and others, as well as determining the “division of labour” in terms of the roles of instruments, as detailed in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6

Adaptation of Mediatlional Triangle (Burrows, 2004, p. 4) with Original Labels by Engeström et al. (1999) Shown in Bold Type



The diagram serves to show that there is a distribution of cognition owing to the various interactions, which may occur in time as something like the example below.

- **thought/feeling:** one player has an idea
- **action:** enacts it
- **mediational experience:** sound is created and becomes part of the music
- **community reaction:** how the group perceives the sound and reacts to it
- **initial player's reaction:** was this as anticipated?
- **musical result:** how the music has played out after the initial player's stimulus to others

(Burrows, 2004, pp. 5-6)

This is qualified with the acknowledgement that these events may happen almost simultaneously and in parallel with similar chains of action and reaction by other members of the ensemble. Burrows (2004) offers a set of necessary abilities for a successful

improviser on the basis of this notion of cognitive distribution, stating that such a performer should contribute ideas as reactions to aural stimuli, make musical gestures as conscious “suggestions” to other players (“directing the outcome”), predict how the music might play out, and be informed by what has been played (the “remembered aural tapestry”) (p. 8).

Prediction and remembering the “aural tapestry” are similar to Kenny and Gellrich’s (2002) anticipation and recall, and Biasutti and Frezza’s (2009) anticipation and feedback. These abilities make no mention of the music that is being played, but concentrate instead on group interaction and how contributions to the “group statement” (Burrows, 2004, p. 8) have led to certain reactions and responses among the players. The implication is that an understanding of musical form as an evolving narrative may be cultivated by engagement in group improvisation which is treated not as a show of performing skill but as a collective creation.

2.3.3 Freedom from Rules: (Semi-structured) Play and Community Music

The discussion so far has been of improvisation with an individual or collective purpose and outcome, whether treated as conversational interaction or the skilful, spontaneous use of a stylistic knowledge-base. In examining the in-the-moment processes involved in improvising, we assume an eventual product; exploratory material has a purpose in the compositional process, allowing composers to test ideas and make decisions; in group composing, this allows players to make suggestions, reach agreements, and rehearse, refine, and perform. However, there remains a case for exploratory playing with no goal, whether a finished product, a formal performance, or an assessed submission. One advocate of this is Nachmanovitch (1990), who distinguishes “play” from “game” in that it has no rules and is “without ‘why’” (pp. 42-43).

Tending more towards the spiritual than the musicological, Nachmanovitch's book, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art* (1990), offers some insights into approaching improvisation as play simply for play's sake, with a powerful indictment of any approach to education which treats infants as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge and ignores their innate abilities. Nachmanovitch poses a challenge to taught musical development and the age-related musical behaviours by suggesting that artists of all ages need to engage in free play in order to access creative flow, advocating a reconnection with "the savage mind, our child-mind" through the "playful experiment" of improvisation (p. 47). Despite the references to untamed, child-like behaviour, Nachmanovitch's concept of "play" is more than this, rooted in the Sanskrit word *Līla*, or "divine play", meaning play as a form of creating that entails the complexities of destruction and renewal as well as spontaneous experimentation (p. 1). All creative acts are seen as "forms of play" and play itself as the "free spirit of exploration" (pp. 42-43). In the context of A-level Music, where creative acts are normally a means to an assessed product, group improvisation could be viewed as something of a diversion, but Nachmanovitch (1991) presents it as an essential nurturing of the creative mindset.

2.3.4 Community Music-making

In presenting the act of improvising as engaging in creative flow without the constraints of rules or a desired goal or product, Nachmanovitch aligns his notion of the value of improvisation with that of community music-making, which is likewise not led by imposed goals and usually takes place outside a prescribed curriculum. Van der Schyff and Silverman (2012) consider community music as communal music-making "guided ... by the interests of the participants" (pp. 1-2). A point of interest is the parallel between their description of

“social and musical communication” and activity theory, described above (2.3.2). Relationships here are afforded equal importance to the music produced.

The social and non-verbal aspects of group interaction and communication are summarised by Schiavio et al. (2019) as “sustained co-adaptive engagement with the bodily and sonic activities of others” (p. 709). This article presents the findings of a qualitative study of the role of facilitators in a community music group, Meet4Music. The role of the leader is not one of being in charge, but rather a matter of taking initiative and helping the group to function well. This is readily transferable to the classroom, offering an appropriate conceptualisation of the teacher-researcher as an enabler rather than a director. Significantly, for a group of A-level students whose final aim is to compose individual pieces for examination, Schiavio et al. (2019) observe that, through “participatory sense-making”, which they define as “a set of meaningful interactions”, the needs of the individual can be met whilst a collective purpose is pursued (pp. 709, 714). In other words, it does not waste individuals’ time to spend their composition lessons engaging in group improvisation.

The reference to “socio-cultural dimensions that are negotiated as the music unfolds” (Schiavio et al., 2019, p. 714) is a reminder of several important factors in encouraging free play in the context of group improvisation: focus on the process, the group’s collective purpose (not to be confused with “product”), release from right and wrong outcomes, and community interactions. There is some overlap between their notion of “in-the-moment interactivity” (p. 713) and Burrows’s (2004) chain of simultaneously occurring action and reaction, shown above in 2.3.2.

The parallel benefits of working collectively and creating without the responsibility of arriving at a refined product are summed up by Sandel (2020), who assesses the value of improvisation as a component of a broad liberal arts programme. He cites the elements of

communication and empathy as key factors in group improvisation and creative play, and highlights the importance of having a safe, no-stakes context in which to try out new possibilities. There is a reminder here of Nachmanovitch's (1990) fixation on play for all age-groups, and it raises the question of what studies into the importance and benefits of unstructured play in early years might offer to one that is concerned with adolescent creativity. "Unstructured" can be defined in terms also encountered in scholarship pertaining to improvisation: without rules (Nachmanovitch, 1990), without adult intervention, "unmediated" (Kenny & Gellrich, 2002, p. 128), and open to possibility, or without predetermined goal. There is a correlation between the skills that teachers might hope to nurture in A-level composers and the qualities that are known to develop during children's unstructured play, which include resilience, creativity, democratic thinking, communication skills, and self-regulation (Drew, 2020).

2.3.5 From Novice to Expert, Infant to Adult: The Possibilities Presented by Structured Playful Group-work

Sandel (2020) and Nachmanovitch (1990) have in common the belief that play should not be confined to childhood, and – despite the title of Nachmanovitch's book, "*Free play*" – both authors are in favour of some restrictions. Nachmanovitch (1990) refers to "the power of limits" (p. 73), and Sandel (2020) supports a scaffolded play process, where the modelled behaviours present possibilities that could only otherwise be recognised through experience that students might not yet have had. Parameters can serve as a helpful scaffold for novice improvisers and, for more experienced improvisers, as the kind of limitation that is acknowledged to stimulate creativity.

The important word here is "possibility", seen by early-years educator Anna Craft as the catalyst for moving beyond "what is" to "what could be" (Craft, n.d., p. 1). In an article

entitled “Creativity and Possibility in the Early Years”, Craft (n.d.) advocates a kind of play that is not completely unstructured, but instead slightly limits the freedom that might lead to confusion by “producing a model ...[to] help to structure children’s ideas” (p. 5). In this balance between structure and freedom, Craft offers possibilities to imaginative young minds, arguing that what she calls “possibility thinking” is at the heart of creativity. It may be as simple as a stimulus which encourages the initial question of “What can I/we do with this?” (p. 1), exactly as might be offered to A-level improvisers, perhaps in the form of a motif to be played with different articulations, timbres, techniques, or dynamics, or, for the more experienced group who might require less instruction, to be used as the melodic springboard for what is to come.

Izumi-Taylor et al. (2010) similarly discuss the *possibilities* afforded by imaginative play, such that, for example, “a chair can be changed into a boat on an open sea” (p. 5). One teacher they interviewed saw this as a result of interaction, describing the “ripple-effect of possibility since, through play, children can exchange their information, listen to different ideas, experience something new” (p. 5). Playing in groups, whether as children in unstructured play or as adolescents in free improvisation, allows for accelerated development by virtue of the sharing of ideas. An understated yet powerful effect of play is on creativity, which the article goes on to say develops even without a specific goal in mind, resonating with the spirit of community music-making.

It is clear that the benefits of play, whether for learning or for development of the whole person, are readily transferable to the context of adolescent improvisation and, by extension, composition. There is a gulf between relatively uninhibited young children and adolescents, who tend to be self-conscious, and the question remains of *how* to engage the latter in playful and free self-expression. Westney’s *The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to*

Trust your Musical Self (2003) brings together the benefits of play with performance-related anxieties that might hinder truly rewarding participation in play-like activities such as improvisation, and addresses the assumption that anyone can do it. This anecdotal account of the author's experiences as performer, teacher, adjudicator, and masterclass leader presents a great deal of valuable experiential knowledge.

The book is aimed at performers, but has many messages for improvisers and composers, and for their teachers. It mentions the hindrance presented by adolescent tendencies to conform, to be self-conscious about appearance, and to be cripplingly aware of public scrutiny (Westney, 2003). The author notes that, in his experience as an adjudicator, the value afforded to what he calls "outer skills" is partly to blame, encouraging credit to be given for "intonation, finger dexterity, ear training, memorisation, [and] counting" when the "inner skills" of "energy, individuality, communication, zest, imagination, sensitivity, healthy physical connection with the instrument, [and] rhythmic vitality" are overlooked and yet easily accessible for players at any technical level (pp. 33-34). As a way of connecting these inner and outer skills, Westney advocates "improvisation, experimentation [and] group experiences" (p. 47).

Improvisation, he later says, is the ideal forum in which to remove the suffocating effect of a pre-determined goal (Westney, 2003, p. 159). For many performers, the thought of improvising is alien and frightening, and this book offers practical advice for dealing with those who are "stricken with panic" (p. 160) with a series of suggested group exercises whose activities make no demands on technical skill. These offer ways to draw self-conscious adolescents into free improvisation, the rationale being that they leave no space for "aesthetic guilt", and there remains no place for ego, shame, fear, or control (p. 213). If the importance of play, for the benefits noted above (Craft, n.d.; Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010),

extends beyond childhood to adolescence and adulthood, Westney (2003) adds a crucial voice to the argument by offering practical ways of enabling older age-groups to participate.

2.3.6 Nurturing Critical Improvisers

This body of musicological, psychological and pedagogical scholarship has several applications in my own research. It endorses the use of improvisation as a creative activity whose value in a truly musical education has been recognised and researched for over a century. Although purposeful improvisatory exploration has a valid and essential place in the individual compositional process, as will be discussed later in the literature review, group improvisation can be “without why” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 45), not product-driven, but for its own sake. There are benefits to creative flow and guilt-free mindset (Westney, 2003), as well as a similarity to community music-making, where the purpose is collective and not directed by a curriculum-led goal. Group improvisation, like semi-structured play, multiplies the possibilities presented by a stimulus, modelling the creative process through interactive and responsive playing.

Literature that examines the nature of these interactions is concerned with the process of improvising, but also provides a foundation for criticality as part of the collective creativity. In fostering awareness of the process, the collective creators are encouraged to be critical, as much about their interactions as about their music. Burrows’s (2004) amalgamation of activity theory and cognitive distribution results in a model that provides a foundation for students’ aural analysis of their own improvisations (see Figure 2.6 above). Burrows’s subsequent list of desirable abilities for an improviser (see 2.3.2) likewise has the potential to act as a set of prompts for critical reflection. The same is true of Biasutti’s (2015) representation of interconnected musical behaviours involved in improvisation.

References to innate human interactions such as conversation (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016) frame improvisation as accessible as well as providing a possible language with which to describe certain musical interactions that students might hear. The strong implication is that improvisation itself can be beneficial to aural awareness and could offer a different way to listen to music – much as Schafer (1967) asked of his students. The review therefore now turns to matters concerning listening.

2.4 Listening: Imaginative and Critical Responses

2.4.1 *Imagination as Actively Participating*

While the term “improvisation” in music is usually associated with playing, whether generating ideas for a composition or performing whilst creating in the moment, the act of listening is also viewed by some as improvisatory. In his article, “Improvisational Listening”, Bertinetto (2012) posits that, in engaging with any music, a listener is improvising to some extent, by imagining possibilities for the direction of the music and making sense of what is heard in the moment. “Listeners experience the musical situation as a field of possibilities in which, while listening, they establish connections and more or less inventively and responsibly shape on the spot the musical ‘meaning’ of the music” (Bertinetto, p. 93). Bertinetto prefers the word “imaginative” in order to distinguish between improvisation as a performance practice and improvisatory (imaginative) listening (p. 101).

Although this type of highly engaged, imaginative listening is also termed “active musical listening” (Bertinetto, 2012, p. 101), *active* does not appear to mean *conscious*. Earlier in the same article he expressly states that the knowledge used by listeners to follow the “moment-by-moment progression of the music” – actively making meaning out of what they hear, generating expectations of what is to come, and responding to their fulfilment

or otherwise – can be “unconscious” (pp. 93-94). He equates this with procedural knowledge, alternatively called practical knowing and understood as *knowing how* to do something. In the case of “active” listening, the moment of hearing music triggers both a connection with what has already been heard, and “which is still resounding in [the] short term memory” and an expectation of what is to come (p. 94). The listener *knows how* to do this based on the aforementioned networks of memory, experience, and familiarity, and so is using not only short-term recall, but also what has been heard in other music (inter-musical connections). In view of this use of prior knowledge, and in order to fit with Bertinetto’s term *active* and my term *participatory*, an understanding of this as a *subconscious* rather than an *unconscious* form of musical listening might be more suitable. This allows for the notion of participation and activity that Bertinetto (2012) says is not planned but is carried out spontaneously. The connection between this kind of participatory listening and responsive improvisation is encapsulated in the title “Improvisatory Listening”, but I would add that it could also be applicable to the compositional process, in that some decision-making may draw subconsciously on a similar network of prior knowledge.

2.4.2 Imagination as Co-creating, Re-creating, and Representing

It is a recurring point that listening, as a process of *making sense* of music (Lehmann et al., 2006, p. 206; Baroni, 2006, p. 89; Schiavio et al., 2022, p. 4), requires us to draw on a body of existing knowledge. With reference to 4E cognition⁴, which views our sense-making as embedded, embodied, extended, and enactive, Schiavio et al. (2022) present this prior knowledge in terms of embedded cognition, with musical perception drawing on one’s

⁴ The four “E”s are embedded (in experience and culture), embodied (the mind and body being intrinsically connected), extended (to other agents that facilitate cognition), and enactive (being a two-way process between the agent and the environment they inhabit and shape) (see Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018, p. 2)

“musical, cultural, and social identity” (p. 4). They also refer to “bodily engagement” in the sense of, for example, imagining the necessary action involved in performing what is being heard – also contingent on one’s prior experience, or “music-motor expertise” (pp. 4-5) – thus drawing not only on 4E cognitive science but also on embodied simulation theory. This form of listening is *creative* in that it may “stimulate novel and valuable ways to engage with music” (Schiavio et al., p. 6), novelty and value being two stipulations of creative activity. Listening is therefore not just active but enactive, being a matter of engaging with music in an “active, exploratory, and ultimately *creative*” way (p. 3). This resonates with Bertinetto’s (2012) notion of active listening, but is subtly different in that it accommodates a general response as well as the kind of subconscious, moment-to-moment participation in the music’s temporal progress that Bertinetto describes.

Baroni (2006) makes the point that creativity, while it represents a departure from repeating learnt knowledge, is nonetheless dependent upon it as a foundation. He demonstrates this in the context of a study of how listeners determine the composer of an unfamiliar piece, reporting on apparently exploratory behaviours displayed during the process of deciding by considering and rejecting possibilities based on prior knowledge. Baroni (2006) describes a number of ways to encourage creative listening, citing two further sources – Wiggins (2002) and Dunn (1997) – that refer to listeners’ “re-creating” or “co-creating” music as they hear it (Baroni, pp. 92, 85) through interpreting or finding meaningful gestures whilst listening. In Baroni’s view, listening can only be creative if there is a problem to be solved; listening for pleasure cannot be considered creative.

Arguably, much of what Bertinetto (2012) and Baroni (2006) say is most relevant to experienced listeners, who are required to draw on existing, music-specific knowledge in order to respond creatively to what they hear, putting it into a context of musical training.

For less experienced listeners – or, in a school context, less advanced students – an entry to creative listening may be offered by Wiggins’s suggestion (2002) that the “re-creating” process can be as simple as imposing an individual interpretation on a piece of music (pp. 79-80), on the grounds that an emotional or personal response can be elicited and musical description subsequently encouraged. Deliège (2006) proposes a similar level of creative response to music in her chapter on the place of analogy in creativity. Here, she recommends ways to “delimit the cognitive processes operating in music listening” (p. 67), including focussing on recognisable cues and segmenting the music. Analogy becomes part of the process when it seems that the music is explicitly representative of something, examples being a sound associated with something external to the music, such as birdsong or thunder, or concepts such as high or low, ascending or descending.

Deliège (2006) refers to the considerable cognitive load involved in listening to, and making sense of, music. This is corroborated by Lehmann et al. (2006), who present listening as the transformation of what is heard into a kind of image that becomes “object-like in our perception” (p. 206). Whilst acknowledging that analytical listening requires prior knowledge, they propose that even an emotional response presupposes “understanding” of the music, which they explain as “making sense of its features” (p. 206). Although this is already familiar from other literature pertaining to types of creative response, they offer a further insight regarding critical listening, which they define as “judging and critiquing music” (Lehmann et al., p. 206). Their view is that, in arriving at the stage of making sense of the music in the moment, we are drawing on our long-term memory – or prior experience of music in that style – which “allows individuals to establish expectancies” (p. 212), a notion reminiscent of Bertinetto’s (2012) active listening model. Lehmann et al. (2006) posit that the “representations” we form in our minds when parsing what we hear are specific to certain styles or traditions, and not readily transferable to unfamiliar music

(p. 215). Consequently, judging and critiquing are matters not only of having heard a style of music before, but also of knowing how to name musical features, reliant on articulacy as much as perception. This is a reminder that aural perception must be matched by the appropriate powers of verbal expression in order for listeners to make true sense of what they are hearing.

2.4.3 Imagination at Novice Level: Sense-making

Without prior knowledge or the necessary vocabulary, novice listeners can initially respond to music with a simple image, narrative, or emotion, in itself an imaginative exercise. Herbert and Dibben's (2017) study into the listening responses of 10-18-year-olds asked participants to listen to a number of pieces and "write down the words, pictures, moods, feelings, stories or impressions that come into your head for each music example" (p. 7). Regardless of musical training and age, participants were able to respond to the music with images, comparisons with music that was familiar to them, connections to films or TV shows, and imagined narratives.

Owens (1986) encourages this kind of response as a "way in" to "make the progress of the music easier to follow", examples being programmatic outlines, abstract concepts, and images (p. 346). A novice listener, despite not having access to an expert's musical knowledge and experience, might nonetheless draw on *extra*-musical connections – a film, an emotion, a scenario – to make sense of unfamiliar music. The next stage is recognising something familiar in the music itself and making "*inter*-musical" connections (p. 346) to produce a more analytical response. Although Owens was working with young children, his reference to rather inaccessible modern music prompts a comparison with my erstwhile A-level students' unreceptive response to similar repertoire, and these two modes of listening


– first for extra-musical then for inter-musical connections – would be an appropriate *way in* for these older students.

2.4.4 A Spectrum of Critical Listening

The sources discussed so far imply that there is a progression in, or spectrum of, critical and imaginative listening, which I have collated into the model shown below in Figure 2.7. I have avoided presenting this as developmental stages so as to discourage connotations of age or musical maturity, and focus instead on experience, familiarity, and exposure. Hargreaves et al. (2012) describe listening as entailing “the mental ability to assimilate and accommodate events within the remembered contexts... in which they are perceived to occur”, referring to this as a “mental map” (pp. 12-13). This is another way of describing participatory listening. So-called expert listeners create better maps – participate better – than novice listeners because they have more background knowledge and experience. Thus, novice listeners, who are not necessarily younger or less musically advanced, tend to make sense of challenging or unfamiliar music using “associative and affective criteria” (Hargreaves et al., p. 12), before they have the prior knowledge to be more analytical, and the means to articulate this. Figure 2.7 presents modes of listening based on several sources discussed above, with examples of responses in each case.

Figure 2.7

Progressive Spectrum of Critical Listening and Types of Response

Modes of engaging in listening			
Affective and associative (Herbert & Dibben, 2017; Owens, 1986; Wiggins, 2002)	Analogous (Deliège, 2006)	Analytical (Deliège, 2006; Baroni, 2006; Lehmann et al. 2006)	Active-Participatory (Bertinetto, 2012; Lehmann et al. 2006; Hargreaves et al. 2012)
			
Critical listening – examples of responses			
Emotion (“it makes me feel...”) Image (“it reminds me of...”) Narrative (series of actions described) no expectation of specific musical detail	Linking musical sounds or events by analogy, such as a rising scale representing ascent of some kind, or a recognised flute sound signifying birdsong.	Recognising recurring “cues” for familiarity or distinctiveness. Includes stylistic comparison and draws on prior knowledge.	Engaging with the music as it progresses, imagining possible directions, based on prior knowledge.

In this context, an important distinction needs to be drawn between the subconscious and the passive. Much of the process involved in the participatory response, in the sense that Bertinetto (2012) describes it, may occur subconsciously, but this does not mean that the music is passively received. Hargreaves et al. (2012) point out the distinction between passive *hearing* and active *listening*, relating this to the listener’s level of engagement and control over their listening. They separate types of response into physiological, cognitive, and affective, stating that all three interact within a given mental and physical context (i.e., who and where the listener is) to determine a response. In referring to cognitive listening as a form of *coding* according to “stored mental representations of the music ... previously heard” (Hargreaves et al., p. 4), their view aligns with that of several other researchers, mentioned above, who have written about drawing on prior knowledge to make sense of

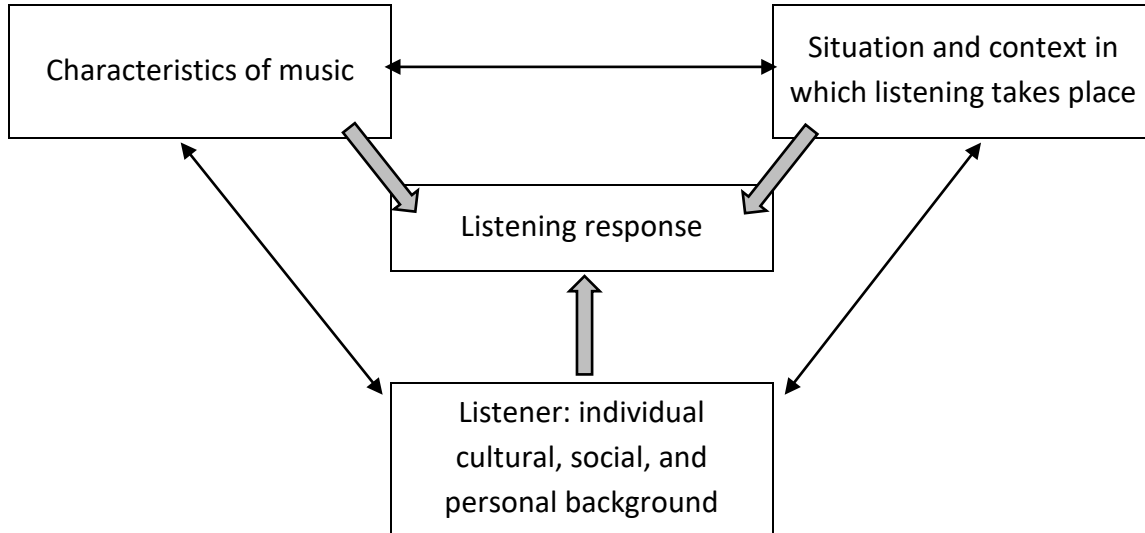
music. Hargreaves et al. (2012) add a significant claim, namely that the same “active cognitive construction and reconstruction” occurs in listening as it does in performing (p. 7), adding that imagination is a part of the process of both musical perception (listening) and musical production (performing and composing). This link resonates with the connection I made above between listening and composition in terms of the spontaneous use of networks of prior knowledge. In short, it is a further endorsement of an approach to teaching composition that does not isolate it from, but embeds it in, wider musicianship.

2.4.5 Networks, Inter-musical Connections, and Knowledge Bases

Hargreaves et al.’s (2012) concept of networks of association serves as a reminder that all participants have an individual personal, musical, and cultural history which impacts on their analytical and participatory responses to music. Networks of association are presented as a way of “perceiving musical meaning” by coding new music in relation to previously heard music (Hargreaves et al., 2012, p. 14). A response may be subjective due to the individual’s personal “listening history” (p. 13), which determines what inter- and intra-musical connections might be made. It is also influenced by their cultural background, which affects not only familiarity but also extra-musical connections. Their reciprocal feedback model, simplified below in Figure 2.8, places the listening response in the centre of three factors: the individual, the situation, and the characteristics of the music itself. It also represents the interplay between each of these factors, which exert an influence on each other.

Figure 2.8

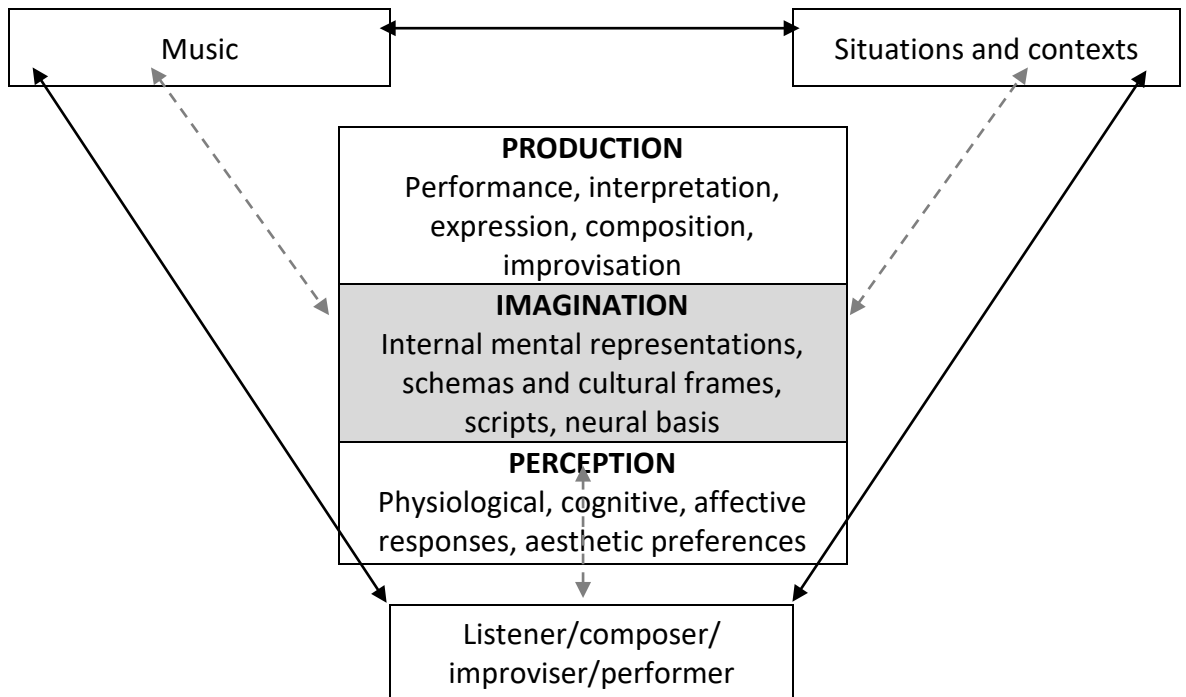
Simplified Version of the Reciprocal-feedback Model (adapted from Hargreaves et al., 2012, p. 544)



A modified version of the reciprocal-feedback model by Hargreaves (2012) affirms and illustrates Hargreaves et al.'s (2012) claim that the same underlying process is involved in listening, composing, improvising, and performing: that of engaging the imagination. Hargreaves's (2012) modified model, shown in Figure 2.9, replaces listener with listener/composer/improviser/performer and includes perception and production where previously there was only listening response (perception). This connects all musical competencies and implies that inter-musical knowledge may include what is gained from other musical activities than listening, including composing, improvising, and performing. Thus, in this view, a listener would not just be drawing on music previously *heard*, but also on music previously played, composed, and improvised.

Figure 2.9

Revised Reciprocal-feedback Model of Music Processing (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 554)



The point that inter-musical knowledge may be gained from a number of musical activities is corroborated by Kaschub and Smith's (2009a) statement that "composition requires the interweaving of *knowledge about* and *know-how*" (p. 1). The authors identify six ways of interacting with music – singing, playing, composing, improvising, listening, and moving – which allow children to discover "how music works as well as how to work with music" (pp. 5-6). Young composers listen in order to inform themselves as composers, not just in learning "how music works" but also in considering the potential audience as they are composing, with awareness of "how others may interact with their own compositions" (Kaschub & Smith, p. 6).

Once again, the issue is raised of exposure and drawing on prior knowledge. Kaschub and Smith (2009a) distinguish between implicit and explicit learning, the former leading to knowledge that is gained "subconsciously as the brain gathers, processes and stores a body

of subjective experiences” (p. 16). There is a striking similarity between this and an understanding of participatory listening as reliant upon procedural knowledge (Bertinetto, 2012): just as listeners might form connections and expectations without being aware of doing so in the moment (subconsciously), composers might make decisions in a similar way, relying on intuition to make their judgements. Kaschub and Smith (2009a) define intuition as a “feeling-based way of knowing” – a form of implicit knowledge – and place it alongside explicit knowledge in the composition process, acknowledging “a balance between intuition (feeling based/knowledge within) and intellect (conscious awareness/knowledge about)” (pp. 16-17). This has implications for demystifying the composition process, and awareness of this balance could be stimulated by, for example, listening to recordings of improvisations and comparing what was conscious whilst playing with what is observable whilst listening.

2.4.6 Listening, Language, and Self-awareness

Kaschub and Smith (2009a) explore a further benefit of interleaving the skills of composing and listening, which is to enhance the ability to self-evaluate and judge the success of one’s own compositions. Lehmann et al. (2006) raised the issue of pairing observation with articulacy in order to express understanding of music experienced through listening; Kaschub and Smith (2009a) here connect “analytical and critical listening skills” to the compositional process (p. 7). Articulacy is not only important in order to make sense of music heard; it is also essential for a composer to understand their own musical decisions.

The parallel development of language alongside other musical skills formed the subject of a study by Major (2007). Major videoed pupils aged 11-16 talking about their composing and categorised their “talk” during the process and afterwards. She charted the parallel development of pupils’ composing and talking skills, showing “a ‘typology of pupil talk

about composing’ which distinguishes between six main types: exploration, description, opinion, affective response, evaluation and problem solving” (Major, p. 165). This study has much to say about the links between articulacy and composing. Excerpts from the first, second and sixth levels are reproduced in Table 2.2, with Major’s (2007) summaries showing the concurrent development of talking about compositional ideas, understanding of musical concepts and associated vocabulary, and creative behaviour and outputs (the right-hand column).

Table 2.2

Excerpts from A Typology of Pupil Talk About Composing (Major, 2007, pp. 170-171)

Type/Characteristics	Musical Knowledge	Evidence of Change and Musical Learning
Exploratory – pupils are mainly dependent on praise and encouragements from the teacher in their comments.	Basic terminology and concepts used. Conceptual knowledge is not fully developed, often partial understanding of concepts.	Pupils are given reassurance or correction and therefore are able to ‘keep going’.
Description – pupils are able to offer accounts of what they are doing – respond to questions – often briefly – heavily teacher-led.	Varied musical knowledge levels but pupils with a good knowledge of musical terms and concepts sometimes have this level of appraising because of lack of engagement with their composing work.	Teacher intervention allows pupils to improve work and to change direction. Teacher help may allow them to give opinions or to identify problems.

Type/Characteristics	Musical Knowledge	Evidence of Change and Musical Learning
<p>Problem Solving – pupils are able to identify problems and use group processes to negotiate solutions – groups can work independent of the teacher, or can develop single questions into extended analysis of their work.</p>	<p>Mature conceptual understandings and a wide background knowledge of structure, texture, and unity of elements of composing. Confident of own work as being of value. Personal satisfaction in own work. Willingness to receive constructive criticism.</p>	<p>Identification of problems with new targets to be met which will allow a composition to change and grow. This will tend to be a more substantial piece or extended piece of work and will involve structure and unity.</p>

In the stages when apt musical vocabulary might be hard to access, Randles and Sullivan (2013) advocate borrowing language from other domains to enable young composers to understand the cues they are giving listeners, stressing the important part played by the use of language to describe music and express intentions. They propose that borrowing the language of narrative allows even the inexperienced composer to imagine their music from the listener’s point of view, drawing on the example of a film: “If something scary happens in a movie, the viewers might need a resolution. Or, if nothing is happening in a movie, the viewer may become bored and desire to see – and hear – something exciting” (Randles & Sullivan, p. 53). Similarly, they suggest that terms “borrowed from dance or cinema, such as sense of movement or flashback, can sometimes illuminate the ongoing creative process” (p. 55).

The authors include a set of examples of what a composer might typically include at the beginning, middle, and end of a piece, a selection of which is shown in Figure 2.10. The models serve very well as suggestions for how developing composers can take their listeners on a musical journey, notwithstanding their slight limitation of presenting music as a generic timeline of narrative or dramatic events.

Figure 2.10

Excerpts from Musical Properties at Different Structural Points (Randles & Sullivan, 2013, pp. 53-55)

Musical Elements Typically Associated with Beginning a Piece of Music	
<i>Crescendi and/or significant expansion of register within the first phrase</i>	A crescendo creates tension and energy, and it implies a goal. Expansion of register opens up new terrain.
<i>Unresolved harmony</i>	If the harmony creates expectations that are not immediately fulfilled, closure is avoided.

Suggestions for Successful Continuation	
<i>Satisfactory flow</i>	Any given piece should have a narrative continuity. Each segment of music should flow logically from the last.
<i>Points of reference</i>	These are points in the music that provide a marker. Points of reference can be motives or themes. Without points of reference, the listener can feel lost.

Elements That Endings of Pieces Should Take into Account	
<i>Harmony</i>	Harmonic progression should reach climax, an ending determined by the intent of the resolution.
<i>Dynamics</i>	Dynamics can contribute to a sense of finality.

The use of broad terms such as “satisfactory flow” and “sense of finality”, without supporting examples, seems to leave room deliberately for interpretation, and allows for two possible uses in the creative classroom:

1. In the intended realm of composition, asking students to imagine or demonstrate how selected recommendations might sound. This would engage them in articulating musical ideas and, if demonstrating, in spontaneously improvising;
2. In imaginative listening, where the qualities suggested in Figure 2.10 could be used to scaffold listening to unfamiliar music: for example, instead of listening analytically for themes, modulations, development and reprise, students could be

asked to comment on continuity, expansion of register, points of reference, or relative rhythmic intensity.

The explanations to the right of the musical elements, such as “*unresolved harmony*”, are useful in pointing out how these features contribute to the experience of the listener, thus helping students to make critical observations.

The authors cited above all place importance on the ability, in young composers, to be observant listeners, able to articulate their responses to music whether in analogous terms, using extra-musical references (Randles & Sullivan, 2013) or in musically specific vocabulary, which develops alongside creativity (Major, 2007). Good listening skills thus engender good powers of self-evaluation, as well as serving to inform young composers (Kaschub & Smith, 2009a) and equip them with a kind of empathy for their own listeners.

2.4.7 On the Subject of How to Listen: Narrative and Phenomenology

Inherent in much of the literature about making sense and understanding the meaning of music, whether as a composer or as a listener, is the notion of music as a temporal artform, defined and shaped in time. It is something that connects the associative-affective response (one example of which is an imagined storyline) with the active-participatory response (engaging in the process of the music as it unfolds in time) (see Figure 2.7 above). Furthermore, since it does not rely on identification of musical features as required in analogous and analytical listening, following the course of music through time offers a “way in” – to borrow a term from Owens (1986) – for inexperienced listeners.

As stated in the introduction, a starting-point for my study was noticing some students’ tendency to close their minds to music that did not lend itself to analytical listening because it was unfamiliar to them, and they could not hear the cues they normally used to make

sense of music. Given the typical listening questions in GCSE and A-level examinations (see Figure 2.11), one might reasonably draw the conclusion – as these students may have done – that the most useful aural skills lie in spotting isolated musical events, recognising stylistic traits, and making intra-musical connections such as noticing repetition and development of musical material. These are appropriate in an examination context, not least because they are measurable; however, they are less practical when the style of music is so unfamiliar as to render some features unrecognisable, and neither are they uniquely helpful to young composers who need their knowledge base to include not just the musical contents but also the way in which music progresses and unfolds through time.

Figure 2.11

Example Questions from a GCSE Listening Paper

0	2	.	1	Name one accompanying instrument.	
				[1 mark]
0	2	.	2	Is this song swing or straight?	
				[1 mark]
0	2	.	3	What is the rising interval between the first two “freedom”s?	
				Major 2nd Minor 3rd Perfect 4th Minor 6th	[1 mark]

The search for literature on the topic of introducing students to unfamiliar music and helping them to listen “openly” led to publications in the fields of music analysis and music philosophy. In the introduction to *Music and Meaning* (1997), Robinson gives an account of the changing scene of music analysis in the years preceding the book’s publication,

pointing out that “the systematic study of music's internal structural relationships” (p. 2) objectifies music and falls short of addressing its dramatic impact or the emotional response of the audience. In other words, Robinson considers too much intra-musical, analytical listening to stifle the equally important affective and associative response. A whole section of the book, comprising chapters by different authors, is devoted to understanding music as a form of story-telling or narrative. This is relevant on several counts:

1. One possible form of “entry-level” response is to describe an imagined storyline or developing scenario prompted by the music;
2. Rather than relying on identification of musical features, an analytical response could comprise describing music in terms of how it embarks on, continues with, and concludes a narrative or musical journey;
3. Music unfolding as live narrative is akin to the notion of improvisation being an ongoing dialogue amongst musicians, and learning to listen and improvise with this in mind could lead to composing with this in mind;
4. This could form a connection between intuition and conscious decision-making in composing, as well as encouraging composers to think of the overall “plot” of their music as they work on its component passages.

2.4.8 How to Listen Openly: A Phenomenological Model

Narrative and journey are two metaphors that can be readily applied to music, partly because they are temporal experiences. Ferrara (1984) has further explored the benefits of listening and analysing using alternative perspectives. He offers a multi-level way of listening to new music that resonates with my own spectrum of types of response (Figure 2.7). Like Robinson (1997), his view is that objective analysis cannot tell us everything, and

does not account for the important human connection between composer and analyst. Central to phenomenological analysis is that *what* we hear is affected by *how* we hear (Ferrara, p. 356), and therefore he sets out a procedure for listening that involves multiple “hearings” of the same piece, in order to listen in different ways. One motivator for this is that he recognises the limitations of analytical methods that purport to result in objective knowledge, essentially seeing them as unfit for purpose when applied to atonal or electronic music.

In advocating a phenomenological approach, Ferrara (1984) proposes that the analyst should seek to understand more than can be revealed by using theoretical systems to examine the components of a piece of music. In other words, Ferrara (1984) seeks to know not what there *is* in a piece of music, but what it *means* to the analyst. The goal is to “‘hold open’ the world of the composer” and uncover the “polyphonic texture of syntactical, semantic, and ontological meanings that is an important part of any functioning, experiential work” (p. 357). Table 2.3 shows the stages in his “procedure for phenomenological analysis”, which I have briefly summarised.

Table 2.3

A Procedure for Phenomenological Analysis (Based on Ferrara, 1984, pp. 359-361)

Mode of listening	Brief Description
1. Open listening	The first hearing of a new piece. Response can be associative or affective, or simply a chronological account of events.
2. Syntactical listening	A focus on sounds in the moment, without assigning meaning to them or referring to the context of the whole piece.

Mode of listening	Brief Description
3. Semantic listening	Similar to analogous listening, this places in-the-moment sounds in a wider context and seeks to explain what is conveyed by them.
4. Ontological listening	Accounts for the overall essence of the music, and what contributes to that. Musical gestures are understood as collectively contributing towards the overall meaning of a piece.
5. Open listening	Syntactical, semantic, and ontological hearings are now imposed on a more narrative or reflective hearing, offering new nuances to the understanding of the music, and explaining the aesthetic experience.

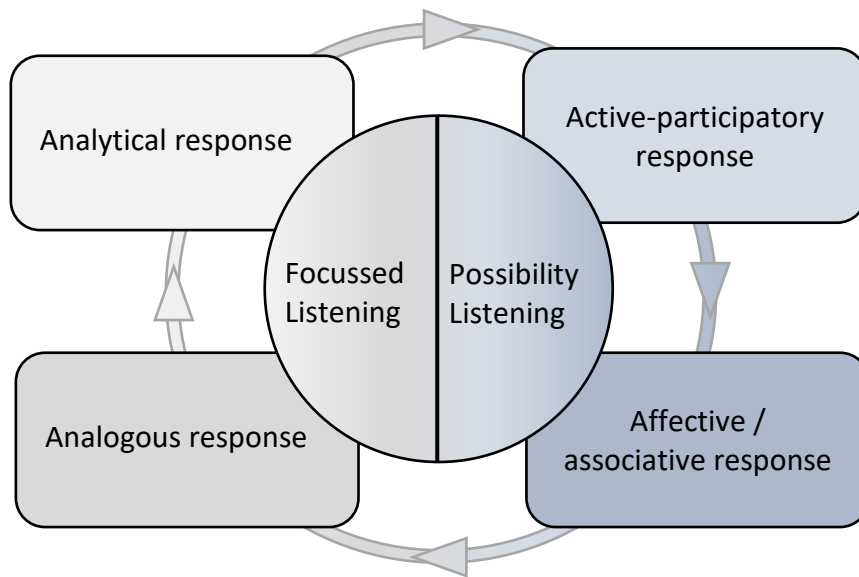
The circular nature of this procedure, which Ferrara (1984) also calls a “phenomenological inquiry” (p. 360), demonstrates the connection between novice-style listening and expert, knowledge-based listening, as it begins and ends with “open listening”. Seeking to understand the music is presented as a process of imposing different hearings on the fundamental reflective narrative arising from the first hearing, a narrative that could alter during the course of subsequent listening. This clear set of stages provides an outline for listening to new music, and as such is a useful aid for scaffolding listening tasks. Ferrara’s inquiry model (1984) is potentially a helpful framework for students hearing and discussing their own improvisations; having been focussed on the music in the moment at the time of playing (a kind of syntactic hearing at the point of performance), participants could then listen for the overall unfolding and journey of the music (an open, narrative listening), semantic meaning (for example, in the relationships between players and musical materials), and ontological meaning (how they collectively formed a piece that conveyed an overall message).

2.4.9 *Reconfiguring the Spectrum of Critical Listening*

In Ferrara's (1984) model of listening to make sense of new music, the first stage resembles novice listening, while the last is akin to active-participatory listening, being "expert" in the sense that it is informed by the other listening stages and their inherent parsing of musical content. Ferrara's view that they are both "open listening" suggests a greater connection between the two opposite ends of the critical listening spectrum (Figure 2.7) than its layout above represents. "Open listening" could be replaced by "possibility listening", possibility being a term which has already appeared in this review, respectively in a novice and an expert context: Craft uses the term "possibility thinking" (Craft, n.d., p. 1) to describe the way young children at play explore the possibilities presented by objects or environments, and Bertinetto (2012) observes that, where music does not lend itself to connections with the familiar, "listeners experience the musical situation as a field of possibilities" (p. 100). In associative or affective listening, an imaginative response might be to wonder what the music could be about, whereas an actively participating listener is engaged "in an enhanced way" (Bertinetto, p. 100) and open to a number of possible expectations and outcomes. Given the similar nature of these two modes of engagement in listening, the spectrum might be better represented as circular, as in Figure 2.12, with both of these types of response necessitating a kind of *possibility listening*, and the other two involving more focussed listening.

Figure 2.12

Circular Model of Critical Listening



2.4.10 Listening as Integral to the Composing Process

The concept of skills transfer between musical competencies has recurred throughout this review of research surrounding listening. Participating in improvisation is a good way to connect listening with playing and promotes awareness that musical perception, as well as musical production, employs the imagination (Hargreaves, et al., 2012). Hargreaves (2012) and Kaschub and Smith (2009a) have acknowledged that the knowledge base used in analytical and participatory listening is gained from and supported by all forms of music-making.

Two further studies discovered during the literature search support the view that listening and composing are interwoven skills, as listening is used not only for inspiration but also for acquaintance with musical devices. A set of six case studies set up by Preston (1994) sought to examine how teachers made connections between the listening, performing, and composing aspects of the curriculum with 10-15-year-olds. Two case studies in particular

stand out for their use of critical, analytical listening as a way of informing composition. In one, entitled “Creating Atmosphere” (Preston, p. 22), groups listened to several pieces for inspiration and chose a piece to imitate in their own compositions, thus having to identify the necessary musical elements to prompt other listeners to respond to their composition in the same way as they had done to the original. In another, groups of students were given phrases from Debussy’s *Syrinx* in the wrong order and asked to assemble the piece in what they considered to be a sensible structure, based on the “cues” given by each phrase. They identified “the quiet, low breathy notes” as belonging to the final phrase (Preston, p. 29), and took more time puzzling over the order of phrases in the middle section, as these were shorter and had less obvious direction. In other words, the function of phrases in relation to the overall structure formed the subject of discussion in the composing class, and the teacher noted the pleasing level of “aural problem-solving” in the group (p. 29).

Implicit in both of these case studies is the expectation that the learning from aural analysis will be transferred to composition. Strand’s (2005) study into the transfer of learning from listening to composing required students to make creative decisions based on what they had learned both through listening and through having a concept explained in theory, an example being the use of antecedent and consequent phrases. Working at a slightly higher level than the students in Preston’s case studies, Strand’s 9-12-year-old participants needed to learn about the concept and then explain why they thought a composer had made certain decisions pertaining to that concept when they listened to a piece of music. Strand (2005) aimed for “positive, vertical, high road transfer” (p. 20), whereby students learn about a concept, recognise it in context, and use it in a novel, creative way, transferring their theoretical knowledge and aural awareness to their own compositions. By implying that the students not only had to recognise the use of the concept but also

musicianship. Listening for inspiration and evaluation has a specific place in several researchers' models of how people compose music at novice and expert levels, and the review therefore turns now to literature regarding creativity and the composition process.

2.5 Creativity and the Compositional Process

Just as Hargreaves (2012) presents imagination as inherent in all forms of musical engagement (see Figure 2.9), so other authors make a case for creativity's place in all musical domains. Barrett (2003) observes a tendency for *creativity* to be used interchangeably with *composition* in literature relating to composition in the curriculum, challenging this with examples of other creative musical activities such as conducting, performing, and audience-listening. Similarly, Stauffer (2013) cautions against the tendency to equate creativity with only composing, improvising, and arranging. According to Stauffer, upholding the common view of creativity as "event-centred (as in the making of a piece to be created, rehearsed, and performed)" (p. 89) undermines the notion that other kinds of musical engagement can be creative. Mindful of this, I have nonetheless chosen to review material pertaining to both creativity and the compositional process in the same section, in recognition of the fact that theories of creativity and stage models of the creative process are commonly referenced in composition research, especially where this culminates in a map of the compositional process. Thus, the search for writing on creative theories placed the educational research into context. It has broadly covered the following:

- types of creativity
- thinking styles and attributes
- models of the creative process

before proceeding to look at their applications in pedagogy.

2.5.1 *Types of Creativity*

Barrett (2003) gives an overview of a few definitions of “creativity”, most of them involving an aspect of novelty and value, or usefulness (p. 4). In the context of novelty, she cites two theorists who have proposed a two-tier notion of creativity: Boden (1991) and Gardner (1993). Boden (1991) separates psychological (individual) creativity and historical creativity (P- and H-creativity), in which the former entails producing something new for the individual, and the latter, something unique in the history of humanity. Gardner (1993) proposes the similar notion of little-C and big-C creativity, inherent in which, according to Barrett (2003), is a hierarchy in which little-C creativity is the “lowly counterpart” (Barrett, p. 5). This distinction of creative acts into big- and little-C or P- and H-creativity appeared in several sources in my literature search, and it has implications for teachers’ and pupils’ judgement of compositional output. In theory, it promotes recognition of the value in little-C, P-creative acts, but there remains a potential problem when the types of creativity are defined in terms of output or *product*, wherein assessment of young people’s P-creativity may refer to “‘historical creativity’ criteria” (Odena & Welch, 2009, p. 417).

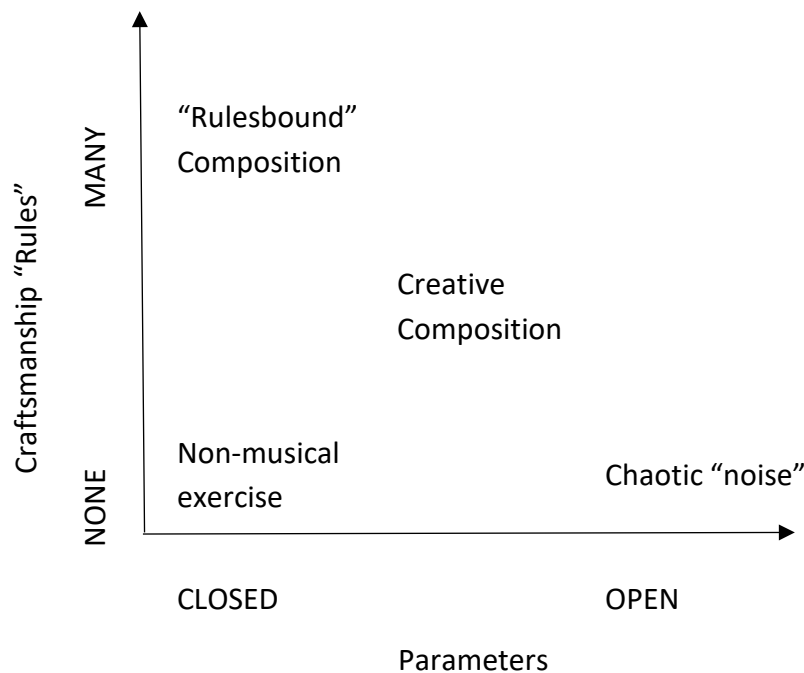
For Barrett (2003), these different types of creativity are linked to her understanding of the *purpose* of creative pursuits in the curriculum. Barrett sees this as a “meaning making enterprise”, where creative work functions as a representation of the meanings children extract from the world (p. 6). This lies somewhere between complete freedom of expression (progressivist view of composition in the classroom) and compositional pastiche (traditionalist view of composition as promoting “musical thinking and understanding” (Barrett, p. 5)), both of which could be seen as meaning-making endeavours. For others, the different types of creativity may represent validation of the creative output of pupils at little-C level, wherein creativity is not event-centric (Stauffer, 2013) nor confined to “mythic moments of creation” (Burnard, 2012, p. 114), but is more inclusively viewed as

“imagination successfully manifested in any valued pursuit” (Odena & Welch, 2009, p. 417). This is not just a distinction between types of creativity as representing personal versus historical discovery, or outputs that constitute little-C versus big-C novelty; this is also a discussion of what creativity looks like in practice. The typical picture of creativity in terms of musical composition is a mythical “masterwork” process of “imagined sounds and carefully notated fixed manuscripts” (Burnard, p. 113) that corresponds to the notions of H- and big-C creativity; creativity in more realistic terms, that could encompass P- *and* little-C creativity, is a somewhat messier trial-and-error “test procedure involving immediate sound feedback from a set of ‘action repertoires’” (Burnard, pp. 113-114).

Hickey (2003) approaches creativity from the perspective of teachers designing composition tasks, probing the concept of the “quality creative product” – that it should be “unique as well as valuable or pleasing” (p. 34) – and further clarifying the value-judgement terms of “creative”, “unique”, and “pleasing”. A composition may be considered *creative* relative to those of one’s peers (professional or novice) and *unique* only if it represents an exception to the norm (Hickey, p. 34). *Pleasing* requires evidence of “craftmanship and musical-sensitivity” as well as “intent” (p. 35). Hickey (2003) proceeds to suggest ways of using these definitions to design composition tasks that assess creativity, rather than treating music composition “as an assignment to be completed and graded” (p. 41). Placing one of the qualities of a “pleasing” composition (craftsmanship) against the nature of a task (open or closed), she offers a number of possible outcomes as shown in Figure 2.14.

Figure 2.14

Possible Music Composition Outcomes (Hickey, 2003, p. 43)



In this diagram, craftsmanship represents knowledge of compositional techniques, and a closed task (one with many given parameters) would therefore result in a harmony exercise, following rules but not exhibiting creativity. Conversely, an open-ended task not prefaced by prior learning about musical devices could result in chaotic "noise". Hickey (2003) advocates a middle ground, where there are some parameters and some prior knowledge of compositional techniques, as the most fertile ground for creative composition. By focussing on creative *response*, this model renders obsolete the hierarchy of P- and H-creativity when applied to the product.

An awareness of different types of creativity is useful in validating creative efforts that do not issue historically original material but nonetheless represent innovation on a personal level. Hickey's (2003) model for assessing creativity avoids notions of originality or novelty, focussing instead on the response to a task. The discussion highlights the importance of

understanding creativity not just in terms of categories of product, but also in terms of purpose (Barrett, 2003) and practice (Burnard, 2012).

2.5.2 Thinking Styles, Mental Attributes, and Modes of Engagement

The above section considers creativity in terms of both output and practice, with Burnard's reference to "action repertoires" and, later, "attitudes, approaches and values" (Burnard, 2012, pp. 114-5) coinciding with other authors' concerns with the thinking styles and mental attributes involved in the creative process. Baroni (2006) considers creativity in the context of listening, describing two studies whose conclusions about mental processes or capabilities are widely referenced. One is the "geneplore" model (Finke, Ward & Smith, 1992), the moniker being a conflation of "generative" and "exploratory", two phases of the creative process between which it is possible to alternate. The other is a list of mental abilities, developed by Guilford (1967) during tests seeking a link between creativity and intelligence. These are given as fluency, originality, flexibility, and sensitivity to problems, this last being of interest as it involves the ability to identify as well as find solutions to problems (Baroni, 2006, p. 83). Baroni concludes that exploratory and problem-solving behaviours are at the heart of creative processes.

While Baroni (2006) is writing about a form of creative listening, problem-solving is also a recurrent theme in the literature on creativity and teaching composition (Berkley, 2004; Collins, 2005; Major, 2007; Kozbelt, 2012; Kratus, 2012). A slight discomfort for the educator might be that the notion of Guilford's (1967) list being *abilities* linked to intelligence implies the problematic view that there are those who can and those who cannot engage in creative acts. Brown and Dillon (2012) helpfully present the same notion in a subtly different way. They examine the act of composition as a form of "meaningful engagement" (p. 82), and put forward five "mental attributes" which they offer as a

desirable mindset rather than as absolute qualities in a successful composer. The attributes that lead to what the authors call “a satisfying involvement in the act of composition” (Brown & Dillon, p. 94) are:

motivation – challenge – involvement – sensitivity – virtuosity.

Although Brown and Dillon’s (2012) chapter is not intended to be instructive for teachers, and uses examples from the practice of professional composers, these attributes are highly relevant to task-setting in the classroom. The attributes of motivation and challenge can be within the control of the teacher if a task is well chosen, whereas the other three rely on the individual pupil. Involvement and virtuosity – a complex area involving “productive flow... [which] requires familiarity with techniques and processes and is developed through experience” (Brown & Dillon, p. 94) – are reliant on the pupil’s engrossment in the task, while sensitivity “implies self-awareness and the ability to perceive the effect music may have on others ... [and] leads to action through decision-making” (pp. 102-3). The implication is that a necessary mindset for engaging in composition can be broken down into components that can be nurtured in novice composers.

In the same chapter, Brown and Dillon (2012) propose a “meaningful engagement matrix” in which typical creative behaviours can be explained according to their position in the matrix. This is made specific to musical composition, and includes the following modes of engagement:

Attending	acting as the audience, reviewing objectively
Evaluating	analysing, selecting draft material, looking for connections
Directing	controlling and manipulating materials with a goal in mind
Exploring	open-ended experimentation without a defined goal
Embodying	falling back on learned practices

(Brown & Dillon, 2012, p. 83)

They place these against three “contexts” in which the composer works: personal, social, and cultural, concerning the source of feedback as, respectively, individual reflection, interaction with others, and public acknowledgement. This offers a way of understanding modes of engagement with the creative process, and connects mental attributes with behaviours.

Table 2.4

Meaningful Engagement Matrix (Brown & Dillon, 2012, p. 84)

	Attending	Evaluating	Directing	Exploring	Embodying
Personal					
Social					
Cultural					

This is followed with examples of likely behaviours in each cell, such as attending + social being characteristic of composers who seek feedback in the context of public performances and might redraft work in the light of this, or personal + exploring describing composers in the early stages of generating ideas through improvising (Brown & Dillon, 2012, p. 84-5). This could be used with young composers in helping them to understand and appreciate the different facets of the act of composing, thus immersing them in the process and potentially drawing them away from product-focus.

Alongside discussions of the product as indicative of certain types of creativity and attempts to model the creative process is another dimension, offered in an article by van der Schyff et al. (2018) that seeks to understand creativity as a form of interaction between people and their environment, objects (e.g., tools or instruments), and fellow “creators”. Viewed through the lens of 4E cognition, creativity is presented as being bound to

experiences and environment, “a dynamically *embodied, embedded, enactive* and *extended* phenomenon” (van der Schyff et al., 2018, p. 5).

“Embodied” cognition dissolves the distinction between thinking and acting on the thought, particularly relevant in the context of improvisation, which the authors say is not a process of premeditating and acting, but a manifestation of “musical sounds and related motor possibilities to be explored” (van der Schyff et al, 2018, pp. 5-6). “Embedded” cognition is so-called because cognition depends on physical, social, and cultural background and surroundings. It is closely linked to “enactive” in that this third form of cognition entails an exchange between agent and environment, the latter both informing and being informed – or shaped – by the former. The example given by the authors is of the social dynamics of a small ensemble, in which “individuality and collectivity must be continually renegotiated by each performer to sustain and develop the musical environment being enacted” (van der Schyff et al., p. 6). The description resonates with the model of group improvisation presented by Burrows (2004), shown in Figure 2.6 above. The final “E”, “extended” cognition, is also viewed as “offloading” onto another being or object, effectively sharing cognition between one’s mind and another person or an object, like an instrument. The “others” (whether people or objects) inform the creative process, so that the agent acts on the object – for example, an instrument being used to generate or develop material during the compositional process – and the object (instrument) in turn suggests possibilities to the agent.

These theories of creativity offer possible insights into the mind of a composer, with some commonly recognised traits such as problem-solving and exploration alongside attributes that are more specific to one theory, such as Brown and Dillon’s (2012) sensitivity and virtuosity. Whether translated into behaviours that typify thought processes, or explained

in terms of theories of cognition that stretch beyond the mind to the body and environment (van der Schyff et al., 2018), they capture aspects of working creatively in the moment. However, they do not purport to model the process from initial ideas to finished product, another area of research pertaining to creativity that will now be addressed.

2.5.3 Models of the Creative Process

Hickey (2003), whose task design for creative response was reviewed in section 2.5.1, discusses product alongside person, place, and process, considering all four to be important considerations for a teacher designing a composition task. *Place* is the environment in which composition happens, and is significant to creative success. The profile of the creative *person* includes a number of characteristics, among them “risktaking; a sense of humour; independence; curiosity; attraction to ambiguity, complexity, and novelty; an open mind; capacity for fantasy; and heightened perception” (Hickey, p. 32). Hickey divides understandings of the creative *process*, which she points out has formed the subject for the largest body of research in creativity studies, into the following:

- conceptual model (expressing a preference for longer-term projects rather than short composition tasks);
- problem-finding, being an additional pre-emptor of problem-*solving*, which is often given as a creative behaviour;
- divergent thinking, a familiar term from Webster’s (1982) notion of convergent and divergent thinking, which consists of four attributes: fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.

(Hickey, 2003, p. 33).

Collins (2005) aims to model the creative process of a professional composer by noting the fundamental difference between studies of composition that focus on the product and

those that focus on the process, with the former seeking evidence of the cognitive processes in the musical characteristics of the piece and the latter observing behaviour or recording commentaries by the composer to draw conclusions. I would add a further distinction, in that those studies that focus on the process can either conceive this as being supported by a constellation of behaviours, thinking styles, or attributes in the moment, or place those behaviours (etc) in an order representing progression from early stages to completion. One such “stage theory” model, which has been highly influential on subsequent models (Burnard & Younker, 2002; Kennedy, 2002), is Wallas’s (1926) four-stage model of

Preparation – Incubation – Illumination – Verification

(Wallas, 1926, p. 10).

This model represents the common classroom practice of treating composition as product-oriented, with the goal of task-completion in the foreground. Collins’s case study (2005) of one professional composer’s compositional methods is useful in that it places stage theory models alongside three other theories of creativity:

- Emerging systems theory, in which “generative ideas evolve over significant periods of time”
- Gestalt theory, in which the composition becomes a sum of its parts through creative problem-solving
- Information-processing theory, in which the composer acts as “problem-solver” in a “problem-space”

(Collins, 2005, pp. 194-5).

These offer an alternative to the stage theory model of defining a composer’s mode of working at given points during the journey from inception to completion. By defining ways of thinking that govern the whole process, they represent how a composer might conceive of the work-in-progress in relation to the intended final product. They could also be used

to access an understanding of the “in-the-moment” composition that takes place during group improvisation, where ideas will be felt to evolve over time and the resulting piece will be the sum of parts contributed by a number of improvisers.

The compositional process of students is the focus of a number of studies in the field of music education, and, while attributes and thinking styles may be relevant, representations tend to appear as versions of a stage theory model. This could be due to the need for teachers to understand those stages in order to assist novice composers and design appropriate tasks. The following section will view a selection of these models of the compositional process in pedagogical research.

2.5.4 Applications in Pedagogy

The literature search revealed several models of the composition process applicable to classroom teaching or based on observations of the creative behaviours of children and adolescents. There are two aspects of interest in the context of my own research:

1. The progression from early stages to finished product and how the models draw on, or bear similarity to, research into creative thinking, behaviours, or attributes;
2. The presence of improvisation and listening in these models.

Kennedy’s (2002) model of the compositional process is based on observations made of the working methods of four adolescent composers, with the aim of recommending effective teaching strategies at high-school level. She begins with a review of four stage models, shown in Table 2.5, which influence her own model:

Table 2.5

Studies Included in Kennedy's Review of Creative Stage Models (Kennedy, 2002, p. 95)

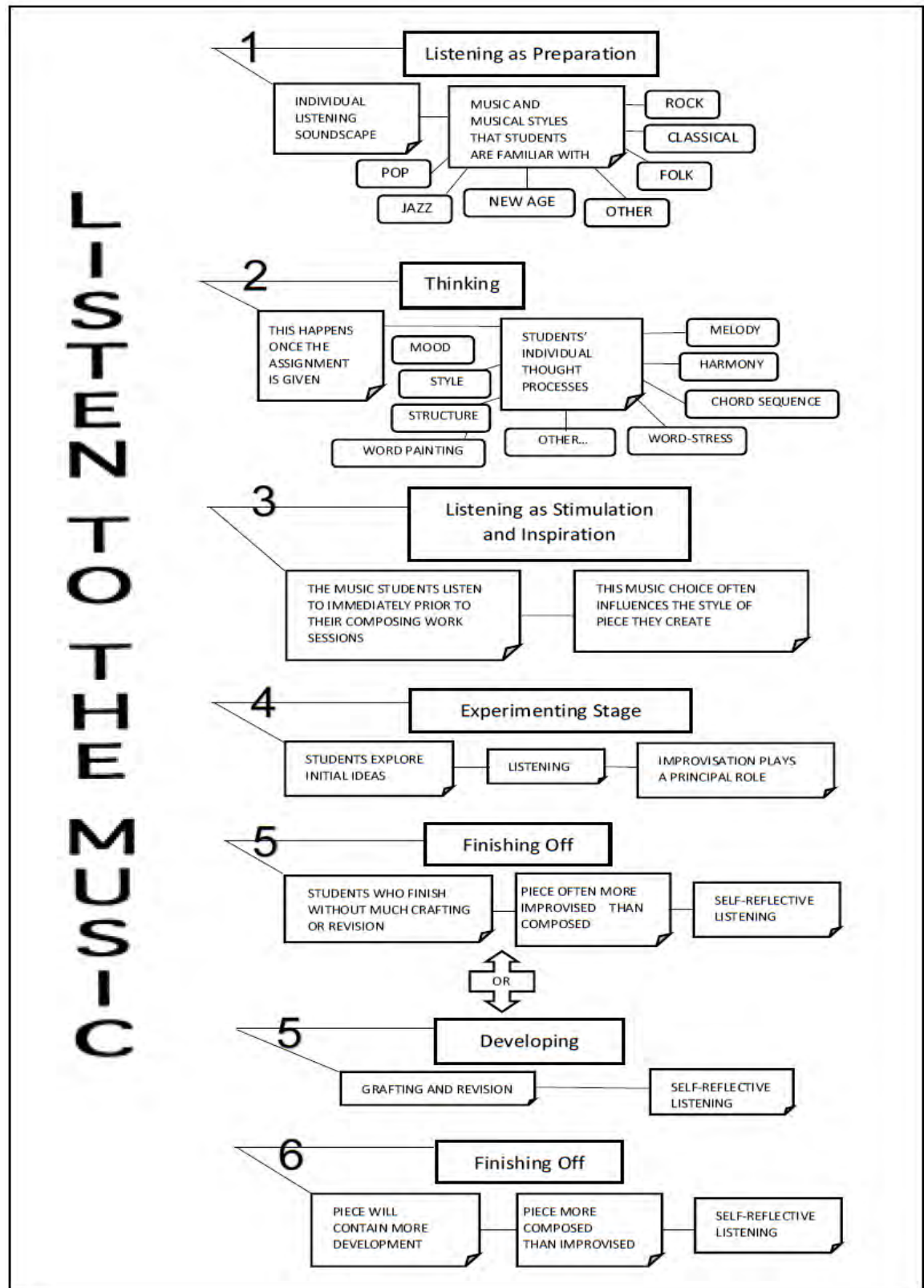
Wallas (1926)	preparation – incubation – illumination – verification
Sloboda (1985)	inspiration – execution
Emmerson (1989)	action (create/combine sounds) – test (listen) – accept or reject/modify
Hung (1998)	listen – analyse – compose
Several “avenues to composition” suggested by sixteen case-study composers	listen – play – compose receive stimulation – introspect – breakthrough sense/observe – imagine – express/create

These appear to have scaffolded Kennedy's study insofar as they all suggest a progression from preliminary to final stages in a process. Kennedy's much more detailed model is reproduced below in Figure 2.15, showing stages of preparation (1, 2, 3), sensing and observing (1, 3), incubation, imagining, or introspection (2), inspiration and execution (3, 4), stimulation (3), verification (5, 6), and accepting, rejecting, or modifying (5, 6).

This model is notable for the important place that listening takes; Kennedy (2002) includes listening as a kind of foundation of experience even before the composition task is set, then as preparatory stimulation and inspiration, and as final-stage self-reflection. It also demonstrates the common use of synonyms for improvisation, which is included as exploring initial ideas and experimenting, and is also the nature of compositions that Kennedy observes to be quickly finished and unrevised or undeveloped, in that these are often still in the improvisatory stages when performed (see stage 5 in Figure 2.15).

Figure 2.15

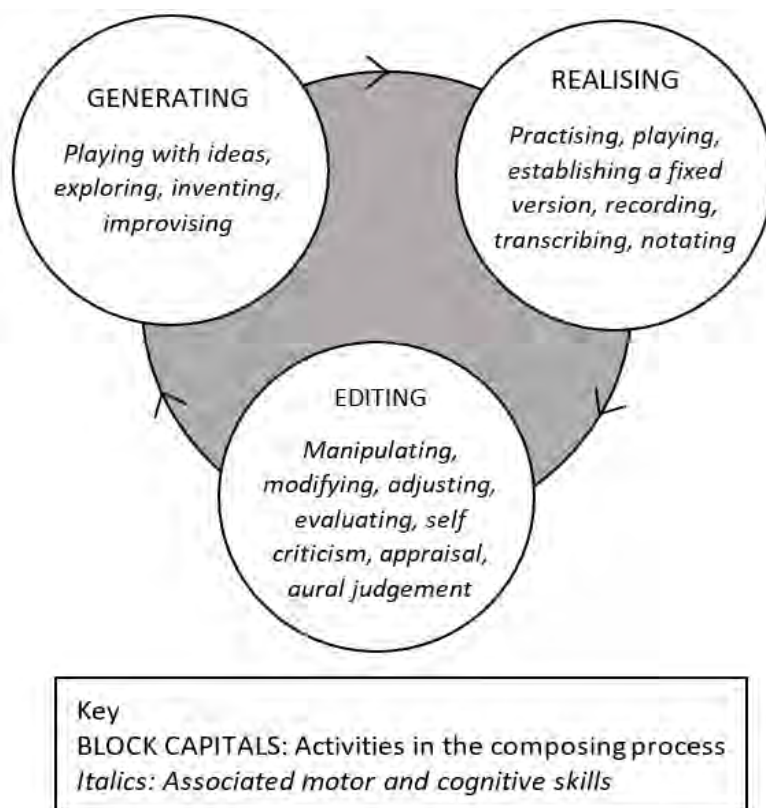
Model of Student Compositional Process (Kennedy, 2002, p. 105)



Berkley's (2001) model of the compositional process (Figure 2.16) includes similar concepts of creating and refining material, presenting it as a cyclical process where stages may be revisited many times.

Figure 2.16

Activities and Associated Skills in the Composing Process (Berkley, 2001, p. 124)



In Berkley's model, the skills involved in generating ideas are, more explicitly, exploring, inventing, and improvising, which she also calls "rhapsodic" activity (Berkley, 2001, p. 123). Listening appears in this model as a requirement for the transcribing part of "realising" and in the evaluating, self-criticism, appraisal, and aural judgement aspects of "editing". While most creative models present stages on a linear progression from beginning to final product, Berkley's cyclical model could be seen as accommodating several modes of creative working, as it allows for revisiting early processes such as exploration as well as progressing steadily from one stage to the next.

In the context of my own study, Berkley's (2001) choice of words is significant when summarising the composition process. She highlights the "central importance of the student's critical self-awareness" (p. 122) implicit in the following:

1. **Generating** ideas;
2. **Manipulating** ideas: using developmental techniques;
3. **Modifying** ideas and creating new ones, as the eventual structure becomes apparent;
4. **Determining the final version**: editing, evaluating, and finishing.

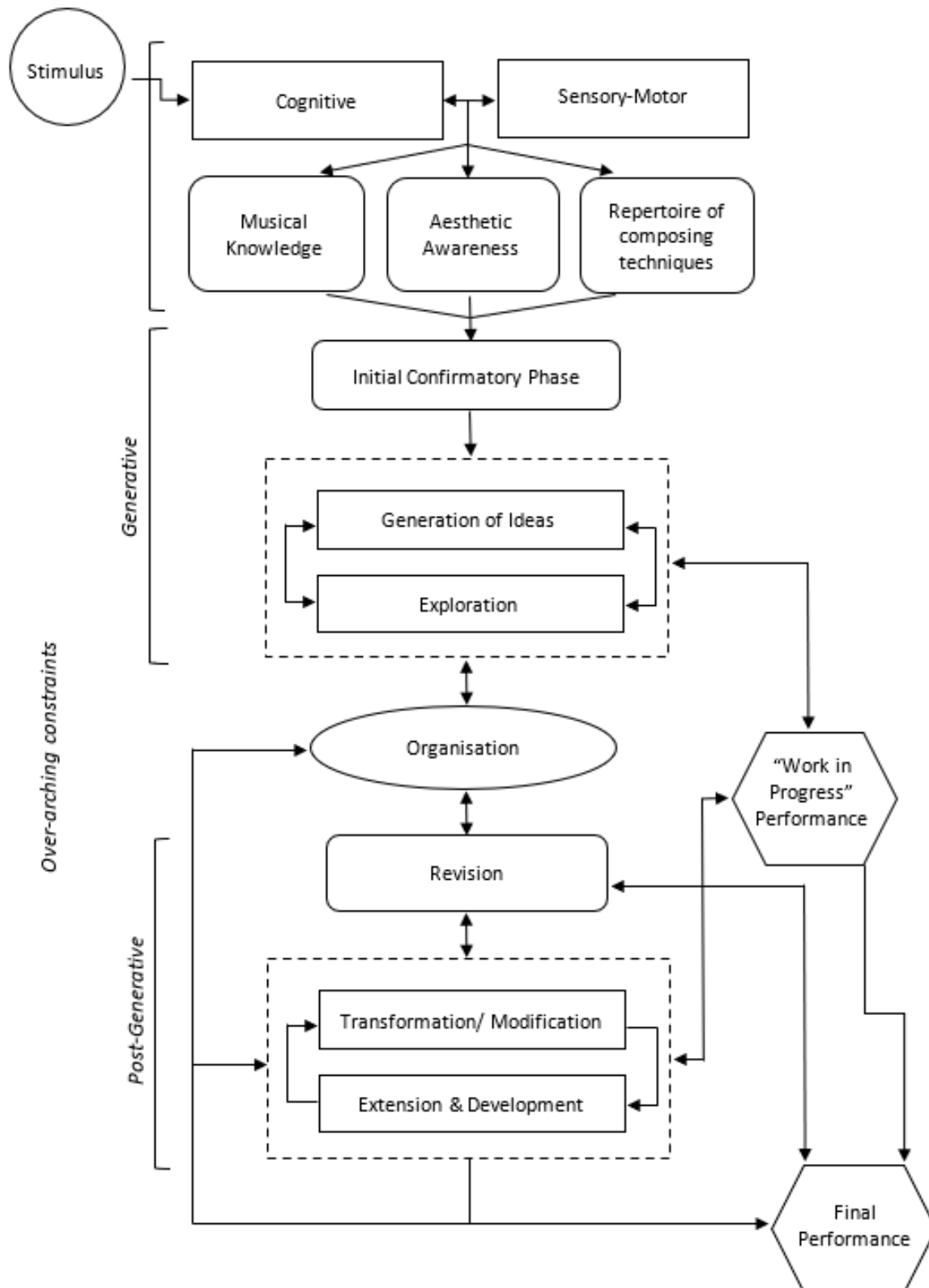
(paraphrased from Berkley, p. 122)

Berkley's cyclical model of the composing process (2001) efficiently accommodates a mode of working that is essentially a linear progression through the generating, realising and editing stages as well as one that may revisit each stage. However, it does not include preparatory work as in Kennedy's stages 1-3, which involve listening, thinking, and listening again before the experimenting stage that is the equivalent of Berkley's generating stage (Kennedy, 2002).

Fautley (2005) presents another model (Figure 2.17) that includes a "pre-generative" stage, consisting of the types of knowledge and skills that pupils might bring to a group composition activity (p. 46). This model is unique amongst those discussed so far in that it pertains specifically to classroom *group* composition in secondary schools. It shows a process that moves from inspiration (stimulus) to exploratory and generative behaviours, followed by a period of revision in which initial material is cemented and rehearsed for a final performance. However, stages can be revisited and repeated and students may move back and forth between them.

Figure 2.17

Model of Group Composing in the Classroom (Fautley, 2005, p. 46)



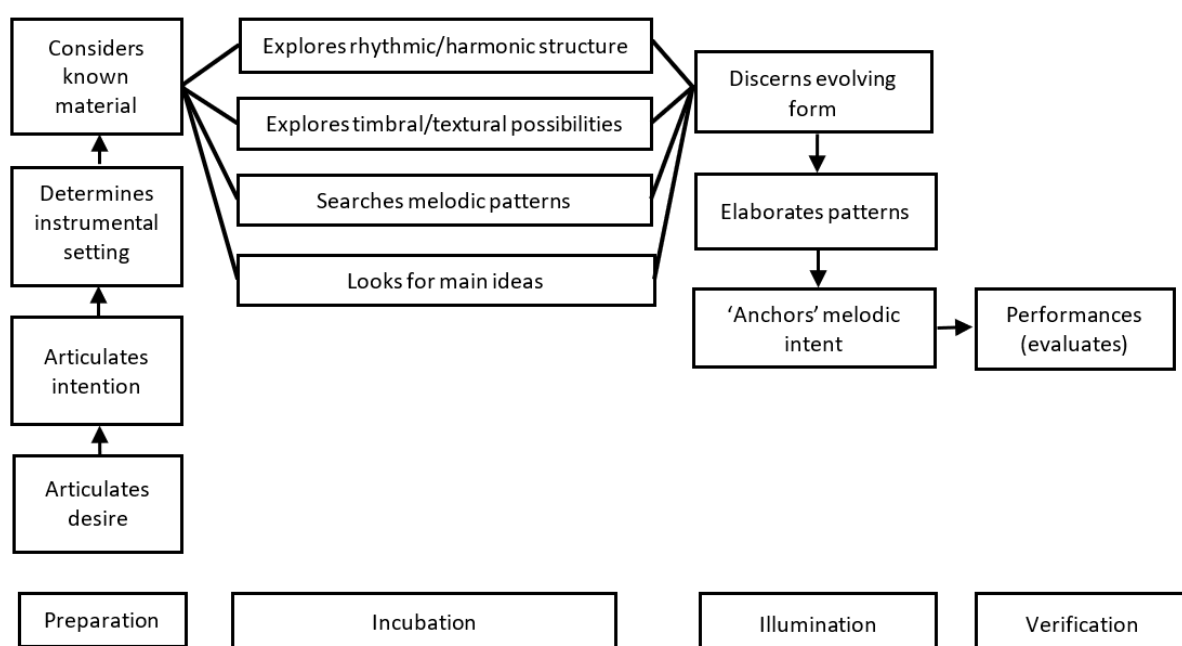
Perhaps one of the most thorough attempts to map the compositional process was undertaken by Burnard and Younker (2002), in a project resulting in three "pathways".

Burnard and Younker (2002) conclude from their own literature search that “composing, as a time-based process, involves strategies that occur along a pathway that moves through stages in the creative process”, adding that these “involve musical decision-making moments” (p. 248).

Burnard and Younker (2002) use Wallas’s four-stage theory as the template for the three “pathways” – linear, recursive, and regulated – formed by categorising data collected from six individual students’ case studies. These show different ways of thinking, but all include improvisatory behaviours (exploring, searching, testing, generating) and critical listening (evaluating, accepting, editing). Data collected from several groups of children of different age-groups was organised into “events” which the authors interpreted as the moments at which decisions were made, distinguishing their compositional strategies (Burnard & Younker, pp. 250-251).

Figure 2.18

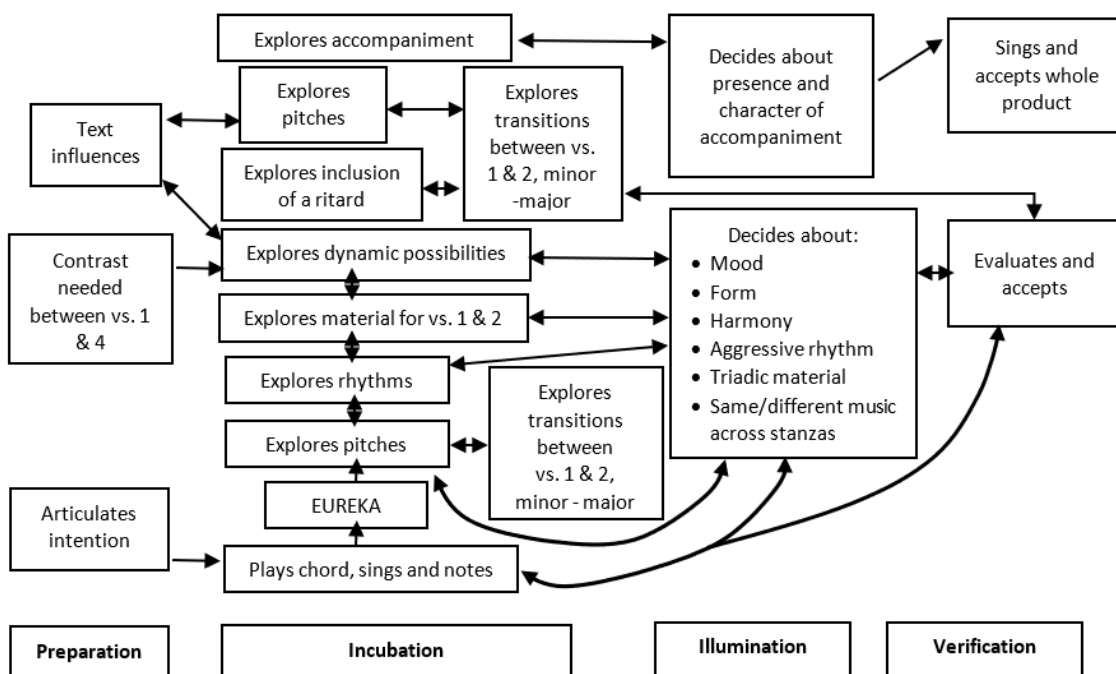
Linear Strategies Exhibited by a 12-Year-Old Guitarist with One Year of Formal Training
(Burnard & Younker, 2002, p. 253)



The linear pathway (Figure 2.18) represents students who moved from one stage to the next without returning and without having a strong vision of the end product. The recursive pathway (Figure 2.19), in which the overlap between improvising and critical listening is especially apparent, represents students who were concerned with unity between new and existing ideas and returned to material to adapt it in the light of later developments.

Figure 2.19

Recursive Strategies Exhibited by a University Student Who Composed with Voice and Piano (Burnard & Younker, 2002, p. 257)

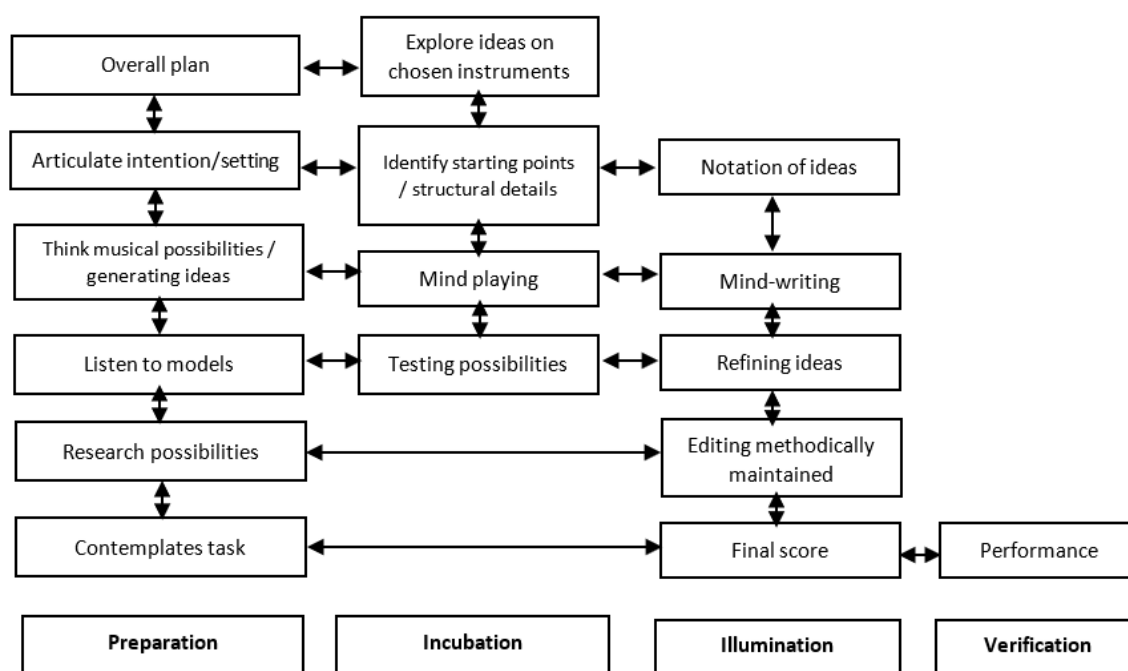


Students who worked in a regulated way (Figure 2.20) had a clear vision of the whole as they made decisions, and engaged less in exploration of ideas. An interesting point to note about the third pathway (regulated) is the internal improvising involved in thinking about musical possibilities, “mind-playing” and “mind-writing” (Burnard & Younker, 2002, p. 256). Listening has been shown to be an important part of the composing process, for inspiration as well as reflection and evaluation. Burnard and Younker (2002) here imply a very high level of imaginative thinking, engaging what could be called the “mind’s ear”. This revisits

the notion of imaginative listening, this time in the form of composers' imagining what they *want to hear* before they attempt to produce it. Bailes and Bishop (2012) also consider this aspect of composition, distinguishing what they term *imagining* – imaginative listening, a creative process undertaken prior to or during composing – from *imaging* – creative engagement through listening.

Figure 2.20

Regulated Strategies Exhibited by a 16-Year-Old Cellist (Burnard & Younker, 2002, p. 256)



This selection of compositional process models allows researchers and teachers to gain a better understanding of how young people compose. Exploration, reflective listening, and refinement or revision are included in each of these models. There is a wide range of literature to support the view that improvisatory behaviour is embedded in the creative process and specifically in musical composition, whether high-level imagining or exploratory playing. Listening appears in all models of the composition process, with the most comprehensive inclusion of this being in Kennedy's (2002) model.

2.6 Conclusion and Research Gaps

The literature reviewed covers practice and research spanning over 120 years, from Dalcroze in the 1890s to the present day. Much of it has been published in the last four decades, during which time the curriculum for schools in England has undergone significant reform and development pertaining to all Key Stages⁵. A greater body of literature exists regarding composition than listening, and no study into A-level students' critical and imaginative listening has come to light. Similarly, the bulk of research related to composition has been undertaken with younger children, with none engaging exclusively with A-level (Key-Stage-5) pupils' musical creativity. As discussed in the introduction, those studies that have focussed on exam classes (Berkley, 2001, 2004; Devaney, 2018) have exposed problems with the teaching and assessment of composition. No study has emerged which addresses the issues of self-trust on the part of both teachers and students that lies at the heart of the reported confusion over assessment criteria.

Material on improvisation ranges from studies of infant "babbling" and "scribbling" (e.g., Hargreaves, 1996) through to sophisticated adult improvisation. The stages of development in improvisational capability have been defined by Kratus (1991, 1996), in order to provide a link between what he calls the "early, musically intuitive behaviours" and later "mature, musically sophisticated ones" (Kratus, 1991, p. 27). However, like many publications documenting the processes and skills involved in improvisation, Kratus's has a genre-bias towards jazz. Subtle adaptations to Kratus's model (1991) to suit my context have been presented above so as to make it suitable for free group improvisation, replacing

⁵ In England, the Key Stages are as follows: Early Years (ages 3-5) Key Stage 1 Years 1 to 2 (ages 5-7); Key Stage 2 Years 3 to 6 (ages 7-11); Key Stage 3 Years 7 to 9 (ages 11-14); Key Stage 4 Years 10-11 (ages 14-16, GCSE years); Key Stage 5 Years 12 to 13 (ages 16-18, A-level years). See <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum> on KS1-4.

genre-specific terms such as structural and stylistic with expectations that improvisation will be fluent and intuitive. My aim has been to produce a method of engaging students in improvisation even if they have no prior experience of it at all, focussing on their ability to participate and *how* they play together, rather than a stylistic knowledge-base that informs *what* to play.

Studies of early-years interactive play, adult community music, and collaborative creativity, whilst not appearing to be explicitly relevant to research with A-level composition students, provide important findings regarding the benefit and value of group-work. With its emphasis on *possibility* and concern with the creative process rather than a product, this body of research acts both as an endorsement of the centralisation of group improvisation within my own study, and as a set of recommendations for engaging students in an activity which could be outside their comfort-zone. To date, no research has explicitly applied models of interactive play to an A-level composition curriculum.

Studies into listening and responding to music, including as part of the composition process, have involved participants from early years to adult, many of them seeking “ways in” to understanding music via imaginative means. Randles and Sullivan’s (2013) advice to composers regarding the structural connotations of certain musical properties (how an effective “ending” can be achieved, for example) also provides an excellent framework for listeners making sense of hearing unfamiliar music. This highlights the notion of “skills transfer”, explicitly investigated by Strand (2005) but also inherent in reports from case studies by Preston (1994) and Fautley et al. (2014). Studies have also been undertaken that link listening to composing, and the “critiquing” element in this requires developing skills of articulation, using musical language to express observations and intentions. Major (2007) showed this to develop in parallel with creative output, and my study would build

on her tracking of creative development alongside pupils' types of talk. However, to my knowledge, there is no study that examines the potential of group improvisation and imaginative listening tasks to enhance students' critical perception and composing, through articulating and discussing intentions, reflections, and opinions.

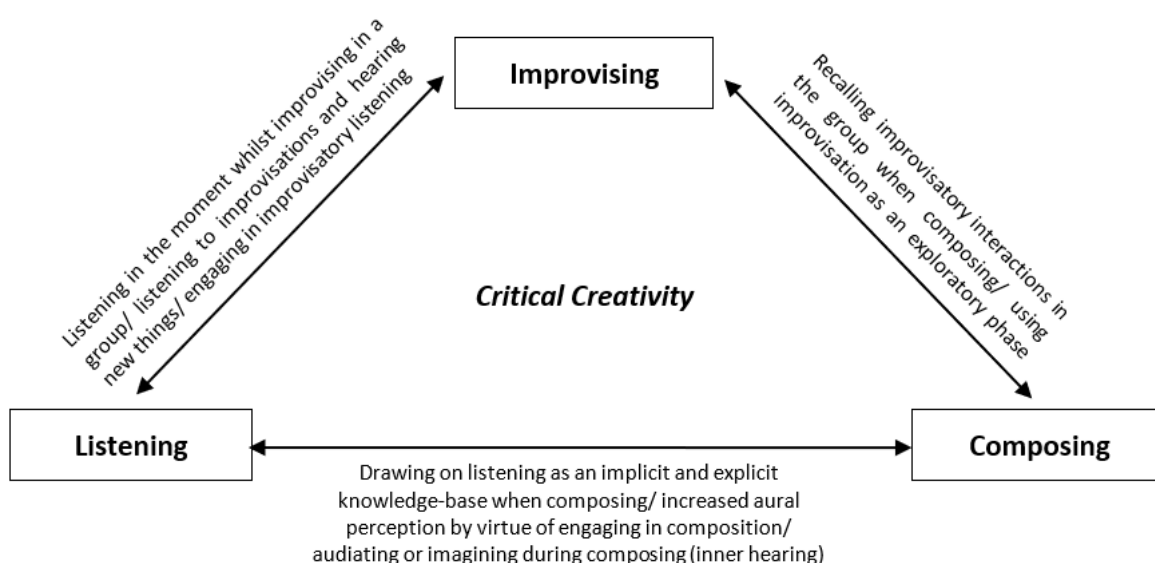
Reading about creativity and creative processes has made clear that several models or theories give a place to reflective and evaluative listening, and to exploratory and generative creating. Imaginative listening in the sense of *audiating* or *prehearing* also forms part of the creative process. While studies into children's compositional processes are plentiful, this has seemingly not ameliorated the problematic and entrenched association of "composition" with masterworks, genius figures, and originality. The separation of creativity into big-C and little-C (Gardner, 1993), or P- and H-creativity (Boden, 1991), is helpful in drawing attention away from the fixation on originality and novelty, although those who have attempted to qualify what makes a creative product have still, according to Barrett (2003), included novelty, alongside value and usefulness. Definitions of creativity in terms of qualities, attributes, and behaviours rather than "abilities" (Guilford, 1950) are helpful in casting composition as something which can be taught and developed. Brown and Dillon's (2012) matrix is the most detailed example of this, placing "modes of engagement" alongside "contexts" (p. 84). Despite the place that such a model might have in encouraging students to concentrate on their own process rather than on the end product, I have not discovered a study that explores what happens when students are actively diverted from a product-focus in favour of other activities that bear no direct relation to any long-term composition task, such as – in the case of my proposed study – group improvisation and imaginative listening.

Models of the composing process include improvisation and listening as part of that process (Berkley, 2001; Kennedy, 2002; Fautley, 2005), but I have not found any study that separates the act of group improvisation and aims to examine how this activity could relate to the compositional processes of the individuals involved. The same is true of research exploring the overlap between imaginative listening and individual composition. The concept of transfer between these three competencies could be represented in the manner of a reciprocal feedback model (Hargreaves, 2012), as shown in Figure 2.21. In this model, the notion of *Critical Creativity* sits in the centre of the triangle, and the three activities are inextricably connected.

With this as the foundation for planning a new programme for teaching A-level composition, I intend to develop a method of engaging students in free group improvisation and other forms of listening than analytical, in order to study the potential impact of these on their individual compositional processes. This research is not only about confidence in the product; it is also about self-trust during the process.

Figure 2.21

“Reciprocal-feedback” Model Pertaining to Improvising, Listening, and Composing



2.7 Research Questions

My research questions pertain specifically to the potential place of group improvising and imaginative listening in an A-level composition programme. Given the centrality of group improvisation to the proposed lessons, this is the primary focus of the first question, with links between the three competencies shown in Figure 2.21 informing the second. They are as follows:

RQ1: How can I, as an A-level Music teacher, best engage students in group improvisation in their composition lessons?

RQ2: How do group improvisation and imaginative listening influence the compositional process of A-level Music students?

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter revisits the Research Questions and reasons for changes to these and the overall research design. It also considers the constructionist and pragmatist elements of the Research Framework, presenting these alongside the methodology, type of data (qualitative), and nature of analysis (thematic) as an Interpretivist Paradigm. Action Research as a strategy of inquiry is discussed in detail, with related issues about the nature of data collection, participant involvement, and knowledge generation.

3.1.1 Changes to the Research Questions

Initially, this research project intended to include examination classes spanning four year-groups, but it quickly became apparent that the study needed to be refined because of the amount of data involved. As a result, I focussed on one class only in order to collect a large amount of data that could be analysed in detail. The original research questions had asked how students made sense of using group improvisation in relation to their individual composition and then in relation to their listening, as shown here:

RQ1: How do A-level students make sense of using group improvisation to inform their individual composition?

RQ2: How do A-level students relate their experience of improvising to their critical listening?

These changed during the process of working with my group, for two reasons. One was that I became more concerned with how the students responded to group improvisation per se, as the original questions wrongly assumed their willing participation in this activity. The

other was that, after a second national COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, what I had planned to be two data-collection periods had to be redesigned and conflated into one so that I could complete the data collection by the end of the academic year. That forced me to interweave listening, improvising, and composing in a way that I had not originally planned, and therefore it seemed appropriate to ask how the three activities were connected. The research questions therefore became:

RQ1: How can I, as an A-level Music teacher, best engage students in group improvisation in their composition lessons?

RQ2: How do group improvisation and imaginative listening influence the compositional process of A-level Music students?

3.2 Research Framework and Paradigm

3.2.1 Research Philosophy and Framework

This research began with the question of whether group improvisation could be useful in addressing what I perceived to be the twin problems of cautious composing and closed-minded listening in A-level Music students. A shift of focus, described in Chapter 1 (section 1.5), led to investigating the influence of group improvising and imaginative listening on creative autonomy during the compositional process (see fig 1.1). The question of *what this influence might be* is shown below in Figure 3.1 as the fundamental **ontological question** underpinning the research, while the question of *how to discover and harness this potential influence* is posed as the **epistemological question**. This combination of ontology and epistemology leads to a focus on “what information we can obtain from answering a particular research question and, crucially, *how* we can come to know this information” (Williamson et al., 2021, p. 15). In brief answer to the epistemological question, this research

set out to engage students in specially designed activities, analysing a wide range of data types to construct “bottom-up” knowledge as it emerged from the data. This particular method of generating knowledge, alongside my active role in the process as the researcher, and the presentation of conclusions true to the participants and drawn from their experiences, align with a **constructionist framework**. However, there are also elements of **pragmatism** in that the second research question, in particular, asks not only how but also *if* group improvising and imaginative listening influence individual compositional processes. Knowledge is not only specific to the participants, but is also transferable to other domains. In a pragmatist framework, the researcher is motivated by the “desire to bring about some form of change” (Williamon et al., 2021, p. 19), and generates knowledge using a bottom-up approach with a small number of students. The final stage of this framework, as outlined by Williamon et al., is a top-down approach applying the newly generated theory to a test with a larger participant cohort, and this stage does not form part of my study.

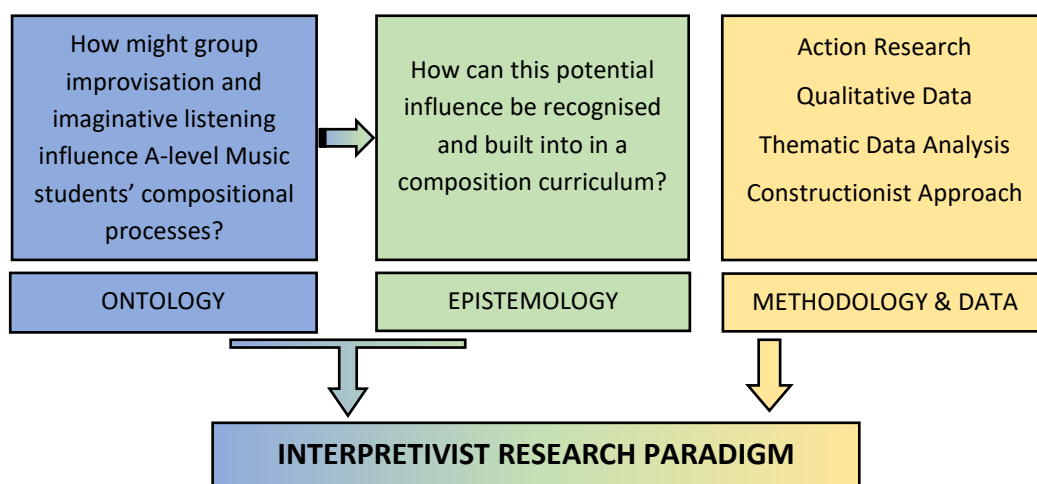
3.2.2 An Interpretivist Research Paradigm

This research was designed to involve both the students and me as active participants, changing practice whilst engaging in group improvisation, imaginative listening, and individual composition tasks, and reflecting on each activity in order to inform subsequent steps. This approach to research design and methodology, as well as the intention of improving my own practice and the outcomes for students, closely aligns with **action research**, whose background and characteristics are discussed later in this chapter. As qualitative research, this was intended to uncover rich meaning in the data and explain participants’ behaviour and experiences. Data was subject to thematic analysis in which recurring behaviours, trends, and patterns were identified and assigned significance that led to the themes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Having posed the ontological and

epistemological questions, the **methodology and data analysis** form the third part of the Research Paradigm shown in Figure 3.1: an interpretivist paradigm, seeking to understand the meaning of students' musical and social actions and interactions.

Figure 3.1

Research Paradigm



This research aimed not only to assess the place of group improvisation and imaginative listening in relation to students' individual compositional processes, but also to examine my own practice as an A-level composition teacher. In line with the principles of action research, the goal was to improve outcomes for everyone by identifying ways in which students could develop more self-trust during composition.

3.3 Strategy of Inquiry: Action Research

3.3.1 *Origins, Definitions, and Aims of Action Research*

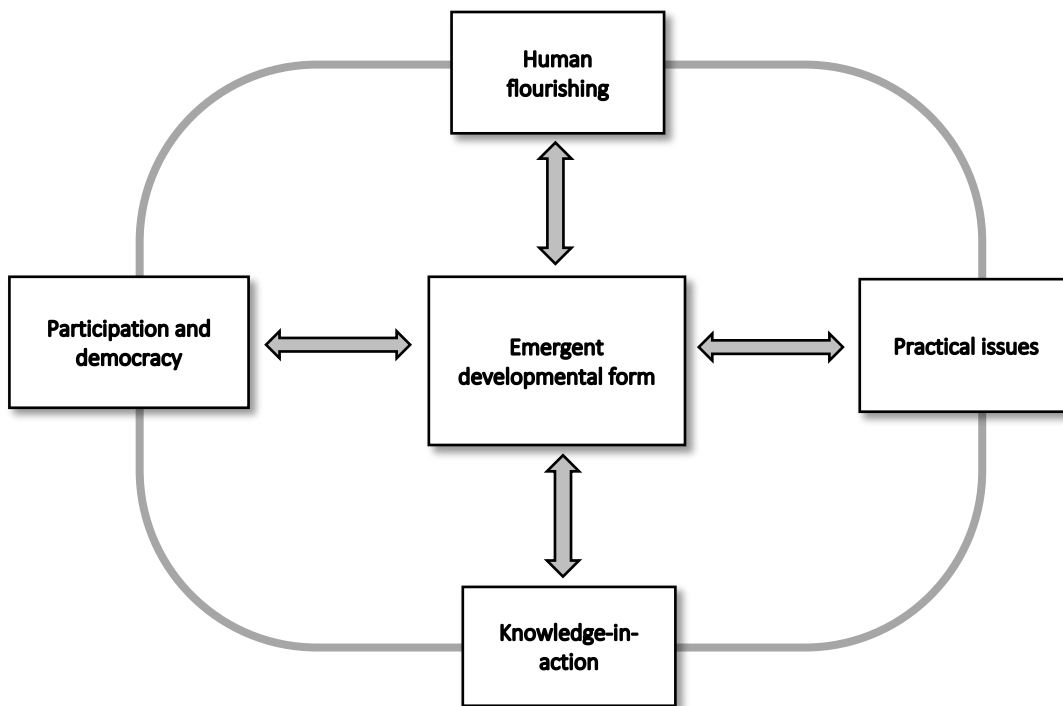
Action research is often described as practitioner-based research, and can be understood as a form of self-reflective practice (McNiff, 2002, p.6). It is not, as this might suggest, a solo or inward-looking undertaking; on the contrary, it is widely viewed as originating with the community work carried out by Kurt Lewin in the 1930s and 1940s (McNiff, 2002;

Adelman, 1993), although some, including Pine (2009), point to John Collier as its founder for his work with native American communities during the same period. Collier's aim to obtain social justice for this poorly treated indigenous group epitomises the *raison d'être* of action research (Pine, p. 38). Lewin observed the enhanced productivity in a work or community setting where affected parties work together in moving forward and finding solutions to problems, and came to see action research as "discussion of problems followed by group decisions on how to proceed" (Adelman, 1993, p. 9).

Both the social and the cooperative aspects of these separate pioneering projects are at the heart of action research, which is often defined using vocabulary related to concepts of collaboration, democratic decision-making, self-improvement, ownership, and knowledge generation, and as such is set apart from the positivist research paradigm in which an observer tests a hypothesis, often on passive subjects. In his book on teachers' action research as a form of inquiry, Pine (2009) describes it as a "conceptual, social, philosophical and cultural framework for doing research" in which teachers feel motivated by the ownership of their discovered knowledge and burgeoning expertise (p. 30). Masters's article (1995) on the history and development of action research distils various definitions of action research into four essential properties: "empowerment of participants; collaboration through participation; acquisition of knowledge; and social change" (p. 3). In the *Sage Handbook of Action Research*, Reason and Bradbury (2008) present the essence of action research as a set of interlinking characteristics, shown in Figure 3.2. The diagram shows a reflexive relationship between the emergent form (changing practice) in the centre and factors surrounding it. For example, there must be some knowledge already for the need for change to be identified; this knowledge is then refined during the process of finding the best changes to implement. Similarly, practical issues will both affect the research design and arise following its implementation.

Figure 3.2

Characteristics of Action Research (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 5)



In view of these descriptions, it is easy to see how action research might be an ideal means of seeking improvement in an educational setting, where the participants include the students, collaboration takes place between them and the teacher-researcher, decisions are made democratically, knowledge is collectively acquired, and the social change involves teaching, learning, and outcomes. This approach is more specifically categorised as *practical* action research, defined by Kemmis et al. (2014) as “guided by an interest in educating or enlightening practitioners so they can act more wisely and prudently” (p. 14). This is distinguished from *technical* action research, where protagonists might exert more control over the results or have a known outcome in mind, such as improved test results, and *critical* action research, which has an interest in community emancipation from injustice.

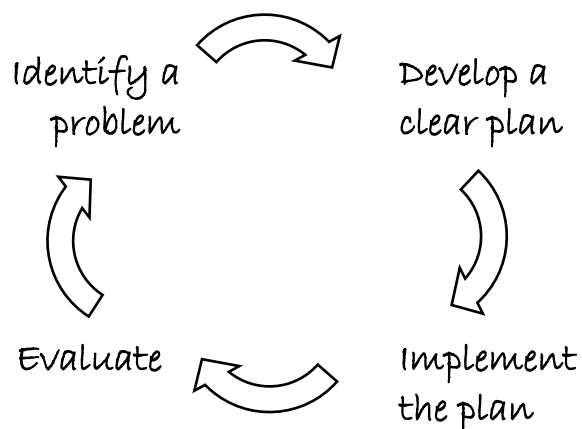
3.3.2 Action Research in Education

Action research has been used in education to make a difference or pose a challenge to the received norms in teaching practice. Kemmis et al. (2014) point to the 1960s and 1970s as a time of change, led by teachers who wished to replace what the authors call “transmission-based” learning with activity-based lessons (pp. 13-14). Action research became a means of allowing students to shape their own curriculum rather than having it imposed on them. It also began to address serious social issues like inclusion, as well as providing a platform for student-led groups aiming to change practice within their schools in areas such as recycling.

Action research continues to be used as a means of allowing teachers (the practitioners) to develop an area of their practice through specific focus on how they work and what could be improved. In their book introducing action research for new teachers, Forster and Eperjesi (2017) present the cyclic nature of an action research project as shown in Figure 3.3:

Figure 3.3

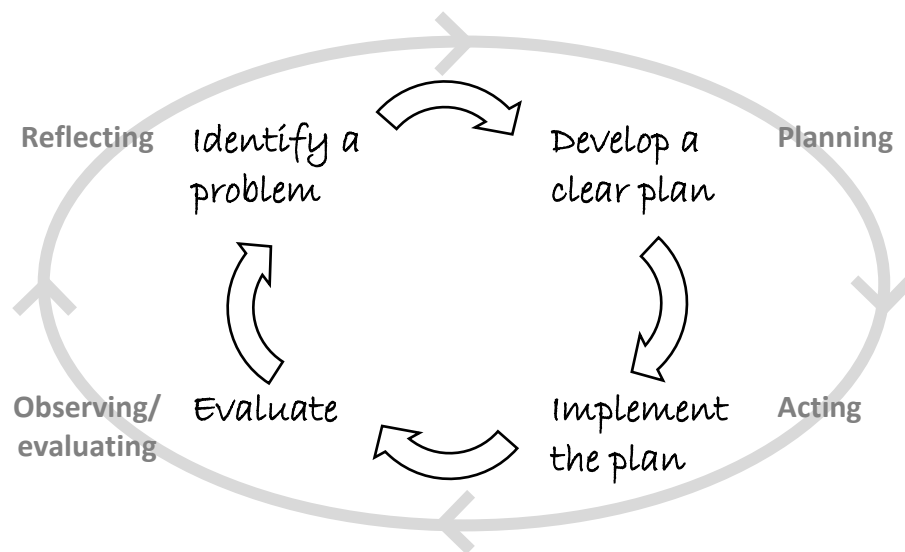
Example Action Research Cycle (Forster & Eperjesi, 2017, p. 2)



This corresponds to other similar cycles often employed in action research, such as Cain’s (2010) model of planning – acting – observing/evaluating – reflecting (p. 160), where the “reflecting” stage would map onto Forster and Eperjesi’s “identify the problem” stage as the researcher prepares to undertake a second cycle in the light of findings from the first.

Figure 3.4

Cain’s (2010) Action Research Cycle Mapped onto Forster and Eperjesi’s (2017)



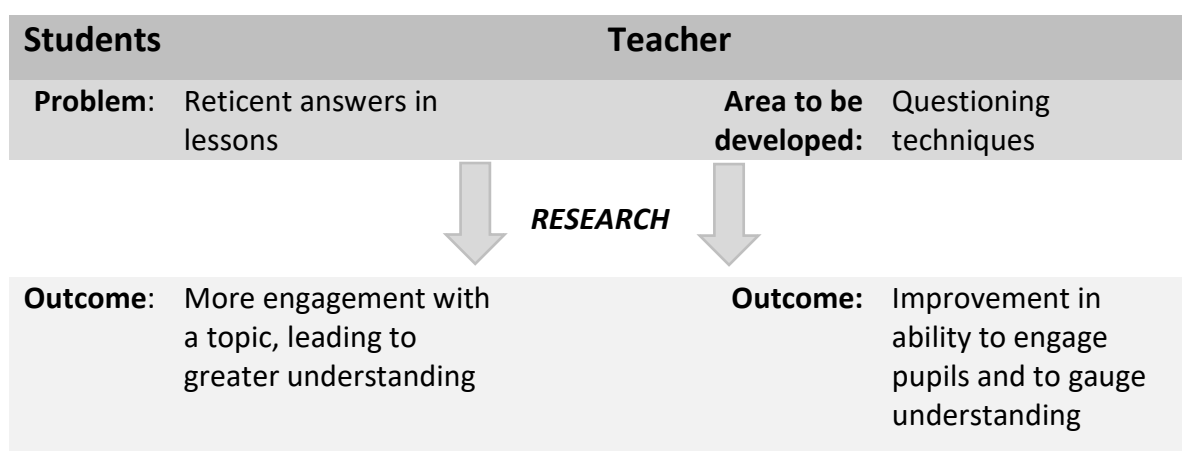
In the context of education, it is often the case that the “problem” lies in learning outcomes, indicating that an aspect of teaching needs development and improvement. Action research in teaching is for the benefit of all parties who might feel its impact: the teacher, who may improve their practice, the students, who may have a better learning experience, and, if relevant, the wider school community, including parents. As expressed by McNiff (2002), “The question ‘How do I improve my work?’ contains a social intent. The intention is that one person improves their work for their own benefit and the benefit of others” (p. 9). An example could be illustrated as shown in Figure 3.5.

Between the initial identification of the problem and the eventual appraisal of the outcomes lies the bulk of the research, which comprises first trialling methods and then

gathering, analysing, and reflecting on evidence, in the light of which the cycle is repeated. To some extent, therefore, the project’s trajectory must be flexible in order to allow for unexpected outcomes and unanticipated new directions. Rather than setting out to prove that changing one thing will result in another, a practitioner aims to find out how to improve an aspect of practice (Forster & Eperjesi, 2017).

Figure 3.5

Example of Problem and Outcome Stages in a Hypothetical Education Action Research Project



3.3.3 Action Research in Music Education

In music education specifically, action research has been used to examine areas as diverse as the impact of community music on young people’s uptake of instruments (Cope, 1999), understanding of musical expression as linked to conducting studies (James, 1998), and using listening as stimulus for composition (Fautley et al., 2014). Composition in the classroom is a particularly popular focus for action research (Strand, 2009). Examples of action researchers in this field include:

- Ward (2009), who investigated three potentially influential factors on his pupils’ motivation and inventiveness in the classroom: using ICT, exploring new sounds in a non-tonal environment, and content, delivery, and informal atmosphere. Ward states

- that he used action research “to continuously improve the learning environment” (p. 154). Taking as his themes a set of “five creative uses of digital technologies” (Loveless, 2002), Ward categorised his data into evidence that pupils had used ICT to work in those creative ways, noting that they were more independent in discussion and evaluation;
- Major (2007), who designed and implemented an action research project that reported on the nature of teacher and pupil talk about composing, using video and audio recordings from a secondary school. Major formulated a “typology of talk” which showed a correlation between how pupils expressed themselves orally, how advanced their musical knowledge was, and what role the teacher played during the composition process (p. 171);
 - Strand (2005), whose study linking composing to conceptual understanding explored transfer theories with the aim of facilitating 9-12-year-olds’ transfer of musical concepts from theory lessons to composing activities. Strand wanted to find out how she could use theories of transfer to inform and improve her teaching in order to help students to apply learning about theory to composing tasks. The findings include observations about quality of composition and evidence of transfer, discussed in terms of how these could inform the next steps in her own teaching.

These three studies represent work with students in different contexts, investigating motivation and inventiveness, the link between composing and articulate talk, and the transfer of skills from theory to application in composition tasks. Major (2007) and Strand (2005) engage in the typical cyclical action research process in order to reflect and inform the next steps of their research. Each researcher has undertaken first- and second-person research, collecting a rich amount of qualitative data (and using a little existing quantitative data in the first case (Ward, 2009)) and using inductive, thematic, and narrative analysis to

draw conclusions. All three studies demonstrate how practical action research may be used in the classroom to allow teachers to gain knowledge and transform practice

3.3.4 Types of Action Research and Presentation of Knowledge

My work with A-level Music students straightforwardly aligns with the principles and aims of action research: I worked with those students in order to inform my practice and improve outcomes for them, and at all stages my work was reflective and responsive to what I observed. However, the complexity of interweaving listening, improvising, and composing alongside maintaining progress with the A-level course meant that some of the research activities and tasks did not map cleanly onto a cyclical model of trialling something, altering it on reflection, and repeating it. While this model (see Figure 3.4 above) is useful in endorsing a trial-and-error approach that can lead to the discovery of unforeseen solutions, it has also been criticised by Kemmis et al. (2014), whose in-depth overview of developments in action research since its inception highlights two shortfalls in the typical cyclical model, also called the Lewinian self-reflective spiral: (i) they consider it to be an oversimplification of the process to view action research as tweaking and repeating the steps in the cycle until eventually yielding a desired outcome; and (ii) they believe that action research carried out on this basis risks propagating the notion of the researcher as an outside observer rather than a participant.

Rather than showing a model of the process of action research, Kemmis et al. (2014) present a picture of it as a diverse field in which, according to the context, different approaches may be taken – for example, participatory research would allow community members to share responsibility for a project in which, based on analysis of social problems, they work towards community action as a solution; in other contexts, a soft systems approach might be more suitable, enlisting an outsider to facilitate discussion in order to

work towards a change in practice. Teachers engaging in action research are most likely to carry out the types shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1

Likely Types of Teacher-led Action Research (based on Kemmis et al., 2014, pp. 11-12)

Research Type	Description
Participatory action research	Community members share responsibility for a research project in which, based on analysis of social problems, they work towards community action as a solution.
Classroom action research	Teachers collect qualitative data in the classroom and analyse it in order to improve an aspect of their teaching.
Critical participatory action research	Involves analysis of the situation in general, detailed self-reflection of group practice, and steps taken to improve or transform the situation. Strong element of participation, and commitment to social justice.

My own research had elements of all of the above. Overall, the whole project is classroom action research, in which qualitative data has been collected and analysed in order to improve my teaching of A-level composition. The first research cycle, dealing exclusively with students' participation in group improvisation, could be viewed as participatory action research, where the specific problem was students' self-efficacy as improvisers, and a way of addressing this was discovered during the course of our sessions together. The second research cycle could be described as critical participatory action research, aiming to improve the "situation" – i.e., the interaction between A-level composition students and me, the teacher – so as to nurture more positive self-concept and self-reliance, or autonomy.

The above types of action research are well suited to an education context because they enable teacher-researchers to arrive at a theory or recommendation for practice – in other

words, disseminable knowledge – that is based on their own experience and observations, or on a field of data collected in a very specific context and subjected to their own interpretation.

Action research can also be undertaken as an examination of one's own practice, one's practice in relation to a small set of participants, and wider community practice, which Reason and Bradbury (2008) compare respectively to first-person, second-person, and third-person inquiry (p. 327). An action research project such as mine draws on first- and second-person data.

3.3.5 Analysing the Data and Contributing to the Field of Knowledge

The way in which data are analysed and findings presented is crucial to the validity and reliability of a study. As with all research, action research is subject to scrutiny in these two respects. Validity concerns suitable research questions, strategy of inquiry, and methodology; reliability requires rigour in data collection, analysis, and writing up of results. Forster and Eperjesi (2017) recommend that teachers, whose action research is often undertaken with small groups of students, use data from a number of sources, or a variety of types of data, in order to validate their findings in a process of methodological triangulation. Johnson (2012) recommends that, in the context of observing what he calls "messy, real-world events in which humans are mucking about" (p. 2), the accuracy and credibility of data relies in part on the clarity and diligence with which it is collated and recorded. Action research is commonly interpretative research, wherein the researcher constructs meaning through interpreting the data. This means that, although researchers may use deductive analysis, applying a theory or hypothesis to the data in order to arrive at results that support the hypothesis, *inductive* analysis is particularly well suited to action research data because it allows understanding of significant trends and patterns to emerge

during an evolving process. Given the nature of the data collected, other methods of data analysis include thematic (similar to inductive) and narrative, which offers a perspective on individuals' accounts without looking for connections and categories, although these may arise.

In the same way that action research does not seek to test any hypotheses, qualitative data analysis does not seek to provide absolute measurements in the way that, for example, statistical analysis of quantitative data does. This can be seen by some as a weakness of action research, and Cain (2010) counters this with respect to the contribution that teachers make to their field of knowledge when they engage in action research. Cain draws on two sources wherein knowledge is categorised: Garvey and Williamson (2002) and Heron and Reason (1997). Garvey and Williamson (2002) delineate types of knowledge as Big-K and Little-K, with the former representing knowledge that is a significant contribution

Table 3.2

Types of Knowledge (based on Heron & Reason (1997) and Garvey & Williamson (2002))

Type of knowledge	Heron & Reason (1997)	Garvey & Williamson (2002)	Example
Experiential knowledge	Knowing through personal experience	Little-K	Knowing that children in a certain group will understand a concept more quickly if it is demonstrated visually
Practical knowledge	Knowing how to do something		Knowing how to teach children to play triads on a keyboard
Propositional knowledge	Knowing that something is the case	Big-K	Knowing that research indicates progression from exploratory to more purposeful improvisations with age
Presentational knowledge	Knowledge presented as an artefact or product		Producing a book of composition lesson-starters

to a field and the latter being personal or practical. Heron and Reason (1997) propose four types of knowledge, which I have presented in Table 3.2 in relation to the division of knowledge into Big- and Little-K, with additional examples from imagined classroom research situations.

Cain (2010) makes a case for practical and experiential knowledge being Big-K knowledge, with the strong precedents of practitioners Orff, Kodály, and Suzuki as examples of figures whose knowledge, gained by experience and practice, had global impact. He presents this as an important precedent for accepting experiential and practical knowledge as equal to propositional and presentational. At the end of his report investigating how music teachers undertake action research and what knowledge is generated as a result, Cain (2010) showed that all four types of knowledge proposed by Heron and Reason (1997) were represented in the findings of the teachers in his study. He proposes that knowledge gained through teachers' action research should be afforded validity by virtue of the fact that other teachers could identify with and learn from knowledge gained from "personal encounter, teaching resources and... teaching and musical skills" (Cain, p. 172). He does not reject the distinction between Big-K and Little-K knowledge, but challenges the assumption that only knowledge acquired in a narrow number of accepted ways should be classed as Big-K. Pine (2009) is more explicit about the way teachers contribute to knowledge in their field, seeing action research as an empowering process through which teachers take ownership of their knowledge, in that they "conceptualise and create knowledge, interact around knowledge, transform knowledge, and apply knowledge" (p. 30).

Further matters surrounding the gathering of data in order to generate knowledge are discussed in 3.4 below, where ethical considerations are discussed.

3.4 Research Procedures

3.4.1 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Royal Northern College of Music Research Ethics Committee in June 2020. Williamon et al. (2021) provide a concise and comprehensive background to current codes of ethical conduct that guide research design and execution in fields such as music education, stating the underlying principles as “voluntary, **informed consent**, the avoidance of harm, and the benefit of research to society” (p. 58). A universal ethical framework for research undertaken with humans was drawn up in the form of the Nuremburg code (1949), following the trials of those responsible for conducting harmful medical experiments in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. Subsequent guidelines for ethical practice have similarly responded to psychologically harmful research, including the Belmont Report (1979), whose three principles, discussed by Williamon et al. (2021), are “(1) respect for persons, (2) beneficence, and (3) justice” (p. 67). These correspond respectively to obtaining informed consent, ensuring minimal harm and maximal benefit, and placing no unjust burden on participants (Williamon et al., 2021).

In the context of my research, **respect for persons** meant providing a Participant Information Sheet for all potential student participants (PIS), obtaining their consent to collect, store, and use their data, and giving them the option to be anonymous in research outputs and to withdraw completely at any time. The PIS and Consent Form (Appendix 3) were modelled on templates provided by the RNCM Research Ethics Committee. In line with Forster and Eperjesi’s (2017) recommendations regarding in-school action research undertaken by teachers, both participants and their parents were asked for informed

consent for data to be collected and analysed. The students were enrolled at two partner schools, and both headteachers gave permission for the research to proceed (Appendix 3). Students' work, conversations, and contributions to the research were acknowledged, stored securely, and presented without revealing exact identities (based on Forster & Eperjesi, 2017, pp. 51-53). Although no one requested anonymity – hence there is no claim to complete *confidentiality* in the presentation of data – all participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity from readers outside the research group (myself, the participants, and the supervisory team). This decision was made in view of the **beneficence** principle, according to which benefits to participants must be maximised and possible harms minimised. Pseudonyms were used because the data was potentially sensitive in a number of ways: some of the transcribed conversations and recorded improvisations revealed participants' insecurities and negative self-concepts; on several occasions participants were asked to take risks and leave their comfort zones, which may have resulted in their feeling self-conscious about their playing, composing, or spoken contributions; the activities and assignments were all undertaken as part of an A-level Music curriculum, and some of the individual compositions had potential to be submitted for the final examination; eventual outcomes discussed in Chapter 6 (Reflections) included reference to their A-level results, which, although generalised rather than listed with names and grades, nonetheless constitute sensitive information.

A consideration which pertained partly to **beneficence** and partly to **justice** was that this research was not only for my own gains, as a teacher wanting to improve my practice, but also for the purposes of providing a better experience for the A-level students who were participants in this research. The activities could not be unduly burdensome or in any way irrelevant to their A-level course. This required a careful balance, on my part, between my

roles as the teacher educating these students and the researcher asking for their co-participation. There is an inherent hierarchy in the teacher-pupil relationship in schools that somewhat compromises the collaborative and democratic nature of action research, resulting in a double-edged “duty of care” to the participants as their teacher, with academic and pastoral responsibilities to every student, and as the researcher, collecting and handling data respectfully, beneficently, and justly.

3.4.2 Participants

In addition to the dual role described above in the context of ethical considerations, there were also two aspects to my position within this research group: teacher-researcher (and therefore facilitator) and reflective practitioner, actively participating in every group-improvisation session alongside the students. Like the archetypal practitioner in Schön’s (1983) model of reflection-in-action, in those sessions I became “a researcher in the practice context”, not only theorising in order to arrive at knowledge, but also doing and reflecting (p. 68). Once again, the role of the researcher in this model is not that of an expert at a distance from participants, but of a practitioner sharing the discovery of knowledge with others. Naturally, I have reflected not only **in** action, with the participants, but also **on** action, away from the participants, when undertaking the thematic analyses.

The student participants were invited to take part on the grounds that they were the six members of an A-level Music group. They are referred to throughout by the pseudonyms Oliver, Jonny, Eliza, Siobhan, Paul, and Emily. Aged 16-17, they brought a variety of experiences and backgrounds to their music-making. The group-size was consistent with the last several years that I had spent at the school, where A-level Music had run every year since I began teaching there in 2003. Also typical of the A-level groups I had taught for nearly two decades at the school was the gender distribution and the range of prior

experience and musical backgrounds. Chapters 4 and 5, which present the findings from the two research cycles, are framed by detailed Participant Profiles that provide updates on each student's improvising, listening, and composing as the research progressed.

3.4.3 Data Types and Collection

In discussing the distinction between data and evidence, Forster and Eperjesi (2017) acknowledge that their book uses the terms almost interchangeably, stating that the nature of data in action research is that it rapidly becomes evidence. Nevertheless, the distinction they make is that data comprises all the raw material gathered during the research, and evidence is drawn from that data and presented in the final analysis and findings (Forster & Eperjesi, 2017). Owing to the relatively small sample sizes involved in action research, and as a result of the adoption of a participatory approach, nearly all data in action research is qualitative, and can take the form of any of the following examples in a classroom context:

- Copies of pupils' written work
- Audio and video recordings of pupils' work
- Recordings of conversations during and after tasks
- Observations of learners and teachers
- Journals, lesson plans, lesson evaluations

Forster and Eperjesi (2017) strongly advise against using interviews and questionnaires as data sources, given the power imbalance between the teacher (adult) and the pupils (children), but they suggest recorded "learning conferences" as an alternative (p. 61). I did include some questionnaires alongside learning conferences, and found both to be useful data types; the questionnaires provided detailed individual and independent responses, whereas the learning conferences allowed students to hear and respond to each other's answers to questions, becoming more like discussions than interviews. The types of data

collected during each research cycle are detailed in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, and these are shown alongside the sessions in which they were collected in Tables 4.2 (Chapter 4) and 5.1 (Chapter 5), as well as in Appendices 7 and 8.

Table 3.3

Data Types Collected for the First Study: September-October 2020 (beginning of Participants' Year 12)

Item	Purpose
Questionnaires	These contained information about students' musical backgrounds and experiences of improvising and composing.
Audio recordings of each session	Recordings of group discussions and improvisations.
Transcripts of each session	Written record of the above. Based on what students said in answer to scripted questions and how they interacted with me and each other, I was able to notice change in their social interactions, critical responses to their own music, and beliefs about improvisation.
Video recordings of each session	An important additional record of students' interactions and how comfortable they felt during the sessions.
My own journal	Reflection on how I felt each session had gone, and any observations I had made during the session or on watching the video.
My own commentaries on students' improvisations	These were useful for noticing change over time, in terms of willingness to participate, confidence to be heard, and musical content.
Students' critical responses to their own improvisations	These, like the improvisations themselves, allowed me to look for changes over time relating to awareness of musical content, how rewarding students had found the activities, and how self-conscious they had felt.

Item	Purpose
Participants' written responses to five unfamiliar pieces of music	These were collected during a one-off session designed to introduce various exploratory ways of listening to music. Some of the responses contain musical observations and vocabulary which bore interesting comparison to students' spoken observations.
Students' contributions to an "Improvisation Clock", displayed afterwards in the classroom	This contained advice to unspecified "future groups" for joining in with and improving in group improvisation. It was an alternative to asking the questions "what have you done /what could you do to improve?" in a bid to deflect self-criticism in students' responses. These responses revealed how their notions of improvisation had changed over time.

Table 3.4

Data Types Collected for the Second Study: April-July 2021 (end of Participants' Year 12)

Item	Purpose
Learning conferences and questionnaire	A form of group interview, these included individual responses to questions as well as occasional discussion. Sometimes answers were scripted first, to help with fluent speaking and to aid my subsequent transcription process. At the end of the data collection period, students completed a questionnaire.
Audio recordings of each session	Recordings of learning conferences, discussions and improvisations.
Transcripts of each session	Written record of the above, alongside which they formed useful records of students' social and musical interactions, as well as their musical awareness.
My own journal	Reflections on each session, as well as comments on composition tasks and students' responses. These helped to build a picture not only of group interactions but also individual creative profiles.

Item	Purpose
My own commentaries on their improvisations	These were useful for noticing change over time, in terms of willingness to participate, confidence to be heard, and musical content.
Students' compositions	Scores (or alternatives) and audio files, which were coded in terms of musical content, style, decisions, and presentation. These included compositions from across the whole academic year, not just the specified data-collection period.
Feedback from me on the above	Various presented as comments on the score, records of discussions with individuals, and summative feedback to students. This was relevant to the notion of students' self-awareness and ownership.
Students' listening responses	Written responses to two sets of unfamiliar excerpts, designed to inform me of their listening experience, receptiveness to new music, and observation skills. Two further listening tasks involved reordering phrases and justifying choices, thus demonstrating range of observations, use of musical vocabulary, and self-awareness.

3.4.4 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis and Grounded Theory

My research consisted of two data-collection periods or research cycles, and a broad range of data types, as listed in Tables 3.3 and 3.4. As qualitative data comprising a large body of different data types, mine was suited to a process of thematic analysis that entails “identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This is not only a way of understanding the data by means of organising and describing it, but it also usually entails some interpretative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), so that underlying meaning is sought beneath the surface of people’s words or actions.

My approach to identifying patterns within the data was an inductive one, in that I was not aiming to validate any theoretical preconceptions. The analysis was data-driven as opposed to being guided by a particular interest in one area, and research sub-questions that were specific to each study emerged as I was coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, in the first study, I gradually began to consider my codes in terms of the following sub-questions:

1. How have these sessions affected students' perceptions of improvisation?
2. How have these sessions affected students' participation in improvisation?

These eventually became a substantial source in answering the main Research Question 1, regarding how I, as an A-level Music teacher, can best engage students in group improvisation in their composition lessons.

In the second study, a number of correlations emerged between behaviours, attitudes, and mindsets in listening, composing, and improvising. It was useful to separate those into the following sub-questions:

1. How have improvisation sessions related to students' composition process and output?
2. How have listening tasks related to students' composition process and output?

Again, these informed the answer to the main Research Question 2, regarding the influence of group improvisation and imaginative listening on the compositional process of A-level Music students.

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend thematic analysis for a participatory research project such as this action research one, and give a list of advantages of thematic analysis, many of which correspond to my own experience of using this approach. As well as allowing me to work with a very large body of data, the thematic analysis revealed some unexpected

insights and connections, and allowed me to include social, psychological, and musical interpretation (based on Braun & Clarke, p. 97).

Inductive analysis shares certain characteristics with grounded theory methods, particularly in the development of codes and categories in response to the data rather than from a hypothesis, and in the way theories are sought to explain behaviour and processes (Charmaz, 1996). Having collected the data, my first step was to refamiliarize myself with it (Braun & Clarke, 2006) by reading, listening, and organising everything. I began my analysis with open, line-by-line coding of the data, seeking to make sense of what I found that would go beyond a narrative account, without arriving prematurely at conclusions (Charmaz, 1996). Line-by-line coding refers to labelling units of meaning, but I also applied the same method to other data types such as audio files and musical scores, as illustrated by the example codes in Table 3.5. Although coding was initially done by hand, using NVivo to store and code all of my data items was useful when it came to applying codes to audio files. The software also enabled me to view all items of various data types with one particular code, and the ability to group codes into categories and themes provided a template for initial, unstructured descriptions of the coded observations (memos), and the eventual report.

Line-by-line coding allowed me to analyse what was said, played, written, and composed, increasingly guided by the research questions I had posed early on in the process. I noticed recurring statements, actions, and behaviours, and attributed significance to those on a case-by-case basis. This revealed not only what changed as the sessions progressed, but when and for what possible reasons, an important step towards more focussed coding (Charmaz, 1996). A valuable stage in the analysis process was memo-writing, which served

to create a deeper understanding of relationships between them and helped with finalising the categories within the themes, each of which examined an aspect of change over time.

Table 3.5

Examples of Labels or Codes Applied to Different Data Types

Data-type	Examples of labels or codes
Transcription of group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-conscious/teasing/social dynamic - Self-aware/perceptive/reflective - Self in relation to others/comparing/expectations - Observation: positive/negative; high or low expectations - Vague/inarticulate/unclear meaning/uncertain - Use of musical vocabulary when speaking - Rambling/waffling
Audio recording of group improvisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Variety of dynamics - Poor timing/togetherness/rhythm - Musical form/shape/natural development - Knowing when and how to end - Intuitive response/musicality - Individual leadership - Safety/repetition/simplicity
Musical score of individual composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attempt to create sense of closure - Awkward transition - Characterisation (with articulation, dynamics, etc.) - Clear intention or style - Confusing phrase structure, texture, melody (meandering) - Effective momentum/build-up - Indiscriminate dynamics, articulation, etc.

3.5 Summary

This chapter places the concept of creative autonomy, as appears in the thesis title, in the context of a Research Paradigm, whose onto-epistemological questions address the potential influence of group improvisation and imaginative listening on creative autonomy in the compositional process. The Research Questions, reproduced here for ease of reference and answered conclusively in Chapter 7, map closely onto the respective research cycles conducted in September-October 2020 and April-July 2021:

RQ1: How can I, as an A-level Music teacher, best engage students in group improvisation in their composition lessons?

RQ2: How do group improvisation and imaginative listening influence the compositional process of A-level Music students?

My research with A-level composition students was based in the classroom and embedded in their A-level Music course, making action research the most appropriate strategy of enquiry. All data was qualitative, subject to thematic analysis which generated knowledge through a constructionist, grounded-theory approach. The aims were to find ways to improve both my own practice as a composition teacher and outcomes for composition students, resonating strongly with the social intent of action research as seeking change for the benefit of all concerned.

Ethical considerations have been discussed both in light of universal codes of conduct in research involving human participants, and in the context of school-based, teacher-led research. Applications of the principles of respect, beneficence, and justice to my research project have been described, with particular reference to this as a project that should be incorporated into an A-level course without detracting from it. This led to a discussion of

the dual nature of my role, both in the sense that my duty of care was as a teacher to students and as a researcher to participants, and in the sense that I was both an actively participating teacher-researcher and a reflective practitioner.

Following this chapter's overview of data types and analysis methods employed in this research, Chapters 4 and 5 will present the design and content of each research cycle and discuss the findings of those thematic analyses with reference to their specific sub-questions.

Participant Profiles: 1. September 2020

The profiles of each participant (student) below are based on information given in their questionnaires, completed in June 2020, and their answers to questions in discussion in session 1, September 2020. The longer profiles reflect more information in their questionnaires or longer contributions to that first discussion.



OLIVER

At the time of completing the questionnaire prior to these sessions, Oliver was playing the trombone to grade 8 and piano to grade 7 standard, and had also been playing the bass guitar, self-taught, for three years. His father was a music teacher, and there was a lot of support from home.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Oliver was playing in the Lancashire Youth Jazz Band (LYJO), and the local Westmorland Youth Orchestra. He was also a regular member of the school's jazz band, salsa band, carnival band, brass quintet, orchestra, and senior choir. He recalled his first compositions as having been "small jazz ensemble things or brass group music", and went on to write a salsa piece and a minimalist composition for his GCSE compositions. Oliver enjoyed jazz and occasionally classical music, and usually composed in a jazz or Latin style. He claimed to enjoy composition because he found it "freeing" and "an excellent way to show creativity". In a similar vein, he said he had done "quite a lot [of improvising] on trombone and piano in bands or to backing tracks" and it was "a really good way of expressing [him]self".

In the first session, Oliver rated his confidence as an improviser at 5/5, saying "Because I do it a lot at home just by myself with a backing track or in a jam session with friends potentially or also in a jazz band out of school or in school. Just do it quite a lot."



ELIZA

Eliza was a late addition to the group, joining at the beginning of Year 12, and she did not meet everyone in the online lessons during lockdown. She had not done GCSE Music, but had been working towards grade 8 on the trumpet and grade 6 on the piano, and came from a musical family. She had played in her local brass band for seven years, more recently joining the big band playing 2nd trumpet. She had not done any formal composition prior to her first A-level task, a short Dorian-mode composition, but had composed piano pieces for herself or her family out of school. She later said that she tended not to write these down, but to memorise them. She said composition “can be fun”. The big band she played in had given her opportunities to improvise, which she said she found both fun, being able to “add [her] own ideas to music”, and “stressful when you have no ideas”.

Eliza rated her confidence in improvising at 3/5 in session 1, saying, “I think ‘cause I can do, but it takes quite a lot of confidence to be able to do it because obviously it's your own music and people might not like it... so I feel you have to be confident to do it.”

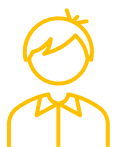


SIOBHAN

Siobhan was a singer-songwriter with a lot of experience in creating and performing her own songs. She had reached grade 6 in singing and grade 4 on the piano before starting the research with me, and had taught herself to play the guitar during the first 2020 lockdown. Her interest in music was triggered by being given a keyboard for Christmas by her grandmother. She was an extremely gifted singer, often performing on stage in local amateur musical productions, and she was a member of the senior choir before joining the sixth form. She began writing pop ballads in Year 5, “because [she] liked artists such as Adele and Ed Sheeran”, and her GCSE compositions were also in this style. She had begun

to work on more “synth stuff” using Garage Band. Siobhan’s responses showed her to be motivated to compose, and she claimed to enjoy composition, but qualified this by admitting that “I’m often scared to show other people my stuff”. Her experience of improvisation before these research sessions was limited to doing “a bit of improvisation around the final chord” when she finished playing a song at home, and she said “generally I don’t do improvisation” and would only consider it enjoyable if she was on her own.

Siobhan rated her confidence as an improviser in the first session as 2/5, saying “It’s a bit, I guess, like... it’s the self, sort of, you’re worried that it’s not going to sound right, it’s not gonna be right, and then if you’re worried about it it’s gonna make you not want to do it and make you feel anxious about it. It depends whether there’s someone around and there’s someone watching me. Like if there’s someone watching me, like even my mum and dad, then I won’t do it ’cause it stresses me out ... it’s awful but if it’s just me then I can sound rubbish and it’s fine.”



JONNY

Jonny had reached grade 8 on the drum kit and was a self-taught pianist, guitarist and bassist. His father taught drum kit, and Jonny had been playing since he was small. Before the 2020 lockdown he was playing in the school’s jazz band, salsa band, carnival band, orchestra, and senior choir. He began composing because he “wanted to make backing tracks to jam on and... experiment with writing stuff in random time signatures and explore rhythmic ideas”, describing his first compositions as “meaningless funk jams”. He did not go into detail about his GCSE compositions on his questionnaire, but said that he also composed at home using Ableton to loop his ideas and “just keep building the piece”. He very much enjoyed composition as a form of experimentation, usually creating pieces in his preferred

styles of Latin and Jazz. He liked composition because it was fun; “there’s no rules and you can do whatever you want to, no matter how stupid it is”. His improvising experience was doing “a few drum and percussion solos in jazz and salsa band, mostly while the rest of the band [were] playing some stabs etc” and had more recently begun improvising on the bass guitar, “jamming with friends” and taking part in an online workshop. He enjoyed improvising because of feeling “free to do whatever you want”, but said that he preferred having “some backing” or “trading with someone else as you can feed off their ideas”.

In session 1, Jonny rated his confidence as an improviser as 5/5, saying: “Well I suppose I’m maybe used to it because when you have a drumkit and you have a chart a lot of it is open to improvisation anyway, so you do it in almost every piece on a drumkit in, say, a jazz setting.”



EMILY

Emily joined the school after doing her GCSEs elsewhere, and first met the rest of the group online during the 2020 lockdown. She was a singer with grade 7 in musical theatre and grade 6 in classical singing, and was working towards grade 6 on the piano. Her enthusiasm for singing led her to get involved in musical theatre summer schools with Stagecoach, and her parents encouraged her to take up singing lessons. She went on to join a respected local girls’ choir, the county youth choir, and her school choir, and was the vocalist in a small pop band at school. Having started writing “probably ‘pop’ songs over simple piano chords” when she was much younger, she returned to this style for one of her GCSE compositions, choosing an instrumental piece for her other composition. She described composing out of school as something she did when “feeling inspired by an artist... and for personal satisfaction (i.e., when I work out a nice chord progression on piano I start singing over it)”, and felt that she

was better at composing if she could play something first. She claimed to like composing when she was “feeling inspired” because it was “a chance to make something up”, but said she was “tough on [her]self”, often not liking what she wrote. Her experience in improvising was confined to individual composition (“sometimes I put on a random backing track and just sing over it and make up lyrics and record on my phone”) and warm-ups with the local choir. She said she enjoyed it when she was on her own, but felt “uncomfortable and shy” in the group warm-ups.

Emily gave herself 2/5 for confidence as an improviser in session 1. As a reason, she said, “Just ’cause I normally don't really know what to do I'm not really used to doing it so I guess I just feel a bit embarrassed like I don't really compare to anyone else, so... not perhaps good enough. I don't always feel very comfortable doing it, to be honest, but I have got better. Like it's better when there's more people. Some people feel the same as me as well. Like, there's only a handful of them that are really, really like.... Not that I'm not confident, ’cause I am confident, but just not in improvising.”



PAUL

Paul began learning the violin in primary school and taught himself the drum kit before “begging for lessons”. He took up the piano in Year 11 in order to complement his orchestral percussion studies at a junior conservatoire, and he reached grade 7 on the piano and grade 8 on the violin, whilst playing orchestral percussion and drum kit to post-grade 8 standard. His family was musically active, and he had a lot of support to enable him to participate in the local Westmorland Youth Orchestra as well as the Liverpool Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (LYPO), National Youth Orchestra and National Youth Percussion Orchestra. In school, he was a member of the folk group, the salsa band, carnival band, jazz

band, orchestra, and senior choir. Paul started composing by “writing songs and simple tunes and writing on manuscript to perform” and said that he preferred to be given a specific task, as he found that “starting is the hardest thing” and the “possibilities [were] too vast and overwhelming”. When he joined the school in Year 10 he was part of the LYPO Rushworth Composer scheme. He had attended an arrangement class at his junior conservatoire, and he won the Royal Scottish National Orchestra competition and was shortlisted in the BBC Proms Inspire competition in 2019. He said he enjoyed composing because “it is very freeing” and appeared to contrast this with performance studies, saying that “learning an instrument these days can be very prescribed”. He declared a wide range of musical interests. His experience of improvising included playing in a jazz trio and several bands, and “jamming at every possible chance”, seeing this as “music at its purest form”. A large part of his drum kit and jazz vibraphone lessons was improvisation. He said he loved improvising “because it is scary, fun, exciting, and so in-the-moment that it has an immensely high reward, and it expresses creativity”.

Surprisingly, Paul only gave himself 2/5 for confidence as an improviser, when asked in session 1. As his reason, he said, “I feel like there's quite a vast availability of great musicians and great music and it's hard to not compare yourself to that when playing and I find it quite soul-destroying listening to myself back. I quite enjoy it, but I just listen to myself and think Jeez... yeah.”

Chapter 4. Preparing to Improvise

4.1 Introduction and Aims

The pedagogical aim of my first research cycle was to enable all students to participate in group improvisation without problematic inhibitions or preconceptions. Despite having planned to work with students in a specific group, I did not know them well; two girls were new to the school, and, of the others, I had taught three of them in Years 8 and 9 (aged 12-14) and briefly taught those three and one other for a term in Year 10, two years before this research began in the first term of their Year 12. Therefore, although I did draw on two whom I knew to be confident leaders in the first session, I could not plan sessions that were specially tailored to this group, and instead created a more general plan for six weekly sessions that could enable students at various levels of confidence and willingness to participate in group improvisation.

4.2 Planning the Sessions

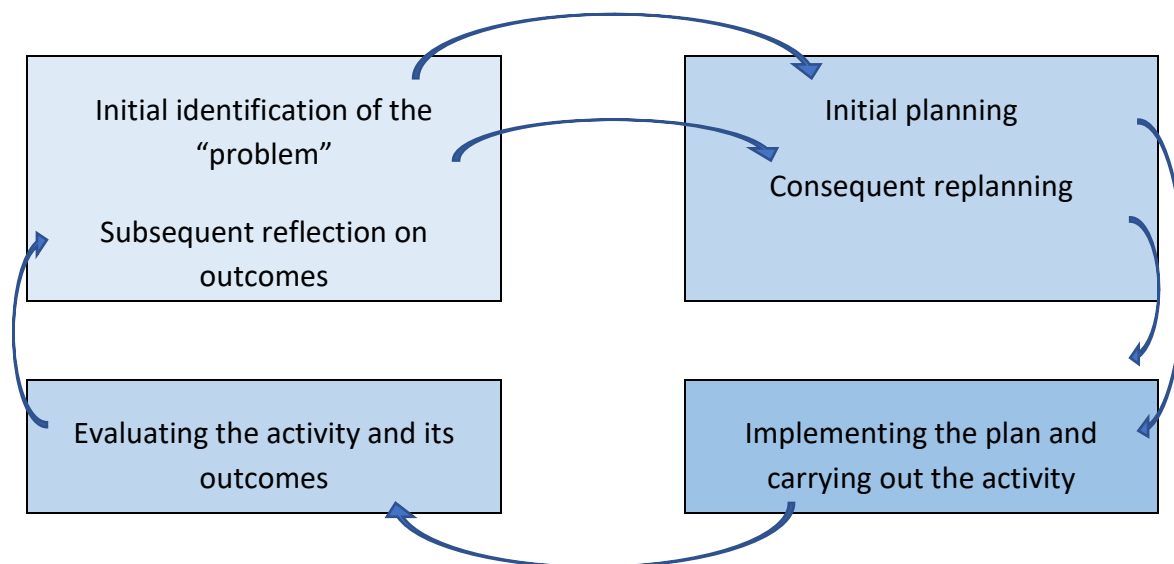
4.2.1 Using the Action Research Planning Model

The model of action research is often presented as cyclical, implying repetition with modifications based on reflection on previous outcomes. Kemmis et al. (2014) caution against rigidly adhering to this model in case of either over-simplifying the process or repeating it until the desired results are obtained. While my own plan of action did entail some repetition and it was, in that sense, possible to map it onto a cyclical model, I had also planned a series of sessions in advance, albeit allowing for change upon reflection. This meant that my plan also had a linear element, in that not all activities were a reworking of the previous week's (see section 4.3 below). The plan for each session did change as the

weeks progressed and I reflected on the outcomes; for example, session 3 included a modification of an unsuccessful activity undertaken in session 2, and making changes like this had consequences for future sessions.

Figure 4.1

Typical Action Research Cycle



4.2.2 Planning the Activities

Each activity was planned with the novice (and nervous) improvisers in mind, as their positive involvement in group improvisation was the “problem” I needed to address. I knew that my experience in teaching would enable me to accommodate the more confident improvisers by offering them extended opportunities, so that all participants could play at a level that they found rewarding. The planned activities were informed by a number of sources containing recommendations for entry-level improvisation. In a short article in *Jazz in Education* (1999), Beale, writing for the teacher and pupil embarking on jazz piano, gives several ideas for the first attempts at improvising, such as the basic task of inventing a rhythm and extending it to rhythmic exploration of a single pitch. This is easily transferable to other contexts than jazz. Higgins and Campbell (2010) offer inroads into improvisation with enough scaffolding to allay anxiety in those still seeking the “correct” way to play

something. These are presented as a set of group activities encouraging, for example, occasional “scribbling” within a prescribed structure, or melodic improvisation using a repeating riff based on a given scale (p. 69). The idea of a *safe-space* is central to these activities, giving enough parameters to allow students to feel that they know *what* to play without the pressure of having to make in-the-moment decisions. Westney (2003) describes how he developed the concept of “The Un-Master Class”, drawing on his own background in Dalcroze to design warm-ups and games for adults. These often eschew the specialist instrument and focus simply on mindful interaction between players, thus detaching performers from worries about technique or skill by using “nonperfectionist means” (Westney, p. 160) and distracting them from the “anxious egoism of ‘What do you all think of me?’” (p. 150).

4.2.3 Considering the Context

Alongside planning *what* my students would do, it was important to consider the context in which they would do it; this meant not only the space but also the dynamic within the group and how students felt with each other and with me. Their development over the course of these sessions would depend not only on increasing experience but also on confidence and self-trust, both of which would be contingent on their feeling that our sessions were a safe-space for exploration.

This drew me back to early-years play, this time with a focus on context rather than activity. Herrington and Brussoni (2015) examine research surrounding the design of outdoor play spaces, and the possibilities and rewards that they afford for physical and imaginative play in large groups or between individuals. The centrepiece of Herrington and Brussoni’s article is their recommendation of “The Seven Cs” for playground design. These are listed in Table 4.1, with their application to A-level improvising in the right-hand column. Many of these

considerations – for example, “clarity” and “challenge” – correspond to the recommendations of Higgins and Campbell (2010) and Westney (2003) and thus played an important part in my plan for the series of activities.

Table 4.1

Applying “The Seven Cs of Playground Design” (Herrington & Brussoni, 2015, pp. 3-4)

The Seven Cs	Application to A-level improvisation
Character refers to the nature of the play space, including light and surfaces, such as soft-play areas.	Relevant to environment, equipment, acoustics, and so on.
Context refers to where the play space is (e.g., rooftop, ground level) and how it fits into that.	Transferable not only to the physical space but also to the group dynamic, their relationships, and even the position of the lesson in their timetable (i.e., what lessons or events surround this activity).
Connectivity is about both physical and visual connections, and is linked to cognitive as well as physical development.	Improvisation entails both the practical skills of spontaneous performance and the cognitive awareness of other players. Equally, this could relate to the physical layout of the room and visual connections with each other.
Change is about the range of differently-sized spaces in the play area, and is linked to cognitive and emotional development.	Corresponds to different tasks, roles and competencies, and levels of confidence.
Chance is linked to the notion of “messy zones”, where children can mess about with sand, mud, and loose parts, exploring and moulding.	The less direction there is in a given stimulus for improvisation, the more is left to unanticipated interpretation and experimentation.
Clarity relates to the balance of allowing discovery without generating confusion.	Offering enough guidance or parameters to ensure that an improvisation exercise is meaningful or productive without giving too much direction.
Challenge involves giving opportunities for self-regulation, risk-taking, and managing one’s own potential.	Making sure improvisation feels both accessible and stimulating, allowing control of participation and an ideal context for experimentation.

4.3 Content of Research Sessions in the First Data-collection Period, September-October 2020

Table 4.2 shows the activities, discussions, and associated homework tasks planned for each session, with brief reference to surrounding scholarship about enabling people to participate in improvisation and, in the case of session 5, to find alternatives to standard analytical ways of listening to music. Data types are also shown for each session. A full account of the content of each session is given in Appendix 7.

Table 4.2

Content of Sessions in Data-collection Period 1 (September-October 2020)

Session and Content	Data Collected
Session 1	
Discussion: preconceptions about improvisation.	- Transcript of discussions - Video recording of the session - Audio recordings of each improvisation
Rhythmic improvisation on buckets.	
Pentatonic improvisation on xylophones.	
Session 2	
Listening and reflecting on Session 1's improvisations.	- Transcript of discussions - Video recording of the session - Audio recordings of each improvisation - Individual compositions (collected later)
Pass the Pose (based on a mirroring activity from Westney's (2003) "UnMasterclass").	
Pass the Rhythm (an extension of Pass the Pose, starting with a rhythmic cell (Beale (1999))).	
Improvisation: Metamorphosis (exploring possibilities for altering a motif).	
Homework task: composition based on Session 1 or Session 2 activities.	
Session 3	
Pass the Pose (energy rhythms and double-circle rhythms: planned to make the session 2 activities more successful).	- Transcript of discussions - Video recording of the session - Audio recordings of each improvisation
Improvisation: Metamorphosis (revisited because more guidance was needed to make this successful).	

Session and Content	Data Collected
Session 4	
Improvisation: Dorian Dialogues (introducing ways to play “conversationally”, in the spirit of improvisation as part of everyday interaction (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016)).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transcript of discussions - Video recording of the session - Audio recordings of each improvisation - Individual compositions (collected later)
Homework task: compose a short piece in a chosen mode.	
Discussion about engaging in improvisation was planned but postponed.	
Session 5	
Listening in different ways: introducing “ways in” to listening to unfamiliar music (Owens, 1986; Herbert & Dibben, 2017).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Written/sketched listening responses from each student (these did not feature in the thematic analysis regarding students’ participation in group improvisation)
Session 6	
Creating a helpsheet for future improvisers: revisiting the discussion about preconceptions of improvisation; offering helpful tips; reminders of good practice. Unplanned group improvisation at the students’ request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transcript of discussions - Audio recording of the session - Completed “Improvisation Clock” - Audio recordings of each improvisation

4.4 Participant Profile Update: September 2020

The participants, also referred to as “students”, were members of an A-level Music class. There were three boys and three girls, two of whom were new to the school in Year 12, at the time of starting this research. In September 2020, each student completed a questionnaire, which included the questions:

- Do you have any experience of improvising?
- Do you like improvising? Please say why/why not.

In session 1, they were also asked to rate their confidence as improvisers, 1 (low) – 5 (high), and to give a reason why.

While nobody claimed to have no experience at all of improvising, two members of the group, Emily and Siobhan, engaged in it rarely and preferred to use it for fun, when alone. Emily's choir used improvisation occasionally in warm-ups. All of the others (Paul, Oliver, Jonny and Eliza) had experience of improvising in jazz bands and, in the case of Paul, Oliver and Jonny, informal groups. The boys were also long-standing members of the school's jazz and salsa bands, both of which involved occasional improvised solos. Jonny was accustomed to improvising as part of routine drumming (often marked on drum music as an invitation to "develop" what is written), and Paul was taking lessons in jazz vibes and was also a drumkit player.

Professed confidence ratings in session 1 corresponded to the earlier questionnaire responses regarding experience and enjoyment of improvisation, with the exception of Paul. Jonny and Oliver rated themselves 5/5 for confidence, while Eliza gave herself 3, on the grounds that she knew she could do it but felt that it put her under pressure; Paul, Emily and Siobhan all rated themselves 2, and all gave reasons associated with feeling unfavourably judged (Siobhan) or judging themselves unfavourably in comparison to others. Given his experience and in light of his subsequent participation in improvisation activities, Paul's response seems to reflect his judgement of the quality of his improvisations, rather than his confidence to improvise. Siobhan and Emily, on the other hand, did appear to have low confidence and to experience some inhibition when joining in with the activities. These responses are further discussed below in the context of Theme 1.

4.5 Data Analysis and Research Sub-questions in Study 1

As detailed above in Chapter 3, the data was analysed thematically, an interpretative process concerned with identifying patterns in the data. In this series of preparatory sessions, although I was focussing in particular on what students played and how they responded to direct questions, I found their social interactions as a new A-level Music group to be relevant, and thus took into account their conversation as well as our planned discussions and improvisations. This would not be as important in the analysis of future research data, as the next study was not designed to effect change in students' confidence to participate in group improvisation as this one was.

Enabling students to participate in improvisation without feeling prohibitive anxiety was my initial aim over these six weeks, but it became apparent after the open coding of the transcription of the discussion in session 1 that students' preconceptions about improvisation were a potentially inhibiting factor in themselves. In other words, mindset was as influential as practical know-how on their ability to participate in a fulfilling way. Therefore, I decided to investigate what the data could show me about students' perceptions of improvisation, separately from what it revealed about their participation in improvisation. In essence, this led me to pose two sub-questions, specific to this data set, that could help to ascertain how successful it had been to reimagine the classroom as a kind of *musical playground*:

1. How have these sessions affected students' perceptions of improvisation?
2. How have these sessions affected students' participation in improvisation?

Changes were apparent in what students thought improvisation was, what it entailed on the part of the improviser, how they felt when engaging in it, what they noticed about their own group pieces when listening to them, what they said or revealed about themselves,

how they interacted with each other, and how they played together. These became my categories, and the links between them – for example, the strong link between social confidence and musical interaction – suggested how they might be grouped into themes. The themes are shown in Table 4.3, with categories listed alongside.

Table 4.3

Themes and Categories in Study 1: Preparing to Improvise

Themes		Categories
Theme 1	Changes in assumptions, preconceptions, and self-efficacy	Context: genre, venue, and purpose
		Expectations and skills
Theme 2	Changes in emotional response, critical reaction, and self-concept	Reward versus deterrent in improvising
		Critical reactions to music created together
Theme 3	Changes in social and musical interactions	Developing trust and social confidence
		Initiative and exploration - developing confidence to take risks and responsibility
		Developing responsiveness and awareness: the confidence to play 'outwardly'

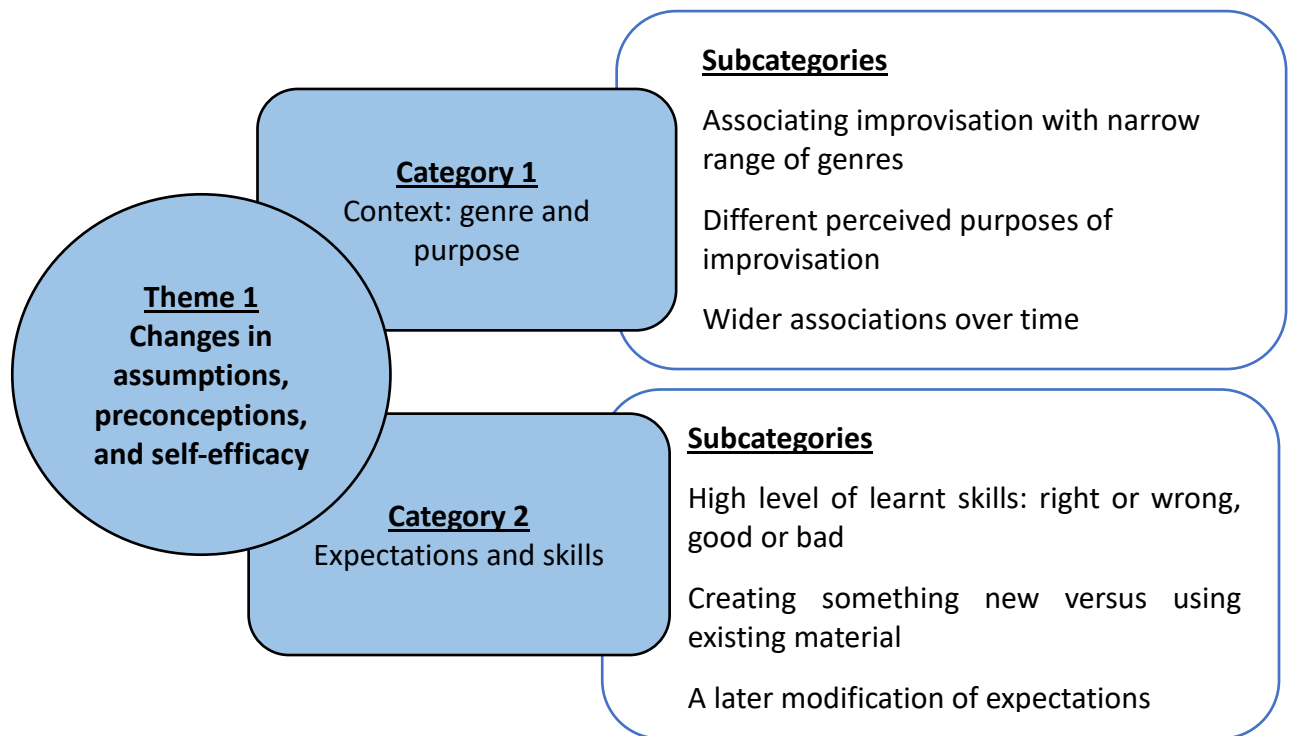
While the themes point to different aspects of our experiences, they overlap and interrelate. A more detailed account of findings and analysis of the data is given below. The group's recorded improvisations are referred to by session then number in that session, e.g., 1(3) means session 1, improvisation 3.

4.6 Findings and Discussion

4.6.1 Theme 1: Changes in Assumptions, Preconceptions, and Self-efficacy

Figure 4.2

Categories and Content Discussed in Theme 1



This theme is concerned with students' understandings of what improvisation is and what skills it entails. Strong associations with certain contexts and a set of high-level skills emerged in their questionnaires, discussions in sessions 1 and 6, and how they critiqued their first group improvisations. I found changes in when, where, and in what musical context they might expect to hear or do improvisation, and changes in what kind of skills they would expect of an improviser.

4.6.1.1 Category 1. Context: Genre and Purpose.

This category describes what the students said about improvisation as they understood it and/or had experienced it, including association with certain styles, ensembles, and

venues, as well as its purpose. Most of them made the connection with solo performance or with jamming, both carrying a certain weight of expectation about what to play and who would be listening.

4.6.1.1.1 Associating Improvisation With a Narrow Range of Genres.

In session 1, I asked the group two questions:

- What is improvisation?
- When or where might you hear it?

The questions were posed again in session 6.

In this category, there emerged associations with the word "improvisation": where, when, and who they might hear improvising. As well as their responses to the above questions, I also took into account their own experiences of improvising, and in what context that took place.

According to what students said in session 1, the range of genres with which they associated improvisation was narrow. They imagined or had experienced improvising in the context of jazz and rock/pop music, the former usually being envisaged as a solo in a larger piece and the latter as "jamming". Even those whose own experience included neither still associated improvising with those two genres, mentioning bands, live gigs, and jazz. Only Oliver mentioned the possibility of improvising in a classical music context ("ad lib section") and only Paul mentioned it in the context of the initial stages of composing.

The associations the students made with a narrow range of genres corresponds to a belief that improvisation entails drawing on a "knowledge base" (Kenny & Gellrich, 2002, p. 118) and appropriate "referents or models", patterns, and motifs (Alder, 2012, p. 6). Naturally, the belief that they did not have access to this knowledge base affected students' self-

efficacy, defined by Bong and Clark (1999) as one's view of how well one can do something, usually measured against "mastery criteria" (p. 2).

4.6.1.1.2 *Different Perceived Purposes of Improvisation.*

In addition to these contexts, four types of improvisation emerged from the students' talk and writing in the questionnaires and the session 1 discussion, grouped below according to purpose:

- Formal/performance-oriented

By associating improvisation with solos and jazz, students were formalising it as an activity that takes place during or in preparation for performance. They felt a pressure of scrutiny from fellow players or an audience.

- Informal/social

There were several references to jamming with friends, which was couched in terms of enjoyment and relaxation rather than performance. Emily's account of improvising in choir warm-ups presented another informal context, in that it was not undertaken in preparation for performance. Both she and Oliver used the word "just", but for different reasons. For Oliver, "just improvising" was improvising for fun, without pressure; for Emily, as revealed by subsequent discussion in session 1, being told "just sing" was uncomfortable for her as she wanted to know *what* to sing. Nonetheless, as in Oliver's situation, no pressure to perform was implied.

- Personal/self-expression

Three students' questionnaires mentioned improvising at home alone: Oliver, Siobhan, and Emily. Both Emily and Siobhan later said that they enjoyed improvising *only* if they were on their own, suggesting that, for them, this is a kind of exploratory playing or singing that

they would not willingly transfer to a public context. Oliver and Paul explicitly mentioned self-expression in their questionnaires and their responses in session 1, but, unlike the girls, they did not couch this in terms of privacy.

- Creative/composition

This barely figured in students' explicit associations with improvisation, apart from Paul's comment in session 1, that you could use it "at the preliminary stages of writing music, creating a song". Oliver said that he had "always kind of just made stuff up on the spot since I started playing", but didn't seem to equate this with creating or composing. In the questionnaire, Emily's response to the question of experience in improvising gave an account of how she would sometimes "put on a random backing track and just sing over it and make up lyrics and record on [her] phone" but she did not explicitly make the connection between this and her composing process, either here or in the session 1 discussion.

4.6.1.1.3 Wider Associations with Genre and Purpose Over Time.

My sessions were designed to move students away from *what to play*, focussing instead on *how to participate* by inviting them to think of their music as everyday interaction or conversation. This is akin to a view of improvisation as an innate behaviour rather than a practice of re-working learnt patterns, proposed by MacDonald and Wilson (2016). I hoped that this would improve their self-efficacy by demonstrating that familiarity with a particular set of stylistic models and patterns was not essential to participating in improvisation.

At the end of the data collection period, the questions about what improvisation was and when or where it might be heard were posed again, and students' answers contained a range of possible contexts that was slightly wider and less genre-specific. They included

statements such as “any musical setting” and “with your friends/on your own/in class”, and allowed for the use of templates and planning. Jazz bands and live gigs came up only once each.

In terms of the four different types of purpose, the group’s descriptions of their understanding of improvisation did not significantly alter between sessions 1 and 6. The separation into four distinct types was nonetheless a useful undertaking, as it revealed something about what individuals saw as the necessary skills involved in improvising, thus providing a link between categories within this theme. The fact that only two people consciously connected improvisation with the composing process (Paul in both sessions and Jonny in session 6) told me that my subsequent research might play an important role in encouraging the group to view improvisation as a valid and active part of the composition process.

4.6.1.2 Category 2. Expectations and Skills.

This category examines the students’ ideas of what improvisation entails, and reveals how confident they themselves felt as improvisers. There was an evident link between students’ assumptions about what they perceived to be the skills required to improvise and their anxiety about it, revealing negative self-efficacy.

4.6.1.2.1 High Level of Learnt Skills: Right or Wrong, Good or Bad.

At first, students associated improvisation with learnt skills and playing something that sounded right or good. Placing it in the context of a solo (see above) seemed to mean equating it with competent or impressive playing. Many of their anxieties stemmed from these assumptions about skills, and the expectation that something impressive would be made up on the spot.

Their initial high expectations included the notion that an improvisation could be good or bad, and right or wrong. Emily needed to know what to do in order to feel confident that she would get it right ("I normally don't really know what to do [in choir warm-ups]"), and she mentioned this again in session 3 ("a bit of organisation is good, sometimes, for people who don't honestly know what they're doing!"). Siobhan was powerfully self-critical: "you're worried that it's not going to sound right, it's not going to be right" and associated this with being witnessed: "if it's just me then I can sound rubbish and it's fine". Siobhan, Jonny, Eliza, and Emily commented on things that sounded like mistakes when listening to their group improvisations during session 2. Only Jonny's was a general observation about the group; the girls all blamed themselves for audible mistakes or bad playing.

The definition of self-efficacy provided by Bong and Clark (1999) stipulates that self-evaluation of skill is usually measured against certain "mastery criteria" (p. 2). It was clear from the students' definitions of improvisation as something genre-specific, with connotations of virtuosity and high-level learnt skills, that they were acutely aware of mastery criteria. Some of them had negative self-efficacy in that they considered themselves unable to measure up. Self-efficacy is a factor in self-concept, the latter distinct from self-efficacy in that it usually involves comparison to others in a specific context (Bong & Clark, 1999). The comparison to others or professed fear of their judgement indicated that students saw their improvisation as a reflection on themselves, and that their negative self-efficacy was affecting their self-concept. This forms a link with Theme 2 (see below).

4.6.1.2.2 Creating Something New versus Using Existing Material.

Another expectation revealed in the data was that an improvisation should be something new, different, or original. For Oliver, the onus was on the improviser "to make a different kind of melody", and Eliza's definition of improvisation was that it should be a "made-up

rhythm which is different to the piece", a condition to which she returned in session 6 by saying it was "not part of the original piece".

In contrast, the use of existing material was also mentioned as a reassuring factor. Jonny's questionnaire expressed a preference for "either [having] some backing or... trading with someone else as you can feed off their ideas as well as your own", and in session 1 he supported his confidence rating in improvisation with an example of a drummer's regular experience of playing with a "chart". His definition of improvisation in session 1 incorporated similar notions of scaffolding, in terms of "making things up over a backing or some chords, or around a melody that already exists".

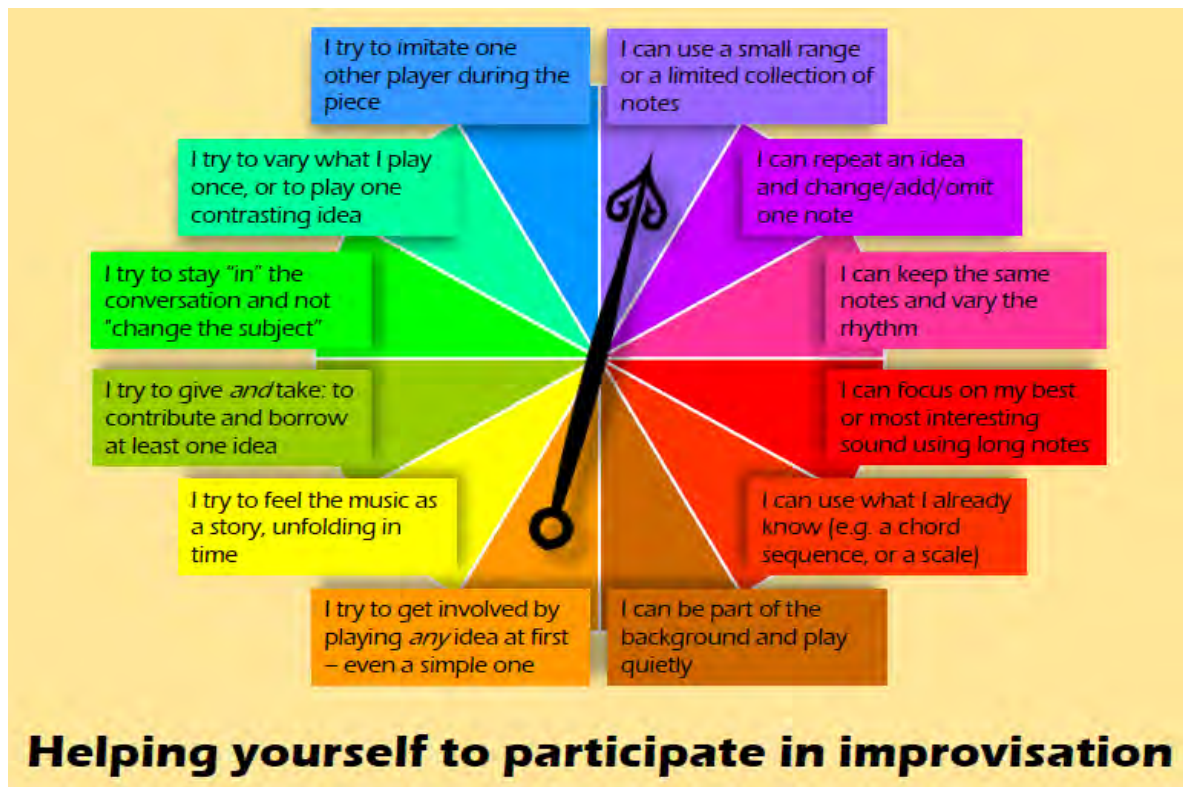
By introducing stimuli and offering guidelines for my students' improvisations, I was effectively scaffolding their participation. In the context of children's play, the practice of semi-structured rather than completely free play is presented by Craft (n.d., p. 4) as an "enabling context", fostering self-confidence, self-esteem, and creativity. Couched in terms of my A-level students' improvisation, the given parameters (the semi-structure) improved their self-efficacy (confidence that they could do it) by proffering possible ways of participating (creative solutions).

4.6.1.2.3 A Later Modification of Expectations.

In session 6, we returned to the questions about what improvisation is and when or where it might be heard. The group was also asked to think of one way of facilitating participation in improvisation, and one way of improving in this context. Their responses were used to create the Improvisation Clock shown in Figure 4.3, with similar responses being conflated to form one contribution. This was displayed in the classroom where the research took place, and its purpose was to serve as a tool for self-help in future improvisation sessions. The clock-hand can be mentally "spun" to a piece of advice.

Figure 4.3

The Improvisation Clock



I was glad to see more recognition of using existing material in session 6, when Jonny referred to using “whatever I have around me”, and Emily acknowledged that, in contrast to the notion of creating something new on the spot, improvisation “often could be slightly planned”. Paul also said that it could be done “with or without restrictions, templates, etc”. This showed me that, by the end of the data collection period, students were ready to moderate their exacting expectations of being an improviser, and therefore were less likely to fear it.

The Improvisation Clock also revealed a great deal of change in students’ expectations of themselves and understanding of the skills involved in improvising. In comments such as “I can use what I already know” and “I try to imitate one other player”, there is a considerable lowering of expectations, with improvisation broken down to manageable skills. When defining and contextualising improvisation at the outset, however, students had

understandably thought about *an* improvisation, the *product*, as was evident in the way they spoke of it as a solo, or something different, with the potential to be right or wrong.

The Improvisation Clock exercise asked for a focus on the *process* of improvising, which could account for why their answers made no mention of the possibility of an improvisation's being good or bad, or their playing something that was right or wrong, or making mistakes. This is in line with one of Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos's (2020) "five visions of improvisation pedagogy" – essentially five categories of how improvisation in music education is conceived in a range of literature spanning 30 years, the fifth being "improvisation as an impetus for creativity" (p.113). The positioning of improvisation in the domain of creativity rather than performance tradition, for example, apparently encouraged students to focus on the "process of discovery" (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, pp. 126-128) that is generating and responding to material, rather than on skills development or stylistic expertise.

Siljamäki and Kanellopoulos's (2020) visions of improvisation pedagogy also make sense of the absence, in students' contributions to the Improvisation Clock, of genre- and context-specific references, or improvising understood as being for "conserving and enlivening traditions" (p. 127). Instead of the potentially intimidating notion of a solo spotlight in a formal performance context, they presented the opposite – "I can be part of the background and play quietly" – as a valid form of participation. In contrast with their shared preconceptions about improvisation in session 1, they did not raise the expectation to create something new, different, or original.

By asking them to think of this in terms of something that could be useful to themselves and to others in the future, I hoped to deflect self-critical comments, such as a piece of advice followed by a self-deprecating remark, and this was successful, as all comments were positive and practical. The students' responses were nonetheless personal reflections

of themselves, such as Emily's contribution: "I can start with a more straightforward chord sequence, if you're unsure of what to start with". She had done exactly that in session 4, but rather than this veiling an unspoken self-criticism, implying that she was the one who never knew how to start, it was a way of her saying that this is a strategy that had worked for her. It is likely that Emily's realisation that this was a valid mode of participation had improved her self-efficacy in this context.

This change in attitude towards improvisation illustrates an important potential benefit of simply being immersed in improvisation, without instruction in genre-specific idioms. In the same way as play offers children the opportunity to enact lived experience and learn possible behaviours by observing and interacting with others (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010), improvisation enabled my students to find out how to engage by hearing what other students did and finding their own ways to participate. The Improvisation Clock is testament to the fact that all of them found ways not only to join in but also to challenge themselves to find creative ways of extending what they played. While Izumi-Taylor et al. (2010) and Craft (n.d.) note the advantages of this kind of immersive, interactive play to developing creativity, I would add explicitly that there are also considerable advantages to self-efficacy, as shown by the changes in how my students felt about participating in improvisation.

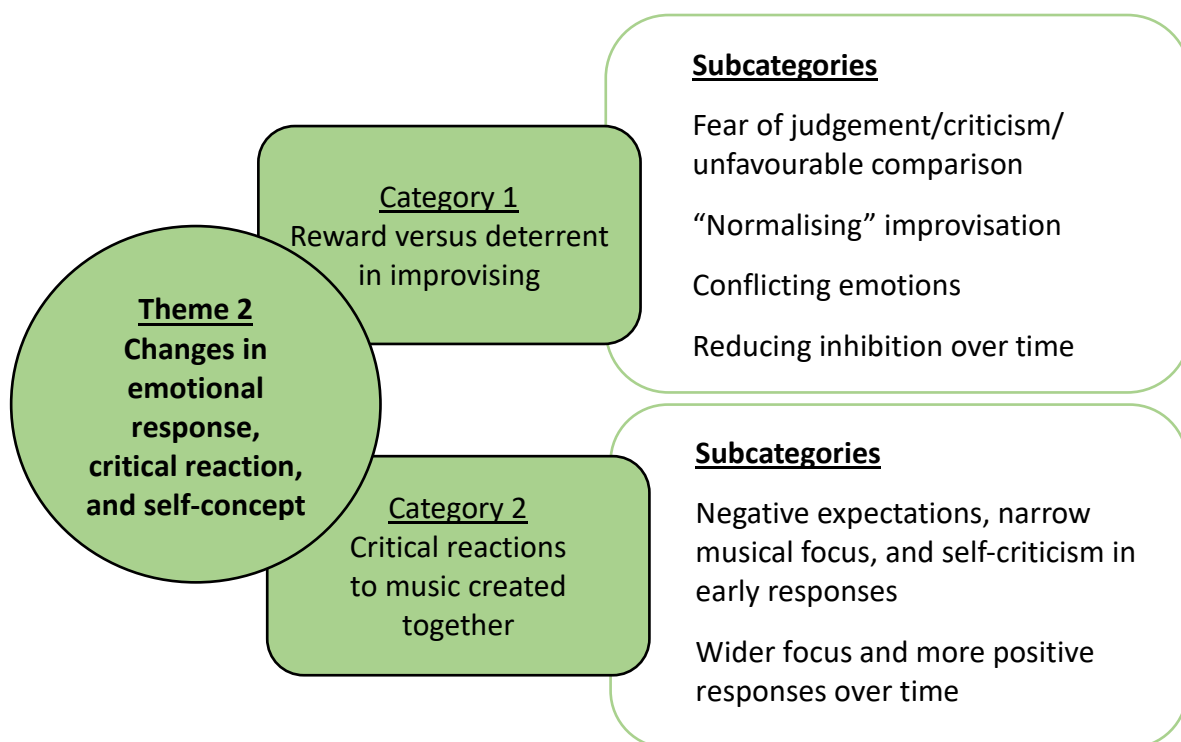
4.6.2 Theme 2: Changes in Emotional Response, Critical Reaction, and Self-concept

This theme discusses positive and negative associations with improvisation. The pedagogical aim of this series of sessions was to enable each individual in the group to feel safe to play in an exploratory manner, and to find some reward in the activities. Finding out about their previous experiences was essential to understanding their emotional starting-point. For this, I used their initial questionnaires as well as their responses to the questions

in session 1, when they defined improvisation and rated their own confidence as improvisers, giving more information when questioned personally. I compared this to what I could construe from the group's contributions to the Improvisation Clock in session 6. I also transcribed their commentaries on their group improvisations, and used my own observations of video and audio files of their lessons and improvisations.

Figure 4.4

Categories and Content Discussed in Theme 2



Whereas self-efficacy – how well can I do this? – was a key part of Theme 1, the focus in my interpretation of findings in Theme 2 became the more complex construct of self-concept – how well do I compare to the others in this (Bong & Clark, 1999), and, by extension, what do *they* think of how well I can do this? Students’ comments about their experiences, observations about the group improvisations in my journal, and details in students’ behaviour, speech, and body language, evident in audio and video recordings, revealed a heightened discomfort associated with feeling that their improvisations were a

reflection of themselves and thus left them exposed to criticism. Negative self-concept led to self-conscious comments or behaviour, comparisons to others, and self-criticism, whereas more positive self-concept was indicated by an absence of those things, as well as more perceptive and reflective critical reactions to their own music.

4.6.2.1 Category 1. Reward versus Deterrent in Improvising.

This category looked at how confident the students felt and why, and how much they enjoyed improvising and why. Reward is very important in the context of the musical playground, where all players should find the possibility for some reward in the activities. In order to maximise potential for reward, I needed to determine what deterred individuals from improvising, particularly in front of others. To do this, I used how they said they felt about improvisation in their questionnaires (a simple question of like or dislike), their confidence ratings in session 1, and my own observations, based on the audio and video recordings, of whether they seemed to be enjoying working and playing with each other during the sessions. I hoped to see some change in this last area, to see if they displayed more enjoyment and less discomfort as the sessions progressed.

I found that apparent enjoyment or discomfort was closely associated with what their observations of their music said about how they experienced improvising together, in that readiness to be negative about the music or themselves reflected how they had experienced the playing or how they were experiencing listening to it. This was related to self-concept, which included, in some people, self-criticism as a form of self-defence.

4.6.2.1.1 *Fear of Judgement or Criticism, and Unfavourable Comparison.*

One of the biggest deterrents felt by students was the fear of being harshly judged or subject to unfavourable comparison to better improvisers. This was closely linked to self-

efficacy and the problematic awareness of mastery criteria, but was complicated by the fear of other people's opinions. Those who disliked improvising or rated their confidence as low tended to associate improvising with being exposed to criticism (being told their playing was not good) or not knowing what to do (being told their playing was not right). Siobhan and Emily spoke in these terms: Siobhan was "worried that it's not going to sound right" and Emily claimed not to know "what to do" and that, when compared to others, she was "perhaps not good enough". Limited experience and anxiety about being exposed to criticism meant that improvising held little to no reward for them.

In some cases, there was a mismatch between the questionnaires and the responses in session 1 to the question of how they rated their confidence in improvising and why. People gave more information in session 1 because it was a conversation, but also tended to be more negative or self-critical. Paul gave the most strikingly different answers, saying that he loved improvising in his questionnaire, but rating his confidence at 2/5 and supporting this by saying "I feel like there's quite a vast availability of great musicians and great music and it's hard to not compare yourself to that when playing and I find it quite soul-destroying listening to myself back". However, as stated above, Paul's rating here seemed to reflect an evaluation of the quality of his improvisations in comparison to those to which he aspired, rather than his confidence to participate.

In the spirit of Westney's (2003) "Un-Master Class", whose premise is to facilitate rather than to model mastery, I aimed from the outset of session 1 to approach improvisation as a liberating shared activity, with "no goal except the enjoyment of exploration" (p. 159), and continued it into sessions 2 and 3 with warm-up games. I hoped that adopting a non-expert, non-exposing approach would address the high levels of anxiety some students felt about improvising, as revealed by their comments about not being as good as other people (Emily and Paul) or feeling judged by others (Siobhan and Eliza).

4.6.2.1.2 *“Normalising” Improvisation.*

Those who liked improvising or rated their confidence as high expressed no fear that their music would be badly received, instead focussing on freedom, expression, and creativity. Oliver said he liked it because “it’s a really good way of expressing myself” and Jonny because “you are free to do whatever you want”. There was high reward in the activity for them. Crucially, these two participants had “normalised” improvisation in some way, either by incorporating it creatively into private practice, as in Oliver’s case, where he had “always just made stuff up on the spot since [he] started playing”, or by doing it as a routine part of playing, such as Jonny’s experience, feeling that, as a drummer, “when... you have a chart a lot of it is open to improvisation anyway so you do it in almost every piece”.

Having normalised improvisation, Jonny and Oliver did not attach the high stakes to it that some other students did. With a focus on playing and the only goal being to join in, students had the chance to become accustomed to the “no-stakes” aspect of our improvisations. Again, this approach is informed by research into the benefits of play, which other authors have advocated on the grounds of its promoting creativity and empowerment. These include Nachmanovitch (1990), in his distinction between “play” – exploration for the joy of it – and “game”, which is governed by set rules (p. 43), and Sandel (2020), who describes creative play as “a highly dynamic, context-dependent cognitive exercise, fuelled by spontaneity and self-expression” (p. 5). The importance of playful music-making lies in how a sense of reward is generated. If reward relies on success, that is problematic for students with negative self-efficacy, as discussed in Theme 1. If, on the other hand, reward is felt when the activity is fun for its own sake, everyone can experience reward. The fact that students chose to spend some extra time in session 6 devising and playing an improvisation that was not in the lesson-plan indicated that most of them associated improvisation with having fun by the end of our sessions.

4.6.2.1.3 *Conflicting Emotions.*

At first, some conflicting emotions were expressed. Paul's questionnaire described improvising as "scary, fun, exciting"; recalling session 1, Siobhan remembered thinking, "It's kind of scary but I'm really enjoying it at the same time"; in her questionnaire, Eliza said "yes [I like it] because it's fun to add [my] own ideas to music, and no because it can be stressful when you have no ideas". There seems to be some weighing up of risk against possibility: the risk of low reward versus the possibility of high reward. Since risk-taking is essential in improvising, being *at ease with risk* is a mindset to nurture. Mitigating the risk – the "stakes" – allowed students to participate with less anxiety. Westney (2003) recommends improvisation for precisely this opportunity to be "inventive, responsive, ridiculous, colourful, fresh, artistic, and – above all – genuine" (p. 159). Irrespective of their confidence to improvise, most students associated this freedom with reward.

4.6.2.1.4 *Reducing Inhibition Over Time.*

If freedom is a mark of reward, then its opposite is inhibition, which prevents full participation and poses a barrier to enjoyment. I noticed signs of discomfort and reticence being replaced by relaxation and enjoyment. While most of this was expressed musically, some was also social. Inhibition was apparent in sessions 1 and 2, for a number of reasons: uncertainty about expectations in the first task; two girls, Eliza and Emily, were new to the school; four out of the six had already said they were not confident improvising. The girls, especially, looked very uncomfortable in the video of session 1. The breakthrough came in session 3, when the mirroring activity, "Pass the Pose", was set to energetic, rhythmic music, encouraging a spontaneous transformation of the activity into "Pass the Disco Move". My journal comments that this session was good "for the purposes of shedding inhibition". Unfortunately, Siobhan and Eliza, who would have benefitted greatly from this,

were absent. This session was based on Westney's (2003) Un-Masterclass model, in which an atmosphere of trust is created by inviting people to join in with shared warm-up activities that do not include solo musical performance. In doing this, "there is no one left behind to play the critic" and the feeling of being "isolated and constantly judged" is dispelled (p. 183).

Having "warmed up" their risk-taking mindset and reduced their inhibition, Emily, Oliver, and Paul embarked on a varied set of improvisations, and seemed to appreciate these when listening to them afterwards, according to my journal. Emily later identified this session as the turning point for her, and the group opted to repeat this activity in session 6, when their exaggerated moves and laughter indicated great enjoyment. Straight after this, given a bit of extra time, the group opted to do an improvisation, significant because this indicated that they anticipated reward from the activity. Only Eliza, who had been very reticent in sessions 1 and 2 and had missed sessions 3 and 4, was uncertain about what to play and seemed inhibited; everyone else was animated. Nachmanovitch's (1990) view of improvisation as "playful experiment", and play as "doing and being for its own pure joy" seems apposite here (pp. 43-47); the students simply chose what they would enjoy for its own sake.

4.6.2.2 Category 2. Critical Reactions to Music Created Together.

This category draws together codes concerning the focus of students' attention when listening to the group's improvisations – on the group, on themselves, on aspects of musicianship, and on positive or negative opinions. I reviewed their comments on their own improvisations played in session 1, and a selection from sessions 3, 4 and 6, chosen in the light of my own critical commentaries on all of their improvisations. If they anticipated hearing something poor or focussed on negative aspects, I took this to indicate lower

enjoyment or reward, thus linking to the previous category; likewise, if they defaulted to self-critical comments, I understood that, even in scaffolded group improvisation, they felt exposed to criticism.

4.6.2.2.1 Negative Expectations, Narrow Musical Focus, and Self-criticism in Early Responses.

When listening to session 1's improvisations in session 2, some students seemed to have had low expectations of it. Jonny said "it sounded much better than it did when we performed it" and Eliza said that, compared to her opinion of it when they played it, she "didn't think it was actually that bad." When they were listening, all of them tended to focus on the negative, especially in relation to timing, rhythm, and togetherness, which were all insecure in session 1. There were several references to falling apart, not fitting together, losing time, or losing concentration. A few references were made to dynamics or "building up". Many of the positive comments also had to do with the same elements of their playing.

Many negative comments about these improvisations were self-critical. Whether coincidentally or not, all of these comments were from the girls. Eliza observed "a few wrong notes", which she said were "probably me as well. I think I can definitely remember doing that". Siobhan said she could hear herself "going really badly wrong all the time", and Emily "disliked the fact that [she] could tell which awkward part was definitely [her], getting it wrong". This corroborates the view that these three expected to be judged unfavourably, and they took the defensive step of pre-empting criticism from others by criticising themselves.

The boys tended to comment on each other, which was in itself another manifestation of self-consciousness. Oliver commented that "Jonny kept a very good sense of pulse and kept

everyone going, more than Paul", and noted that another piece had "a bit more of a dynamic range which is controlled mostly by Jonny. AND Paul, of course". Paul's comment about one of the pieces was that "we always settled in and kind of tapered off, apart from Oliver". All three boys made a comment about one of the others during this session.

Whether they were criticising themselves or each other, students' comments conveyed something about their self-concept. Anticipating, deflecting, or redirecting criticism were manifestations of Bong and Clark's (1999) examples of the more complex questions that adolescents ask themselves: "Can I do this better than... (social comparison)?" or "Am I supposed to do this better than... (stereotyping)?" (p. 21), in which self-concept is strongly influenced by self-efficacy. However, a point of interest here is the stark gender divide in the evidence above. Hickey et al. (2016), in examining the effects of instruction on confidence and attainment in jazz improvisation, cite two studies that suggest a similar phenomenon: Wehr-Flowers (2006), who found lower confidence, higher anxiety, and more negative attitudes to jazz improvisation in females than males, and Alexander (2012), whose results showed a similar mismatch between genders, albeit only in anxiety. Among my participants, the discrepancy between boys and girls was a matter of confidence in the act of improvising as opposed to anxiety about how they might be perceived by their peers, thus partially concurring with Wehr-Flowers. The male participants in my study were not lacking in confidence that they could improvise (their self-efficacy was positive); instead, they appeared anxious, afterwards, about how they had fared within the group (their self-concept was less positive).

4.6.2.2.2 Wider Focus on Musical Content and More Positive Responses in Later Sessions.

When listening to the improvisations in session 3, students showed more evidence of liking what they were hearing. Oliver commented that one piece "kind of just sounded very free and... I liked it like that". My journal noted that there was mutual appreciation of what they were hearing, and their manner of listening in session 3 was more relaxed, open, and positive. This could have been a consequence of there being fewer of them (only Oliver, Paul, and Emily), or of the nature of the improvisations, which were atonal and ametrical.

After the whole series of sessions had been completed, students were played three improvisations – 3(3), 4(1), and 6 – and asked to reflect on them. I chose those ones because they represented a range of stimuli and player interactions, as well as being very different in musical content. In most cases, their responses were much more positive than the comments they gave in session 2. This could have been because I had asked for a favourite, or because, after so long, they had forgotten who had played what, or because some of them had been absent and were therefore not drawn towards self-criticism.

Although this activity was framed as a discussion, the students approached it as a written task, to be collected, before the conversation began. It is possible that the prospect of submitting the session 6 responses on paper after the discussion affected their quality and coherence. An improvement in this respect was evident in musical vocabulary, as compared with session 2. For example, Emily spoke of "the gradual crescendo across all the instruments" in 3(3), and liked "the chromaticism, particularly within the higher range of the piano". Oliver listed a number of musical features in improvisation 6, including "driving rhythm to push it forward" and "piano glissando [which] increases intensity".

Students were listening much more widely than in session 2, when nearly all comments were about timing and rhythm. Their focus extended to overall sound, a range of devices,

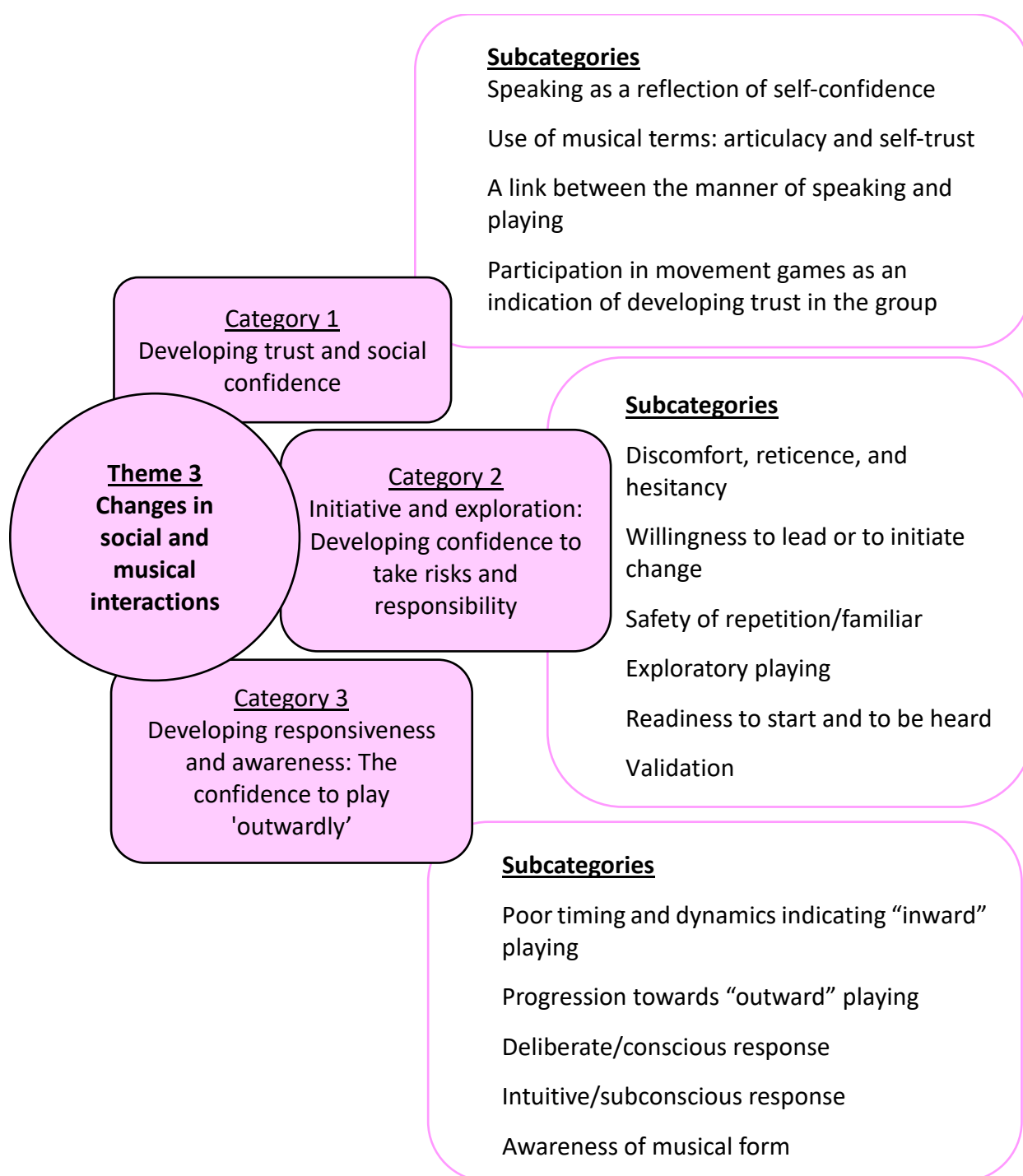
and the structure of the whole piece. Emily wrote in terms of structure and effect, commenting on the “sense of drama and mystery introduced right from the beginning” and the “sudden darkening of the mood”. Oliver focussed on timbre and devices, noting the “guitar ringing sounds [which] adds to [the] organ pedal”, and a “shift from darker piano to light, airy flute”. Jonny also picked out instruments and timbre: “pedal note in organ, acoustic guitar as a timbre is nice. Sudden textural and timbral shift help to tell the story – love it!”

The wider range of observations and vocabulary is perhaps a consequence of students realising that, rather than being a reflection of the self, group improvisation is a shared responsibility. In parallel with this potentially appealing to novice improvisers by virtue of being less daunting (MacDonald & Wilson, 2020), I would argue that knowing it was always a shared enterprise encouraged less self-defensive responses than some had offered in session 2. Several comments by the students on the group’s interaction demonstrated awareness that the improvisations were collective efforts. Emily observed that one piece seemed “intuitive – people had similar ideas and one person didn’t just do their own thing”, which Eliza phrased as “everyone moved together”. To Paul’s ear, the music “had a structure, common focus” and for Jonny “everything seemed to make sense and gel”. Students’ reduced tendencies to be defensive, self-conscious, or self-critical when reacting to their own music allowed them to express more appreciation of what they had played. It also revealed an improvement in their self-concept, and they seemed to be more willing to identify as improvisers.

4.6.3 Theme 3: Changes in Social and Musical Interactions

Figure 4.5

Categories and Content Discussed in Theme 3



This theme is about self-confidence and how that manifested itself in students' spoken contributions, playing, and responsiveness to the other players. I saw increased confidence in some aspects of their conversation, in their readiness to play and explore, and in their

ability to turn their attention from their own playing to that of the group. While the spoken element stands slightly apart from the two musical categories, it is connected in being one aspect of group interaction, and in that verbal and musical contributions are strikingly similar in some cases. The interconnectedness of these categories makes for a rich and complex theme.

4.6.3.1 Category 1. Developing Trust and Social Confidence.

I observed how students spoke and behaved with me and with each other, how fluently, accurately, and concisely they expressed their observations, and how spontaneously they conversed, laughed, and moved in the mirroring and imitating activities.

4.6.3.1.1 Speaking as a Reflection of Self-confidence.

Students' self-confidence in the presence of others was often demonstrated in how they spoke, with self-doubt being apparent in the following:

- Needing prompting to speak;
- Phrasing things as questions (uptalk);
- Not finishing sentences;
- Doubting their use of musical vocabulary;
- Rambling and talking more than necessary.

In session 1, as could be expected, students needed prompting to speak at first. This very quickly became a more natural exchange between the boys, who already knew each other very well. Uptalk was common in sessions 1 and 2, in statements such as "in the eco groove we had a set pulse I think one was in 4 and one was in 3, I think?" and "we felt... in the second one we started to hit our stride a bit and then sort of as we went through the second one we maybe started to fall apart a little bit more?". This is commonly also called High Rising Termination, and is associated with a number of possible causes, including

geographical, social/interactional (Warren, 2016). Given the presence of other qualifying lexical content, such as “sort of”, “I think” and “maybe”, the uptalk in my students’ answers seems to reflect a form of “checking [and] seeking a response” (Warren, p. 56), revealing a degree of self-doubt. This corresponds to a tendency not to finish sentences, a similar sign of uncertainty, as seen in this example from Siobhan: "but, like, I was tapping too much and didn't sound right and there was just too much going on, but... yeah..."

4.6.3.1.2 Use of Musical Terms: Articulacy and Self-trust.

While the students did know musical vocabulary, as shown in their written responses in session 5, only Paul really used it confidently and unselfconsciously in early sessions when speaking. An example of the comfortable incorporation of technical language into his speech was heard in session 2: "we kind of explored rhythm and pitch, first in the medium of an eco-groove, then pentatonic scales, and we made kind of really loose structures so we could kind of make it grow more organically". Others used musical terms and immediately qualified them with more basic vocabulary, such as Siobhan’s observation that "there was good dynamics in the second one, I feel like it really grew and shrank and stuff like that", and Emily’s point: "we were like kind of all on the same dynamic level for quite a long time in the first one but then it like crescendoed; it increased the sound". Both speakers used musical terms and then seemed to doubt them, seeking reassurance by “qualifying” what they said (Warren, 2016, p. 56).

4.6.3.1.3 A Link Between the Manner of Speaking and Playing.

A connection between certain students’ speaking and playing was sometimes evident. Oliver was an interesting case, as he used musical vocabulary well, but talked a lot, and appeared uncomfortable offering short statements. "Jonny led it and Paul led the solos and we did a kind of call and response pattern and traded solos and then we played on the

xylophone as well, um, and it was very polyphonic and both the xylophone and the buckets were polyrhythmic. Lots of... lots of rhythms and melodies going on." He often rambled or struggled to find the words he wanted, as in this comment: "Erm, but at the start of... like Jonny said, it just grew into it, at the start of the second, parts were a bit more kind of distinguishable, rather than them sounding kind of, like, not like a mush or anything, I dunno, just a bit more clear than the first one". Oliver's speaking, in this respect, reflected his playing; in both, he had a lot to contribute and sounded confident, but found it hard to stop.

Siobhan's speaking and playing were also connected: she had plenty to say, but imagined it to be possibly wrong, shown here: "in the first I liked all the different sort of, like, melodies and how they all fit together. I thought it just sort of worked as a sound?" in which she demonstrated uncertainty in "sort of, like" and the uptalk. This was reflected in her playing, in which she showed a contradictory willingness to play loudly but anxiety in body language in session 1. In the recording of 4(1), Siobhan can be heard starting a melody and apologising aloud for something only she thought was "wrong".

4.6.3.1.4 Participation in Movement Games as an Indication of Developing Trust in the Group.

Traits of uncertainty in students' speech in session 2 were paralleled by an obvious reticence and lack of sense of pulse in the session 2 activities of Pass the Pose and Pass the Rhythm. In response to this, I changed the music in session 3 to something more energetic, and repeated the exercise, seeing much more confident interaction as a result. Pass the Pose morphed into copying each other's disco moves, which those who were present really seemed to enjoy. Speaking about the session 3 version of this activity, Emily said, "That was when it was just me, Oliver and Paul. That was good. Maybe that made me more brave".

By session 6, when they requested this activity again, it was undignified and raucous, and they had lost all self-consciousness and inhibition in this context.

Session 3 was a turning point in terms of their conversational interaction as well. My journal notes that "I like the fact that while I'm talking there is a lot of interaction, quiet agreement or acknowledgement." In session 4, there was some quick and fluent conversation, and I have noted "some nice moments in this session, with laughter ... They listen well". By the end of session 6, when they were piecing together the story of Hansel and Gretel, they were animated and confident, with the exception of Eliza, who was worrying about what to play. Eliza had been absent in sessions 3 and 4, and lacking in confidence in sessions 1 and 2 for reasons outlined above. She continued to display some uncertainty in the way she spoke in session 6, an example being this unfinished sentence without clear musical terminology: "like, you can just be simple, it doesn't have to be like all over the place. It can just be like...". While uncertainty was not eradicated from all other students' speaking, the contrast between Eliza and the others served to affirm the benefit of sessions 3 and 4 to their confidence in this area.

4.6.3.2 Category 2. Initiative and Exploration: Developing Confidence to Take Risks and Responsibility.

This category concerns students' readiness to start and to play out confidently. This is not to be confused with playing "outwardly", which is discussed in category 3 below, and has to do with mindset and awareness of other players rather than this less complex issue of being willing to play loudly enough to be heard. I have contrasted this with reticence, uncertainty, reluctance, discomfort, tentative playing, and hesitancy, on the part of individuals or as a group. I have also examined evidence of their being willing to take the initiative, to lead, to instigate a change in the music, and to be exploratory rather than safe.

4.6.3.2.1 *Discomfort, Hesitancy, and Reticence.*

Uncertainty and hesitancy were perhaps to be expected in session 1. Students needed to stop and check what to do, and, while the boys seemed very cheerful, the girls looked terrified on the video. The group as a whole responded to my request for more dynamic variation by playing more quietly and tentatively. Session 2, likewise, was lacking in flair and communication. In both cases, this resulted in quite poor ensemble.

4.6.3.2.2 *Willingness to Take the Lead or Show Initiative.*

Leadership fell into two categories: being elected to lead something, and showing initiative, or taking the lead without being asked to do so. This included intuitively leading a musical change, such as the crescendo led by Paul and Oliver in 4(3) (Audio 4.1). Examples of the former are cuing the breaks in session 1 (Jonny), leading the call and response in session 1 (Paul), or initiating the melodic dialogue in session 4 (Siobhan). Students who intuitively led a musical change showed, in doing so, more confidence in their audible contribution to the group's music than those who remained in the background.

Audio 4.1

Oliver and Paul Leading a Crescendo in 4(3)



4.1 4(3) Oliver and
Paul lead a crescendo.

4.6.3.2.3 *Falling Back on the Safety of Repetition and the Familiar.*

There is a contrast between players' falling back on the safety of repetition and the familiar, and their feeling free to explore, experiment, and develop, discussed below. What is interesting about the safety of repetition and the familiar is that it does not seem to

correspond automatically to professed confidence. This is best illustrated by looking at two cases: Emily and Oliver. They placed themselves at opposite ends of the confidence spectrum in session 1, but both of them showed signs of falling back on the familiar and on repetition. For example, Oliver started improvisation 3(5) with a syncopated repeating note, and Emily began 3(3) with the motif played as written, which she called "playing it normally" (Audio 4.2a). Similarly, in session 4, Oliver started 4(2) (Audio 4.2b) with a short, punchy riff and an answering phrase comprising a two-note cell, repeated, and Emily started 4(3) with a 4-chord turnaround.

Audio 4.2

Examples of Openings by Emily (3(3)) and Oliver (3(5))



4.2a 3(3) Emily's opening.mp3



4.2b 3(5) Oliver's opening.mp3

Emily seemed to find the confidence to play out by using repetition or the familiar, while it seems likely that Oliver was *already* confident because he used repetition or the familiar. This approach is not being framed as uncreative; in fact, MacDonald and Wilson (2020) recognise reliance for “a large proportion... [on] repeated or sustained material” as a common feature of improvisations they describe (p. 66). Nonetheless, it is a safer option than exploratory playing, which can be more surprising in the moment.

4.6.3.2.4 Exploratory Playing.

I coded exploratory playing of two types: private experimentation before playing with the group, and audible exploration during a group improvisation. The former was evident during periods between improvisations, when individuals could be heard tinkering and

trying things out. I took this to be a sign of their feeling at ease. Paul often did this, and the improvisations that he started in sessions 3 and 4 had the most experimental or characterful openings (Audio 4.3). Significantly, Emily also started to try things out between pieces in session 3, a sign that she was feeling much more comfortable. There was also some audible uninhibited experimentation from her during an improvisation in this session.

Audio 4.3

Paul's Characterful Openings in Sessions 3 and 4

Session 3: Opening
of 3(4)



4.3a 3(4) Paul's
opening.mp3

Session 4: Opening
of 4(4)



4.3b 4(4) Paul's
opening.mp3

In session 1, only Paul and Jonny (experienced improvisers on percussion) were exploratory in the course of playing, and my journal comments that the other players might actually have been disconcerted by this. In session 3, the preparatory exercises that were intended to demonstrate possible mutations of the motif served to encourage exploratory playing. This session also seemed to foster more “group flow” (MacDonald & Wilson, 2020, p. 83) in this and subsequent sessions, such as the sudden flourishing in 3(2) and an in-the-moment decision by several players in 4(1) to swell and fade (Audio 4.4).

Audio 4.4

Sudden Crescendo by Several Players in 4(1)



4.4 4(1) crescendo in
middle.mp3

The fact that session 3's enhanced guidance resulted in the most experimental playing corroborates the theory that scaffolded, semistructured play can be more productive than completely free play (Craft, n.d.). By modelling options for using the given motif in session 3, I showed students how to ask and respond to the question "What can I/we do with this?" (Craft, p. 1), thus offering them the experience that would allow them to recognise possibilities (Sandel, 2020). Sometimes the exploratory playing was at the expense of the ensemble, but I was not discouraged by that, as it was also a sign of letting go of inhibition and exploring possibilities. As Westney (2003) writes, the "strangeness" of atonal improvisation is one of its liberating assets, as it invites the player to "act" their music through "gesture and drama" (p. 165).

4.6.3.2.5 Readiness to Start and Be Heard.

In session 3, I noticed loud, confident playing, including on the part of Emily, who had been much less confident in the first two sessions. Even though she continued to rely on repetition in this session and the familiar in session 4, her willingness to be heard and her readiness to start a group piece on her own represented a great improvement in confidence. A possible reason for attributing Emily's sudden increase in confidence is offered by Mawang et al. (2019), who found that there was a significant correlation between positive musical self-concept and creativity in musical composition. The strongest link to creativity was found in individuals with positive self-concept in rhythm (Mawang et al., 2019), meaning that beginning session 3 with a rhythmic activity may have presented a great benefit to students.

In session 4, there were instances of Siobhan and Emily – both less confident in sessions 1 and 2 – being adventurous and willing to be heard, such as in the melodic exchange in 4(1), in which Siobhan played synth strings and Emily can be heard responding on an electric

piano sound (Audio 4.5). Here, both girls seemed content to be exposed in 4(1) by taking over the solo melody line. At several points in the same piece, they can both be clearly heard. In 4(4), both play loudly and exploratorily at the end. Given that Siobhan had not been in the previous session to experience the same unexpected benefits as Emily, it seems likely that she responded to a sensed improvement in the group's self-efficacy and self-concept overall. When viewing the individual journeys of these two less confident students, one purported benefit of community music, visited in Chapter 2's literature review – that it allows individuals to “explore and develop their own musical abilities” in the context of a collaborative effort (Schiavio et al., 2019, p. 714) – was very much in evidence.

Audio 4.5

Confident Melodic Exchange Between Siobhan and Emily in 4(1)



4.5 4(1) Siobhan and
Emily exchange.mp3

4.6.3.2.6 Validation.

I found that part of fostering confidence, when a source of anxiety was that a contribution might not be “right”, was making players feel validated. The decision to choose certain people to take the lead in what I knew they could do well, such as cuing the breaks or initiating a melodic exchange, as described above, helped to make those students feel validated. As the sessions progressed, students also experienced validation when another player imitated their motif (e.g., imitation of Emily's phrase during 4(1)) or when the group responded appropriately to their opening (e.g., Emily, 4(3)). In the latter, Emily began with her “safe” 4-chord progression, but followed this with an inventive melodic phrase, transcribed below (Figure 4.6, Audio 4.6).

they had already been engaged in rewarding improvisation since the beginning of that warm-up game.

4.6.3.3 Category 3. Developing Responsiveness and Awareness: The Confidence to Play 'Outwardly'.

In this category, I saw a change from students' playing "to themselves" (inwardly) to playing outwardly, with more awareness of the others. When they played inwardly, it was characterised by things like poor timing or poor awareness of balance. I took this to be a sign of low confidence, leading to introverted – inward – playing, and concluded that listening to the overall sound represents a form of risk-taking in that players have to spread their concentration. When they played "outwardly", this was audible in other ways than just good timing or dynamics; there was a sense of musicality, intuitive responsiveness, and often more obvious, deliberate interchange between players, in the form of call and response or imitation. "Outward" playing also characterised improvisations that had natural development, and a sense of changing musical form or shape.



4.6.3.3.1 Poor Timing and Dynamics as Indicators of "Inward" Playing.

One of my initial codes was "poor timing/togetherness/rhythm", and this tended to refer to the earliest improvisations and games in sessions 1 and 2. Dynamics were unvaried in session 1, and became tentative when I requested variety. Even though I felt that there was more effort to contrive dynamic variety at the time, this did not translate to audible dynamic contrast in the recordings. I do not see this as a reflection of their musicality, but of a set of egos under threat: adolescents tend to be self-conscious, and their "self" – their ego – is "the protective shell of a person feeling in control" (Westney, 2003, p. 140). The only thing they could control was their individual playing, and focussing on that came at the expense of basic musical interaction.

Another code referred to “meandering and falling apart”, but this one was more often used for moments in later improvisations where the music seemed to suffer from a lack of conviction, for example not knowing what to do next in 3(4), or not knowing how to bring it to a close in 4(4) (Audio 4.7).

Audio 4.7

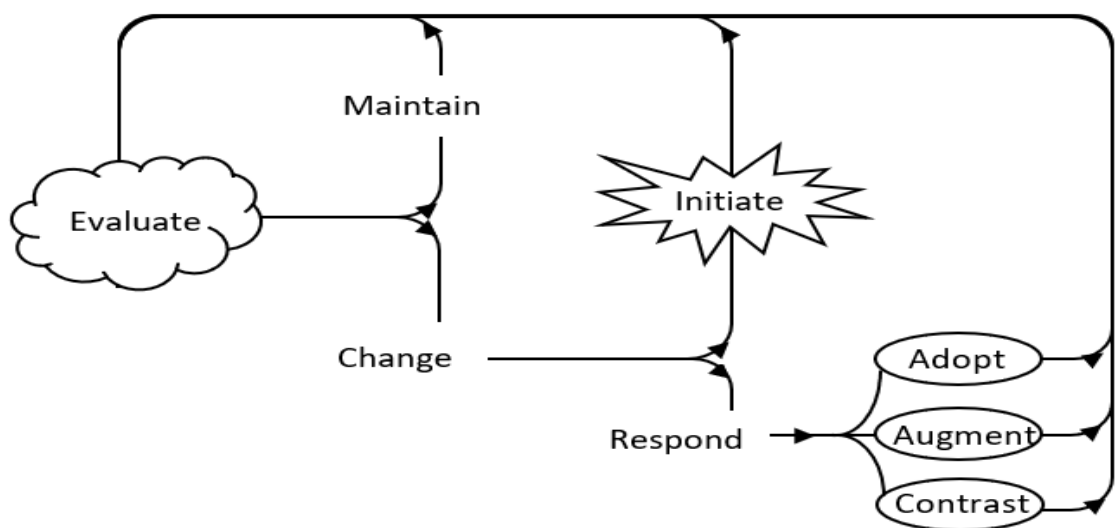
Examples of Lack of Conviction in Improvisations

<p>Uncertainty about what to do next in 3(4)</p>	 <p>4.7a 3(4) meandering middle.mp3</p>	<p>Indecisive ending in 4(4)</p>	 <p>4.7b 4(4) unsure how to end.mp3</p>
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Viewed through the lens of MacDonald and Wilson’s (2020) model of individual choice during group improvisation (Figure 4.7), this could be understood as no one “evaluating”, or everyone “maintaining” rather than initiating change.

Figure 4.7

Model for the Process of Individual Choice During Group Musical Improvisation (MacDonald & Wilson, 2020, p. 78)

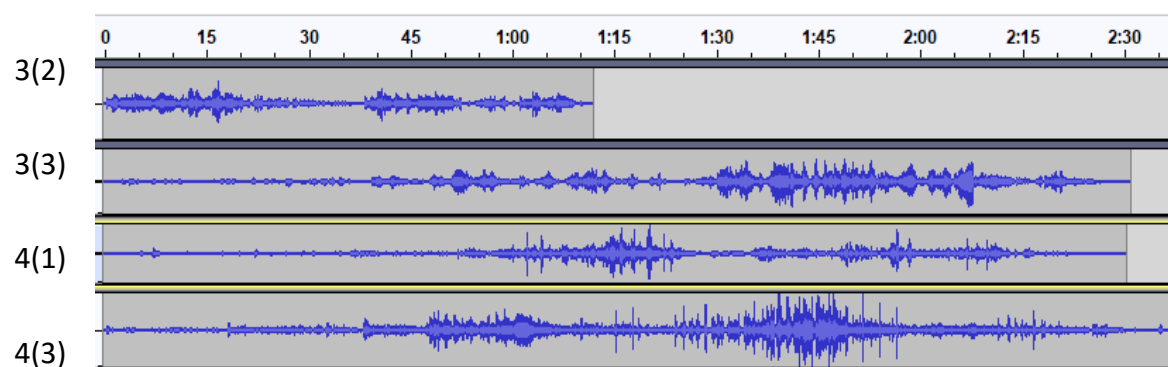


4.6.3.3.2 Progression Towards “Outward” Playing.

In terms of the musical basics of timing and dynamics, there was great improvement during the course of these sessions. The concern about “timing/togetherness/rhythm” disappeared after session 2, and dynamic contrast became a natural part of their playing from session 3 onwards, as shown in the wave forms in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8

Waveforms of Selected Improvisations, Showing Dynamic Variation



Notably, in session 2 nearly all of their comments related to timing and dynamics, but by the time they came to writing advice for participating and improving for the Improvisation Clock in session 6, these basics were not mentioned, as they were taken for granted. When they commented on the three selected improvisations, the wider musical focus of their observations (detailed above in the discussion of Theme 2, Category 2: Critical Reactions to Music Created Together) reflected the breadth and musicianship of their playing. This was evident not only in matters of rhythm, timing, and dynamics, but also in their responsiveness to the music going on around them. Burrows (2004) offers a list of actions undertaken during improvisation, of which two – contributing ideas in response to aural stimuli and making “suggestions” to other players by means of musical gestures (p. 8) – are in evidence here, as students became more responsive to their musical surroundings.

4.6.3.3.3 *Responsive Playing: Deliberate/Conscious Response.*

Responsive playing came with experience. It is to be expected that basic musical necessities such as timing and dynamics should be in the foreground at first, but very quickly students' awareness of fellow players extended to other types of interaction. I have separated conscious response and player interaction from intuitive response that is a result of inherent musicality. In the former, I have included instances of imitation, as heard in 4(1) (Figure 4.6, Audio 4.6a), handing over ideas, and evidence of eye contact when directing a musical "question" to another player. In 4(2), which Oliver started, he directed his gaze at me, the player he wanted to take over from him, but continued to respond to me (Figure 4.9, Audio 4.8). Similarly, Paul joined in with a march-like snare-drum figure, which he felt was most appropriate to the character that had been established. There were several further examples of imitation in sessions 3 and 4, proving that players were increasingly aware of and ready to respond to each other.

Figure 4.9

Audio 4.8

Interchange Between Players at the Beginning of 4(2)



4.8 4(2) opening
interchange.mp3



4.6.3.3.4 *Responsive Playing: Intuitive/Subconscious Response.*

More intuitive responses included examples such as a unanimous blossoming in 3(2), a very tight re-entry by Oliver and Paul after a spontaneous break in 3(5) (both in Audio 4.9), and various good examples of how players picked up on and adjusted their playing according to the mood set by the player who started. This was the case in nearly all of the session 4 improvisations, about which my comments include: [4(2)] "very characterful opening which

invited a certain style of playing from everyone else"; [4(4)] "[Paul] crashed about, and it invited a lot more experimental playing"; [4(5)] "This one began with a tremolo on the piano, immediately picked up by Paul on the cymbals, and Siobhan on synth strings". This aspect of their playing demonstrates the set of "psychological constructs" (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016, p. 110) that could be termed a kind of group mindfulness, with the students having a progressively more collective experience over time.

Audio 4.9

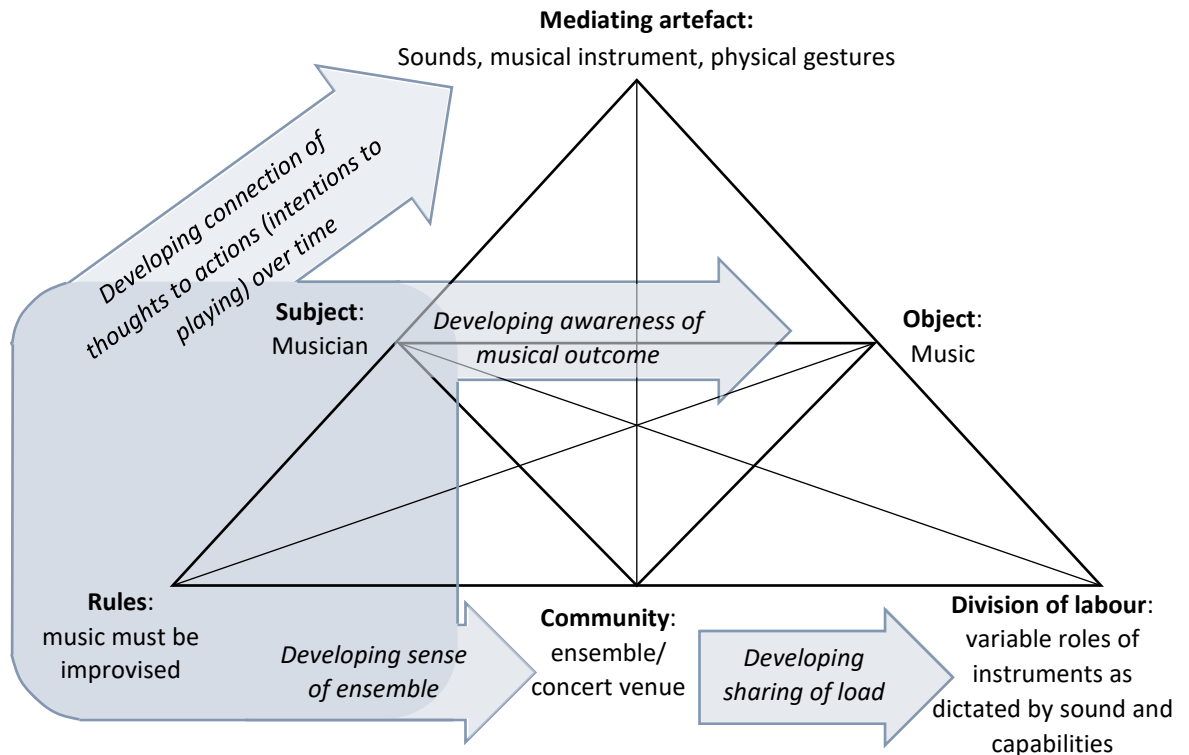
Examples of Intuitive Playing in Session 3

<p>Unanimous blossoming after a rallentando in 3(2)</p>	 <small>4.9a 3(2) flourishing in middle.mp3</small>	<p>Tight re-entry after a spontaneous break in 3(5)</p>	 <small>4.9b 3(5) break re-entry.mp3</small>
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Students' interactions and responsiveness are evidence of their increasingly sharing the creative and cognitive load, illustrated by Burrows (2004) in an application of Engeström et al.'s (1999) mediational triangle to musical improvisation. When comparing students' playing to this model, shown below in Figure 4.10, it is possible to trace their progress over time as a widening awareness of how to take collective responsibility. At first, students were focussed on the subject (themselves) and the rules (what they had been told to play). There was poor ensemble and a lack of variety in texture and dynamics because the community and the division of labour were not yet part of their thinking. It was only from session 3 onwards that an increased awareness of and responsiveness to other players, both deliberate and intuitive as discussed above, led to a connection between thoughts and actions, with the object – a piece of music created in the moment – as the focus. The rules of what to play also changed over time, as students' concepts of what improvisation entails developed.

Figure 4.10

Students' Focus During Improvisations as it Developed Over Time, Mapped onto Mediatlional Triangle (Engeström et al. (1999), adapted by Burrows (2004))



4.6.3.3.5 Awareness of Musical Form.

The code “musical form/shape” was usually a comment on how the music progressed through time, and also included knowing when and how to end. As might be expected of a group including novice improvisers and people who do not regularly play together, this remained something to be improved at the end of session 6. Burrows (2004) refers to this as predicting how the music might play out and drawing on the “remembered aural tapestry” (p. 8). To be aware of shaping something through time is a tougher requirement than in-the-moment responsiveness. I noted several times that improvisations seemed too long. Many of these comments pertained to the improvisations in sessions 3 and 4, such as, of 3(1): "it seemed about to finish halfway through... the development after this was

quite appropriate... then I think they didn't know what to do with it... it doesn't reach any kind of definitive end", and, of 3(3), "it felt as if it was coming to an end halfway through". In session 4, the shaping and musical form was closely linked with balance and dynamics in my comments. I noted that 4(1) had "some shape and dynamic variety, which allowed the quieter instruments to come out", and "fabulous light and shade and sense of build-up in [4(2)] was achieved".

Many of my references to continuing to play rather than bringing the music to a close are linked to Oliver. This strongly corroborated my observation that his reliance on familiar short riffs and repetition served to bolster his confidence, and my earlier link between his way of speaking to fill the silence and playing without feeling able to stop. In a sense, opting for silence, either by dropping out or by stopping altogether, is both a form of risk-taking and a responsive decision, and it is important not to overlook this. Knowing when *not* to play is as important as feeling enabled to participate and be heard; falling silent can also be a musically appropriate choice (MacDonald & Wilson, 2020).

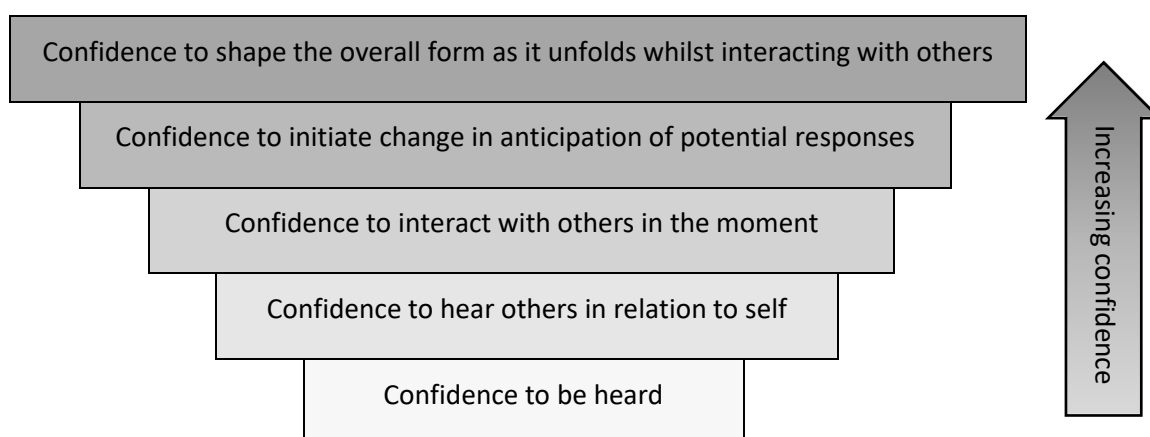
Unwittingly, in sessions 6's unplanned improvisation, we found one way of addressing the issue of awareness of overall form by imposing a narrative on the music, taking the lead from Jonny's idea for the Improvisation Clock (Figure 4.3). Although this one was very long, it bore its length very well because of the changes suggested by the narrative. Interestingly, other aspects of musical awareness, such as melodic dialogue and development, were less evident. In this respect, session 6's improvisation bears comparison to session 1's, although it is much more advanced in terms of musical form and "outward" playing.

This comparison led me to conceive of levels of "outward" playing, corresponding to confidence (Figure 4.11). First, there is the confidence to be heard – lacking in some students in session 1, but much improved when even the least confident were able to start an improvisation on their own. Then there is the confidence to hear others – to show better

ensemble skills by playing in time and responding to changes in dynamics. A step beyond this is the confidence to interact with others – to imitate, share a crescendo, respond appropriately to an opening motif. Imposing oneself on the music in order to initiate change is a further level of confidence. Being able to relate the moments to the whole and be aware of the unfolding musical form is more advanced still, and this is perhaps why the improvisation in session 6 lost something of the detailed, in-the-moment interaction heard in session 4.

Figure 4.11

Levels of “Outward” Playing in A-level Music Students’ Group Improvisation



The connection between students’ confidence and the quality of their playing is significant in light of the nature of our improvisation sessions. While a study by Watson (2010) found that instruction in jazz improvisation improved self-efficacy, I did not set out to impart a “knowledge base” or to instruct them in genre-specific improvisation, preferring the model of semi-structured play. Despite this non-didactic approach, students’ self-efficacy, self-concept, and musical outcomes all improved, suggesting that carefully planned *immersion* in improvisation is enough to have a positive impact on all three.

4.7 Conclusion

In analysing and interpreting the data in the light of surrounding research, I have aimed to answer the following sub-questions:

1. How have these sessions affected students' perceptions of improvisation?
2. How have these sessions affected students' participation in improvisation?

The success of the "musical playground" design is also under scrutiny.

4.7.1 Addressing the Questions of Perception of and Participation in Improvisation

4.7.1.1 Perceptions of Improvisation.

The effect on students' perceptions of improvisation is demonstrated by the changes to their understanding of when and where improvisation might be heard or undertaken, with a slightly wider and less genre-specific range of possible contexts. Their concept of skills and expectations also changed, as shown in their contributions to the Improvisation Clock. The fact that they became less self-critical revealed a shift in the way they perceived improvisation as a reflection of themselves, and began to acknowledge it as collective creativity.

4.7.1.2 Participation in Improvisation.

Self-concept was an intrinsic part of their perceptions of and participation in improvisation, in that they owed many of their negative associations with it to a belief that they were exposed to criticism or unfavourable comparison with others who were more experienced improvisers. Self-efficacy had a large influence on their participation, and there was an evident reduction in self-conscious or self-critical comments, as well as less apparent inhibition as the sessions progressed and they found ways to participate. As they became

more confident in their ability, their musical observations and use of musical vocabulary expanded, and they were more willing to speak freely overall. The musical interaction and awareness of other players improved the quality of what they played. In line with Mawang et al.'s (2019) research, the observed improvement not only in my students' confidence but also in their ensemble and responsive playing supports the association between positive self-constructs and creativity.

4.7.2 The Successful Design of the Musical Playground

Conceptualising my A-level classroom as a "musical playground" was the outcome of exploring literature about the benefits of early years play and how this informs playground design. In addition to the demonstrable applicability of research by Izumi-Taylor et al. (2010) and Craft (n.d.), Drew's (2020) list of advantages of unstructured play, including negotiation, turn-taking, and creating group rules, is also evident in the form of musical dialogue involving listening and responding, and allowing a kind of musical language to develop during an improvisation (i.e., responding appropriately to given cues). All of these were evident as students' playing became more "outward" and began to include deliberate/conscious and intuitive/subconscious responses to each other's playing.

Herrington and Brussoni's Seven C's of playground design (Herrington & Brussoni, 2015) consider the benefits to social, physical, and cognitive development offered by a well-designed playground. The advantages of having actively applied these considerations in the design of my improvisation sessions can be seen in the following ways:

- **Connectivity**, of benefit to cognitive and physical development, directly impacted on my students' social and musical interactions;
- **Clarity**, allowing discovery without confusion, informed the design of improvisation tasks promoting exploration without unclear expectations;

- **Change**, which affords children the possibility to play in different types of space, encouraged me to consider the different types of role that could be available to my students;
- **Challenge**, the opportunity to control or regulate risk, was a large factor in the students' development as improvisers;
- **Chance**, so-called "messy zones" with materials for building and mixing, transferred to my improvisation classes in the form of musical stimuli with the opportunity for unplanned outcomes.

The data collection took place during the Covid-19 global pandemic, and this compromised the context and character – the location and nature – of my students' environment. The room was set up as shown in Appendix 1, to separate students and minimise the risk of surface or airborne transmission of the virus. Although I was worried about the possible negative effect of this arrangement on students' communication and connectivity, they coped well with the layout of the room, and it did not appear to hamper their group interaction.

The changes in their perceptions of improvisation as something accessible and versatile, and their increased confidence to participate in a musically rewarding way, reassured me that these students would feel comfortable in joining in with further action research. In the sense that they showed themselves willing to engage at a level suitable for them, to explore possibilities, to take initiative, to establish guidelines for themselves, to appreciate what they had created, to interact with other players, and to abandon inhibition to a greater or lesser extent, the "musical playground" was successfully created.

Participant Profiles: 2. April 2021

The profiles of each participant (student) below are based on my observations of their composing and listening work, undertaken between the end of the first research cycle and the beginning of the second. The majority of this time had been spent in lockdown, and there is a little reference, in these profiles, to some online improvisation activities carried out in January 2021, in the context of students' participation in group improvisation during the first data-collection period.

These summaries of my observations on each student are based on responses to the following tasks and activities:

Listening Response 1 (LR1), completed in January 2021. Students were given eight short excerpts and were asked to respond in any way they felt appropriate. Each piece was preceded by a Likert Scale asking about familiarity, liking, and interest.

Two remote/online improvisation activities carried out in January 2021. For each one, I gave them a backing track that I had recorded on the piano, and they sent me their improvised part as an audio file. The first piece was texturally very dense, as no one had heard anyone else's part, so the group was split into two for the second piece. The parts were recorded in relay, with the first person recording over my backing track, the second adding their part to both tracks, and the third person having all previous tracks to listen to.

All compositions completed during the first two terms, as follows:

- September 2020: Miniature piece using a 5-note motif as explored in the preceding group improvisation, with a choice of two briefs.

- October 2020: Dorian-mode composition, following a group improvisation session using the same mode.
- November 2020: A composition for the group to play, with a choice to give players parts that were “instructions” rather than notated scores.
- December 2020-January 2021: “Butterfly composition” – a piece intended to be part of a looping soundtrack for an art installation planned by the art department. There was no set brief beyond this; they could interpret “Butterfly” in any way they liked.
- Feb 2021: Motif monologues – a very short exercise in exploring several ways to use the same motif, following an aural and analysis lesson.
- Feb 2021: Up to two melodic variations on a given folk melody, following a lesson spent practising this.
- Mar 2021: Two “snapshot” pieces that captured contrasting characters, based on an incantation I had composed a few years earlier. This was followed by a presentation about how they had used the original melody in their own pieces, and what musical elements they had chosen to create two contrasting moods or characters.
- Early April 2021: Some short harmonic exercises to develop the ability to modulate using pivot chords and overshooting.



OLIVER

Oliver always seemed to compose lengthy pieces relatively quickly, and always included performance detail, which became less indiscriminate and more judicious with time. His first pieces showed good awareness of pacing, with a tendency to rely on short phrases and repetition.

Sometimes the metre as he had imagined or heard it did not match the score, and he was not always able to hear unintentional harmonic clashes. Some attempts to include new devices resulted in their sounding a little contrived, but it showed development and ambition. In January, Oliver's usual compositional style suddenly changed, with the first piece that used a two-part texture throughout and had longer melodic phrases than were usual for him. He responded well to the short composition tasks during the January-March 2021 lockdown, improving his ability to develop and vary melodies. Harmony continued to be an area for improved aural awareness, as did the accurate notation of rhythm and use of metre to reflect what he wanted to hear. The harmony exercises at the beginning of April showed that his understanding in this area was in need of improvement.

Oliver was able to recognise and describe a lot of musical features in LR1, and seemed to like or be interested in a variety of styles. He occasionally included imagery or narrative, but tended to prefer specific musical detail. Sometimes he expressed his observations quite vaguely, despite many correct points, or was suddenly sweepingly general.

Oliver had been happy to contribute quite prominently to group improvisations in the first term, and often took the lead or initiated change. He sometimes fell back on short, catchy riffs, but was always a responsive and willing player, including in the online improvisations in January 2021. In the latter, he captured the character of the music well, but sometimes missed harmonic cues.



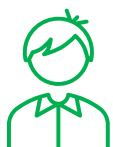
ELIZA

Eliza had not composed before joining this group, apart from short piano pieces at home. She showed good aural awareness in her first two pieces, with effective use of instruments, particularly in the piece written for live performance. A common trend in all of her pieces was the need to listen

to how parts fitted together and especially how a triadic melody matched the harmony. Eliza was ready to notate her pieces straight away, and started to include some performance detail quite early on. By March, it seemed that she would create longer compositions by piecing them together section-by-section or by adding new layers. There was promising development in the voicing of chords and how to use timbre or other devices for effect. Her harmony exercises at the beginning of April showed some considerable gaps in her understanding.

Listening tasks were also unfamiliar to Eliza, and she wrote very little for LR1, spotting a few musical features but sometimes not knowing the appropriate vocabulary to describe it. She often wrote only what she imagined the piece to be about, without musical detail.

Eliza was tentative at first in the group improvisations, and she was absent for some sessions, having to self-isolate after being in close contact with someone with Covid-19. This made it hard for her to develop self-trust in this context, and she remained concerned about *what* to play in the last session. She contributed well to the online improvisation tasks, although she did not play for the full length of the given backing track.



SIOBHAN

Siobhan was an enthusiastic composer who avoided notation whenever she could, and recorded her own compositions. When notation was used, it hindered the composition process, and she wrote much shorter pieces, with no marked expression. When she described her own compositions, there was often some vagueness about their content (e.g., a reference to cadences not lining up in a piece that had no discernible cadences). Her music was usually very effective, reliant on repetition and additional layers, and she enjoyed improvising vocal parts. Sometimes, particularly in the January compositions, this led to quite a

confusing, dense texture, and awareness of how parts fitted together harmonically remained an area for development. Siobhan did not really start to depart from her comfort zone until the compositions that were set during the second study. Her harmony exercises at the beginning of April were inconsistent, in that the modulation via a pivot chord was very successful, but basic awareness of chords within a key was lacking.

In terms of listening, Siobhan really embraced the opportunity to respond with pictures and comparisons to scenarios or music that she already knew, although she gave little accompanying musical detail at first. She had a good sense of style, and correctly identified two pieces in LR1 as, respectively, a film and a ballet score without knowing them beforehand.

Siobhan was a perplexing combination of anxious about group improvisation and apparently willing to play out. In the first session, she appeared very anxious, but in the fourth session she was laughing and seemed willing to start one of the improvisations. I also noticed her looking for cues and playing more responsively. Her contributions to the online improvisations were intuitively sung.



JONNY

Jonny was already composing substantial pieces in September, with accurately notated complicated rhythms and often quite large ensembles. He had a good sense of pacing, albeit usually reliant on periodic phrasing and repeating sections, and he was starting to use chromatic harmony, with varied success. He always included some performance directions, sometimes amusing and inventive. From January, he began to compose in a variety of styles, starting with a piece that he multi-tracked and about which we had several quite high-level conversations that led him to listen more closely to the music and make changes

in the light of that. Jonny had to work hard to improve his articulacy in order to describe what he wanted to hear, so that I could help him to realise his intentions. He treated some of the shorter composition tasks as interesting exercises, and started to use them to work in new styles. While there was varying success with this, every piece showed that he had an excellent ear for stylistic detail. At the same time, his harmonic language began to include more chromatic, dissonant, and extended chords. However, he showed a surprising lack of understanding in the harmony exercises at the beginning of April, suggesting that the adventurous harmony in his compositions relied on his ear rather than theoretical knowledge.

Jonny's excellent ear for detail was not always matched by knowledge of the necessary vocabulary, meaning that he often spotted musical features in the first Listening Response task, but expressed the observations rather vaguely. However, he always made an effort to include both specific features and an imaginative narrative or image. The musical detail was usually which instruments he could hear. He was apparently interested in a wide variety of styles, whether or not he also liked the pieces.

Jonny was always ready to lead and play out in group improvisations, and it was a shame that he was only present for three of the sessions, having had to self-isolate after being in contact with someone with Covid-19. He liked a variety of instruments, sometimes switching during one improvisation, and often stopped to listen before contributing again.



EMILY

Emily preferred to compose by recording short melodic ideas on her phone and adding layers using Garageband. Attempts to use notation software tended to hinder her compositional process, but during the January-March 2021 lockdown, she began to notate things by hand. Emily

generally did not need help with generating initial ideas, but rather with knowing how to extend or develop them, and she sometimes needed to be shown how to listen for parts fitting together harmonically. By January, she was creating slightly longer and more chromatic chord progressions than in September, using melodic sequence, and showing a fairly good grasp of counterpoint. The final composition, started in March 2021, was the first departure from her normal comfort zone of repetition and layers, and she showed more awareness of what she had put in it and why. Her harmony exercises at the beginning of April were characteristically methodical, but did not show clear understanding of the supporting theory.

Emily's first Listening Response showed that she could identify basic features in the music, but in LR1 she was sometimes reluctant to state them as fact (presumably in case they were wrong). Some observations would have benefitted from being more specific (e.g., "ornamentation" not specifically identified). She claimed to be unfamiliar with most of the pieces, and tended not to like much of the music. Emily preferred giving musical details rather than using narrative or imagery.

Emily was very anxious about improvising in the first session, but became more willing to play out during session 3, when there were only four of us (including me) because of absences. There was a marked difference in session 4, when she was openly exploring and not relying on repetitive cells, and she seemed much more at ease with the expectations in session 6.



PAUL

Paul was always trying something new in his compositions, and he often left them unfinished while he moved onto the next task. His first piece showed excellent attention to performance direction in the score and a very good sense of pacing. He was comfortable with dissonant harmony, but not with harmonic progressions, and larger-scale development – whether harmonic or melodic – became a focus for Paul. He usually notated his pieces, but one was a set of instructions (phrases to play in a chosen order) for the group to record live, and another was multi-tracked by him during the January-March 2021 lockdown. Paul was always ready to discuss his music at quite a high level, and was self-aware. There were sometimes some contradictions between what he wanted to hear and what was on the score (e.g., changes of metre whose effect was disrupted by choice of articulation). His responses to the short tasks focusing on motivic development and variation were very ambitious, to the point where they could not be finished in a realistic timescale. His harmony exercises at the end of April were simple and effective, albeit with a rather last-minute modulation, and he developed the chord progressions with some more characterful figuration.

Paul always offered a great deal of detail in his Listening Responses, with many specific, accurate observations for which he chose appropriate vocabulary. He was perceptive across a range of musical elements, and in LR1 he usually added a sentence or two to say what he thought added to the overall effect of a piece, such as a particular timbre on one instrument.

Paul was comfortable playing prominently and taking the lead in group improvisations, and was the most responsive and intuitive player in the group. He often changed instrument, seeming to enjoy having different roles within the group in that respect.

Chapter 5. Developing a Multi-skill Curriculum for A-level Composition

5.1 Introduction and Aims

The pedagogical aim of this research cycle was to include group improvisation as a routine part of composition lessons, building on the previous cycle (Chapter 4), whose purpose had been to enable every student to participate in improvisation. My original plan had been to explore, separately, the influence of group improvisation on students' compositional process, independence, and self-trust, and to facilitate access to challenging modern and contemporary repertoire in the appraisal (listening and analysis) component. However, the plan was amended after schools were closed during a national COVID-19 lockdown in January-March 2021 and this meant that the group improvisation sessions could not take place in person. The two planned studies were therefore amalgamated into one period of data collection in April-July 2021, interweaving group improvisation and imaginative listening with composition tasks set for homework. The thematic analysis revealed associations between behaviours and attitudes in the three areas, with implications for teaching composition and nurturing self-trust. Two research sub-questions were posed, specific to this study:

1. How have improvisation sessions related to students' composition process and output?
2. How have listening tasks related to students' composition process and output?

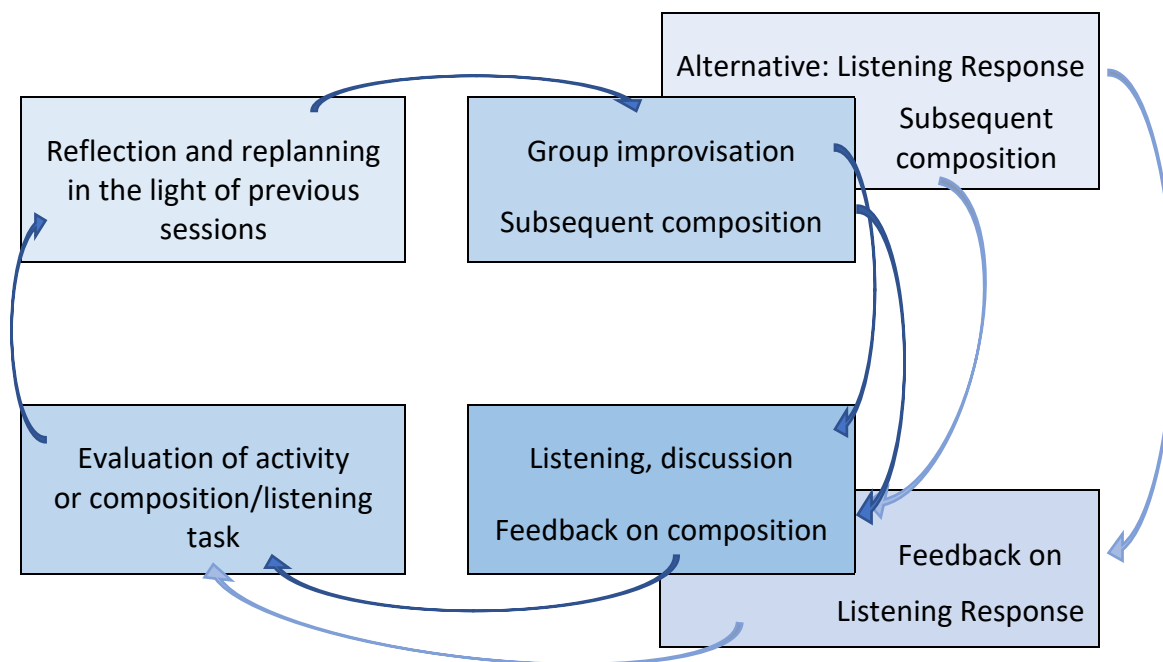
5.2 Planning the Sessions

5.2.1 Using the Action Research Planning Model

The plan for these sessions could be mapped quite clearly onto a typical action research-style cyclical model, in that all practical sessions involved group improvisation with the stimulus of a short motif, and the collective aim was to focus on responsive playing and shaping the overall form as it unfolded in time. Some lessons (sessions 4 and 7) were spent doing a separate listening activity, and as such fell outside the rest of the cycle, but were connected through composition tasks, the consideration of overall form, and the kind of listening response on which each group discussion drew.

Figure 5.1

Action Research Cycle for Study 2



5.2.2 Planning the Activities

The group improvisation and individual listening tasks were closely linked to composition homework, and were based on both the previous study and surrounding literature. By the end of the first research cycle, students were able to participate in group improvisation and

were gaining confidence not only to be heard but also to interact (hear and respond to others) and, in some cases, to initiate change and take the lead. The highest level in Figure 4.11 (see Chapter 4), showing “Levels of “Outward” Playing”, refers to the confidence to shape the overall form as it unfolds whilst interacting with others, and this became a focus of every group improvisation session. Each improvisation began with exploring possibilities in a short motif, inspired by the notion of semi-structured play and “possibility thinking” (Craft, n.d.). When these were followed by group discussions, with questions designed to prompt reflection and evaluation after listening to recorded improvisations, students were invited to give affective, analogous, or analytical responses, and they readily transferred this to their conversations when planning improvisations as well. This built on the notion of finding “ways in” to listening, as advocated by Herbert and Dibben (2017) and Owens (1986), and Major’s (2007) connection between articulacy and creativity.

The Listening Responses (LRs) were likewise intended to invite any kind of response that felt appropriate, and a number of possible types of response had been modelled during the first research cycle, in session 5. LR1 and LR2 were an extension of that, and also included a Likert scale, shown below in Figure 5.2, to show any links there might be between observation and description, and students’ experiences and preferences. LR3.1 (preparatory exercise) and LR3.2 were inspired by a case study reported by Preston (1994), in which students were given phrases from Debussy’s *Syrinx* and asked to place them in an order that made sense to them, giving reasons. LR4 included a compressed version of Ferrara’s “Phenomenological Inquiry” (Ferrara, 1984), inviting students first to respond to a piece of music emotively, associatively, and affectively, and then to build on this with a second listening that required more analytical detail, before returning to the overall narrative or shape of the piece. The inclusion of a video performance of the piece was

inspired by Lochhead (1995), who found that a connection between the visual and the aural greatly helped with making sense of unfamiliar music.

Figure 5.2

Likert Scale included in LR1 and LR2

	not at all				definitely
I already know this piece	1	2	3	4	5
I like this music	1	2	3	4	5
I often listen to music like this	1	2	3	4	5
This is a familiar style to me	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this for relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this out of interest	1	2	3	4	5

5.3 Context: A Pandemic and an A-level Course

These sessions had originally been planned as two separate research cycles, one centralising group improvisation in a composition programme, and the other starting with imaginative listening tasks and partnering these with improvisation activities. The first half-term of the academic year, September-October 2020, had been spent on the sessions that comprised the previous study, “Preparing to Improvise”. Two further research cycles were planned for the next two terms, as shown in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3

Original Plan for the Academic Year 2020-2021

Term 1		Term 2		Term 3	
Sept-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Feb-Apr	Apr-May	Jun-Jul
Study 1 (Preparation)		Study 2		Study 3	

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools in England were closed to the majority of students during January and February 2021. This extended into the first two weeks of March, with a staggered return for students and significant disruption while everyone was tested for the virus before being allowed back on site. Given the importance of group interaction in the improvising sessions, I could not adapt the plans to take place online, and had to reimagine the remaining data collection, conflating the two research cycles that I had planned. Therefore, the adapted Study 2 took place as shown in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4

Adapted Plan for the Academic Year 2020-2021

Term 1		Term 2		Term 3	
Sept-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Feb	Feb-Apr	Apr-May	Jun-Jul
Study 1 (Preparation)		Lockdown		Study 2	

During the lockdown, my research group had their composition lessons with me on Teams, and I used the first two lessons to complete Listening Response 1, in which they could respond to eight excerpts in any way they wanted to – affective, analytical, visual, descriptive, or another way of their choice (see Appendix 6). For the remaining time, the group undertook two remote group improvisation activities, with varying success. We also spent some time discussing these (see Appendix 4). I had been prepared to adapt the research cycles to include some online improvising, but the trial activities demonstrated that this was an inadequate substitute for being in a room together. I also arranged one-to-one feedback meetings with everyone about their compositions. One of these was an ongoing assignment, having been set in December 2020, and the others were short tasks that required students to develop their ability to use and vary given motifs in their compositions, thus building on our work in group improvisations during the “Preparing to Improvise” study. These formed part of the large data set for the present study.

Another important consideration was that an A-level group has five terms to complete their examination course, with the sixth term typically being significantly truncated by the examinations themselves. Our examination board required two compositions per student, and I was aware that my research needed to be completed within one academic year so that they could give their full attention to the compositions they would submit. In the event, exam boards reduced their expectations to one composition, in recognition of the disruption suffered by this year group, but did not convey that message until mid-July 2021, when I had finished the data collection.

5.4 Content of Research Sessions in the Second Data-collection Period, April-July 2021

Table 5.1 shows the content of each session, with brief reference to surrounding research and a summary of data collected in each session. Many of these sessions were replanned in response to a previous session, and some took more than one lesson to complete (session 3), or needed to be extended in order to make a homework task clearer (session 1). Appendix 8 contains the detail of each session, and Listening Response templates can be viewed in Appendix 6.

Table 5.1

Content of Sessions in Data-collection Period 2 (April-July 2021)

Session and Content	Data Collected
Session 1	
Improvisation using a 5-note motif (“What can you do with this?” – a question based on Craft’s (n.d.) possibility thinking).	- Commentary in my own journal - Audio recordings of each improvisation
Listen, observe, comment – inviting immediate reflection on the improvisations.	- Transcription of their reflections on the two improvisations
Homework: a 2-part Study based on the same motif, preceded by quick analysis of an example.	- Two drafts of individual compositions (collected later)

Session and Content	Data Collected
Additional Session following Session 1	
Further analysis of examples of pieces based on short motifs. This session was added because the homework task was not well attempted, on the whole.	- Second attempts at individual composition task
Homework: second attempt at Session 1's homework task.	
Session 2	
Improvisation based on a 3-note motif. Improvements on last time's improvisations were proposed, based on students' reflections in Session 1.	- Commentary in my own journal - Audio recordings of each improvisation - Listening responses: LR2 (collected later)
Listen, observe, comment – inviting immediate reflection on the improvisation, especially in the light of intended improvements.	
Homework task: Listening Response 2, consisting of three pieces to which students were invited to respond in various ways in order to make sense of the music. Its main purpose was to provide a link between this listening activity and the improvising and discussion in Session 2.	
Session 3	
Listening Response 3.1: an activity in which students were given separate phrases from a purpose-written flute solo and asked to place them in an order that made sense to them, with reasons for their decisions (modelled on a case study reported by Preston, 1994). This was designed as a short preparatory task preceding Listening Response 3.2.	- Justification for ordering of phrases in the preparatory exercise (LR3.1) - My journal's comments on their responses to the listening homework task
Homework: students were asked to listen to a number of given solo pieces, choose their favourite, and prepare to talk about it in the following session.	

Session and Content	Data Collected
Session 3 continued the following week	
<p>Listening Response 3.2: same principle as LR3.1, using phrases from Greenwood's "Sympathetic Strings" (<i>Horror Vacui</i>, 2019)</p> <p>Listening Response 3.1 took longer to explain and conduct than anticipated, so Session 3 expanded to fill two lessons.</p>	
<p>Homework: compose a "Soliloquy" for a solo instrument, using the description of why phrases in LR3.2 made sense in the chosen order as a template for the composition. Designed to make explicit the link between perception, articulation, and composition (cf. Major, 2007).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual Listening response 3.2 - Soliloquy compositions (collected later; two drafts)
Session 4	
<p>Reflection: listening to an improvisation from Session 2, which was based on a set plan that the students had created in discussion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commentary in my own journal - Audio recordings of each improvisation - Audio recording of the session - Transcription of each discussion
<p>Preliminary exercise before improvisation: consider some of the musical cues outlined by Randles and Sullivan (2013), with the aim of encouraging composition with the listener in mind.</p>	
<p>Improvisation: response to a 4-note motif, with emphasis on what would make a good opening, continuation, and ending.</p>	
<p>Discussion and reflection on the recorded improvisation.</p>	
Session 5	
<p>Discussion about musical form and musical interaction in the contexts of group improvisation and composition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commentary in my own journal - Audio recordings of each improvisation - Audio recording of the session - Transcription of each discussion - Individual accounts of own composition process (collected later)
<p>Model of "outward playing" shared with the group.</p>	
<p>Improvisation: using the same motif as in Session 4, with an emphasis on varying the mood of their exploration of possibilities. There was a given template for guidance without overplanning, as requested in Session 4.</p>	
<p>Discussion and reflection on improvisations.</p>	
<p>Homework: students were asked to write an account of their composition process.</p>	

Session and Content	Data Collected
Session 6	
Discussion about judgement and aesthetics, including reference to the wording in the assessment criteria for A-level composition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commentary in my own journal - Audio recording of improvisation - Audio recording of the session - Transcription of discussion
Analysis of some purpose-written pieces, with an emphasis on harmony.	
Improvisation: in response to a request in Session 5, a chord progression was provided for this last group improvisation.	
Session and Content	Data Collected
Session 7	
Listening response 4 (“Spring” from <i>Horror Vacui</i> (Greenwood, 2019)). The guidelines for this were based on two papers about phenomenological listening: Ferrara (1984) and Lochhead (1995).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual LR4 responses - Individual questionnaire responses
Questionnaire about students’ understanding of the links between their group improvising, individual composing, and the listening tasks.	

5.5 Participant Profile Update: April 2021

This data collection period followed almost a term of lockdown (January-March 2021) and online teaching, during which the group had undertaken one Listening Response (LR1), a few online improvisation tasks and several short compositions. The online improvisations met with mixed reviews; for example, Jonny said he missed the group interaction in the moment, whereas Emily felt emboldened by the absence of others. All compositions were completed individually, some with one-to-one feedback in meetings on Teams. The composition tasks all focussed on motivic development, as a logical follow-up to the previous term’s group improvisations, which often began with a motif or scale for the students to explore. In general, responses to the composition tasks were positive, and some students progressed well in their ability to develop and manipulate motifs or write variations on melodies. However, a lack of playing together made it much harder to ensure exposure to the multiple possibilities for each task. During this term, some students’

compositional style and process remained unchanged, whereas others seemed motivated to use the short tasks to try new things, notably Oliver and Jonny. Some were held back by the limitations of instruments and software available at home.

5.6 Data Analysis and Research Sub-questions in Study 2

As in the first study, I conducted a thematic analysis of the data collected for this study. The data set was very large, consisting of audio recordings, students' written work, transcriptions of discussions, individual questionnaires, compositions with feedback, and my own journal, which contained observations about group interactions and each student's contribution to group improvisations. Compositions and Listening Responses from the entire academic year were included in the data set, in order to show any changes and progress more clearly. As well as the raw data listed here, I created three case summaries for every student – one each for listening, composing, and improvising – in order to view any changes and progress more easily. The data was first classified according to data-type (see Table 5.2), alongside a brief description of what purpose each would have, without developing any preconceptions about what it would show me. All of these items could be open-coded as in the previous study, but it was important to find ways to streamline this, with so many data items. Therefore, the coding was not always a strictly "line-by-line" process, particularly in the case of compositions, where the equivalent – bar-by-bar – would be unnecessarily complex.

This categorisation of data was an important first stage of the analysis process for two reasons. Firstly, it allowed re-familiarisation with a large amount of data, some of which – listening responses and compositions – spanned the entire academic year. This is the first stage identified by Braun and Clarke (2006), and is presented by Nowell et al. (2017) as an active process during which "ideas and identification of possible patterns may be shaped"

(p. 5). Secondly, the organisation of the data in this way also streamlined what could have been a daunting coding process by virtue of the identified “purpose” for each data-type, and provided an order in which to proceed. It made most sense to search for patterns in data related to composition and listening first, as those were the two aspects of the A-level course in which I had set out to change my teaching methods and improve outcomes for the students.

Table 5.2

Data Types and Their Purpose in This Thematic Analysis

Raw data	Purpose in the thematic analysis
Compositions and feedback (September 2020-June 2021)	Several data types provided information about students’ compositional output over the academic year: journals (containing a record of conversations as well as a copy of written feedback), scores and recordings, participants’ descriptions of their composition process, and the last questionnaire they did for me about their perceived link between composing, improvising, and listening.
Listening responses (September 2020-July 2021)	These revealed individuals’ listening habits, preferences, familiarity, and perceptions, as well as their approach to listening to new music and access to appropriate vocabulary.
Journals, commentaries, and improvisations (April-July 2021)	These told me how I felt the group responded to group and individual tasks, and what everyone played in the group sessions.
Discussions, transcripts, and learning conferences (April-July 2021)	In students’ direct answers to questions as well as their contributions to informal discussions, I could analyse their use of language, perceptions, and willingness to take part.
Further data type	
Case summaries	A summary of each student’s progress in composition, listening, and improvisation.

Annotating all of the data-types related to composition led to some recurring labels that became my initial codes. These included the following examples:

- Characterising ideas (with articulation, dynamics, etc)
- Logical contrast
- Intuitive pacing
- Satisfying reprise
- Reliance on repetition
- Reliance on layers
- Notation software as hindrance
- Contrived devices (e.g., awkward sequence, indiscriminate dynamics, unsuccessful attempt to generate momentum)
- Good ending
- Weak finish
- Meandering melody/confusing phrase structure
- Means of building momentum successfully

The following is an example of how these codes were initially grouped, not yet into final categories, but into what I conceptualised as “wider codes” at this stage:

- Hearing potential of ideas (evident in students’ characterisation of these on the score, in how they discussed them, and in their further use of them)
- Commitment to their ideas (in discussion, in how they presented them straight away)
- Musical judgement (pacing, form)
- Comfort zone (different for everyone, and not confined to lower-ability or less confident composers)

I began writing memos very early in the analysis, as this was an essential part of making sense of my annotations of diverse data-types. Charmaz (1996) recommends memo-writing as a stage between coding and writing up, but for me it became a parallel, almost diary-like process, and the additional description applied to the codes revealed trends in individual cases and connections between them. From this, questions about possible links

between composition, listening, and improvising began to arise; for example, the place of discussion in more than one of the “wider codes” above suggested a link between use of language and awareness of musical elements as listeners and as composers, while things like “comfort zone” and “commitment to ideas” were evident both in compositions and in the way people played during group improvisations. This eventually led to two research sub-questions pertaining to this study:

1. How have improvisation sessions related to students’ composition process and output?
2. How have listening tasks related to students’ composition process and output?

These questions made sense in light of the organisation of the sessions in the period April-July 2021, in which students were engaged either in group improvisation (and related discussion) or individual listening tasks, and subsequent homework was always a composition task.

I noticed changes over time in students’ responses to composition tasks, in terms of presentation, awareness of decision-making and content, and compositional process. These could be linked to students’ listening and improvising; for example, awareness of content in compositions became apparent through discussion and had a correlation in a student’s ability to observe and describe details in music they heard. Similarly, there was a link between responsive playing in group improvisations and a kind of “responsive composing”. There were also apparent changes in students’ perception of themselves as composers, which became clear not only in the compositions themselves but also in the nature of my feedback. Risk-taking became a central focus of students’ behaviour, as there was a strong connection to behaviours in listening and improvisation. The changes are presented as themes in Table 5.3, with the categories shown alongside. A more detailed account of the findings and analysis of this rich and complex data set is given below. The

group's recorded improvisations are referred to by session then number, e.g., 1(3) refers to Session 1, Improvisation 3.

Table 5.3

Themes and Categories in Study 2: Developing a Multi-skill Curriculum for A-level Composition

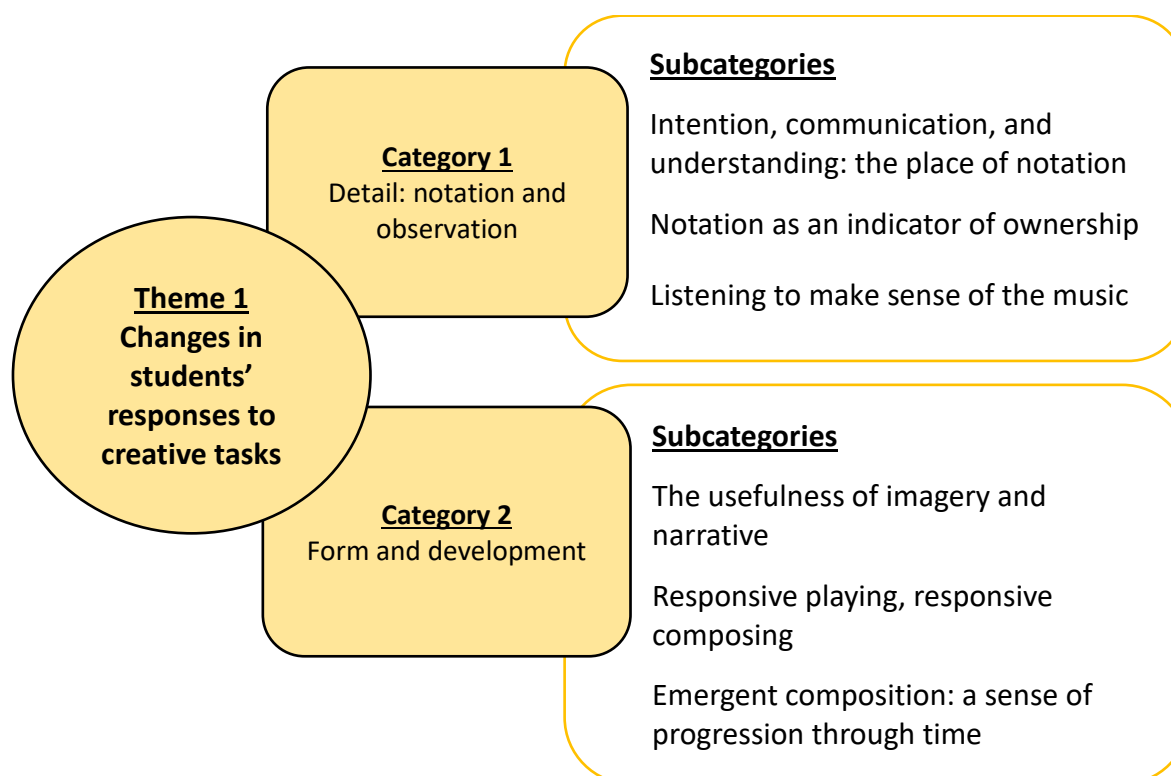
Themes		Categories
Theme 1 Changes in students' responses to creative tasks		Detail: notation and observation
		Form and development
Theme 2 Changes in students' attitudes and self-concept as composers		Comfort zone and composer identity
		Risk-taking, curiosity and receptiveness

5.7 Findings and Discussion

5.7.1 Theme 1: Changes in Students' Responses to Creative Tasks

Figure 5.5

Categories and Content Discussed in Theme 1



This theme discusses students' individual compositions, their responses to listening tasks, and their roles in group improvisations. Compositions undertaken during the second data collection period – April-July 2021 – are considered in the wider context of pieces composed throughout the academic year (September 2020-July 2021), in order to demonstrate changes in students' responses to composition tasks.

5.7.1.1 Category 1. Detail: Notation and Observation.

Category 1 scrutinises the benefits and barriers presented by notation, addressing the related issues of ownership, aural perception, and verbal expression of musical observation. A link between characterisation of musical material by a composer or improviser and personalisation of musical responses by a listener is proposed, in support of including imaginative listening in a composition programme.

5.7.1.1.1 Intention, Communication, and Understanding: The Place of Notation.

Musical notation has been and continues to be hotly debated in the context of music education. Opposing views hold, on the one hand, that understanding how to decode notation is a prerequisite of musical learning, and, on the other, that many musical traditions and genres do not require it for preservation and transmission (Fautley, 2017). The issue returns repeatedly in the context of examined composition, in preparation for which a continued fixation on notation is apparent (Berkley, 2001; Koops, 2013; #CanCompose, 2019), despite the fact that it presents a barrier for many students and a deterrent to some teachers (Koops, 2013). The debate often favours the promotion of alternatives to notation, such as the preservation of compositions by means of recording (Terry, 1994), descriptions of sounds, or graphic notation (Koops, 2013). This subcategory addresses a few specific limitations of such alternatives, with regard to intention, communication, and understanding of the probable aural outcome.

Some of my students did experience notation as a significant barrier when composing. This included practical issues such as finding the process of notation to be time-consuming, as well as musical limitations such as difficulties with accurately notating rhythms, or knowing how to notate specific devices (e.g., a soft cymbal roll in one of Eliza's early compositions). Notation itself was raised as a problem by Emily ("I'll compose something and then I'll struggle with the theory side of it e.g., notating it") and by Siobhan ("I spend a very long time trying to get exact rhythmic figures correct"). For both students, this was a matter not only of being confident with music theory but also of using notation software.

Students were allowed to use alternatives to notation in early compositions, in order to deflect any sense that they were doing it "wrong" because my feedback was partly focused on notation and successful navigation of software. Berkley (2001) observed that too much time spent correcting notation rather than focussing on the music had a detrimental effect on young composers' autonomy and sense of ownership, and, twenty years on, the same could be true if too much time were spent correcting use of software. However, I soon found that alternative formats presented their own barriers or limitations, both to my students and to me.

5.7.1.1.1.1 Limitations in Imagined Outcome and Communication of Intentions.

Handwritten scores and verbal instructions were often hard to decipher, and one attempt by Siobhan at a graphic score for the group resulted in our not understanding what she wanted us to play, as she had a very specific melody in mind that she eventually notated by hand (Figure 5.6). This piece, "Ocean", also contained a lengthy section relying on performers to improvise the depiction of a chaotic "storm at sea", the end of which is heard in Audio 5.1 below.

Siobhan: End of Stormy Passage in "Ocean" (November 2020) and Notated Melodic Phrase



5.1. Siobhan - ocean composition.mp3

Siobhan's was a good example of a piece in which staff notation "is not always the most expressive vehicle for indicating how a piece of music is shaped or feels" (Kaschub & Smith, 2009a, p.6). Notating it may even have been detrimental to its success, in that either notating this passage to represent the intended sound could have proved too hard, therefore resulting in simpler music that was less successfully chaotic and stormy, or, in scoring music to sound like the excerpt above, she could have provided parts that were extremely hard to read and render as intended. Nonetheless, the alternative format held limitations, and in itself this was a valuable learning experience for Siobhan, who was experimenting with it for the first time. In the case of her melody, the intention was so specific that staff notation was the best way to communicate it. In the case of the stormy passage, the intended aural outcome was not specific *enough*, and it was apparent from the additional questions that we needed to ask when rehearsing this piece that some decisions had not been made, and performers were required to improvise the majority of the material.

5.7.1.1.1.2 A Correlation Between Un-notated Music and Limited Aural Awareness.

For this same brief – creating a piece for the group to play – Emily likewise chose not to produce a score, and, like Siobhan, she partly relied on performers' invention (e.g., "rising melody starting on A (around the notes A, B, F#, D)"; "plays improvised melody line around the chords played by the piano"). Like Siobhan, she had not made some of the decisions

that would have demonstrated a clearer understanding of what she expected to hear. Lamont (2016) concludes, from studies of children’s invented notations, that increasing detail in how they sought to represent, or “symbolise”, sounds in terms of pitch, duration, and timbre corresponded to their level of musical understanding (p. 403). I would add to this that the more precise the “symbolisation”, the more apparent is an expectation to hear something specific. In the case of the un-notated compositions described above, the lack of precision reflected vague expectations about the resultant sound, and therefore suggested a lack of aural awareness.

Compositions by the students that were submitted in alternative formats to scores, or as audio without supporting written material, had often been created by looping parts and adding layers. In several of these, additional parts sounded awkward (e.g., harmonically dissonant, or texturally confusing), which corroborated the observation that there was a lack of aural awareness on the part of the composer. The absence of a detailed score then created a further problem, namely that, without a score to refer to, discussion of those awkward moments was confined to imagination and concept, meaning that feedback was hampered. An example of this was “The Butterfly” by Siobhan (Audio 5.2), where added layers clashed with repeating parts already present. This was also the case with a later composition (started in July 2021), but because she had provided a score, our discussion about harmonic discords was facilitated by the visual aid.

Audio 5.2

Siobhan: Excerpt from “The Butterfly” (January 2021)



5.2 Siobhan The
Butterfly.mp3

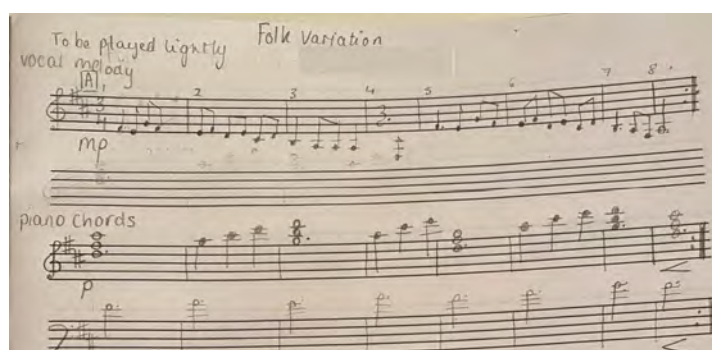
It became clear, through these examples, that students' aural awareness and clarity of intentions were reflected in the format of their compositions. The composition process itself was sometimes also apparent in the same way. Emily made a great effort to compensate for her lack of notation software at home during the January-March 2021 lockdown by handwriting her compositions. The presentation revealed the process: she composed one part at a time, adding subsequent parts as layers in a repeating piece. This exposed some problems with notating rhythms accurately – a question not only of her grasp of music theory but also of her aural awareness – and presented her with a disadvantage in that the rhythmic correlation between parts (or layers) would have been clearer with vertical alignment. The same is true of harmonic relationships; in the example shown in Figure 5.7a, aural awareness could have been aided by seeing the un-notated chordal part in relation to the melodic line, which clashed considerably in places. Listening to Audio 5.3b alongside Figure 5.7b shows the mismatch between notation and sound. This had not been so problematic in her previous composition, in which parts *were* vertically aligned (Figure 5.7a), suggesting that there were aural benefits to having a score to view.

Figure 5.7

Audio 5.3

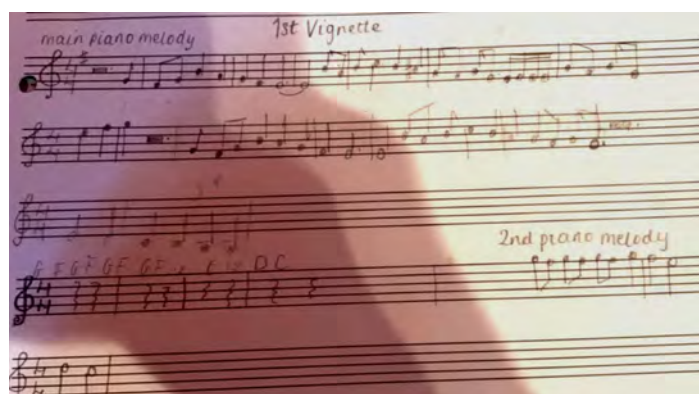
Two Examples of Emily's Handwritten Notation

Figure 5.7a Emily's Variation on a Folk Tune (February 2021), Showing Parts Vertically Aligned



5.3a Emily variation, section A.mp3

Figure 5.7b Emily's First Vignette Composition (March 2021), with Layout That Disconnects the Parts



5.3b Emily 1st Vignette.mp3

There was more to the notation issue than the debate about the appropriateness of staff notation to a genre or an individual composer. Communication with performers about how, as well as *what*, to play is possible via alternative methods to traditional notation. However, in the case of the pieces discussed above, choosing *not* to notate was usually a symptom of something else: unformed intentions, unclear decisions, or lack of aural awareness. There were visual advantages to notation, including providing an aid to hearing how parts interrelated, and offering a canvas for facilitating feedback. As suggested by Lamont (2016), musical understanding is reflected in the way compositions are represented visually, and, as discussed in the next subcategory, the amount of detail included in that “symbolisation” (notation) is a strong indicator of decisions made and ownership claimed.

5.7.1.1.2 Notation as an Indicator of Ownership.

The above list of advantages highlights two important aspects of the musical score, whether staff notation or otherwise: (1) that it contains more than simply indications of pitches and rhythms, and (2) that it is a means of communicating how a composer intended or expected something to sound. This appeared to me to be a matter of ownership. Where students had left some decisions unmade, or had not fully conceived the aural outcome, I deemed that detrimental to their ownership of the piece. This was the case whether the

piece in question was unnotated and gave incomplete instructions, or it was presented in staff notation that was missing the additional detail about *how* as well as *what* to play.

5.7.1.1.2.1 *Ownership Inherent in the Communication of Decisions.*

Lehmann et al. (2006) draw a distinction between creating and generating which is useful in this context. In order to bypass connotations of genius in the word “*creative*”, they offer the “more neutral term... *generative* to indicate that new material is being generated in the process of improvising or composing” (p. 127). The *creative* impetus for “Ocean” came from Siobhan, who imagined the piece and directed us in how and when to play; however, the performers were required to *generate* some of the material themselves, as a consequence of her not having notated it. Lehmann et al. proceed to acknowledge the “extreme demands on the generative powers of the performer... when the score contains only nonstandard notation” (p. 129), to which I would add that reliance on performers in this way can also detract from the composer’s *ownership* of the final piece, if it calls into question how much of the final outcome was a result of their decision-making.

While it is obvious that a non-specific instruction such as “improvise around the notes A, B, F#, D” (Emily, November 2020) leaves much of the generating of material to the performer, some inventive interpretation is also required if a score lacks performance directions. Leech-Wilkinson (2016) exhorts young composers to consider “how much of a piece’s character is encoded in the notes” (p. 333) for the benefit of potential performers, a matter, again, of students’ taking ownership of how their music will sound. Where there was minimal (or no) detail on my students’ scores, decisions about how to play had not been made, and the imagined sound was not fully evident. This is clear in the two examples in Figure 5.8 below.

Figure 5.8

Excerpts from Two Untitled Dorian-mode Compositions (October 2020)



The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Bass Guitar and Keyboard. The Bass Guitar part is written in a 4/4 time signature and consists of four measures of music. Each measure contains a triplet of eighth notes, indicated by a '3' above the notes. The Keyboard part is also in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The first two measures feature a melody in the treble clef, while the last two measures are mostly rests in both staves. The score is attributed to (Siobhan).



The image shows a musical score for a Keyboard instrument. It is written in a 4/4 time signature and consists of two systems of music. The first system has four measures: the first two measures contain chords in the treble clef, and the last two measures contain chords in the bass clef. The second system has four measures: the first two measures contain a melody in the bass clef, and the last two measures contain chords in the bass clef. The score includes dynamic markings: *mf* (mezzo-forte) at the beginning and *dim.* (diminuendo) in the final measure. The score is attributed to (Eliza).

When I saw detailed directions in a student’s work, I inferred that the composer was imagining something about the character of the music and making decisions in order to communicate that as fully as possible. There is an argument for replacing the term “reading music” with “speaking music”, in recognition of the fact that we do not read music as we read words, in our heads; we “read” aloud, which is to say we “speak” music as we play it (Fautley, 2017, p. 123). Fautley presents this as a mode of meaning-making, arguing that the information on the page is meaningless if its sound is not understood. Therefore, the more detail there is about how to “speak” the music, the more meaning is conveyed, and the more ownership the composer has of that message.

At first, this level of detail was sparse in all but Paul’s scores, and I saw a lack of detail or performance direction in nearly everybody’s notated music in the earliest few tasks. When this began to change, a bid to fulfil this expectation sometimes resulted in slightly

indiscriminate directions, as in an example by Oliver (Figure 5.9), with a tenuto marking on every electric bass note and a confusingly presented crescendo, but the additional characterisation of material represented Oliver taking ownership of that music.

Figure 5.9

Excerpt from Oliver's Second Composition, "Rayuela" (October 2020)

The musical score for Figure 5.9 consists of three staves: Tbn., E. Bass, and Pno. The score is for measures 41-43. The Tbn. staff has a tenuto marking on every note. The E. Bass staff has a tenuto marking on every note. The Pno. staff has a tenuto marking on every note. The score is in 4/4 time and features a complex rhythmic pattern with many slurs and accents.

5.7.1.1.2.2 Characterisation in Improvisation and Ownership of Composition.

There was a connection between students' participation in the improvisation sessions and their willingness and ability to apply dynamics, articulation, and other directions to their compositions. Several improvisation sessions in the third term (April-July 2021) began with a motif as a stimulus, the first task being to find as many different ways of playing or altering it as possible. This had been a successful way of beginning an improvisation session in the autumn term, as it encouraged everybody to have their ideas heard (a form of validation) and presented a collective discovery of possibilities. After free exploration time, what students shared aloud was usually something they liked and found memorable. The more confident of these shared explorations were usually played with purposeful character, while the less confident were blander, lacking conviction.


This led me to view detail on scores similarly as a form of students' *characterising* and having conviction in their music. Again, Oliver makes a good case study. He was a prominent player in some improvisations, not only because the trombone stands out, but also because he often gave his motifs and phrases character by playing with deliberate, obviously intended articulation and dynamics. In the first session, he introduced a glissando motif in the first improvisation that he had previously agreed Paul would then imitate on the timpani. He characterised this glissando as a looming, swooping figure, played with clear intention, as shown in Figure 5.10 (Audio 5.4a). Likewise, his contribution to the session 4 improvisations was a very musically shaped melody (Audio 5.4b, 4(1)). Oliver's compositions developed in this respect over the course of Year 12, from the laudable effort in "Rayuela" (Figure 5.9 above) to less indiscriminate direction and, in the two pieces he composed in the third term, absolute certainty about how he wanted every phrase to be played (e.g., "Soliloquy", Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.10

Audio 5.4

Oliver's Glissando Motif in Improvisation 1(1) and His Melody as Played in Improvisation 4(1)

1(1)





5.4a Oliver improv
1(1).mp3



5.4b Oliver improv
4(1).mp3

4(1)




Figure 5.11

Excerpt from Oliver's Soliloquy for Trombone (May 2021)

The musical score for Trombone, Excerpt from Oliver's Soliloquy, is presented in three staves. The first staff (measures 28-33) is marked *p* and *rit.*. The second staff (measures 34-40) is marked *f* and *Adagio*. The third staff (measures 41-48) is marked *p* and *Tempo primo*. The score is in bass clef with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The first staff features a series of eighth notes with accents, followed by a half note and a quarter note. The second staff features a series of half notes with accents, followed by a quarter note and a half note. The third staff features a series of eighth notes with accents, followed by a quarter note and a half note.

Oliver's "Soliloquy" not only included characterisation, as in the articulation and dynamics in each phrase, but also clear intentions and style. Other compositions sharing these features were almost exclusively by students whose contributions to group improvisations are described in my commentaries as being prominent, characterful, and exploratory, most frequently Paul and Oliver. In both this and the tendency to characterise their contributions to improvisations, they contrast with some other students, whose playing in group sessions was less distinctive or musically shaped, and whose composition scores correspondingly included minimal or indiscriminate performance detail. By comparison, an ostinato figure played by Emily in one of the session 2 improvisations (Figure 5.12, Audio 5.5) contains less meaningful musical shape than Oliver's examples in Figure 5.10, Audio 5.4, and this corresponds to a relative lack of characterisation or clarity of intentions in a piece she composed in the same month (April 2021).

Figure 5.12

Audio 5.5

Emily's Ostinato in Improvisation 2(2), and Score for her 2-part Study on 5 Notes (April 2021)



Ostinato figure



5.5 Emily
improvisation 2(2).mp

Emily's 2-Part Study on 5 Notes



While an increasing effort to include performance directions was evident in all students' compositions as the academic year progressed, this was something I still needed to encourage explicitly in most cases. When discussing their experiences as performers, these same students expressed a preference for music that gave a clear indication of the composer's intentions. Despite my trying, with reference to this, to impress on them the importance of composing with the performer in mind, several students' scores remained relatively undetailed. As a connection emerged in the data between their attention to detail in this respect and their powers of observation as listeners, it became clear that these young composers needed encouragement to draw on their experiences not only as active performers, but also as active listeners.

5.7.1.1.3 Listening to Make Sense of the Music.

Kaschub and Smith (2009a) present listening skills as an essential part of the composition process in two respects: firstly, the ability to listen to other music analytically and critically facilitates self-assessment, and secondly, access to music through listening offers young composers “the bank of sounds and sound gestures that are available for manipulation within their own work” (p. 7). The first relates to ownership, in that self-assessment entails self-awareness. The second is revisited in a later publication by the same authors, in which they again make a case for a composer’s voice developing in light of “the range of expressive gestures that are familiar from music listening experiences” (Kaschub & Smith, 2013, p. 7). Although “expressive gestures” could imply general shaping of music and realising of intentions rather than specific isolated features like intervals and cadences, the latter became important in my data because of the correlation between focussed musical description in a listening response and specific performance detail on scores as discussed above.

5.7.1.1.3.1 Detailed Observations, Detailed Scores.

Listening tasks did not initially stipulate a required level of focussed musical detail from students, for reasons outlined above in 5.2.2. Although there were therefore no right or wrong responses, some students did opt to incorporate musical detail in their first listening responses and others included much less, the latter being the same who submitted compositions with no score, or one lacking in performance detail. For example, Siobhan’s first notated score (Figure 5.8 above) included no performance detail, corresponding to a lack of musical features in her response to Gershwin’s Piano Prelude no.3 – “Sounds like a pianist would play at a really posh restaurant/hotel. Very tricky to play but not my cup of tea”. Although this was an appropriate association and contained implicit recognition of

the virtuosity, a much more detailed response was given by Paul, whose first notated score is shown below in Figure 5.13:

The use of syncopation and a montuno-like pattern in the accompaniment to the melody provides a tango-like feel. This is also supported using raised 7ths in the minor key (harmonic minor) which is common in this style especially in its abundant use of perfect cadences.

Figure 5.13

Paul: “Train Delay” (September 2020)

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Train Delay" by Paul, dated September 2020. The score is written for a string ensemble and is divided into two systems. The first system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The second system includes staves for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 114. The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 12/8. The score features a melody in the Violin I part with a glissando effect. The accompaniment in the Violoncello and Viola parts includes syncopation and a montuno-like pattern. The score is marked with a forte (f) dynamic and includes a triplet of eighth notes in the Violin I part.

This link between students’ attention to performance detail in their compositions and their abilities to recognise and articulately describe musical features was similarly evident in the following comparison between Eliza and Oliver. Eliza had not done GCSE music, and analytical listening was less familiar to her than it was to Oliver. Her response to “The Sinking” from Horner’s *Titanic* film score read: “This is like a scene from *Gladiator* where the gladiator is entering the colosseum arena to fight and all the lions and tigers come out”.

While it was clear that Eliza could appropriately interpret the character of the music's panic, terror, and confusion, this contains no musically specific detail to suggest how the composer achieved that effect. The piano part for her composition from the same time (January 2021) also has very little performance direction compared to one by Oliver, as shown in Figure 5.14.

Figure 5.14

Opening Bars of Two Compositions, Showing Difference in Performance Detail (January 2021)

Eliza:

The first piece, marked *allegro*, consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The treble staff begins with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and continues with a series of half notes (F#4, A4, C5, B4, A4, G4). The bass staff begins with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3) and continues with a series of eighth notes (F#2, A2, C3, B2, A2, G2). Dynamic markings include *mf* in the treble and *mp* in the bass.

The second piece, marked *Adagio*, also consists of two staves. The treble staff begins with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and continues with a series of half notes (F#4, A4, C5, B4, A4, G4). The bass staff begins with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3) and continues with a series of eighth notes (F#2, A2, C3, B2, A2, G2). Dynamic markings include *mf* in the treble and *mp* in the bass.

Oliver:

The first piece, marked *Adagio*, consists of two staves (Trumpet in Bb and Trombone). The Trumpet staff begins with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and continues with a series of half notes (F#4, A4, C5, B4, A4, G4). The Trombone staff begins with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3) and continues with a series of eighth notes (F#2, A2, C3, B2, A2, G2). Dynamic markings include *pp* in both staves.

The second piece, also marked *Adagio*, consists of two staves (Trumpet and Trombone). The Trumpet staff begins with a whole note chord (F#4, A4, C5) and continues with a series of half notes (F#4, A4, C5, B4, A4, G4). The Trombone staff begins with a whole note chord (F#2, A2, C3) and continues with a series of eighth notes (F#2, A2, C3, B2, A2, G2). Dynamic markings include *ff* in the Trombone and *mp* in the Trumpet.

Oliver also likened “The Sinking” to a fight scene in a film, but, unlike Eliza, he had recently done GCSE Music and was able to write about the musical features that had led to that impression: “The staccato chords against quavers [in the] strings really gives a driving feel... I really like the trumpet motif as the sharp timbre works well with the mellow, sweeping horns.” Corresponding to this musical detail in his response is the amount of performance direction on his composition shown above.

5.7.1.1.3.2 Personalised Listening and Characterised Scores.

The second listening task (LR2) was similar in that it asked for a free response to a selection of excerpts, this time three longer ones than the eight short ones in LR1. Students were told, “You can represent some of what you mean with pictures or graphics, but the overall description should be analytical and make good use of musical vocabulary and observations.” Nobody opted for the pictures/graphics, and, although there were still some narratives and comparisons to other music, everyone aspired to write a musically specific description of what they heard. While there were many more specific musical observations in most students’ responses to LR2 than there were to LR1, this did not correspond to an impression that students were making sense of the music more than before, even though there was undeniably more detail in some responses. It was partly because alongside those specific observations were a number of quite vague statements, such as “the percussion instrument [unnamed] ... develops different melodic ideas” and “the drums added some texture to the piece”. Some responses resembled a list of noted features, as if, in an effort to include the required analytical detail, the connection between that and the overall experience of listening had been lost. In the example below, by Emily, although there is some terminology and a reference to the overall form of the excerpt, there is little sense of how she experienced the music:

Quick tempo. Beginning strings quickly layered with other string instruments. Solo violin over the top of initial string parts. Build up to a much gloomier-sounding middle section which briefly moves back to the original theme before then speeding up even more and the descending motif heard at the beginning can be heard underneath this (cello? Ostinato). Very clear ending with reiterated chordal string writing at a forte dynamic marking (played staccato).

Compare this to Siobhan's response to the same piece, which begins as follows:

Quick and almost sounds like string sections are in canon with one another. Quite a sequential section leads to the music sounding fraught. I imagine someone running away because they're about to be murdered.

This reveals how Siobhan made sense of the music as she was experiencing it, and the fact that it is, arguably, a more engaging description than Emily's more detailed one demonstrates the importance of imagination in support of observation. When students included both, it showed their understanding of why a composer might have included certain (specified) details and how that had a certain effect on them as listeners, as in this excerpt from Oliver's response to the same piece:

It evokes imagery of a chase or a hunt due to the fast motor rhythm and ostinato low figures as well as the strong imitation between instruments which adds a dense texture. The piece seems to tell a story with the low aggressive playing of the cello at the beginning and the piece sets off with a fast tempo and relatively loud dynamics. The instruments play in an imitative texture with ostinato figures and share around the melody. The dotted rhythms add a certain aggression as the accents seem to be very important to the sinister tone of the music.

The combination of personal response and focussed explanation is valuable, as it moves from the implicit sense of a chase or a hunt to the explicit – for example, the instrument, how it is played, when it is played, what it plays. I placed importance on students' ability to articulate the source of their emotional response to music as listeners because the reverse process could be employed in composition, namely making decisions about how to provoke a response with their own music. This is the link between intuitive response and intellectual explanation, or, from the composer's point of view, the use of "intuition – the knowledge gained in the subjective experience of implicit learning – to inform explicit artistic decision-making" (Kaschub & Smith, 2009a, p. 17). Being able to articulate observations has also been shown by Major (2007) to correlate directly to a composer's ability to self-evaluate and make decisions, with a "good command of terminology" corresponding to "pieces of music that reflect previous or original intentions" (p. 171).

Both Kaschub and Smith (2009a) and Major (2007) assert that perceptive listening skills enable composers to make informed and conscious decisions about what to include in their own music, even if this does not always smoothly transition from "knowing *that*" to "knowing *how*" (for example, compositional techniques like fugal string quartet openings still need teaching). In the context of my own study, realising not only what a composer did and how it was done, but also for what intended effect on the listener in the overall progression of the piece, translates into the precise performance directions and characterisation present in some students' music by the end of the data collection period (see Figure 5.15). This could also explain why some students included rather indiscriminate performance directions in their compositions without seeming fully aware of their purpose, and why that seemed to correlate to a tendency to give detached lists of observations (e.g., Emily) or imaginative responses with less accurate or detailed musical support (e.g., Siobhan).

Figure 5.15

Excerpts from Two Compositions Showing the Difference in Performance Detail

The image displays two musical excerpts. The first, "Rat" by Jonny, is a snare drum piece in 2/4 time with a tempo of 70. It features dynamic markings of *p*, *mf*, and *p*, along with triplets and a trill. The second, "Soliloquy for piano" by Emily, is in 4/4 time and marked *legato* and *p*. It shows a piano part with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with dynamic markings of *f*, *pp*, *f*, and *pp*.

Perhaps because it is a form of *personalisation*, imagination, rather than isolated detail, confers a similar ownership on a listening response to that of characterisation in composing. Both personalised listening and characterised scoring are a way of *making sense* of music, and both represent a deep level of involvement in the music, whether responding as the audience or communicating as the composer. As students incorporated more specific observations into their affective listening responses, and as they saw the need for more precise performance directions in their own compositions, I saw a deeper commitment to the music and conviction in their descriptions and decisions.

5.7.1.2 Category 2. Form and Development.

Category 2 continues to explore the connection between listening and composing, assessing the usefulness of narrative and imagery in making sense of music. This is

considered in terms of both planning the overall form of a composition or group improvisation and hearing a piece of music unfold in time. A parallel is drawn between responsive improvising and intuitive composing. The category goes on to present the benefits of a specific listening task to a composer's awareness of decision-making during the compositional process.

5.7.1.2.1 The Usefulness of Imagery and Narrative.

5.7.1.2.1.1 Accessing and Understanding Music Whilst Listening.

Writing about music education some decades ago, Owens (1986) advocated a pedagogical approach that offers pupils "ways in" to new music, whether in the context of listening or performing (p. 345). Despite the many changes that music education has seen in the generation since this publication, the notion of making music accessible to young listeners like my A-level students is very much still a current concern, being a matter of interpreting, or finding a way to engage with music. With his focus seeming to be on enjoyment more than analytical listening, Owens (1986) suggests using familiar concepts from outside music, giving the example of a "programmatic outline... [making] the progress of the music easier to follow" (p. 346). His recommendations for instilling enjoyment and sense-making in young listeners can be extended to become a starting-point for young analysts, seeking to describe the effect of hearing a new piece of music.

Imposing imagery and narrative on unfamiliar excerpts proved to be a popular "way in" to the music for my students as they sought to communicate their responses to the pieces in LR1. Eliza, who was new to studying Music in Year 12, used it to express her response to all but two of the eight excerpts. The two for which she used no narrative or imagery references (perhaps because she did not need it) were the styles familiar to her through performing. There was a parallel in Siobhan's responses, which relied largely on pictures

with a sentence or two, apart from the one style which included a lot of features she would by then have encountered through studying Baroque concertos. Jonny, likewise, used more imagined scenarios to express his response to the pieces which he claimed were the least familiar styles, whereas a more familiar style elicited a set of musically specific observations.

For these three students, using pictures, stories, and movie references to convey their experience of listening to unfamiliar excerpts seemed to facilitate the process. Beginning in such an “open” way is recommended by Ferrara (1984) in his phenomenological model, which begins with open listening, “allowing any dimension of meaning (syntactical, semantic, or ontological) to emerge”, before relistening to focus on the detail in the sound (p. 359). Not only did this approach offer a “way in” for students, as discussed above, but it also seemed to enhance their enjoyment of the music. The chosen excerpts for LR2 were challenging and relatively obscure compared to LR1, and it was apparent that students’ more imaginative, “open”, affective responses tended to correspond to pieces they claimed to like. Licence to use narrative and imagery could therefore be a key to enjoyment, as, again, it is a way of making sense of the music. Eliza, for example, strongly disliked the music in LR2, and only one of the three pieces evoked any kind of imagery, a fleeting reference to “horror film music” in response to an excerpt from Messiaen’s *Des Canyons Aux Étoiles*. Jonny, on the other hand, gave vivid descriptions of what he imagined two of the pieces could be depicting, especially the one he said he liked more (taken from MacMillan’s *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel*):

It manages to be quite peaceful but also horrifying at the same time. I like how it uses pedals to create the dissonance as the harmony moves underneath. The beginning is a peaceful character relaxing by the water, then the marimba comes

and disrupts – but isn't a totally evil character, he has a hint of sarcasm about himself. Like the monkey in Jungle Book.

In his closing summary, Owens (1986) exhorts teachers to encourage pupils “to identify, control and discuss the expressive character of music” (p. 349), thus encompassing all the musical disciplines of listening, performing, and composing. The transfer of the narrative/imagery approach from hearing to creating music was also evident amongst my students, in group improvisations as well as in some individual compositions.

5.7.1.2.1.2 Shaping Original Music Through Narrative and Imagery.

Students sometimes used imagery or narrative to express a suggestion in our improvisation sessions. We had a collective aim, during that third term of Year 12, to be aware of the overall musical form of our improvisations. In session 4, the following conversation took place about what to change in an improvisation they were about to repeat, in order to create a unanimous build-up and agree how to shape the music over time:

Oliver: I think, you know it, like, when you're watching Jurassic Park, you see like, there's the camera and then it suddenly opens out onto a big plain and you see all the dinosaurs... [...] That would be quite cool.

Jonny: So everyone's just a little bit more... so there's more of a driving sense of pulse.

[some fiddling on instruments, a bit of chatter]

Siobhan: Wait, are we escaping dinosaurs or are we just wondering at dinosaurs?

Jonny: I think there is wonder but because they're dinosaurs they're quite scary. It's as if you're sort of... you're at the zoo and you're looking at tigers, but then you

realise that the glass can be very easily shattered, so if the tiger saw you it would kill you.

In order to express a suggestion for how the music should sound, students in this conversation opted not for musical terminology, but for affective descriptions of how the music should make them feel when they played it. Jonny's reference to "driving pulse" is the only exception. In the sense that music can be used to create a temporal experience, the students were using narrative; it may not have had a prescribed narrative structure, but the unfolding of imagined events was to inform what they played. Simon (2019) draws a subtle distinction between story-telling and programmatic music, defining musical narrative not in terms of a programme of musical representations or plot, but in terms of the "evolution of a listener's understanding over the temporal course of a performance or recording" (p. 4). Storytelling in music can be a matter of experience over time, without necessarily requiring a programme of "events" that are meant to be representative. Understood in those terms, the affective, "listener experience" approach to planning this session 4 improvisation could account for why, according to my journal, the second rendition of the piece *did* include more coordinated and unanimous development and "a sense of direction", heard in Audio 5.6 below, although there had not been a programmatic structural plan.

Audio 5.6

Unanimous Build-up in 4(2)



5.6. 4(2) unanimous
build-up.mp3

By contrast, session 2's improvisations had been more clearly planned, at the students' request, and we had tried out several of their ideas and created a timeline, shown below in Figure 5.16. The events specified in the timeline are clearly discernible in the recording,

but overall students were not very positive when they listened to it later. They felt it was too long, with a lot of responsive playing but not enough decisive action to move it on, and they found the “sudden terror” moments contrived (although they liked the contrast and definition these provided). My commentaries on the improvisations in this session concur with students’ observations, and note that, although students were following an agreed timeline, the piece nonetheless felt rather like an over-long soundscape with imposed contrasting “events”.

Figure 5.16

Co-created Plan for Session 2 Improvisation

Emergent opening	Sudden moment of terror	Ostinato figure, build-up to crisis-point	Sudden cut-off and modulation up a semitone	Sudden moment of terror	Fade-out, mirroring the opening
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The observation that the “sudden terror” moments in 2(2) felt contrived, compared to the more convincing build-up for similar effect in 4(2), suggested that Simon’s (2019) subtle distinction is an important one, and having a narrative plan for an improvisation or composition might be less advisable than aiming, rather more generally, to create a temporal experience. This is supported by instances in individual compositions where slight awkwardnesses or contrived use of devices corresponded to a narrative that had been used to inform the structure of the piece. Examples included an abrupt shift from major to minor, and back again, in one of Eliza’s compositions, intended to portray positive and negative emotions, and a rather confusing passage in the middle of Jonny’s otherwise excellent snare-drum solo, “Rat”, where his programme note says he imagined “the quintuplets and sextuplets... portraying the randomness and chaos of the chase as the rat tries to escape

the predator”. Perhaps it was because the improvisation in session 2 followed an agreed timeline that it felt like an over-long soundscape in which the plan restricted students’ ability to play responsively; perhaps Eliza’s and Jonny’s imposed programmatic elements similarly affected their compositions’ shaping from start to finish.

One of the group’s last improvisations, in May 2021, corroborated this view by demonstrating how a composer might still control the expressive character of music and the temporal experience of the listener *without* imposing a pre-ordained programme on it. Audio 5.7 is the opening of improvisation 5(2), for which there was no more planning than the agreement to change from one mood to another during the course of the piece. Paul took the lead so that the changes would be unanimous.

Audio 5.7

Improvisation 5(2), Directed from the Piano by Paul



5.7 5(2) Paul
leading.mp3

The improvisation feels full of variety, with a lot of genuinely responsive playing as well a real sense of musical progression through time. This was particularly successful because everyone allowed Paul to do the decision-making in real time. A possible cause of the students’ dislike of improvisation 2(2), which they said sounded contrived, was that it was over-planned, such that some decisions were already made and therefore one element of responsive playing was removed. Conversely, in session 5, the decisions were made during the course of the improvisations, reliant on Paul’s intuition. This meant that, in addition to individuals’ responding in the moment to each other, the musical form itself could be shaped responsively as it unfolded. Enacted collectively during group improvisations, this real-time decision-making also had the potential to be transferred to individual compositions.

5.7.1.2.2 *Responsive Playing, Responsive Composing.*

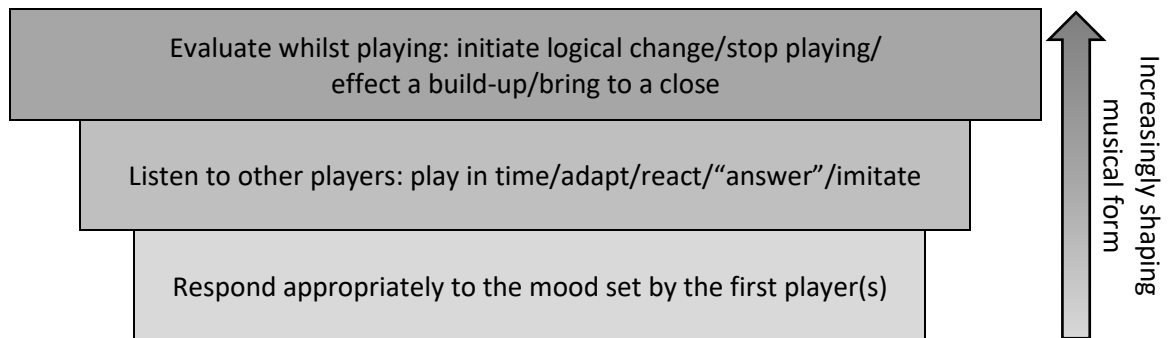
5.7.1.2.2.1 *Responsive Playing as Intrinsic to Controlling Musical Form.*

In the first data collection period, when I was concerned with normalising improvisation and encouraging “outward” playing, I saw responsive playing as a matter of confidence, moving from being heard to being aware of and interacting with others, and culminating in initiating change and shaping the overall form as it unfolds. In the second data collection period, a shift of focus from confidence to shaping musical form meant that responsive playing could be viewed as a progression from bottom to top of the model shown in Figure 5.17.

Improvisation 5(2) (Audio 5.7) demonstrated progress in, and showed the value of, the group’s collective approach to form in two ways. In the preparation for this improvisation – sharing different ways of depicting moods and agreeing on the general journey through these – and in Paul’s leadership of in-the-moment, responsive decision-making, the group illustrated the notion that collaborative creativity makes visible the cognitive processes involved (Sawyer & de Zutter, 2009, p. 81). The piece also represented an agreed effort to begin and end abruptly, thus breaking habits that they recognised in themselves – to start gradually and “let it go big” (Eliza), and to fade out one by one and “never come to just a finish” (Emily, Oliver). This showed that group *discussion* can model self-evaluation in the same way as group creativity can model individual creativity. In both scenarios, the necessary interaction through listening, playing, and conversing incites participants to embody their responses and perceptions, with both instruments and peers constituting a kind of “hybrid *extended* cognitive system” (Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018, p. 5).

Figure 5.17

Levels of Responsive Playing



Structure and form are often conflated in composing criteria provided by examination boards, examples from the most recent A-level composing criteria being “a commanding structure that is more than just a standard form” (AQA), “basic structures” equated to “formulaic or standard forms” (Edexcel) and reference to “shaping ideas” alongside “structural events” (CIE). There is nonetheless an important distinction to be made between the two, as shown by the comparison between the two improvisations above (Figure 5.16; Audio 5.7). When improvisations like 2(2) were over-planned, as in the plan shown in Figure 5.16, the structural template prevented responsive playing at the top level of Figure 5.17. When decisions were instead made in real time, in response to what had gone before, musical form was shaped as the improvisation unfolded. Again, this kind of responsive creativity is facilitated by the social context; spontaneous interaction represents both embodiment and extension of cognitive processes, resulting in “new meaningful interactivities... without involving mental plans, rules, or normative domains” (Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018, p. 9).

5.7.1.2.2.2 Group Practice Influencing Individual Processes.

A comparison of students' compositions from the first and last terms of the academic year shows a similar difference between pieces with a structural template and those with an emerging form. Compositions with a "stock" structure allowed for a less responsive compositional process. For example, those that relied on looping one part and adding layers tended to be too long and sometimes had a weak or abrupt ending. There was often no sense of progression or development, and a preoccupation with texture came at the expense of form. Emily's first Vignette (Figure 5.7b, above) was an example of this, as was Siobhan's first composition, a meditative piece comprising several layers and samples and a sudden cut-off at the end (Audio 5.8).

Audio 5.8

Siobhan: Sudden Ending of Meditative Piece (September 2020)



5.8 Siobhan -
meditative piece endin

Jonny's piece for the group to play in November 2020 was neatly constructed and presented; periodic phrasing enhanced by new entries was very satisfying, as were little music details such as the xylophone's semiquavers leading into bar 9, and the parallel octaves in bar 12 (Figure 5.18, Audio 5.9). However, despite its effectiveness and appropriateness to the brief, it fits the description of a piece that feels "guided but lacking intention" (Simon, 2019, p. 13); there was a clear structure, but reliance on repetition and layers precluded true development or progression.

Figure 5.18

Audio 5.9



5.9 Jonny - opening of 'Toast'.mp3

Jonny: opening of "Toast" (November 2020)

The musical score is for the opening of "Toast" by Jonny, in 4/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 70. The score is written for Xylophone, Bass Guitar, Voices, Trumpet (Tpt.), Xyl., Bass, and Violin (V.). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The Xylophone part begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Bass Guitar and Voices parts are silent for the first six measures, then enter in measure 7 with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Trumpet part enters in measure 7 with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Xyl. part continues its rhythmic pattern. The Bass part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Violin part has a simple harmonic accompaniment.

Other compositions with clear structures that were defined by contrasting sections and reprise also had some limitations, sometimes fitting another hypothetical description by Simon (2019) of a piece to which “the student may give... a contrasting section because that is what is expected” and others containing sections with a “limited sense of interconnectedness” (p. 13). Oliver’s first composition (Figure 5.19, Audio 5.10) exemplifies this; it has inventive and characterful content, but the contrasts feel neither like a logical consequence of the previous passages nor like deliberate discontinuity.

Figure 5.19

Audio 5.10



Oliver: *Untitled Composition* (September 2020)

5.10 Oliver untitled
composition.mp3

The musical score is arranged in three systems, each with three staves: Horn (Hn.), C Trumpet (C Tpt.), and Trombone (Tbn.). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system (measures 10-14) features a Horn part with a dynamic marking of *f* and a melodic line of eighth notes. The C Trumpet and Trombone parts provide harmonic support with chords and rhythmic patterns. The second system (measures 15-19) continues the Horn's melodic line, which becomes more active in the final measure. The C Trumpet and Trombone parts maintain their harmonic roles. The third system (measures 20-24) begins with a *rit.* (ritardando) marking and a tempo indication of $\text{♩} = 90$. The Horn part has a dynamic marking of *p* and plays a sustained chord. The C Trumpet and Trombone parts also have dynamic markings of *f* and *p* and play sustained chords.

These pieces all had in common that they felt “structured” rather than *emergent*. Understood to denote a piece with “an unpredictable outcome, rather than a scripted, known endpoint” (Sawyer & de Zutter, 2009, p. 82), the term “emergent” encapsulates the sense of progression from opening to subsequent musical material that was a product of the responsive playing described in improvisation 5(2). In order to identify when, as the objective listener, I felt students were also listening to their own compositions and “responding” with what made sense to them, I developed a set of codes labelling “logical contrast”, “satisfying reprise” and “intuitive pacing”, to denote musical events that seemed to have emerged as the consequence of previous material and not “because that is what is

expected” (Simon, 2019, p. 13). The codes were most frequently applied to later compositions, written in April and May 2021. The ending of Eliza’s 2-part Study on 5 Notes comprises a satisfying, truncated reprise of previous material, and Siobhan’s (Figure 5.20 below) also uses truncated reprise to form a conclusive-sounding ending, as well as being defined by some clear contrast earlier on. I made similar observations about Emily’s final composition, the Soliloquy for piano (shown in Figure 5.15 above), which represented a step away from her usual repetition and layers in favour of more progressive movement from one phrase to the next, and had a real sense of closure.

Figure 5.20

Siobhan’s 2-part Study on 5 Notes (April 2021), Showing Truncated Reprise

The image displays a musical score for a piano piece, consisting of three systems of music. Each system has a treble and bass clef staff. The first system (measures 1-5) features a melodic line in the treble clef and a bass line in the bass clef. A blue rectangular box highlights the first four measures of both staves. The second system (measures 6-10) continues the piece. A green rectangular box highlights the first two measures of the bass staff. The third system (measures 11-14) concludes the piece. A blue rectangular box highlights measures 12-13 of both staves, and a green rectangular box highlights the final two measures (13-14) of both staves, which serve as a truncated reprise of the first system's material.

These compositions illustrate the change in students’ compositions during the latter part of Year 12. In the second term, most of which was spent in lockdown and composing alone, the three students whose work illustrates the point in the previous paragraph did not change their practice or style at all. The third term, when group improvisation was possible

again, saw the changes described above, suggesting that group improvisation was beneficial to individual composition in encouraging awareness of pacing, decision-making, and allowing a piece to unfold in time. However, far from wishing to encourage a “see what emerges” mentality, I aimed to help students to understand *why* their intuitive decision-making made sense. Therefore, listening once again became central to the composition programme, with tasks intended to bring intuitive decisions to the surface.

5.7.1.2.3 Emergent Composition: A Sense of Progression Through Time.

Over time, it became evident that more students’ compositions appeared to be “emergent” than formulaic, or reliant on repetition and stock structures, as they approached the end of Year 12, even with slight awkwardnesses resulting from challenging themselves. The “responsive” playing/composing that I was encouraging, and that had worked so well in improvisations like 5(2), discussed above, necessarily draws on intuition. “Intuition”, however, is not intended to imply a kind of subconscious trust of instincts in lieu of engaged decision-making. Simon (2019) cautions that with “an intuitive approach to writing, decisions about compositional form and structure may be totally arbitrary, or guided but lacking intention” (p. 13), implying that “intuition”, understood as underpinning decisions subconsciously, can lack thought or self-awareness and result in disconnected or contrived compositions. A useful way of recouping “intuition” is as “feeling-based knowing” (Kaschub & Smith, 2009a, p. 16), wherein implicit learning takes place through subjective experience. The description of a “balance between intuition (feeling based/knowledge within) and intellect (conscious awareness/knowledge about)” as “the knowledge base for compositional decision-making” (Kaschub & Smith, p. 17) resonates strongly with my motivation for Listening Responses 3.1 and 3.2 (LR3.1, LR3.2), in which instinctive choices needed to be justified in an effort to promote awareness of decision-making.

LR3.1 was intended to be a quick demonstration of how to tackle LR3.2. Both worked on the same principle: phrases had been mixed up and students had to place them in an order that made sense to them in terms of progression from one to the next, and of overall form. This was modelled on a similar activity reported in a collection of case studies collated by Preston (1994). In choosing where to place phrases in relation to each other, students had to think about the signals that might distinguish an opening from a closing phrase, or one that formed a continuation or a springboard for the next passage. For example, Oliver explained that he chose an opening phrase that “had a sense of beginning, particularly due to the dynamics and articulation which started at a quiet dynamic and had a slow crescendo.” As reported by the teacher in Preston’s case study (1994), it was a valuable exercise in listening critically, analytically, and creatively, “by generating theories and supporting these with evidence taken from the music” (p. 29). Students completed this individually, and were able to explore different possibilities using a sequencing programme which allowed them to shuffle phrases to hear them in different orders.

In this way, the exercise became a form of improvisatory listening, in that there was room for experimentation, and no correct answer – just the expectation that students would justify their choices. Bertinetto (2012) describes listening to music in real time as an active and performative process in which listeners “shape and organize the sounds they hear insofar as they can understand its (formal, expressive, symbolic...) meanings” (p. 93). He later describes it as “even unconsciously... shaping musical units as the music is unfolding in time” (p. 94), the same language I have used to describe the improvising and composing process that students were developing. LR3.1 and LR3.2 provided the opportunity to slow down this process, making these unconscious connections conscious.

Figure 5.21

Screenshot Showing Jonny's Phrase-order for LR3.1



The activity could also be viewed as a slow-motion exploration of possibilities, as occurs in the moment when a listener is actively participating in the temporal progress of music: “perceiving what is occurring; reflecting on what has happened; creating expectations of what might follow; examining what actually occurred in light of those expectations” (Dunn, 1997, p. 43). In LR3.1 and LR3.2, the process was fully enactive, with the additional factor of being able to manipulate as well as respond to what happened as the music progressed – not only “thought-in-action” (Schiavio et al., 2022, p. 2) but also active (and *actioned*) thought.

Once again, this listening response highlighted the importance of focussed listening in the context of a composition curriculum. Since students were asked to justify the decisions they had made in LR3.1 and LR3.2, they were required to articulate observations and express opinions, engaging in “aural problem-solving” (Preston, 1994, p. 29) that not only focusses on musical perception but also transfers to the composition process. To make this transfer explicit, LR3.2 was followed by a composition task, to write a “Soliloquy” for any instrument, mapping the musical form onto their own descriptions of the piece used in LR3.2, “Sympathetic Strings” from *Horror Vacui* by Greenwood. This meant that

observations made in LR3.2 needed to be detailed enough to inform these follow-up compositions.

Paul's response to this task was an excellent example of how the aural problem-solving and expressions of musical perception in LR3.2 could transfer to a composition. Figure 5.22 shows how he even put numbers in his score to make it clear which phrase-descriptor applied. Extracts from his very detailed observations about "Sympathetic Strings" are shown in the text boxes, which I added afterwards.

Figure 5.22

Audio 5.11

Paul: Opening of "Soliloquy" for Piano, with Matching Descriptions of "Sympathetic Strings"



5.11 Paul Soliloquy
for piano 2.mp3

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 1-4) is in 4/4 time. The right hand starts with a melody marked *ff* (fortissimo), while the left hand provides a dissonant drone. A *Ped.* (pedal) marking is present under the first two measures. A first annotation box (1) points to the beginning of the melody, and a second annotation box (2) points to a variation in the melody. The second system (measures 7-10) shows a change in tempo and dynamics. The right hand begins with a *pp* (pianissimo) melody, which gradually increases to *mp* (mezzo-piano) and then *mf* (mezzo-forte). The left hand has a *p* (piano) accompaniment. A *Ped.* marking is present under measures 8-10. A third annotation box (3) points to the start of the second system, and a fourth annotation box (4) points to the end of the second system.

1 There is a clear motif suggested by the violin, and I think it enters the piece at the beginning quite assertively over the dissonant background drone with a relatively loud dynamic. In spite of this it leaves somewhere to go and could be expanded upon as it is melodically quite simple.

2 I think it is of similar style to the opening but is varied by changing the range at which it is played on the instrument. It seems a logical step without changing the opening pensive mood.

3 Slowly, in this next phrase, the melodic ideas begin to snowball... growing upon former ideas (variation on the first theme).

4 ... balances well with the third phrase as its melodic shape moves in the opposite direction ... and concludes the preceding material well. The piece is still in a very 'cadenza-like' stage...

Students whose descriptions of “Sympathetic Strings” were most detailed had a rich resource on which to base their subsequent compositions. Descriptions that included specific musical detail, not limited to a few recurring elements but covering a range of features, with supported opinions and valid justifications, corresponded to some extremely detailed and confident compositions. In LR3.2, all students made a good attempt to include musical detail and to justify their decisions, with several examples of musically specific descriptions that were enriched by personal responses. In Oliver’s descriptions, this was often embedded as adjectives that expressed how he experienced the impact of certain features, e.g., “pace seems to get quicker and the use of double stopping and aggressive arco figures add to the general effect of the piece”; “this makes the piece more intense as the texture is more dense and dramatic with dissonance created towards the most dramatic descending point of the glissandos”. Paul was more explicit about his own response, including statements such as “This is a clear reprise of the main theme implemented at the beginning in a higher range which decrescendos to an eerie and slightly ‘unfinished’ ending which I think is quite reflective of the mood this piece conveys for me. It moves down in range in conjunction with the decrescendo, and like the first melody puts emphasis on the most dissonant notes of the melody”.

Both Oliver and Paul proceeded to compose characterful pieces with detailed scores that bore a perceptible resemblance to what they had written in LR3.2. To a greater or lesser extent, this collection of compositions, the Soliloquys, included the most instances across all students of characterisation, intuitive pacing, logical contrast, and satisfying reprise, and there were no “stock” structures, with pieces instead having a sense of emerging form. This indicates that LR3.1 and LR3.2 were an effective tool for foregrounding the implicit knowledge that informs decision-making in the composition process, and served to

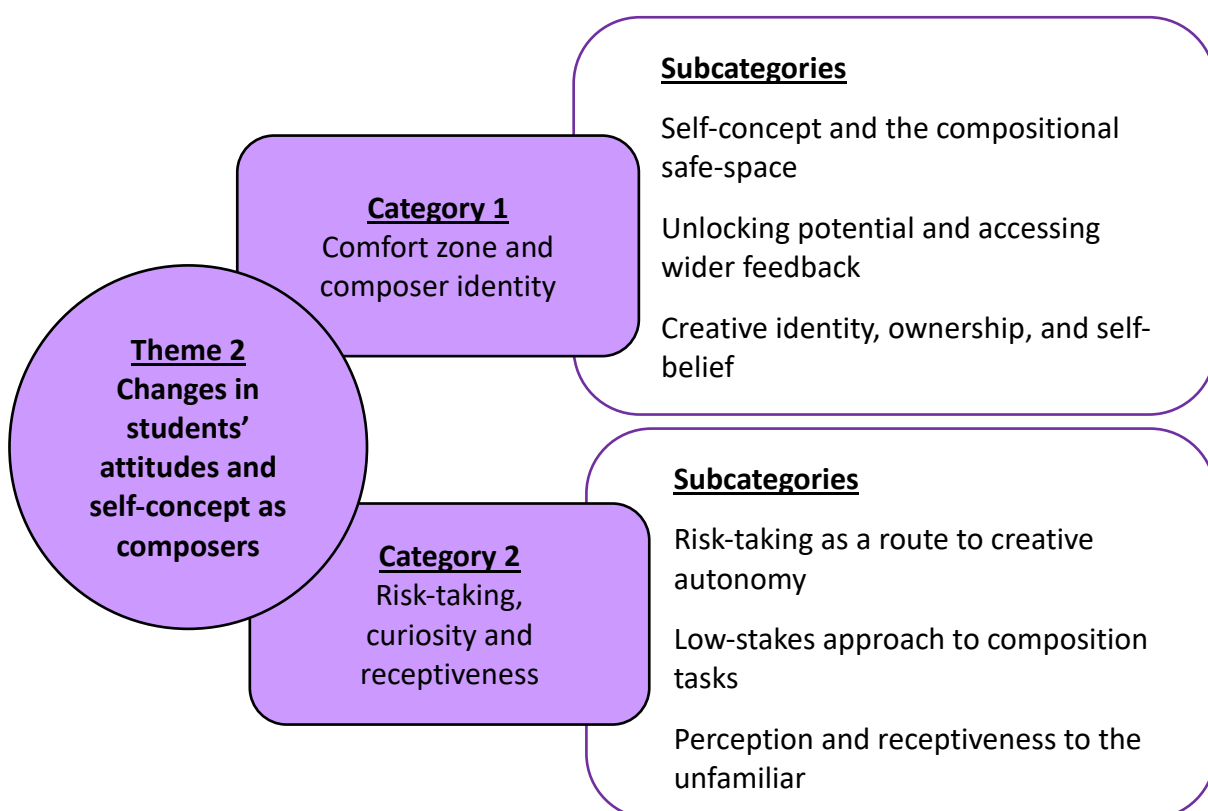
illustrate the “balance between intuition... and intellect” (Kaschub & Smith, 2009a, p. 17) that allows musical form to be shaped as it unfolds.

The valuable place of listening in this programme of composition lessons is further examined in Theme 2, which also addresses matters of perception and reception from a different angle. Before this, Theme 2 returns to matters arising from the data pertaining to links between behaviours and mindsets evident during composing and improvising.

5.7.2 Theme 2: Changes in Students’ Attitudes and Self-concept as Composers

Figure 5.23

Categories and Content Discussed in Theme 2



This theme makes a number of connections between improvising, listening, and composing, and behaviours, attitudes, and mindsets that are common to all three. On the

subject of composer identity, the comfort zone is discussed, and why a challenge to try new styles or methods, rather than being a threat to composer identity, can foster a better ability to self-evaluate and establish a healthy sense of ownership. Risk-taking, perfectionism, and curiosity are all linked, and category 2 discusses ways in which these connected behaviours can be nurtured in one area for the benefit of another. In particular, the importance of listening as part of a composition curriculum is presented.

5.7.2.1 Category 1. Comfort Zone and Composer Identity.

Category 1 of this theme discusses students' creative comfort zones, also termed their compositional safe-spaces. Beginning with an account of how and why students were challenged to explore the unfamiliar and "disturb" their comfortable norms, it goes on to consider the benefits of creating music outside the safe-space. These include the productive outcomes of overcoming an impasse or disappointment, accessing a variety of feedback, and fostering the ability to self-evaluate more confidently, with reference to broader criteria.

5.7.2.1.1 Self-concept and the Compositional Safe-space.

Although I frequently used the code "comfort zone", I did not intend this as a value-laden term, to describe laziness or lack of detail, but to indicate a student's using something familiar or safe for them, such as a favoured style in which they felt they could successfully compose – a compositional safe-space. It reflected an aspect of each individual's composer identity, a view corroborated by the fact that, when students were asked in Learning Conference 1 to identify something they had liked about one of their own compositions, the majority cited a piece that represented their comfort zones.

5.7.2.1.1.1 Why Challenge Students to Leave Their Safe-space?

When I asked students to step out of their comfort zones, I was aware of the potential impact on their self-efficacy and therefore their self-concept as composers. Siobhan, for example, seemed to feel deskilled by certain tasks or even just by a specified deadline, which she said led her to “freak out and procrastinate and... end up working on a piece [she was] not passionate/proud of”. Her positive self-concept as a composer relied on being “able to experiment and get better within the style [she was] good at”, not on being challenged to compose in new ones. Reluctance to engage with the unfamiliar was perhaps for fear of failure or hard work, or uncertainty of how to evaluate. Those deterrents, however, can be viewed more positively as reasons to challenge students to relinquish their comfort zones, and, rather than feeling deskilled, to apply their existing skills in new ways. In the words of John Finney, “the unfamiliar needs to be made sense of through ways of thinking and acting that already exist in the child yet at the same time [are] in need of disturbing” (Finney, in Fautley et al., 2014, p. 30).

Many composition tasks set for my students during the course of the academic year included specific requirements, such as the use of a certain motif or mode, as explored in an improvisation session, and there was never a task which allowed every student to compose in a familiar, comfortable style. Everyone, at some point, had to venture into unfamiliar territory, whether they were, for example, songwriters being asked to compose for this group of instrumentalists and vocalists, or Latin and Jazz enthusiasts faced with creating a 2-part Study. In responding to a task that necessitated engaging with an unfamiliar process or style, students had to use what they already knew in order to make sense of what they did not – a necessary “disturbance” of the normal *modus operandi*.

When students did “disturb” their norms and try new things in compositions, they encountered novel problems and learned to think critically about how to continue or how to recraft something they did not like. An example of this arose in conversation with Jonny about one of his first attempts to write in a new compositional style. He had created a short piece using a given melody as a stimulus, and was unhappy with the harmony at the end (Figure 5.24, Audio 5.12). Our discussion hinged on his awareness of the harmonic language earlier in the piece, and identified that the problem arose from the incongruity of the final cadence. Had he chosen to respond to this brief by writing in his “comfort-zone” Latin and Jazz styles, this harmonic issue might not have arisen, nor the opportunity to develop critical awareness of how to identify both a problem and a solution.

Figure 5.24

Audio 5.12

Jonny: First- and Second-draft Endings of “Melancholy” (March 2021)

The image shows a musical score for the first draft ending of 'Melancholy'. The score is for five instruments: Harpsichord (Hpsd.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The music is in E-flat major and 3/4 time. The score starts at measure 10 and ends at measure 14. The tempo is marked 'rit.' (ritardando) and the dynamics are marked 'f' (forte) for the Harpsichord, 'ff' (fortissimo) for Violin I, 'mf' (mezzo-forte) for Violin II and Viola, and 'f' for the Violoncello. The final cadence is in E-flat major.

First draft, with perfect cadence in E flat major that Jonny disliked.



5.12a Jonny first ending of 'Melancholy'

2

Second draft, showing a more chromatic approach to the last chord.



5.12b Jonny second ending of 'Melancholy'

This instance highlights a benefit to students of composing out of their comfort zones, and endorses a pedagogical approach that asks young composers to create music that they may struggle to evaluate, or feel is less successful than their “safe-space” pieces. The benefit lies in learning to think critically about the reasons behind dissatisfaction, how to recraft material to meet personal intentions, and how to evaluate music within a wider set of criteria. Mid-process, as in the above example of Jonny’s unsatisfying cadence, this “productive failure” can provoke creative insight, prompting problem-solving and nurturing a developing mastery of the creative process more generally (Sawyer, 2019, p. 2, p. 5).

In Jonny’s case, the solution itself was less important than his learning about identifying and solving a problem during the creative process. In the sense that it was “productive”, this fits Sawyer’s (2019) theory of productive failure, although “impasse” – or simply “dissatisfaction” – is a more suitable term in this case. Nonetheless, Sawyer’s study is applicable not only in terms of viewing unwanted outcomes as fruitful opportunities to develop creative skills, but also in the role played by the instructor-student discussion prior to the second draft. Sawyer (2019) reports that these conversations have the purpose of promoting reflection, perseverance, and, ultimately, awareness of the creative process.

From my perspective during this study, an advantage of having students compose out of their comfort zones was that problems, setbacks, and disappointments made these productive and reflective discussions more likely.

5.7.2.1.2 Unlocking Potential and Accessing Wider Feedback.

5.7.2.1.2.1 Open Discussion and Willingness to Change.

When students departed from their compositional safe-spaces, I usually found them to be more receptive to advice and more willing to redraft things. Siobhan's last two pieces, composed in April and May 2021, illustrated this point, in that she seemed out of her comfort zone, uncertain of how to evaluate her first drafts, and, perhaps as a consequence, open to discussion and suggestions. Redrafting the pieces involved deliberate and self-aware creative decision-making. The two versions of the 2-part Study on Five Notes (Figure 5.25, Audio 5.13), show how the first draft saw an effort to create a two-part texture for three bars, before arriving at a left-hand riff that, true to Siobhan's preferred way of composing, persisted for the rest of the piece. Siobhan had not found it easy to compose in this style, and was open to suggestions for reintroducing the two-part texture later in the piece. The second draft shows the result of her decisions to use the chordal riff more sparingly to define the musical form, and to alter some of the later melodic material so that her final piece was more faithful to the brief.

When Siobhan composed in her familiar and comfortable style, she was less willing to make changes following discussion with me. In those cases, she tended to compose quickly, and I was not witness to the different phases of the creative process as presented by Petty (2009): Inspiration, Clarification, Evaluation, Distillation, Incubation, Perspiration (pp. 325-6). There is no doubt that Siobhan was inspired, but I saw less evidence of the critical

Figure 5.25

Audio 5.13

Siobhan's First- and Second-draft 2-part Study on 5 Notes



First draft:

5.13a Siobhan draft 1
study on 5 notes.mp3



Second draft:

5.13b Siobhan draft 2
study on 5 notes.mp3

thought processes that Petty describes as essential “mindsets” for the Evaluation and Perspiration phases. Similarly, while Siobhan could give an account of the order in which she usually added parts to her compositions, she did not indicate awareness of making strategic selections (Clarification phase), nor of assessing “the potential of ideas” (Distillation phase) (Petty, pp. 325-6). I would not go so far as to align Siobhan’s “comfort-zone” compositional process with Petty’s rather damning description of students who “latch on to the first idea that comes to them, and quickly and uncritically bring it to completion without serious thought” (p. 326), but I would agree with the sentiment that the process, when it is so familiar, could become less thoughtful (or critical). It is possible that composing in a familiar way or style meant that many decisions were made before starting – perhaps certain aspects of the process, such as adding layers in a particular order to effect a build-up of texture, were almost automatic – and therefore not only was the decision-making process less conscious or explicit, but also willingness to change was diminished.

There is some support for this speculation, again from Sawyer (2019), who shows that understanding how to make decisions develops when students encounter problems during a trial-and-error process. In other words, decision-making may become more conscious in a difficult or unfamiliar context. Thus the opposite may be also true, with the process becoming automatic when the context (or compositional style) is familiar. In the case of Siobhan’s two last compositions, described above, the relative difficulty of the process could have contributed to her receptiveness to discussion and willingness to make changes; by contrast, her two Vignettes, which she said felt “easy and organic” to compose and were very much in her usual mould, were the subject of much less open discussion and were left largely unchanged.

5.7.2.1.2.2 Access to Varied and Higher-level Feedback.

Siobhan's two Vignettes illustrated another common problem for me, as the composition teacher, with students not venturing beyond their comfort zones: apart from being apparently less receptive to the prospect of redrafting, the similarity between pieces meant that feedback was restricted or repetitious from one composition to the next, and could not act as a catalyst for progress. An example was the nature of comments made on successive compositions by Emily in the first two terms: the composition for the group (November 2020), "Keep On" (January 2021), the folk-tune variations (February 2021) and the Vignettes (March 2021). My record of feedback during the composition process for each of these reveals a focus on the same few issues, namely structure, notation, textural and harmonic relationship between parts, and chord-voicings, rather than more profound discussion of problems and possibilities related to musical material.

When students composed in an unfamiliar style, the more explicit or conscious decision-making contributed to their developing awareness of the creative process. This was one of two advantages, the other being that it invited feedback on different issues arising in the composition process and the pieces themselves. Compositions outside students' normal styles often attracted different kinds of comments, so students could gain more varied feedback by venturing onto new ground. For example, Jonny, who was most comfortable writing in Latin and Jazz genres, used the Vignettes brief to write one Baroque piece and one with post-Romantic harmony. My feedback therefore addressed areas of harmonic and textural writing that had not arisen in the context of compositions in his more "comfortable" styles. It also took the form of presenting possibilities and offering explanations, thus sparking a higher level of discussion.

I observed that as feedback became less rudimentary – less concerned with the basics of presentation, for example, or with direct suggestions for next steps – more responsibility was placed on the composer to find solutions, make decisions, or retain advice for another context. The following comment on one of Oliver’s compositions gave him a specific point to address in this piece, as well as a general consideration for future compositions:

Sometimes the chord doesn’t quite sit right (e.g., bar 14). It’s often a consequence of writing contrapuntally that we start thinking about each line and stop checking things vertically to see if the harmony still makes sense.

A discussion with Jonny about a passage in a composition that he disliked did not conclude with a suggested solution to that problem, but uncovered the possible reason *why* he was uncomfortable with it (noted in my journal as “the piano break... was not yet fulfilling the function that he wanted it to, perhaps because the melody and harmony were still just repeating”) and left him to act on that himself. In both Oliver’s and Jonny’s cases, the higher-level feedback handed them responsibility either for retaining advice or for finding a solution, serving to accelerate the development of self-evaluation.

5.7.2.1.3 Creative Identity, Ownership, and Self-belief.

5.7.2.1.3.1 Awareness and Self-efficacy.

The higher-level feedback, comprising discussion or presentation of open possibilities, conferred more responsibility for decision-making on the students than rudimentary comments, which were usually more prescriptive. Once decisions had been made, or solutions to problems found, those students had ownership of their music. This seemed to relate to positive self-efficacy in composition in a way that straightforward complimentary

feedback did not. For example, Eliza's first-draft 2-part Study incurred encouraging and positive comments from me:

Very good structure, with a clear opening statement, a punchy ending, and an obvious "middle section" which uses a rising sequence. The contrapuntal writing is successful. ... What you need to improve is the level of detail in the score.

Despite this, and despite responding to the request for more detail in her second draft, Eliza herself remained unconvinced by her own capabilities as a composer, saying in a group discussion a few weeks after this that she felt she was not improving. Eliza had not formally composed before Year 12, and was unable to identify a piece she liked amongst her own compositions in Learning Conference 1. Instead, she said, "I don't know. They're all for school so would have to check mark scheme." The implication was that she did not feel confident identifying a favourite piece because she needed to know what others – her teacher, peers, or unknown examiner – valued in order to develop a frame of reference for her own judgement.

This case highlights the importance of self-evaluation as opposed to reliance on teacher feedback. Although Eliza wanted to know other people's rationale for aesthetic valuation, receiving positive comments did not boost her self-concept as a composer. For that, she needed to be able to evaluate her own music and develop the kind of conviction in her compositions that I observed in Oliver and Jonny through their articulation of intentions, awareness of creative decisions, and ability to defend and discuss their music. It helps to make sense of this when considering it alongside a report by Gooderson and Henley (2017), whose study of undergraduate songwriters found that less direct involvement by tutors in the students' creative process led to their feeling that there had been *more* focus on themselves, rather than less. The implication is that they filled the "teacher-feedback"

space with self-evaluation and thus developed more conviction in their own creative decisions. Applying this to Eliza's case, one could consider self-evaluation as leading to self-reliance and self-belief, in a way that my positive comments alone did not.

5.7.2.1.3.2 Strengthening Self-criticality by Measuring Against Unfamiliar Criteria.

The usefulness of the unfamiliar resurfaces here. If there is more conscious decision-making when the creative process takes place in new territory, perhaps there is also more conscious comparison to criteria during self-evaluation. In the same way that composing in new styles could incur a variety of feedback, so could it widen measures by which students might self-evaluate. A particular composition brief contains criteria to be fulfilled and therefore implicitly informs self-evaluation; if the brief draws a student away from their comfort zone, this might result in such a recalibration of self-measurement.

Two students whose work exemplifies this are Siobhan and Oliver, both of whom responded to the 2-part Study on Five Notes brief with a piece that bore the hallmarks of their earlier compositional safe-spaces or comfort zones. Siobhan's two drafts of this study were discussed above, the first dominated by a repeated one-bar riff that was redolent of her preferred compositional style, suggesting that she had turned to what she knew in order to create a piece she could judge favourably. After discussion with me, she considered the brief more carefully and redrafted the piece so that it was "successful" according to new criteria.

Oliver's first draft for this brief was not a 2-part Study at all. Instead of trying to rework it as Siobhan did hers, he started afresh completely, thus reconsidering the criteria for successfully fulfilling the brief even more than Siobhan had done. The examples in Figure 5.26 show how different Oliver's two responses were: the first returned to his favoured

Latin style and did not meet the brief for a 2-part Study; the second bears no resemblance to the first, as he had taken account of the requirements of the task.

Figure 5.26

Excerpts from Oliver's First- and Second-draft 2-part Study on 5 Notes (April 2021)

First draft:

consejo para el día

The first draft score is for a piece titled "consejo para el día". It features four staves: Flute, Piano, Egg Shaker, and Wood Blocks. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The Flute part begins with a rest and then plays a series of eighth notes starting on G4, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Piano part consists of chords in the right hand and a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the left hand, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Egg Shaker and Wood Blocks provide a rhythmic accompaniment, both marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic.

Second draft:

The second draft score features two staves: Flute and Violin. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The Flute part is marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and features a melodic line with slurs and accents. The Violin part is marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with slurs and accents. Both parts have dynamic markings of *mp*, *f*, *mp*, and *f* across the measures.

The two cases of Siobhan and Oliver raise the question of how responding to specific briefs can generate a more critically creative response than having free choice. Free choice might lead composers to favour certain styles or methods because they know how to gauge their success, but the compositional safe-space that I have also called the comfort zone is only one aspect of composer identity. Composer identity also entails critical awareness during

the creative process, and self-reliance and self-belief when evaluating the final product. Promoting these two capabilities necessitates taking young composers *out* of their safe-spaces so that they can expand the measures by which they self-evaluate, and doing so in safe ways that allow them to feel a sense of reward, whether from engaging in the critical discussion or from the satisfaction of rising to a challenge.

5.7.2.2 Category 2. Risk-taking, Curiosity, and Receptiveness.

Category 2 advances the issue of stepping out of one's comfort zone, discussing indicators of risk-taking in composition and improvisation. These are linked to high- and low-stakes attitudes, and the ongoing process-versus-product debate, which is considered in the light of research into dimensions of perfectionism and how these, in turn, correspond to a particular model of opposite learner types offered by Petty (2009). A correlation is noted, among my own students, between creative risk-taking and "positive striving", on the one hand, and curiosity, receptiveness, and open-mindedness in listening, on the other. A final case for including listening in a composition programme is supported by evidence that a creative listening task with verbal description demonstrably affected awareness of decision-making in composition.

5.7.2.2.1 *Risk-taking as a Route to Creative Autonomy.*

5.7.2.2.1.1 *Departures in Process, Format, and Harmonic Language.*

I defined "risk" in composition as any unusual compositional feature for an individual. This included composing in an unfamiliar style, examples being Paul's "Magnificat" – his first attempt at choral writing – and Siobhan's last composition, "The Creature" (Figure 5.27, Audio 5.14), in which she abandoned her usual preferences and genuinely responded to the brief. Of this piece, Siobhan later said she had consciously tried to "create something

different to what [she]’d normally write”. Despite this risk, she said she was very pleased with the final live performance.

Figure 5.27

Audio 5.14

Opening of “The Creature” by Siobhan (May 2021)

5.14 Siobhan The Creature opening.mp3

This score, even in its first draft, sported the most characterisation and detail Siobhan had included thus far, indicating increased ownership of her decisions and her developing creative autonomy. Siobhan said that she deliberately decided to compose the piece using Sibelius so that she was not limited to what she could play on the piano, which possibly also accounts for why she indicated her intentions in more detail than usual. The composition was therefore also a departure from Siobhan’s norm in terms of the *method*

of composition, as was Paul's unfinished piece, 'Butterfly', which he created using sequencing software, building his piece from samples of himself playing (Audio 5.15).

Audio 5.15

Excerpt from Paul's 'Butterfly' (January 2021)



5.15 Paul 'Butterfly'
excerpt.mp3

Several students' risk-taking manifested itself in their harmonic language, which sometimes arose as a consequence of trialling a new style or method. Paul demonstrated this in his "Soliloquy" for piano, shown above in Figure 5.22, Audio 5.11. This was an atonal piece whose form was mapped onto his description of "Sympathetic Strings" by Greenwood as part of Listening Response 3.2, and was a new venture in that sense. Jonny explored a new style and consequently new harmonic language in three pieces: one of his folk tune variations, a cross between a minuet and a waltz, and both of his Vignettes, shown in Figure 5.29, Audio 5.17 below.

Comparing the "riskier" pieces to the same students' "comfort zone" compositions revealed that the former sometimes sounded less accomplished or looked less detailed in score, as illustrated by viewing Jonny's confident and detailed writing for his instrument in "Rat" (Figure 5.28) alongside the Vignettes (Figure 5.29). Sometimes a risk was ambitious to the point of outstripping ability, or resulted in a slightly awkward or contrived passage. This was never a retrogressive step; rather, it was often an indication that students were challenging themselves, that their norms were being "disturbed", and that they dared to step out of their comfort zones.

Figure 5.28

Audio 5.16

"Rat" - Snare-drum Soliloquy by Jonny (May 2021)

Musical score for Snare Drum Soliloquy. The score is in 2/4 time with a tempo of quarter note = 70. It features two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Snare Drum' and includes dynamic markings *p*, *mf*, and *p*, along with triplet markings. It is divided into sections labeled 'Edge of drum' and 'Middle'. The bottom staff has dynamic markings *f*, *pp*, *f*, and *pp*, and includes a trill marking.



5.16 Jonny Snare-drum Soliloquy

Figure 5.29

Audio 5.17

Excerpts from Jonny's Two Vignettes (March 2021)

Musical score for Vignette 1: "Knock, knock, it's Baroque o'clock". It features two staves: Oboe (Ob.) and Harpsichord (Hpsd.). The Oboe part starts at measure 8 and has a dynamic marking of *mf*. The Harpsichord part has dynamic markings of *mp* and *mf*.



Vignette 1: "Knock, knock, it's Baroque o'clock"

5.17a Jonny Baroque o'clock.mp3

Vignette 2: "Melancholy"

Musical score for Vignette 2: "Melancholy". It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The tempo is quarter note = 53. The Violin I part has a dynamic marking of *mf*. The Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello parts have dynamic markings of *p*.



5.17b Jonny Melancholy.mp3

5.7.2.2.1.2 Risk-taking in Composition Linked to Behaviours in Improvisation.

The distribution of the “risk-taking” code across the data set shows that Paul, Oliver, and Jonny were quicker than the others to start taking risks in composition. Two connections were apparent between this and their contributions to group improvisations. One was that Paul and Oliver, who displayed risk-taking in composition early in the year relative to other students, were most often the players to introduce new material during improvisations, to play “outwardly”, and to take the lead spontaneously. Both players were usually easier to distinguish in the recordings than others, and they were proactive as well as prominent. My commentary on Paul’s role in our group improvisations includes statements supporting this: “introduces a descending glissando to see what we will do with it”; “drives us into something more rhythmic with louder, accented repeating notes” (Audio 5.18a). Of Oliver, I have written: “moves onto staccato repeated note which is eventually taken on by the piano and others – good initiating by Oliver here”; “quite prominent in this, partly because of the instrument and partly because he isn’t afraid to experiment out loud and then decide he likes what he heard, and repeat it” (Audio 5.18b).

Audio 5.18

Two Examples of Proactive Playing in Improvisations

5.18a. Paul: Introducing Glissando in Session 5



5.18a Paul in improv
5(pre3).mp3

5.18b. Oliver: Staccato Repeated Note Taken on by Others



5.18b Oliver in
improv 2(2).mp3

Implicit in these descriptions of Paul’s and Oliver’s improvising is responsive decision-making, suggesting that they were already developing creative autonomy that may have given them the confidence to try new things when composing. The extracts from each

improvising profile show the boys' willingness to take risks in the context of improvising, corresponding to their early risk-taking in individual composition. More than being a case of musical confidence, their behaviour in these improvisation sessions also suggests an element of social risk in presenting new material to the rest of the performing group, and in having the conviction to initiate change or take the lead. A link between this and their individual creative risk-taking makes sense in view of a study by Tyagi et al. (2017), who found a link between social risk-taking (for example, daring to be conspicuous or different) and creativity.

The second connection between the "risk-taking" code and improvisation concerned Jonny. Having rated his confidence as an improviser at 5/5 at both the beginning and the end of the year, citing his experience in session drumming as the reason for being at ease with it, Jonny often purposely avoided his "expert" instruments in favour of participating on something which made him work much harder. It was apparent in some recordings that he was less comfortable when he did this, sometimes playing very little or trying things out quite softly. His improvisation on the glockenspiel in session 6 (when he also had access to the drum kit but eschewed it) showed that he was unused to the harmonic and melodic demands on a tuned instrument. Jonny's social risk in being willing to experiment aloud without the guarantee of success was also a personal decision for the benefit of his own development, and thus a matter of creative autonomy.

Jonny's approach maps onto Tyagi et al.'s (2017) significant wording in the conclusion to their study, where they refer to risk-taking *attitudes* in someone with a "creative *personality and mindset*" (p. 7 – my emphasis). Jonny was motivated by the potential in novelty; hence improvising on the bass guitar or glockenspiel rather than the drum kit, or choosing to write a Baroque pastiche rather than another confident Latin piece. My journal

noted, after a one-to-one discussion with Jonny about composition, an evident “enjoyment of new territory and of risk-taking”, and he acknowledged in Learning Conference 1 that he sometimes composed not to create a great piece of music, but to challenge himself. The final product, for Jonny, was less important to him than the experience and the learning process.

5.7.2.2.2 Low-stakes Approach to Composition Tasks.

5.7.2.2.2.1 Learning Process Versus Perfect Product.

Another author who focusses on the importance of mindset is Petty (2009). Distinguishing between active and passive learners, Petty polarises their respective mindsets as empowered or disempowered. The empowered mindset is focussed on the process rather than “likely negative outcomes” (trying your best rather than “succeeding”), “improvement (rather than perfection)”, and the positive (Petty, p. 58). It is a model that fits Jonny, and explains this comment in an account of his own composition process:

With pretty much all of my compositions I just listen through a couple of times ... then once I've sent the finished version off I never listen [to] or think about that composition again.

It was not a lack of commitment that motivated this, but a focus on the process rather than the product. It was to Jonny's advantage that he had a “low-stakes” approach to both the group improvisations and the composition tasks, neither of which impacted on his self-concept. This makes sense of his deliberate choice to be the non-expert in improvisation sessions, and to keep trying new styles in his compositions; Jonny himself agreed, in later conversation, that he was not worried about others thinking he was bad at either.

Conversely, what others might think was a source of anxiety for some other students. In a group discussion in May, halfway through the third term, Eliza and Siobhan were both feeling the strain of the composition tasks. For Siobhan, the tight deadlines, which she had identified as a problem in Learning Conference 1 (see above), were becoming a source of stress, and her disappointment that she was “not passionate/proud of” every piece indicated that she was treating each task with a “perfect product” mindset. Consequently, she was developing negative self-concept, missing deadlines and telling me later that she imagined I would hold this and what she saw as the poor quality of her music against her. Eliza shared this feeling, and felt so insecure about her last composition that she would not submit it at all. The Passive-Learner model presented by Petty (2009) matches these two perfectly: a disempowered mindset of “I won’t succeed, so I’m giving up”, focussed on “the impossibility of getting it perfect” (p. 58).

The process-vs-product debate has had a place in conversations about music education for decades. Most research into composition emphasises the process, but both examination candidates and teachers are required to aim towards a product, the danger being that this eclipses the process and affects the mindset and attitude of young composers and their teachers. It is partly a symptom of teaching to the test, or to the assessment criteria (Devaney, 2018, p. 359), and treating composition as a “one-size-fits-all”, measurable product (Francis, 2012, pp. 165-6). This inevitably leads to conversations such as we had in Learning Conference 1, in which Eliza expressed the need to see the assessment criteria before selecting something “good” from her own pieces. A focus on the perfect product is a “high-stakes” attitude to creative work that devalues the process, not only as an act of *working towards* something final, but also as expanding *self-knowledge* at the same time (Kaschub & Smith, 2013, p. 7).

5.7.2.2.2 *The Complexities of Perfectionism.*

The irony of the “perfect-product” focus is that it can lead to a lack of improvement due to a “defeatist... [and] despairing” mindset (Petty, 2009, p. 58). Jonny, with his low-stakes approach to exploration and possibilities, trial and error, made more progress by *not* worrying about a “perfect product” that was a reflection of himself. It is likely that Jonny valued progress towards something more than he prized the achievement itself; his personal goal was to develop as a composer, not to compose a good piece for every task.

What emerged from my data was a picture of different kinds of perfectionism, not in its commonly understood negative sense of feelings of failure and resultant low self-esteem, but in a wider sense of what motivates people to achieve and how they self-evaluate. Hewitt and Flett (1991) identify two dimensions of perfectionism that were helpful in understanding the behaviours and approaches of my own students: “self-oriented” and “socially prescribed” (p. 457). Both are associated with self-criticism and high standards, but the difference lies in the “locus of control”: self-oriented perfectionism involves setting one’s own high standards and being less concerned with the evaluation and approval of others than socially-prescribed perfectionism (pp. 460-461). It can be further broken down into a two-factor structure wherein a “striving factor”, such as could be seen in Jonny’s interest in his own learning process, or Paul’s constant drive to try new things in composition, has a positive effect on self-esteem (Choy & McInerney, 2006, p. 7). The fact that both Jonny and Paul were risk-takers and adopted a low-stakes approach to their creative endeavours allowed them to benefit from this positive factor of self-oriented perfectionism, whilst not falling prey to the negative self-criticism that accompanies the second factor, a more damaging fixation on *being* perfect.

The “perfect-product” anxiety concerned right and wrong, assessment criteria, and the composition itself. These concerns are associated with socially-prescribed perfectionism and align with the disempowered mindset of the passive learner (Petty, 2009). This notion helps in understanding the various approaches of Siobhan, Eliza, and Emily that can be summarised as follows:

- Siobhan was anxious about wanting every composition (product) to be as good as possible and the mismatch between this and the nature or timescale of the tasks. Her account of her composition process drew a distinction between her personal songwriting and compositions she wrote for school, seeing them as requiring a completely different process. Her comments included “For most of the year I have felt completely out of my comfort zone. I feel that a lot of my composition is not particularly what I like or enjoy making but I have enjoyed the challenge”.
- Eliza wanted to measure her compositions according to other’s people’s expectations or ideal standards, holding the view: “It’s like tick-boxing, it’s like they need to go through it and be able to tick off what you’ve done.” Viewed as a symptom of socially-prescribed perfectionism, Eliza’s anxiety about needing to know the assessment criteria before feeling able to evaluate her own compositions makes sense as “a perceived incontinency between [her] own behaviour and the unrealistic standards prescribed by others” (Hewitt & Flett, 1991, p. 468).
- Emily always tried to meet the brief and was always unwilling to claim that she liked what she had composed, or even to assert the value of what she found satisfying in music. Her response to the latter was to say, “I was going to say something structured, but I feel that’s just a bit boring, like, people don’t always like structured pieces, do they?” Both the adherence to the given brief and the lack of conviction in her opinion demonstrate the importance she placed on needing approval and reassurance.

Choy and McInerney's paper (2006) draws together perfectionism and self-concept in school-aged children, thus resonating with my own research in several ways. One of these is the striking similarity between their recommendation that teachers should enable pupils to separate learning to master skills from "demonstrating how 'good' they are at performing these tasks" (Choy & McInerney, p. 8), and music education research that exhorts teachers to spotlight the quality of the process rather than the end-product. An example of the latter is found in the report by Fautley et al. (2014) on six school-based composition studies, in which composing was viewed as "a *process*, an active form of engagement", and the potentially limiting effects of focussing on a product were observed (pp. 29-31). The message is the same from both quarters: draw attention away from the self and the outcome, and focus on the positive aspects of learning and improving.

5.7.2.2.3 Perception and Receptiveness to the Unfamiliar.

5.7.2.2.3.1 Risk-taking and Curiosity.

The benefit of "positive striving", the risk-taking attitude, and the active learner mindset described by Petty (2009), is that all of them are aspects of openness, whether to change, the unfamiliar, or (relative) failure. They have in common a certain curiosity about what can be learned or explored, which outweighs fear of imperfection. This curiosity was apparent in some students' composing and improvising, as discussed above, but their Listening Responses were equally revealing in terms of openness to the unfamiliar and ability to respond with positivity and interest.

As I was analysing students' responses to the excerpts heard in the Listening Responses, it became clear that being "receptive" was a question of not only finding something to like in the music, but also – sometimes instead – being *interested* in it. In order to gauge personal

opinion alongside musical observations, Listening Responses 1 and 2 asked students if they already knew each piece, and to score them as shown in Figure 5.30.

Figure 5.30

Likert Scale for Excerpts in LR1 and LR2

	not at all				definitely
I already know this piece	1	2	3	4	5
I like this music	1	2	3	4	5
I often listen to music like this	1	2	3	4	5
This is a familiar style to me	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this for relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this out of interest	1	2	3	4	5

On reflection, the scale could have asked for a “no/maybe/yes” response to whether or not they already knew the piece, as 3/5 for this usually meant the same as “This is a familiar style to me”.

There was a correlation between the risk-taking composers and those who gave a wide variety of genres a high score for “interest”. These students tended to be the ones who were more familiar with a range of music, showing that they had already accrued a body of listening experience. Both aspects of their listening profiles showed them to be *curious* listeners. In addition, two students indicated that they often heard details in passing and mentally filed them away for future use in their own compositions: Paul’s final questionnaire mentioned the importance of listening in helping to “inform [his] compositions by ways of ‘stealing’ ideas from other pieces”; Jonny was more specific than this, describing “a really nice tiny chord progression (just two chords) that [he] sort of transcribed so [he] can use it in a composition in the future”. Jonny’s account of his own composing process implied that he habitually noted features he had “seen or heard in a

piece” in this way, citing “the layered clapping thing” that opened his Butterfly composition, “Chequered Skipper” as an example (Audio 5.19).

Audio 5.19

“Chequered Skipper” by Jonny (January 2021)



5.19 Jonny
Chequered Skipper.mp3

In a related way, one of Paul’s compositions (Figure 5.31, Audio 5.20) used a concept from outside the musical domain. This was a film, “Black Mirror: Bandersnatch”, whose fascinating feature of a viewer’s controlling the protagonist’s fate via the TV remote control inspired him to create a piece in which, according to his programme note, “the musician decides in what direction the piece will move, making for a new and organic performance every time”. This piece, written for the A-level group to perform, was quite a risk for Paul, and he was delighted with the outcome.

It is widely acknowledged that listening is an important part of the composition process, with one model by Kennedy (2002) showing it at several stages, including stimulus and inspiration for a task as well as “self-reflective listening” at nearly every point *en route* to completion (p. 105). The first stage of Kennedy’s model is “Listening as Preparation”, which is defined as “Music and musical styles which the students are familiar with”, i.e., general listening not yet related to a specific task. What Jonny and Paul were describing was not general familiarity with certain music, nor targeted listening specifically for inspiration related to a given task, but what could be termed “general curiosity” – focussing on something that caught their attention and could be added to a kind of “mental sketchbook”.

“Bandersnatch” by Paul (November 2020)

The image displays a musical score for 'Bandersnatch' by Paul. It begins with a bass clef staff in 8/8 time, showing a sequence of eighth notes. Below this, there are several treble clef staves. The first treble staff contains a series of chords, with a 'Pedal' marking indicating a sustained bass note. A second treble staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes. A third treble staff continues the melodic line. A fourth treble staff shows a more complex rhythmic pattern. A fifth treble staff at the bottom shows a melodic line with eighth notes. Lines connect the various staves, indicating their relationship in the piece.



5.20 Paul
Bandersnatch excerpt

These two students, already cited above as being willing creative risk-takers and exhibiting the “positive striving factor” of self-oriented perfectionism (Choy & McInerney, 2006, p. 7), professed interest in a wide range of musical excerpts, as encountered in LR1 and LR2. Given that the inverse correlation was also evident in other students, this suggested an association between risk-taking, “positive striving” with a focus on self-improvement rather than the perfect product, and curiosity in listening.

5.7.2.2.3.2 Response, Perception, and Self-concept.

This curiosity seemed to link to positive self-concept in composition. “Interest” did not always align with liking a piece, but Paul, Oliver and Jonny had a largely positive response to the range of excerpts, whereas Eliza and Emily gave much lower scores overall, especially in LR1. Siobhan, with her complex composer-improviser profile of confidence in certain (comfortable) fields and self-doubt in others, gave a much more mixed response. Although

the pieces had been selected on the grounds that most students would not already know them, certain excerpts inevitably reminded students of music they had heard before, and this familiarity sometimes corresponded to preference, particularly amongst those whose scores tended to be lower in terms of what they liked or found interesting. In a sense, this “I like what I know” mindset is the opposite of open-minded curiosity.

A further correlation was apparent between this combination of positive response and curiosity (collectively “receptiveness”) in listeners, and students’ powers of perception. Those students who were most receptive to unfamiliar music were also those who were most able to observe a range of musical features and accurately express them in words. The likelihood is that this link between *perceptiveness* and *receptiveness* allowed them to be more productive self-evaluators – purposeful and positive – and therefore to develop more self-trust and ultimately more creative autonomy in their composition process.

5.8 Conclusion

This data set was broad and very complex, reflecting the complexity of composing and of *teaching* composition as a process of creativity, self-evaluation, and progress towards autonomy, which requires self-reliance and self-trust.

The research sub-questions specific to this study were:

1. How have improvisation sessions related to students’ composition process and output?
2. How have listening tasks related to students’ composition process and output?

The above thematic analysis of data collected intensively during the second research period in April-July 2021 as well as across the academic year September 2020-July 2021 reveals associations between the three competencies of listening, improvising, and composing.

These were apparent in the way listening and improvising tasks impacted on individual compositions, and in apparent connections between behaviours, mindsets, and attitudes in all three.

5.8.1 The Relationship of Group Improvisation to Students' Individual Composition Process and Output

Theme 1 demonstrated an association between the behaviour of several students in group improvisation and their presentation of individual compositions. That is, those students whose contributions to group improvisations were musically shaped and characterful were also most ready to include performance detail on scores for their individual compositions, thus “characterising” their musical material and communicating their intentions.

Risk-taking was also seen across improvisation and composition in the same students, as discussed in Theme 2. Those who took the lead and offered their “explorations” with conviction in group improvisations were the same students who were willing to compose in unfamiliar styles or ways. This corroborates a link presented by Tyagi et al. (2017) between social risk-taking (in this case, willingness to be exposed in group improvisations) and creativity. The observed low-stakes attitude and positive striving, itself an aspect of self-oriented perfectionism, showed a focus on the process rather than the product by certain students. This contrasted with those students whose contributions to improvisations were hampered by a lack of conviction resulting from negative self-concept in that context, and whose attitude to individual composition was high-stakes and product-focussed. Most students fell easily into Petty’s Empowered vs Disempowered mindset models (Petty, 2009).

In all students, some benefits of improvisation to their composition were evident. In Theme 1, it was posited that responsive playing in group improvisations seemed to encourage

responsive composing, i.e., making intuitive decisions about pacing, contrast, reprise, and ending during the composition process. Our group improvisations encouraged all students to adopt an “emergent” view of a piece, in the sense that it could have an unpredictable outcome (Sawyer & de Zutter, 2009). Improvisation modelled the process of making decisions in real time, and not over-planning before starting a composition. Becoming accustomed to the “emergent” nature of the improvisations could help students to feel at ease with this in their compositions, potentially helping them to develop more critical resilience. Although our group improvisations allowed students to participate at their chosen level, it was also necessary to join in without seeking affirmation, thus fostering creative self-reliance.

5.8.2 The Relationship of Listening Tasks to Students’ Individual Composition Process and Output

Two main aspects of listening were covered in the two Themes above:

- aural awareness and observation, including the ability to listen analytically, as well as the ability to use these skills to self-evaluate;
- aural imagination, which entails affective responses to music as well as imagination during the individual composition process.

Both are forms of critical listening. Regarding skills of observation, it became apparent in Theme 1 that those students who were better able to identify and accurately describe musical features when listening to a piece of music also showed more proficiency in notating and including performance detail in their compositions. Conversely, those who opted for alternatives to notation tended to be less aurally observant and less articulate when describing music, limiting the extent to which their score-alternatives conveyed their

intentions or defined their creative decisions. The comparison between these students suggested a link between aural acuity, articulacy, and creative communication, corresponding to findings by Major (2007) regarding the development of purposeful “evaluative talk” in student composers (p. 173).

The observed connection between articulate observation and performance detail suggested that perceptive listening skills can enable informed decision-making during the creative process and therefore impact on students’ ownership – a word also used by Major (2007) – of their compositions. Theme 2 addressed another behaviour apparently associated with articulate observation in noting a link between perception and reception, or receptiveness to unfamiliar music. Students who showed a “curious” mindset were also the risk-takers in improvisation and composition, and they were the most engaged in productive discussions about their own compositions. Receptive both to new music and to advice about their own music, they were also the more perceptive students, identifying a range of musical features when listening. The combination of receptiveness and perceptiveness made them better able to engage in the kind of self-assessment which, supported by musically-perceptive and articulate evaluative talk, cultivates self-reliant critical creativity.

The more affective, imaginative listening tasks also related clearly to the compositional process. As well as presenting students with “ways in” to listening to new music, affective and associative responses such as imagined narratives also encouraged composers to be aware of their future listeners’ temporal experience. When students used the narrative experience to plan group improvisations, all three activities – improvising, composing, and listening – were clearly interrelated.

Students who were able to combine affective and analytical responses to music were at an advantage because they gave an account of how specific aspects of the music affected them as listeners. There was a correlation between this kind of “personalised” listening response and the detailed musical scores in which material was “characterised” in order to show how it had been imagined in sound.

In the pair of listening tasks that were LR3.1 and LR3.2, the link between listening and composing was most explicit. The process of choosing a “best-fit” order of phrases was a slow-motion, conscious version of the kind of co-creative, imaginative listening described by Bertinetto (2012), in which anticipation forms part of a subconscious, participatory listening process. It was also an analytical process, requiring students to observe and describe in order to justify their decisions, thus being a slow-motion, conscious version of the composition process. The requirement to describe and explain the decision-making process has the potential to be useful for someone composing out of their comfort zone, when the next step might require more than relying on intuition. It can also nurture conviction in one’s own decisions, as each choice had to be justified with reference to the musical material itself. As there was no advantage to students’ accidentally choosing the “right” order for the phrases, the task also removed the possibility of seeking affirmation, thus fostering self-reliance. When viewed collectively, those outcomes of this listening task could have a valuable impact on a student composer’s creative autonomy.

Participant Profiles: 3. July 2021

The following participant profile updates describe students' contributions to group improvisations and responses to composition and listening tasks set during the second data-collection period, April-July 2021. Details of each session and the related homework tasks are given in Chapter 5, and the following is a brief summary of composition and listening tasks:

- April 2021: 2-part Study on five notes, a composition task following a group-improvisation session exploring possibilities for developing the same 5-note scale. This task was set twice, as the first responses to this showed that some students did not understand the purpose of the task.
- April 2021: Listening Response 2, a set of three excerpts that were longer than the eight in LR1, but were otherwise presented in the same format. Each piece was preceded by a Likert Scale asking about familiarity, liking, and interest.
- May 2021: Listening Response 3.1, a short preparatory task demonstrating how to approach LR3.2, which was the main task. In the end, both became important as they could be compared.
- May 2021: Listening Response 3.2, which, like LR3.1, asked students to reorder phrases, within a given scaffold, until they made sense to them as a complete piece. They were asked to describe in detail what had informed their choices.
- May 2021: "Soliloquy" composition task, which was set as a follow-up to LR3.2. Students were asked to compose a piece for solo instrument, using the description of their choices as a set of instructions for their own piece.

- July 2021: at the very end of the data-collection period, Listening Response 4 was set. This included questions inviting affective, analogous, and analytical responses, with reference to group improvisation activities.



OLIVER

Oliver reverted to his erstwhile comfort-zone style of catchy riffs and a Latin flavour when he first responded to the 2-part Study brief. Although he made good use of the motif, it was a melody-and-accompaniment piece, whereas his second attempt was a genuine two-part texture with great care given to articulation and sensibly-placed dynamics. I felt that Oliver had taken on board not only individual feedback but also everything that had been presented as a possibility in our improvisation sessions. It remained for him to try to be more harmonically adventurous, as this slightly detracted from a sense of satisfying arrival at a reprise. Oliver's Soliloquy was at first rather bland, without any characterisation on the score, and it was hard to map it onto his LR3.2 description. The second draft made this much easier, and also made an attempt to modulate. There was a clear sense of *why* he had included certain articulation and dynamics, although the tempo changes on the score were not realized in his performance, suggesting that he had relied on those to have an expressive effect that did not make sense to him when it came to playing it. Otherwise, it had effective shaping and pacing, including logical contrast and a satisfying reprise.

Oliver's Listening Responses 3.1, 3.2 and 4 all had in common a tendency to leave some things unexplained or imprecisely expressed – for example, he knew the word “displaced” but did not use it – whilst clearly recognising aspects not only of the musical detail but also of the overall pacing of the music. This meant that his sense of something making a good opening or ending was often not supported with the musical features that made it so. This did not align with his wide range of musical observations in isolation, and it seemed that,

rather than not perceiving things, Oliver was just not aware of needing to make an extra step towards being more specific.

The overall impression of Oliver's contributions to group improvisations in this third term was that he was much more responsive and adaptable than he had been, and less likely to introduce a repeating, catchy riff that steered everyone towards it. He was often a prominent player, partly because of the nature of the trombone, but also because he was willing to play out. He always shared something characterful and musically shaped after exploration at the beginning of sessions, but was also willing to play in the background more than he had been. When he decided to introduce a prominent new idea, he often chose an apt moment to do so, showing intuitive pacing as well as good long-term listening. His melodic lines were longer by the end of this term, and he was starting to reuse previous material, again with a sense of the long-term shaping.



ELIZA

Eliza responded well to the 2-part Study brief, with a clear opening statement, a slightly developmental middle passage, and an emphatic ending. The contrapuntal writing was successful. However, there was no commitment to the piece in terms of imagining how it should be characterised, so no detail was given on the score beyond the notes. Eliza later admitted that she felt she was not improving as a composer, and this may have accounted for the lack of ownership on the score. Her confidence waned to the point where she did not want to hand in her Soliloquy.

While there was a marked improvement in the use of musical language in LR2, with many more specific and accurate observations amongst some more vague statements, Eliza's response to nearly all of the pieces was generally that she did not like them and was not

familiar with the styles. Eliza's Listening Responses 3.1 and 3.2 showed that she could hear quite a few musical features, but still had to acquire the vocabulary in order to describe it in full. She was developing a good sense of the effectiveness of the music, nonetheless. Her struggle to find the right expressions aligned with a similar hurdle in discussions about her own compositions. LR4 was answered very sparsely, but did include some accurate specific musical terminology.

Eliza rarely brought her trumpet to group improvisation lessons during this third term, possibly preferring the digital piano because it was easier to play unobtrusively. This often made her part hard to hear, although when she did share ideas with the group they tended to be quite expressive, even if they were quite short. It seemed that Eliza sometimes struggled to find a place in the overall texture where she felt her contribution, or her idea of how to use the given motif, would fit well. She was most easy to hear and played in a most exploratory way when others were playing more loudly, but if she disliked what she was playing or sensed that it clashed with something else, rather than resolve it in the moment she would prefer to stop. Although there was some much bolder playing towards the end of this term, Eliza did not seem to be fully comfortable yet with playing outwardly, with the requirement to be heard, to listen to others, and to respond in the moment.



SIOBH

Siobhan's 2-part Study at first highlighted the ongoing tension between the composition tasks and her comfort zone, and she arrived early on at a chordal riff that she then repeated for the remainder of the piece. In the redraft, this became a recurring contrasting motif, and was used much more effectively in the overall structure, which also included a truncated reprise of earlier material. Although the piece did exactly what was required,

there was no detail on the score at all, suggesting that it was uninspiring for her. The Soliloquy was an improvement in this sense, and there was some quite musical shaping, with obvious motifs and longer phrases that returned and made the piece quite satisfying for a listener.

Siobhan began to add more musical observations in her Listening Responses, also these were often quite general, e.g., “larger use of orchestration”. She was cautious with her praise, tending not to profess a liking for the pieces in LR2. Siobhan’s Listening Responses 3.1 and 3.2 showed a marked improvement in her aural perception, albeit with a limited palette that meant her observations were often confined to a narrow range of features. She occasionally misused terminology, but there was a good effort to be more specific than in LR1 and LR2. Conversely, LR4 elicited much vaguer responses, and she seemed to dislike the piece and find it hard to answer the questions.

Siobhan often enjoyed the organ sound on the digital piano, and sometimes could be heard rapidly adjusting her volume to make it less prominent in the mix. She tended to prefer being a background player, but could still be heard changing her part as the piece progressed or playing quite experimentally sometimes. Although Siobhan often restricted her part to something simple or repetitive, this did not seem to be because she was limited to this, but rather because she wanted to listen. There were times when she was very happy to contribute prominently, and more than one occasion when she reintroduced something she had played earlier, with a good sense of the overall form. She also began to imitate others in later sessions, and to wait before choosing when to join in.



JONNY

Jonny's first draft of his 2-part Study was quite long and was packed with different uses of the given motif, using almost everything from the lesson. Texturally and structurally, it needed some improvement, but rather than redraft it, he composed a new one, and this, too, was packed with motivic development. The harmonic language was a little inconsistent, and there was still some refining of the overall form to be done, in terms of not allowing it to drift in the middle passage, and perhaps using a little reprise of the opening as a conclusive final statement. The Soliloquy was a neat snare-drum study, with a very impressive amount of detail on the score, and a lot of demanding stickwork. It was hard to match this to his LR3.2 response, but he created a successful "musical journey" nonetheless, with effective pacing, contrast, and momentum, and a very strong ending.

While Jonny's response to LR1 had favoured identification of instruments, LR2 contained a wider range of observations. Jonny was unfamiliar with most of the pieces, but interested in everything he heard, whether or not he also claimed to like it. Jonny wrote a lot for LR3.1 and LR3.2, although he tended to confine his observations in LR3.1 to pitch and dynamics, and often included statements about phrases making a good opening or ending without saying why. It was particularly clear in LR3.2 that he could hear connections and a certain logic in the progression from one phrase to the next, but that he struggled to find the words to articulate it. On the other hand, he could also suddenly write a lucid sentence such as "the descending arc lends itself really nicely to 'winding down' or ending a piece". His response to LR4 was concise and extremely well focused, with some accurate use of musical vocabulary and a good impression of how different elements contributed to the build towards a climax in this piece. He clearly found it interesting and was engaged in the exercise.

Jonny played a variety of instruments in group improvisations during the third term, including bass guitar, tuned percussion, and guitar. It was typical of Jonny to listen and play very little, judging when to join in. He was thoughtful in his contributions to our discussions, and therefore made a good leader for planning sessions, as well as being happy to take the lead in the improvisations. As he was less fluent improvising on melodic instruments than on drum kit, it took him some time to join in with something substantial in the final improvisation session, but when he did, he had settled on a pattern he could repeat, always choosing the same chord for the pitch peak, and he played a solo with good rhythm and phrase-shape.



EMILY

Emily's two compositions in this time showed a marked departure from her erstwhile comfort zone. She began the 2-part Study with a hand-notated piece that had a few inaccuracies, but redrafted it and added some more judicious performance directions (an area still to be improved at this stage). Emily liked knowing exactly what a composition brief wanted from her, and therefore the 2-part Study, with its clear requirements to use a given set of notes in a number of different ways, was well-suited to her. There were some features that sounded a little contrived, but showed ambition to stretch herself, and the overall form was good, with a convincing use of the opening as a closing statement. The second draft of her Soliloquy likewise improved greatly on the first, showing that she understood and was receptive to my feedback. The pacing felt intuitive and it was a step away from her reliance on repetition, and the feedback I gave her was more varied than it had been.

As in LR1, Emily was unfamiliar with most of the pieces in LR2, and did not like the music. She continued to favour specific musical observations rather than alternative responses,

such as narrative or imagery. Emily's responses to LR3.1 and LR3.2 showed that her description of music was becoming more sophisticated and specific, but, judging by the amount she wrote and the careful, almost basic justifications she gave (e.g., low = finished, crescendo = developing), she was not comfortable with the possibility that she might not be placing the phrases in the right order. There was some sophisticated language alongside rather more ambiguous wording. LR4 suited Emily in that she was able to list a lot of good ideas for potential development of a motif, but this was not matched by recognising them in the context of this quite dissonant and meandering piece. However, she was able to say something about every musical element and how it had been used by the composer to contribute to the overall musical form, and her improvement as an open-minded listener was very much in evidence.

Emily continued to enjoy the same sound on her keyboard (galaxy piano), presumably because it was one "known" quantity in the context of improvisation. She began this third term playing rather tentatively, but appeared to be more independent and exploratory than she had been in the first term (September-October 2020). She was most audible when she had decided on a repeating pattern and knew when she would be playing it, as in the session 2 improvisations. She was unafraid to be exposed for very short amounts of time, such as one improvisation when everyone finished and she wanted to complete a phrase, and another when Jonny was leading and signalled "just Emily". By the last two sessions in this term, she was still playing quietly, but could be heard imitating others in the moment and creating some well-shaped melodic phrases. In the more turbulent and chaotic improvisations, the impression was that Emily was unsure *how* to make her usual kind of melodic pattern fit this sort of music, which would align with her claiming not to know what to listen for in similar music in the Listening Responses.



PAUL

Paul's first 2-part Study was a little careless, but the second – a new piece rather than a redraft – had very clear intentions, used a lot of interesting devices, and had a lot of detail, intuitive pacing, successful momentum, and logical reprise, although it was harmonically quite static. The feedback was very detailed and consisted more of prompts for further thought than detailed suggestions, reflecting the level at which he was working. His Soliloquy for piano was outstanding, and he responded to the plentiful feedback on the first draft in full. He seemed to enjoy using his LR3.2 response to inform this piece, and it resulted in a really well-crafted piece, with excellent handling of atonal harmonic language and a fabulous sense of a “musical journey”.

Paul's Listening Responses were perceptive and intelligent, and contained very few unexplained or vague statements. He wrote a lot and always made an effort to cover a range of musical elements. In LR2, he included for each piece a closing statement about how each piece had made him feel and why. He was clearly very engaged in these exercises, and he was interested in all pieces, whether or not he also liked them. He often described the effect of the music very articulately but at the expense of musical detail, for example, saying more about the *feeling* of mystery and tension than about how they were achieved. In LR3.2, his descriptions were excellent, and he sometimes departed from the description of a particular moment to place it in context of the whole excerpt, an excellent example of someone who could switch between micro- and macro-listening. His response to LR4 included a very good effort to describe some unfamiliar devices, and he expressed his likes and dislikes very well in musical terms.

Paul remained a very intuitive and spontaneous improviser on instruments including a range of orchestral percussion, drum kit, and piano. Sometimes he listened before joining

in and took the part of a responsive player, adding things for effect (e.g., a soft cymbal roll) or answering another instrument with a new motif. His ability to catch a mood and enhance it with his own playing was particularly evident when he played the drum kit, responding to dynamic and harmonic changes very effectively, and introducing a sense of pulse or some momentum if he felt things were starting to drift. On the piano, he was extremely dexterous and adventurous, and made an excellent leader when the group had nominated him to shape the overall piece for us through his cues. This ability to respond or lead in the moment whilst retaining an awareness of the overall form was evident in the way he described music in the Listening Responses, and his intuitive sense of pacing and the need for contrast or reprise was also apparent in his compositions.

Chapter 6. Reflections on Practice and Outcomes

At the heart of this research is the need to address a problem that I perceived when I first started teaching A-level composition, rather late in my career. Students' reliance on teacher feedback – or even instruction – to ensure a good mark led to some very cautious composing, a lengthy process of piecing music together, a lack of self-trust, and, quite often, disappointment on the students' as well as the teacher's part. I was initially surprised that fluent, able performers could not transfer that experience of music to the creation of their own, and my own self-efficacy as a composition teacher suffered because I felt unable to help them to develop into more independent composers. Noticing the correlation between this kind of “disempowered” composing (to borrow a term from Petty, 2009) and an unreceptive response to challenging music in the appraisal unit made me realise that I was looking in the wrong place for a transfer of knowledge. Instead of encouraging students to connect their performing experience with their composition, I began to pilot the use of group improvisation, as described in Chapter 1, in the hope that it would affect how students experienced challenging modern and contemporary repertoire as listeners, and that it might also have an impact on their compositional processes.

6.1 Revisiting the Principles of Action Research

This study has adhered to the principles of action research in that it began with the recognition of the above problem, and an intention to change my own practice through a process of planning a change, reflecting on it, and adjusting it in response to that. I have never lost sight of the “social intent” (McNiff, 2002, p. 6) of the project because this was an A-level class whose eventual aim was a final grade for A-level Music. Whatever I did had to

accommodate that personal goal as well as contributing towards it; there could never be a sense that my research was encroaching on the A-level course, only that it was a newly-imagined part of it.

Action research has been presented in previous chapters as often being rooted in a problem identified, after which solutions are sought via action in the context where the problem arises. True to the spirit of participatory action research, the “solution” was a deeper understanding of the connected behaviours and attitudes that have been described in the findings above, an understanding reached by “doing and reflecting, action and research” (Cain, 2012, p. 417). In other words, my conclusions, presented in Chapter 7, are based on experiential knowledge, defined by Heron and Reason (2014) as “knowing through the immediacy of perceiving, through empathy and resonance” (p. 367). Contrary to connotations of subjectivity in this definition, this experiential knowledge is transferable in the sense that it can be used to inform the practice of other teachers who may identify with it (Cain, 2010).

Inherent in action research is that the outcomes should represent improvements for everyone involved. “Outcomes” should not merely be read as “results”, a particularly loaded word when the student participants were examination candidates; outcomes are also about experiences, both theirs and mine.

6.2 Outcomes: The Teacher’s Perspective

According to Cain, in participatory and classroom-based action research, the centrality of the researcher’s position to the situation necessitates self-study on their part (Cain, 2010). A question to ask myself at this stage is whether anything has changed in the way I teach composition, and the way I reflect on my composition teaching. Inevitably, I have rethought

the way I teach composition, and I have reused much of the content of my research cycles with a subsequent A-level group. Having analysed the data collected last year, I can explain to these students the value of certain activities in terms of my own findings, and this has apparently engendered a sense of shared purpose in those lessons, as well as bolstering my own self-efficacy as a composition teacher. Knowing that a group can confidently engage in group improvisation now allows me to plan sessions that immediately incorporate discussion and reflection, and the improvisation activities can be clearly linked to composition tasks. As demonstrated by the need to revisit the 2-part Study task after the first session of cycle 2, it is also important to dedicate time to analysis as part of this holistic programme.

The students I teach have needed to adjust their preconceptions about composition lessons as much as I have, relinquishing the notion of composition as a solitary activity with an exam-driven goal. With more varied practical and listening tasks, my own dissatisfaction with composition lessons spent trying and failing to give every individual a small piece of useful feedback has vanished. Students have become used to bringing their instruments either for improvisation or for live performance of a short composition, and view it as normal to receive feedback from their peers and me in that lesson. I am now comfortable with setting very short composition tasks, and my own “stakes” are lower; I never expect to be able to “fix” and “perfect” every piece as if it were the final product.

When I need to offer one-to-one feedback because a composition is a longer project, requires more detailed feedback, or is intended as a submission for summative assessment, I find the process much less laborious than I used to. The importance of discussion and articulation of intentions is now foremost in my interactions with my students, and it is much rarer for me to find myself grappling with the time-consuming process of trying to

diagnose a problem, from my perspective as the listener, explain it to the young composer, and try to think of solutions and suggestions. I find the process more rewarding.

6.3 Outcomes for the Student Participants

The outcomes discussed here specifically pertain to the student participants in my research and my interactions with them as their composition teacher during the academic year 2021-2022, which followed the year of data collection (2020-2021) and saw those students submitting a composition for their Music A level.

At the end of the group's first year on the A-level course, having focussed for most of the year on motivic development and shaping musical form, I turned the attention to harmony. The task was prefaced by listening and analysis, and the only stipulation in the brief was that it should make use of the way every example piece had juxtaposed unrelated chords and used chromatic harmony. It was a long-term project as it spanned the summer holiday (typically six weeks in England, from mid-July to the end of August), and it was to be a potential final submission for their A level.

I was most pleased with how the group engaged with the type of harmonic language we explored. I noticed great improvements in presentation, willingness to notate compositions, and inclusion of performance directions, although of course this was still subject to limitations in some cases. Some people struggled to fit melodic lines with their unusual chord progressions, and needed my help with voice-leading or idiomatic figuration, particularly for piano parts. Some familiar aspects of people's comfort zones resurfaced – over-repetitive passages, reliance on adding layers, clashes between harmony and melody that had gone unheard – and it was a common trait that creating a long melodic phrase seemed to present a challenge. Some people, conversely, pushed themselves beyond their

previous limits, notably Siobhan, whose chord progression was extremely adventurous and more chromatic than anything I had ever heard from her. Likewise, Eliza's assimilation of the stylistic elements of the pieces she had enjoyed most in our preliminary analysis showed a marked improvement in aural acuity, and Oliver's many modulations were very well handled.

6.4 Final Update: External Assessment

Given the confidentiality of work that was submitted for the A-level composition unit, I will not discuss its content in specific terms here. Some general observations about the students' compositional processes and styles can still be offered, however.

There were some frustrations for me during the final period of working on these compositions. I received an email asking how to improve a composition grade, despite a great deal of feedback on that student's previous work. This person and one or two others began to rely on one-to-one feedback again, and one of those came to a specially arranged session having done nothing between sessions, hoping for my "instruction". One student completely withdrew from the feedback process and fell back on their very earliest comfort-zone style and only showed me work that was considered complete and beyond amendment.

However, the majority of my work with the group was a joy, and included the following evidence that the research activities had genuinely resulted in some improved outcomes in terms of their experiences and mine:

- I was able to ask them to bring their instruments either to group or to one-to-one sessions and use them to explore developments and possibilities. A combination of explanation and demonstration was a valuable component of our discussions. It was

particularly pleasing when this was Eliza or Emily, whose improvisations had been so inhibited early in year 12, and who now felt at ease with using improvisation in front of someone else to generate material they would like to include in their compositions. By playing or vocalising their material as they generated it, these students were enacting and embodying their mental processes, and extending them to their instrument or voice (Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018).

- I noticed a great improvement in melodic writing in some cases, notably the long melodic lines in compositions by Oliver and Jonny, both of whom used to rely so much on repetition and, particularly in Oliver's case, on short catchy riffs.
- It had sometimes been a common problem for me that people created a lot of material at once, and could then either be resistant to change or potentially overwhelmed by the amount of feedback this incurred. With the exception of the student who withdrew from the feedback process, mentioned above, I never felt this to be an issue with these compositions, and Oliver, in particular, got the balance just right in that respect, representing an improvement on his part.
- All but one of the students were motivated to include contrast without my prompting, and everyone recalled previous material in a way that made sense in terms of the overall musical form.
- Only two people seemed over-reliant on repetition, and in one case this was greatly mitigated by a much-improved sense of pacing and use of textural variety.
- Paul, who had sometimes lacked a sense of proportion in his music during Year 12, chose to base his composition on a narrative involving several (mostly nasty) characters and events in a Shakespeare play, seeming to use this to guide his musical form and make judicious decisions about reprise and contrast and the length of a passage of music.

- Jonny, ever the curious listener, incorporated some Messiaen-inspired chords into his piece, using something that he had enjoyed in analysis lessons to push his own harmonic language even further.
- Nearly every feedback discussion began with a question about intentions and therefore relied on students' own articulacy and self-awareness. None of those discussions felt laborious from my position, and I was often able to refer to the listener experience in our conversations.
- All but one of the pieces was recorded live with me as one of the performers, which led to some very productive discussions about intentions and presentation.

Final grades and written comments from the examiner cannot be shared here, but it is possible to summarise the aspect of “outcomes” that is the final judgement of these compositions by referring to the current AQA assessment criteria, whose wording is indicated below in italics. The majority of compositions were judged to have *technical control that was largely successful* or showed *sustained mastery*, and to use musical elements at least *with variety and secure handling*, and sometimes also *flair and imagination*. The structure of most was either *successful*, owing to the quality of *contrasting ideas* and their *development*, or was deemed to be beyond this – a true *musical journey* – and the style of each composition was at best *convincing, fluent, and compelling*, and, for lower marks, *assured* and *clear*. In all cases, clear or comprehensive scores or alternative written materials were an expectation. Inconsistencies in any one area, or imprecision or lack of detail in written materials, could lead to a lower mark within the same mark-bands. Where there were reservations about any of those qualities – for example, less convincing development of ideas, or generic use of features to create a convincing style – the compositions got a slightly lower mark, although they were still deemed to show *creative exploration*. Knowing whose marks they were, I can add that they

seem to reflect the compositional process as much as the content, and receptiveness to advice and feedback on some points within a certain composition.

6.5 Reservations: A Balance of Trust, and Long-Term Time-Management

I have two reservations about the way I guided this group towards their final composition submission. One is that I occasionally wondered if my strong encouragement to be self-reliant and to justify decisions in conversation led to a bit of stubbornness on the students' part regarding isolated moments in a piece where taking my advice might have been beneficial. In one or two cases, there could perhaps have been a better balance between self-trust and teacher-trust.

The other reservation, concerning time-management, is the way our five terms together were spent. With the second of those terms being spent largely in lockdown and the first and third being dominated, albeit only in part, by data collection, the period of time we could spend finalising their A-level submissions was compressed. While I am an advocate of *not* spending months on one composition (as I used to do with my composition classes), I would also have liked a "transition" period from the short exercises set almost weekly in Year 12 (2020-2021), to the longer period of time spent on the final compositions. In that transition period, medium-term composition tasks would have been set, allowing the group to test their creative autonomy within a lower-stakes context. With future groups, any re-use of the research activities can be condensed into a shorter timeframe, and I fervently hope that no other cohort would experience such disruption from a pandemic as this one did from the COVID-19 outbreak.

Chapter 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Initial Conclusions from the Two Studies: A Summary

7.1.1 Preparing to Improvise (Study 1)

The first research cycle, “Preparing to Improvise” (September-October 2020), was undertaken in response to evidence that improvising was an uncomfortable activity for many students, and I needed to demystify it by dispelling assumptions about requisite knowledge and skills base. “Nonperfectionist” activities (Westney, 2003, p. 160) were used to encourage students to participate, and rhythm and movement games helped to address the social aspect of group improvising that was at the root of some people’s negative self-concept. Using a motif as a stimulus and encouraging exploration of possibilities for its alteration and development was a form of semi-structured play (Craft, n.d.), and led to some inventive improvisations. While playing in the background was an option for participation, treating improvisations as a sort of conversation encouraged everyone to step into the foreground for at least one phrase, and engendered responsive playing. For those whose self-concept was less robust, having the chance to share something or start an improvisation and hear it adopted by others was an important validation.

While exploration forms part of many people’s individual compositional process, a *group* context had the benefit of multiplying the possibilities arising from a stimulus – a “ripple-effect” (Izumi-Taylor et al., 2010, p. 5) – demonstrating responsive interactions between parts, and allowing the form to emerge as people played. It helped to normalise improvisation, not only in the group but also as part of the individual creative process, and,

as Eliza pointed out in her final questionnaire, it helped to be comfortable with starting a composition without feeling the need to “make something sound perfect straight away”.

Discussion and reflection on the improvisations as students listened to what they had played together was also beneficial, both to the students and to me as a researcher. For the students, it offered the opportunity to listen critically and to hear their peers’ responses, multiplying the evaluative possibilities in a reflection of the possibilities explored in the playing itself. As a researcher, I saw indicators of their musical confidence in the way they spoke, with poor self-confidence evident in seeking reassurance, doubting their use of musical terminology, and defaulting to self-criticism or, less often, teasing their friends. In parallel with their burgeoning responsiveness in playing and their increasingly “outward” playing, their musical observations and use of vocabulary became more assured, and they tended to be much less unproductively self-critical. Thus the “Preparing to Improvise” sessions were valuable for fostering not only musical creativity but also constructive reflection, and corroborated the view that creativity is linked to self-confidence (Mawang et al., 2019).

7.1.2 Developing a Multi-skill Curriculum for A-level Composition (Study 2)

The second research cycle began as a reintroduction of group improvisation activities, after a gap of several months due to the closure of schools nationwide in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The level of responsive playing and social as well as musical confidence needed to be re-established, so the successful model from the first research cycle of starting sessions with an exploration of possibilities was adopted.

Again, the group context was vital to the creative development of individual students, and this was evident in several respects. The shared cognitive load in group improvisations – and discussions – was also a shared responsibility, and this was a benefit particularly to less

confident participants, making it less daunting (MacDonald & Wilson, 2020). Responsive playing seemed to encourage a sort of responsive composing, allowing material to emerge rather than over-planning. With less teacher-led direction in this research cycle's tasks, discussions were not only reflective and evaluative, but also part of the planning process. Sawyer and de Zutter (2009) posited that collaborative work could make explicit the stages in the creative process, and this was apparent in the students' planning discussions and in their responsive playing. Similarly, their evaluative discussions were a model of constructive self-assessment. The other members of the group thus became an extension of individuals' creative thinking, and their collective interactions in planning, playing, and evaluating were an enactment of the creative process (see Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018).

A number of behaviours, attitudes, and mindsets revealed connections between improvisation, listening, and composing. There was a connection between responsive playing – listening to other players – and responsive composing – using the imaginative “inner ear” to continue a composition. Oliver commented on this in his final questionnaire, saying that the improvisation activities had allowed him to be more expressive as a composer, and include more variety. Paul also recognised the effect of group improvising on his awareness of development, pacing, and generating new ideas. Both were unwittingly describing what Kaschub and Smith (2009a) termed “feeling-based knowing” (p. 16) in that both were using aspects of knowledge gained through experience to inform their compositions. Corresponding to this is the kind of imaginative listening employed in choosing an order for the phrases in LR3.1 and LR3.2, another form of responsiveness, and the link between this and the creative decision-making process was made clear by the composition task that related to LR3.2. At this point, there was a combination of intuition (“knowledge within”) and intellect (“knowledge about”), the very things that Kaschub and Smith (2009a) view as underpinning the compositional process (pp. 16-17).

Taking the lead, initiating change, and audibly experimenting in improvisations were forms of social risk-taking, which Tyagi et al. (2017) linked to a creative personality and mindset. Amongst the participants, these students were also ready without my prompting to leave their comfort zone in composition and try new things (with varying success), being concerned with self-improvement and the process of composing rather than a perfect final product. This is a form of “positive striving” (Choy & McInerney, 2006) that typifies self-oriented perfectionism (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). The same students were the curious, interested, open-minded listeners, suggesting a link between risk-taking, positive striving, and curiosity, in the form of receptiveness to the unfamiliar.

Presenting material in a characterful way in improvisations often corresponded to including detailed performance directions in a composition, and this had its parallel in listening responses that were personalised by virtue of containing some affective or analogous material as well as specific musical and analytical detail. The significant link here lies in the understanding and communication of musical meaning. This is slightly separate from playing with conviction in improvisations (although that also tended to be characterful), which corresponded to self-awareness when discussing compositions, and self-reliance in decision-making. Those students also demonstrated a wider awareness as listeners, with broad-ranging observations, usually with an attempt to express these using appropriate musical vocabulary. The combination of articulacy and conviction, as an improviser or composer, generated more purposeful self-evaluation (in line with Major, 2007), all three being indicators of empowerment (Petty, 2009).

The connections described in this subsection are presented in Table 7.1, where it is clear that the threads running through the central column, regarding composition, are autonomy in the process and ownership of the product.

Table 7.1

Connections Between Improvising, Composing, and Listening, Showing Autonomy and Ownership in Composition

Autonomy in Process; Ownership of Product		
Responsiveness and Intuition		
Improvising	Composing	Listening
Listening, and reacting in improvisation	Responsive continuation of a composition and generation of new material; conscious decision-making based on intuition; self-awareness	“Imaginative” listening drawing on “feeling-based knowing”, combining this with conscious understanding of decisions or responses
opposite: playing without interacting	opposite: over-planning, not knowing what to do next, or automatic, “comfort-zone” composing	opposite: uncertain response or limited ability to explain responses to music
Receptiveness to the Unfamiliar		
Improvising	Composing	Listening
Social risk-taking in improvisation	Concern with self-improvement, process-focussed	Curiosity and open-mindedness in listening
opposite: needing to be inconspicuous or to be told what to play	opposite: concern with knowing how to do it right first time, product-focussed	opposite: short, negative responses to music that does not remind the listener of anything
Understanding and Communicating Meaning in Music		
Improvising	Composing	Listening
Characterisation in improvisation	Detailed performance direction in composition	Personalisation in listening (combination of analytical and affective response)
opposite: bland or uncertain playing in improvisation	opposite: no decisions made to convey intentions about <i>how</i> to play	opposite: bias towards either affective or analytical without linking the two
Empowerment and Purposeful Evaluation		
Improvising	Composing	Listening
Conviction when playing	Self-awareness when discussing compositions, self-reliance in decision-making	Broad-ranging, articulate observations in listening
opposite: timidity when playing	opposite: self-doubt, teacher-reliance	opposite: limited listening responses

7.2 Answering the Research Questions

Each of the two studies whose findings are summarised above had their own research questions, with the following overarching questions' pertaining to the entire project:

RQ1: How can I, as an A-level Music teacher, best engage students in group improvisation in their composition lessons?

RQ2: How do group improvisation and imaginative listening influence the compositional process of A-level Music students?

Sub-questions pertaining to Study 1, "Preparing to Improvise", went some way towards answering RQ1 in that they investigated, respectively, the changes in students' perceptions of and participation in improvisation, thus providing some considerations for engaging students in group improvisation. The sub-questions pertaining to Study 2, "Developing a Multi-skill Curriculum for A-Level Composition", examined the meaningful connections between listening and composing, and group improvising and composing, mapping closely onto RQ2.

7.2.1 RQ1: How Can I, as an A-Level Music Teacher, Best Engage Students in Group Improvisation in Their Composition Lessons?

This question is not simply about how to enable every A-level student to feel comfortable participating in group improvisation; it is also about how to maximise the purposefulness of the activity in the context of A-level composition lessons. In short, this is a case of making it accessible for all, and rewarding both in the moment and in the longer-term context of a composition curriculum. It was essential to be mindful of students' self-efficacy in these group improvisation sessions, and to create a safe, "low-stakes" environment.

7.2.1.1 Enabling All Students to Consider Themselves Improvisers: Making Group Improvisation Possible and Purposeful.

My initial experience with the pilot group in 2018 was both blessed and unusual. Most A-level students are not so uninhibited and able to engage in group improvisation without due preparation. The activity needs to be structured carefully, to be made both possible and purposeful, so that everyone sees themselves as an improviser.

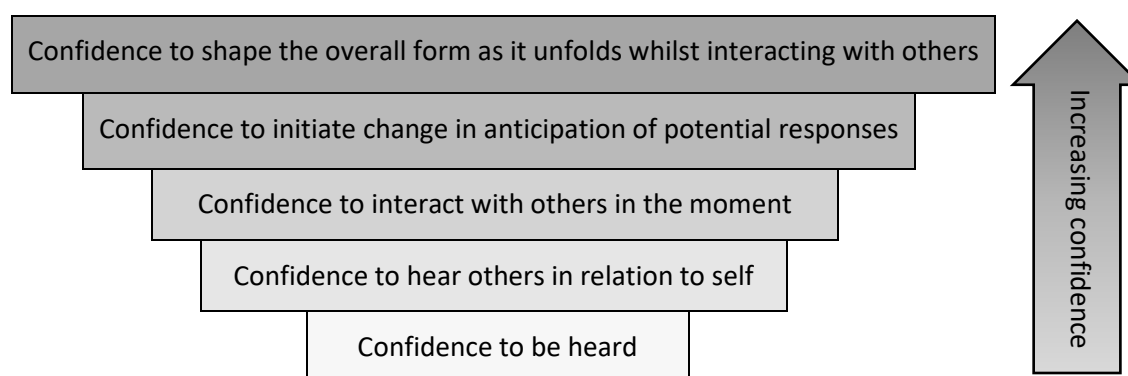
It is important to be aware of the fragility of a student's self-efficacy, defined by Bong and Clark (1999) in terms of the "cognitively perceived capability of the self" that takes account of prior attainment in the domain in question and measures the self against perceived "mastery criteria" (Bong & Clark, 1999, p. 9). The initial learning conference in session 1 of the first research cycle allowed students to share how they felt about improvising and, subsequently, to participate knowing that their capabilities and anxieties had been considered. This is a useful measure for combatting negative self-efficacy. Similarly, an understanding of the distinction between self-efficacy and self-concept is important, especially when complicated by adolescent self-consciousness. Self-concept entails comparison to others in terms of relative superiority, and is a perception of the self that incorporates "awareness and understanding of the self and its attributes" (cognitive self-concept) and feelings of self-worth (affective self-concept) (pp. 7-9).

As recognised by Westney (2003), self-conscious and anxious performers may be inhibited by a "what do you all think of me?" mindset (p. 150), a preoccupation that allows self-concept to overwhelm self-efficacy. It is essential to "de-skill" improvisation to the point where all students feel able to participate – invisibly, if necessary – without allowing the view of their own ability in comparison to others to become an emotional factor and ultimately prevent them from feeling able to participate rewardingly. An important part of

this seems to be avoiding style-specific or genre-based improvisation, especially where improvising is equated with “soloing”. This allows students to focus on exploring possibilities, finding a sound they like, and gradually feeling able to “be heard”, if that was not already their starting point. It may be useful to share the Improvisation Clock (see Chapter 4) or to create something similar as a group; similarly, the “Levels of Outward Playing” model that was an outcome of the first data analysis (see Chapter 4) could serve as a reminder that expectations are not about what to play, but how to feel.

Figure 7.1

Levels of “Outward” Playing



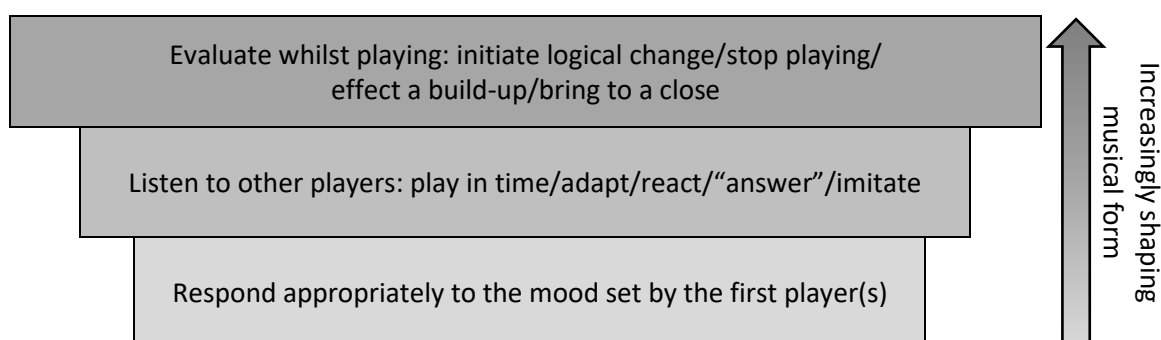
This model offers reward and acknowledges achievement at every level, whether it is feeling able to participate or challenging oneself at the upper levels. Activities were designed to allow more confident students to feel fully engaged, while less confident students could feel safe when stepping out of their comfort zones. This begins with finding “nonperfectionist” ways of participating (inspired by Westney, 2003) and making sure there are no expectations of skill in improvising, not to trivialise it but to facilitate participation. A crucial related factor for me, as teacher-researcher, is that I should never only observe, but always participate. I did not always lead or even play prominently, but I

was always ready to do both if it would encourage through example. In this sense, improvisation sessions become more like community music-making than A-level lessons.

It has also been beneficial both to the research group and to subsequent Year 12 students to have composition tasks related to improvisation tasks immediately, as the relevance of the group improvising is explicit and can be a persuasive factor for unwilling participants. The progressive model of responsive playing (Figure 7.2) offers some clear descriptors of development, thus making the activity itself feel purposeful. In its top-level descriptor, it is also directly relatable to individual composition, encouraging students to mimic this kind of responsiveness in their own composing process.

Figure 7.2

Levels of Responsive Playing



Another important factor is the inclusion of student discussion, firstly about themselves and, in later sessions, about their reflections on the music. This not only models self-assessment and planning, as discussed in Chapter 5 above, but also reveals a great deal about individuals' self-concept and how important it is to improve that in order to foster constructively critical self-evaluation that had a musical rather than emotional or personal focus. Discussion also gives greater ownership to the group, another aspect of community music-making.

7.2.2 RQ2: How Do Group Improvisation and Imaginative Listening Influence the Compositional Process of A-Level Music Students?

7.2.2.1 Group Improvisation.

Including group improvisation in these students' composition programme has revealed the value of collective thinking and exploration of possibilities, exposed the link between social risk-taking and creativity, and shown the importance of composing like an improviser – responsive composing, in-the-moment decisions, and allowing form to be emergent. Some students were aware of the impact of improvisation on their own compositional process; Oliver felt that he was a more expressive composer as a result, and Paul felt it had impacted not only on how easily he generated material but also how he developed it and approached the “pacing [and] overall structure” of his pieces. Eliza and Emily implied an attitude-shift in their composition as a result of the improvisations, with Eliza feeling more comfortable not “trying to make something sound perfect straight away”, and Emily not only feeling that she could take “new ideas of what [she] could include” but also that the improvising had made her “want to try to push [her]self out of [her] comfort zone”.

7.2.2.2 Imaginative Listening.

Including listening in the composition programme likewise invites students to compose like a listener, thinking about how they would like others to respond to their music, and to listen like a composer, considering how and why composers have affected them in certain ways. Analytical and affective listening are both important, and there is a link between this kind of “personalised” listening and the ready characterisation of material in compositions (and improvisations). The connection between musical observation and self-evaluation – and therefore creative self-concept and autonomy – is also apparent: taking ownership of one's

own music requires an ability to express intentions about sound, and aural skills and musical vocabulary are invaluable for understanding and communicating musical meaning.

When asked about this in their final questionnaire, most students did not recognise these connections, and understood the question to be asking about listening for inspiration. Those who mentioned this implied, but did not specify, the importance of aural acuity and musical articulacy for a composer. Only Eliza and Paul made connections between listening and composing that went beyond listening for inspiration; Eliza mentioned listening critically to her own compositions, and Paul recognised that “analysing and thinking in depth about pieces that I would usually subconsciously listen to provides a greater understanding of what pleases me as a listener”, going on to say that this then informed his compositions. Paul also mentioned the importance of having “a receptive ear” both as an improviser and as a composer.

7.2.2.3 Interleaving Improvising, Listening, and Composing.

Although I have separated improvising and listening in relation to composing in the above discussion, the findings in Chapter 5 show that an understanding of the three activities as interconnected is more appropriate. Interleaving the activities and tasks in the second research cycle imposed explicit connections between them, and what emerged from the data was a series of relationships between students’ behaviours and processes, attitudes, and mindsets, which combine to present a powerful case for the inclusion of all three competencies in a programme for teaching composition. Group-work presents possibilities; improvisation allows experimentation and fosters low-stakes attitudes. Listening presents more possibilities, develops awareness of the temporal experience, and informs the decision-making process. While some students may retain traits of socially-prescribed perfectionism, seeking approval and needing reassurance, this collection of lessons and

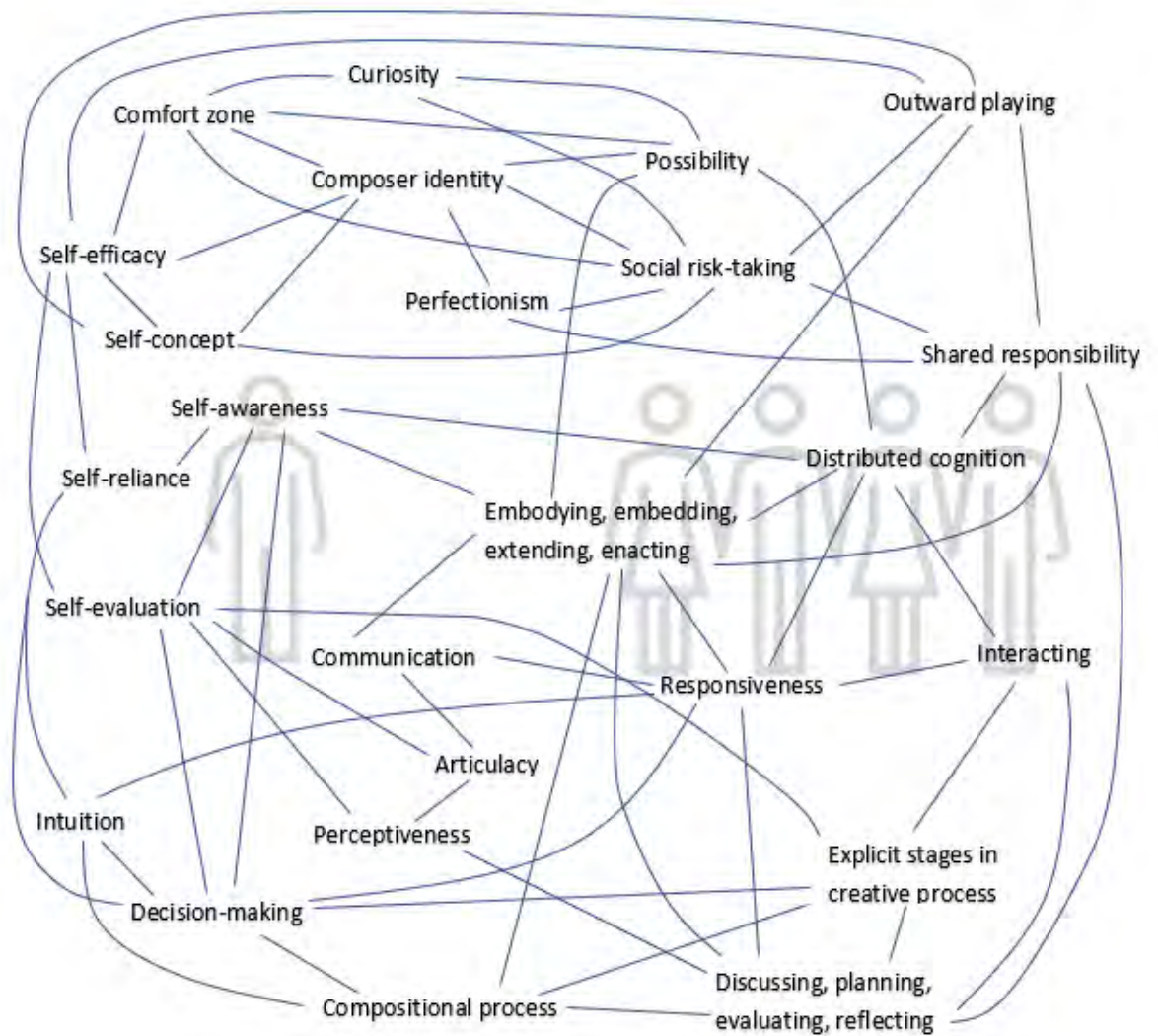
tasks draws the focus away from the individual pursuit of the perfect product, and turns it towards learner-development, process, and positive striving. Varied feedback and discussion, overcoming problems with productive solutions, a low-stakes attitude, and open-mindedness have all surfaced as catalysts for learning during the composition process. Creative autonomy is enhanced when students are asked to articulate their intentions, communicate how they imagined their music should sound, find solutions, try new things, and say what, when, and why decisions have been made.

7.3 Concepts Arising: The Self and the Group

Several concepts have recurred during the data analyses, discussions, and conclusions. These include aspects of composer identity, such as self-concept, the comfort zone, and risk-taking; they include exploratory behaviours such as possibility-thinking and curiosity; they refer to responsiveness in playing, composing, and listening; they draw together aspects of musical meaning through communication, characterisation, and articulacy; they include intuition, decision-making, the implicit, and the explicit. This brief overview is not exhaustive, but it demonstrates that these concepts – many of them qualities to be nurtured in an A-level composer – form not a list but a network. Some of them concern the individual self; some of them require a group context; some could be present in both. Figure 7.3's visual representation of these and other concepts shows that many qualities that can be nurtured directly appear on the "group" side (right-hand side), and these are connected to the "self" side (on the left), where inner qualities and attributes are much harder to teach.

Figure 7.3

A Network of the Individual and the Group



Centrally positioned in this network is the concept of 4E cognition (see Schiavio & van der Schyff, 2018; Schiavio et al., 2022), in which participants' creative experiences are embedded in their own musical identities and socio-musical backgrounds, embodied in their activities – imaginative listening or group improvising – and extended to their instruments and their peers in the context of group interaction, thus enacting their creative processes.

7.4 Limitations, Contribution to the Field, Recommendations, and Further Research

7.4.1 Limitations of the Research

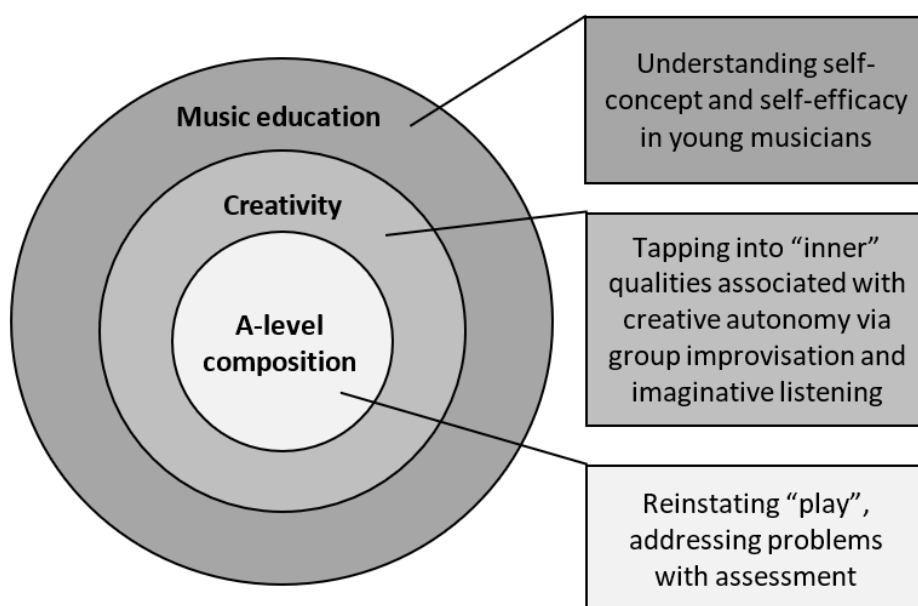
As with all action research, the two studies in this project have been specific to the researcher and the participant group, and therefore it is unlikely that an exact replica could be undertaken with another cohort. However, while a limitation of this kind of research is that its findings pertain to a small number of participants, the deep analysis of data gives rise to transferable insights into behaviours and recommendations for practice, alongside highlighting potential areas for further research.

7.4.2 Contributions to the Field

This study has been conducted in the context of music education, with respect to creativity in the specific domain of A-level composition (see Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4

Contribution to the Field and Wider Contexts



Although details of contributions to the field are couched in terms of A-level composition because of the precise context of this research, they pertain to a cross-section of all three fields – music education, creativity, and A-level composition. Contributions are discussed below, as follows:

- Nurturing “unteachable” qualities through group creativity and imaginative listening activities;
- Addressing some potentially problematic aspects of assessment criteria;
- Finding “ways in” to creative autonomy for composition students.

7.4.2.1 Nurturing “Unteachable” Qualities in Young Composers.

The reference to “inner” qualities and attributes in Figure 7.3 resonates with the Romantic notion of creativity as internal and innate, but this should not be read as propagating the “genius myth”, which has been superseded by an acknowledgement that creativity may be modelled, nurtured, and developed through repeated engagement and practice, and that there are multiple musical creativities to replace the view of creativity as a solo activity resulting in a fixed product (Burnard, 2012). However, I would argue that many of the attributes and dispositions in Figure 7.3 remain “inner” ones, and therefore present a challenge to a teacher hoping to find ways to foster their growth in students. These attributes include self-concept, self-awareness, intuition, and curiosity, among others – qualities that are hard to target directly. This study has shown that they can be nurtured *indirectly* via other means: positive self-concept can be fostered through validation and reward in group-work, as well as through improving skills of observation and articulacy, which have a bearing on productive self-evaluation; self-awareness can be developed through articulate discussion and reflection; intuitive responses in listening, or decision-making in composing, can be foregrounded by listening tasks that make “feeling-based

knowing” (Kaschub & Smith, 2009a) a matter of conscious choice, and through encouraging compositions that veer away from pre-determined, automatic decisions made in an over-familiar comfort zone; curiosity appears to be linked to risk-taking, which can be encouraged in a carefully curated group setting.

Whether making “sounding” decisions in the moment during improvisations or actively moving phrases around to place them in a satisfying order, the embedded, embodied, and extended aspects of musical creativity are at the heart of this enactive approach to teaching composition to A-level students. Every example above concerns interaction, making the creative process more of an “outer” one thanks to the group context. This builds on various theories of distributed cognition during the creative process (Sawyer & de Zutter, 2009; MacDonald & Wilson, 2020; Burrows, 2004) and adds planning and evaluating as factors that can be “externalised” within a group. These are fundamental to the development of autonomy in a composition student, as they encourage conscious decision-making and constructively critical and informed self-evaluation.

7.4.2.2 Addressing A-level Composing Assessment Criteria.

Many of the attributes that have surfaced during these two studies have been connected to communication of intentions, perceptiveness, conviction, ownership, and self-awareness. Revisiting the composing assessment criteria in Appendix 2, one can see these concepts couched in similar language: ownership and conviction are inherent in *assurance*, *confidence*, and *authority* (Edexcel); perceptiveness appears as *aural familiarity* (CIE), *perceptive use of style* (AQA), and *sophisticated use of musical elements* (OCR); self-awareness is evident in language such as *reflective*, *perceptive*, and *appropriate selection and understanding* of musical content (CIE; AQA; Edexcel: OCR); communication is a requirement not only in terms of written materials – score, report, or annotation – but also

in providing the listener with a *compelling musical experience* (AQA) and producing a recording that is a *vivid representation of the composer's ideas* (CIE). It is possible that following a composition curriculum like the one I have developed with these student participants could address these criteria which are most open to interpretation and least conducive to a tick-boxing, teaching-to-the-test approach.

7.4.2.3 “Ways in” to Creative Autonomy: Recommendations for Other Teachers.

This research has sought to address a problem perceived in my own classroom – cautious, teacher-reliant composition coupled with closed-minded listening – that I recognised as symptomatic of a wider issue concerning composing for external assessment. It has built on previous research into cognition related to creative processes, problems with teaching and assessing composition, *ways in* to listening, and what is to be gained from group *play*. It has resulted in insights into not only the creative process but also its deep connection with other aspects of musical “being, doing, and knowing” (van der Schyff et al., 2018, p. 1). These have enabled recognition of “ways in” to teaching A-level music students to develop creative autonomy, nurturing the outer, social, embodied, enactive, conscious, informed, critical, and articulate, so that the “inner” agent may be more self-reliant.

7.4.3 Recommendations

7.4.3.1 Recommendations to Composition Teachers.

Regarding a reshaping of the way A-level composition is taught so as to focus on the process and developing creative autonomy, recommendations to teachers are as follows:

1. Engage in group improvisation in order to model the creative process (but do not fixate on the quality of the music produced! Refer instead to outward and responsive playing).

2. Ask students to bring instruments to lessons, whether it is for group improvising, playing each other's compositions, or exploring possibilities in a one-to-one composition lesson.
3. Encourage the group to compose for each other so as to embed the importance of communication and clarity of intentions.
4. Invite everyone to offer feedback to their peers, for the purposes of articulacy, constructive criticism, and mutual trust.
5. Keep composition tasks short and avoid redrafting more than once.
6. Allow alternatives to standard notation but do not allow this to limit communication of intentions or effectiveness of feedback.
7. Encourage (firmly) people to leave their comfort zones and disturb their norms, in order to access a wider range of feedback, discover more criteria for self-assessment, avoid composing "automatically", and become more aware of decision-making.
8. Avoid "instruction" wherever possible; ask about intentions and use a combination of verbal explanation and practical demonstration to express and realise those.
9. Engage in listening and reflection as a group in order to tease out self-consciousness, develop articulacy, foster mutual respect and trust, and model the self-evaluation process.
10. Use listening as part of composition lessons, separately from the appraisal paper, exploring "ways in" so as to encourage personalised listening.
11. Take every opportunity to improve articulacy, as there is a proven link between this and creative self-awareness.

7.4.3.2 Recommendations to Examination Boards.

1. Discuss and give examples to illustrate the assessment criteria that do not lend themselves to straightforward interpretation;
2. If not already doing so, provide exemplar materials with detailed accounts of how these have been assessed (standardising training) as well as more general takeaway suggestions for teachers based on each piece;
3. Alongside training in standardising assessment (point 2 above), offer teachers composition courses to develop their own skills and confidence;

4. Consider providing recommended activities for students' creative development in preparation for their examined submissions, beyond a list that simply maps onto the assessment criteria, with guidance on *how*, as well as *what*, to teach;
5. Make it clear that, while it may refer to specific guidelines and mark schemes within certain categories such as technical control or musical structure, the assessment of composition is holistic and appreciative of musicality, and does not depend on personal taste.

Any of the above could be coordinated across multiple examination boards, thus ensuring consistency in the perception of composition for examination purposes.

7.4.3.3 Recommendations to Initial Teacher Training Providers.

1. Provide tuition for all primary teacher trainees to enable them to be musically literate and confident, so that music can be normalised alongside other subjects in the curriculum;
2. Make use of music for learning in every subject area at primary level;
3. For secondary music teacher trainees, offer lessons in composition with reference to the guidelines for teachers and examination boards above.

7.4.3.4 Recommendations to Policy-makers.

1. Recognise the value of play for learning at all levels;
2. Regarding the National Plan for Music in England, consider creativity as being of equal importance to instrumental learning;
3. Recognise and utilise the transferability of creative pursuits from any domain to another.

7.4.4 Subsequent Work and Further Research

It is my hope to be able to share the above recommendations for A-level composition with a wider teaching community by reshaping my findings into a shareable programme primarily aimed at Year 12 students, by offering workshops, and by publishing selected findings. Given the accessibility of the activities in the "Preparing to Improvise" sessions,

beginning this work with younger examination classes (Year 10, the first year of GCSE, aged 14-15) could also be appropriate, and would require some adaptation to match their level of musical understanding, vocabulary, and observation.

There are further areas to address which have arisen during the data analysis, including the question of whether confidence with notation has any correlation to musical understanding and self-awareness, and what effect this might have on students' access to the highest marks for composition. Listening Response 3.2 and its accompanying composition task have the potential to be developed into a standalone study of creative decision-making, intuition, and the importance of articulacy to self-awareness. It could also be interesting to present Listening Responses 1 and 2 to a cohort with a wider range of age or musical experience, to examine any potential correlations between this and their professed familiarity, preference, and interest. In the field of 4E cognitive science and its application to music pedagogy, there is scope for using group improvising and listening activities like LR3.2 to model the enactive aspects of the individual creative process.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Risk-assessment and Set-up of Room

Risk assessment for Year 12 and 13 practical music lessons during COVID-19 pandemic

Member of staff responsible: Jen Hartley	Head of Department: [Redacted]	Line Manager: [Redacted]
Risk assessment endorsed by: [Redacted]	Date: 25/07/2020	Review Date: 25/10/2020

Activity: small ensemble, including blown instruments and voices

Identified risks: spread of COVID-19 via airborne or surface transmission

Risk calculated using the following matrix (based on templates published by Music Mark):				
Likelihood more less	Risk rating:			Control measures
	5 4 3 2 1	1-6 8-12 15-25	Green Amber Red	
	better 1 2 3 4 5 worse			Monitor to ensure control measures are implemented consistently and that the rating remains valid. Try to identify additional controls to reduce the risk. Ensure that control measures are implemented consistently and look to improve by the next review. Cease this activity until additional controls can be put in place to manage the risk.




Notes:

- Severity has been calculated as 5 if there is a risk to people at home through transporting an instrument, as there might be older and more vulnerable people at home.
- Severity has been calculated as 3 if the risk is to pupils and teacher (JCH).

Initial requirements:

- All pupils to have a designated storage box for their accessories, such as sticks, picks and spare strings. This is to avoid their being unable to participate if they forget something or break a string, as well as to avoid sharing equipment. They may also wish to keep their own wipes in this box.
- RR to be marked out with tape to show where pupils and teacher should be in each session.
- Ideally, plastic screens will be available for use in cases specified below.
- Each space should have its own music stand and chair/ stool which are wiped down after use.
- RR should have clearly visible instructions (see end of document).
- RR windows to be accessible for easy opening (will require steps as the existing bench is too low for JCH to reach).
- Usual rules about not sharing or borrowing stationery apply.
- Where no distance is specified, normal social distancing applies.

Description of activity	Initial measures	Risk of transmission	Who is at risk?	Estimated likelihood x severity	Measures to mitigate risk of transmission	Adjusted estimated likelihood x severity	Additional recommended precautions
Playing string instruments (violin, viola, cello, bass, guitar, bass guitar, harp)	No shared instruments or equipment. Pupils bring own from home or identify one at school for their sole use. Pletra/picks, spare strings, and other accessories to be kept in storage box.	Surface transmission through transporting instrument to and from school.	All, including people at home	2 x 5 (10)	Cases to be left in the room on arrival at school and immediately wiped down. Reverse procedure on leaving school. Pupils to wash hands/ use hand sanitiser before taking instrument out both at school and at home.	1 x 5 (5)	If measures are not possible or anxiety remains, pupils may borrow a school instrument for their sole use, assuming one is available.
Playing percussion instruments	No sharing of instruments or equipment in the same session. Pupils have their own sticks and mallets or borrow them from school to keep in storage box.	Surface transmission through transporting sticks and mallets to and from school. Possible surface transmission when a different group uses the room.	All, including people at home	2 x 5 (10)	Where possible, sticks and mallets to be left at school. Where not possible, all to be wiped down before and after playing. All instruments and stools to be wiped down after use.	1 x 5 (5)	Pupils may wish to wear gloves when handling percussion instruments that need to be adjusted or moved (e.g. for optimum height or angle).
Playing keyboard instruments	No sharing of instruments in the same session. Pianists to have one piano or keyboard designated for their use in each session. Teacher not to touch the same keyboard.	Surface transmission when a different group uses the room. <i>Note that there is usually a minimum of 22 hours between sessions involving different groups.</i>	Pupils	3 x 3 (9)	All keys to be wiped after playing. Plastic keys may be wiped with disinfectant wipes; other keys may be wiped with cloth soaked in soapy water and dried after 30 seconds.	1 x 3 (3)	If anxious, pupils can have a designated piano that is not used by any member of the other group.

Playing brass instruments or saxophones	No shared instruments or equipment: pupils bring own from home or identify one at school for their sole use. Accessories such as valve oil and reeds may kept in storage box.	Airborne transmission	All	4 x 3 (12)	Minimum of 2m between the end of the bell and other people. Recommendation is 3m for extra safety. All players must have a pack of paper towels and waste disposal bags for emptying water vents. Nothing should be emptied onto the floor.	Players may purchase a stretch-fabric cover for the bell, which would function in a similar way to a face mask. Plastic screen in front of bell. <i>Note that there is only one trombonist in each group.</i> Plastic screens. <i>Note that there is only one flautist in the two groups, and no other known woodwind players.</i>	
Playing woodwind instruments	No shared instruments or equipment: pupils bring own from home or identify one at school for their sole use. Accessories such as valve oil and reeds may kept in storage box.	Airborne transmission	All	4 x 3 (12)	Minimum of 1.5m between these players and other people. Flautists also need a recommended 0.8m to their right (end of flute). Recommendation is around 2m for all woodwind.	<i>Note that there is only one flautist in the two groups, and no other known woodwind players.</i>	
Singing		Airborne transmission	All	4 x 3 (12)	When the group includes singers, they should face in the same direction as each other and be at least 3m from other players. Plastic screens strongly advised.	If prohibitive anxiety about airborne transmission from singers remains, these students will be asked to play their second instrument.	
Conclusion:	It is possible to proceed with appropriate measures in place, as stipulated above. Suggested measures reduce the likelihood of transmission to very low in all cases.						
Signed:		J. Hartley	Date: 25/07/2020				

To be displayed in the Recital Room: Instructions for practical music lessons

General good practice

Only use your designated area in the RR. Keep all accessories (see below) in your designated box, within your area.

You are strongly advised to bring your own packet of wipes and, if needed, hand sanitiser and keep these in your box.

Wipe down the music stand, chair/ stool and screen, if applicable, after the session.

Bringing your own instrument

If you have brought your own instrument it should be left here for the duration of the school day.

Wipe down the case on arrival and before departure, especially the handle.

Wash your hands/ use hand sanitiser before you take out the instrument in school or at home.

Using a school instrument

Under NO circumstances should instruments be shared or used as a one-off solution to your forgetting your own.

If you are using a hand-held school instrument it should be labelled as yours for the duration of the special COVID-19 measures and left in the area where you play each lesson.

Wipe down the case after use, especially the handle.

Sticks, mallets and accessories (picks, spare strings, tuners, valve oil, footstools, mutes, etc)

You may leave these in a designated box in the RR. This includes any that you borrow from school, which will then become yours for the duration of this arrangement. **You should leave them in a designated box and take nothing home if your forgetfulness will cause you to be unable to participate in these sessions.**

Keyboards

You should only use the piano or keyboard that has been designated for your use.

Wipe down the keys and buttons and stools. If these are plastic (most digital pianos and all keyboards), use antiseptic wipes as normal. If not (acoustic pianos and organ), use a cloth soaked in soapy water and wrung out, wait 30 seconds, and wipe with a dry cloth.

Percussion

No sharing of instruments during the same session.

Wipe down instruments after use, especially anything that has been touched by hand (stools, wind chimes, cymbals, communal beaters such as the gong or bass drum beaters, etc).

Woodwind, brass and voice

If you have a sneeze screen, wipe it down after the session.

Brass players should vent water onto paper towels which are disposed of in a waste bag that only you handle. Sanitise hands afterwards.



Appendix 2. Example Criteria for A-level Composition

Exam Board	A-level composition criteria (for AQA, CIE and Edexcel these are top-band descriptors; the OCR specification is not similarly formatted)
AQA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the composition has a sustained mastery of technical control. the quality of contrasting ideas and their development creates a commanding structure that is more than just a standard form, providing a musical journey. musical elements are used with flair and imagination, complementing each other with strong creative purpose to give a consistently fluent and successful result. the style of the composition is convincing, fluent and used perceptively to give a compelling musical experience. the music is communicated fluently on paper with comprehensive score or commanding annotation.
CIE*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report* is fully detailed, coherent and reflective. Influences and sources are identified, and the sustained analysis is relevant, appropriate and effective. Strong and creative shaping of ideas, showing detailed aural familiarity with relevant listening. Imaginative and sensitive control of structural events. Strong use of techniques to combine, develop and extend materials and to refine these, imaginatively. Wholly idiomatic use of medium, with a broad range of inventive and varied textures/figuration. A clear and articulate presentation of the score; OR A comprehensive and detailed written account. The recording communicates a vivid representation of the composer's ideas.
Edexcel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Musical ideas are created, developed and extended with assurance and imagination throughout. Musical elements and ideas all contribute to a sense of wholeness with a sophisticated sense of fluency, and a mature balance of unity and variety throughout. The musical elements are used with maturity and confidence to create contrasted and well-paced moods, atmosphere and effects that are communicated successfully throughout. The control of musical elements is assured and sophisticated throughout. Stylistic devices and conventions for the chosen genre/style have been selected appropriately and handled convincingly throughout. Forces and textures are handled idiomatically and exploited and varied with creativity and authority.
OCR	<p>Learners should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create and develop musical ideas with technical control and expressive understanding. compose music that develops musical ideas and shows understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition. compose music that is musically convincing and shows a sophisticated use of musical elements in combination. compose music that makes creative use of musical ideas and shows understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.

* CIE criteria shown are for the optional Extended composition unit, whose criteria differ from the mandatory composition unit only in the requirement for a written report and in a slight rewording of the 4th bullet-point, which appears as "Strong and inventive use of techniques to combine, extend and connect materials" in the mandatory composition unit.

A highlighted version of this table is shown below for the purposes of comparing requirements and assessment language. **Bright blue** indicates terms that relate to ownership, conviction, communication of intentions, perceptiveness, and self-awareness.

Exam Board	A-level composition criteria (for AQA, CIE and Edexcel these are top-band descriptors; the OCR specification is not similarly formatted)
AQA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the composition has a sustained mastery of technical control. the quality of contrasting ideas and their development creates a commanding structure that is more than just a standard form, providing a musical journey. musical elements are used with flair and imagination, complementing each other with strong creative purpose to give a consistently fluent and successful result. the style of the composition is convincing, fluent and used perceptively to give a compelling musical experience. the music is communicated fluently on paper with comprehensive score or commanding annotation.
CIE*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report* is fully detailed, coherent and reflective. Influences and sources are identified, and the sustained analysis is relevant, appropriate and effective. Strong and creative shaping of ideas, showing detailed aural familiarity with relevant listening. Imaginative and sensitive control of structural events. Strong use of techniques to combine, develop and extend materials and to refine these, imaginatively. Wholly idiomatic use of medium, with a broad range of inventive and varied textures/figuration. A clear and articulate presentation of the score; OR A comprehensive and detailed written account. The recording communicates a vivid representation of the composer's ideas.
Edexcel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Musical ideas are created, developed and extended with assurance and imagination throughout. Musical elements and ideas all contribute to a sense of wholeness with a sophisticated sense of fluency, and a mature balance of unity and variety throughout. The musical elements are used with maturity and confidence to create contrasted and well-paced moods, atmosphere and effects that are communicated successfully throughout. The control of musical elements is assured and sophisticated throughout. Stylistic devices and conventions for the chosen genre/style have been selected appropriately and handled convincingly throughout. Forces and textures are handled idiomatically and exploited and varied with creativity and authority.
OCR	<p>Learners should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create and develop musical ideas with technical control and expressive understanding. compose music that develops musical ideas and shows understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition. compose music that is musically convincing and shows a sophisticated use of musical elements in combination. compose music that makes creative use of musical ideas and shows understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.

* CIE criteria shown are for the optional Extended composition unit, whose criteria differ from the mandatory composition unit only in the requirement for a written report and in a slight rewording of the 4th bullet-point, which appears as "Strong and inventive use of techniques to combine, extend and connect materials" in the mandatory composition unit.

Appendix 3. Participant Information Sheet and Consent Forms

The Participant Information Sheet was circulated before a few changes, including the decision not to involve year 13 students and the decision to start immediately in September 2020 with year 12 on the “Preparing to Improvise” programme. It also shows a working title that is different from the final one.

Participant Information Sheet
Title: Critical Creativity: listening to and composing new music
Date: June 2020
Invitation
You are being invited to take part in my action research project. It is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your parents/guardians if you wish. Please ask me if anything is not clear, or you would like more information. After reading, you may keep this information sheet.
Project
The aim of the action research project is to explore how A-level Music students make sense of using improvisation in the context of (a) their individual composition and (b) their listening to unfamiliar music. Action research involves collecting qualitative data, and typically involves very in-depth study with a few participants. The data collected will include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ an initial questionnaire to establish your musical experience and background;➤ copies of written responses to music you listen to;➤ audio- or video-recordings of group improvisations that the group does;➤ audio- or video-recordings and transcripts of discussions that take place in class;➤ scores, recordings and programme notes of individual compositions;➤ my own journals and records of experience from the perspective of the teacher-researcher.
Characteristics of participants
You have been asked to participate in this research because you are taking A-level Music. You and the other members of the Year 12 and 13 groups have been asked to participate (a total of 11 students at the time of producing this information sheet).
Voluntary participation
It is up to you if you want to take part in this project or not. If you decide against it, you will still be involved in lessons as normal, and your data will not be collected alongside that of the students who are participating. If you decide to participate, you will be given this information sheet to keep and a consent form to sign. You are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason, either by physically leaving the group or by withdrawing consent for me to use whatever contribution you have already made to the research. You will not be penalised in any way for not wishing to take part.
Nature of participation
If you are taking your A-level Music in June 2021, the research is due to start in June 2020, COVID-19 allowing, or September 2020 if not. Data collection will be finished by April 2021. If you are taking your A-level Music in June 2022, the research is due to start in January 2021. Data collection will be finished by January 2022.

<p>The research will take place in your scheduled composition and analysis lessons with me, and has been designed to contribute to your A-level Music studies, not to detract from or impinge on them. There are currently two intense research periods planned, with the estimated duration of a few weeks each.</p>
<p>Potential risks to participants</p>
<p>There are no foreseeable risks to participants.</p>
<p>Potential benefits to participants</p>
<p>The nature of action research is that it aims to address a perceived “problem” by developing an improvement in practice. In this case, the “problem” I have perceived is in how my A level students (a) respond to new music (by which I mean unfamiliar and contemporary music) and (b) compose at this high level. The “practice” that I wish to improve is my own teaching of both aspects of the A-level course. By participating in this research, you will be helping to shape that improvement, and will have the benefit of being involved in critical discussions and creative activities.</p>
<p>Possible termination of research</p>
<p>If my project has to be terminated for any reason and therefore your contribution is no longer required, you will be informed and given the reason.</p>
<p>Confidentiality and anonymity</p>
<p>If you agree to take part in my project, I will ask you and your parent/guardian to sign a form giving your informed consent to participate. You will be given one copy of this to keep, and I will keep the other copy. This will give me permission to collect and store your data and information for the purposes of the research project only. Your information will be kept strictly confidential, and all audio and video recordings, transcripts, and copies of work will be stored and backed up on password-protected drives. If you would prefer not to be identifiable or visible in video recordings, you have the option to make this clear at the time of recording.</p> <p>Data and information from you will only be attributed to you by name with your explicit permission. You may choose to be named in full, labelled by initials, or given a pseudonym. If you do not wish to be identified, this will preclude your participation in any future presentations.</p>
<p>Storing personal data and information</p>
<p>Your personal data and any information that you provide for the purposes of the research will be stored securely on password-protected hard drives for three years after completion of the PhD, which is due to be at the end of 2022. At the end of the period it will be destroyed. If the research period is extended, you will be informed.</p>
<p>Outputs</p>
<p>Your data and contribution to the research will form a significant part of the write-up for my PhD thesis, and will be shared in the interim in conference presentations or shorter articles that I may write.</p>
<p>Debriefing</p>
<p>If you are taking your A-level Music in June 2021, you will be contacted by email when the findings of the research are ready to share. If you are taking your A-level music in June 2022, this information will be most likely be shared with you during the course of your lessons with me. I will email all of you the link to the electronic thesis when it has been examined and finalised.</p>
<p>Ethical approval</p>
<p>The RNCM Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed this project and granted ethical approval for it to be carried out.</p>

Contact details

Researcher

Jen Hartley

Research Student,

Royal Northern College of Music

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jennie.hartley@student.rncm.ac.uk

Tel: 019242 7175 (school)

Supervisor

Dr John Habron

Head of Music Education,

Royal Northern College of Music

john.habron@rncm.ac.uk

Tel: 0161 907 5286

Thank you for reading to the end of this information sheet.

Participant Consent Form
Title: Critical Creativity: listening to and composing new music
Name of researcher: Jennie Hartley
Participant identification code for this project: <i>[to be filled in by researcher]</i>

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated June 2020 for the action research project in which I have been asked to take part and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. I give the researcher permission to collect information about me and that I provide for the purposes of the research project as long as all information about me will be kept confidential, stored securely and destroyed three years after the completion of the thesis.

4. I give the researcher permission to contact me on the following email if, before the debriefing, I have left XXXXXXXXXX School and no longer use that email address.
[please write here]

5. I do / do not [delete as appropriate] give permission for information I provide to be attributed to me by name. If *not*, I would prefer to be referred to by my initials / a pseudonym [delete as appropriate].

6. (a) I do / do not [delete as appropriate] give permission for audio-recordings in which I am identifiable to be played in the course of reporting the research.

(b) I do / do not [delete as appropriate] give permission for video-recordings in which I am identifiable to be played in the course of reporting the research.

7. I agree to take part in the above-named research.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

Signatures

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of parent/guardian	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of researcher	Date	Signature

Headteacher Permission Form

Title: Critical Creativity: listening to and composing new music

Name of researcher: Jennie Hartley

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated June 2020 for the action research project in which students of the [REDACTED] Trust Schools have been asked to take part, and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that their participation is voluntary and that they are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I have read and approve of the consent form for participants.
4. I can be contacted on the following email address.
[please write here]
5. I give permission for the above-named research to take place with students of my school.

Signatures

Name of headteacher

Date

Signature

Institution

Name of researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 4. Remote Improvisation Activities.

Remote Improvisation Activity 1

In this activity, participants will be sent a track to which they should improvise a new part, to be played at the same time.

Everyone should record a part and send it to Mrs Hartley by the end of the session.

Participants are encouraged to listen first, and to imagine characters or scenarios that fit the music they hear. This may inform the part they decide to play or sing.

This activity is not intended to be spontaneous improvisation, and everybody is allowed to listen several times and to spend time working out what they want to play. However, a limit of four takes is advised, in order to prevent multiple frustrated retakes!

Based on previous research, I have noticed that the following aspects of playing seem to represent responsive playing in the moment:

- Being aware of dynamic and textural changes
- Hearing little motifs and imitating them
- Matching what you play to the mood of the piece or the section

More advanced group improvisation entails:

- Being aware of the overall form of the piece – where it has come from, and where it is going to
- Developing your own part whilst listening and responding to others
- Knowing when not to play, and how to end

Play or sing your part whilst listening to the track through earphones, and make sure that the backing track is not audible on your recording.

Share your recording via OneDrive if it is too big to email or attach on Teams.

You will be asked to participate in a discussion after all parts have been collated, including:

- Your first impressions of this piece
- How you created your part – where you got your ideas, what you thought would be suitable, etc
- What you think of the final version, with all parts in it

All of your recordings and your discussion will be retained and used as part of the data collection for this research.

Remote Improvisation Activity 2

In this activity, participants will be sent a track to which they should improvise a new part, to be played at the same time. Unlike activity 1, participants will receive an updated track one by one, only adding their part when they can hear what the previous person did. For this reason, there is a schedule for everybody, and the group will be split so that no one is kept waiting for too long.

Participants are encouraged to listen first, and to imagine characters or scenarios that fit the music they hear. This may inform the part they decide to play or sing.

This activity is not intended to be spontaneous improvisation, and everybody is allowed to listen several times and to spend time working out what they want to play. However, a limit of four takes is advised, in order to prevent multiple frustrated retakes and so as not to keep the next person waiting.

In this activity, I am looking for response to other players, so that each added part connects in some way with what has gone before.

Reminders from last week that good ensemble improvisation entails:

- Being aware of dynamic and textural changes
- Hearing little motifs and imitating them
- Matching what you play to the mood of the piece or the section
- Being aware of the overall form of the piece – where it has come from, and where it is going to
- Developing your own part whilst listening and responding to others
- Knowing when not to play, and how to end

Play or sing your part whilst listening to the track through earphones, and make sure that the backing track is not audible on your recording.

Your track needs to be returned promptly to Mrs Hartley so that the next person can start their contribution.

Share your recording via OneDrive if it is too big to email or attach on Teams.

You will be asked to participate in a discussion after all parts have been collated.

All of your recordings and your discussion will be retained and used as part of the data collection for this research.

Appendix 5. Questionnaires and Learning Conferences

Initial Questionnaire

This questionnaire helps to build a profile of each research participant's musical background. It aims to discover information that might not otherwise become evident during the course of A-level lessons or the research activities. Details of your performing background, your listening preferences and your composition and improvisation experience are really helpful in contextualising the research findings.

Please give as much or as little information as you like, and feel free to omit any questions that you do not want to answer. For longer answers, the boxes should expand as you type.

Many thanks for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. Anticipated completion time: 30-45 minutes.

Personal background							
Name							
Age	(y)	(m)		Ethnicity			
Gender	Male		Female	Other:	Prefer not to say	
Participant identification code for this project:				<i>[to be filled in by researcher]</i>			
Musical Background and experience: performing and listening							
What instruments do you play? Please include voice as an instrument.							
Instrument				Years played and/or grade most recently taken or currently working towards (include information such as self-taught)			
				<i>You can add further rows by clicking in this cell and pressing the tab key</i>			

How did you begin your music-making? You might consider members of your family, friendship groups, faith communities, school music, and so on.

Are you in any groups that regularly play either formally or for fun and/or rehearse and/or perform together? If so, please give information below.

Group and type of music played	Your role in the group	How long you have played in it
		<i>You can add further rows by pressing the tab key</i>

What do you like to listen to? Please give as much information as you like, e.g. if this depends on circumstances, mood, etc.

Composing experience

When did you start to compose, and what was the stimulus or motivator?

What kind of things did you start out composing?

If you have done composition in school, please describe the composition you did at:

Primary school	
KS3 (years 7-9)	
KS4 (years 10-11)	

KS5 (year 12 +)	
Do you compose or arrange music out of school? If yes, please answer the questions below.	
For what do you write (e.g. for your band, for a composition class elsewhere, for competitions, for one-off events, for personal satisfaction, etc)	
Are the compositions you write out of school different from the ones you write in school? If so, is there a reason for that?	
How do you usually compose? (e.g. what software do you use, do you write things by hand, do you start at an instrument, do you memorise ideas and then note them down, etc?)	
Do you like composing? Please say why/why not.	
Improvising experience	
Do you have any experience of improvising?	
If so, please give as much information as possible: instrument, context (e.g. lessons, bands, composition classes, on your own, what kind of thing you improvise, etc), how long you have been doing it, etc.	
Do you like improvising? Please say why/why not.	

Many thanks for completing this questionnaire. These responses will be very helpful. Please email your completed questionnaire to jennie.hartley@student.rncm.ac.uk.

I am looking forward to the next stages of working with you on this research.

Learning Conference 1 (15/03/21)

About composition

Please share some good advice that you have been given about composing.

What works for you when you are composing?

How does your composition relate to other aspects of your musical life, such as performing, A level studies, listening (for studies or for pleasure), or anything else?

What barriers or frustrations do you sometimes face in composition?

What are your strategies for overcoming difficulties?

Describe what you like about one of your own compositions.

How would you like the "ideal" composition teacher to help you?

Learning Conference 2 (15/06/21)

About judgement and aesthetics

What do you think makes a “good” piece of music?

Is that the same as what you like?

How does this match what makes a “good” film or painting?

Is that easier or harder for you to describe?

How do you think your compositions are judged at school/by examiners?

Return to what you said made a “good” piece of music.

Does it match how you think your compositions are judged?

Do you think this is the same at KS3? KS4? KS5? Professional level? Different genres?

Have you read the exam board criteria?

Can we have a go at explaining what some of the terms and phrases mean?

Do you think you know what is required of you as an A-level composer?

Final Questionnaire (02/07/21)

Questions about our lessons this year

You have completed nearly a year of improvisation, listening tasks, and composition.

Improvisation has obviously dominated our lesson time in school, but we also did two improvisation tasks during the January lockdown (remember them?).

Listening tasks included hearing 6 pieces back in October and being given a number of ways to respond – graphic score, story, musical details, etc, and doing a similar thing but choosing how to respond, more recently. Both looked like this example on the right:

Example 1

After listening and completing your response, select an answer for each of the following:

	1	2	3	4	5
I already know this piece	1	2	3	4	5
I like this music	1	2	3	4	5
I often listen to music like this	1	2	3	4	5
This is a familiar style to me	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this for relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this out of interest	1	2	3	4	5

You also did two “putting phrases in order” tasks on Cubase.



Compositions have included:

- Something for the whole group to play (e.g. Jonny: Toaster piece, Eliza: Whale song, Paul: Bandersnatch)
- Butterfly compositions
- Motif monologues
- Variations on a folk tune
- A pair of vignettes with a presentation
- A 2-part Study on 5 notes

1. To what extent do you feel that the improvisation has related to your individual composing?

2. To what extent do you think the listening tasks have related to the improvising?

3. To what extent do you feel that the listening tasks have related to your individual composing?

Listening Response 1 (05 and 12/01/21)

This may be spread over two sessions, to avoid fatigue

Purpose: to see what kind of responses the students have to certain music, and how they use language to describe that. This is not an exercise to invite preference and judgement, although this may be evident in their responses; it is to gauge how they make sense of the music.





They will be allowed to listen to each excerpt a maximum of three times.





Students will be encouraged to write descriptions, draw pictures, make connections, create graphic scores, imagine narratives, or any other kind of response.

The pieces have been chosen to include the following:

- Major, minor, chromatic, dissonant
- Solo, band, chamber ensemble, small and large orchestra, a cappella voices
- A range of eras and styles, including Renaissance, neo-Classical, Romantic, Modern, Jazz (-influenced), Middle-eastern (traditional, fusion)
- A range of tempos, tonalities, devices, and characters
- Music that might be familiar alongside music that is likely to be unlike anything they normally listen to
- Music that will allow description of recognisable devices and music which will be harder to describe

Students will be told that this is part of their background profile, to show me what they know, what they can hear, how they express their observations, and so on. They will be reassured that there are no hidden expectations, and we will look at examples of how they might respond to a piece of music in various ways, including with analogy (maybe to something they find easier to describe), pictures, graphic scores, timelines, and free description. They will be encouraged to use musical vocabulary if they want to, but will be told that this is not a requirement. They can complete their responses by hand or at a computer. They will also be given the option to say whether we continue after the first 4 pieces, or whether we complete this in two sessions, as I want to get the best possible responses from them, and this can be mentally quite tiring. It will be made clear that their responses will be retained and used in future presentations and in the final write-up for the PhD.

1. Yared, Gabriel: Love Theme (Cold Mountain)				 1. Yared Cold Mountain Love Theme	
Film music	Small orchestra	Slow	Romantic	Soft	
Encourages an emotional response to intense high strings, oboe timbre, harp accompaniment figure, minor key, and may encourage use of technical language such as soloists in counterpoint, arpeggio figure, suspension, unexpected modulation near the end.					
2. Zappa, Frank: King Kong				 2. Frank Zappa King Kong.mp3	
Jazz	Small band	Fast	Exciting	Loud	
Encourages focus on instrumentation and rhythm. Some might give detail about use of drum kit, specific instruments in the horn section, cross rhythms, and syncopation. Extended saxophone improvisation over a repeated chord at the end of the excerpt should elicit some varied responses, as recognisable devices are not obvious in this.					
3. Gershwin, George: Prelude no.3 for piano				 3. Gershwin prelude for piano no.3.mp3	
Solo piano	Jazz influence	Fast	Clearly structured		
Focus on tonality (switches between major and minor) and rhythm (syncopation). Also has features which would invite use of relatively basic vocabulary, such as pauses, spread chords, stride bass, appoggiaturas, sequence, repetitive structure, inner chromatic countermelody, original at a higher octave. Might invoke a narrative response on account of the tonality changes and recurrent pauses.					
4. Gesualdo, Carlo: Moro lasso (Sesto libro di madrigali, XVII)				 4. Gesualdo moro lasso.mp3	
Choral	Renaissance	Slow	Chromatic		
Could invite some very specific vocabulary such as a cappella, chromatic, imitation, melisma. As students are very unlikely to have studied Renaissance music, they will be unfamiliar with the style and the level of chromaticism might take them by surprise. Possibly one for a more emotional response.					

5. Horner, James: The Sinking (Titanic)			 5. Horner Titanic.mp3
Film music	Large orchestra	Loud	Dramatic
This one might encourage a narrative response, as it is very dramatic in its use of irregular rhythms and abrasive percussion and urgent brass.			
6. Stravinsky, Igor: Andantino (Pulcinella)			 6. Stravinsky Pulcinella Suite Andan
Neo-Classical	Chamber ensemble	Refined	Major
This is another that might encourage them to focus on instrumentation and devices that they recognise, such as imitation, sequence and pedal notes, as well recognisable articulation, and techniques.			
7. Khairat, Omar: Egyptian overture			 7. Omar Khairat Egyptian overture.mp3
Strings and percussion	Fast	Minor	Middle-eastern
Very distinctive eastern character owing to the melodic repetition and percussion. A lot of percussion to recognise. Encourages a response in relation to rhythm, tradition, instrumentation, and texture. Could also provoke a dance- or film-related response.			
8. Prokofiev, Sergei: piano concerto no.3, op.11, 1 st mvt			 8. Prokofiev piano concerto no.3 1st mvt
Concerto	Dissonant	Modern	Large orchestra
This could easily be a narrative, film-like response because of the rapidly changing textures and the drama of the dynamics and dissonance. Some distinctive instrumentation, including oboe and clarinet solos, piano soloist, castanets.			

Listening Response 1

This will form part of your background profile, to show me what you know, what you can hear, how you express your observations, and so on. There are no hidden expectations. You are encouraged to use musical vocabulary if you want to, but this is not a requirement. You have the option to respond with a drawing or a graphic score, as well as writing a description of what you hear. The description can include comparisons to music you already know, imagined scenarios, a narrative, or a storyboard. You can complete your responses by hand or at a computer, and may be asked to word-process passages of text afterwards. Your responses will be retained and used in future presentations and in the final write-up for the PhD.

Listen to each excerpt 3 times. Do not feel the need to start writing/drawing immediately.

Your name	Participant ID <i>[for my use only]</i>	
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Don't forget to fill in the 1 – 5 scores for each piece

[Template for response to each piece:]

Excerpt 1					
After listening and completing your response, select an answer for each of the following:					
	not at all				definitely
I already know this piece	1	2	3	4	5
I like this music	1	2	3	4	5
I often listen to music like this	1	2	3	4	5
This is a familiar style to me	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this for relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this out of interest	1	2	3	4	5

Listening Response 2 (27/04/21)

Imaginative response to three pieces of music

Students listen to three excerpts of music that is likely to be unfamiliar to them

Instructions to students

You are encouraged to think in terms of those things when you are writing your description of what you hear. Please do include imaginative responses such as narratives and characters, and you may make represent some of what you mean with pictures or graphics, but the overall descriptive should be analytical and make good use of musical vocabulary and observations.

Students will be told that this will form part of a portfolio of listening responses, joining the task they completed earlier in the research project, when they responded freely to 8 excerpts. I will explain the reason for my choosing these three composers (related to the Art Music Area of Study for A level). They will be reminded of how they have talked about and aurally analysed their own improvisations so far, with a focus, perhaps, on the relationship between parts or the overall journey or narrative of a piece. This could provide a starting point for their listening now, with the aim of making it slightly more focused than their responses to the 8 excerpts. They will be reminded that their responses, in whatever form they are handed in, will be retained and used alongside other data.

Rationale for the pieces

The aim is to match what they are asked to study for the Art Music unit, as this is music that I noticed students find hard to access. I have therefore chosen two pieces by composers they will study (MacMillan and Messiaen) and one piece that is reminiscent of another of the set composers (Shostakovich).

01 MacMillan: Gaude, Gaude (Veni, Veni, Emanuel) – there are no obviously harmonic or structural cues. This excerpt has an interesting interplay of texture and pacing, with several apparently unrelated layers moving at different paces. It will be interesting to see how students describe this.



01 MacMillan, James - Gaude, Gaude (Veni, Veni, Emanuel)

02 Messiaen: Les Orioles (Des Canyons aux Etoiles) – has a fairly improvisatory nature to the playing, and uses groups of instruments almost conversationally. No harmonic or metrical clues, so they would have to listen outside those things for structural cues, such as repetition of ideas or timbres.



02 Messiaen, Olivier - Les Orioles (Des Canyons aux Etoiles)

03 McGregor: String quartet, 3rd mvt – this has a lot of recognisable recurring motifs, changes of pace, and a “journey” that I hope they will find imaginative ways to describe. The interplay between instruments invites some good description.



03 McGregor, David - String 4tet, 3rd mvt.m

Listening Response 2

Imaginative response to three pieces of music

Analysis is a very important part of learning to compose. We have been focusing on two big things recently:

- 1. Melodic and textural writing (motifs, variations, vignettes using the same starting motif, and the 2-part Studies)*
- 2. Overall form: what makes a piece sound like it progresses from beginning to middle to end, and how can it sound well-rounded?*

You are encouraged to think in terms of those things when you are writing your description of what you hear. Please do include imaginative responses such as narratives and characters, and you may represent some of what you mean with pictures or graphics, but the overall descriptive should be analytical and make good use of musical vocabulary and observations.

As with previous written work, your responses will be retained and used in future presentations and in the final write-up for the PhD.

Your name

Participant ID *[for my use only]*

Don't forget to fill in the 1 – 5 scores for each piece

[Template for response to each piece:]

Excerpt 1					
After listening and completing your response, select an answer for each of the following:					
	not at all				definitely
I already know this piece	1	2	3	4	5
I like this music	1	2	3	4	5
I often listen to music like this	1	2	3	4	5
This is a familiar style to me	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this for relaxation	1	2	3	4	5
I would listen to this out of interest	1	2	3	4	5

Listening Response 3.1: Preparatory Exercise (04/05/21)

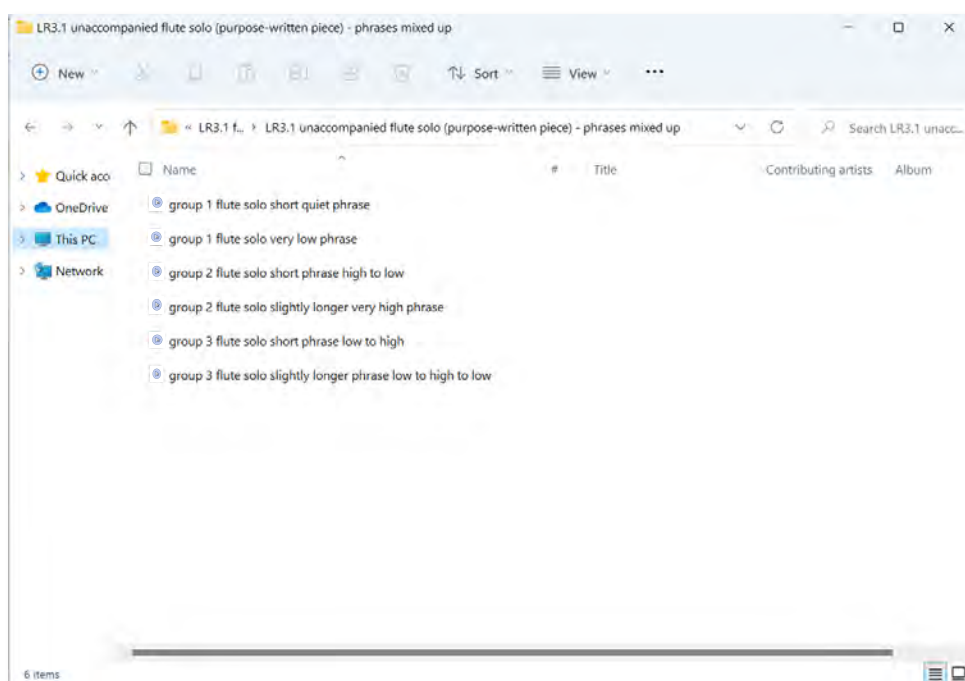
Preparatory task: game of mixed-up phrases.

Music: *Soliloquy* for solo flute (purpose-written for this task)

This is a preparatory task using a purpose-written piece, so that pupils will have not heard it before. Students will be given instructions as shown below, and told that this task aims to make them think about why certain musical gestures are used at given places in a piece of music. They will therefore need to describe what each phrase does and provide a brief explanation, in writing and then orally, for why they placed them as they did. The aim is not to put them in the exact original order (probably impossible), but to recognise cues and devices and articulate what their effect is. They will be reminded that their responses will be retained and used alongside other data.

Instructions to pupils:

Listen to the phrases in group 1 and decide which goes at the beginning and which at the end. Give reasons. Place them in a timeline (you can drag them if doing this in Cubase).
Listen to the phrases in group 2. One of them is the second phrase in the piece, and the other goes somewhere in the middle. Decide which is which, and give reasons.
Listen to the phrases in group 3. These both belong somewhere in the middle. Decide where they are best placed, and give reasons.



Complete piece (not shared beforehand with students)



Listening Response 3.2: game of mixed-up phrases (11/05/21)

Why? To develop an awareness of the cues we give to listeners regarding the musical “journey” we are creating for them.

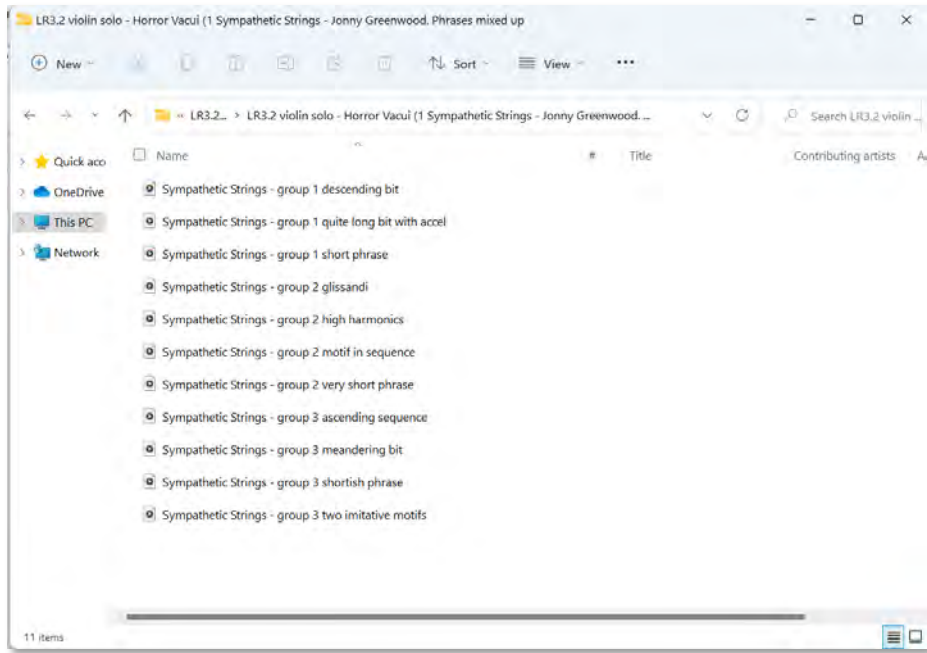
How?

- Drag phrases around in Cubase, then export the audio mixdown
OR
- Rename the sound files and create a playlist

Enter the name of the phrase you have chosen (e.g. 1A, 2C) and give a brief reason for placing it there (e.g. because it starts in the same way as the previous one, but higher)

The choice is helpfully limited by being told which group some of the phrases should come from. You’re welcome.

	GROUP	Your choice	Your reason
1	Group 1		
2	Group 2		
3	Group 3		
4	1 or 3		
5	1 or 3		
6	1 or 3		
7	Group 2		
8	Group 2		
9	Group 2		
10	Group 3		
11	Group 1		



Listening Response 4 (02/07/21)

Listen to and watch “Spring” by Jonny Greenwood

Why? This is to investigate several things:

- Your perception of how melody is developed
- Your recognition of how composers shape musical form
- Your powers of observation alongside the ability to express things in words
- Your subjective experience (opinion, if you like) of this piece

Answer the questions below as fully as you can. Don't watch the performance until you have completed all the questions by listening.

Before you listen:

1. Jot down a few things you could do with these two motifs in an improvisation or composition:



On the first hearing:

2. How does this piece immediately make you feel? This could also include what you imagine it is trying to convey.

3. What do you like/admire about it?

4. What do you dislike about it?

On the second hearing:

5. What do you notice about how the composer uses those two motifs above?

On the third hearing:

6. How does the composer use various musical elements (pitch, texture, timbre, tempo, dynamics, harmony) to shape the journey from beginning to end in this piece? Think about opening and closing gestures, but also about moments of arrival (e.g. a climax, a pause, a point when your anticipation is satisfied, or expectation is met, *etc.*).

Now watch the video of this piece, and then answer the questions below.

7. What difference did it make to be able to see the performers, and why?

Appendix 7. Content of Sessions in First Data-collection Period (September-October 2020)

Session 1, Data-collection Period 1 (September-October 2020)

Session 1

- Discussion: “improvisation”
- Eco-grooves (buckets)



- Pentagroove (xylophones or keyboards)
- Discussion: “improvisation”

Reminders

- You are participants in my research
- Everything we do and say will be recorded
- You are unlikely to be directly quoted for any length of time
- Your videos and – more likely – your audio recordings will be used in presentations and the final thesis
- There is no right or wrong
- I do not have an outcome or “answer” in mind
- If there is anything you want to include, suggest it
- If you think something would work better, say so



The first discussion was about students’ confidence and prior experience in improvising, and asked them how they defined or conceptualised it, and the second was in a response to a question about how these activities compared with students’ usual experiences or conceptualisations of improvisation.

Session 1 Eco-grooves

- On your bucket, invent a simple groove, to be played in time with the rest of the group
- One person will start, different person up to 3 times
- Jonny will lead the breaks (up to 2) and the ending
- Paul will fill the breaks in call and response with one other person (different each time)

"Eco-grooves" is derived from a school percussion group which used only reclaimed plastic boxes and buckets as instruments.



Westney (2003) advocates using non-specialist instruments in order to remove perfectionist anxiety about technique and skill (p. 160). Beale (1999) recommends starting with a rhythmic cell and feeling free to repeat this or slightly alter it, rather than continuously generating new material (p. 13).

Session 1 Pentagrooves

- Everyone will play a repeating pattern using the notes of the given scale
- We will agree a pulse but not a time signature
- Options:
 - Include harmony
 - Change the pattern gradually/subtly or drastically
 - Extend or contract your pattern
 - Introduce one chromatic pitch for a temporary period
 - Drop out for a short period



Example of lots of repeating patterns that have a common pulse but not a common metre







This activity was borrowed from Higgins and Campbell (2010) in order to encourage melodic improvisation within given parameters.

Data collected in session 1:

- Transcript of discussions
- Video recording of the session
- Audio recordings of each improvisation


Session 2


- Listening and talking
- Warm-up: mirroring
- Pass the pose
- Pass the rhythms

Eco-groove 1		Pentagroove 1	
Eco-groove 2		Pentagroove 2	

What do you remember from last week?
*what did we play?
*did we just “play” or did we set up parameters?
*did we have to adapt anything?
*how did you feel whilst playing?

Listen to the recordings in batches of two.
Jot down a few comments:
*likes/dislikes?
*any surprises, or things you didn't notice last week?
*any comparisons?

 Be realistic about how much we can each say, and get ready to speak clearly and concisely.


I might want to photograph your board if you have put ideas on there, especially if we can't hear everything from everybody. 

Higgins and Mantie (2013) encourage “opportunities for students to be reflective in their music-making and to consider the sonic decisions they and their peers have made” (p. 42).

Session 2

Pass the pose

- Warm up: mirroring.
- We take it in turns to be copied making fluent movements (5 seconds each)
- Then...
- Stand facing inwards.
- Person 1 adopts and holds a physical pose, which we pass around the circle.
- When everyone is in the same pose, the next person along in the circle does a new pose.

 Keep it rhythmic

This is based on a mirroring activity from Westney’s “Un-Master Class” (Westney, 2003, p. 194). The pressure lies only in being ready to adopt *any* pose in time with the music, and the activity aims to normalise being looked at without feeling scrutinised.

Session 2

Pass the rhythm



- person 1 claps a rhythm that is repeated around the circle and ends with person 1 clapping it again. Then the next person instigates a new rhythm, and so on.
- option to add physical gestures (e.g. clapping up to the right)
- if there are enough people
- repeat the exercise with more complicated rhythms so that they might change as they travel round the circle
- option to start two rhythms at once if there are enough people

Keep it rhythmic

This is an extension of “Pass the Pose”, combining that activity with Beale’s (1999) idea of a short rhythmic cell as a starting-point. Given that some rhythms might not be identically repeated as they travel round the circle, this also fosters an acceptance of “mistakes” as part of the evolution of improvised musical material.

Session 2

Metamorphosis



1. play the motif together, slowly and expressively
2. pass it round with each person's choice of articulation, dynamics, or register (everyone imitates, and each cycle ends with the person who began before moving on to the next person)
3. invert it (work that out - play it together)
4. each person play it slowly, one after the other, starting on a different pitch
5. each person decide on a different order of pitches and play their new motif one after the other
6. each person decide to play just one portion of the motif
can play it and repeat it, develop it, etc, but it must be clear when to pass it on to the next person
7. if time, think of a new thing that we haven't done yet and play it (if no ideas, suggest textural and timbral changes)

The notion of imposing these parameters in order to introduce possibilities was taken from the concept of treating exploration as a semi-structured process of asking “what can I do with this?” (Craft, n.d.)

Composition homework: miniature piece lasting 1-2 minutes

- Choose one of the following.
 - You can submit a score or recording + description.
1. Create a rhythmic meditative piece using tuned percussion, drums and strings. All of these can be intended as acoustic or synthesised. You decide where the interest will be: elaborate motifs? Interlocking polyrhythm and cross rhythms? Extended chords?
 2. Create a piece using the 5-note motif we have just played and invent a musical "conversation" amongst 2 – 5 players. This can be for any acoustic or synth instruments, can include harmony (based on but not restricted to the motif) and should use at least one of imitation, slight variation, inversion and fragmentation.

Will appear as a Teams Assignment.
Due 8pm Fri 25th September.

Data collected in session 2:

- Transcript of discussions
- Video recording of the session
- Audio recordings of each improvisation
- Individual compositions (collected later)

Session 3, Data-collection Period 1 (September-October 2020)

Session 3

- Warm-up: pass the pose (fast-paced)
- Energy-rhythms
- Double-circle rhythms



This was replanned in order to make the session 2 activities more successful.

Session 3 Metamorphosis revisited



1. play the motif together, slowly and expressively
2. pass it round with each person's choice of articulation, dynamics, or register (everyone imitates, and each cycle ends with the person who began before moving on to the next person)
3. invert it (work that out - play it together)
4. each person decide on a different order of pitches and play their new motif one after the other
5. each person decide to play just one portion of the motif (a fragment) and either repeat that to make it longer, or extend it in your own way.
It must be clear when to pass it on to the next person.
6. if time, think of a new thing that we haven't done yet and play it (if no ideas, suggest textural and timbral changes)

See next slide: try out the options and choose a few to use



This reappeared in session 3 because, although we started it in Session 2 as planned, we could not spend enough time on it as the discussion was (satisfyingly) lengthy, and Pass the Pose/Rhythm had not been as successful as I had hoped and took longer than planned.

Further guidance on point 2 was provided on a separate slide showing possibilities.

Session 3 Metamorphosis revisited


- **ARTICULATION:** accents, staccato, legato, marcato, tenuto
- **TECHNIQUE:** tremolo, pizzicato, fluttertongue, muted
- **RHYTHM** on every note
- **AUGMENT OR DIMINISH** the note values
- **DYNAMICS:** crescendo and decrescendo, explore extremes
- **PITCH/REGISTER/TESSITURA:** take it higher or lower
- **FRAGMENTATION:** pick 2 or 3 notes and make a new pattern
- **CHORDS:** use the motif to create block and broken chords
 - these can stay the same or can change
 - you could opt to make one note a pedal
- **INVERSION:** turn it upside down
- **RETROGRADE:** play it backwards
- **TRANSPOSITION:** start it on a different note
- **RE-ORDERING:** put the pitches in a different order



If some of these aren't quite exact, it *really* doesn't matter.

Data collected in session 3:


- Transcript of discussions
- Video recording of the session
- Audio recordings of each improvisation



Session 4 Dorian Dialogues

What do you already know about modes?

Following the first improvisation in this session, I initiated a few short question-and-answer conversations, translating these into musical phrases and thus demonstrating ways of responding to other players “conversationally” (reflecting, imitating, conclusive response, development, etc). This uses the notion that improvisation is part of everyday life and conversation (MacDonald & Wilson, 2016).



Everyone

Constant accompaniment using the mode

- Chords
- Drones
- Oscillating motifs
- Arpeggios

Individuals

Melodic lines

- Dialogue
- Conversation
- Discussion

Remember pentagrooves? Like that.

Session 4 Dorian Dialogues

Each person, including me, was asked to begin one of our improvisations, in order to give everyone a chance to have ownership and feel validated. A sense of reward for everyone is important in any kind of creative play.

Session 5: listening in different ways



What are some alternative ways to respond to what you hear?

In a music lesson, **WHY** do we listen to music?

As these sessions were intended to be preparation for future research cycles, session 5 was included as preparation for the imaginative listening responses that would be required in later data-collection periods. The data from this session did not feature in the thematic analysis that follows, as it had no bearing on participants' experiences of group improvisation.

Our alternatives today

draw a picture

create a graphic score

invent a narrative or scenario

describe the musical features

compare to something you know



This could also be a cartoon strip



= write a story (or storyboard) or describe a scene

Straightforward GCSE-style response

e.g. reminds you of a piece by this composer or the music for that film

These different types of responses were all, with the exception of the “straightforward GCSE-style response” which encouraged analytical observations, intended to demonstrate “ways in” to unfamiliar music (Owens, 1986, p. 346) and imaginative listening (Herbert & Dibben, 2017).

Who is doing what

	1	2	3	4	5
graphic score	Oliver	Siobhan	Emily	Paul, Eliza	Jonny
comparison to something familiar	Eliza	Oliver, Jonny	Siobhan	Emily	Paul
picture/cartoon strip	Siobhan, Emily	Paul	Eliza	Jonny	Oliver
scenario/narrative/storyboard	Paul	Emily	Jonny	Oliver	Siobhan, Eliza
musical description, GCSE-style	Jonny	Eliza	Oliver, Paul	Siobhan	Emily

On this occasion, certain types of response from each student were prescribed so that they would all try everything once. In future Listening Response tasks, the mode of response was their choice.

Data collected in session 5:

- Written/sketched listening responses from each student

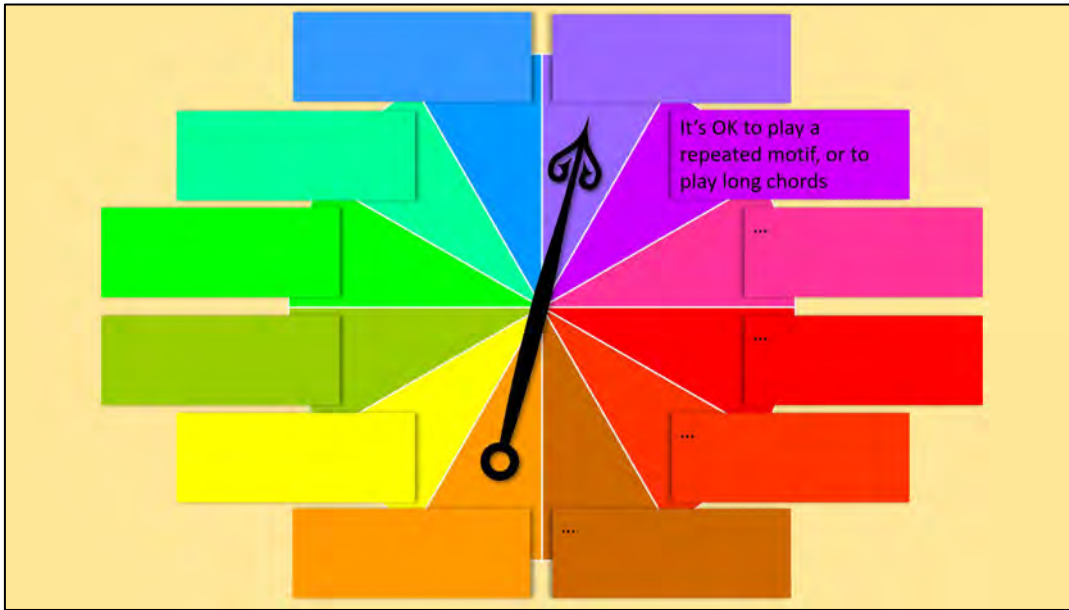
Session 6, Data-collection Period 1 (September-October 2020)

Session 6

Our last task: a helpsheet for future improvisers

- Definition of improvisation (and maybe also what improvisation *isn't*)
 - What is improvisation?
 - Where or when might you do it?
- Helpful tips (e.g. it's OK to fixate on a repeated pattern, or to use long notes)
- Reminders of good practice (e.g. try imitating someone else at least once)

This was intended to prompt students to reflect on their participation in the sessions that included group improvisation. The request for helpful tips and reminders of good practice was phrased as such in order to deflect self-criticism by focussing on constructive advice for future groups.



This is the template for the students' tips and reminders, which would subsequently be displayed in the classroom when filled with their contributions. It takes the form of a clock or roulette wheel, so that students can imagine spinning the arrow and choosing one thing to help them to participate or one new thing to try.


Data collected in session 6:

- Transcript of discussions
- Audio recording of the session
- Completed "Improvisation Clock"
- Audio recordings of each improvisation*

**The improvisations played at the end of this session were unplanned and were the students' choice of activity*

Appendix 8. Content of Sessions in Second Data-Collection Period (April-July 2021)

Session 1, Data-collection Period 2 (April-July 2021)

<h3><u>Session 1</u></h3> <p>What can you do with this?</p> <p>Ideas:</p>	 <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Play any of these ideas, at will2. Choose up to 5, play through them in order (repeating as you wish), then stop when you have done them all
---	--

This was the first group improvisation session after a period of online learning (January-March 2021), so it was based on the same principles as “Metamorphosis” (session 3 in the first data-collection period), with the question inspired by Craft (n.d.), who posed this as a tenet of possibility thinking.

<h3><u>Session 1</u></h3> <p>Listen, observe, comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any response – descriptive, graphic score, narrative, <i>etc</i>• Explain, evaluate, articulate• Compare: which version did you prefer in terms of<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Texture, dynamics and interaction• Overall music form• Give us a focus for improvement
--

This purposeful discussion built on two concepts found in the surrounding research: “ways in” to listening, as advocated by Herbert and Dibben (2017) and Owens (1986), and Major’s (2007) connection between articulacy and creativity.

Session 1

Individual composition task:
2-part motivic study

Think about musical form:

- Beginning statement
- Middle development
- Closing gesture

Due: next Sunday evening

Example for quick analysis:

Andante e poco pesante

f *mp*

f *etc.*

some alternatives:

The homework task was designed to use the principles of the improvisation session, in order to encourage the transfer of possibilities and form encountered during this session to individual compositions. The example shown was purpose-written.

Data collected in session 1:

- Commentary in my own journal
- Audio recordings of each improvisation
- Transcription of their reflections on the two improvisations
- Two drafts of individual compositions (collected later)

More on motivic development

Last week's ideas, which we incorporated into our improvisations, included:

- Extension/contraction of the motif (also fragmentation)
- Inversion (this can be chromatic, like this example:



or it can just stay in the same key and not change any accidentals

- Rhythmic augmentation/diminution
- Contrary motion, or parallel motion – 8ves, 3rds, 4ths, etc
- Chordal version of the motif
- Reordering the pitches
- Transposition (often implies a modulation)
- Repetition in sequence
- Canon or less exact imitation

This session was not in the original plan, but was included in response to the first set of compositions from Session 1. The transfer from the group improvisations to the individual compositions had not been very successful, so I spent an extra session demonstrating this through analysis of a few pieces.

You can see some of these in this example from last week

The image shows a musical score for piano with several annotations in green boxes with arrows pointing to specific parts of the music:

- Extension (increasing each time)**: Points to a sequence of notes in the right hand that grows in length.
- Inversion (chromatic), and fragmentation**: Points to a chromatic inversion of a motif.
- Rhythmic augmentation**: Points to a note that is held longer than the previous one.
- Extension like phrase 1**: Points to a phrase that repeats the structure of an earlier phrase.
- Fragmentation, sequence**: Points to a shorter version of a motif.
- Inversion and imitation**: Points to a phrase that is inverted and then repeated.
- Opening, now in contrary motion**: Points to a phrase that is played in the opposite direction.
- Opening, now in canon at the 8ve**: Points to a phrase that is repeated an octave higher.
- Opening, now with RH chordal version, inverted and rhythmically augmented**: Points to a phrase that is played as a chord in the right hand, inverted, and with a longer note value.

Notice how everything is articulated carefully. This level of exact direction is needed. It also helps to define motifs (e.g. the same motif is always played in the same way) and differentiate between them (e.g. the staccato LH in bar 3 versus the legato LH in bar 4). Dynamics are similarly important for shaping phrases and the whole piece of music (e.g. emphasizing the new key at bar 3, or enhancing the arrival at bar 5, a reprise of the opening).

This was designed to enable students to improve their awareness of musical devices and to see if this level of analysis would transfer to their compositions.

77. Упражнение

Allegro risoluto ♩ = 72

1880

- Parallel 8ves at the beginning, and this is transposed and repeated in bar 4
- Note the very clear phrasing
- With so much pitch-circling, this melody could sound a bit directionless, so the rhythm defines it (listen to how the pianist emphasises the quavers on the downbeat)
- Inversion at the 3/4 bar, and extension of the phrase to fit the new metre
- Very clear definition of the phrase-ending at bar 13 (the cadence)
- Contrary motion when the 3/4 phrase returns.

There were several example pieces which were used to demonstrate how to analyse in terms of motivic development, with a few references to overall form.

The homework was to redraft or redo the 5-note study that had been set in session 1.

First piece: Uprazhneniye (“An Exercise”), from *Mikrokosmos* by Bartók.

81. Странствование

Non troppo lento ♩ = 76

1880

- Imitation between the hands, which is then swapped round in the second system
- Inversion on the third system
- Then becomes more contrapuntal from the fourth system
- This one returns to the opening texture at the end, a good way to make the short piece sound well-rounded.

These ones with the Cyrillic titles are by Bartók, whose harmonic language is very dissonant. You can easily replicate these melodic and textural devices without being so dissonant.

Note that it is unusual to have different dynamic markings for LH and RH; that's not something you should normally do in a piano composition.

The second piece for analysis in class: Stranstvovaniye (“Wandering”), from *Mikrokosmos* by Bartók.

105. Игра
(в двух метатональных тональностях)

Allegro $\text{♩} = 120$

- Imitation between the hands, but they are using different scales, so this is bitonal (see previous slide; it's possible to remake this piece using the same key)
- LH immediately extends its phrase; RH copies this, then starts making a longer phrase by reordering the pitches
- At the *Più allegro*, the hands are in contrary motion. Two parts to this phrase: and
- These are repeated in various ways: look at how the crotchets become and you get 3 bars of that instead of 2; then is played twice, but with the first quaver missing. Tiny details, very effective.
- In terms of harmonic detail, this becomes increasingly chordal towards the end, but only as a consequence of each hand sustaining a pedal note. At first, this is B (the only note the two scales have in common).
- Some very nice parallel motion at this point (from the last two bars of the 3rd system)
- That is then rhythmically augmented in the final passage, marked *Tempo I*

The third piece for analysis in class: Igra (“The Game”), from *Mikrokosmos* by Bartók.

The Clown

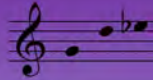
Kabalevsky
Op. 39, No. 20

Allegro

- *This one isn't a 2-part study, as the LH is just an accompaniment throughout. However, the RH offers some good motivic development.*
 - The motif is those first 3 notes, A-B-C#. Repeated as A-B-C. This major-minor alternation forms the rest of the phrase. Note how it is extended by adding a passing note (circled, b.2). The end of the phrase is clearly marked with a different, emphatic figure (boxed, bb.3-4). It's good for the listening if you “scaffold” your piece like this.
 - Bars 5-8 answer the first 4, inverting the motif and starting every bar with this anacrusis figure.
 - Bars 9-12 are an inversion of the first 4 bars in a new key.
 - The middle section (bb.9-17) includes a bit of spinning out of ideas, seen clearly at bb.13-16, where the phrase is repeated and then made longer the 3rd time (a classic rhetorical device in both music and speech). This could easily have been a sequence, and been just as effective.
-
- It ends as it began, which makes a well-formed little piece.

The fourth piece for analysis in class: “The Clown”, by Kabalevsky.

Session 2



Using this motif, create a piece together.

Improvements:

Overall form: think about how ending recalls opening
How will ideas fit together? Responsive playing rather than rigidly pre-planned

Plan (musical form) for this piece:

You can literally plan this out, or you can simply be mindful of opening statement, progressive middle section, closing statement (preferably including recall of opening).

What did you want to improve last time?

These improvements were taken from the group discussion in session 1. Again, the group improvisation task requires possibility thinking. The benefits of group-work include making explicit the creative process (Sawyer & de Zutter, 2009, p. 81). This motif was deliberately shorter than before, to encourage transposition and inversion and anything else that might suggest harmonic change.

Session 2

Listen, observe, comment

- How does this compare to last time (if you can remember)?
- Did it accomplish what you wanted?
- Does it “work” as music?
- Would you change anything?
- Explain, evaluate, articulate

Like session 1, session 2 contained two “partner” tasks: collaborative creating, and reflection and evaluation. This encouraged the parallel improvement of responsive playing and articulate observation.

Session 2

Listening task for homework
(word processed, please)

Due: next Sunday evening

- Write a response to the three pieces in the folder
- This should take into account
 - Musical form (narrative, structure, journey)
 - Interaction between parts (or lack of)
 - Use of motifs, reuse of ideas, *etc* (if applicable)
 - Images the music brings to mind
 - Do sections or instruments take on characters or roles?
 - Where in the larger piece do you think this occurs, and what makes you think that?
- You can also say what it reminds you of (e.g. another piece, a composer's style, typical...)

This task was designed to allow students to respond in various ways (sense of narrative, images brought to mind, more analytical detail, inter- and intra-musical connections, etc). Its main purpose was to provide a link between the improvising, discussion, and listening activities.

Data collected in Session 2:


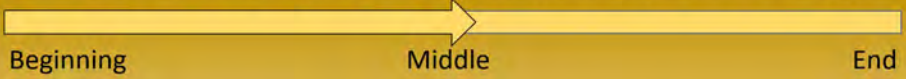

- Commentary in my own journal
- Audio recordings of each improvisation
- Listening responses: LR2 (collected later)

Session 3

A listening game

Preparatory exercise: flute soliloquy

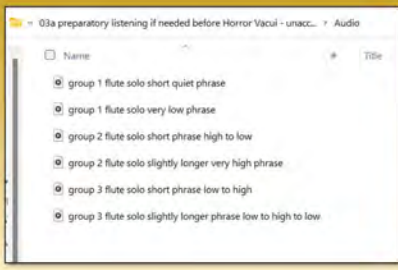
In what order should we place the phrases? Where in the timeline? Why?



This task was modelled on one of the case studies reported by Preston (1994). The preparatory exercise was intended to demonstrate how to do it, so the piece was shorter than the violin solo that was Listening Response 3.2.

Session 3 Listening Response 3: Preparatory Exercise

- **Instructions to students:**
- Listen to the phrases in group 1 and decide which goes at the beginning and which at the end. Give reasons. Place them in a timeline (you can drag them if doing this in Cubase, or number them like a playlist if not).
- Listen to the phrases in group 2. One of them is the second phrase in the piece, and the other goes somewhere in the middle. Decide which is which, and give reasons.
- Listen to the phrases in group 3. These both belong somewhere in the middle. Decide where they are best placed, and give reasons.



The task was scaffolded as shown so as to limit confusion. Phrases were placed in groups as shown below, so that freedom of choice was within certain parameters.

Session 3

Listening task
(preparation for
composition task
next week)

Due: next lesson

- Listen to the four “soliloquy”-style pieces in the folder
- Choose your favourite one, and prepare to tell the class what you liked about it and why

The original plan was for this to be set at the same time as the composition, but setting it as a standalone task created the opportunity for students to utilise the perception and articulatory skills that had been required in the preceding lesson.

Session 3 (continued)

Listening Response 3: game of mixed-up phrases

Why? To develop an awareness of the cues we give to listeners regarding the musical “journey” we are creating for them.

How?

- Drag phrases around in Cubase, then export the audio middown
- OR
- Rename the sound files and create a playlist

Enter the name of the phrase you have chosen (e.g. 1A, 2C) and give a brief reason for placing it there (e.g. because it starts in the same way as the previous one, but higher)

The choice is helpfully limited by being told which group some of the phrases should come from. You’re welcome.

	GROUP	Your choice	Your reason
1	Group 1		
2	Group 2		
3	Group 3		
4	1 = 3		
5	1 = 3		
6	1 = 3		
7	Group 2		
8	Group 2		

Your turn! This is a violin solo taken from a longer piece.



“Session 3” took place over two lessons: the preparatory part of the session, demonstrating the task and including homework that both built on the task and prepared for the composition homework, and the main listening task with accompanying composition homework.

Session 3 (continued)

Composition task

Due: next Sunday evening

- Take your “reasons” column and use the description as a set of instructions for your own soliloquy
- It **MUST** be notated in full, with tempo, dynamics, techniques and articulation (*etc*)
- You have to record it, or ask me to play it
- Choice of solo (unaccompanied) instruments:
 - Your instrument (if voice, you must show lyrics/vowel sound)
 - This can be for drum kit or other untuned percussion; there is no obligation to have a melody
 - Flute, piano (or cello) if you want me to play it

This required an explicit link between perception and articulation in the listening task and composition. In effect, the decision-making process had already taken place, and their composition task was to translate that into music.

Data collected in session 3:

- Justification for ordering of phrases in the preparatory exercise
- My journal's comments on their responses to the listening homework task
- Individual Listening response 3.1, 3.2 (template shown above)
- Soliloquy compositions (collected later; two drafts)


Session 4

Listen to an improvisation from last time

- Did we use the motif well?
- Were people playing responsively to each other, as well as sticking to the plan?

Emergent opening	Sudden moment of terror	Ostinato figure, build-up to crisis-point	Sudden cut-off and modulation up a semitone	Sudden moment of terror	Fade-out, mirroring the opening
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- As composers, what did you think of the pacing?


 10 minutes (use whiteboards to jot down thoughts as you listen)

Throughout our improvisation sessions this term, we had been conscious of overall form and how we could better shape that in the moment. The plan shown here was agreed and enacted in session 2's improvisations.

Session 4

What can you do with this?

Explore some possibilities for this motif
Share some of these
Agree on a loose structure and who will play
Play it

 20 minutes to plan, agree, perform (10 minutes to redo it if needed)

THINK: what will make a **good opening**? Where should the **developmental** stuff go, and what will that be? How should it **end**?
Try not to let it drift...

Before embarking on this familiar group improvisation task, students were given a selection from Randles and Sullivan's (2013) tables of musical cues at different points in a piece (see below), in order to prompt discussion and demonstrate that these things can be clearly defined. This aims to encourage composing with the listener in mind.

Session 4

Musical Elements Typically Associated with Beginning a Piece of Music

<i>Crescendi and/or significant expansion of register within the first phrase</i>	A crescendo creates tension and energy, and it implies a goal. Expansion of register opens up new terrain.
<i>Rising lines</i>	Rising lines are associated with increasing emotion or stress.
<i>Unresolved harmony</i>	If the harmony creates expectations that are not immediately fulfilled, closure is avoided.
<i>Rhythmic variety, contrast of note values, or sudden contrast of motives</i>	The juxtaposition of dissimilar rhythmic elements tends to create discontinuity of movement.
<i>Orchestral and registral discontinuities</i>	Abrupt changes in either of these dimensions tend to suggest later resumption.

TABLE 2

Suggestions for Successful Continuation

<i>Satisfactory flow</i>	Any given piece should have a narrative continuity. Each segment of music should flow logically from the last.
<i>Renewal of interest through contrast</i>	Contrast presents the listener with a greater emotional breadth. Through difference, musical ideas are more clearly experienced.
<i>Suspense</i>	Suspense is the tension of predictability in the unfolding of the musical progression.
<i>Points of reference</i>	These are points in the music that provide a marker. Points of reference can be motives or themes. Without points of reference, the listener can feel lost.
<i>Climax</i>	In terms of narrative continuity, climax is the push of intensity throughout the piece, brought to final fulfillment.

TABLE 3

Elements That Endings of Pieces Should Take into Account

<i>Harmony</i>	Harmonic progression should reach climax, an ending determined by the intent of the resolution.
<i>Melodic line</i>	The melodic line should be rounded off.
<i>Rhythm</i>	Rhythmic intensity should be considered when ending a piece. Complex rhythmic structure says one thing, while simple rhythmic structure says another.
<i>Dynamics</i>	Dynamics can contribute to a sense of finality.

Selected excerpts from Randles & Sullivan, 2013, pp. 53-55.

Session 4

Listen and discuss

- Was there a clear musical form?
- How were our interactions, dynamics, etc?
- What was the most effective bit?
- Do you prefer a motif with an implied key, or an atonal motif?
- Are there still clear musical cues?
- Do we need harmony, or do other elements do the job of delineating structure?

More group discussion, intended to connect their listening, articulation of observations, and creative decision-making. These questions were there as prompts, and I did use them when needed, but they were not intended as a structure for the discussion (i.e., it was not a group interview).


Data collected in session 4:

- Commentary in my own journal
- Audio recordings of each improvisation
- Audio recording of the session
- Transcription of each discussion

Session 5

Musical form and musical interaction: can we focus on both?

Individual compositions need both



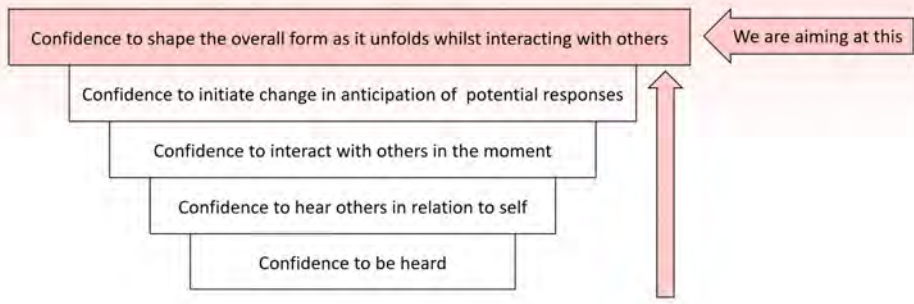
Listeners need:

- Overall sense of moving through the music logically and engagingly – a journey
- Short-term memory cues – recall of familiar ideas during the piece
- Long-term memory cues – something that is familiar or evocative (whether musical or otherwise)
- To be able to make immediate sense of what they are hearing
- *any other ideas?*
-

Continuing our focus on musical form in both group improvisation and individual composition, this discussion was intended to bring listening into the realm of composing.

Session 5

Something to share: your progression as improvisers



Confidence to shape the overall form as it unfolds whilst interacting with others

Confidence to initiate change in anticipation of potential responses

Confidence to interact with others in the moment

Confidence to hear others in relation to self

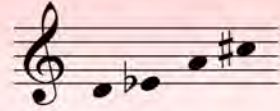
Confidence to be heard


We are aiming at this

This figure had arisen from the thematic analysis of the first study, and I felt it was important to share with the group at this stage.

Session 5

Today's group improvisation

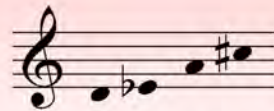


- Same motif as last week
 - Think of some ways to play it with different articulation, rhythms, dynamics, pitch, etc
 - Think of some ways to develop it – make a longer melody, invert it, extend it, fragment it, change the intervals, etc
 - Vary your approach: subtle/calm → decisive/assertive → bold/angry
- 5 minutes for individual preparation – mess about, be productive** 

Another exercise in “possibility thinking” (Craft, n.d.). The wording “mess about, be productive” was an invitation to explore unrestrictedly, and is a gesture towards “messy zones” in playgrounds that leave things to chance (Herrington & Brussoni, 2015, p. 4). The motif deliberately does not suggest a key. Westney (2013) points out that atonal improvisation is “liberating” and invites communication “through gesture and drama” (Westney, 2003, p. 165).

Session 5

Today's group improvisation



- Here is our plan (as requested last week)
- Sort your ideas for using the motif into subtle, assertive and bold
- Imagine (without making any noise) how you might use them for this plan

Boldest moves for a shocking opening		Subtle moves Quiet, low, extended – listen to each other * If you haven't dropped out yet, consider doing so * If you dropped out, come back	Assertive moves Develop things, move upwards and outwards in pitch, dynamics, rhythmic activity – be the catalyst for change	Back to your bold moves Reuse something from the beginning Listen, watch: it can be short, but don't end too soon
	After this: Calm down or drop out			

In response to their request for some more direction from me (but mindful of their preference for the music not to sound over-planned and contrived), I provided this template. Imagining “without making any noise” encourages the pre-hearing process in composition.

Session 5

Listen and discuss

- Was there a clear musical form?
- How were our interactions, dynamics, etc?
- What was the most effective bit?
- Do you prefer a motif with an implied key, or an atonal motif?
- Are there still clear musical cues for a listener?
- Do we need harmony, or do other elements do the job of defining structure?

Like other discussions, these questions were used as prompts rather than a group-interview-style structure. They encourage students to hear their own music in terms of the aesthetic considerations raised at the beginning of the session.

Session 5

Homework

Write a description of your composition process (it can be illustrated if you like!)

- This can be how you generally start, continue, get stuck, get over problems, seek help, decide something is finished, etc, OR...
- ... it can be a detailed description of what you did for one particular piece, in which case you can refer to bits of the music and bar numbers and attach that score or include screengrabs
- Please also include stuff about whether or not you like what you are composing/have composed, and what impact this has on the composition process
- I am interested to know if the way you compose in response to this year's tasks differs from how you compose for other purposes or how you used to compose before Year 12 (e.g. for GCSE)
- All of this will help my dialogue with you about your individual compositions

Data collected in session 5:

- Commentary in my own journal
- Audio recordings of each improvisation
- Audio recording of the session
- Transcription of each discussion
- Individual accounts of own composition process (collected later)

Session 6

Evaluating/assessing a composition

About judgement and aesthetics

What do you think makes a “good” piece of music?

Is your definition of a “good” piece of music the same as what you like?

How does your definition match what makes a “good” film or painting?

Is a film or painting easier or harder for you to describe in this way?

How do you think your compositions are judged at school/by examiners?

Return to what you said made a “good” piece of music.

Does it match how you think your compositions are judged?

Do you think this is the same at KS3? KS4? KS5? Professional level? Different genres?

Have you read the exam board criteria?

Can we have a go at explaining what some of the terms and phrases mean?

Do you think you know what is required of you as an A-level composer?

An intention from the outset of this action research project with the participating Year 12 students was to engage them with the assessment process, helping them to understand the criteria and what those meant in the context of their own compositions.

Top-band criteria for four examination boards: also see Appendix 2.

AQA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the composition has a sustained mastery of technical control the quality of contrasting ideas and their development creates a commanding structure that is more than just a standard form, providing a musical journey musical elements are used with flair and imagination, complementing each other with strong creative purpose to give a consistently fluent and successful result the style of the composition is convincing, fluent and used perceptively to give a compelling musical experience the music is communicated fluently on paper with comprehensive score or commanding annotation.
CIE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report is fully detailed, coherent and reflective. Influences and sources are identified, and the sustained analysis is relevant, appropriate and effective. Strong and creative shaping of ideas, showing detailed aural familiarity with relevant listening. Imaginative and sensitive control of structural events. Strong use of techniques to combine, develop and extend materials and to refine these, imaginatively. Wholly idiomatic use of medium, with a broad range of inventive and varied textures/figuration. A clear and articulate presentation of the score; OR A comprehensive and detailed written account. The recording communicates a vivid representation of the composer’s ideas.
Edexcel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Musical ideas are created, developed and extended with assurance and imagination throughout. Musical elements and ideas all contribute to a sense of wholeness with a sophisticated sense of fluency, and a mature balance of unity and variety throughout. The musical elements are used with maturity and confidence to create contrasted and well-paced moods, atmosphere and effects that are communicated successfully throughout. The control of musical elements is assured and sophisticated throughout. Stylistic devices and conventions for the chosen genre/style have been selected appropriately and handled convincingly throughout. Forces and textures are handled idiomatically and exploited and varied with creativity and authority.
OCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learners should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create and develop musical ideas with technical control and expressive understanding compose music that develops musical ideas and shows understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition compose music that is musically convincing and shows a sophisticated use of musical elements in combination compose music that makes creative use of musical ideas and shows understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.

Session 6

Consequences

- Listen to and analyse the given short pieces, with attention to clues or foreshadowing of later harmonic colouring or modulations



Bringing analysis into the composition process had proved useful for the session 1 homework (5-note motif study). This was also a follow-up to the discussion of assessment criteria, and how to interpret requirements which, however they are worded, point towards music sounding both sophisticated and uncontrived. Having spent a long time on motivic development and musical form, we were due to consider harmony. All of the pieces used were purpose-written.

Allegretto giocoso

A musical score for a piece titled "Allegretto giocoso". The score is in 3/4 time and features a piano and a violin part. The tempo is marked "Allegretto giocoso". The score includes dynamic markings such as *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *ff*, and *etc.*. There are also performance instructions like "rit." and "simile". The score is divided into measures, with measure numbers 6, 11, and 16 indicated.

Accompanying instruction:
Find the chromaticism early on and circle it. What later key-change or chromatic chord(s) does it lead to?

Prestissimo

Accompanying instruction:
Find the chromaticism early on and circle it. What later key-change or chromatic chord(s) does it lead to?

Lento

Accompanying question:
Why does it make sense to reprise the opening bars in the tonic (parallel) minor?

The callouts show tasks and questions posed to the students in relation to each short purpose-written piece.

This repeated analysis exercise begins to address the question of why some music is judged as “good”, or why something “works” in one context but not in another. It presents it as something objective and definable, without using value-laden or subjective vocabulary.

Session 6

Why learn about this?

- Harder to handle → greater demonstration of “technical control”
- Good for expression / atmosphere / “compelling experience”
- “More than just standard”
- Sophisticated, “mature”
- *etc*

But it's no good shoehorning in a chromatic chord or modulation for the sake of it; it has to have context and it has to make sense.

Let's play something!

The group had requested one last improvisation over a given chord progression. This formed a good link to the next composition task, which was set for completion over the summer holiday and did not form part of this research cycle.

Session 6

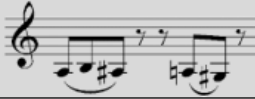
Use this chord progression as the basis for an improvisation

Dm	Am	Dm	Am
Eb	Gm	Eb	D
Gm	Bb	Dm	Am
Eb	C#°7	A ⁷ sus ⁴	A

Data collected in Session 6:

- Commentary in my own journal
- Audio recording of improvisation
- Audio recording of the session
- Transcription of discussion

Session 7

Listening response 4	
Listen to and watch “Spring” by Jonny Greenwood	
Why? This is to investigate several things: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Your perception of how melody is developed• Your recognition of how composers shape musical form• Your powers of observation alongside the ability to express things in words• Your subjective experience (opinion, if you like) of this piece	
Answer the questions below as fully as you can. Don't watch the performance until you have completed all the questions by listening.	
Before you listen:	
1. Jot down a few things you could do with these two motifs in an improvisation or composition:	
On the first hearing:	
2. How does this piece immediately make you feel? This could also include what you imagine it is trying to convey.	
3. What do you like/admire about it?	
4. What do you dislike about it?	
On the second hearing:	
5. What do you notice about how the composer uses those two motifs above?	
On the third hearing:	
6. How does the composer use various musical elements (pitch, texture, timbre, tempo, dynamics, harmony) to shape the journey from beginning to end in this piece? Think about opening and closing gestures, but also about moments of <u>arrival</u> (e.g. a climax, a pause, a point when your anticipation is satisfied, or expectation is met, etc.).	
Now watch the video of this piece, and then answer the questions below.	
7. What difference did it make to be able to see the performers, and why?	

Listening Response 4 was designed to include a miniature version of Ferrara’s “phenomenological inquiry” (Ferrara, 1984, p. 360), starting with affective listening. This was preceded with question 1, a reference to all group improvisations that had started with exploring possibilities presented by a motif. The second, analytical, hearing was then already prepared. The third hearing drew on our discussions about musical form.

The idea to give students the video to watch after their listening response was inspired by Lochhead’s discovery that students could make more sense of new music if they could relate sounds – particularly unfamiliar ones – to players’ movements (Lochhead, 1995, p. 38).

Session 7

1. To what extent do you feel that the improvisation has related to your individual composing?
2. To what extent do you think the listening tasks have related to the improvising?
3. To what extent do you feel that the listening tasks have related to your individual composing?

Students were also asked to complete this very short questionnaire.

Data collected in session 7:

- Individual LR4 responses
- Individual questionnaire responses