

Integrated improvisation instruction into the daily jazz band rehearsal

by

Ryan Partin

B.M., Wichita State University, 2011
B.M.E., Wichita State University, 2011

A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF MUSIC

School of Music, Theatre, and Dance
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Approved by:
Major Professor
Dr. Frank Tracz

Abstract

The purpose of this master's project was to develop and implement daily improvisation instruction in the high school jazz ensemble rehearsal. I consider myself a competent jazz musician, but up until this school year, I did not have any structured improvisation lessons in place. This newly developed curriculum presents the topic of jazz improvisation in a logical and clearly sequenced design that starts with the most basic principles of listening and melody construction, giving the students the foundation upon which to build their knowledge and facility as improvisors. The primary focus is on utilizing articulations and rhythmic ideas that exemplify the style, with a secondary focus on note selection. To further develop their sense of time and style, students listened and responded to various famous jazz solos in several styles, echoed rhythms that were demonstrated by the instructor, and composed several short musical ideas, or licks. At the conclusion of the project, each student performed one chorus of an improvised solo and critiqued their classmate's improvisation based on the provided rubric.

Over the course of my Master's Program at Kansas State University, I further honed my ability to develop a curriculum that is organized in a natural sequence of learning and is well thought out for the entire year. I utilized the backward design process of starting with desired outcomes first, a process I learned while taking the course Curriculum Development and Learning Assessment at KSU last summer. I also learned to create adequate assessment tools that inform my decisions on further curriculum refinement. The process of developing program goals, course goals, and assessment tools has further refined my understanding of effective course design and will only increase my impact as an educator. Though my master's project was focused on one aspect of jazz ensemble rehearsal, I plan to use what I have learned about curriculum development to further refine all aspects of my teaching. Another area of growth that

I experienced during my time at KSU is my ability to confidently access and interpret research in music education. I now have a plethora of resources at my disposal, and I can identify and implement new practices in my classroom that are backed by empirical evidence. Based on my newfound knowledge in educational research, I created an action research project that examined the relationship between singing tonal rhythm patterns and its effect on intonation of middle school band students. I enjoyed the process of creating the research project and I will most certainly create more action research projects throughout my career. My time at Kansas State University has made me a more effective music educator and has equipped me with the skills and knowledge to provide an excellent music education for my students.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
List of Tables	vi
Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy.....	1
How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching	7
Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans.....	8
Improvisation Curriculum Goals Overview	9
Scope and Sequence.....	10
Course Outline	10
Sample Modal Jazz Improvisation Unit Sequence	11
Lesson Plan 1 – Guided Listening	12
2014 Music Standard (2014) Addressed.....	12
Prior Knowledge/Skills	12
Lesson Objective.....	12
Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies	12
Lesson Sequence	12
Assessment.....	13
Lesson Plan 2 – Echoing and Composition	13
2014 Music Standards (2014) Addressed	13
Prior Knowledge/Skills	14
Lesson Objective.....	14
Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations	14
Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies	14
Lesson Sequence.....	16
Assessment.....	17
Lesson Reflection	18
Chapter 3 - Reflections	21
References.....	25

List of Figures

Figure 2.1. Chord progression for So What, composed by Miles Davis (1959).....	15
Figure 2.2. Chord/scale relationships with transpositions for each instrument	16

List of Tables

Table 2.1. Rubric used to assess student responses to writing prompts	13
Table 2.2. Jazz improvisation assessment rubric	18

Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Formal education has existed in the United States since the mid-seventeenth century. It is a crucial component to prepare students how to not only function in our society, but also how to be more human. Through the formal school setting, students gain essential life-skills, exercise creativity and critical thinking skills, develop social and communication skills, and learn how to continue developing their mental acuity once they leave school. The classroom should be a positive, safe place where all students are allowed the opportunity to grow and succeed. Every child deserves a teacher who believes in them. Music education not only enhances every aspect of formal education, it provides an aesthetic experience that is unlike anything else that can be experienced in school. Music is art, and through music education students come to realize that there is beauty everywhere in life. Studying music helps them to recognize this beauty and teaches them to become more human.

The guiding philosophy of any teacher, administrator, or policy-maker should always be to do what is best for the students. Formal education must be student-centered. Decisions should be made for what is best for all students, not just most students. Teachers must design their lessons to reach students of varying learning styles, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural backgrounds. Supports must be provided to allow all students the opportunity to grow and succeed. Through formal schooling, students learn essential life-skills that will enable them to function in the society in which the school exists. The factory model and production-centered approach to education is outdated. Separating the school day into distinct chunks of learning various branches of knowledge is, in my opinion, not the best way to teach students. I instead share a similar belief with Christopher Small, that students should be free to pursue what is interesting to them (1996). Turning students loose and allowing them to pursue whatever they

want poses a number of problems and is generally not feasible. Alternatively, students should have some level of freedom to further their own understanding within the framework of structured classes. In the music classroom, this could be an assignment in which students study a musician they identify with or learn a song they enjoy. The teacher would integrate this self-exploration into the curriculum of the class to ensure that students are still meeting benchmarks and making necessary connections to the course material. Another model that I think is worth exploring is the idea of academies at the secondary level. Many high schools are moving to a collection of academies within the school that offers more specialized instruction in a given career path. For example, a student might be interested in music or art, so they would join the fine arts academy where courses would be offered to them that align with their interest. Subjects such as math, science, and reading would be taught through the lens of the specific academy.

Through formal education, students gain the ability to exercise creativity and critical thinking skills. Problem solving and making sense of information becomes increasingly important in a world where technology allows access to a staggering amount of information. Information can be obtained in a matter of seconds thanks to the invention of smart phones that nearly everyone carries with them. Therefore, discovering how to interpret data and draw connections should become the focus of education. Another important development that students gain in formal education is social and communication skills. Students must interact with their teachers and classmates through a variety of mediums and social situations. Learning how to communicate thoughts and feelings and understanding societal norms on how to communicate are essential to a person's success during and after leaving school.

Many students deal with stress outside of school in various forms of trauma, including limited access to food, lack of safety at home, homelessness, poor hygiene, and insufficient

clothing. These stresses put students into a fight-or-flight mode, and make it impossible to learn anything while they are in this state of mind (Levings et al., 2020). At school, students should have access to a positive, safe learning environment where they are reassured that their well-being is cared for and their basic needs are being met. Only after the basic needs of safety, food, and shelter are being met can students begin to learn. Every student deserves a teacher who believes in them. Having someone in their corner can be a powerful motivator and give them the confidence they need to make a positive difference in their lives and their communities.

Music is a collection of sounds that, when organized in a specific manner, can create an aesthetic experience. Music is art. It is communication without words or gestures. A listener or performer experiences changes in emotions and perhaps enlightenment from listening to an organization of a grouping of sounds. My belief of music as an aesthetic experience is closely aligned with the English art critic, Clive Bell (1914):

To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man's activity to a world of aesthetic exaltation. For a moment we are shut off from human interests; our anticipations and memories are arrested; we are lifted above the stream of life. (p. 25)

Why does music have such a visceral effect on us? As humans, we are predisposed to recognize art and beauty all around us. Music taps into this predisposition and helps our students to better learn how to recognize this beauty. It can provide an extremely powerful emotional experience that can even be life-changing. I firmly believe that music has the power to affect change in individuals, and as a result it can change the world. I share a similar belief with Christopher Small, in that music is of central importance to our human nature, similar to speech. I also

believe that everyone is born with the gift of music and the capacity to create and listen to music (1998). It is a basic right that every student should have access to a quality music education to realize their full potential as humans. Many students and adults do not view themselves as capable of making music, which is a tragedy. Through studying music, students gain a better understanding of what it means to be more human.

Music education is unique in that a variety of learning modalities are accessed naturally, and sometimes simultaneously. Students develop executive function by learning how to play a musical instrument. They learn the mechanics of the instrument, how to sit, how to form an embouchure, how to use air, how to create different articulations, and which combinations of fingers to push down to create different pitches all while listening, assessing the sounds they are creating, and making needed adjustments. Students actively decode music notation and make connections with sounds through audiation. Music is a language, and when performing or listening to music, language centers are activated in the brain. A group of Finnish researchers examined magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) pictures of volunteers as they listened to a piece of modern Argentinian tango. They found that music listening not only activates the auditory areas of the brain, but also activates large-scale neural networks. The processing of musical pulse recruits motor areas in the brain. Limbic areas known to be associated with emotions were activated in rhythm and tonality processing. Processing of timbre activated the default mode network, which is associated with creativity (Alluri et al., 2012). Given the amount of brain activity during listening to music, one can only imagine how it lights up while performing music. Through regular music performance, all areas are exercised and strengthened daily. Music is unique in that very few subjects hit all these modalities at once. The strengthening of

performance in other subject areas is a side-effect of studying music, but it is not a justification for music education. Music should be taught because of its own inherent value as a subject.

Students exercise creative and critical thinking skills when they engage in music performance. They must analyze the music and make creative decisions. For example, students must constantly listen to the ensemble to determine how their part contributes to the performance. Knowing when they have the melody will inform their decisions to play louder in order to be heard, while at the same time not playing too loud as to distort section blend. Students are also able to explore various expressive techniques to enhance the music. Perhaps a slight crescendo into the next phrase would create more energy and musical excitement. Every student has the capacity to make creative decisions regardless of the instrument they play or the music they are performing. A percussionist playing a simple triangle part during a chorale might view their part as mundane. The teacher's response might be to ask probing questions such as, "How does your conception of the woodwind texture and phrasing in this section of music inform your approach to triangle technique? Should it change later in the piece when the brass enter?" By asking the students questions and encouraging creativity, they are allowed the opportunity to make musical decisions on their own. The teacher need not always inform the students exactly what to do and how to make music.

Performing in a music ensemble teaches students they are important to the success of the group. They must learn their part and understand how it fits into the overall architecture of the piece of music. An ensemble class is unique in that it requires 100% participation from everyone at all times. Everyone in the group is actively participating in creating music. This leads to a feeling of importance and belonging, which all students require as a basic need. The music teacher holds the students to high musical expectations, while being fair and nurturing their

musical growth. It is a place for students to feel they are appreciated and who they are is important. Participating in music should be an enjoyable activity. The music teacher has a responsibility to teach music by utilizing quality literature, but should also find a balance of studying music that is appealing to the students. I also firmly believe in the power of humor. Cracking jokes from the podium is a great way to humanize the teacher and also alleviate any preconceptions the students might have about the “stuffiness” of music rehearsal. Being relatable through humor is also a great way to begin establishing connections with students and begin to form relationships, which will in turn develop trust and encourage them to perform better in class.

Participating in an ensemble class such as band, orchestra, and choir runs the risk of becoming too teacher-centered. Most of the musical decisions are often placed on the director and not the students. A conscious effort must be made to allow the students opportunities to make critical and creative decisions about the music, which will give them more confidence to engage with music in some manner once they leave school. This could be performing music for fun, attending a concert, or simply having increased understanding when listening to music.

Formal education is a crucial component of our modern society. Students gain essential life skills including how to function in society, exercise creative and critical thinking skills, develop social and communication skills, and learn how to continue learning once they leave school. Education should always be student-centered, and guiding decisions should be made with the student’s best interests in mind. It is a basic right for all students to have access to a positive, safe learning environment and to have a teacher who recognizes their potential for greatness. Music education is invaluable in the formal school curriculum because it provides an aesthetic experience that cannot be found in any other classroom. Learning music allows students to

exercise several learning modalities at once, teaches the importance of teamwork, and emphasizes the value of creativity. The music education classroom is a place for students to feel welcome. By studying music, students come to realize there is beauty everywhere in life, they become more human, and it gives them hope.

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

Jazz improvisation is often a subject that students are apprehensive to approach. They leave behind the comfort of familiar written notation in exchange for a set of chord changes and musical freedom. This unfamiliarity can leave the students feeling vulnerable and fearful of failure in front of their peers. In designing the improvisation unit, I was sensitive to the students' potential feelings of vulnerability. I established a safe, positive learning environment where perceived failure is not failure at all, but rather a learning opportunity. I shared with my students that one of the great aspects of improvisation is that it is subjective in its very nature. There are no wrong notes or ideas when it comes to crafting a solo. One area the curriculum focuses on is to share techniques and ideas they might find appealing. Self-exploration was encouraged throughout the process in order for the students to find ideas that resonated with them. In addition to establishing a learning environment of equal standing for all students, the lessons were also scaffolded to provide support as needed as students became more familiar with the concepts. I modeled the concepts being taught, and then provided guided practice by having them echo ideas I played. I then gave them individual practice at the same time, so as not to put any one student on the spot. I was careful not to make any student uncomfortable throughout the lesson and only asked for volunteers to perform in front of the class. My hope is that through the improvisation unit, my students have discovered a new avenue to express themselves through music.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plans

I am incredibly passionate about jazz and the freedom to create through improvisation. I received a Bachelor of Jazz Studies from Wichita State University and I am an active jazz musician performing with various groups throughout the year. I am a veteran educator, just finishing my thirteenth-year teaching band, including both middle school and high school jazz bands. My experience has led me to be comfortable with jazz education and confident in my abilities to teach all facets of the music, including improvisation. My approach to jazz improvisation has not always been well-structured. Mostly, it has taken the form of informal formative assessments, which would inform my next steps. The purpose of my revamped jazz improvisation curriculum is to organize my teaching strategies in a natural sequence of learning that is well-thought-out for the entire year, and also to provide adequate assessment tools that will inform my decisions on further curriculum refinement. Documentation and tracking student progress throughout the year is also invaluable data for stakeholders to show my program is effective. The curriculum also serves to develop and refine my course goals to determine which concepts are most important. Goals are closely aligned with the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) music standards (2014). The scope and sequence of the curriculum was designed for a class that is separated into four quarters through the year, with each quarter lasting nine weeks. Two units will be taught per quarter in the form of various jazz styles. I have found modal jazz to be most accessible to students who are unfamiliar with improvisation, so it is a natural starting point. Eight broad styles of music are to be covered over the course of the year with each unit building upon previous units.

Improvisation Curriculum Goals Overview

Program Goals:

- Students will remember and apply three different approaches to jazz improvisation.
- Students will perform an improvised solo by analyzing musical style and chord progression.
- Students will develop a cursory background of the jazz idiom through improvisation, history, and performance.
- Students will develop the necessary skills to perform on their instrument.
- Students will develop the necessary skills to interpret and compose music.
- Students will develop their ability to listen to, describe, and analyze music.

Course Goals

Creating

- Students will embellish a jazz melody by changing/adding at least two musical elements (rhythm, pitch, articulation, dynamics, extended instrument technique: scoops, glissandi, falls, growls, or false fingerings).
- Students will identify and demonstrate at least three different approaches to jazz improvisation (embellishment, rhythmic, scale-based, vertical playing, licks, quotes/cliches, etc.).
- Students will compose and notate short one to two measure licks in the following jazz styles: blues, swing, modal jazz, cool jazz, funk, Latin, bebop.
- Students will perform a self-assessment of their own recorded improvisations by providing at least two positive observations and one point for improvement.
- Students will improvise original melodies over a given chord progression with appropriate rhythm, style, and tonality.

Perform

- Students will demonstrate the ability to read music accurately and with correct style and identify the various elements of music.
- Students will perform five two-octave major scales with fewer than two mistakes per scale.
- Students will perform the blues scale in four different keys with fewer than two mistakes.

- Students will perform the following modal scales with fewer than two mistakes: dorian, lydian, mixolydian, aeolian.
- Students will perform accurately with expression and technical accuracy, alone and in an ensemble.
- Students will perform a variety of jazz repertoire in various keys, meters, and genres, alone and with the ensemble, with correct pitch, rhythm, articulation, and style.

Respond

- Students will classify examples of music, aurally and visually, into various genres of jazz and explain their reasoning for classification.
- Students will list and compare/contrast at least three characteristics of improvised solos of two jazz musicians.
- Students will engage in a musical dialogue by incorporating musical ideas from their classmates' improvisations into their own improvisations (trading fours).
- Students will develop aural skills by listening to and echoing one to two-measure licks.
- Students will develop aural skills and notational skills by transcribing one to two-measure licks.
- Students will compare and contrast musical elements found in jazz with musical elements found in other genres of music.
- Students will identify three resources to help them further their understanding of jazz style and improvisation.

Scope and Sequence

Course Outline

- Jazz Band is a performance class that is divided into four nine-week periods.
- A variety of jazz styles will be covered in each quarter in preparation for various performances.
- Improvisation curriculum focus for each quarter:
 - Quarter One
 - Modal Jazz and Blues
 - Quarter Two

- Swing and Funk
- Quarter Three
 - Latin and Rock/Fusion
- Quarter Four
 - Bebop and Free Jazz

Sample Modal Jazz Improvisation Unit Sequence

Lessons will be presented in the following order, though some lessons may be revisited throughout the unit:

- Background information, historical, cultural, and social context.
 - What factors led to the development of modal jazz? What function did it serve? Who created it?
- Listening and responding to various recordings
- Embellish melodies and short ideas
- Rhythmic improvisation
 - Pitch limitations – one to three pitches
- Style and articulations
 - Swing, ends of phrases followed by rests are short, off-beats accented
- Compose one to two-measure licks
- Theory
 - Form and structure of tunes, chords, and note selection
- Group improvisation
- Individual improvisation
- Recorded improvisation
 - Self-assessment
- Trading fours, collaboration
- Composition
 - Students will compose a thirty-two-bar solo using two dorian scales
- Rhythm section musicians
 - Establishing characteristic groove
 - Bass and drums relationship

- Characteristic comping style and rhythms
- Musical dialogue with soloists

Lesson Plan 1 – Guided Listening

2014 Music Standard (2014) Addressed

MU:Pr4.3.E.IIa: Demonstrate how understanding the style, genre, and context of a varied repertoire of music influences prepared and improvised performances as well as performer's technical skill to connect with the audience (2014).

Prior Knowledge/Skills

The students in this lesson are in a high school jazz ensemble. They are proficient on their instruments and are capable of playing music at the appropriate level. They have also had regular exposure in listening to jazz music.

Lesson Objective

Students will listen to Miles Davis' improvised solo on So What from the album *Kind of Blue* (1959) and respond to a series of prompts. The students will gain an increased awareness of the creative decisions that musicians use when crafting an improvised solo.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

The teacher will utilize the following resources: google classroom, student iPads, iPhone to play the audio example, a Bluetooth adapter, and the stereo system in the classroom.

Lesson Sequence

- So What is playing as students enter the band room at the start of class. This serves to ensnare the students' attention, and also allows them to begin familiarizing themselves with the tune.
- Teacher provides cursory information about Miles Davis and his contributions to jazz.
- Students navigate to today's assignment, a series of prompts located on Google Classroom.

- The teacher plays Miles Davis' solo on So What as the students respond to the following questions:
 - How does Miles Davis use rhythm in his solo?
 - Does the solo have an arc? Are there ideas that are developed? How?
 - How does the rhythm section interact with the trumpet soloist?
 - How is Miles Davis telling a story through his solo?
- The teacher asks the students to share their responses and adds feedback as necessary.
- After the class discussion, students are allowed to add to their responses if they choose.

Assessment

Students respond to several prompts on Google Classroom and participate in class discussion. Student responses are assessed based on the following rubric:

	Needs Improvement	Approaching Expectations	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Focus	Writing demonstrates little or no understanding of key ideas	Writing is somewhat focused on responding to the prompt	Ideas are largely focused on responding to the prompt	Ideas are tightly focused on responding to the prompt
Support and Elaboration	Little or no attempt at explanation of ideas	Writing presents somewhat limited explanation of ideas	Writing presents logical opinions and interpretations	Writing is grounded in text and/or facts and includes insightful interpretations

Table 2.1. Rubric used to assess student responses to writing prompts

Lesson Plan 2 – Echoing and Composition

2014 Music Standards (2014) Addressed

MU:CR1.1.E.Ia: Compose and improvise ideas for melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements for specific purposes that reflect characteristic(s) of music from a variety of historical periods studied in rehearsal.

MU:CR2.1.E.Ia: Preserve draft compositions and improvisations through standard notation and audio recording.

Prior Knowledge/Skills

The students in this lesson are in a high school jazz ensemble. They are proficient on their instruments and are capable of playing music at the appropriate level. They have also had regular exposure to listening to jazz music.

Lesson Objective

Students will gain an increased understanding of chord/scale relationships and will perform on their instrument with rhythm and style appropriate to the swing genre. The students will also compose short musical ideas (licks) to be used in improvisation.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Needed Modifications/Accommodations

Students will likely be at varying levels in their ability to notate musical ideas using standard music notation. The teacher may need to establish background knowledge for the students to successfully notate their ideas.

Instructional Resources, Materials and Technologies

The following resources will be utilized in the lesson: chord progression sheet for So What (Figure 2.1), and the chord/scale relationship sheet (Figure 2.2).

(Up Tempo Swing)	So What		Miles Davis	
A 4/4 D₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
D₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
A D₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
D₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
B E^b₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
E^b₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
A D₋₁₁		⋈		⋈
D₋₁₁		⋈		⋈

Figure 2.1. Chord progression for So What, composed by Miles Davis (1959)

So What Chord/Scale Relationships

C Instruments



The notation for C Instruments shows two scales in 4/4 time. The first scale is D Dorian, starting on D4 and ascending to D5, with the chord D-7 indicated above. The second scale is Eb Dorian, starting on Eb4 and ascending to Eb5, with the chord Eb-7 indicated above. A bracket connects the two scales.

Bb Instruments



The notation for Bb Instruments shows two scales in 4/4 time. The first scale is E Dorian, starting on E4 and ascending to E5, with the chord E-7 indicated above. The second scale is F Dorian, starting on F4 and ascending to F5, with the chord F-7 indicated above. A bracket connects the two scales.

Eb Instruments



The notation for Eb Instruments shows two scales in 4/4 time. The first scale is B Dorian, starting on B3 and ascending to B4, with the chord B-7 indicated above. The second scale is C Dorian, starting on C4 and ascending to C5, with the chord C-7 indicated above. A bracket connects the two scales.

Bass Clef



The notation for Bass Clef shows two scales in 4/4 time. The first scale is D Dorian, starting on D3 and ascending to D4, with the chord D-7 indicated above. The second scale is Eb Dorian, starting on Eb3 and ascending to Eb4, with the chord Eb-7 indicated above. A bracket connects the two scales.

Figure 2.2. Chord/scale relationships with transpositions for each instrument

Lesson Sequence

- Introduce chord/scale relationships. Students will reference the chord/scale relationship guide for So What
 - D-7 = D dorian and Eb-7 = Eb dorian (2nd mode of the major scale)
 - Play dorian scales together as a class
- Rhythm section comps on D-7. Teacher improvises utilizing a single pitch. Students respond on any note in the dorian scale.

- Emphasis is placed on rhythmic ideas, articulations, and appropriate style. Pitches are purposely limited to focus on the most important aspect of improvisation, playing with a good sense of time and rhythm.
- Teacher will open up to any two notes of the dorian scale. Students respond on any two notes
 - Consider the root and the 7th. How many unique combinations exist? Twelve combinations using only those two pitches. Possibilities for improvisation are vast!
- Simple Licks
 - Teacher plays one-measure licks. The students echo back.
 - Licks are explained and analyzed in scale degrees to better facilitate transposition to other keys. D dorian to Eb dorian.
 - Utilizing staff paper, students compose one or two short musical licks, one to two measures in length. Volunteers share their licks with the class.
 - The students will keep a lick journal and add to it throughout the unit.

Assessment

Informal-formative assessment. The teacher will listen as students are participating in group improvisation and give verbal feedback. The students will respond to the following exit ticket question: What are two approaches to jazz improvisation?

The following rubric will be used for a more formal assessment to track student progress:

	Emerging	Approaching	Meeting	Exceeds
Rhythm	Student improvises with unclear rhythmic ideas, inconsistent tempo, and does not incorporate information found in the tune	Student improvises with limited rhythmic ideas, inconsistent tempo, and does not incorporate rhythmic information found in the tune	Student improvises with a variety of rhythmic ideas, consistent tempo, and incorporates rhythmic information found in the tune	Student improvises with a wide variety of rhythmic ideas, consistent tempo, rhythmic information found in the tune, and there is evidence of development of rhythmic ideas
Style	Student improvises without swing	Student improvises with either appropriate swing	Student improvises with appropriate swing	Student improvises with appropriate swing feel and a

	feel or appropriate use of articulations	feel or appropriate articulations	feel and appropriate use of articulations	variety of appropriate articulations
Tonality	Student improvises notes that do not match the chord progression and tonality of the tune	Student improvises notes that match the chord progression and tonality of the tune but does not justify their selection	Student improvises notes that match the chord progression and tonality of the tune and justifies their selection	Student improvises notes that match the chord progression and tonality of the tune, utilizes two or more tonal approaches (blues scale, major scales, minor scales, playing outside, diminished, whole-tone, chromatic, vertical, etc.) and justifies their selection

Table 2.2. Jazz improvisation assessment rubric

Lesson Reflection

My goals for the improvisation lessons, and my goals for the overall curriculum, are for my students to gain an increased awareness of appropriate jazz style, better understand the creative decisions that are available when crafting an improvised solo, and perform on their instrument with a good sense of time, rhythm, and style appropriate to the genre of music. The students demonstrated their understanding of several approaches to jazz improvisation by participating in class discussion and responding to listening prompts. They also created a lick journal they will continue to add to as they progress through their jazz career. By listening and matching a model (teacher), the students have begun to play with a good sense of time, rhythm, and style appropriate to the genre of music.

I utilized Socratic question strategies throughout the lessons, guiding my students' thinking and class discussion by continually asking probing questions. While there are concrete concepts the students must learn in order to be successful improvisors, such as music theory, I still want my lessons to have an element of discovery. Information will be more meaningful and

retention will be better if the students discover their own answers, as opposed to a more teacher-centered classroom. The idea of sharing the responsibility of learning between the teacher and students is one I have been careful to facilitate over the course of my teaching career. The nature of leading an ensemble class, with a director sharing their vision of the piece of music being rehearsed, runs the risk of becoming too teacher-centered. Due to time constraints in preparing for performance, there is a balance that must be achieved between allowing students to take part in musical decision-making and the director giving direct quality feedback on performance. During the improvisation lessons, I acted as an auditory model for the students to emulate. As the students were echoing the licks that I played, I would repeat the lick if they played any component incorrectly. The most commonly overlooked aspect was subtle nuances in rhythm and articulation. I repeated the licks until the students realized what was not being played correctly. There were a few occasions that I stopped to discuss what specifically needed to be played better.

To assess the written prompts, I utilized a simple quick-write rubric (Table 2.1). I also offered feedback in the form of private comments on Google Classroom. Throughout much of the lessons, I offered feedback in the form of informal-formative assessments. I listened to students perform and offered positive and constructive verbal feedback. As a more formal evaluative assessment, the students each performed an improvised solo over one chorus of whatever tune we were working on for that week. The students had a choice to perform in class or submit a recorded performance over a rhythm section backing track. I utilized an improvisation rubric (Table 2.2) that I created for the purpose of providing feedback and tracking student progress.

One adjustment that I will make moving forward is to preload some of the rhythm section instruction in regards to accompaniment (comping). My students did not have experience reading lead sheets, which do not explicitly provide specific instructions to the rhythm section instruments on how to play. This was one area I overlooked, and it slowed the pacing of my initial lessons due to having to take time to explain correct technique, piano voicings, comping rhythms, etc. In the future, I will provide much of this instruction in the form of supplemental materials which I will provide to the students in the rhythm section a day or two before the lesson. I will also continue to develop and refine my rubrics I use for assessing improvisation. The very nature of performing an improvised solo is subjective, and developing a meaningful rubric is something I would like to continue to explore.

Creating the jazz improvisation curriculum increased my thinking by allowing me to create a sequence of lessons that progressively led to my course goals of expanding my students' understanding of jazz and improving their improvisation skills. I found by designing the lessons and rubrics used for assessment, my teaching was more focused and effective. I plan to continue refining my curriculum for years to come.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

My experience in the Master's Program at K-State in Music Education has been a positive experience and I have grown as an educator in all facets of my teaching. I especially appreciate how the program focuses on facilitating coursework for the current music educator by offering instruction in the summer. I also found that my classes equipped me with practical knowledge I could put into practice for the following school year. Three major areas that I have grown through my experience at K-State are: 1) my ability to develop a curriculum that is focused on achieving course goals and creating effective assessment tools, 2) gaining confidence in my ability to interpret research in music education and implement new practices in my teaching based on empirical evidence, and 3) improving my prowess as a conductor and developing my leadership skills and confidence as the leader of my band program.

While taking the course Curriculum Development and Learning Assessment, I gained a broader understanding of how to effectively create a curriculum focused on achieving program and course goals. One of the main takeaways from this class is the concept of backwards design, which involves starting with the desired outcomes first and then developing broad steps or units to reach program goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Once units have been developed, specific lessons can then be crafted to reach unit goals. The concept of starting broad and then establishing smaller steps is a logical design strategy I plan to continue exploring throughout my career. Guidance was also provided on how to write effective course goals. One goal for my improvisation curriculum is by the end of the course, the students will realize there are many different approaches to jazz improvisation and effective improvisors make a variety of creative decisions when crafting their solos. I started with this broad goal and then designed units and lessons to determine the best path to achieve this goal. I realized one of the initial steps must be

for students to listen to quality jazz musicians performing improvised solos in order for them to begin to develop a sound model of effective improvisation. This was a component I focused on throughout the year. I started each lesson by having students listen and respond, either individually by submitting responses through Google Classroom, pairing with a partner for discussion, or by the teacher-facilitated class discussion. Another area of growth is my understanding and ability to develop effective assessment tools. Through taking the Curriculum Development course, I gained practice in writing performance rubrics. I realize the importance of effective assessment tools and how they allow me to be more consistent in my instruction, provide documentation of student learning, and aid in identifying concepts students struggle with to inform me how to refine my lessons. Jazz improvisation is subjective in nature and I found it somewhat challenging to develop meaningful assessments. I wish to give my students the tools they need to become better jazz musicians, at the same time I do not want to end up preaching there is a correct and incorrect method of improvisation. The curriculum is designed to instill confidence in the students and lay the foundation upon which they find their own voice as musicians. I plan to continue exploring and refining my performance rubrics.

During my first summer in the Master's Program at K-State, I enrolled in Research in Music Education. I was initially intimidated by educational research, however, throughout my coursework I grew to enjoy reading and interpreting studies in music education. I gained access to a vast amount of music education research through music journals, master's theses, and dissertations. I recognized the value in reading about a study or technique that yielded positive results and applying it to my own teaching. One of the areas in which I sought improvement is the intonation of my students. I came across a study in *Music Educators Journal* in which two music professors at James Madison University, James Hiatt and Sam Cross, utilized an audiation

method for their aural skills classes and found much success. They take an aural-oral-visual approach to teaching music. After hearing a tonic pitch, students are asked to audiate the exercises in their head before singing. They also adapted this method for teaching beginning instrumentalists. The students are asked to learn and sing familiar tunes for their instrument. They are then taught how to play the songs, before finally being introduced to notation. Associating sound with the physical movements required to play their instrument, not with notation, allowed the students to acquire excellent performance skills, including improved intonation (Hiatt & Cross, 2006). The summer after I read this article, I changed my teaching practices in beginning band to first develop my student's aural skills and physical skills on their instruments. I taught them how to play familiar tunes by ear before eventually introducing music notation. Anecdotally, I observed an increase in their acquisition of basic foundational skills as musicians and they appeared to progress at a faster rate than previous years of beginning band students.

During my time in the Master's Program at K-State, I have grown as a conductor and leader of my band program. Enrolling in Advanced Instrumental Conducting equipped me with the skills I needed to better convey meaning and musicality from the podium. I became more sensitive to how subtle changes in gesture can illicit varying musical responses from the ensemble. While enrolled in Advanced Rehearsal Techniques and Literature Analysis, I gained new skills and confidence in approaching score study, allowing me to form a clear mental image of the music and develop a plan to reach my ensemble goals. While taking Arranging for Band, I came to better understand each instrument in the ensemble, including their strengths and limitations. The final wind band project of arranging a piece for wind ensemble was both challenging and rewarding. I have greatly enjoyed my time in the Master's Program at K-State in

Music Education. As a result of the program, I am more confident in my abilities as a music educator and have gained invaluable skills I will carry with me throughout my career.

References

- Alluri, V., Toiviainen, P., Jääskeläinen, I. P., Glerean, E., Sams, M., & Brattico, E. (2012). Large-scale brain networks emerge from dynamic processing of musical timbre, key and rhythm. *NeuroImage*, 59(4), 3677-3689.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2011.11.019>
- Bell, C. (1914). *Art by Clive Bell*. Chatto & Windus.
- Davis, M. (1959) So What [Song]. On *Kind of blue* [Album]. Columbia Records.
- Hiatt, J.S., & Cross, S. (2006). Teaching and using audiation in classroom instruction and applied lessons with advanced students. *Music Educators Journal*, 92(5), 46-49.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3878502>
- Levings, K. (2020, June 23). Trauma-Informed Classroom: Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom. *Insights to Behavior*. <https://insightstobehavior.com/blog/trauma-informed-classroom-creating-trauma-sensitive-classroom/>
- National Association for Music Education. (2014). *Core Music Standards*. <https://nafme.org/my-classroom/standards/core-music-standards/>
- Small, C. (1996). *Music, society, education* Wesleyan University Press paperback ed. 1996). University Press of New England
- Small, C. (1998). *Musicking the meanings of performing and listening*. University Press of New England.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2011). *The understanding by design guide to creating high-quality units*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.