A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO THE PROCESS OF TEACHING JAZZ IMPROVISATION

by

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by

Roger G. Coss
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Roger and Patty Coss, for their continuous support and encouragement throughout my academic pursuits.
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I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to my dissertation committee, Dr. Thomas Nelson, Dr. Harriett Arnold, Dr. Ruth Brittin, and Dr. Bruce Torff, each for their support in completing this monumental project. To Frank Martinez and Roy Fisher, I owe you both a debt for your role at pivotal points in my intellectual development as mentors and dear friends, without which this dissertation would never have been possible. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the thousands of humans, young and old, for whom I have been privileged to serve in the role of teacher. You have taught me humility, passion, patience, and how much I still have yet to learn. If by chance any of you someday stumble upon this study, know that you were the reason and inspiration for undertaking a project of this magnitude.
A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Process of Teaching Jazz Improvisation.

Abstract

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In seeking to further exploration on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity, this study describes the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. Improvisation has been an integral feature of the jazz performance tradition for well over a century. However, the field of creativity studies has only recently come to recognize improvisation as a site for the creative process. While the jazz performance tradition has traditionally operated with a more collaborative and community-based pedagogical model based on various playing opportunities such as apprenticeships and participation at local jam sessions, the growth of jazz courses and degree programs has raised questions on the efficacy of current teaching practices within academia. The following central research question guided this study: What is the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity? A qualitative methodology served as a theoretical underpinning for framing two supportive research questions: (1) What pedagogical beliefs do jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process? (2) What are the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process?
This study utilized Moustakas’ transcendental, phenomenological research design and defined the phenomenon as the process of teaching jazz improvisation. Seven expert jazz educators situated in a variety of teaching contexts throughout Northern California were selected as participants using purposeful, snowball sampling strategies. Twenty themes emerged and were organized through four features of improvised music found across a variety of genres: creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible. These findings challenge de-socialized ways of teaching and learning creativity and add to the knowledge base on the teaching beliefs and practices of jazz educators within the fields of creativity, jazz, and music education. In providing valid data through semi-structured interviews, observations of the participants in a teaching context, and documents such as syllabi, student handouts, and music recordings, this study is intended to inform jazz educators and academics of the importance of collaborative, fully-immersed learning opportunities for the development of the skills needed for jazz improvisation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background of the Study

Since bursting onto the American cultural scene during the early 20th century, jazz music has captivated, seduced, intrigued, thrilled, and even confused listeners, performers, educators, and academics in the US and abroad. Originating through the juxtaposition of 19th century African-American folk music with European-American concert music (Collier, 2002), the history of jazz music has since birthed a variety of musical styles such as ragtime, blues, big band, swing, bebop, hard bop, and a host of others. Far from a homogeneous musical sound, this musical tradition contains a kaleidoscope of sub-styles, instrument groupings, harmonic colors, and practitioners from many walks of life. Recognizing that defining jazz has been a topic of much discussion (Gabbard, 2002), the use of the term “jazz” in this study is in reference less to a set of musical criteria, but rather to a historical performance tradition that encompasses these various styles.

Improvisation. Despite the myriad of ways in which research has conceptualized and discussed jazz as a musical practice, the practice of improvisation remains an integral feature of jazz (Monson, 2002). Improvisation has traditionally been central to many forms of music making in Western music, as well as in musical cultures outside of the Western tradition (Bailey, 1992; Nettl, 1998; Solis & Nettl, 2009). Even in popular styles today such as jazz, blues, folk, and hip hop, improvisation is the primary mode through which this music is created (Sawyer, 2008). Furthermore, improvisation has
helped to distinguish the jazz musical tradition from the dominant practices of Western art music (Martin, 2002).

While improvisation has and still remains an integral feature of the jazz musical tradition, no one single definition can sufficiently express such a complex musical practice. This is evidenced by the myriad of definitions of improvisation found in research (Alperson, 2010; Berkowitz, 2010; MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012; Nettl & Russell, 1998). For the purpose of this study, I adopted Ferand’s (1961) broad definition of improvisation as “the spontaneous invention and shaping of music while it is being performed” (p. 5). This definition has been used by several scholars in their study of improvisation (Nettl, 1998; Norgaard, 2008); and is by no means intended as a definitive definition, but rather serves as an operating description for the purpose of clarity as this term is used throughout this study. Furthermore, this definition contains several key components found in a variety of ways improvisation has been conceptualized in research. Improvisation is spontaneous in that musicians create music—melodies, rhythms, harmonies—that are in some ways different or novel during each performance. Novelty emerges during the actual act of performance, rather than pre-scripted in an exact form ahead of time. As MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) assert, many definitions of improvisation highlight the “real-time negotiation of unfolding musical interactions” (p. 242).

**Jazz improvisation and creativity.** Trends in research have provided various constructs of creativity to conceptualize improvisation. Early research in the field of creativity studies focused on the individual as the unit of study, specifically the cognitive processes they exhibited. However, over the last 30 years this field has come to adopt a perspective of creativity that is process-focused. Furthermore, inquiry into the process of
creativity necessitates an interdisciplinary lens through which to understand how creativity is a collaborative, emergent, and participatory act.

**Perspectives of musical creativity.** Depending on what discipline researchers take as their point of departure, they conceptualize musical creativity through different perspectives. These include psychology, sociology, and other humanistic disciplines (Burnard, 2012). Creativity studies have traditionally focused on creative products such as books, musical scores, and paintings. With regards to music, the focus has been on the study of composition, particularly the high-art models of the Western musical canon as exemplified by such composers as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven (Burnard, 2012). This focus is grounded in the field of psychology through questions focused on the “psychological processes that created them” (Sawyer, 1997b, p. 2).

In this study, I adopt Sternberg and O’Hara’s (1999) generally accepted definition of creativity as “the process of bringing into being something novel and useful” (p. 251). As noted above, the study of creativity in music has traditionally focused on compositions, particularly those in the Western musical canon. However, scholars are attempting to broaden the idea of musical creativity to “its particular manifestations of multiple music creativities” (Burnard, 2012, p. 6–7). Creativity has been used as a term for multiple musical phenomena such as “musical invention, improvisation, generation, composition, arranging, and performance” (Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell, 2012, p. 3). Recent research is even now exploring the ways in which listening is creative activity (Hargreaves, Hargreaves, & North, 2012; Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell, 2012). The teaching and learning of creativity has been explored through the musical activities of improvisation (Black, 2008; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Sawyer, 2006), composition (Andrews, 2004; Barrett, 2006a, 2006b; Burnard & Younker, 2002; Henry,
Drawing on interdisciplinary studies such as jazz, African dance, improvisational theater, and Nepalese drumming, Keith Sawyer (1997b) discusses a myriad of ways creativity is present in performance—music, theater, or otherwise. He argues that “unlike product creativity, which involves a long period of creative work leading up to the creative product, in performance creativity, the creative process and the resulting product are co-occurring” (p. 2). The broadening of creativity studies from product to performance perspectives, particularly exemplified by the early work of Keith Sawyer (1997a) and later by Clarke (2012), has framed subsequent research on the jazz performance tradition and its strong communal ethos. The ways in which the jazz community imbues their performances with personal expression is one such example of how the construct of creativity has been used as a lens to further understand jazz improvisation (e.g., Berliner, 1994, 1997; Borgo, 2007; Schroeder, 2002; Monson, 1991, 1996; Norgaard, 2008, 2011; Sawyer, 1992, 1997a, 2006).

**Jazz improvisation as creative.** MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) outline several distinct features of improvisation found across many genres and musical/cultural contexts: improvisation is *creative*; improvisation is *spontaneous*; improvisation is *social*; and improvisation is *accessible* (p. 246–247). Improvisation is creative in how novelty emerges in each musical performance. Each improvisational performance is different from previous performances. They summarize that novelty occurs because improvising “generates new music, or new versions of music in which musicians use their imaginations to develop and elaborate on their stock of knowledge of existing musical
forms” (p. 246). They continue that improvisation is “unquestionably creative in that improvising musicians produce novel music, within or beyond genre parameters, that may be similar to, but have substantive differences from, any previous musical performances” (p. 246).

Another unique and salient element of improvisation lies in its spontaneity. Like composition, the act of improvisation generates new music that is different or novel in some fashion. However, through improvisation, the emergence of new music occurs during the actual performance (Sawyer, 1997a). Novel music emerges in real time.

Third, as evidenced in the seminal, ethnographic studies of Berliner (1994) and Monson (1996), improvisation is a social phenomenon. The dominance of psycho-cognitive perspectives of creativity research has often failed to recognized the myriad of ways in which creativity is socially situated (e.g. Sawyer, 1997b). Clarke (2012) echoes this in stating:

It makes little sense to try to explain such a practical and concrete phenomenon as creativity in performance without reference to the physical apparatus (bodies and instruments) and cultural substance and context (stylistically constituted musical materials and performance circumstances) by means of which it is expressed. (p. 27)

Research has increasingly recognized that while focusing solely on the cognitive processes of improvisors is an important part of understanding improvisation (e.g. Clarke, 1988; Johnson-Laird, 1998, 2002; Norgaard, 2008, 2011; Pressing, 1988, 1998), more holistic descriptions need to include the socially-situated nature of improvisation.

Finally, improvisation research veers away from the perspective of creativity as lying solely in the mind of a few creative geniuses. Instead, improvisation is accessible in the sense that “everybody can engage in it; we are all musical improvisors at some level” (MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012, p. 247). As MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s
(2012) summary of the creativity, spontaneity, social-dependency, and accessibility of improvisation demonstrates, jazz improvisation represents a broadened way in which musical activity can be conceptualized as creative.

**Questions on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity.**

Research on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity has raised and explored a number of questions: What are the thought processes of jazz improvisors, particularly in how they invent or shape music as it is being played? (Norgaard, 2008, 2011; Pressing, 1988, 1998) What variables outside of improvisors’ thought processes—personal, social, and/or cultural—are at play during improvisation? (Csikszentmihalyi & Rich, 1997) In what ways is jazz improvisation collaborative and socially situated? (Berliner, 1997; Kenny, 2014; Monson, 1991, 1996) In what ways does the jazz performance tradition inform and shape a jazz improvisor’s performance? (Csikszentmihalyi & Rich, 1997; Sawyer, 2006) What kind of preparation is involved in learning to improvise? (Berliner, 1994) What are the most effective strategies, methods, or approaches for teaching others to improvise? (Borgo, 2007; Rutherford, 2014; Schroeder, 2002) These questions are just a few examples of how the construct of creativity has been adopted to further illuminate the practice of jazz improvisation. This study is primarily concerned with exploring the last two questions regarding how best to learn and teach jazz improvisation.

**Rise of jazz education in academia.** The rise in interest on the part of academics in jazz music further exemplifies both the current importance of this music and, as this study has demonstrated, difficulties in understanding the most effective methods for teaching this music to others. Researchers on American jazz education have often crafted narratives that describe jazz through the lens of its acceptance into academic institutions
such as K-12 schools and higher education. Prouty (2005) describes this as an “institutional narrative” (p. 80). For example, the Berklee College of Music (originally Schillinger House of Music) in Boston, MA and the University of North Texas (originally the Westlake College of Music) are just a few frequently cited examples of early jazz education programs that institutions of higher education adopted (Murphy, 1994). This acceptance of jazz improvisation within an academic context seems, initially, to be a positive shift within Western musical practice. The acceptance of jazz within academic circles has widened the presence of jazz education programs in schooling and academia (Ake, 2002; Dobbins, 1988; Prouty, 2002; Roach, 1998; Whyton, 2006).

**From community to academia.** While the focus on jazz education has been steadily growing in academia, researchers have shared that the context in which many jazz musicians learn to improvise has shifted (Dobbins, 1988). Roach (1998) illuminates this shift in stating that this “development reflects a changing jazz infrastructure, formerly centered in local bands but increasingly based in a network of higher education institutions, and the growing conviction that jazz can be taught in academic settings” (abstract). Similarly, Ake (2002) observes that “jazz musicians—young and old—increasingly consider the university or conservatory, rather than ‘the street,’ to be the prime training ground for beginners” (p. 115). Evidence suggests that jazz musicians are experiencing diminishing opportunities to perform in local, communal settings such as jazz clubs and jam sessions (Chessher, 2009). Jazz education courses and degree programs in K-12 and higher education have provided aspiring musicians the opportunities to learn and perform jazz.

**Community-based learning.** This shift in jazz education, as evidenced through the rise of courses and degree programs in academic contexts, has perpetuated a
particular “history” of jazz. Researchers on jazz have adopted an educational identity primarily in relationship to its acceptance or rejection in academic contexts. Prouty (2005) critiques this institutional narrative in how it reinscribes a bifurcated “academic vs. non-academic” reading of the history of jazz (p. 79). Berliner (1994) argues in his seminal book, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation*, that “for almost a century, the jazz community has functioned as a large educational system for producing, preserving, and transmitting musical knowledge, preparing students for the artistic demands of a jazz career through its particularized methods and forums” (p. 37). He presents evidence that jazz musicians developed their musical craft through participation in a variety of playing opportunities such as jam sessions, sitting in at concerts, and “extended tenures” with professional bands (p.46), in addition to formal educational institutions. These apprenticeships, jam sessions, and other forms of social interactions were crucial to the development of jazz improvisation (Alperson, 2010). Furthermore, these bifurcated narratives of jazz education history have caused jazz educators to feel distanced from non-academic jazz communities (Prouty, 2005). Prouty (2005) argues that “institutionally driven narratives also have served to increase the cultural and social distance that many jazz educators feel in relation to the larger non-academic jazz community” (p. 100). A holistic understanding of the history of jazz rejects the notion that jazz education only occurred as jazz ensembles and improvisation courses emerged in university music departments.

This study was built upon these community-centered descriptions of the ways jazz education has functioned throughout its development (Berliner, 1994). Further inquiry on how best to learn and teach jazz improvisation seems to be more effectively accomplished outside strictly institutional narratives of jazz education. This suggests the
importance of developing effective teaching practices that keep to the values and heritage of the broader, interrelated jazz community.

Literature in music education suggests that development of instruction is informed by expert practitioners (Bruner, 1977; Duke, 2005; Hickey, 2009; Norgaard, 2011). Norgaard’s (2011) study of the thought processes of “artist-level” jazz musicians concludes that “the primary goal of improvisation instruction should be to structure learning activities in which students at all levels can experience ways of thinking that resemble those of artist-level improvisors” (p. 124). Several key studies have focused on the thought processes of advanced practitioners in jazz (Berliner, 1994, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi & Rich, 1997; Monson, 1996; Schroeder, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Scant empirical evidence exists on (1) the pedagogical beliefs jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process; and (2) the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. While studies are emerging that explore the creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible dimensions of jazz improvisation through the construct of creativity, further research is needed in developing teaching and learning strategies for developing this skill (Hickey, 2009; MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012).

Development of effective teaching practices has been a topic of crucial interest for jazz education research over the last 30 years. In a summary of doctoral research on the topic of jazz education, Bowman (1988) notes one of several questions that still remains: “How have great improvisors learned to improvise?” (p. 74). This question has been addressed in great detail by researchers since (e.g. Berliner, 1994). However, later concluding a review of literature on the topic of jazz pedagogy, Watson (2010) asks:
“What behaviours or characteristics do effective jazz teachers exhibit, either in classroom or private lesson settings?” (p. 390). Further research is needed on the beliefs and practice of effective jazz educators (Watson, 2010). Given research conceptualizing jazz improvisation as a form of creativity, the actual practice of jazz educators—how they think about their own teaching and the strategies they employ in educational settings—does not have a significant presence in research within the focus of jazz education. Furthermore, research conceptualizing improvisation as a form of creativity provides another lens through which to ask new questions on this topic. Using the construct of creativity as a lens through which to examine the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators, the purpose of this study is described below.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process.

**Research Questions**

Central Research Question: What is the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity?

Supportive Research Questions:

1. What pedagogical beliefs do jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process?

2. What are the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process?

**Significance of the Study**

In conceptualizing jazz improvisation through the construct of creativity, this study explored this relationship through providing evidence on (1) the ways in which jazz
educators conceptualize improvisation as a creative process; and (2) the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. Exploring this relationship was an interdisciplinary endeavor involving drawing and synthesizing data from multiple fields of study, including creativity studies, jazz improvisation, and music education.

**Contribution to creativity studies.** This study contributes to the scholarly understanding of creativity, specifically how it is conceptualized and taught by music educators. Discourse in education research has lately been focused on the construct of creativity as a fundamental aspect of the educational process (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004). Still, there remains much contention and debate in understanding what it means for music education (Burnard, 2012).

Discussing the variety of theoretical frameworks available in studying the construct of creativity, Kozbelt, Beghetto, and Runco (2010) suggest scholars ask “what aspects of this theory seem out of balance or underdeveloped, particularly when viewed in the light of the broader landscape of creativity studies?” (p. 40). As will be argued in more depth in the literature review, creativity research is increasingly focusing on confluence perspectives where “multiple components must converge for creativity to occur” (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 10). Mayer (1999) notes:

> A major strength of contextual approaches is a broadening of the study of creativity. The narrow focus on cognition epitomized by the psychometric and experimental approaches should be widened to recognize the social, cultural, and evolutionary context of creative cognition. (p. 458)

Improvisation, considered one of the most salient aspects of the jazz musical tradition (Norgaard, 2011; Schuller, 1968), has been increasingly conceptualized through the lens of creativity as one of the many ways music is said to be creative. Researchers have
adopted approaches to the study of jazz improvisation that focus on the socio-cultural contexts and influences of jazz musicians (Balara, 2000; Berliner, 1994, 1997a; Campbell, 2010; MacDonald & Wilson, 2006; Sawyer, 2006). However, the ways in which these socio-cultural factors are present in the teaching beliefs and practices of jazz educators remains unclear. This study contributes to research descriptions of the ways jazz improvisation educators conceptualize and incorporate the socio-cultural dimensions of jazz improvisation into their own practice.

**Contribution to jazz improvisation.** Second, this study presents evidence significant for understanding jazz improvisation, specifically whether it can be taught and the best practices for teaching it. Patton (2002) notes that “researchers working within any specific disciplinary tradition strive to make a contribution to knowledge in the discipline and thereby contribute to answering the fundamental questions of the discipline” (p. 215). The question of how to learn and teach the skill of improvisation is one that has consistently permeated jazz education research over the last 30 years (Berliner, 1994; Bowman, 1988; Watson, 2010). Furthermore, the ways in which expert jazz educators overcome the tension of “freedom vs. discipline” (Louth, 2012, p. 1) in their own practice within schooling and academic institutions has been a neglected focus of inquiry. This study contributes an understanding of how expert jazz improvisation educators overcome the challenges of teaching improvisation given the climate of ‘academisation’ occurring in academic institutions.

**Contribution to music education.** Third, in addition to contributing to the knowledge base on creativity studies and jazz improvisation, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of how to more effectively teach creativity in music education. The question of whether creativity can be taught has been an area of inquiry in music
education research over the last 50 years (Richards, 1983; Running, 2008). Since the National Standards for Arts Education included improvisation and composition in 1994 (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994), and more recently the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014) and its focus on artistic processes (improvisation again being one such process), researchers have focused even more on understanding the construct of creativity and what it means for music education (Running, 2008; Webster, 1988).

Concluding a 25-year review of literature on creativity research in music education, Running (2005) suggests that “an attempt to determine whether creativity is something that can be taught, and if so, the best methods for teaching it should be established” (p. 46). This study suggests that creativity, specifically jazz improvisation, can indeed be taught, as well as provides evidence on the most effective methods for doing so.

**Framework**

This study describes the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of distinct features of improvisation outlined above is utilized to analyze, organize, and present the data collected in this study. They describe improvisation as being creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible (p. 246–247). A visual representation of this framework appears in Figure 1. Each of these features of improvisation are explored in more detail in the Literature Review (Chapter 2).
Figure 1. Summary of Research on Improvisation (MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012, p. 246–247).
Chapter Summary

Improvisation has remained an integral feature of a jazz performance tradition spanning over a century and encompassing many different musical styles. It is only more recent that the broadening field of creativity studies has come to conceptualize jazz improvisation through the construct of creativity. Over the course of the jazz performance tradition, the surrounding jazz community has served as an educational system in the form of playing opportunities such as jam sessions, concerts, playing in professional bands, and apprenticeships (Berliner, 1994). As such, questions on the efficacy of current teaching and learning practices with regards to jazz improvisation have been raised given the rise of jazz education courses and degree programs in schooling and academia. Despite a widening research base in the field of jazz pedagogy (Watson, 2010), scant empirical evidence exists on (1) the pedagogical beliefs jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process; and (2) the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of distinct features of improvisation (i.e. creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible) will be utilized to analyze, organize, and present the data collected in this study. Through exploring the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity, the findings of this study present significant contributions to the fields of creativity studies, jazz improvisation, and music education.
Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. The central argument of this chapter is that while jazz improvisation functions as a site for the creative process, scant empirical evidence exists on both (1) the pedagogical beliefs jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process; and (2) the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. This chapter presents a critical analysis and synthesis of research exploring the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity.

The literature included in this review focuses primarily on peer-reviewed journal articles, handbooks of research, and books by authors highly respected in their own fields. These criteria include authors who frequently publish in this field, as well as those whose books are frequently cited in peer-reviewed research. Any other additions to the literature will be discussed in the context of the unfolding narrative. Finally, there are multiple dissertations and theses that inform this synthesis of literature. The merit and focus of this research will be discussed as well, although this literature review acknowledges the difference in scholarly weight they hold for assessing the status of these various fields of inquiry.

This chapter will first discuss historic trends in research on creativity. This section will demonstrate how research over the last 30 years has come to recognize the
creative process and how this process is situated in socio-cultural contexts. Second, literature on the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation is presented and organized utilizing MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of features common to improvised music: improvisation is creative; improvisation is spontaneous; improvisation is social; improvisation is accessible (p. 246–7). Third, this chapter will explore the literature on the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process. Specific analysis will be given to studies presenting evidence of the beliefs and practices of jazz educators, as well as studies where pedagogical implications were extrapolated through exploring the formative experiences and current practices of jazz musicians. Finally, as recommended by Maxwell (2013), this chapter will conclude with a discussion of how the research questions relate to—and build upon—the knowledge base on the topic of jazz improvisation and creativity.

Relationship between Jazz Improvisation and Creativity

Creativity. Research on creativity has gained considerable momentum over the last 50 years (Fasko, 2001; Haring-Smith, 2006; Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004; Weiner, 2000). Runco and Albert (2010) note that “the maturing of a professional interest can be seen in the growth of its journals” (p. 5), several of which include Creativity Research Journal; Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts; The Journal of Creative Behavior; and Thinking Skills and Creativity. Furthermore, the publication of handbooks of research on a particular topic is evidence of the recognition that knowledge within a field has grown to a point that scholars can pause to take stock of where it has been and possible directions for where it is going (Mumford, 2003). Several examples include the Creativity Research Handbook (Runco, 1997), the Handbook of
Creativity (Sternberg, 1999), and The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010). These handbooks are helpful in assessing current trends in creativity research. In doing so, this section will provide a context through which to understand the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation.

Defining creativity has been a topic of heated discussion. While these diverse perspectives on defining creativity are weaved through the first half of this literature review, what is most salient at this point is a brief description of what these definitions have in common. Scholars generally acknowledge two central aspects of creativity: novelty and usefulness (Sternberg & Kaufman, 2010). Novelty refers to the way in which creativity—in thought or action—manifests itself as being new or different with regards to what it is being compared with. Usefulness refers to creativity having some sort of utility, purpose, or function, whether limited to a single individual or to a specific demographic. Given this description, the following statement represents a working construct of creativity used in this literature review: “the process of bringing into being something novel and useful” (Sternberg & O’Hara, 1999, p. 251). Again, this is emphasized more as a description of the common themes emerging on creativity, rather than a singular definition of creativity.

Historic trends in creativity research. Scholars frequently acknowledge Guilford’s 1950 American Psychological Association presidential address as initiating an empirically-focused era of research into what he argues as the neglected field of creativity (Fasko, 2001; Haring-Smith; 2006; Hickey, 2002). Guilford argued that “out of the 121,000 titles listed in Psychological Abstracts from the late 1920s to 1950, only 186 dealt with creativity” (Runco & Albert, 2010, p. 5). For him, “a comprehensive learning theory must take into account both insight and creative activity” (Guilford, 1950,
Even over 50 years later, scholars continue to argue how insights into creativity are of paramount importance to an education aimed at academic, cognitive, emotional, and cognitive development (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004).

In Guilford’s (1950) address, he framed the study of creativity through the “creative aspects of personality” (p. 454). Factors such as problem-finding, problem-solving, ability to conceive of novel ideas, ability to synthesize seemingly disparate concepts, and skills of evaluation were just a few of the cognitive processes he argued that creativity research should focus on. These processes could be most effectively studied through individuals demonstrating creative personalities. As such, early research on creativity was monopolized by psychologists focusing on the cognitive processes of creative individuals.

Since Guilford, the understanding of creativity has transformed from an innate characteristic of highly creative individuals towards it being an ability that is able to be developed by all (Haring-Smith, 2006). In discussing the history of research on creativity, Runco and Albert (2010) summarize:

Over the last 50 years research on creativity has merged an interest in creative persons with empirical methods and a feeling for the humanity and dignity of subjects, out of which has come respect for the unambiguously creative, as well as everyday creativity. (p. 16)

Their reference to the “unambiguously creative” acknowledges the shift in understanding of creativity that occurred through inquiry into the cognitive processes of creativity, as well as environmental-individual relationships.

Along this same trajectory lies an important distinction between Big-C creativity and little-c creativity (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010). Big-C creativity refers to works of great magnitude—eminent individuals whose creativity are deemed so with
relatively little question or ambiguity. These works have seminal impact on a given field (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999). Referring again back to the working definition of creativity as “the process of bringing into being something novel and useful” (Sternberg & O’Hara, 1999, p. 251), the usefulness of Big-C creativity lies in its magnitude of impact, particularly on a given overall field. Little-c creativity describes creativity as it permeates everyday life. Individuals need not produce works that significantly affect the field they are working in. No one else need even know about their creative endeavors for it to be creative.

Furthermore, this shift of understanding creativity from being an innate characteristic of only certain individuals towards it being an ability attainable by all is reflected in what is often referred to as the four Ps of creativity: (1) the personality characteristics of a creative person; (2) the effective environments or places for creative work; (3) the creative process; (4) or analysis of the creative product (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010; Odena & Welch, 2012). Because of the de-emphasis on the creative product that Big-C creativity so relies upon, little-c creativity has helped to focus attention into the process of creativity (Richards, 2010). As will be discussed when this body of research is applied below towards jazz improvisation, this distinction (i.e., product vs. process) is central to emancipating a monopolized conceptualization of creativity based solely on a tangible product.

Since Guilford’s address, research has since focused on defining and theorizing creativity; the assessment of creativity; the relationship between learning and creativity; teaching creativity; creativity and intelligence; teachers’ and researchers’ beliefs about creativity; the context for learning creativity in the classroom; and creativity and national education policy (Andiliou & Murphy, 2010; Plucker & Makel, 2010; NACCCE, 1999;
Spencer, Lucas, & Claxton (2012). Research on creativity has been studied from a variety of perspectives, including cognitive; social-personality; psychometric; psychodynamic; mystical; pragmatic or commercial and, laterally, more postmodern approaches; biological or neuroscience; computational; and context, systems or confluent approaches (Spencer, Lucas, & Claxton, 2012, p. 37). This body of research has produced a variety of theoretical perspectives: developmental; psychometric; economic; stage and componential; cognitive; problem solving and expertise; problem-finding; evolutionary; typological; and systems theories (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010).

Furthermore, as discussed by Barrett (2012, p. 52), these theoretical perspectives frequently lie along a continuum that on one side acknowledges creativity as a general capacity that operates across multiple domains (Finke, 1995; Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992; Guilford, 1968), while on the other side argues that creativity is domain-specific (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Gardner, 1993, 1997; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995).

Spencer, Lucas and Claxton (2012) remind researchers and educators that “no single model or approach has, to date, become established” (p. 11). Responding to the pluralistic field of research on creativity, Kozbelt, Beghetto, and Runco (2010) conclude:

In suggesting that scholars apply a “golden mean” to existing creativity theories, we are not necessarily advocating for the development of such models into grand unifying theories…. Rather, we are suggesting that scholars better situate their theories in the broader theoretical and empirical landscape of the domain, acknowledging and, when possible, incorporating the plurality of perspectives that have taken root and flourished. (p. 40–41)

This immersion into creativity means embracing the messiness inherent in the process of inquiry. As noted earlier, research on creativity has been conducted from a variety of perspectives (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Several of these perspectives have served as
the dominant framework—implicitly and explicitly—by researchers of jazz: psychometric, cognitive, social-personality, and confluence approaches (Watson, 2010).

A more focused discussion of these perspectives is warranted. Doing so provides a more robust foundation for justifying a confluence perspective in this study.

**Psychometric approaches.** It is largely because of Guilford’s address that psychometric approaches to the study of creativity dominated this first wave of creativity research. This approach emphasizes the measurement of subjects’ creativity through a convergent-divergent thinking lens, mostly in the form of paper and pencil tests— later codified through Torrance’s development of the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* (1974). Divergent thinking is present “when ideas and associations move in varied directions, and as a result new and original ideas may be found,” whereas convergent thinking is present “when cognition is used to identify one correct or conventional answer” (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010, p. 32). The novelty of creativity was explained as emerging through this convergent-divergent thinking process.

Though psychometric perspectives have served as a foundation for early studies and assessments of creative thinking in music (e.g., Baltzer, 1988; Gorder, 1980; Webster, 1990b), they are not without critique. Sternberg and Lubart (1999) note that while easy to administer, “some researchers criticized brief paper-and-pencil tests as trivial, inadequate measure of creativity” and that “fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration scores failed to capture the concept of creativity” (p. 7).

**Cognitive approaches.** While psychometric approaches emphasize accurate measurement of creativity, this approach’s frequent focus on the creative *product* as the unit of analysis neglects the thinking process that leads up to an individual’s own creative endeavor. Cognitive approaches “seek to understand the mental representations and
processes underlying creative thought” (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 7; e.g., Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992; Ward & Kolomyts, 2010). What are the thought processes individuals use in the creative process? From this question, it is evident that creativity, rather than being conceptualized and explored through the creative product as in psychometric approaches, is approached from the perspective of the creative process and the creative person (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010). Several models have been developed such as the Geneplore (“generate” + “explore”) model where creative thought moves through two main processing models: generative and exploratory. First the generative phase is where processes produce “candidate ideas of varying degrees of creative potential,” followed by the exploratory phase where the potential of these ideas are expanded towards a “creative outcome” (Ward & Kolomyts, 2010, p. 94). Ward and Kolomyts (2010) note that “rather than relying solely on more global cognitive descriptors, such as ‘divergent thinking,’ the creative-cognition approach seeks to specify the basic component processes that lead to divergent productions” (p. 94). Given the generative nature of jazz improvisation, along with the optimal cognitive operations that occur during this process (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991; McPherson & Limb, 2013), the thought-processes of eminent jazz improvisors have been explored in previous research (Norgaard, 2011; Pressing, 1988, 1998). However, much of this literature lacks meaningful engagement with literature in creativity studies.

**Social-personality approaches.** Social-personality approaches to the study of creativity emerged in tandem with cognitive approaches and focus on personality variables, motivational variables, and the socio-cultural environment as sources of creativity (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 8). This expansion of the study of creativity into the socio-cultural dimension has particularly gained ground over the last 30 years (Kasof,
1995; Simonton, 1984). It has provided necessary insights into the relationship between creativity and jazz (e.g., Watson, 2010). However, methodological problems emerge such as “biased biographers, the interpretation of biographical data as fact, and a lack of evidence for validity and reliability of results” (Watson, 2010, p. 389). Problems such as this contribute to the critique of studies where inquiry occurs through both cognitive and socio-personality approaches (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Sternberg and Lubart (1999) note that “the cognitive work on creativity has tended to ignore or downplay the personality and social system, and social-personality approaches have tended to have little or nothing to say about the mental representations and processes underlying creativity” (p. 9).

**Confluence approaches.** Confluence approaches—also referred to as “systems theories” (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010)—to the study of creativity “hypothesize that multiple components must converge for creativity to occur” (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999, p. 10). Mayer (1999) argues:

> A major strength of contextual approaches is a broadening of the study of creativity. The narrow focus on cognition epitomized by the psychometric and experimental approaches should be widened to recognize the social, cultural, and evolutionary context of creative cognition. (p. 458)

Examples of this approach include Csikszentmihalyi and Rich’s (1997) study of musical improvisation through the lens of Csikszentmihalyi’s systems model where the *domain, field, and individual* all interact for creativity to occur, as well as Gardner’s (1993) historio-biographical study of seven creative artists. Reviews of research on creativity and musical pedagogy suggest a more nuanced understanding of the creative achievement in children (Hickey, 2002) as well as in jazz (Watson, 2010) can be achieved through confluence perspectives.
Towards a creativity of performance. The above-discussed psychological perspectives monopolize the study of creativity—often resulting in an over-emphasis on the creative product as the unit of analysis (Sawyer, 1995, 1997b). Keith Sawyer, an important figure in research on performance creativity since the early 1990s, argues that “the focus in creativity research on product creativity is not surprising, because our goals are often to understand the histories of our own creative genres, and to identify and encourage creativity (particularly scientific creativity) in our own societies” (1997b, p. 2). This is evident in the psychometric approaches to assessing creativity. He continues in stating that “theories that claim to be directed at underlying universals in the psychological and social processes of creativity must be cognizant of all manifestations of creativity, including both product creativity and performance” (p. 2).

Research in creativity studies is increasingly recognizing the performative aspect of creativity (e.g. Clarke, 2012; Sawyer, 1997a). The significance of this trend lies in how it departs from psychological-dominated perspectives to embrace those from anthropology, philosophy, and ethnomusicology to just to name a few (Sawyer, 1997b). Furthermore, traditional approaches to studying creativity such as the cognitive approaches discussed above, while emphasizing the creative process, neglect the social nature of creativity. Creativity research is far from comprehensive due to the “desocialized and rather disembodied way in which performance has often been studied” (Clarke, 2012, p. 27). In his key text on the performative aspect of creativity, Sawyer (1997b, p. 4) notes several themes that can help researchers understand the synthesis of both psychological and social elements of performance creativity: listening as a catalyst for interaction; the collaborative nature of performance, otherwise known as collectivity; the contingent nature of how performers create in the moment; the analysis of
performance primarily in terms of the emergence of collective activity; the learning process as participatory and social in nature; and the use of discourse analysis to understand the nature of performance. While many of these themes emerged throughout the rest of this literature review, what is of most importance at this stage is the recognition of performative creativity as an emerging trend in creativity research (Sawyer, 2009).

**Summary of research on creativity.** Research on creativity from the 1950s to the 1980s has focused on the creative person—the cognitive process they exhibit and the creative product they produce. However, creativity studies over the last 30 years have come to recognize the creative process and how this process is situated in socio-cultural contexts. Performative creativity challenges strict psychological inquiry into the nature of creativity in employing interdisciplinary perspectives to understand how creativity in performance is collaborative, emergent, and participatory.

**Creativity and jazz improvisation.** In a recent review of jazz pedagogy research, Watson (2010) discusses the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation. Research in jazz improvisation has traditionally used the psychometric approach and the social-personality approach to studying creativity (Watson, 2010). Exploring improvisation from a psychological perspective has primarily focused on developing and testing cognitive models for understanding the ways in which creativity is manifested (Biasutti & Frezza, 2009; Clarke, 1988, 2012; Johnson-Laird, 1988, 2002; Norgaard, 2008, 2011; Pressing, 1988, 1998). While it is important not to dismiss this body of research entirely, it would be wise to balance with Clarke’s (2012) caution against “the tendency for psychological theories to place creativity firmly inside the heads of its creators” (p. 27). It is critical to avoid the “desocialized and rather
disembodied way in which performance has often been studied” (p. 27). There has been a tendency to study creativity through the lens of the creative product. This tendency has demonstrated a focus on cognitive processes and the development of cognitive models of creativity. This is what Sawyer (2009) refers to as the first wave of creativity research. Over the last 25 years, research in creativity studies has begun to recognize how cognitive development is situated in socio-cultural contexts. This has suggested that creativity is collaborative in nature (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1990; Sawyer, 2009). Watson (2010), in his survey of research in jazz pedagogy, argues for further research on the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation. He states that “future studies might alternately adopt a confluence approach to investigating the relationship between creativity and jazz performance achievement” (Watson, 2010, p. 390). The central research question in this study explores the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. Watson’s (2010) survey supports the argument that the field of creativity studies provides an appropriate lens through which to explore this overarching research question.

This section will summarize the research base on the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation. MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) outline in broad strokes four features common to improvised music: improvisation is *creative*; improvisation is *spontaneous*; improvisation is *social*; improvisation is *accessible* (p. 246–7). These features will be used to organize this summary of research on the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation. Each feature is used as a subheading below. Sources will be discussed that explore this relationship through a confluence construct of creativity. This approach recognizes the socio-cultural
dimensions of jazz improvisation. Qualitative studies, ethnographies in particular, proved to be the most effective resources for developing this base.

**Jazz improvisation is creative.** Jazz improvisation is in a variety of ways a creative process where novel or new music is produced. However, unpacking in more depth how this novelty is produced and what makes it new is dependent on how one conceptualizes “creativity.” This section will develop in more detail how jazz musicians rarely improvise completely new music. Often the “blank sheet of paper” metaphor is used to describe this idea (MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012). Rather, jazz musicians create novel music through manipulating and developing pre-conceived musical ideas and sounds. A broad definition of creativity adopted in this study was “the process of bringing into being something novel and useful” (Sternberg & O’Hara, 1999, p. 251). So then the question remains: In what way(s) is novelty and usefulness produced during the process of jazz improvisation?

A question that frequently surfaces in the discussion of jazz improvisation as a creative act is the degree (if at all) to which it necessitates previous preparation. Do jazz improvisors make up their notes, phrases, and melodies out of thin air? Or is there some sort of previous preparation at play in this process? Contrary to the often popularized belief that jazz musicians make up their improvisations “out of thin air,” evidence has consistently demonstrated that jazz improvisors have a well-stocked repertoire of previously developed musical ideas from which to pull from (Berliner, 1994; Johnson-Laird, 2002; Norgaard, 2011; Pressing, 1988). Norgaard’s (2011) investigation of the thinking processes of seven artist-level jazz musicians revealed how they recalled previously-developed “well-learned ideas from memory and insert[ed] them into the ongoing improvisation” (abstract). In Berliner’s (1994) landmark study of the learning
processes of a jazz community regarded for its expertise in jazz improvisation, his argument refutes the popular misconception of jazz improvisation as lacking previous preparation. He describes this process:

At one moment, soloists may play radical, precomposed variations on a composition’s melody as rehearsed and memorized before the event. The very next moment, they may spontaneously be embellishing the melody’s shape, or inventing a new melodic phrase. There is a perpetual cycle between improvised and precomposed components of the artist’s knowledge as it pertains to the entire body of construction materials on any and every level of solo invention. (p. 222)

From his description, jazz improvisation seems to oscillate between prepared and spontaneous ideation. Similarly, Sawyer’s (1992) study discusses the way in which the jazz community is consciously aware of the “domain of jazz performance, primarily through listening to albums of jazz improvisation” (p. 258). These ideas are significant, as they attest to the importance of conscious and intentional learning that is essential to mastering jazz improvisation. This also contributes to a foundational assumption upon which this dissertation is built upon: jazz improvisation can be intentionally learned.

Literature on how music is created during the process of jazz improvisation is dominated by cognitive approaches into the thinking processes of improvisors (e.g. Norgaard, 2011). Hargreaves summarizes three general approaches to how jazz performers generate ideas during improvisation. *Strategy-generated ideas* are “consciously formulated and implemented with an intended design” (p.359). Second, *audiation-generated ideas* are “unconsciously formulated but presented to the conscious mind in a manner that the brain mentally ‘hears’ and processes without sound being present” (p. 360). Finally, *motor-generated ideas* are “manifested in actions of the body to produce musical output,” much like muscle memory (p. 362).
Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990, 1991, 1996, 1999) has a rich trail of research in the field of creativity studies. In his systems model of creativity, a performer makes changes in the domain and this is legitimized by the field. The domain in jazz improvisation could be a time signature change on a familiar standard or a groove shift on a typical swing tune. He describes this dimension by stating that “if creativity is to retain a useful meaning, it must refer to a process that results in an idea or product that is recognized and adopted by others” (1999, p. 45). This model helps to explain how a creative product becomes established in a particular culture. “Creativity is not the product of single individuals,” he concludes, “but of social systems making judgements about individual products” (1997, p. 46). This is what makes the creative product and process valuable. Csikszentmihalyi’s systems model of creativity makes a valuable contribution to this body of research in how it is used as a lens through which to understand how the social milieu is embedded in the creative process (e.g., Balara, 2000; Berliner, 1997; Black, 2008; Sawyer, 1992).

**Jazz improvisation is spontaneous.** Improvisation involves the creating and shaping of new music as it is being played. Bailey (1992) calls this process ‘in the moment’ composition. In their discussion of improvisation as a creative activity that cuts across multiple genres, MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) highlight several key features of improvisation. They note that improvisation is a creative process that is spontaneous in nature. This concept of spontaneous creativity is in line with Ferand’s (1961) definition of improvisation as the “spontaneous invention and shaping of music while it is being performed” (p. 5).

Sawyer’s (1992) exploration of the creative thinking processes of several jazz improvisation performers unpacks how improvisational creativity is different from
compositional creativity. Several characteristics emerged: interactional influences; conscious and nonconscious processes; units of ideation; the balance of structure and innovation in the domain; and the balance of structure and innovation within the individual (p. 255).

**Jazz improvisation is social.** The practice of jazz improvisation is in many ways a social process that has multiple layers of collaborative interaction, often occurring simultaneously. Previous attempts have been made to explore and develop cognitive models of improvisation in general (Pressing, 1988, 1998), as well as jazz improvisation specifically (Johnson-Laird, 2002; Norgaard, 2008, 2011). However, MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) summarize how improvising musicians all have input in shaping the performed sound. They argue that “the practice [of improvisation] primarily takes place among a group of individuals involved in collaboration in order to produce a more coherent piece of music spontaneously and simultaneously” (p. 247).

There are several early seminal ethnographic studies that explored the improvisational thinking of expert jazz musicians (Berliner, 1994; Monson, 1996). In Berliner’s (1994) landmark study, he discusses the collaborative aspect of the improvisational process. He notes how many of his respondents utilized the metaphor of a “conversation” that occurs among jazz musicians during a performance (Berliner, 1994, p. 348). Berliner later expands this metaphor of improvisation as a conversation through describing how musicians perceive musical interaction during performances (Berliner, 1997). He summarizes that “as a multi-layered, dynamic activity, collective improvisation makes unique demands on artists, requiring them to respond instantaneously to the changing rhythmic, harmonic, melodic, and timbral features of their group’s inventions” (1997, p. 37). Berliner explores and develops several
dimensions that occur simultaneously during a performance that jazz musicians respond to in the moment of performance. These include: the negotiation of a shared sense of groove that serves to form a cohesive bond between all the performers; the interaction among the rhythm section players in not only establishing a shared sense of groove and rhythm, but also in collaboratively shaping the harmonic form; the interaction between the rhythm section and soloist; the interpretation of improvised musical ideas by other members of the band; the interplay between improvising and pre-composed musical ideas; negotiating unexpected surprises and/or errors that occur during performance; and the attempt to shape the larger performance to form some sort of continuity (Berliner, 1994).

This collaborative aspect of jazz improvisation is supported in Monson’s (1991, 1996) ethnographic study of the improvisational interaction among rhythm section players. Similar to Berliner, Monson (1996) finds the metaphor of the improvisational process—in this case in the rhythm section—to be a “conversation” (p. 97).

Sawyer’s (1992) exploration of the creative thinking processes of several jazz improvisation performers unpacks how improvisational creativity is different from compositional creativity. One theme he found was how the social interaction of individual jazz performers among each other, as well as the interaction between the performers and the audience, shape the creative process of improvisation. He describes this process as a “form of dialogue [that] occurs between the performer’s nonconscious and conscious” (p. 261).

Csikszentmihalyi and Rich (1997) found in their interviews with several prominent musicians (Ravi Shankar, Oscar Peterson, and Gunther Schuller) that they discuss how improvisation performances have a collaborative, interactive dimension to
them. They use Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) systems model of creativity to explore the socio-political dimensions of creativity in the improvisational process. The “gatekeepers” in jazz, as Csikszentmihalyi (1997) argues, are the “other band members, the audience of jazz lovers and novices in the club, the club owner, and perhaps any critics in the audience” (p. 54). Because of the role that these other individuals and groups have during performances, the creative product that is produced has a collaborative aspect to it. In an exploration of how collaborative creativity is present within a local jazz ensemble in Ireland, Kenny (2014) observes a variety of ways their performances are collaborative. These include:

Musical responses to each other, the seamless nature of passing on solos, non-verbal gestures to attend to conventions, peer approval through behaviour such as bowing their heads, nodding and occasional smiles, and audience approval as the group became more experimental. (2014, p. 6)

In a series of interviews, MacDonald and Wilson (2006) investigated the ways in which 10 UK jazz musicians understand their collaborative musical practice. The authors discuss jazz improvisation as an important “modus operandi for creativity” (p. 72). The metaphor of a “conversation” frequently surfaced in how the participants in this study framed their collaborative musical practice.

Black (2008) examined the “communicative processes” of university jazz instructors that inform the theoretical understanding of the relationship between creativity and improvisation. He suggests that this examination has implications for theories of creativity. He suggests that the various theories of creativity in research neglect to discuss the activity of jazz improvisation, which he defines as “norms of interaction/interplay” (p. 292) as well as “talk about these norms of interaction and interplay (meta-cognition)” (p. 293).
Several theses and dissertations have found themes related to the collaborative aspect of jazz improvisation. In his thesis exploring the process of group improvisation, Campbell (2010) found several emerging themes, including a sense of “group flow” and the “concept of dynamic roles and shifting hierarchies” (abstract). Similarly, Balara’s (2000) dissertation explores the personal and social dimensions of creativity in his study of four jazz musicians’ “interaction with self, peers, and environment” (abstract). The central research question he explores is “what, if any, are the categories, processes, and/or themes to emerge from musicians engaged in the social participatory experience of creating collective jazz improvisation?” (abstract). These studies support the argument that jazz improvisation is collaborative in nature.

In summary, jazz improvisation is a collaborative musical practice at various levels: between members of the rhythm section; between soloist and accompanist; between musicians and audience. These collaborative aspects inherent during performances are often communicated by jazz musicians utilizing the metaphor of having a conversation.

**Jazz improvisation is accessible.** MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) summarize the fourth feature of improvisation as accessible. They state:

> Not only is [improvisation] a form of creative experimentation and a fundamental psychological process that underpins many aspects of daily life (e.g. conversations), but, from a musical perspective, improvisational forms are creative activities that can be undertaken by anyone, regardless of musical experience or technical proficiency. (p. 247)

They argue that improvisation as a creative process can be experienced by anyone.

**Summary of research on creativity and jazz improvisation.** This section has demonstrated how the trajectory of research on the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation has adopted a confluence approach. This approach recognizes socio-
cultural factors as influencing the ways in which improvisation is conceptualized through the lens of creativity. Jazz improvisation is creative in how novel or new music is produced. Unlike the process of composing music, jazz improvisation is spontaneous in how new music is created in the moment. Furthermore, this research recognizes jazz improvisation as socially situated and with levels of collaborative interaction at play during a performance: between members of the rhythm section; between soloist and accompanist; between musicians and audience. Finally, though the research base on whether jazz improvisation can be taught is scant, there seems to be a general consensus that it is an ability that can be taught.

**Pedagogical beliefs and practices.** This literature review has first explored the trajectory of research in the field of creativity studies. This field has come to recognize creativity as a process that is situated in socio-cultural contexts. Second, this literature review has explored the relationship between creativity and jazz improvisation in recognizing four features common to improvised music: creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible.

This next section will explore the literature on the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process. The first part will summarize in broad strokes the trajectory of research on creativity and music education. The second part will explore literature on the beliefs and practices of jazz educators.

**Trajectory of research on creativity and music education.** Research in music education has included a focus on creativity for over 80 years, but especially started gaining ground soon after Guilford’s 1950 keynote address (Richardson, 1983). Since the National Standards for Arts Education included improvisation and composition in 1994, researchers have focused even more on understanding the relationship between
creativity and music education (Running, 2008; Webster, 1988). Hargreaves, MacDonald, and Miell (2012) summarize that the term “creativity” has been used “as a generic term for the phenomenon of musical invention, improvisation, generation, composition, arranging, and performance” (p. 3). The teaching and learning of creativity has been explored through the musical activities of improvisation (Black, 2008; Koutsoupidou & Hargreaves, 2009; Sawyer, 2006), composition (Andrews, 2004; Barrett, 2006a, 2006b; Burnard & Younker, 2002; Henry, 1996; Kratus, 1985, 1989; Mellor, 2008; Priest, 2001; Rohwer, 1997), performing (Graham, 1998), analysis (Lock, 2011; Odena, 2001), technology (Crow, 2006; Dillon, 2003; Running, 2008; Thompson, 2012; Webster, 1990a), and listening (Hargreaves, Hargreaves, & North, 2012; Hargreaves, MacDonald, & Miell, 2012). The widening presence of improvisation has been further validated in the scholarly discussion of what constitutes a philosophy of music education (e.g. Silverman & Elliott, 2014; Silverman, Davis, & Elliott, 2014). Elliott’s (Elliott & Silverman, 2014) praxial philosophy of music education widens the nature and significance of music to include processes such as improvisation, composition, and even listening as meaningful points of departure. In discussing possible directions for future research in creativity in the arts, Hickey (2002) summarizes that “as improvisation is a kind of ‘spontaneous music making,’ we might consider it a helpful tool toward for creativity in music” (p. 409).

This trajectory of research on the relationship between creativity and music education has broadened the conceptualization of musical creativity. Burnard (2012) summarizes that this research has broadened to include a “plurality of equally valid creativities through which musicians may fluidly move or situate within realms of creating and receiving musical artworks and cultural products” (p. 15). Musical
creativity is being conceptualized through individual, collaborative, communal, emphatic, intercultural, performance, symbolic, computational, and collective perspectives (p. 14–15). One such focus of research is on the process of creativity. Webster’s (1990b) article discusses the use of the term creative thinking instead of creativity and argues that “by focusing on creative thinking, we place the emphasis on the process itself and on its role in music teaching and learning” (p. 22). He summarizes that “creative thinking, then, is a dynamic mental process that alternates between divergent (imaginative) and convergent (factual) thinking, moving in stages over time” (p. 28). This early model by Webster is grounded in a cognitive approach to understanding creativity in music.

Empirical research has found that music educators find creativity to be an important—even central—aim of music education. In a recent study of Greek music teachers’ understandings of creativity and the teaching conditions that may enhance or inhibit it, Zbainos and Anastasopoulou (2012) concluded that “creativity is considered to be important and desired as a primary aim of music teaching” (p. 59). However, they continue that creativity “is regarded by teachers as something vague, mysterious and personal, thus its enhancement and development without training is almost unfeasible” (p. 59). Odena, Plummeridge, and Welch (2005) also discovered that while music teachers’ understandings of creativity is by no means unified, these same teachers acknowledged the “idea of creativity as a capacity of all students” (p. 12). Creativity is now being seen as crucial in the “current push for more student-centered teaching and learning” that constructivists have been increasingly advocating since the mid-1990s (Fasko, 2001, p. 326).

Most of the research discussing creativity in music education through improvisation and composition is in K-12 contexts. Yet despite the increased focus of
research on this broadened conceptualization of musical creativity, as well as music teachers’ understanding that musical creativity is an important topic in research, research on developing musical creativity in students is a much-neglected focus in music education research. (Hickey, 2002). While several models of creative development exist (Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Swanwick, 1991), their emphasis on differing skill sets make comparison difficult (Hickey, 2002, p. 400–402).

Barrett (2012) espouses the notion that early exposure to music—individually and socially—significantly affects students’ preparation for music creativity. Her research into children’s music-making as song-makers, composers, and notators supports the notion that early exposure and participation in music-making is foundational for developing both their domain-specific knowledge, as well as creative behaviors such as improvisation, persistence, and curiosity (p. 59–60).

In a study of the effects of improvisation on 6 year old students’ creative thinking in music, Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) found improvisation to be a significant factor in the development of childrens’ flexibility, originality, and syntax in their music-making. While their study contributes to research suggesting childrens’ creative ability “improves with experience” (p. 252), what is most significant is the way in which creativity was conceptualized and measured. In this study, the authors state that “quantitative assessment becomes essential in cases where we have to assess the influence of different factors on creativity” (p. 255). Creativity was measured using Webster’s (1987, 1994) Measurement of Creative Thinking in Music II (MCTM-II) which scored factors such as musical extensiveness, flexibility, originality, and syntax. Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves (2009) acknowledge that “some sociological factors involved in the realization of the experiment could be taken into account in future
reapplications of the MCTM-II” (p. 268). Koutsoupidou and Hargreaves’ (2009) study demonstrates the importance of improvisation in contributing to the overall development of childrens’ creative music making. However, this study also exemplifies the focus of research on creativity in music education within K-12 contexts over that of post-secondary contexts.

In summary, research has explored the relationship between creativity and music education through the musical activities of improvisation, composition, performance, technology, and listening. While empirical research has demonstrated that music educators—particularly in K-12 settings—find creativity to be important, little is known regarding the most effective ways to teach students to be creative. What research has been done suggests the importance of early exposure and continued experience in music making for developing students’ creative abilities.

**Jazz improvisation pedagogy.** In an overview of doctoral research in the topic of jazz improvisation pedagogy, Bowman (1988) asks several questions that research over the last 25 years has failed to adequately address: “How have (do) the most influential teachers of improvisation taught (teach)? What do teachers of improvisation in institutional settings consider to be crucial problems, techniques, stages, etc.?” (p. 74). The above section explored literature related to various forms of creative musical activities and what they mean in the context of music education. This next section below explores further the topic of jazz improvisation as a mode of musical creativity and its corresponding literature on pedagogy.

This section is organized in two parts. The first part explores a question commonly found in research: can jazz improvisation be taught? The second part explores factors contributing to jazz improvisation achievement. Much of the research in this
second part consists of academic theses and dissertations, although there are also some peer-reviewed studies relevant to this section.

*Can jazz improvisation be taught?* A question commonly found in literature on jazz pedagogy is whether or not improvisation can be taught (Azzara, 2002; Hickey, 2009; Johnston, 2013; Kingscott & Durrant, 2010; Rogers, 2013; Schroeder, 2002). Jazz educators sometimes hold to the assumption that improvisation is an intuitive ability that cannot be taught in a traditional sense (Borgo, 2007). As argued by Borgo (2007), this viewpoint has caused improvisation pedagogy to suffer in academic institutions. Improvisors are often relegated to “develop ‘on their own,’ since they won’t benefit from, and might even be harmed by, a ‘formal’ music education” (Borgo, 2007, p. 87).

Conversely, another assumption held by jazz educators is that improvisation students are “blank slates” where improvisation is taught through imparting knowledge such as theory, scales, and biographical information (Borgo, 2007, p. 87).

Often, the reason for answering “no” to whether jazz improvisation can be taught is based on the critique that traditional models of teaching and learning jazz improvisation in higher education are stifling to creative performance (Hickey, 2009; Roach, 1998; Schroeder, 2002). In response to whether improvisation can be taught, Hickey (2009) also answers no, not in the way “teaching” is traditionally conceptualized. She explains through placing the idea of “teaching” along a continuum that oscillates between a *transmission* model that is more didactic and teacher directed; and an *enculturation* model that is more learner directed (p. 286–7). She asks:

> Is it really possible to teach, in the didactic sense, extemporaneity, unpreparedness, in-the-moment music-making utilizing didactic approaches to teaching? I will argue it is not; that the most creative and true improvisation is a disposition to be encouraged, facilitated and modeled in our classrooms, along with the musical skills that need to be taught. (p. 287)
Traditional models of teaching seem to be inadequate for developing a disposition for creative, improvisatory music-making.

Baudo (1982) examines the effectiveness of jazz education for enhancing overall creative music making. His survey of high school educators revealed that they all “believed to some degree that the characteristic traits of creativity in music are enhanced through the jazz curriculum” (p. 92). However, this dissertation does not specify exactly how these educators conceptualize creativity. For his study, he states that “creativity is defined as creative ability; artistic or intellectual inventiveness. This study will focus on mechanical/artistic inventiveness which is synonymous with improvisation” (p. 14). Creativity is used synonymously with the term improvisation as “the art of spontaneously creating music” (p. 15).

One such aspect to this issue involves the codification of knowledge that often occurs in higher education. Louth (2012) explains:

For many university educators the most basic problem confronting improvisation pedagogy, regardless of style, is the question of how such a process can be taught as a form of creative expression given that any musical vocabulary involved must be codified to some degree in order to be transmitted in a formal academic environment. (p. 9)

Codifying musical vocabulary for the purpose of teaching in academic contexts has resulted in pedagogical methods utilizing chord-scale approaches. These chord-scale approaches emphasize pedagogical methods and exercises for juxtaposing a “correct” scale over any given chord (Watson, 2010). For example, an important harmonic sequence in jazz is the ii-V7-I chord progression. In the key of F, this sequence would be G minor to C dominant to F major. The corresponding mode would be applied over each chord (ex. G dorian to C mixolydian to F ionian). Pedagogy focuses on these kind of
harmonic-melodic relationships rather than rhythmic development, melodic development, or ear training (Watson, 2010). Music ideas are then “codified” into objective rules to solve a given harmonic problem—much like a puzzle that requires a single right answer. Jazz improvisation is codified through its abstraction from the musical, communal, and social context from which it has traditionally been learned and performed (Berliner, 1994). These codified approaches to jazz pedagogy are frequently criticized as fostering a form of music expression devoid of “freedom, liberation, and individuality” (Prouty, 2008, p. 1). Ample research exists that discusses these chord-scale pedagogical approaches as problematic, particularly in how they hinder the development of creativity within jazz improvisation (Borgo, 2007; Louth, 2012; Mantie, 2008; Monk, 2013; Prouty, 2008; Wilf, 2010). Even research on pedagogical materials for jazz improvisation has demonstrated an overwhelming emphasis on this chord/scale approach, in particular neglecting melodic, aural, and rhythmic dimensions (Watson, 2010; Witmer & Robbins, 1988).

Factors contributing to jazz improvisation achievement. In a more recent review of literature over the past few decades on research in jazz pedagogy, Watson (2010) discusses several themes that have emerged: investigations of variables that predict achievement in jazz improvisation; content analyses of published instructional materials; investigations of the effectiveness of pedagogical methods; the construction and evaluation of jazz improvisation achievement measurement instruments; and investigations of a possible relationship between jazz improvisation achievement and the construct of creativity. Studies reviewing the literature on what factors most significantly contribute to jazz improvisation achievement were not always in agreement.
Watson (2010) shares three factors that were found to contribute to jazz improvisation achievement in multiple studies: (1) jazz theory knowledge (Ciorba, 2006; Madura, 1996); (2) aural imitation (May, 1998, 2003; Madura, 1996); and (3) self-evaluation of improvisation skill (May, 1998, 2003; Ciorba, 2006). However, in a more recent review of literature on established jazz improvisation educational concepts, Rutherford (2014) summarizes multiple factors that significantly influence learning to improvise jazz: practice; self-directed learning; metacognition; and the role of the teacher and the learning environment (p. 36).

**Empirical studies on the beliefs and practices of jazz educators.** The above discussion was primarily concerned with current issues in jazz improvisation pedagogy: Can jazz improvisation be taught? What are significant factors that contribute to jazz improvisation achievement? This next section discusses the field of teacher beliefs and explores empirical research on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators. Similar to the literature explored above on jazz improvisation pedagogy, much of the relevant research in this next section consists of academic theses and dissertations.

**Research on teachers’ beliefs.** The study of beliefs is increasingly recognized, in particularly over the last three decades, as a critical focus within disciplines dealing with human behavior and learning (Ajzen, 1988; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Hong-bo & Wenjuan, 2010). It is within the discipline of educational research that investigation of teachers’ beliefs has gained significant ground (Pajares, 1992). The study of teachers’ beliefs and the subsequent results of such inquiry have and are currently being used for the evaluation of teacher effectiveness (Fenstermacher, 1979), for the improvement of teacher education (Pintrich, 1990), and for furthering the scholarly understanding of teachers’ professional development needs (Bingim & Hanrahan, 2010).
As part of this increased scholarly attention, scholars have recognized and given much discussion to the difficulty in studying teachers’ beliefs. Issues of clarity, clear definition, balance of scope and specificity, assumptions embedded in these terms, and the nature of varying belief structures all have been problematized in this focus in research (Pajares, 1992). The terms “attitudes, values, judgements, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions,” etc., just to name a few, have all been used in the literature (Pajares, 1992, p. 309).

Pajares (1992), in his often-cited review and synthesis of seminal figures in the development of our current understanding of teachers’ beliefs, distinguishes between “belief” and “knowledge.” Through a critical review of research on the relationship between belief and knowledge (e.g. Anderson, 1983, 1985; Goodman, 1988; Nespor, 1987; Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Rokeach, 1968), Pajares (1992) proposes a distinction between belief and knowledge: “Belief is based on evaluation and judgement; knowledge is based on objective fact” (p. 313).

Despite the myriad of misunderstandings inherent in the study of teachers’ beliefs, a consistent body of research demonstrates how teachers’ beliefs have bearing on their educational practices (Haney, Czerniak, & Lumpe, 1996; Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1994). As a result, several assumptions may be reasonably held in investigating teachers’ educational beliefs. While not exhaustive, these assumptions are pertinent to the development of a theoretical foundation for investigating the beliefs and practices of jazz educators: these beliefs are formed early and are often acquired through cultural transmission; these individuals’ beliefs strongly affect their behavior; these beliefs necessitate inference through taking into account the entirety of their statements, their “intentionality to behave” in a particular manner, and their behavior in reference to said
belief; and that beliefs regarding teaching have already been formed by the time a student gets to college (Pajares, 1992, p. 324–326).

An additional subset within the field of teachers’ beliefs has focused on the use of metaphor as a reliable methodology for unpacking pedagogical assumptions (Bullough, 1991; Hong-bo & Wen-juan, 2010). Work in the field of metaphor, including the seminal *Metaphor We Live by* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), has shaped educational research, in particular to understand how teachers understand their own role as teachers (Hong-bo & Wen-juan, 2010; Pajak, 1986; Clandinin, 1986). As demonstrated above, the study of beliefs necessitates inference on part of the researcher. Metaphors provide an effective outlet for teachers to make explicit their own “professional identity” (Pajak, 1986, p. 123). As such, previous research investigating teachers’ metaphors, while more focused on the language teaching field, have revealed the metaphors of teacher as coach, teacher as nurturer, etc. (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Oxford, et al, 1998).

**Teachers’ beliefs about creativity.** In addition to research exploring the nature of beliefs and the role they have on teachers and teaching, research has also explored teachers’ beliefs about creativity. However, the literature in this field is much less extensive. In their review of literature investigating teachers’ conceptualizations of creativity, Andiliou and Murphy (2010) found that researchers identified varying foci, including (1) the nature of creativity; (2) the profile of creative individuals; and (3) the creative classroom environment. However, unlike the broader field of teachers’ beliefs, the relationship between teachers’ beliefs about creativity and their classroom practices remains unclear. As they summarize, “no direct links were made in most of the reviewed studies between teachers’ espoused beliefs and their enacted classroom practices (Andiliou & Murphy, 2010, p. 216). Many of these studies examined the espoused
beliefs of participants in absence of triangulated data that included observations of their beliefs in action. “Triangulation of data,” they continue, “seems paramount when considering the relation between beliefs and behaviors” (p. 216).

Beliefs and practices of jazz educators. Several studies have explored the teaching approaches used by jazz educators (Chessher, 2009; Rutherford, 2014; Salonen, 2010; Schroeder, 2002; Wadsworth, 2005). Chessher’s (2009) master’s thesis explores the teaching approaches of Australian jazz-musician educators and include a number of methodological similarities to that of this dissertation including: (1) a qualitative design utilizing semi-structured interviews; (2) six participants who are both active in performance and educational roles within the jazz community; (3) and a similar research question. The findings as a result of this study surfaced multiple approaches and issues that were important to the participants: the importance of listening; focusing on various sub-styles found within “jazz” music; balancing the inclusion of small and large ensembles; and the increased confidence in playing and making music felt by students through the study of jazz. Chessher (2009) notes that “a logical next step would be to observe a broader range of jazz musician-educators working in the wide array of contexts in which jazz is taught” (p. 48).

Rutherford’s (2014) doctoral dissertation synthesizes a jazz improvisation pedagogical framework by gathering and sharing participant viewpoints regarding the following six pedagogical orientations that emerged from her literature review: theory-based, aural, sequential, immersion, imitation, creativity. This framework represents her six participants’ viewpoints on the most effective approaches to teaching and learning jazz improvisation. She summarizes these viewpoints as the following: The Pragmatic Emulator (the belief that the ability to improvise can be taught through providing tools or
strategies for self-learning); *Listen and Just Play* (recognizes “how” to improvise may be something cannot be taught); and *The Jazz Communicator* (main aspiration is to engage the audience with their musical narratives) (Rutherford, 2014, p. 69–70).

Similar to Chessher’s (2009) master’s thesis above, Salonen’s (2010) dissertation utilizes a qualitative design and through semi-structured interviews of seven jazz-musician educators who learned improvisation outside of a higher education program (abstract). His data collection and analysis suggested a number of pedagogical techniques commonly found among all the participants: modeling improvisation by the instructor; practicing improvisation; teaching scale/chord associations; listening to jazz music; teaching jazz theory; group improvisation; and using jazz standards as the main source of teaching material.

Schroeder (2002) frames jazz improvisation education within academia as problematic because of the limited amount of time allotted to developing fundamental principles of improvisation. This causes a “lack of mastery” with regards to basic elements of jazz improvisation. He interviews and unpacks the pedagogical approaches used by four jazz artists at a summer jazz workshop: Joe Lovano, Dave Holland, Dave Douglas, and Kenny Werner. Joe Lovano adopts a *formal* approach to improvisation. Schroeder (2002) describes this approach as such: “Lovano plays against an existing form by exploring and taking risks within its boundaries, giving shape to improvisation while grounding it within specific points of reference. Those references are form, harmony, and melody” (p. 37). Dave Holland adopts a *rhythmic* approach for internalizing complex meters by combining different syllables. Dave Douglas adopts an *intervalllic* approach through having students sing non-diatonic, intervalllic shapes and patterns. This approach adopts musical material and techniques such as serialism and folk music from
outside of the jazz tradition. Finally, Kenny Werner adopts a *psychological* approach through focusing on mental states that aid or hinder musical growth.

Dyas’ (2006) dissertation examined two performing arts high school jazz programs in Texas. These schools have distinguished jazz education programs as evidenced in part through numerous *Downbeat* Student Awards. In an analysis of the two schools, including interviews with students and the two program directors, he found that they encourage extracurricular performing opportunities for the students ranging from jam sessions to paying, professional engagements. Furthermore, both directors described their role as educators as “coaches and informal education facilitators” (abstract). Students at these schools confirmed the directors’ comments on the importance of extracurricular performing opportunities, also noting how listening to jazz recordings and studying with private teachers were fundamental to their own development. Commenting on why their school program was so successful, they shared how much they learned from fellow students and alumni, as well as their directors who facilitate educational opportunities for them.

Wadsworth’s (2005) dissertation explored the pedagogical techniques and materials of jazz educators. However, this study was focused specifically on vocal jazz. In a survey of directors and performers of the International Association for Jazz Education (IAJE), she investigates several teaching strategies and how they relate to developing improvisation skill. The most important techniques were listening, imitative ability, and learning jazz standards. Wadsworth (2005) notes, “there were high levels of agreement regarding which techniques were considered most and least important. However, several differences in satisfaction levels arose, suggesting that perhaps the intention and application of these teaching strategies is not fully understood” (p. xiii).
**Extrapolated pedagogical implications.** In addition to studies exploring the teaching practices used by jazz educators, other studies have explored the formative experiences and current practices of jazz musicians and have extrapolated pedagogical implications from their data (Johnston, 2013; Lin, 2011; Murphy, 2009).

Johnston’s (2013) ethnography on the American jazz ensemble Jimmy Giuffre 3 acknowledges Hickey’s (2009) concern on the efficacy of teaching jazz improvisation in higher education contexts. He describes their musical practices—particularly in their rehearsals—and extrapolates pedagogical strategies that address current issues in jazz pedagogy. He concludes with a discussion of several pedagogical strategies such as “collective experimentation” (p. 392) and the importance of free jazz.

In an examination of the University of North Texas jazz studies program, Murphy (2009) elicits student reflections and responses by several professors on their experiences in studying improvisation. He specifically focuses on experiences that the students felt influenced their own development as improvisors—both inside and outside of the formal program curriculum. He found that experiences both outside of traditional improvisation courses (e.g. performing ensembles, master classes) and outside of the formal curriculum (e.g. playing in community venues, teaching, professional work) were significant factors in their own learning of jazz improvisation. He argues that “scholars need to consider the university jazz program as a valid musical culture that blends academic and nonacademic approaches and that is worthy of study in a holistic fashion” (p. 172). This study highlights the significance of extra-curricular student experiences as essential for learning improvisation in an academic setting.

Lin (2011) explored the “formative experiences and social environments of [five] professional jazz pianists” in an effort to “understand how early influences and practice
habits shaped later growth and development” (abstract). This study is significant because of the five artists that were chosen, several are recognized as jazz artists of immense influence and skill (e.g. Kenny Barron, Mulgrew Miller). Kenny Barron was also a participant in the seminal text, Thinking in Jazz (Berliner, 1994). Several themes emerged as key components in the participants’ development as artists: “the integration of jazz music into the daily pattern of everyday social life, the presence of a musical community, peer involvement, playing and listening as a social activity, the concept of self-teaching, and the idea of the self-motivated learner” (Lin, 2011, abstract). One of the participants in Lin’s (2011) study was also a participant in this current study. As a result of these themes that emerged, he suggests several pedagogical foci that jazz instruction be structured around: (1) playing by ear (i.e. the ability to hear a musical note, set of notes, phrase, or song and be able to replicate it on his or her instrument); (2) listening with others; (3) performing for others frequently; and (4) playing with others frequently (abstract). Lin (2011) shares, “there was a remarkable emphasis on the social nature of their listening experiences with music - not just the music being listened to, but the environment and social circumstance in which that music was being experienced” (p. 278).

**Summary of research on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators.**

This section explores empirical research on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators. While a number of qualitative studies have explored the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators, most of them consist of academic theses and dissertations. Additionally, there were a number of studies where pedagogical implications were extrapolated through exploring the formative experiences and current
practices of jazz musicians. A large variety of approaches and skills were discussed as important for developing improvisational skills:

1. Aural skills such as listening and the ability to replicate musical sounds heard internally or from external sources (Chessher, 2009; Lin, 2011; Schroeder, 2002; Wadsworth, 2005).

2. Listening to a wide spectrum of jazz music, including various sub-styles (Chessher, 2009; Dyas, 2006; Lin, 2011; Salonen, 2009; Wadsworth, 2005).

3. Performing experiences outside of the formal curriculum (Dyas, 2006; Lin, 2011; Murphy, 2009).

4. Use of jazz standards as teaching material (Salonen, 2010; Schroeder, 2002; Wadsworth, 2005).

5. Experiences playing in a variety of performance ensembles such as combos, big bands, and master classes (Chessher, 2009; Murphy, 2009).

6. The importance of building confidence in students of improvisation (Chessher, 2009; Schroeder, 2002).

7. Providing tools for self-learning on the part of students (Lin, 2011; Rutherford, 2014).

8. Learning jazz theory (Rutherford, 2014; Salonen, 2010).

The next section discusses further research needed in light of this review of literature and relates it back to the research questions that drove this dissertation.

**Directions for Future Research**

The overarching research question in this dissertation explores the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. This literature review has outlined and discussed the research base on this question through (1) discussing historic trends in
creativity research; (2) outlining various ways in which jazz improvisation is conceptualized as creative (i.e. creative, spontaneous, social, accessible); (3) and summarizing research on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators. This research base is an attempt to bring the reader to the “frontier of knowledge” that Bowman (1988, p. 71) argues for in his critical review of doctoral dissertation literature on the topic of jazz pedagogy.

**Relationship to research questions.** Maxwell’s (2013) first concern is that the literature review should demonstrate how the research questions relate to prior research and theory. The first supportive research question asks how jazz educators conceptualize jazz improvisation as a creative process. The second explores the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. These two supportive research questions ultimately contribute towards a more coherent understanding on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. What follows below is a discussion on the literature base pertaining to each of these questions.

**Improvisation as creative.** This literature review has demonstrated how research has conceptualized the concept of “creativity” through psychometric, cognitive, social-personality, and confluence lenses. Trends in creativity studies have recognized the *process* of creativity and how this process is situated in socio-cultural contexts. MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) outline four features common to improvised music: creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible. These features were used as section headings to organize the summary of research on how jazz improvisation serves as a particular site for the creative process.

Given the research conceptualizing jazz improvisation as a site for the creative process, there is scant empirical evidence for how jazz educators conceptualize both (1)
creativity in general, as well as (2) jazz improvisation is a creative process. Several studies have demonstrated a precedent for exploring teachers’ perceptions of creativity (Odena, 2001; Odena & Welch, 2012; Odena, Plummeridge, & Welch, 2005; Zbainos & Anastasopoulos, 2012). While these studies are not generalizable, findings suggest that music teachers have difficulty understanding creativity, as well as distinguishing creative and non-creative musical elements (Zbainos & Anastasopoulos, 2012). Second, findings suggest that music educators’ perceptions on creativity are shaped by their own musical experiences, teaching experiences, and professional training (Odena & Welch, 2012). Finally, findings suggest that the perceptions teachers have regarding “creativity” have bearing on their teaching practices (Zbainos & Anastasopoulos, 2012).

However, these studies do not address the question of how jazz educators conceptualize improvisation as a creative process. While they address music educators, they do not address jazz educators specifically. They are also conducted outside the United States in the countries of England (Odena & Welch, 2012) and Greece (Zbainos & Anastasopoulos, 2012). Like Odena, Plummeridge, and Welch (2005), the nature of this question is more exploratory. This question is primarily intended to clarify the second supporting research question regarding the pedagogical practices of jazz educators.

**Pedagogical practices.** This literature review has demonstrated how research has explored the relationship between creativity and music education through the musical activities of improvisation, composition, performance, technology, and listening. While evidence in this literature suggests music educators consider creativity to be an important concept in their practice, little is known regarding the most effective ways in which to teach music students to be creative. The process of jazz improvisation being one such mode of creativity, the question of whether it can be taught permeates the literature on the
topic of jazz improvisation pedagogy. Studies result in mixed responses as to whether jazz improvisation can be taught and often problematize traditional models of teaching and learning jazz improvisation.

While a number of studies have explored the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators, most of them consist of academic theses and dissertations (Chessher, 2009; Rutherford, 2014; Salonen, 2010; Wadsworth, 2005). Other studies have explored the formative experiences as well as current performance practices of jazz musicians in an attempt to extrapolate pedagogical implications (Johnston, 2013; Lin, 2011; Murphy, 2009). As a result, a wide variety of teaching approaches and skills emerged as important for developing improvisational skills, such as: (1) aural skills; (2) listening; (3) extracurricular performing experiences; (4) jazz standards as teaching material; (5) a variety of performing ensemble opportunities; (6) building confidence in students; (7) providing tools for self-learning; and (8) learning jazz theory.

While these studies contribute valuable findings towards a more holistic picture of effective jazz improvisation pedagogy, there are methodological issues with these studies that this dissertation attempts to address. Chessher’s (2009) master’s thesis explores the teaching practices of jazz educators situated in Australia, whereas this dissertation utilizes participants from Northern California. Rutherford’s (2014) dissertation utilizes Q methodology where she summarizes the literature on jazz improvisation pedagogy into a select number of factors and looks at correlations between her participants regarding these factors. However, since there is no literature on jazz educators’ beliefs regarding creativity, this question was not addressed in her study. Salonen’s (2010) dissertation utilizes participants who learned improvisation outside of a higher education program, so the pedagogical beliefs and practices of those who learned to improvise via an academic
context are not included. Wadsworth’s (2005) dissertation focuses exclusively on vocal jazz. Schroeder’s (2002) descriptions of the pedagogical focuses of four high-profile jazz educators, while illustrative of how to develop fundamental elements of improvisational ability, are all too brief and are not discussed within the wider context of research on jazz improvisation pedagogy. All these studies also do not discuss their findings within the larger context of creativity studies. After his review of research on jazz pedagogy, Watson (2010) shares a question that still remains: “What behaviours or characteristics do effective jazz teachers exhibit, either in classroom or private lesson settings?” (p. 390). Further research is still needed in the area of jazz improvisation pedagogy and this second supporting research question contributes to current scholarship on this topic.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. This literature review has presented a critical analysis and synthesis of research exploring the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. Research has tended to study creativity in a desocialized way that has neglected the socio-cultural context that is at play during this process. Jazz improvisation functions as a site for the creative process where multiple collaborative elements function. When jazz musicians improvise, new novelty emerges with multiple elements at play. The musicians and audience are listening to each other. The sound being produced is collaborative in nature and contingent on what is produced in the moment. Learning to improvise is as much a social and participatory process. MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell (2012) outline four common features found across multiple genres of improvised music: improvisation is *creative*;
improvisation is *spontaneous*; improvisation is *social*; improvisation is *accessible*. These features were used to organize the summary of how jazz improvisation is creative.

Music educators consider creativity to be an important topic in education, yet little evidence exists on the most effective ways to teach music students to be creative—jazz improvisation students even more so. While the question of whether jazz improvisation is a skill that can be taught frequently surfaces in literature on jazz pedagogy, evidence suggests that this skill can be learned. Several factors have been found to significantly contribute to jazz improvisation achievement such as jazz theory knowledge, aural imitation, self-evaluation and self-directed learning skills, practice, metacognition, and the role of the teacher in the learning environment. However, little evidence still exists on the actual teaching practices of jazz educators. Research on the teaching practices of jazz educators provides evidence for various approaches such as developing listening and aural skills, providing a variety of curricular and extracurricular performing experiences, using jazz standards as teaching material, building confidence in students and providing them tools for self-learning, and learning jazz theory are all important for developing jazz improvisation skills. However, these findings are not discussed by the authors within the larger context of creativity studies.

This literature review has demonstrated how little evidence exists on (1) how jazz educators conceptualize improvisation as a creative process; and (2) the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. The next chapter discusses the adopted methodology for this study to address these gaps in research.
Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. The following central research question guided this study: What is the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity? A qualitative methodology served as a theoretical underpinning for framing two supportive research questions:

1. What pedagogical beliefs do jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process?
2. What are the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process?

This chapter begins with an overview of the adopted methodology for this study, followed by a description of the specific research design.

Methodology

This study describes the experience of human behavior, that is, the pedagogical beliefs of jazz educators in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process, and how these pedagogical beliefs are embedded within their educational practice. Therefore, a qualitative methodology was utilized. As described by Creswell (2013), the overarching aim of qualitative research is to “inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). In this proposed study, the central problem of inquiry is a limited understanding of the pedagogical practices of jazz educators. Furthermore, a qualitative methodology was
most appropriate for this study because pre-developed lists or inventories on jazz educators’ beliefs do not account for the uniqueness of the participants (Munby, 1982, 1984). As Muchmore (2001) argues, survey instruments “mute the voices of teachers” (p. 90). The open-ended interviews, observations, and data collection most often used in qualitative research allow for these unique voices to be more fully heard than through a quantitative methodology. Therefore, adopting a qualitative methodology provided a more appropriate framework for exploring these pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators.

In discussing the ways in which research in music education is responding to the reconceptualization of curriculum over the last 30 years, Barrett (2007) acknowledges that “qualitative research—particularly ethnography, case studies, narrative research, and phenomenology—also deepens our understanding of the meaningful and situated nature of the musical experience” (p. 147). As noted in the introduction, the experience of teaching improvisation has increasingly shifted to academic contexts (Ake, 2002). However, descriptions of the experience of improvisation pedagogy is lacking in research. Barrett (2007) further argues that a qualitative methodology best “problematicizes practice, foregrounds beliefs that are normally obscured, and calls normative conceptions of teaching and learning into question” (p. 148). Through descriptions of jazz educators’ beliefs and practices, this study foregrounded jazz educators’ pedagogical beliefs and practices. Additionally, this study analyzed their pedagogical practices vis-à-vis previously conducted qualitative research on the teaching and learning of jazz improvisation as it is experienced by various communities (Berliner, 1994; Monson, 1996).
**Research Design**

This study adopted a phenomenological research design. The purpose of a phenomenological design is to describe the “common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). For the purpose of this study, this phenomenon is described as: *the process of teaching jazz improvisation*.

This study focuses on *describing* this phenomenon as experienced by the participants, through their own words and illustrations, rather than *explaining* it (Groenewald, 2004). Doing so aligned this study with Welman and Kruger’s (1999) description of phenomenologists as “concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved” (p. 189). As noted in the literature review, research on creativity has, over the last 30 years, expanded out from strict psychological or *individual* perspectives to include *social* perspectives. As will be discussed further below, MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of research on improvisation provides an appropriate framework for studying the pedagogical practices of jazz educators. This framework addresses Welman and Kruger’s (1999) argument that phenomenological research concerns itself with both psychological and social perspectives.

Two common perspectives and processes for conducting phenomenological research are van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutical approach and Moustakas’ (1994) empirical approach. The perspective of van Manen (1990) is what Creswell (2013) refers to as “hermeneutical phenomenology” (p. 79) where the researcher describes themes of a particular lived experience and, after reflection, endeavors to interpret what these themes mean. This study, however, is not primarily concerned with *interpreting* the lived
experience of jazz educators. Rather, this study provides a holistic description of this phenomenon. To this aim, this study adopted an “empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenological” stance (Creswell, 2013, p. 80) that was previously outlined by the work of Moustakas’ (1994). In this stance, phenomenological research “is focused less on the interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). This research design was selected to experiencing afresh the phenomenon under inquiry. In the section below titled “Role of the Researcher,” I attempt to bracket my own assumptions and personal beliefs most directly related to this phenomenon so my analysis focuses on giving a holistic description.

**Participant Selection**

This study used a purposeful, criterion sampling strategy. In this strategy, the researcher selects participants because they can inform the phenomenon under inquiry. Patton (2002) describes purposeful sampling as appropriate for “describing some particular subgroup in depth” (p. 235). Furthermore, criterion sampling describes explicit criteria for the purposeful selection of these participants.

For the purpose of this study, this subgroup is defined as jazz musicians who are recognized in the jazz community as expert performers as well as educators with regards to jazz improvisation. These participants had extensive performing experience as demonstrated through any of the following factors: (1) recording experience as either a sideman or leader; (2) performing experience at jazz festivals and community venues; (3) national and/or international touring experience; and/or (4) performing experience with other notable and highly-recognized jazz performers.
Several factors qualified a participant as an expert *educator*. These include: (1) extensive teaching experience at the K-12 or post-secondary level; (2) published pedagogical material; and/or (3) maintenance of a teaching studio along with notable students who have become exceptional jazz musicians themselves. Ultimately, this study acknowledges these qualifiers as subjective to the researcher. Effort was made to recruit participants who meet as much of these criteria as possible.

Seven participants between the ages of 33 and 62 were selected for inclusion in this study. As described by Creswell (2013), researchers have recommended phenomenological studies recruit between 3 to 10 participants. However, the primary concern with the sample size was to describe the phenomenon in as rich in detail as possible. The criteria described above includes 7 overarching tenets for selection. Recruiting seven participants ensured that, at the very least, each participant excelled in at least one of these criteria.

In addition to a purposeful, criterion sampling strategy, this study used snowball-sampling procedures for recruiting participants. This strategy solicits information from individuals who know where participants who meet the criteria for a particular study might be located and how they might be contacted. I located potential participants who meet these criteria through my connections within the jazz community in Northern California. While these participants were all situated in Northern California, they came from a variety of locations across the country (New York, Texas, and California), as well as one participant relocating to the U.S. from out of the country in his early 20s. Of the seven participants, I was well acquainted with 3 of them prior to this study. Two of them I had studied with privately for several years and another I had played in a big band under his direction for several years. I had no experience with the other 4 participants prior to
this study so a significant amount of conversation in the form of emails and discussions over the phone occurred prior to asking them to participate in this study.

Prior to contacting potential participants, permission for this study was obtained from the IRB at the University of the Pacific. This can be found in Appendix D. Potential participants were contacted via email using Appendix A as a template. The email was customized to fit the given circumstances in introducing myself to the potential participant. After contacting a participant, I first spent time observing them in a teaching setting—either one-on-one or in a group setting. After determining that they met the criteria for inclusion in this study, participants were formally invited to participate. Before data collection began, the participants were required to sign a consent form. This can be found in Appendix B.

Data Collection

The type of data I collected focused on creating a holistic description of the phenomenon of teaching improvisation. This included interviews, observations, and document collection. I conducted an interview with each participant. While I did not set a time limit, each interview was conducted for approximately one hour. During the interviews, I followed the protocol in Appendix C. The original formation of the research questions was framed through two general questions that Creswell (2013) relates: What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? The participants were also asked questions that emerged as part of my observation of them in a teaching context. All interviews were audio-recorded.
In addition to interviews, I observed the participants in a teaching setting—either one-on-one or in a group setting such as a classroom. During these observations, I kept an observation journal and attempted to remain a fairly detached observer.

Finally, I collected documents from the participants that further illuminate the phenomenon. Examples include syllabi, student handouts, and music recordings used during class. Additionally, I collected some music recordings of the participants as either a leader or as a sideman to more effectively understand their own musical background. Collection of this data strengthened the validity of the data by allowing for data triangulation between multiple participants.

Data Analysis

All the personal interviews were transcribed verbatim by myself, the researcher. However, in reporting the data I excluded pauses, repeated words, and phrases such as “hmm” or “uh” if they did not affect the meaning of the statement. This strategy has been utilized in recent qualitative research on jazz improvisation (Norgaard, 2011, p. 114). After transcribing the interviews, I sent the full transcription back to each participant for them to confirm that their descriptions are true to their own beliefs. Any changes the participants wished to make were added to the data.

After being transcribed and undergoing member checking, the interviews were read repeatedly in order to understand the phenomenon using Matare’s (2009) three levels of analysis: meaning analysis, process analysis, and sub-group analysis. Through meaning analysis, I focused on the aims, intentions, purposes, and meaning embedded in the text. In the second level, process analysis, I focused on how these meanings were achieved. Lastly during the sub-group analysis, I searched for emergent themes.
Furthermore, I triangulated the data analysis through a variety of sources: interview transcriptions, observational notes, and collected documents and media material.

**Theoretical Influences**

**Teacher beliefs.** The context for the development of the two supporting research questions that focus on the *beliefs* as well as *practices* of jazz educators is grounded in the field of beliefs, which for the purpose of this study is defined as implicit or explicit educational beliefs *about* learning, motivation, and instruction (Pajares, 1992). Aligning with Pajares’ (1992) concern with clarity, this study is not concerned with educators’ larger belief structure (e.g. beliefs about politics, religion, etc.), but rather their educational beliefs—all while still recognizing that their educational beliefs are not altogether disconnected from their own larger belief system. Kagan’s (1992) observation, even if almost 25 years ago, that the term “belief” is not always used consistently, still rings true. The terms “perspectives,” “personal epistemologies,” or “orientations” are just a handful of terms researchers often haphazardly use synonymously with the term “belief.” As discussed by Pajares (1992), and reviewed earlier in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), this study recognizes the distinction between belief and knowledge. The use of the term “belief” in this study adopts the definition of an “individual’s judgement of the truth or falsity of a proposition” (Pajares, 1992, p. 316). Furthermore, while a body of research has examined the beliefs pre-service teachers hold (Patrick & Pintrich, 2001), pre-service teachers’ beliefs were not a focus in this study.

In addition, as discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), the field of metaphor analysis also provides a useful tool for unpacking pedagogical assumptions (Bullough, 1991; Hong-bo & Wen-juan, 2010), in particular to understand how teachers understand their own role as teachers (Hong-bo & Wen-juan, 2010; Pajak, 1986;
Clandinin, 1986). Therefore, the final question asked of the participants to come up with a metaphor that describes their role in teaching jazz improvisation.

**Improvisational creativity.** The process of searching for emerging themes throughout the data was undertaken using MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of research on improvisational creativity as a framework. In their discussion of improvisation as a creative process, they “outline key common features of this broad conception of improvised music that can be seen as central to all its manifestations” (p. 246). They discuss the following themes as central to improvisation (p. 246–247): improvisation is *creative*; improvisation is *spontaneous*; improvisation is *social*; and improvisation is *accessible*.

In their summary, the *creative* element of improvisation is present through the way in which novelty emerges in each performance. Each improvisational performance is different from previous performances. Another unique and salient element of improvisational creativity lies in its *spontaneity*. Creativity is a process that occurs “as it is being played” (p. 246). Within each performance, novelty emerges in real time. Third, as evidenced in the seminal, ethnographic studies of Berliner (1994) and Monson (1996), improvisation is a *social* phenomenon. The dominance of psycho-cognitive perspectives of creativity research has often failed to recognized the myriad of ways creativity is socially situated (e.g. Sawyer, 1997b). Finally, improvisation research veers away from the perspective of creativity as lying solely in the mind of a few creative geniuses. Instead, improvisation is *accessible* in the sense that “everybody can engage in it; we are all musical improvisors at some level” (MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, p. 247). Fieldwork for this study adopted this framework for the exploration and description of the
pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process.

**Validity**

Drawing on Maxwell’s (2013) conception of validity in qualitative research as the “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 122), multiple measures for ensuring the validity of this study were taken. In the attempt to “rule out spurious associations and premature theories” (p. 126), this study utilized multiple observations of the participants as if I did not know them previously. This ensured a more long-term immersion into the phenomenon. This allowed me to check conclusions and descriptions from one observations with other observations if needed. In addition to long-term immersion into the phenomenon through multiple observations, a follow-up email was sent to a participant if, upon the data analysis, I felt a particular question arose that was not answered during the interview.

Second, addressing Maxwell’s (2013) concern for “ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on” (p. 126–127), member checking was utilized. After the transcripts were transcribed, they were sent out to the participants for their review. Modifications to the manuscript were made in light of their responses. This served to ensure that I accurately captured the description of the phenomenon, as well as unearthed my own biases in interpreting the data.

Third, Maxwell (2013) argues that outside feedback is essential for validity in qualitative research. Outside feedback on my conclusions and descriptions of this phenomenon was solicited at multiple stages of this study, such as during data collection, analysis, interpretation, and discussion. Individuals for this included my dissertation
committee and colleagues who are doing similar research in my particular area of inquiry. Any conflicting or discrepant conclusions of this phenomenon that emerged are presented as such for the reader to draw their own conclusions.

Finally, in an effort to reduce the “risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 128), triangulation was utilized. Data from multiple participants were compared. In addition, I used multiple methods—interviews, observations, and document collection—to collect data. These measures ensured that data were collected from a variety of individuals and personalities in a multiplicity of ways.

**Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I attempted to remain fairly detached. Because I have adopted Moustakas’ (1994) transcendental perspective of phenomenological research, my purpose is to “bracket” aside my own experiences to “take fresh perspective towards the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). As noted above, phenomenological research focuses on describing the particular perspectives of each participant. Interviews were primarily focused on how the participants describe their own beliefs and practices. During observations, I situated myself as inconspicuously as possible.

In relation to my own experience, the primary reason for developing a study around the topics of creativity, jazz, and music education was because my life is saturated with these themes. I have been playing jazz piano for over 15 years and have completed my Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in jazz performance. I am a very passionate musician and love what I do. Additionally, I am a K-8 music educator. I consistently speak with administrators and fellow educators on the role of music education in
schooling contexts and consistently hear the rhetoric of how important music education is, but always see it marginalized in the school curriculum. My very selection of this topic was a result of my prior interests in these areas of my life.

While I did not explicitly look at issues of gender and race in this study, I believe it is important to note several aspects in how I construct my identity. I am a multi-racial (Caucasian-Latino) heterosexual, protestant Christian, middle-class male. These aspects to my identity shape both what I chose to study, as well as what I chose not to study. These are the lenses that I am choosing not to use, but I acknowledge them because they are still present.

**Assumptions**

In discussing the assumptions I am working from through designing and conducting this study, I used Gubrium’s (1988) concept of paradigm as “a way of structuring everyday experience, a way of framing events, a sense of what is real and how to prove it, and an implicit stance on ontology and epistemology (i.e., being and knowing)” (Hathaway, 1995, p. 541). My choice of a qualitative methodology assumes reality as a personal construct. The way in which I assume I can best understand the ways in which creative jazz improvisation is taught is by “becoming part of the situation by understanding the participant views of it” (Hathaway, 1995, p. 543–544). This assumption influenced my decision to choose a qualitative methodology. While earlier I noted that I remained fairly detached in my data collection, I was still physically present and interacting in-person with the participants.

I also have intensely personal reasons for pursuing these research questions. Admittedly, I am undertaking this study with the assumption that jazz improvisation is indeed a skill that can be learned and taught, although I hope to gain a better
understanding of how this is accomplished. I come from an extensive jazz performing and composing background. Additionally, I am a K-8 general music and band teacher who is dedicated to the inclusion of improvisation into my own practice. I feel that the exploration of these questions has direct and immediate consequences for my own practice and development as a music educator. I am concerned with affording my students every available opportunity and resource for fostering their creative thinking. This study will help me to better understand what aspects of my own pedagogy and methodology exacerbates Woodford’s (2005) concern that assumptions underlying highly prescriptive pedagogies and methodologies often “stifle the individual creativity and thinking of students and teachers alike” (p. 30). This study will ultimately serve as a foundational launching pad for my own development as a more effective jazz improvisor and educator.

In addition, my own musical experiences mirror many of those of the participants in this study. As a jazz pianist and educator, I have and still do encounter many of the same challenges faced by the participants. Many of my own learning experiences with regards to jazz such as participating in jazz band at school and studying jazz in college position myself as an insider into the culture of jazz education. We speak a common musical language, have relatively similar musical tastes, and share many mutual communal connections with regards to the jazz community in Northern California.

Finally, there is a potential for bias or favoritism in analyzing and reporting the results of this study. I have studied with three of the participants in the past for at least a year. While I attempted to remain unbiased in this study and mitigate these potential limitations, they are still present and possibly warrant investigation in future studies in this field.
Limitations

The immense task of synthesizing literature from multiple fields and traditions of inquiry, including creativity, jazz, and music education, is rarely attempted. While much research exists on creativity and improvisation, an attempt was made to focus the literature review on what the researcher felt was essential to supporting and exploring the research questions. Second, while the small number of participants (N = 7) might be viewed as a potential limitation, this sample size is well within the suggested limits of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013).

Another limitation is the lack of female participants in this study. Research suggests that the field of jazz education remains dominated by males (Barber, 1999; McKeage, 2004; Steinberg, 2001). While attempts were made to elicit female participants, I found it much more difficult to find female educators that met the criteria of this study. This is not to suggest that female jazz educators are by any means less qualified than their male counterparts. One possibility for this difficulty could very well be my own lack of connections to female jazz educators. Nevertheless, as suggested in Chapter 5, further research should explore the questions of this study from the perspective of female jazz educators.

Chapter Summary

This study utilized a transcendental, phenomenological research design to investigate and describe the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. Phenomenological research focuses on how participants find their own experience of a phenomenon meaningful. I defined this phenomenon as the process of teaching jazz improvisation. Participants who are expert jazz performers and educators were selected using purposeful sampling
through specific criteria. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants; observations of the participants in a teaching context; and documents such as syllabi, student handouts, music recordings used during class, and/or music recordings of them as either a leader or as a sideman. Data were analyzed through the four-part framework of improvisation as creative, spontaneous, social, and accessible. As a researcher, I attempted to remain as detached from the process as possible, especially given my potential biases as a jazz musician and educator myself.
Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

The interviews, observations, and documents collected in this study centered around the following central research question: What is the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity? A qualitative methodology served as a theoretical underpinning for framing two supportive research questions:

1. What pedagogical beliefs do jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process?
2. What are the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process?

Twenty themes emerged in the analysis of this data. While most qualitative studies yield a much smaller amount of themes, the vast amount of ground covered in the participant interviews, as well as the wide variety of strategies that emerged as a result, all made reducing the amount of themes less conducive to presenting a rich description of the phenomenon of teaching jazz improvisation. These themes were analyzed, organized, and presented utilizing the four-part framework outlined in MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of research on improvisational creativity: improvisation is creative; improvisation is spontaneous; improvisation is social; and improvisation is accessible. In organizing these themes under the four-part framework, several of the examples given that provide evidence for a theme could very well have been placed in another theme.
For example, the participant Sydney brought up the phrase “full immersion” in discussing the importance of getting students to play, listen, and gain exposure to new music and playing situations. This example could have supported the theme titled “Culmination of Life Experiences” (Theme 9) as a way to recognize how a player’s improvisations are a result of the music and musicians that they have been exposed to up to that point in time. Ultimately, the placement of the examples and quotes within this chapter to support these themes represent the researcher’s attempt to contextualize what the participants were attempting to communicate. What follows in this chapter are brief profile sketches of each participant; a description of issues that arose during the data collection process; an essence description of the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators; and descriptions of each theme.

**Participant profiles.** Seven expert jazz educators situated in a variety of teaching contexts throughout Northern California were selected as participants in this study. They were asked to provide their own pseudonym to be used in this study. Below is a brief sketch of each participant. The headings indicate their pseudonym used throughout the study along with their primary instrument.

**Andrew (piano).** Andrew is a prominent jazz pianist in the Northern California jazz scene. A native to Northern California, his diverse academic experiences include degrees in classical piano performance, jazz studies, and education. As a performer, he has extensive experience playing and/or recording with world-renowned artists such as Bobby Hutcherson, Woody Shaw, Eric Alexander, David “Fathead” Newman, Slide Hampton, and many others (Lin, 2011). His earliest experiences with improvisation were around 5th grade when he tinkered around with melodies that he heard on his parents’ record player. The memorable melodies of Charlie Brown, Maple Leaf Rag, and the
soundtrack to the movie “The Sting” were a few of his first exposures to jazz music. Later the musical stylings of Dave Brubeck and a book by John Meahgan called “Rhythmic and Tonal Principles” were key elements to his development in his high school years.

**Delaney (saxophone).** Originally from Rocklin, CA, Delaney’s musical journey has placed him in the role of performer, arranger, and educator across much of North America and Europe. He refers to this as his “strategic triad” and notes how he has made his living in all three of those areas, though usually focusing on one more than the others at various points in his life. An accomplished woodwind player, he has performed with artists such as Ray Charles, Dave Liebman, Randy Brecker, and many others. He was also a student of Joe Henderson for many years. Regarding this experience, he cites it as tantamount in his jazz improvisation development. Delaney teaches at several colleges in the Northern CA central valley area. He also teaches the applied jazz saxophone students at a major university in Northern California.

**Sydney (piano).** A distinguished jazz pianist and educator, Sydney directs a prestigious jazz education program in Northern California. Several of his accolades include the founding of his own record label; creating a local jazz club where the students he oversees have opportunities to perform at; releasing of several CDs throughout his performing career; and being invited to give a TedX talk on the topic of jazz and playing “in the moment.” Born outside the U.S., he attended a prestigious performing arts high school in the U.S. where he was exposed to a variety of jazz musicians his own age and older whom he cites as important factors in his own development. Later he attended a two-year diploma course back home overseas, an experience he describes as such: “We have two-hour classes where we would play a tune and talk about approaches to
improvisation. So that was like a full immersion experience, too, at a critical time in my late teens and early 20s.” He later went on to complete a doctoral of musical arts (DMA) in jazz studies. While he frequently speaks of this immersion process in learning to improvise, he emphasizes the energy and freedom he heard in artists such as Louis Armstrong that attracted him to the music.

**Pat (trombone).** A BM and MM graduate of the prestigious Eastman School of Music, Pat is an active trombonist in several symphonies, ballets, and opera orchestras in Northern California, as well as in the local Sacramento jazz scene. He cites Bill Dobbins, professor of jazz studies and contemporary media at Eastman School of Music, as one of his primary influences while obtaining his Master’s degree there. “Most of what I learned,” he shares, “I learned by transcribing and then doing analysis, you know under the tutelage of people like [Bill] Dobbins.” Pat has made his mark as an advocate for arts education, as evidenced through a variety of self-published music education products and lessons. Many of these lessons and resources are focused on connecting and integrating music and the arts to reading, math, and science.

**Jason (saxophone).** Jason is a jazz saxophonist and educator at a nationally-recognized arts high school in Northern California. This school has won multiple jazz competitions such as the Monterey Jazz Festival, as well as performed numerous times at the Essentially Ellington Festival in New York. A native of New York, he described his own high school musical experience as “spotty” and without much support. Still, he comments on his early learning experiences that “it was fun for me to improvise. You know, I was given some of the basics and it was always creative because it was a part of my family. I wasn’t afraid to try.” This opened up an opportunity for him to lead a student-run jazz band as a junior and senior in high school. He notes how growing up in
New York afforded him opportunities to see such artists as Dizzy Gillespie and Art Blakey. While he attended the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music for a while, he later finished his degree on the West coast studying history. He is currently a member of one of the highest artistic level jazz bands in Northern California.

Fred (drums). A Texan native who obtained undergraduate and graduate degrees in percussion performance in his home state, Fred is a prominent jazz drummer and percussionist in Northern California. He has performed throughout North America and Europe in various jazz settings ranging from small combos to big bands, as well as various local symphonies and music festivals. While he is primarily an instructor of jazz and percussion at a college in Northern California, directing several jazz ensembles and big bands, he is also an active jazz educator at various music camps and nearby colleges.

Brent (drums). Another jazz drummer in this study, New York native and now San Francisco resident Brent left the Eastman School of Music after his first year to move to the West coast. “By the time I was actually going to Eastman,” he shares, “I wasn’t as interested in just jazz music. I mean I was still interested in it, and I still, I am very much interested in it, but I wanted to learn about funk music.” He cites Erykah Badu’s album “Mama’s Gun” and D’Angelo’s album “Voodoo” as life-changers in his musical interests. Citing his dad as a music educator, Brent shared his initial hesitation at being a teacher, but how his dad’s musical influence had always been there and fueled his passion for teaching. Brent currently maintains a private teaching studio in San Francisco and is the technology teacher at a nearby music conservatory.

Data collection. This study into the topic of jazz improvisation pedagogy was originally intended as an attempt to ask the participants about their specific teaching practices. The goal was to write up rich descriptions of what their interactions were like.
in teaching one-on-one and in ensemble settings; the kinds of assignments they gave to students; the artists they had students listen to; how and to what detail they had their students transcribe jazz solos; and how improvisation students practiced these transcribed solos. This goal was largely informed and guided by my own life’s journey learning to improvise and sojourning through undergraduate and graduate degrees in jazz studies.

However, as the interviews and observations proceeded, the focus of this study shifted from minute details towards a broadened approach in teaching jazz improvisation. The interviews and discussions began to focus more on the larger concepts that guided them. After the first couple of interviews, I found myself asking the participants questions based on descriptions previous participants had shared with me. It was helpful to corroborate the participants’ interview descriptions and comments with previous observations of them in a teaching setting, as well as through an examination of any collected documents/recordings they chose to share. In most cases, describing the process of teaching jazz improvisation was best communicated through abstract terminology, specifically through the metaphor of language.

Bailey (1992) notes in his exploration of improvisatory practices of musicians from around the world that “there is very little technical description of any kind, simply because almost all the musicians I spoke to chose to discuss improvisation mainly in ‘abstract’ terms” (p. xi). Similarly, the participants in this study in large part spoke about their approach to teaching through similar ‘abstract’ language, imagery, and concepts. As such, many of the participants borrowed from the ‘language’ metaphor in describing how they learn, play, and teach jazz improvisation. This tendency towards the use of abstract language and metaphor reflects David Elliott’s (1986) discussion of the use of language in jazz education. He argues:
The use of metaphoric language is particularly recommended in the beginning stages of jazz instruction as the ability to grasp time-feels and to improvise creatively depends on a “freeing-up” of the perceptual attitude; it depends on full allocentricity, which is more likely to occur with a liberal use of global metaphoric cues from a guiding teacher than with the exclusive use of terms having specific, local foci. (p. 48)

For example, early into the interview, Delaney framed his discussion by stating, “I think of, first of all, music as being a language and jazz as being a dialect.” In his attempts to help students work through the often uncomfortable and foreign feelings that they often feel when in the early stages of learning to improvise, Brent likens the process to “having a conversation on your instrument.” He continues, “Music is just another language and you’re just trying to make it your second language.” Similarly, Andrew defined jazz improvisation as “speaking in a language of musical tones that comes from an African-American musical tradition.” This language metaphor frames the way he teaches jazz improvisation. For example, he later stated, “So I often go back to ‘how am I gonna’ teach this to someone?’ and it’s about when I was learning English, how did that come about?” Sydney frequently spoke about how he learned to improvise in his early development through “full immersion in the music, the language of the music.” Participants borrowed from this language metaphor to articulate what made an improvisation interesting or special. As Brent puts it, “It’s the way they’re all talking to each other when it’s happening together. It’s intoxicating.” He later even refers to the “conversation” between instruments as “funky.” Reflecting Bailey’s (1992) earlier observations, jazz improvisers often rely on abstract imagery and language in describing their own pedagogical practices.

**Essence description.** The experience of teaching improvisation is a messy journey unique to each teacher. In describing their teaching beliefs and practices,
participants often found this process difficult, as evidenced by the overwhelming reliance on metaphors and imagery ranging from the educational philosophy of John Wooden, seven-time NCAA basketball championship winner, to the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. They spoke as much to the psychological aspects of teaching students to be creative ‘in-the-moment,’ as to the specific techniques or exercises they assign to them. They viewed their teaching as a culmination of their own life journey and experiences—a summation of how they were taught and how they learned to improvise. This informs the myriad of ways they themselves view excellent pedagogical practices and how these practices are manifested in their own teaching. Teaching improvisation goes beyond imposing a “correct” scale upon a given chord. It involves getting students to hear the sound they want—through years of listening to excellent artists and performing in local clubs as well as with other musicians. It is a skill that can be learned—not just by a genetically-gifted minority—through years of hard work and persistent dedication. As a creative, spontaneous act that is socially situated and able to be learned to some degree by anyone, jazz improvisation is taught by educators who described themselves as guides in this process and can only demonstrate and point the direction that the students must go themselves.

**Improvisation is Creative**

Improvisation is *creative* in the way novelty emerges in each performance. Each improvised performance is different from previous performances. Four themes emerged in the data analysis that speak to how novelty emerges in each performance: improvisation as creative; improvisation as personal; juxtaposition; and jazz standard as a vehicle.
**Improvisation as creative.** While this first theme shares a similar title as the framework sub-heading (i.e. “creative”), the purpose of this theme is to describe how exactly they conceptualize jazz improvisation as creative, as well as how to distinguish between creative and non-creative forms of improvisation, or even if such a concept exists. The subsequent three themes in this section then unpack various ways in which this conceptualization of creativity is manifested during the act of improvisation.

The participants were asked to describe how they conceptualize jazz improvisation as a creative process. These questions were typically framed as “Do you think jazz improvisation is creative? If so, then how?” Responses were varied in concept, as well as the manner in which they presented their views and opinions. Some participants had a clearly articulated response ready right out of the gate, while others seemed to hesitate and struggle with putting their ideas into words. Part of the reason for this may be that while I emailed the questions to the participants ahead of time, some noted that because of busy schedules, they were not able to review the questions prior to our meeting.

**Inherently creative.** In one sense, improvisation is creative just for the fact that it is improvised. For example, a painter is involved in the creative process by the very fact that he is painting. “Just the fact that they’re doing it, to me, is creativity,” argues Andrew in discussing this painter/painting analogy. Similarly, Sydney notes, “I think if you’re improvising, if you’re truly improvising, then you’re creating.” Improvising is at its core a creative act. Practicing a solo “exactly the same way” (Sydney) and preparing what notes go over a certain harmonic passage—playing them exactly as prepared—is not creating. Improvising involves making choices. These choices occur in the moment of the performance. So then improvisation is itself a creative act.
**Creative vs. non-creative.** While improvisation is itself a creative act, jazz educators frequently differentiate between some sort of ‘creative’ and ‘non-creative’ form of improvisation. One participant was asked, “How would you differentiate creative jazz improvisation from un-creative jazz improvisation? What is an example of something that’s not very creative?” Having the participants describe how improvisation is “un-creative” aided in clarifying their thoughts. Delaney responded:

> There are some players who tell you a story and engage you. And there are some players who play a lot of right notes. You can play all the right notes and completely miss the point.

When he says “right notes,” he is referring to an improvisor choosing a scale to fit over a given chord or harmonic progression. When a soloist pre-scripts his or her improvisation ahead of time and it is pre-planned, that is not considered creative in a meaningful sense. Improvisation is “made up on the spot.” Again, choices are made in the moment of performance. Sydney explains that “If you’re playing a whole bunch of stuff that you know fits here, and you’ve practiced this solo exactly the same way, and when this chord change comes you’re gonna’ play exactly that note, that’s not improvising.”

Improvisation occurs when choices are made in real time. Playing pre-scripted musical material detracts from the creativity of that improvisation. Sydney uses the analogy of the interviews used as part of this study. While we have a pre-planned structure (i.e. my interview questions), our conversation is not entirely pre-scripted. He is hearing the questions for the first time as I ask them. He is pulling from his knowledge and experience to improvise an answer in that very moment. This then spurs further questions and reflections on my part which I share. The cycle then continues.

**Improvisation as personal.** When asked to further describe the ways in which improvisation was a creative act, the participants frequently highlighted the connection
between creativity and making improvisation personal. Delaney states:

Creativity, by and large, is taking the things around us that are familiar and seeing them in a new light and making them personal in whatever ways we come up with to do that. And it’s the personal that becomes the creative part, you know.

What Delaney does is describe creativity in a way that is not limited to just jazz improvisation. The way in which he describes making something personal is through taking something that is familiar and changing it in some way.

Rephrasing the melody. Delaney gives an example of a primary tool he uses and emphasizes to his students. This he refers to as the first tool of improvisation: rephrasing the melody. He explains:

You take a known storyline, Goldilocks, m’kay? There’s Goldilocks, there’s the house, there’s the three bears, there’s three bowls, there’s three chairs, there are three beds, right? So you have this structural outline of the story, but then you say “what can I do with this and sort of give my own take on it?” Which is what really defines the personality or character of a musician or of a band would be: what do you do with the common thing? So you know, Goldilocks is this hip Hollywood chick. And one day she decides to go visit grandma down at the beach and she hops in the Jag and off she goes on the freeway, right? And when she gets to the gates, as she’s on the way, she gets to the gates but the gates are open. So she goes “well that’s kind of odd. Huh, I wonder where the guard is?” So she drives in and then the first house she sees is not grandma’s house, but huh, the door’s open and nobody’s here. “Maybe I should go tell them, and look at this, they left their Mercedes in the driveway with the keys in it. So maybe I should go in.” And you go from there. But these concepts are mined over and over and over again. Take a familiar storyline. Develop your own take on it.

Though there are variations, we are familiar with the story of Goldilocks and the three bears. Goldilocks discovers a house, enters, eats the bears’ porridge, sits in their chairs, and falls asleep in one of their beds. This story is our familiar musical melody. But a soloist is concerned with taking a known melody and making it personal. Delaney makes this story personal by changing the fundamental context—re-clothing it in a different culture—yet still keeping the arc of the storyline.
Connection to life experiences. Making improvisation personal is also connected to our—both learners and teachers of improvisation—unique experiences that lead up to learning to improvise. Learners of improvisation come to the metaphorical table with different learning styles, musical tastes, listening history, and playing abilities that all culminate in some form of unique voice. Here is the language metaphor surfacing again. Sydney states:

So creativity is really the freedom to express oneself. You know, it’s that simple. And the fact that we’re all unique. I think the fact that we’re all unique means that we’ve all got original voices, anyway. And when we improvise, it’s the sum total of our experience and our knowledge to that point in time of our lives, and how we feel in that moment on that day. So if we’re absolutely honest about that, um, that’s [the] creative process.

Making improvisation personal inherently occurs in how what is played by an improvisor is a culmination of unique experiences. The next several themes serve as examples of how an improvisor expresses afresh that which is familiar in ways that are new and personal.

Juxtaposition. When asked about what ways jazz improvisation is made personal, the participants frequently mentioned the concept of juxtaposition. “We don’t think about taking the very normal things and then combining them,” explains Delaney, “You know it’s like you take two disparate things which are fairly formed and you cross them and something new comes out. That retains characteristic of both.” Jazz improvisation can be creative through the juxtaposition of various musical elements that are “put together into something that’s new” (Andrew). Harmony, rhythm, and tonality are a few of these elements that can be combined in ways that create music that is new and unexpected. Often these elements can be “something very broad or very simple” (Brent). Delaney describes this concept of creativity as “connected with familiarity and
unfamiliarity.” When he improvises, he thinks about “taking simple concepts and combining them in different ways.”

**Triads.** For example, triads are generally considered a fundamental building block in jazz harmony. An improviser can take two triads—whether playing them simultaneously or using these notes in creating melodic material—and juxtapose them. This often creates a form of tension and release which the improvisor utilizes for their own purpose. A soloist may also take triads (e.g. C-E-G) and sequence them up symmetrically with a particular interval until arriving back at the original triad. An example of this is taking a C major triad and playing it up in minor thirds: C, E-flat, G-flat, A, and finally arriving back at C. Delaney explains, “So the ear says ‘I am here. Here’s home. But I’ve gone away from home even though I recognize the pattern because of the sequence.’ It’s gonna’ get a long way from home, but what happens is that it comes back if you keep going.” Whether combining triads or sequencing triads up by particular intervals, soloists use juxtaposition to create tension and release as a form of creative expression.

**Meter.** A soloist might take a song with a particular meter, for example “Take 5” which is in a 5/4 meter and play it in a different meter. In a humoring manner, Delaney then refers to this song as “Take 3” or “Take 4” or “Take 7.” I had the privilege of studying with Delaney while in college and remember vividly the first day of class where he was leading a small jazz combo with me at the piano. He asked us to play the jazz standard “Autumn Leaves” in a 5/4 meter. The challenge for us was to figure out how to rephrase the melody so it made musical sense in this new meter and where to shift the harmonic placements to align with the melody. Delaney explains his rationale for this
pedagogical strategy: “It forces them to mentally establish what has to be played to recognize the song. And yet, what can be left out and still remain recognizable.”

**Tonality.** Another example of using juxtaposition as a form of creativity is through tonality. Tonality can be modified to where a soloist juxtaposes a different tonality on top of another. Delaney shared an example where during a pre-concert soundcheck, he improvised a relatively simple blues in the key of F#, much to the surprise of the rest of the band who were playing a C blues. This juxtaposition of tonalities plays with the listener’s ears using tension and release. “Because music is a language of tension and release, the question is: okay the tension starts, and the tension goes for a while, now when’s it going to release it?” (Delaney). A soloist creates tension through establishing a tonality that is different from the rest of the musicians and releases by musically arriving back at the original tonality in whatever way they see fit.

**Thinking differently.** When asked if and how improvisation is creative, Brent shares how he thinks “it’s just the idea of thinking differently,” an observation noted by Andrew in our discussion as well. Himself a drummer, Brent gave an example stating, “It’s like taking a rock beat, maybe moving the bass drum part to your hi-hat, and moving your hi-hat part to your bass drum. That could be creative. It might not work, but it was creative to think of it.” For Brent, he gave each traditional appendix a different role. In that sense, he thought of it as creative.

**Jazz as a juxtaposition of styles.** Looking at the concept of juxtaposition more broadly, even jazz as a style (or perhaps a collection of styles of music) is an evolving creative product. Delaney speaks of jazz as a “hybrid music” that came about as a result of an “intersection of cultures.” Andrew mentions this idea as well and explains that “It’s really European instruments and European harmony being fused with African call-and-
response and African rhythms.” Another manner in which the concept of juxtaposition is manifested is through utilizing forms of instrumentation that are not normally used together. “In recent times,” observes Delaney, “I’ve noticed a lot more drummers playing kits and bringing the congas and bringing other percussion things and having them available and continuing to play the kit.”

**Jazz standard as a vehicle.** A jazz standard frequently functions as a vehicle through which musicians modify, re-phrase, re-harmonize, and/or tweak a given or known musical entity. “Which is why we call those standards,” explains Delaney. The use of the term “jazz standard” or “standard” in this study refers to compositions that have been adopted into the musical repertoire of jazz musicians. Some examples might be a Broadway show tune such as “Summertime” by George Gershwin or a composition by a jazz musician such as “Giant Steps” by John Coltrane. Delaney continues to ask, “How does so-and-so play a standard? If everyone played original music, it would be very creative and interesting, but we would have no comparisons by which to say ‘this is pretty good and this, eh, they need to work on,’ you follow me?” It is through jazz standards, “Bluesette” or “Stella by Starlight” for example, that young improvisors begin to develop an ear for the patterns that form the basis of the dominant language of jazz—tonally, harmonically, and melodically. Delaney takes a more quantitative approach to having his students learn jazz standards. “Instead of really learning one song well right away,” he shares, “it’s a more effective thing to take three songs and learn the melodies to sing over and over and over and over and over again. Just embed them.” Over time, students will intuitively discover the patterns that emerge in these songs. These melodies that jazz musicians have been playing for years teach students everything they need to know about the song such as the key center, the harmonic setting, the form, the feel, the
time signature, etc. He adds that “We automatically know things without even knowing that we know them. We know how the language sounds.” In my observations of the participants’ teaching, all their students were playing some jazz standard that was familiar within the broader jazz community. It was in these standards that the participants based whatever concept or idea they were teaching to their students.

**Improvisation is Spontaneous**

Improvisation is spontaneous in how novelty emerges in the moment or “as it is being played” (MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012, p. 246). This process occurs in real-time. Four themes emerged in the data analysis that speak to how novelty emerges in the moment: spontaneous; focus on sound; chord-scale relationships; and rhythmic development.

**Spontaneous.** Similar to improvisation as creative (Theme 1), this theme shares the same title as the framework sub-heading (i.e. “spontaneous”). This theme captures the participants’ thoughts on what processes are involved in creating new music spontaneously, as well as influence in this process such as the importance of full immersion into the jazz musical culture, how this process is similar to composition, and various pedagogical implications.

Topics that came up with the participants focused not only on the ways in which novelty emerges during jazz improvisation, but also on how novelty emerges in the moment. Improvisors cannot revise what has been played as in composition. So then I asked the participants how they teach students to improvise in the moment. Initially, some noted that improvisors don’t really know where exactly their ideas come from. Speaking in particular to songwriting, although later applying this idea to improvising, Brent states that “You ask all the great writers, they all say the same thing and it’s like
they have no idea where it comes from. It just comes to you and then you’re lucky enough to be the messenger, right?” However, as the discussions progressed, they were able to describe their viewpoints a bit more clearly. An important aspect of this theme under discussion is how all the participants acknowledged how improvisors don’t really completely make up their improvisation, but rather are informed by a long history of playing, listening, and practicing to improvise.

*Creating in the moment.* When a musician is songwriting, this process occurs over a longer period of time. The creator has more time for drafts and revisions before the product is presented in some sort of final form. However, during improvisation, the creating process occurs in the moment. “In jazz,” shares Pat, “what we really wanna’ strive for eventually is don’t decide what you’re going to play until you’re right there.” Sydney frames this process as making choices. An improvisor makes choices “in the moment” (Sydney) as these various aural opportunities and situations are presented to the improvisor. However, these decisions are driven and informed by the preparation that they put into their craft.

We have to prepare them enough so that they can do that in whatever key they happen to be playing in, at whatever tempo they happen to be playing in. And that’s why they have a lot of preparation, whatever style of music [or] style of jazz they happen to be playing in. (Pat)

Students practice playing in various keys, in various styles (e.g. traditional, bebop, hard-bop), and with various playing considerations idiomatic to their instrument. The theme of Andrew’s class when I observed him was a focus on the style of bebop jazz, however the class over the semester listens to and studies a variety of styles. My observation of Fred was during a big band rehearsal where they were listening to “Sweet Georgia,” a big band recording in the swing era in an effort to develop a feel for how to articulate their
phrases. The goal was not just to help students master that particular song, but ultimately to be able to apply these skills to future playing situations right there on the spot. This kind of preparation is essential to getting students to be able to be spontaneous improvisors. “They’re really sort of training their brain to be fluent in just kind of whatever is going to come their way” adds Pat. Sydney discusses what he calls an “intuitive understanding of the sound of the music” that is essential to be able to spontaneously create in real time. I asked him what he meant by “intuitive.” He responded that during improvisation, information comes and goes so quickly that an improvisor cannot consciously think about every note he is going to play. He has to hear the music or sound he wants to create, but this process has to occur in real time. Again, the language metaphor is used:

The fact that we have a repertoire of words that we pull out of our thoughts to express ourselves, it’s very much the same act that an improvisor has to engage in in order to improvise. So the questions about how does one learn that? I think it’s very similar to learning to speak a language. You are able to navigate the rhythmic components. You’re able to understand the melodic components and the harmonic components. And then you have enough of an emotional palette that you can say something that you think represents what you would like to hear in the music. (Sydney)

He argues that developing the ability to improvise in real time occurs through making the process second nature, a skill that can only occur through what he frequently refers to as “full immersion in the music.”

**Full immersion.** Full immersion occurs in three forms. These consist of listening, playing, and exposure.

**Listening.** First, full immersion occurs through listening to music—whether live or in a recording form. Being around others who play, particularly improvisors of high caliber, gives the developing improvisor an opportunity to listen to the music in real time,
what Sydney calls “visceral contact with the music.” In the program he directs, he frequently brings in artists such as vibraphonist Stefon Harris to give masterclasses with his students.

*Playing.* Second, full immersion occurs through having the opportunity to play. Students need the opportunity to play and “to make mistakes in a safe environment” (Sydney). When I asked Sydney how one practices being spontaneous, he responded that “You practice the spontaneous by throwing yourself into situations where you’re required to be spontaneous.” This includes affording students these opportunities to play.

*Exposure.* Third, full immersion occurs through being exposed to varying approaches to learning and developing this intuitive as well as academic understanding of the music. He distinguishes between an external and internal journey towards his intuitive development. The external journey was in part going to a performing arts high school and his subsequent years learning in an academic setting. However, the “internal journey,” Sydney explains, “was very much listen listen listen listen; full immersion. Just in the same way that a toddler listens to their parents speak.” The goal is to make improvising a second nature process, something that can only occur through spending a lot of time doing it, akin to Malcolm Gladwell’s “10,000 hour rule” (Sydney). “If there’s not a good amount of that full immersion experience,” argues Sydney, “and several hours a day really committed to that activity, you won’t acquire it, you know?”

*Similarities to composition.* While the process of improvisation occurs more in-the-moment as compared to composition, the general principles of composition are still very much present during improvisation. These include re-phrasing melodies, re-orchestration, changing the meter, changing the tonality, etc. “They are all really compositional principles, but they’re also basically improvisational tools,” argues
Delaney. Still, even during the act of improvisation where a performer cannot go back in time to change what he or she played, they can modify what is subsequently played to change the effect the original note or phrase sounds. Delaney explains, “This is one of the things I love about jazz, it’s about revisionist history. If I play something that didn’t sound right to me or I didn’t mean, I can always rephrase the next thing to go back and fix it.” A soloist’s improvisation is still being created in the moment, but they have the ability to reshape the listeners’ perception of that moment even after it has passed. A soloist has to be ready at any given moment to change the direction or sound that they are attempting to create in light of what they have just played. In this context, Delaney comments on what he means by the sound controlling him. He shares, “I’m hearing a sound, yes. And I’m just, I’m just trying to get that sound. To reach that sound. I’m following that sound. And hopefully I get there in time to play it. And, but I’m not controlling the sound. The sound is controlling me.” It is the sound that is being created in that very moment that he is immediately responding to, even if it is different than what he had previously decided.

**Pedagogical implications.** The pedagogical implication in this is a mindset to prepare students to respond to what occurs in the moment, not to prepare them to play a pre-conceived sound that has been practiced beforehand. “So as jazz players,” argues Delaney, “we’re not preparing ourselves to say this and say this. We’re preparing ourselves to say anything in the moment that happens. It’s like ‘okay, be prepared for everything.’” It was this aspect of spontaneity that originally drew Sydney into jazz in the first place. “The idea that people have a chance to choose,” he explains, “and that the music can turn on a dime as it were, you know, take a whole different direction. It’s not
pre-scripted.” It is in the moment that students make decisions on what sound comes out of their instrument.

Developing the ability to spontaneously create music in the moment necessitates much practice on the learner’s part. As one strategy to help students develop this skill, Pat incorporates a particular game into his improvisation class. After he incorporated this game into his class when I observed him teach, I asked him about it and he responded:

One of the games we play is we take a B-flat blues, arguably the easiest key for my kids, and we have each student play a chorus. The last two bars of their chorus, they have an idea that they state. Usually it has to be a very well-defined simple idea with some clarity. And then the next student uses that idea to build a solo. They play it for 10 bars. The last 2 bars they have another idea that they come up with that they’re passing on to the next person. And that person uses that idea as the basis for their solo.

In this game, students develop the skills to be able to go beyond just relying on previously practiced musical material or the “body of information” (Pat) they’ve already developed. They then have to rely upon everything that occurs “in the moment” (Pat) before a solo begins. “At that point, they are given a fresh idea,” shares Pat, “there’s no preparation that they can go through before that in their mind that day.” Students are put in a situation where they cannot use musical material that they have previously practiced or memorized. Rather, they practice developing the musical material they are presented in that very moment.

A challenge frequently encountered by improvisation students is when they begin learning and putting into practice alterations to chords and melodic solos. When playing alterations “they’re playing a number of notes that may not necessarily be in a chord and their ears are just not really accustomed to hearing that” (Pat). Pat addresses this issue by having them play a game: students are asked to play the “worst solo they can possibly play.” It is in this situation that students often times play at their highest level. He
comments on how this strategy often brings out the best playing in his students: “They tried to play something that didn’t work. And actually, some spark of creativity was unleashed because they were no longer trying to play all the stuff that they prepared to play.” Students are playing music that is not prepared and getting “out of the rut” (Pat). These games help to create a learning environment that is more fun and enjoyable for the students. “We need to prod them with games and something that’s actually fun and sparks their creativity like a form of play,” argues Pat. Improvisation involves making real-time choices to create musical sounds, but as discussed in next theme, this process involves an improvisor first hearing the sound they want before a note is even played.

**Focus on sound.** An important value within the broader jazz community is a pulling away from learning and playing music that is written down (usually in some form of traditional musical notation) and gravitating towards more aural ways of learning and performing. “Let’s learn how they learned it,” argues Brent, “that’s really important if you want to improvise. You got to learn how to use your ears.” Delaney echoes this idea and reminds me that “music is sound.” A jazz musician primarily deals with manipulating that sound. “Start with the ears,” Delaney continues, “and use the ears and interpret from there.” The participants frequently argued that students need to hear the sound that they want before they play it. However, while students seem to struggle with this idea of “hear-first, play-second,” they still seem to have an intuitive sense of how music is supposed to sound. “Before you ever studied music, did you know how music was supposed to sound?” asks Delaney. He continues, “Whether you ever thought about it or not, you knew what it was supposed to sound like.” The assumption that improvisation students have an intuitive understanding of the sound of music, even if rudimentary, drives the pedagogy of many of these participants.
**Intentionality.** Even connected to the idea of a creative ear is the notion of intentionality. When an improvisor hears the sound they want in their head—whether a specific note, a multi-note motive, or an overall mood—and they play that sound, they are operating with intentionality or purpose. A contrast is when an improvisor plays notes or passages without hearing the sound they want in their head first. This could occur through playing out of muscle memory or even artificially crafting passages through solely choosing notes based on chord-scale relationships. This process of intentionality seems to be valued among jazz improvisors and is a process that jazz educators often attempt to elicit out of their students. “If I didn’t mean it, no matter how good it sounds, if I didn’t mean it, it’s wrong,” argues Delaney. He continues, “Did you play what you meant? And if you can learn to connect what you mean, which the only way to know what you mean is to hear clearly.” Intentionality occurs when a soloist plays what they already hear through their aural imagination.

Much like humans learn to speak a language before learning the grammar and how to write it down, the participants were concerned with getting their students to hear and play a musical sound. When Andrew gets a new student, particularly an older student, he argues that they’ll be a little more attuned to the sound they want to achieve in their improvisation. “So they’ll be a lot more, you know this ‘I appreciate what you’re doing, but here’s the sound I’m hearing. How do I get that sound?’” (Andrew). Much of the reasoning behind this is because older students typically have more years of listening experience than younger students. For Pat, conceptualizing the music is secondary to the sound. Conceptualizing may include, though is not limited to, learning 7th chord arpeggios in all 12 keys, understanding individual notes in various forms of 7th chords, and so forth. “What I tell my students,” he shares, “is when you do that, that may be
necessary in order for you to learn it. But get rid of it as soon as possible.” What’s most important, the ultimate goal, is to “hear the note and play the note you’re hearing.” Here the mental and physical aspects become “merged” according to Pat. He states that he tries to get them to “not think about a conceptual idea of what they’re doing, but just hear it and play it at the same time.” Pat refers to conceptualizing in the sense of explicitly think about each note, specifically in regards to its harmonic context. “It’s like growing another head. You don’t want it, you don’t need it. You’re gonna’ have to lose it” (Pat). Hearing a sound and the physical process of playing that sound are merged into a simultaneous process. Thinking about the process while in the moment, argues Pat, is too difficult for the brain to keep up. “When you look at how fast the brain actually can process things conceptually,” he shares, “it cannot process things conceptually as fast as a musician plays a phrase.” Delaney explains this concept:

What you have to know is you have to have that practical, um, first of all, I hear a sound. Second of all, I imaginatively use that sound to say something. Third of all, I have to know what that sound is relative to the context I’m speaking in. Fourth of all, I have to have the mechanical resources on my instrument to find that sound and manipulate that sound with the imaginative concept. And fifth of all, if you like I’ll write it down for you.

This example Delaney shares exemplifies this focus on musical sound over that of understanding the theory behind that sound. Focusing on the sound first is a concept Delaney learned from his own mentors and older peers. “The older generation,” he argues, “they learned by putting on their records and wearing their records out by playing along with them.” This concept is closely related to the theme below on transcribing. However, I chose to discuss it here as it is pertinent to this theme of focusing on the sound first.
**Aural imagination.** Delaney argues that “there’s a more direct route to playing and improvisation is all about being in the moment and responding to the sound, not responding to the notes, or the chords, or the scales.” While improvising, a jazz musician is often encouraged by many teachers and mentors to respond to the sound in the moment. Again, Delaney explains this as responding to the sound. While speaking in the context of hearing and recognizing harmony while playing or transcribing, he speaks to how he develops in students this aural imagination, what he refers to as identifying characters. “If you wanna’ know what that chord quality is,” he explains, “you learn to hear the sound and describe it using an adjective and then listen for the adjective. And if you hear the adjective, you will probably be hearing that sound.” Taking this concept to improvising on a given standard or tune, Delaney suggests students do the same. “How would you describe this song with an adjective? What’s the feeling of the song? What’s your impression?” he asks. Now while Delaney admits that this adjective (or descriptor) is subjective to each musician, he still encourages his students to keep to this adjective when crafting an improvisation. Delaney explains:

So when you’re improvising, I want them to tell me a story that has the same quality of characteristics. And you can, through that adjective, imply melodic ideas, harmonic ideas, rhythmic ideas, characteristics, right? And through that, you will maintain the underlying, um, impression of the song to the listener and sound like you’re playing the song through being thoroughly familiar with the melody, whether you’re playing it or not, you’re playing relationally to that melody, the emotional contour through the form of the tune. If I’m gonna improvise from a song, I’m gonna use something from the song as my point of departure.

Delaney encourages his students to not necessarily improvise on the harmonic and formal structure of a song, but to obtain or create an emotional impression of the song and then express that.
**Singing.** Singing is an important tool for the young improvisor. “I think a lot of it is a lot of people growing up don’t learn how to sing or match pitch,” comments Fred. Being able to match pitch seems to be very important in improvising. As he notes: “Your inner ear is asleep.” The participants in this study often spoke of the ability to sing as being an essential tool that is often neglected, yet is fundamental for developing one’s inner ear. Most commonly, this may take the form of simple tunes, folk songs, or even childrens’ songs. “The young generations by and large don’t ever sing or don’t ever generate their own pitches,” laments Delaney.

**Inner ear.** The participants used such phrases as “inner ear” (Fred) or “aural imagination” (Delaney) to capture the skill necessary for a successful improvisor. Delaney explains an approach to developing in his students their aural imagination through an exercise called “50 Tunes.” He explains:

> How I deal with that is I start with the 50 tunes and just start with just simple recognition of melodies relative to key centers. And taking melodies and saying “where do they start relative to my key?” And then extrapolate that in slightly more complex tunes. And then bring that into the jazz standards that we study. You know, or say “let’s learn some standards” because we need a common language that we can go anywhere, you know. Um, I walked in cold all over Europe and said, listen to someone play, “oh, they’re playing ‘Just Friends.’” I know that tune.” So you know I don’t speak polish, but I can play music with you. [laughing]

In having his students learn 50 tunes, Delaney is developing students’ aural imagination, much like a baby learning a language begins by listening to it spoken a lot. Sydney cites William Adam, former trumpet and professor emeritus at Indiana University, as a large influence in his concept of sound. “His whole concept was that music was sound,” he shares, “and it was sound that you had to hear in your imagination.” The sound has to originate in the aural imagination. “And so if you could imagine something, you would will it into being as long as your body was trained to do it” (Sydney). While being able
to play the sound an improvisor hears in their head is highly valued and a large focus in pedagogy among jazz performers as well as jazz educators, this is not enough. The following theme discusses the idea that the improvisor needs to also be able to hear sounds that are creative or “interesting” in some sense.

**Hearing interesting stuff.** The ability to improvise in a spontaneous manner that is generally regarded within the broader jazz community as creative and of high quality is based on an improvisor’s aural imagination, also referred to as their creative ear. Jason phrases this concept as “the creativity of being able to actually hear interesting things.” An improvisor hears the sound they want to play before it is played, although they need not hear the exact notes or phrases. The overall mood, character, or melodic shape may even be imagined beforehand. “There are some people who have tremendous technical fluidity,” continues Delaney, “but they’re not hearing anything interesting. So therefore they’re not playing anything interesting, even though they’re playing everything they hear.” While the previous theme of focusing on the sound that is imagined internally is generally valued among these educators, this theme then takes this concept and focuses on the quality of this aural imagination.

When I ask him about the pedagogical implications in the idea of a creative ear, Jason shares a Charlie Parker quote: “First you have to know your instrument, then you have to know your music, and then you have to forget it all and just play.” While a bit oversimplified, this quote exemplifies a process that many of the participants adhere to in some form or state in a variety of ways when discussing the pedagogical implications.

Still without the technical ability on one’s instrument such as making a quality tone (“quality” being somewhat subjective of course), knowing their notes, or even knowing how to play an instrument, there can be no improvisation. “If you’re hearing
really creative great things, but you can’t play it fluidly on your instrument, it doesn’t really matter what you hear because nobody else is going to hear it” (Jason). Delaney describes what he calls the six ears of the educated musician: the melodic ear, the rhythmic ear, the harmonic ear, the thematic ear, the orchestral ear, and the stylistic ear. Through just knowing the melody to a song, a musician uses these six “ears” to glean most of the information they need to know about a song (e.g. the harmony, the style, etc.). Delaney uses the song Frères Jacques as an example. After he plays only the first four notes (do-re-mi-do), he comments:

Oh, now I have tonality. There’s harmony. There’s melodic shape. There’s rhythm: dah-dah-dah-dah. Mkay, there’s still orchestra—piano. And there’s style. “Oh, something very simple. It’s like a children’s song.” And there’s thematic, “well I did return from whence I started.” Okay, so in other words, all these things are set in motion.

It is these “ears” that an improvisor uses as tools to articulate on their instrument what their aural imagination is hearing.

**Chord-scale relationships.** A common focus of jazz educators is on chord-scale relationships. A jazz player learns to identify which particular scale fits over a given chord or harmonic progression. Participants were asked how they navigate the emphasis on theoretical constructs of jazz, often in the form of learning which scales fit over particular chords. For Jason, it is about muscle memory. “That’s a really hard thing for people to understand,” he emphasizes, “it’s like okay, I’m doing all these exercises like playing scales up and down. What is the point of it? How am I gonna use it? You don’t really know until you actually do it.” Technical exercises that jazz educators assign their students are important to practice, but should not be forced out during a performance, much like the old saying “forget everything you know and just play.” The point is for it to come out naturally. “The more you think, the less you hear,” explains Delaney, “and
even if you think and you play all the right sounds, what you end up with is a bunch of right notes.” Playing a bunch of “right notes” doesn’t necessarily constitute a quality improvisation according to Delaney. Furthermore, a quality improvisation can use all the wrong notes because it tells a story. “The reason you’re doing this,” argues Brent, “is because you want to get to a place of owning it. Where it is just muscle memory for you.” Learning jazz scales and harmony seems to have a more tangible effect on improvisors, as it “ignites their creativity” (Fred). “I don’t teach licks,” asserts Jason, “I don’t teach licks at all.” He shares that his focus is on specific skills such as knowledge of chords and how they relate to each other, passing tones, leading tones etc. He then leaves it up to the students in how they use that knowledge. They have the freedom to do with that knowledge what they wish.

While chord-scale relationship exercises were frequently emphasized by the participants, they repeatedly noted that they should surface in a student’s playing “naturally” and should not be forced. Sydney uses the language analogy to explain how this information is used by the improvisor. He shares, “I’m thinking a thought and then a stream of codified language serves my thoughts as I speak to you.” Learning this codified language and phrases equips improvisors with the tools and language to physically express their musical thoughts. Earlier I discussed the need to develop one’s aural imagination. These are the tools they need to express what an improvisor is hearing in their head.

**Rhythmic development.** The concept of rhythmic development is an important improvisational tool—the “meat and potatoes” of soloing (Brent). “In regards to improvising and how I try to communicate that to my students,” shares Brent, “I talk a lot about rhythm.” This importance lies in “being able to take a core idea from a melody,
and then permutate that idea, as one of the compositional techniques that improvisors use” (Pat).

**Rhythmic strategies.** Pat shared Ed Byrne’s *Linear Jazz Improvisation Method Book* as a resource he uses in assisting students in rhythmic development and discusses its importance in his own pedagogy. He shares, “[it has] compositional, improv techniques. One is where he takes a rhythm and he permutates it. He displaces it in different ways. And he shows how to modify an idea, to play with the idea, to compositionally alter and permutate that idea.” Brent shares that “you could have a very popular melody and take away the notes and just leave the rhythm and most people would still know what that melody is. But you can’t do that on the reverse. You can’t take away the rhythm and just have a bed of notes.” Isolating the rhythmic aspects of improvising is Brent’s first step in assisting students in developing their improvisation skills. As a first step to improvising, he will have his students take a single note and “play around” with it, seeing what kind of rhythmic ideas can come of it. He will then have a student improvise on two notes, then three, and so forth. Eventually this develops into using all the notes of a scale. But the primary interest of a solo lies in its rhythmic development.

**Rhythm of language.** The reason for focusing on the rhythmic aspects of improvising are again tied to the metaphor of language in improvisation. Brent consistently attempts to relate the concept of rhythm “to something as simple as just talking.” As he puts it, “What is going to make it interesting is if you are talking to me on that instrument.” He continues:

So if you want to make your improvisations—your solos—interesting, think about it just in how you approach a conversation with somebody. Life would be really fucking boring if everybody walked around and was like “Hey Roger how you
doing good to see you good to see you!” [spoken in a loud, monotone, monopo-
paced voice]. You know it’s like fast and loud, you know? But if I walk into a
room like “Hey Roger! How you doing?” [added dynamic variation]. You know,
it’s like, that’s way more interesting.

The rhythmic aspects of improvising are likened to the rhythm and pacing of speaking
and having conversations. In our interviews, participants often spoke of wanting to hear
students “breath” and “not just play all the way through” (Brent) in reference to how they
phrase and pace their improvisations. Brent even has his students “write down a sentence
or think of a phrase in the English language” when students ask about learning to
improvise.

Other times, jazz educators view the rhythmic aspects of improvisation as an
essential starting point based on the dance-based origins of jazz music. Fred notes that
growing up, “The music we heard was dance music and it was very rhythmically a part,
well jazz is, I’m here to tell you, is dance music.” He frequently has his students listen to
top-level jazz big bands in his Big Band class. But as he notes, “You can’t feel what a
band like that feels like in a practice room.” He also has his students visit and sit in with
jazz groups at local clubs he plays at.

**Improvisation is Social**

The process of improvising music is a social phenomenon through the interactions
occurring at multiple levels: performer and audience; between various band members,
between band sub-groups such as rhythm section and wind players (Berliner, 1994;
Monson, 1996). Furthermore, these themes suggest that learning to improvise does not
occur through solitary confinement in a practice room. It is a culmination of one’s life
experiences in listening to music and through performing with peers and mentors. Four
themes emerged in the data analysis that speak to how improvisation is socially situated,
as well as the role that social phenomenon plays in learning and teaching improvisation: culmination of life experiences; transcribing; developing a voice; learning from peers.

**Culmination of life experiences.** Far from any sort of mechanical approach, improvisation seems to be an intensely personal act that draws from a player’s entire musical and life experiences. Improvisation is a combination of past experiences that culminate in musical statements unique to that individual. Sydney comments, “We’re all unique means that we’ve all got original voices, anyway. And when we improvise, it’s the sum total of our experience and our knowledge to that point in time of our lives, and how we feel in that moment of that day.” Arthur Rhames has previously expressed this idea in stating that artists “play out of their experiences, their lives—the things that happened to them” (as cited in Berliner, 1994, p. 121). A jazz improvisor takes their musical influences and even their knowledge about life in general and “puts it together into something that’s different and hasn’t been said in quite that way before” (Andrew). These past experiences include musical intuition. It involves “allowing your imagination come to flower—to show itself” (Jason). This is echoed by Andrew when he states “You’re trying to use your imagination to recreate whatever it is that’s in your imagination and make an interpretation of it.” When soloists make statements using musical tones—statements that are not scripted or pre-planned—this is a personal musical expression (Andrew).

Brent echoes Andrew’s earlier assertion that jazz improvisors synthesize their musical influences. The Golden State Warriors 2015 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers being fresh in his memory—not to mention living in the heart of San Francisco—Brent raves on the creativity he sees in Steph Curry, the 2015 NBA season MVP. He describes
Curry’s creative performance like a dancer. His thoughts on Curry’s influences are a vivid analogy of how improvisors synthesize their own influences into their unique style.

You know I think you have to have optimism in being creative because if you’re closed, you’re not allowing other influences to come in. Steph Curry was probably checking out everybody: Isaiah Thomas, Jordan, Magic, you know. And it’s all encompassed into what he’s doing, you know? (Brent)

Similar to the ways in which Steph Curry’s playing style is a culmination of the basketball players he’s studied, a jazz improvisor’s musical style is a culmination of the players he or she has spent time listening to and playing with. Studying other players—in person or from recordings—is an integral part of learning to improvise. Part of this process involves a significant amount of transcribing, which is discussed next.

**Transcribing.** The most typical form of transcribing is that of a process where jazz musicians listen to a solo and preserve it in some form—most often as musical notation or sometimes just memorizing it as they go along.

**Learning through transcribing.** Participants in this study remarked the importance some form of transcription had on their early musical development in learning how to improvise. For example, in discussing the music his parents danced to as he was growing up, Fred noted how much he wanted to learn it. “I learned how to play by emulating records,” he shares. Andrew frames the role of transcription in terms of the process of learning a language. Typically, in the later stages of learning a language, students study the classic literature in that language, what Andrew refers to as spending time with a “master.” He shares, “You’re spending some time with Hermann Melville or Shakespeare. You’re acting them out, you’re studying them, you’re talking about them.” Andrew’s Jazz Styles class that I observed exemplified this approach in how he
structured the class to focus on a different style or significant composer/player every few weeks.

**Teaching through transcribing.** Transcribing as a form of practice is an “advanced form of ear training that goes well beyond the kind of ear training you might get in the first couple years of theory as a music undergrad” (Pat). Participants frequently spoke of this process of emulation as an essential component of how they teach improvisation. Fred relays the importance of “playing at jam sessions and talking to people and saying like ‘okay, what did you do there and how did you do that’ and then getting insights.” Andrew explains how this process helps a student in his or her development in stating that “I think you have to do it by ear for it to be valid… You’re actually internalizing it and reproducing it by your own mechanisms.” Ear training involves emulating the idiomatic nuances of an artist under study. “I felt a connection to the music that I’d never really felt because I wasn’t looking at the music; and I didn’t realize how much it was distracting me,” comments Fred. Students are sometimes required to learn a particular transcription “up to speed” (Pat) and that includes tonguing, breathing, breaks, scoops, etc. They sometimes learn these solos in several different keys. “I want them to be able to play, ideally, like that person when they play that solo,” explains Pat.

Andrew ties this notion of playing idiomatically to my question of how jazz educators balance teaching the nuts and bolts of applying specific scales over specific chords, and being able to spontaneously create “in the moment.” Both are applicable to a developing jazz improvisor.

So the idea of what’s more important: pre-developed musical ideas or developing spontaneity while improvising? The answer is yes. I’ve gotten these really high-
level guys and they all say “Don’t imitate. Don’t learn transcribed solos.” I never did that. (Andrew)

This process is akin to learning adverbs and conjugating verbs in learning a language. Ultimately, transcribing is viewed as preparation for improvisors to develop a “freedom in being able to improvise” (Pat). Fred emphasizes to his students the importance of “learning tunes and playing without music and playing by ear.” Transcribing jazz solos as a learning tool goes beyond just learning a collage of ii-V-I licks to juxtapose over a given chord progression or a bag of tricks from which to pull out stock musical ideas from.

**Stylistic development.** Transcribing solos has a stylistic component to it as well in which students are encouraged to “be able to play the whole spectrum of jazz” (Pat). Students are often expected to be fluent in playing and improvising jazz in a variety of styles and time periods such as early swing, bebop, cool, etc. “If we’re doing something with early jazz and they want to learn to play with a plunger,” says Pat, “I might have them learn a “Tricky Sam” Nanton solo just the way he played it in Duke’s band.” Again, the purpose is not to be able to necessarily transpose this solo into different keys or extract from it musical motifs (although by no means is that not possible), but rather “just learn how to play it” (Pat). Pat suggests his students learn a transcription exactly like the original recording, including the articulations, phrasing, and style. He further comments that “there are some jazz transcriptions that I really don’t look at for just licks.” In his beginning jazz improvisation course, Pat has his students present several transcriptions throughout the semester. On the day I observed, students shared their first transcription from early jazz and pulled from artists such as Louis Armstrong and Benny Goodman. Students performed their transcription for the class by playing along with the
original recording and were encouraged to play as stylistically similar to the original artist. Then they played the solo from memory on their own.

In similar fashion, Jason teaches from a “historical perspective” with his high school students and comments on how often he receives feedback that the bands that he teaches have a unique sound. “Our bands tend to sound different than any other school bands,” he shares with a teacher’s pride, “our kids have a more sophisticated understanding of the history of the music and play more authentically. Regardless of their ability level, they’re approaching the music authentically.” He challenges his students to understand a little bit of the history and times behind the musical styles they are playing: why it sounded like it did; how bands and their particular sounds were geographically situated (i.e. bands from Kansas sounded different from those in New York); even the racial issues involved in jazz throughout the 20th century.

Fred’s focus on learning pre-bop styles of improvisation emphasizes a “melodic style” of improvisation. This is why Fred criticizes the Jamey Aebersold play-along series. “Aebersold starts from the notion that harmony is where it starts,” he argues, “I mean I’m sure there are people who start and write a song based on chord changes, but I think most people write a song because they hear a melody.” Through the process of transcription, jazz musicians gain an intuitive understanding of the language of the musical style they are learning to improvise. Over time, improvisors develop their own musical voice that is a culmination of their music experiences.

**Developing a voice.** A topic that Paul Berliner (1994) discusses in *Thinking in Jazz* is that of developing a unique and personal musical voice when improvising. This is another metaphor frequently used by the participants in this study. My conversation with Pat unveiled his thoughts on the difficulty of developing a musical voice for improvisors:
Interviewer: That was one of the things that I remember reading about [in *Thinking in Jazz*]. These old jazz players would be mentored by somebody and they would copy their style and then eventually go on to develop their own voice. So how does one develop their voice?

Pat: I don’t think that jazz students in college really develop their own voice. I don’t think they get to that point. I think that’s further down the road. I mean if you listen to Wynton Marsalis in his early years playing with Art Blakey, he sounds like Clifford Brown. He doesn’t sound like Wynton, he sounds like someone else. He went through his Miles stage, you know. He went through all these stages where he was a professional musician playing with world-renowned musicians far advanced from college players and he was still sounding like Clifford Brown. So is a college player supposed to develop his or her own voice? That’s not the way Wynton did it. And I think that’s asking too much.

Developing a unique “voice” as an improvisor seems to be dependent on one’s journey to learn to improvise at a young age.

Developing improvisational proficiency gets more difficult the older a student starts. “It has to start pretty young,” argues Fred, and continues that “people who start improvising later in life, they might get okay, but they’re never gonna be like a real master.” There seems to be some innate quality that develops in jazz students at a younger age that can’t be taught, but is necessary to become a master improvisor. Many of the participants alluded to something along these lines, but most had a hard time attempting to articulate what exactly they meant. “Most of the people that I know who are really strong musicians really began pretty young and really worked hard at it. And it caught their imagination real young” (Fred). While there seems to be consensus that learning to improvise at a young age is necessary for mastery later on in life, Pat argues that there is a vast amount of work that should be done on the student’s part before they can develop their own voice. “I think if someone’s too quick to develop their own voice,” he warns, “that means they haven’t properly done enough homework.” He continues to share how students of improvisation are part of a lineage and how fluency in that lineage is essential to mastery of improvisation.
Reflecting on his role as a jazz educator, Sydney adds “What is the goal here? The goal is to find your voice within this language.” Again, here is the language metaphor at work. I asked him how one finds their voice. His response encapsulates his overall approach. He shares, “The way you do is that general balance of language, vocabulary, information, the opportunity to explore all those things, and the encouragement to allow people to feel good about who they are as an individual, and expressing themselves honestly.” Developing a voice involves not only the building blocks and tools necessary to improvise, but also opportunities to practice and experience improvising in a safe space that allows for mistakes and freedom of expression.

**Learning from peers.** Many participants in this study noted how students frequently learned important improvisation lessons from their peers as much as from their teachers. “I learned an awful lot from my teachers, but most of what I learned was from playing with my peer group and listening to what they listened to and making contact with their contacts and that kind of stuff” (Andrew). Again returning to the language metaphor, Andrew notes how children learn to speak from listening and interacting with their parents. They learn from peers in elementary school. They read in school and pick up on vocabulary. He further adds how the student groups (small jazz combos, etc.) are picking up ideas from each other and others their age. “I hear what they’re doin,’ and then in some cases I marvel at it and agree, and in some cases I don’t,” critiques Andrew. During my observation of him guiding a rehearsal, he stepped in and played piano with the group on a few songs. This class was a “Jazz Styles” class where students choose a particular jazz artist or style to study about every five weeks. My visit coincided with their study of Charlie Parker. During a performance of “Shawnuff,” a classic jazz standard from the bebop era, my own ears picked up on Andrew’s stylistic differences in
motive vocabulary and melodic phrasing from that of the rest of the younger players.

“They’re not necessarily speaking the King(s) English as far as I’m concerned, but I kind of let them do it” (Brent). Peer interaction seemed to cultivate a reciprocal relationship between students where they share the music they are studying and listening to.

**Improvisation is Accessible**

Rather than lying solely in the mind of a few geniuses, improvisation is an accessible skill learnable by everyone to some degree. Eight themes emerged in the data analysis that speak to the accessibility of improvisation: psychological aspects; anybody can be creative; can jazz improvisation be taught?; role as a jazz educator; lifelong learners; jazz education and academia; motivating students; metaphors.

**Psychological aspects.** Challenges are still present in teaching students how to improvise—how to be creative *in the moment* as jazz improvisation challenges its practitioners to do. When placed on the spot to improvise, students still struggle to create. “Most of the things that kids do, there is very little creativity involved in it,” argues Jason. When students are so often given the “rules” during their formative years as improvisors (fit this scale over this chord being just one example), students struggle when they are suddenly placed in a position where they have to improvise.

**Mental Blocks.** During improvisation, many students have mental blocks that hinder their improvisation. Fred shares that “everybody’s got things that get in their way.” In describing this phenomenon that students encounter, Pat uses the metaphor of the “editor” and the “spector,” which he borrows from Stephen Nachmanovitch’s book, *Free Play: Improvisation in Life and Art*. The editor is concerned with “helping the creative process to be quality by knowing what’s appropriate for the style or key” (Pat). The spector on the other hand is the judge. The problem, as Pat argues, is that the spector
is “out of control.” It becomes over-judging and hinders the creative process. Pat spends a lot of time working on psychological aspects in the improvisation process. He tries to get his students to understand “how we can keep ourselves from short-circuiting our own creativity and certain attitudes we have about our music and ourselves.” He is concerned with developing in students ways to keep their own inner judge from being a hinderance to the creative process. He continues, “We can’t make ourselves be creative or spontaneous, but we can practice at it. And we can practice not short-circuiting it.” One way in which this creative process is hindered is through fear of improvising, which is discussed next.

**Fear.** In addition to mental blocks, students, especially in their younger years, are afraid of improvising. “There’s a lot of students, especially young high school kids that come to me,” mentions Brent, “and a lot of them are afraid of improvising.” As a high school teacher, he gets students as they are entering high school and are typically at the beginning stages of learning to improvise. His goal is to not “scare them away from being a soloist.” Pat shares how in many of his own experiences, he wanted to flip the “creative switch,” but how feelings such as nervousness, being upset, and other distractions served to “short-circuit” this from happening. Much of his own teaching approach involves not necessarily making his students be creative, but rather helping them to remove those barriers that are short-circuiting the creative process.

**Peer pressure.** The participants in this study work primarily with students in high school and their early college years. Peer pressure during these ages plays a large role in learning to improvise. “They’re not going to say, like in a rehearsal full of their peers, ‘uh I just don’t understand this,’ right?” argues Fred. He notes how during his early college years being intimidated because his own band director was a great drummer. He
remembers moments leaving rehearsal feeling discouraged. These kinds of experiences have shaped the way he teaches. He notes the importance of awareness of how students are feeling at any given moment. “It requires being careful to be aware of how they’re feeling” (Fred). Feelings of intimidation from peer musicians are frequently encountered and dealt with by jazz educators.

Intimidation. In addition to pressure from peers, jazz musicians play in front of audiences that cultivate feelings of intimidation as well. Andrew describes how he conceptualizes his understanding of this relationship between improvisor and audience. Returning again to the language metaphor, he argues, “There is an element of oration. When someone’s playing a jazz solo, you gotta get up there and improvise what would be considered a pretty substantially, well thought-out statement that people are going to be actually listening [to].” An improvisor is expected to churn out a well-crafted series of musical statements, motifs, and phrases over the course of a given solo. “They are listening to you and wanting to hear what you have to say,” continues Andrew, “you better have something to say.” However, students often encounter feelings of intimidation from the audience that makes them uncomfortable. Pat refers to a “fight, flight, now freeze” syndrome. When students are fighting, they resort to over-playing in a more competitive way against their peers or fellow performers. “They’re trying to out-do the person that just played. They’re trying to play a lot of notes and really aggressively, which usually is not a good strategy” (Pat). When students are flight-y, Pat shares, they are playing more timidly and less assertive. “They’re usually trying to do just the opposite of what they heard and it’s kind of very tentative” (Pat). When students are freezing, they have a sort of stage fright and have a hard time playing their instrument, let alone creating an interesting and captivating improvisation. “Their fingers
are not going down at the right time and they’re embouchure is full of, you know it’s a…, they got dry mouth and it’s just, it’s not a good environment in which to play at all” (Pat). Educators who perform professionally—as well as their students—both express feelings of intimidation (albeit to varying degrees) with regards to the pressure to construct a well thought out solo spontaneously.

Learning to improvise often necessitates putting oneself into situations where an improviser has to just attempt the process, even if it results in failure. Because of this, students often need to be inspired by their teachers in a way that makes them want to keep trying again and again. “People have to leave your presence energized and feeling better about themselves than when they entered your presence,” argues Sydney. Students are often in situations where they don’t sound good. Sydney asserts that if students have the confidence and courage to do this, “they’ll have the confidence to have the courage to try something where they don’t sound good for a while.” A significant role of improvisation teachers is helping students be comfortable with feelings of not sounding good in their own opinion. Sydney comments on the role his own mentors played in his improvisational development. “The great mentors and teachers I have had,” he shares, “I always leave them feeling inspired and able to cope better.”

Learning styles. Aside from the all too common mental blocks and fears that accompany improvising, the process of teaching improvisation involves working with students that have a variety of learning styles, dispositions, and musical preferences. What works with one student won’t necessarily work with another. Each student brings their own completely unique personality to the metaphorical table—although this isn’t necessarily new information in research on best pedagogical practices. “At a community college in a band with 20 kids,” shares Fred, “you have 20 different learning styles.”
This could be specific learning disabilities or mental illnesses—diagnosed, or more often, not diagnosed; various social factors such as first relationships or other issues of sexuality; insecurities; lack of money or a job; substance abuse; or even just plain laziness. The process of teaching improvisation cannot be separated from these other life issues. Jazz educators encounter issues in their students and have to develop their own methods of helping them. “I’m really dedicated to helping them holistically,” shares Fred. Jason shares, “I’m trying to develop these kids as human beings so that they can achieve their greatest potential—whatever that is.” As a high school teacher, he felt that these life issues had a large effect on the improvisation development of his students. He continues to share that “I’m looking at them as people. You know, we have some kids who come in with a really, really strong sense of ethics and all that kind of thing. But some need a little help in that direction. And that’s part of what I’m doing with them.” He further argues that improvisation involves an aspect of empathy because of the collaborative aspect inherent in it. He asserts that improvisors need to be able to work collaboratively with other players. He explains:

> What they play is going to be partially determined by what I play and we’re going to have this interplay and this musical discussion, um, that only works if we’re being empathetic with each… considering each other’s needs—as people and as musicians.

Improvisation involves responding to other players’ playing in ways that affirm or deny what they are expressing musically. His comment suggests that life skills such as empathy have bearing on how they improvise.

**Age.** In addition to metal blocks encountered by students as well as the diversity found among students with regards to learning styles and dispositions, the age of a student has bearing on how a jazz educator approaches teaching improvisation. When
asked about how his teaching approaches might differ with students of different ages, Andrew observes how older students generally approach learning with the realization that learning to improvise will take a significant amount of time. “If you told somebody who was 50 that in order to do this, you’re gonna need to dedicate the next 10 years of your life to this,” he adds, “that wouldn’t really phase them.” He continues, “But if you went to a 12 year-old and said, if you wanna learn this, it’s gonna be 22, you know, well that’s their whole life.” Younger students—kids in particular—tend to trust their teacher a bit more and question less when they are learning a particular concept or practicing something assigned to them by their teacher.

**Anybody can be creative.** A theme that emerged among several of the conversations with participants was how everybody can be creative through improvisation. “I think there’s a lot of mysticism around the word creative,” argues Sydney, “and I actually don’t think that the creative process is that mystical.” Learning to improvise is a learnable skill that is not limited to a genetically lucky few. It is a skill that anybody is able to develop.

Sydney suggest one way in which each learner, because of their inherent individuality and uniqueness as a person, is creative. “I think we’re all naturally creative in that we are all unique” (Sydney). Everybody is creative by the fact that they have life and musical experiences. So then someone who is at the very least improvising—spontaneously creating music in the moment as opposed to performing a pre-scripted solos note-for-note—they are being creative no matter how skilled they may be or at what level their improvising is regarded within the jazz community.

Brent shares one strategy that he uses to get his students to not only improvise, but to realize themselves that they are capable of improvising. This strategy is a rhythmic
approach to improvising where he has his students reduce their improvisation down to a select few notes and developing them rhythmically. He notes how his students’ improvisations improve dramatically. “Usually these kids bust out great solos after that,” he celebrates, “especially the ones that were afraid to solo. They do that and they’re like ‘oh shit, I can improvise!’ Of course you can. Everybody can. We’re all improvising.”

At a basic level, an improvisor is taking very simple musical idea and developing it. As such, Brent’s focus in his instruction is on developing simple musical ideas. Himself a drummer, he often approaches this development from a rhythmic perspective. Delaney discusses the importance of developing simple musical ideas:

\begin{quote}
A lot of people, especially in jazz, they seem to think it has to be complicated. And the first thing I say to them is “you don’t want to make anything complicated just for the sake of complication.” What you do is you take something simple and then you take something else that’s simple, and then you combine them and you develop this amazing complexity.
\end{quote}

The participants in this study discussed in their own ways how anybody can improvise. I then pressed the issue under discussion a bit further in asking them to discuss if and how improvisation can be taught.

**Can jazz improvisation be taught?** The focus of this study being on the teaching practices of jazz educators, I asked all the participants in this study to share their thoughts on whether or not jazz improvisation can be taught. A definition of what is meant by “taught” was not provided to the participants. The intention for this was to allow them to define how they themselves use the term. In addition, much of the conversations touched on topics relating to how they learned to improvise and what their views were on learning to improvise. They often spoke to how learning to improvise takes much time to develop and focused their responses on their own role in teaching students to improvise. It was necessary to briefly differentiate “teaching” from
“learning” improvisation when asking this question. This question of whether jazz improvisation can be taught frequently emerges in research, yet there seems to be no consensus. This was true among the participants as well. Some even seemed to struggle with answering the question.

**Student responsibility.** The participants all emphasized that the responsibility for learning rested squarely on the shoulders of the students themselves. When asked the question of whether jazz improvisation can be taught, Brent immediately responded “Um, yeah, parts of it can.” He then clarifies, “I don’t know how to teach somebody to be creative. I just know how to give them the tools to want to be creative.” These jazz educators emphasized how their teaching style was less about transferring knowledge from their heads into their students’ heads, but rather about developing in students lifelong tools so they can be motivated to learn for themselves. Fred argues:

> When you take a concept like improvisation, you can teach people, you can explain a concept, but then they have to work with it. They have to do the work. I think that ultimately, that’s what people mean when they say you can’t really teach jazz improvisation. They mean that you can’t just gift someone with the ability.

The participants emphasized how educators should provide learners with the tools to learn improvisation and take on this responsibility themselves.

**Immersion.** In response to whether jazz improvisation can be taught, Andrew answers yes. He makes the analogy that just as the way spoken language can be taught, so can improvisation. “You’re only gonna get as good as you’re spending the time on it,” he argues. Because of the noted similarities of learning improvisation to that of learning a language, spending a significant amount of time being immersed in the learning process is necessary. Discussing improvisational concepts, as well as listening to and playing music, in a class that happens maybe three hours per week is not enough time for
developing improvisational skills. “So the kids have to be doing some of it on their own outside of class,” argues Andrew.

**Role as a jazz educator.** The participants utilized imagery and metaphors from various other non-music related activities when asked to describe their role as a jazz educator. This was in part because of the difficulty they had in attempting to describe their own role as jazz educators. Agreement was often found in how many jazz performers in general have difficulty articulating their own thought processes they go through when improvising as well as describing their own teaching practices. I asked the participants to comment on this phenomenon. Pat noted how he thought that there seems to be what he called a “social bias” against adopting a teaching role by many jazz performers. “A lot of these great musicians that I’ve met,” he shares, “they’re not interested in trying to help an aspiring student go through the stages.” Many jazz players didn’t get into jazz to teach it, but rather to play it. They are interested in being players, not teachers. “And when they do talk about music,” continues Pat, “they want to talk about it in the framework that makes sense for them.” In describing their music, these musicians often speak in imagery and metaphors using terms related to color, feeling, and emotion.

**Metaphors.** The most consistent metaphors the participants used in describing their role as a jazz educator was that of a guide, mentor, or coach. While these metaphors can be each conceptualized in a variety of ways, there were commonalities found throughout the participants’ use of them. “I think in general when you’re teaching someone improvisation,” argues Andrew, “that’s what it is. You’re more of a guide than anything else.” Sydney borrows from the language metaphor in an analogy he shares: “I’m coaching them as writers rather than teaching them grammar.” Jason shares how he
views his role as “part educator, part cheerleader, part facilitator.” As an educator in a high school setting, some of his students are still encountering opportunities to improvise for the first time.

Many are scared to improvise, particularly in front of their peers. Jason takes this role into the larger context of coaching his students not just into artistic improvisors, but into human beings. Character development was an important focus for him. He states:

One of my idols in many ways is John Wooden, the former coach at UCLA. Um, basketball coach at UCLA in the 60s and 70s who is sort of universally considered the greatest coach at any level of all time. He was really great. And what he was, he was not about winning. He was about character development, which led to winning. Character development and hard work and he won 10 national championships—seven in a row. But he wasn’t trying to win. He was trying to develop character and work as hard as he possibly could to achieve their potential, which led to winning.

Jason’s emphasis on more holistic student development is in large part due to the age that he teaches. Students in their early freshman and sophomore years of high school tend to be scared of the improvisation process, especially if they are new to it. “So you really have to break down barriers of 14 year olds when they come in,” he shares, “and the first step for me is making the room a safe place for them to experiment and make mistakes. So we have to get the culture into a supportive environment where effort is recognized and appreciated.” At younger ages such as elementary school (grades 1-6), students tend to be more carefree. However, as they mature and get older, they tend to worry about others’ perceptions of them, particularly when improvising. When his freshman students first arrive in his class at the beginning of the school year, Jason tried to focus his efforts on building a culture best suited for learning to improvise. His first couple of weeks of classes focus on “trying to get that culture happening—that supportive, nurturing culture where they don’t feel afraid to try things.” During this early stage of learning to
improvise, Delaney argues that “The educator’s role early on, you know, uh I think is one of inspiration.” His focus is on inspiring his students and guiding them along their journey.

*Exposure.* In many cases, jazz educators understand their mentorship role as exposing students to music and ideas they have never heard. Sometimes what they share is not readily accepted by their students. Even if this is the case, the participants still found it necessary to expose students to these ideas. This exposure occurs across the spectrum of students’ improvisational ability. Andrew shares:

> If the student is relatively new to the concept, I believe it’s my role to expose them to what jazz is. You know and some important jazz musicians and what the sound of it is and that kind of thing. And then to really get them into the nuts and bolts of how the music is put together.

In referencing more experienced students, Andrew continues that “at the highest level of students I’ve found that my role is more to expose them to things that they haven’t really been exposed to.” During Andrew’s jazz improvisation class that I observed, the class was focused on exposing students to seminal jazz artists and music. Many of the students were just experiencing—playing and listening—jazz music for the first time. This was their first significant, in-depth analysis and study of the process of jazz improvisation. Andrew viewed his role in this setting as one of exposing the students to high caliber jazz through listening to music, watching videos of performers, having them study jazz harmony, and learning new songs. He likened this class to a survey class. “A lot of those people were just dabblers,” he shares. While some of the students were majoring in jazz studies, many were music students in other focuses or just college students who played an instrument on the side wanting to explore jazz improvisation. Still, exposing students to new music and ideas is necessary regardless of their ability.
Exposing students to high-level, accomplished artists within the wider jazz community is one of the most influential and beneficial ways an educator can influence their students. It’s not just enough to be exposed to new music, but this music should demonstrate to students what improvisation of high quality sounds like. Fred shares, “I’m always bringing in different recordings and saying ‘check this out,’ exposing them to that. They come down to the club and they hear professional-level players.” The club Fred is referring to is a local jazz club that hosts weekly jam sessions and local jazz groups—ranging from small combos to big bands—as well as internationally-recognized jazz artists. Jazz educators teach through having students listen to music, particularly live music because “people learned by watching other people play” (Fred). The participants themselves noted how much they learned by watching others play, particularly older, more experienced musicians. “I have a good fortune to be around what I call the old guys,” explains Delaney, “they were either playing or they weren’t.” Whether it be a rehearsal, soundcheck, or concert, Delaney notes how he is always giving his 100 percent when he plays. This is something that I noticed as a graduate student when I took private lessons from him and played piano in a small jazz combo he directed. “You either give a hundred percent, or nothing, you know? Or you’re just bullshittin’. It was just ‘I’m playin’ or I’m not.’ And that’s a whole very different concept which you don’t get much nowadays either” (Delaney).

**Immersion.** For Sydney, learning to improvise was a “full immersion process” that consisted of listening to music every day. Sydney cites in particular tenor saxophonist Willie Akins as a great inspiration in his early professional career as a jazz pianist.
He would do things like say “do you know such and such?” We’d be in the middle of a gig, you know, on the stage and I’d say “no” and he’d say “well we’re gonna’ play it anyway. Here we go.” You know, so a lot of the tough love thing. (Sydney)

Particularly influential to Sydney’s own development were the older and more experienced musicians he was around and heard play on a regular basis. Musicians that he rubbed shoulders with while in Australia such as trumpeter Peter Cross, Roger Frampton, and Paul Magnomara, or even those from his high school such as Robert Morgan were major influences in Sydney’s development. He comments on how Robert Morgan, former director of jazz studies at Houston’s High School for Performing and Visual Arts, influenced him:

So here was a man who was able to create an environment where there was a lot of peer nurturing and access to the music and the right combination of sort of academic and intuitive information to help people get a picture of the improvisation world.

Exposing students to high-caliber improvisors—through recordings or live performances—serves to help students immerse themselves into learning improvisation.

*Exploration.* There is an exploratory, fun, and almost playful aspect to exposing students to new music and ideas in teaching improvisation. Delaney uses the imagery of the puppy and the scientist:

In recent times I’ve been using the puppy and the scientist. So, you got your, you know, your right brain if your right handed, or its opposite if you’re left handed. But you know your right brain is this experiencer. It’s in the moment. “Wow! What’s that? Hey cool! This is really fun!” And then you have the scientist which walks around behind and writes everything down to remember them. Because the puppy doesn’t remember a thing. You know, it’s just there. And then it’s gone, right. And we have to have these two elements to really develop ourselves. We need both. But this goes back to the original thing I said about education and the focus of education. The easy thing educationally is to talk about the scientist. “Hey, here’s the facts. Just the facts, man.” Okay, write them down. Here’s the scale. Here’s the chords. Here’s the tune. Here’s the structure of the tune. Here’s how it went. Here’s blah blah blah blah blah. What did this composer mean when they wrote this? I don’t know, the composer did it.
Similar to learning a language, learning to improvise is typically more effectively accomplished through experiencing it—through attempting to improvise, listening, etc.—than through first analyzing it. “They are both always present,” comments Delaney in discussing how these elements are present in his own pedagogy, “but I emphasize the puppy.”

**Student ability.** The teaching approaches adopted by the participants in this study depended in large part on the level of the students and what skills and abilities they assumed on the student’s part. Students at earlier stages of learning to improvise are often more dependent on a teacher or mentor. “I think that when people are really confronting this music for the first time,” observes Sydney, “I think that they’re really depending heavily on you for a way through the maze.” As such, Sydney describes his style of teaching with regards to students at an earlier stage of improvisation as “more purposeful and hands on” (Sydney), yet still includes the elements of full immersion such as frequent listening and opportunities to perform the music.

In his more advance classes, Andrew’s role is more of a resource provider. He explains, “So they’re already playing changes and they already, you know, have listened to all this stuff, but they might not have heard this particular obscure person who was an influence on a person that they really like, you know?” His focus is on more conceptual ideas and exposing them to new things in the music they are playing and listening to. “When I had private students,” shares Delaney, “I have to learn how you hear. And so I have to listen to you and I’ll ask some questions to get things started.” This is followed up with having his students play something so he can hear them. In his comments on what he exposes his students to, I asked if it changes depending on their level. Delaney
responded, “It changes depending on who they are. On what they’re doing. On what their interests are. What their goals are.” The level a student is at determines what role the teacher adopts in their pedagogy. “At the college level, I’m a coach,” says Delaney, “I mean, a lot of the basic technical foundations have been set into place.” His focuses on more the details. Exposing students to new ideas and players is a priority for Fred, who includes many opportunities for students, such as playing at local clubs, sectional, guest workshops, and jazz festivals that often include guest artists coming in and working with the students. Jazz educators view this “element of apprenticeship” (Fred) as a mark of a good academic program. Jason describes his role in somewhat different terms based on where he views his students are at in their improvisational ability. At a fundamental level, his focus in his high school classes is on making sure that every one of his students goes through the jazz program developing a “working knowledge of basic improvisation and can do it when necessary.” For students, freshmen in particular, who are just experiencing jazz improvisation for the first time or are very new to it, he views himself as an encourager. However, this transforms into a facilitator in creating opportunities for ambitious students to expand their skills and knowledge. For students at the “highest level,” the focus is on “creating opportunities for them not to be constrained” (Jason).

**Self-reflection.** While the participants in this study discussed how their teaching strategies changed depending on the students’ level of ability, Sydney emphasizes the importance of getting the student to understand themselves both where they are currently at in their development and what is needed from them to progress beyond that level. “One of the most important things a teacher can do,” argues Sydney, “is make sure they have a thorough understanding of where someone is and that you’re able to move them to the next place.” He continues, emphasizing that “it’s really important as a teacher that
you know exactly where this student is in terms of their hearing, their concept of the music, and that you can get them to the next place.” All too often, jazz players are viewed as averse to explaining or conceptualizing their craft. This has a lot to do with the way they learned to play jazz themselves (Berliner, 1994). Jazz players have traditionally learned during the gig, on the bandstand, and through getting their asses kicked under a mentor (Berliner, 1994). “Sometime they don’t want to try to spoon-feed someone,” reminds Pat. Jazz performers have most often learned to improvise through the guidance of a mentor. As such, their role is often that of a mentor themselves with their students.

**Lifelong learners.** Part of what it means to be a mentor or coach is focusing on developing students into lifelong learners. Andrew states, “I found that with the highest students, too, that just exposing them to how dedicated you have to be and how you have to be a lifelong learner. You have to always be looking for something and always discovering things.” From his interview with Andrew, Lin (2011) found several themes culminating Andrew’s early, formative experiences as a jazz pianist: self-discovery, self-discipline, and leadership. In our interview, as well as in Lin’s (2011) study, Andrew shares several influential moments in his early development which includes seeing the movie, *The Sting*, in sixth grade and hearing Dave Brubeck perform on television. He shares this experience:

I saw Dave Brubeck on television and around that same time my mom got me a subscription to Downbeat magazine. So all those things were kind of like happening simultaneously. I start reading, you know, I’d go to Tower Records and I see all these jazz records and I have no idea where to even start. But through that magazine and kind of focusing on people that I liked, I started to kind of focus in to certain, certain things.
Andrew’s early improvisational development was driven through not just his teachers telling him to learn this or learn that, but hearing new sounds, new performers, and seeing where these discoveries took him as he pursued them further. Lin (2011) writes:

The music [Joe (Andrew)] heard and saw inspired him to want to practice on his own for the first time, instilling the basis for the self-discipline and setting the foundation for self-discovery that would permeate his early endeavors to learn to play jazz music. (p. 125)

It would seem that this basis permeates his own approach to not only learning, but also teaching jazz music. Jason argues for the importance of affording his high school students opportunities to go out into the community and play paying gigs. These students perform the gigs without the supervision of a teacher.

If you’re going out and playing a gig and they don’t have me there to tell them, you know, to count them off and tell them what tune to play and everything. They have to figure it all out themselves, including getting there, and setting up properly, and getting power, and getting paid, all these things that professionals have to deal with. (Jason)

Developing lifelong learners is intimately connecting to motivating students. For Fred, a large focus is on teaching students the “process” for how to learn—a process he argues will “continue for the rest of their lives.” Fred argues:

It’s a different way of approaching life. To think for themselves and then make their own choices. So that’s what I do. I think that’s primarily what I do. That’s my style of teaching is to… I mean I give them as much information as I can. I talk about the concepts. I try to get them to give me feedback in rehearsal. I ask them to think about what it is that happened and to verbalize what it is that happened. And I’ll ask them to say “hey, what did you think about this? What is it we can do to get better?” So that they’re thinking about the process.

These opportunities to figure the process out for themselves help develop students into self-driven and lifelong learners.

Jazz education and academia. Most of the participants had a significant amount of experience learning and teaching jazz in an academic setting. For example, Andrew
holds a doctorate in education and studied jazz at several nationally-recognized universities. Dr. Sydney attended the High School of the Performing and Visual Arts (Houston, TX) at the age of 16 where he was “exposed to many wonderful players of his own age and a little bit older, who were a bit further down the road.” He also enrolled in a two-year diploma course in Australia at the Conservatorium of Music when he was 19. Jason attended the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music for a semester upon graduating high school, but left to pursue a B.A. degree in history from U.C. Davis—though still continuing his jazz studies personally.

**Functional skills.** Jazz educators often differentiate between the skills that jazz education in academia focuses on, and the skills that are needed outside of an academic setting. Borrowing again from the language metaphor, Delaney frames the difference between these skills as “conversational or functional” jazz that is mostly found in performances outside of academia and that of “written jazz that gets studied.” He again emphasizes his earlier comment of “music as being a language and jazz as a being a dialect” and shares this analogy:

So I liken it to saying okay, you want to go to France, you get yourself a book and you read up on French. And you learn all about French in the book and then you go to France. You think you’re going to be able to speak. M’kay, that’s the disconnect. The things that get focused on, you know, what looks good when you’re writing a program for an institution. He says “oh, well these are the things we studied” and you list them in order. But the things that you really need to know to become proficient, you kind of have to know those things, but those are secondary.

This perceived disconnect from the common language of jazz or “conversational” jazz as Delaney frames it above, is connected to the idea that jazz music has lost its connection to everyday people. When Delaney teaches, he focuses on the elements needed for actual improvisation. “When I teach,” he shares, “I focus on the things that I do when I play,
which are not the things that quite often are focused on as the things you need to know to improvise.”

It was Jason’s minimal formal study of jazz in academia that he cites as a factor in his teaching success. “As an educator,” he shares, “I’ve had to figure everything out on my own. I never had a pedagogy class. I never had a pedagogy book.” It was this trying-to-figure-it-out approach that helped him approach teaching improvisation in a more personal way, rather than merely adopting the pedagogical strategies and styles of those he learned from. “I feel like I am able to teach my best in the classroom because I’m not doing somebody else’s thing. I’m not teaching the way many people that have had a formal education teach” (Jason). The participants in this study reaffirmed how skills often taught in academia were peripheral to those skills needed to become a successful improvisor. Therefore, this informed and guided how they approach teaching improvisation.

**Marginalizing modern jazz.** In our conversations about the various issues that arise in teaching improvisation within an academic setting, the participants often noted a disparity between what academia considers masterworks and what’s actually happening in the current jazz world. “There is becoming more and more of a disparity—a chasm,” comments Andrew, but then adds “I do feel that I’m a part of this. And it’s hard to break out of it.” He explains:

There’s an awful lot of attention to gettin’ a good feel and a lock up between the bass and the drums and, you know, compin’ these voicings, and playing through these changes and all that stuff. And when you get out there in, for some high level young kid who’s gonna move to New York, it’s good to know, but if they get on the road with one of these people that are on the magazine covers, they’re not gonna be doin’ a whole lot of spang-a-lang.
Andrew comments are in reference to a period-specific way of playing jazz from around the swing music of the 1930s up through the hard bop style in the 1960s. The phrase “spang-a-lang” is a cheeky way of describing the stereotypical swing rhythm drummers often play on their ride cymbal. Sing “spang, spang-a-lang, spang-a-lang” and you can get a rough idea. Andrew’s comment suggest that this period-specific style of playing is not as popular among jazz musicians who are active in the current performing scene. The pilgrimage to New York that he mentions is a popular path taken by many emerging jazz musicians because of the city’s thriving and competitive jazz scene. It is sometimes viewed as a rite of passage. Andrew’s comment and those by many of my participants speak of an evolution occurring within jazz music that isn’t being addressed in academic institutions. The often-studied jazz masters such as John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Cannonball Adderley, Herbie Hancock, and many others were in their prime right around the time jazz education started migrating towards academic institutions around the 1960s and 1970s. “Jazz education came up in a time when all this stuff was happening,” comments Andrew.

He further comments on jazz history books and documentaries such as the famous Ken Burns documentary on jazz. These sources have marginalized the developing jazz music of the last 30 years. “The Ken Burns movie, it’s how many episodes? Ten episodes or whatever and the last episode deals with the last 50 years of the music” (Andrew). Andrew noted how his higher-level students are listening to and trying to play music that is strikingly different than that in the jazz history canon. He observed how much of this music being absorbed by these students has come out within the last 5 years. Andrew speculated how these younger students, particularly ones right out of high school, are more prone to listening to and performing music that came out from their high
school years because that is when many of these students started taking jazz more seriously. This perceived disparity between academia and non-academic settings has also informed and guided the teaching approaches of these participants.

**Motivating students.** The participants emphasized that motivating students is a necessary and important part of their role as mentors. Their approaches to motivating students differed based on their own views of teaching and learning improvisation. Additionally, their own life experiences in growing up learning to improvise influenced their approaches as well. “Every educator,” argues Delaney, “I think, the only thing you can really draw on honestly is your own experience.” They frequently alluded to how there is no one way to teach students. In referencing how he really doesn’t know where exactly improvisation ideas come from, Brent states “I try to teach my students, or I approach my classes that way, just don’t be so focused on what the outcome’s gonna’ be. Just let it come to you.” His focus is on the process of improvising. “I think that’s probably the greatest hurdle of improvising,” observes Sydney, “is how do I have the courage to try things in order to know what works and what doesn’t.” Similarly, Brent observes that “not everything can be great, but not everything is gonna’ suck. You try at something you love rather than fail at something you hate.” Improvising requires tremendous amounts of courage to just attempt it. I see this with my own 5th grade band students when I challenge them to improvise on their instruments for the first time. My participants shared how they too needed courage when they were learning to improvise.

During our interview, Fred referenced a movie that was recently released called “Whiplash” about a young drummer who enrolls at a top-level music school and encounters a hard-ass mentor who pushes his students to their limits. Having both studied music in college, we both rightly acknowledge how this is (mostly) a caricature
of the experience of studying music in college. However, Fred shares a quote he remembered from the movie: “There’s one thing the lead actor says in the movie, how does he put it? ‘The worst thing you can say to someone is good job,’ and I don’t know if I agree with that.” He is speaking of casually throwing out compliments to students that have little substance. If you say “good job” for everything they do or play, then it loses its meaning, especially when they play or do something that deserves special recognition. He noted that while encouragement is important, throwing casual comments at students with no real meaning is not the way to go about it. Regardless of where exactly improvisational ideas come from, jazz educators frequently speak of the importance of students being internally motivated. The idea of being “intrinsically driven” (Fred) frames the way in which jazz educators see themselves as educators.

**Metaphors.** Concluding the interviews with each participant, I asked them the following question: If you had to come up with a metaphor for your role as a teacher, what would that be? Most participants were initially surprised or slightly confused by this question, so some clarification and examples were usually given. This question seemed to elicit quite a bit of reflection on the participant’s part. “How about like an enthusiast?” shared Brent. “I’m enthusiastic about music,” he continues, “I’m just encouraging them to continue to be enthusiastic about it.” He articulated his teaching as a manifestation of how he views his overall life’s purpose: “My reason for being here in this world is to just give people positivity. It’s an important part of who I am” (Brent).

After his initial reflection, Sydney comments:

I think we’ve been using the metaphor and that’s language. Now the difference with this language is that we’re not expressing perhaps precise thoughts that we want. We’re not saying “pick up the pencil from the table,” you know, that’s not our art. Our art is maybe commenting on the shine that comes from the table. So it’s more abstract than that.
Again, the language metaphor is used in describing Sydney’s own role as a jazz educator.

The jazz educators in this study all articulated in some way the importance of being positive and passionate when teaching students. They didn’t view themselves as directly controlling the minute decisions and direction of their students, but rather guiding them, inspiring them, and giving them the tools they need to learn on their own. Another metaphor used was that of a “gem-ologist” (Pat). Pat explains that they can “see something and be like ‘no, that is priceless. Let’s see how we can bring that out.’” “Really all I’m trying to do is push them to do whatever it is that they want in their hearts,” Brent empathetically states. “The teachers that you learned the most from are the ones that are enthusiastic about what it is that they’re teaching” (Brent). Jason argues to “encourage the kids, get whatever you can out of them, and then build on that. It’s not really a metaphor.” These comments shared by the participants all in some way express a desire to encourage improvisors no matter the level they are currently at.

Chapter Summary

This chapter organized and presented evidence on how seven jazz educators situated throughout Northern California conceptualized jazz improvisation as a creative process and described their pedagogical practices in teaching jazz improvisation. This evidence was organized into 20 themes according to MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of distinct features of improvisation: improvisation is creative; improvisation is spontaneous; improvisation is social; and improvisation is accessible (p. 246–247). Table 1 provides a visual summary of these themes.
Table 1. Summary of 20 Themes.

<table>
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<th>Creative</th>
<th>Spontaneous</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Accessible</th>
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<td>19. Motivating students.</td>
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<td>20. Metaphors.</td>
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Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of Findings

Through analyzing the data collected as a result of this study, 20 themes emerged on the pedagogical beliefs and practices of jazz educators. The data were analyzed, organized, and presented utilizing the 4-part framework outlined in MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) summary of research on improvisational creativity. The participants discussed how novelty emerges in each musical performance, how this novelty emerges in real-time, how performing and learning the skill of improvisation is socially-situated, and what their roles are in teaching this learnable skill. This next section discusses these themes in relation to the research questions that drive this study. This next section consists of a focused discussion on how these themes inform the research questions in this study.

Discussion

The data collected in this study provided rich descriptions of the process of teaching jazz improvisation, as told through the voices of seven expert jazz educators situated in a variety of teaching contexts throughout Northern California. As a result, the data informs several lines of inquiry within the fields of creativity, jazz, and music education. The inquiry in this study has been framed around the following central research question: What is the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity? The two supportive research questions in this study were (1) what pedagogical beliefs do jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process?
Second, what are the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process? These questions are discussed below utilizing the data collected by the participants. The supportive research questions are discussed first, followed by the central research question.

**Supporting research question 1.** Evidence suggests that music educators have difficulty understanding creativity, as well as distinguishing between creative and non-creative musical elements (Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012); music educators perceive creativity through their own musical, teaching, and professional experiences (Odena & Welch, 2012); and music educators partly shape their teaching practices through their perceptions of creativity (Odena & Welch, 2012). However, these studies do not address how jazz educators in the US conceptualize improvisation as a creative process. Like Odena, Plummeridge, and Welch (2005), the nature of this question is more exploratory and is primarily intended to clarify the second research question regarding the pedagogical practices of jazz educators.

The first research question is primarily informed by MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) first feature of improvisation as “creative.” This feature is captured by the first four themes outlined in Chapter 4: (1) improvisation as creative; (2) improvisation as personal; (3) juxtaposition; and (4) jazz standard as a vehicle. Below is a brief summary of these themes followed by a discussion of how each theme relates to previous research.

**Improvisation is creative.** Improvisation is creative in how novelty emerges in each musical performance. The participants in this study spoke to how improvisation, just for the fact that it is improvised, is inherently “creative.” After spurring them to speak to how jazz improvisation is “creative” versus “non-creative,” they shared how jazz improvisation is not creative when a soloist performs pre-planned musical material.
While improvisation involves the recalling of previously practiced musical material and ideas, there is some form of spontaneity in how this material is played and manipulated during the moment of performance.

Still, while a jazz musician’s improvisation may involve creating new musical material on the spot using notes that correctly fit over harmonic patterns, this doesn’t necessarily mean that it is creative. An important value among the participants was to make one’s playing personal. One example is through rephrasing a melody (as illustrated through Delaney’s vivid analogy of rephrasing the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears). Another is the juxtaposition of various musical elements (meter, tonality, styles, etc.) through the use of jazz standards. These jazz standards serve as vehicles through which the improvisor develops these ideas. Ultimately, the sum of an improvisor’s musical experiences up until that point emerges during a “creative” performance.

**Relationship to previous research.** Evidence in previous research suggests (1) music educators have difficulty understanding creativity, as well as distinguishing creative and non-creative musical elements (Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012); (2) their perceptions of creativity are shaped by their own musical, teaching, and professional experiences (Odena & Welch, 2012); and (3) their perceptions of creativity have bearing on their teaching practices (Odena & Welch, 2012). However, data were gathered outside the US in the United Kingdom (Odena & Welch, 2012) and Greece (Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012), but do not represent the perceptions of music educators in the United States. Furthermore, there is no evidence on the beliefs of jazz educators with regards to how they conceptualize creativity.

**Creative versus non-creative.** Previous research suggests that music educators have difficulty understanding creativity and distinguishing between creative and non-
creative musical elements (Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012). These observations also surfaced fairly consistently in the discussions with each participant. They often resorted to imagery and metaphors in their explanations such as the process of painting (Andrew) or story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears (Delaney).

*Connection to life experiences.* During our discussions on the construct of creativity throughout the interviews, the participants consistently brought up their own musical, as well as non-musical, life experiences. This confirmed research suggesting that perceptions of creativity are shaped by previous musical, teaching, and professional experiences (Odena & Welch, 2012). “I think the fact that we’re all unique means that we’ve all got original voices,” argues Sydney, “and when we improvise, it’s the sum total of our experience and our knowledge to that point in time of our lives, and how we feel in that moment on that day.” The participant’s previous musical, teaching, and professional experiences seemed to not only have bearing on their perceptions of creativity, but also the manner in which they participate in the spontaneous act of improvisation itself.

*Bearing on teaching practices.* Music educators’ perceptions of creativity have been found to have bearing on their teaching practices (Odena & Welch, 2012). While this question was not asked of the participants specifically, the question of how jazz educators conceptualize improvisation as a creative process (Supporting Research Question 1) was asked under the assumption that their responses would help to clarify the data on their pedagogical practices (Supporting Research Question 2). Evidence of their pedagogical practices discussed below suggests a connection between the perception of improvisation as novel and various pedagogical approaches for providing students with the tools to develop this novelty. For example, Delaney shares that creativity is “taking the things around us that are familiar and seeing them in a new light and making them
personal in whatever ways we come up with to do that” (Theme 2). His pedagogical focus involves juxtaposition of various musical elements (tonal, rhythmic, instrumental) as a way to make one’s improvisation “personal.”

**Summary.** Jazz educators conceptualize improvisation as inherently creative in how novelty emerges in each musical performance (Theme 1). They value making improvisation “personal” (Theme 2), often through the process of rephrasing melodies, the juxtaposition of various musical elements (Theme 3), or through using jazz standards as vehicles for creativity (Theme 4). In relationship to previous research, evidence as a result of this study suggests that jazz educators have difficulty understanding the construct of creativity and distinguishing between creative and non-creative musical elements (Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012) and their perceptions of creativity are shaped by their own musical, teaching, and professional experiences (Odena & Welch, 2012).

**Supporting research question 2.** Evidence suggests that music educators consider creativity—improvisation in particular—to be an important concept in their practice as well to have bearing on their own teaching practices. However, sparse evidence exists on the most effective ways in which to teach music students to be creative. Furthermore, questions as to whether jazz improvisation can be taught and what the most effective teaching and learning practices are permeate research in the field of jazz pedagogy.

This second research question is primarily informed by the final eight themes organized under MacDonald, Wilson, and Miell’s (2012) feature of improvisation as “accessible,” although the other sections describing improvisation as “spontaneous” and “social” speak to this question as well. Describing the pedagogical practices used by the
participants in this study does not lend itself to neatly-packaged lists and bullet points. It is a rich, complicated, and yet messy process that can only begin to be understood through multiple readings through the Findings (Ch.4) chapter. Still, this next section presents a summary of this process and discusses it vis-a-vis previous research.

**Improvisation is spontaneous.** A second distinct feature of improvisation is that it is spontaneous in how novelty emerges during the actual performance in real time. During the process of jazz improvisation, new musical material is created in the moment. Out of analyzing the participants’ responses for how this skill is developed emerged the idea of “full immersion” in the music. They noted the importance of listening to, playing, and being exposed to new music in both high quantity as well as of high quality. Strategies used by the improvisor are similar to those of composition: re-phrasing melodies, re-orchestration, changing the meter or tonality, etc. One pedagogical strategy used by a participant involved having their students strategically play the worst improvisation they can, which in turn often brings out some of their best playing through getting out of their typical rut.

An important value the participants all spoke about was that of focusing on the sound of the music during improvisation. The notion of “hear-first, play-second” often eludes students, highlighting several important themes such as *intentionality* on part of the soloist with the sound they want; the development of an emerging soloist’s *aural imagination* through identifying adjectives or descriptors for the sounds they hear; *singing* as a way to develop a soloist’s aural imagination; developing the *inner ear* of a soloist so they can hear what they want to play before they play it; and improving the quality of what a soloist actually hears before they play it, which is summed up in the phrase: “hearing interesting stuff.”
A question posed to the participants was on the problem of the chord-scale pedagogical approach which focuses on learning which scales fit over which chords. There were a diversity of responses to this problem. Some responded that these strategies needed to be learned, but emphasized that they needed to become muscle memory and come out in one’s playing naturally rather than forced. Furthermore, some emphasized that “right notes” don’t necessarily constitute a quality improvisation.

**Improvisation is social.** A third distinct feature of improvisation is how it is a socially-situated phenomenon. The participants shared how they learned to improvise through interactions with peers and mentors. The music that they improvised was a culmination of their musical and life experiences up until that point. This includes the artists—jazz or otherwise—they listen to; the peers they learned from and played with; and the mentors they studied with. Transcribing serves as a way to learn the skill of improvisation, as well as a tool used by the participants to teach their students to improvise. In addition, transcribing served as a form of stylistic development in which students learned the stylistic nuances of jazz artists. It is the culmination of an improvisor’s musical experiences that ultimately contribute to the development of their own personal voice. Several participants shared how developing one’s own voice while improvising often takes a lifetime to achieve.

The participants spoke to the importance of rhythm in the spontaneous invention of new musical material. Rhythm served as a pedagogical focus through developing musical material rhythmically. Also, this focus on rhythm was another way in which the language metaphor was at work. There seems to be an inherent rhythm to language that is similar to how musical language works.
Improvisation is accessible. The fourth distinct feature of improvisation is that it is an accessible skill that can be learned. This feature hosted a more variety of themes as compared to the previous features, many of which more directly relating to the research question exploring the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators. Students learning to improvise, particularly in their more formative stages, navigate a variety of psychological challenges such as mental blocks, fear, peer pressure, intimidation, a variety of learning styles, and working through specific challenges associated with their own age such as trusting their teachers and understanding the amount of time needed to master this skill. Still, the participants asserted that the creative process is not that mystical and can be learned by anyone, citing the uniqueness of the individual alone as evidence that they can be creative. When asked whether jazz improvisation can be taught, the participants asserted yes, but emphasized that the responsibility rested on the shoulders of the students. Educators can only give students the lifelong tools to develop their creativity.

The participants were asked to describe their role as a jazz educator, frequently adopting metaphors and imagery from their life experiences such as a guide, mentor, or coach. Exposing students to high-level artists; immersing them through listening to new music every day; cultivating an exploratory mindset that values new ideas; recognizing how students come to them with different abilities and goals; motivating students; and developing in students the ability to self-reflect and identify their own strengths and weaknesses were all strategies shared by the participants in describing their role as guides, mentors, or coaches.

The participants all had experience learning to improvise as well as teaching others to improvise in a more formal academic setting. Many differentiated between the
functional skills needed for active, performing improvisors and those skills most often taught in an academic setting. Furthermore, the participants commented on the disparity between what academia considers masterworks and what’s actually happening in the current jazz world.

The participants shared a metaphor they felt captured their own role as a teacher. Responses included an “enthusiast,” or a “gem-ologist” (i.e. someone who sees something that is priceless and attempts to bring that out).

**Relationship to previous research.** Previous research has suggested that a variety of approaches and skills are important for developing improvisational skills such as aural skills, listening, performing experiences within and outside the formal curriculum, jazz standards, building confidence in students, providing tools for self-learning, and jazz theory. These approaches and skills will now be discussed as they relate to the themes that emerged in the data analysis.

**Aural skills.** Previous research presents evidence on how aural skills such as listening and the ability to replicate musical sounds heard internally or from external sources are important for the development of improvisation skills (Chessher, 2009; Lin, 2011; Schroeder, 2002; Wadsworth, 2005). Aural imitation has also been found to contribute to jazz improvisation achievement (May, 1998, 2003; Madura, 1996). These skills were frequently brought up by the participants as part of their pedagogical process. Theme 6 (Focus on Sound) emphasizes a more aural way of learning and performing. The participants emphasized intentionality in what is improvised through replicating the sounds they hear in their head, also phrased several times as a performer’s “aural imagination.” Silverman and Elliott (2014) further develop this process of “imagining” and explain how musicians have a “nonverbal concept (an aural image) of a sound that
exists in reality” and realize this image or concept into actual sounds (p. 350). While they distinguish this process from the concept of creativity as a distinct idea, Silverman and Elliott argue that this process of “inner hearing (p. 351) is a critical aspect of musical performing. Pedagogical techniques such as singing and the development of a student’s inner ear were shared as part of their pedagogical process.

Theme 10 (Transcribing) describes a common tool among jazz musicians to develop the skill of replicating musical sounds on one’s instrument. Transcribing music involves preserving a recorded piece of music either on paper for study or through memorization outright. The participants shared how they all learned to improvise using transcription as well as use the process of transcribing to teach their students as well.

Listening. Listening to a wide spectrum of jazz music, including various sub-styles was discussed by the participants, particularly through the form of transcription (Theme 10). Part of the transcribing process involves learning the idiomatic nuances of a variety of styles. “If we’re doing something with early jazz and they want to learn to play with a plunger,” shared Pat, “I might have them learn a ‘Tricky Sam’ Nanton solo, just the way he played it in Duke’s band.”

Performing experiences. Performing experiences in a variety of ensembles such as combos, big bands, and master classes (Chessher, 2009; Murphy, 2009), as well as outside of the formal curriculum (Dyas, 2006; Lin, 2011; Murphy, 2009), were all a part of the participants’ own pedagogical process. Learning to improvise involves being spontaneous (Theme 5). The participants discussed their own pedagogical process for developing this ability in their own students, often involving affording them performing opportunities within and outside the formal curriculum. Sydney argues that “you practice the spontaneous by throwing yourself into situations where you’re required to be
spontaneous.” He further outlines his focus on “full immersion” into the study of jazz music involving listening, playing, and exposure to a variety of learning approaches. Within the formal curriculum, the more common form of performing experiences offered to students consisted of combos, big bands, and occasional master classes where a high-level artist works with students through discussion and playing.

The theme of learning from peers (Theme 12) emerged as the participants noted how while learning to improvise themselves, they learned as much from their peers as from their own teachers and mentors. This kind of learning often occurs within these ensemble experiences. In addition to discussing their role as a jazz educator (Theme 16), the participants noted the importance of performing experiences outside of the formal curriculum such as communal jam session or self-directed gigs. They viewed their own roles as mentors focused on providing their students with these opportunities.

**Use of jazz standards as teaching material.** Evidence in research demonstrates how the use of jazz standards as teaching material is a practice commonly used among jazz educators (Salonen, 2010; Schroeder, 2002; Wadsworth, 2005). In our discussions on creativity and how the process of jazz improvisation might be conceptualized as creative, the participants frequently shared how jazz standards served as a site for creativity. Jazz standards also served as a vehicle to teach students about the creative process (Theme 4). The jazz standard, “Bluesette” or “Stella by Starlight,” for example, functions as a vehicle through which improvisors manifest common approaches to improvisation such as re-phrasing melodies, reharmonization, or juxtaposition.

**Building confidence.** Building confidence in students as they learn jazz improvisation emerged as a priority among jazz educators in previous research (Chessher, 2009; Schroeder, 2002). A striking amount of discussion was given to this focus during
the participant interviews, particularly as compared to the other themes that emerged in the data. Schroeder’s (2002) study shares the approach adopted by Kenny Werner where he focuses on mental states that aid or hinder musical growth. These psychological aspects (Theme 13) such as mental blocks, fear, peer pressure, intimidation, differing learning styles and ages of students were discussed in detail by the participants in this study. “Everybody’s got things that get in their way,” shares Fred. As part of Pat’s pedagogical process, he focuses on developing in students various ways to keep their own inner judge from being a hindrance to the creative process. He comments, “We can’t make ourselves be creative or spontaneous, but we can practice at it. And we can practice not short-circuiting it.” Motivating students (Theme 19) was an approach commonly adopted in the pedagogical process. Even the metaphors (Theme 20) shared by the participants centered around encouraging and building confidence in them.

The findings in this study support several arguments outlined by Silverman and Elliott’s (2014) on best practices for the development of musical creativity. One argument they outline is that the development of musical creativity necessitates a “receptive environment that encourage risk taking” (p. 356). The participants in this study all discussed various ways in which they realize this type of environment. Second, the development of creativity is best supported through teachers acting in the role of a guide or mentor (Theme 20). They argue, “guiding students toward artistic and creative achievement seems to call for a music teacher-as-coach, advisor, facilitator, and informed critic, not teacher as ‘know-it-all’ big brother” (Silverman & Elliott, 2014).

Self-learning. Research has demonstrated how jazz educators are focused on providing tools for self-learning on the part of the students (Lin, 2011; Rutherford, 2014). Additionally, the ability to self-evaluate one’s own improvisational skill has been found
to contribute to jazz improvisation achievement (May, 1998, 2003; Ciorba, 2006). When asked whether or not jazz improvisation can be taught (Theme 15), the participants in this study emphasized that learning to improvise was the student’s responsibility. When asked whether jazz improvisation can be taught, Brent immediately responded “um, yeah, parts of it can. I don’t know how to teach somebody to be creative. I just know how to give them the tools to want to be creative.” The participants commented that part of what it means to be a mentor or coach to their students in the learning process is focusing on developing students into lifelong learners (Theme 17). Andrew’s early, formative years learning to improvise were saturated with such themes as self-discovery and self-discipline (Lin 2011).

*Learning jazz theory.* Learning jazz theory knowledge has been found to contribute to jazz improvisation achievement (Ciorba, 2006; Madura, 1996). Additionally, developing in students knowledge of jazz theory has surfaced as an important pedagogical focus (Rutherford, 2014; Salonen, 2010). Traditional models of teaching and learning jazz improvisation that focus on jazz theory knowledge, often exemplified through chord-scale approaches, have been criticized as stifling to creative performance (Hickey, 2009; Roach, 1988; Schroeder, 2002). The participants were specifically asked how they approach the focus on chord-scale relationships in their pedagogical focus (Theme 7). Varied responses were given. Jason, Brent, and Delaney emphasized that this knowledge needed to become muscle memory without thinking about it. “Forget everything you know and just play,” argues Delaney, “the more you think, the less you hear.” Fred comments that this knowledge can contribute to igniting students’ creativity. Sydney adopts the language metaphor. “I’m thinking a thought and then a stream of codified language serves my thoughts as I speak to you,” he explains.
Learning this codified language and these phrases equips improvisors with the tools and language to physically express their musical thoughts.

**Findings not discussed by participants.** While discussion with the participants on their pedagogical approaches and the subsequent themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis aligned in large part with previous evidence on best practices in jazz pedagogy, there were several topics that rarely emerged. Free improvisation is a phenomenon that has been discussed as a viable approach to jazz pedagogy (Johnston, 2013), particularly to accentuate the socially-embeddedness of the improvisatory experience (Borgo, 2007). The participants in this study did not discuss this phenomenon in any detail.

In addition to free jazz, the topic of chord-scale approaches to jazz pedagogy, specifically how these approaches might address the problem of stifling creative jazz improvisation, was not discussed. When the participants discussed chord-scale approaches (Theme 7), these discussions came about through the researcher asking them how they navigated the inclusion of chord-scale approaches. This topic was brought up in the interviews based on research surveys that found jazz pedagogical materials as having more emphasis on tonal development (i.e. chord-scale approaches) over that of aural and rhythmic development (Watson, 2010; Witmer & Robbins, 1988). The participants did not discuss whether or not these approaches were stifling to the development of creative expression.

**Summary.** Teaching the skill of improvisation as a creative process involves teaching students to create new musical material. While similar to composition, improvisation is an inherently spontaneous process (Theme 5) that is developed through full immersion into the music. Developing the spontaneity of improvisation begins with
the sound (Theme 6) where the participants focus on fostering intentionality, aural imagination or “inner ear,” the skill of singing, and hearing music that is of high quality. Study of chord-scale relationships (Theme 7) as well as development of the rhythmic aspects of the music (Theme 8) also emerged as necessary to spontaneously improvise novel music. The process of learning to improvise is as much a social phenomenon. Ultimately, one’s improvisation is a culmination of an individual’s musical and non-musical life experiences (Theme 9) up until that point in time. For example, transcribing (Theme 10) is a tool that students utilize to study the stylistic nuances of artists, ultimately contributing to the goal of developing a voice within this genre (Theme 11). The participants argued that they, as well as their students, learned from peers (Theme 12) in addition to their teachers. This highlighted the importance of performing opportunities such as combos, big band, and extra-curricular jam sessions. Teaching others to improvise involves negotiating a variety of psychological challenges such as mental blocks, fear of improvising, peer pressure, intimidation, learning styles, and age of students (Theme 13). Still, the participants emphasized that creative improvisation is a skill that can be learned by anybody (Theme 14). When asked whether improvisation can be taught, they answered yes but emphasized student responsibility in the process (Theme 15). When asked about their role in the pedagogical process, they described themselves as a guide, mentor, or coach (Theme 16) focused on developing in students the tools to be lifelong learners (Theme 17). While the migration of jazz education into the academic arena has surfaced issues such as the functionality of skills taught and the marginalization of more modern styles of jazz (Theme 18), they emphasized their responsibility for motivating students as part of that role (Theme 19) and utilized various metaphors
(Theme 20) in their explanations such as an “enthusiast” or a “gem-ologist (i.e. someone who sees something that is priceless and attempts to bring that out).

Central research question. This study has described the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process. This data has contributed to a more scholarly understanding of (1) how jazz educators conceptualize improvisation as creative; and (2) the pedagogical practices they utilize in teaching improvisation. These supporting research questions were intended to inform the scholarly understanding on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. This study adopts the definition of creativity as “the process of bringing into being something novel and useful” (Sternberg & O’Hara, 1999, p. 251). During the process of improvisation, novelty emerges in how improvisation “generates new music, or new versions of music in which musicians use their imaginations to develop and elaborate on their stock of knowledge of existing musical forms” (MacDonald, Wilson, & Miell, 2012, p. 246).

Previous research. Previous investigation into this relationship has tended to study improvisation from a psychological perspective through testing cognitive models for understanding the ways in which creativity is manifested (Biasutti & Frezza, 2009; Clarke, 1988; Johnson-Laird, 1988, 2002; Norgaard, 2008, 2011; Pressing, 1988, 1998). In doing so, creativity has been studied and constructed as a desocialized product, often neglecting the socio-cultural context in which it emerges (Clarke, 2012). However, over the last 25 years, research in the area of creativity studies has demonstrated that cognitive development is situated in socio-cultural contexts, further confirming the collaborative nature of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1990; Sawyer, 2009).
The supporting research questions in this study have furthered the scholarly understanding on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. Previous research has explored a number of questions on this relationship:

- What are the thought processes of jazz improvisors, particularly in how they invent or shape music as it is being played? (Norgaard, 2008, 2011; Pressing, 1988, 1998)

- What variables outside of improvisors’ thought processes—personal, social, and/or cultural—are at play during improvisation? (Csikszentmihalyi & Rich, 1997)

- In what ways is jazz improvisation collaborative and socially situated? (Berliner, 1997; Kenny, 2014; Monson, 1991, 1996)

- In what ways does the jazz performance tradition inform and shape a jazz improvisor’s performance? (Csikszentmihalyi & Rich, 1997; Sawyer, 2006)

- What kind of preparation is involved in learning to improvise? (Berliner, 1994)

- What are the most effective strategies, methods, or approaches for teaching others to improvise? (Borgo, 2007; Rutherford, 2014; Schroeder, 2002)

**Contributions of this study.** What this study contributes to the ongoing scholarly investigation into the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity is a more in-depth understanding on how teaching and learning jazz improvisation is a collaborative process. One of the many contributions Berliner’s (1994) study in *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* provides is a rich description on the learning experiences of influential 20th century jazz artists. He shares that “for almost a century, the jazz community has functioned as a large educational system for producing, preserving, and
transmitting musical knowledge, preparing students for the artistic demands of a jazz career through its particularized methods and forums” (p. 37). Jazz musicians often developed their musical craft through participation in a variety of playing opportunities such as jam sessions, sitting in at concerts, and “extended tenures” with professional bands (p.46), in addition to formal educational institutions.

*Full immersion.* Many of the themes that emerged as a result of this study demonstrate how expert jazz educators and performers infuse their own pedagogical approach with similar experiences for their students. In discussing his pedagogical approach to helping his students develop the ability to improvise spontaneously (Theme 5), Sydney argues that this skill can only be developed through “full immersion in the music.” He then shares three ways in which this occurs. The first is listening to live or recorded music, what he refers to as “visceral contact with the music.” The second is affording students frequent opportunities to play. He comments, “you practice the spontaneous by throwing yourself into situations where you’re required to be spontaneous.” The third approach for developing this skill involves providing students not only frequent listening and playing opportunities, but also exposing them to varying approaches to developing an intuitive understanding of the music. Full immersion as a pedagogical focus that involves collaboration with other musicians through listening to their music and performing with them.

*Peers.* Many participants shared how they, as well as their students, learned important improvisation lessons from peers as much as from their teachers (Theme 12). Andrew shares, “I learned an awful lot from my teachers, but most of what I learned was from playing with my peer group and listening to what they listened to and making contact with their contacts and that kind of stuff.”
Psychological aspects. Not only did the participants share how collaborative learning experiences were essential to developing the skills needed for improvisation, they also shared how aspects of these collaborative experiences could be a hindrance to students’ learning. Psychological aspects (Theme 13) such as peer pressure and intimidation often haunt learners, particularly younger learners who are encountering various life issues such as an emerging sexual identity, puberty, or a developing personal identity.

Summary. Ultimately, the supporting research questions explored in this study begin to address the oftentimes de-socialized way of studying and learning creativity. Pedagogical approaches such as full immersion through frequent listening and playing opportunities; peer interaction and learning opportunities; and even addressing the psychological hindrances inherent in collaborative learning such as peer pressure and intimidation, all exemplify a collaborative focus in teaching students to be creative.

Future discussion on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity should now recognize the importance of collaborative learning in developing the skills needed for jazz improvisation.

Recommendations

Recommendations for practice. The data collected as a result of this study suggests several recommendations for practitioners. During the interview, Sydney shared, “you practice the spontaneous by throwing yourself into situations where you’re required to be spontaneous.” This quote captures the recommendation this study has for practitioners. Despite the resurgence of creative activities with music education curriculum in the United States over the last 25 years (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 2014;
Running, 2008), music educators have often marginalized creative activities such as improvisation and composition as compared to more performance-based activities. Previous research suggests that early exposure and participation to music-making activities is important to the development of improvisation development (Barrett, 2012). However, music educators often still have difficulties teaching students to improvise (Odena, 2001; Zbainos & Anastasopoulou, 2012). Music educators, particularly in K-12 settings, can infuse their pedagogy with a more balanced approach to creative music-making by including improvisatory-based music activities. As Sydney’s quote demonstrates, this includes more activities in which students are put into situations where they are forced to improvise. Furthermore, early immersion into jazz music through such activities as listening and playing would begin to develop in students important skills needed for jazz improvisation.

Another major implication this study has on practitioners is the importance of collaborative learning experiences. In many jazz education programs, especially in higher education, performing ensembles in the form of small jazz combos or big bands are a standard part of the formal curriculum. However, the importance of extra-curricular performing opportunities such as jam sessions and master classes were emphasized by participants in this study as well as previous research (Dyas, 2006; Lin, 2011; Murphy, 2009). Jazz educators should strive to create as many extra-curricular performing opportunities in front of real audiences for their students as possible and not limit these experiences to just in-class performances.

**Recommendations for future research.** The data collected as a result of this study also suggests several recommendations for future research. Despite numerous attempts to elicit several female participants into this study, there were an overwhelming
low number of female jazz educators that met the criteria of this study as compared to male. Of course, this is not for lack of effort on my part to elicit female participants. Nor is it meant to suggest that female jazz educators are somehow less qualified. Further research is needed on the topic of gender and jazz education. Evidence demonstrates how the field of jazz education remains dominated by males (Barber, 1999; McKeage, 2004; Steinberg, 2001). Further research could duplicate a similar study with the perspectives of female jazz educators. Questions for further inquiry include: What pedagogical beliefs and practices do female jazz educators hold in teaching improvisation as a creative process? Are there any differences between that of male jazz educators? What challenges and/or hindrances do female jazz educators encounter in jazz education?

Further research could also be conducted in the K-12 arena of jazz education. Only one participant (Jason) taught primarily in a K-12 setting. As a high school educator, he often brought up issues and perspectives not explicitly discussed by the other participants. Jason shares, “most of the things that kids do, there is very little creativity involved in it.” He also emphasizes the importance of developing his students “holistically” through developing their non-musical persona such as empathy and negotiating peer pressure. Further research could explore the teaching practices of K-12 educators and how they incorporate listening and performing opportunities for students with regards to the style of jazz. Questions for further inquiry include: What pedagogical beliefs and practices do high school jazz educators hold in teaching improvisation as a creative process? Are there any differences between that of male jazz educators? What jazz listening and/or performing opportunities do elementary educators incorporate into their own practice?
Conclusion

This study has explored and described the pedagogical beliefs and practices utilized by jazz educators for the teaching of improvisation as a creative process, ultimately contributing to a more scholarly understanding on the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity. The beliefs and approaches shared by the participants highlight the importance of a jazz improvisation pedagogy infused with intentionally collaborative learning experiences for students. These findings ultimately challenge the often de-socialized method of both studying the construct of creativity, as well as teaching others to be creative. It is my hope that educators and researchers in the fields of creativity, jazz, and music education will benefit from the findings in this study.
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APPENDIX A. INTRODUCTION LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear [Participant’s Name],

My name is Roger Coss. I am currently a doctoral student in education at the University of the Pacific (Stockton, CA) under the supervision of Dr. Thomas Nelson. [statement indicating how the participant was located]. My purpose for contacting you is to discuss the possibility of you being a participant in a research study describing jazz educators’ perceptions of teaching and learning improvisational creativity.

For this study, I am looking for participants who have demonstrated excellence as both a jazz educator and performer who would be available for a personal interview, as well as be observed in a teaching setting. [Insert statement indicating their specific qualifications for inclusion as a participant in this study].

As a participant in this study, you would be observed in at least two settings as you teach jazz improvisation. Examples could be a jazz improvisation course, a private one-on-one lesson, or a small jazz combo class. These observations would be unobtrusive and I would be sure to stay well out of the way of you and your students. In addition to the observations, participation would require a personal interview lasting approximately an hour. If additional time is warranted, an additional interview session could be scheduled. This interview would be conducted at a time and/or place of your own choosing and will be audio-recorded. The focus of this interview would be on your beliefs, experiences, and strategies in teaching for creative jazz improvisation. Here are a few examples of interview questions:

1. In what ways do you consider jazz improvisation to be creative?
2. What strategies do you use in teaching for creative jazz improvisation?

The time frame for this study would be over the course of this Summer and Fall (2014). The results of this study would be of great benefit to the development of methods and resources for jazz education.

I would love to further discuss this topic with you in-person if you have the time. Please let me know if you have any further questions. I will respond within 24 hours to answer any questions you may have. Does this sound like something that interests you?

Thank you for your time,

Roger Coss
(209) 815-3981
rcoss15@comcast.net
APPENDIX B. CONSENT FORM

[Participant’s Name],

You are invited to participate in a research study on jazz improvisation pedagogy. My name is Roger Coss, and I am a doctoral student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd School of Education (Stockton, CA). You were selected as a possible participant in this study because of your expertise as a jazz performer and educator.

The purpose of this study is to describe jazz educators’ pedagogical beliefs and practices of improvisational creativity. Your participation will involve an audio-recorded interview which will last approximately one hour. Additional interviews may be needed. You will also be observed in a teaching context by myself.

There is some minimal risk involved for participants. This includes the possibility of emotional trauma and anxiety caused by being observed while teaching. In addition, this study primarily involves questions and observations related to your own profession. Even though I will use pseudonyms and store all data in a password protected computer, there remains the risk of loss of confidentiality and its repercussions for your employability and representation. Finally, minimal physical risk is involved, primarily in transportation to and from the interview setting.

Financial compensation will be offered for any travel expenses to conduct an interview or expenses incurring through document transfer.

Benefits of the results of this study will contribute to the existing literature related to pedagogical strategies for jazz improvisation.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please call me at (209) 815–3981 or email me at rcoss15@comcast.net. You may also contact my doctoral advisor at the University of the Pacific, Dr. Thomas Nelson, at (209) 946-3253 or at tnelson@pacific.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Research & Graduate Studies Office, University of the Pacific, at (209) 946–7367. In the event of a research-related injury, please contact your regular medical provider and bill through your normal insurance carrier, then contact the Office of Research & Graduate Studies.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to ensure your confidentiality include keeping audio recorded data in a
password-protected file. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the study is completed.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to participate, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies.

You will be offered a copy of this signed form to keep.

SIGNATURE: _________________________________  DATE: __________
APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Questions

Central Research Question: What is the relationship between jazz improvisation and creativity?

Supportive Research Questions:
1. What pedagogical beliefs do jazz educators hold in how they conceptualize improvisation as a creative process?
2. What are the pedagogical practices utilized by jazz educators in teaching improvisation as a creative process?

Interview Questions

Early Experiences and Understanding (optional)
1. Can you describe some of your earliest experiences learning to improvise jazz?
2. What kind of pedagogical strategies were used by your teachers?

Improvisational Creativity
3. Do you believe jazz improvisation is a form of ‘creativity’? If so, in what way(s) is it creative?

Pedagogical Practices
4. Can you describe your role as a jazz improvisation educator? Do you believe jazz improvisation can be ‘taught’?
5. What strategies do you use to teach students to improvise jazz?
6. Is there a metaphor that best describes your role in teaching jazz improvisation?
APPENDIX D. IRB PROTOCOL APPROVAL

Valerie Andeola

From: Valerie Andeola
Sent: Friday, July 25, 2014 11:50 AM
To: Rcos15@comcast.net
Cc: Thomas Nelson
Subject: IRB Approval: R. Coss, 14-119

July 25, 2014

Mr. Roger Coss
Education
Benedict School of Education

Re: Review of IRB Proposal #14-119

Dear Mr. Coss:

Your proposal entitled "Jazz Educators Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Improvisational Creativity," submitted to the University of the Pacific IRB, has been approved. Your project received an expedited review.

You are authorized to work with 7 jazz musicians as human subjects. This approval is effective through December 31, 2014, which is either the month listed in the application as your graduation date or one year from your approval date, whichever comes first.

If you are not finished with data collection by the expiration date, we request that you file a renewal form prior to the new deadline.

Procedural changes or amendments must be reported to the IRB, and no changes may be made without IRB approval except to eliminate apparent immediate hazards. To report a protocol revision, please complete the Protocol Revision Form and submit to the IRB Administrator.

Thank you, and best wishes for continued success in your studies.

Sincerely,

Ms. Valerie Andeola
Grants & Research Specialist
IRB Administrator

CC: Dr. Thomas Nelson

Valerie Andeola
Research & Graduate Studies
University of the Pacific
Kuderer Hall Room 206
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