Plural possibilities of improvisation in music education

An ecological perspective on choral improvisation and wellbeing

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Improvisaation monet mahdollisuudet musiikkikasvatuksessa:
Ekologinen näkökulma kuoroimprovisaatioon ja hyvinvointiin

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Abstract

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Improvisation is increasingly valued in music educational contexts and beyond, however it has not yet gained an established position in music education research and practice. This dissertation addresses the need to recognize the wide variety of affordances that improvisation can offer music education. By utilizing a socio-ecological research framework, this dissertation aims to contribute to the theorizing of improvisation as a social practice and pedagogical approach, as well as to unwrap how improvisation can contribute to the quality of human life on multiple levels. The socio-ecological perspective allows us to explore improvisation as social action with the goal of understanding the complex and transformational processes by which learning occurs and musical agency and identity are constructed in relation to the social environment. By untangling these social aspects, as well as addressing the significance of the quality of social interaction, this work points out that there is a need to recognize the conditions that either support or hinder the social participation and diversity of learners, and furthermore their wellbeing and equality.

This is an article-based dissertation with an instrumental multi-case study design, and aims to identify the plural and holistic affordances that improvisation can offer to music education. The three sub-studies provide insight into and diverse perspectives on exploring the phenomenon of improvisation: 1) a collective case study contextualizing the research literature in music education; 2) an empirical case of an arts intervention choir; and 3) an empirical case of an improvisation choir. In both adult choirs, the researcher was positioned as an insider and the quality of the social interaction and the pedagogical atmosphere were supported by applying a mindset stemming from applied improvisational theatre. Interviews, observations, and researcher diaries were analyzed as empirical material in the choir cases. The findings from the sub-studies were interpreted within a socio-ecological framework, drawing on Tia DeNora's sociological and social psychology perspective on the

interrelation of wellbeing and music, as well as anthropologist Christopher Small's conceptualization of musicking as a social and relational process.

The first sub-study explores approaches to improvisation and maps visions of improvisation pedagogy in music education scholarly research by visualizing the multitude of possible approaches and pedagogical practices associated with the practice. The study highlights the need to develop opportunities for learners to engage in a variety of approaches to improvisation, and also conceptualizes the values, tensions, and beliefs underpinning the teaching of improvisation that can induce tensions and conflicts. The second sub-study, also the first choir case, explores university students' narrations of their experiences of an arts intervention choir project and of social anxiety in university contexts and beyond. The findings show that the experimental project combining choral singing and improvisation with health care expertise from the Finnish Students Health Services offered the participants a safe environment and social space for developing interaction skills and coping with social anxiety. The case highlights the significance of the quality of social interaction in education, and of recognizing each student as an individual with specific needs in learning. The third sub-study, and second choir case, examines the affordances of the collaborative, vocal, and bodily improvising practices of a free improvisation choir for adults with mixed skills. The improvised musicking afforded the participants resources for constructing both their social and musical agency, as well as the opportunity to explore playful collaborative musical learning and thereby their deeper wellbeing. The case thus exemplifies how, when meeting the conditions of a safe learning environment, free improvisation can enhance equal participation in music regardless of one's prior cultivation of musical skills and knowledge – and thus, overall equity.

This dissertation advocates that more emphasis could be placed on the reciprocal co-construction of musical learning environments that, firstly, support an experience of safety, participation, and exploring capabilities when encountering the inherent uncertainty of improvisation; and, secondly, that provide each learner with the opportunity and capacity to perceive their potential avenues of conduct as social, creative, and improvisational agents of their own future wellbeing and learning

within their social ecology. By extending the understanding of improvisation from being regarded solely as a musical practice to being fully perceived as a social practice and pedagogical approach, we will be able to support the constructing of learning environments with more emphasis on individual and emotional development through holistic (embodied), reciprocal, playful, and free (welcoming all kinds of sounds) expression, and the acknowledgement of individual affordances of music and music making for each learner, as well as the true meaning of equity.

Keywords: Affordance, choir singing, collaboration, improvisation, learning, music education, play, socio-ecology, social interaction, wellbeing

Tiivistelmä

Siljamäki, Eeva. (2021). *Improvisaation monet mahdollisuudet musiikkikasvatuksessa: Ekologinen näkökulma kuoroimprovisaatioon ja hyvinvointiin*. Taideyliopiston Sibelius-Akatemia. Studia Musica 86.

Improvisaation arvostus musiikkikasvatuksessa lisääntyy jatkuvasti. Tästä huolimatta improvisaatio ei ole vielä saavuttanut vakiintunutta asemaa musiikkikasvatuksen käytännöissä tai tutkimuksessa. Tämä väitöstutkimus nousee tarpeesta tunnistaa improvisaation musiikkikasvatukselle tarjoamat mahdollisuudet eli tarjoumat. Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys on sosio-ekologinen, jossa improvisaatiota voidaan tarkastella systeemisenä ilmiönä ja ymmärtää asioiden kompleksisuutta, keskinäisriippuvuutta ja vaikutusta. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on edistää improvisaation teoretisointia sosiaalisena toimintana ja pedagogisena lähestymistapana sekä luoda ymmärrystä siitä, miten improvisaatio voi edesauttaa elämänlaatua monentasoisesti. Tutkimuksen laajempi tavoite on ymmärtää niitä monimutkaisia ja uudistavia prosesseja, joissa oppiminen, musiikillinen toimijuus ja identiteetti rakentuvat. Sosio-ekologisesta näkökulmasta musiikki ja improvisaatio ovat sosiaalista toimintaa suhteessa sosiaaliseen ympäristöön. Näin ollen on tarve tunnistaa niitä olosuhteita, jotka tukevat tai estävät oppijoiden monimuotoista sosiaalista osallistumista ja siten myös hyvinvointia ja tasa-arvoa.

Tämä artikkeliväitöskirja on instrumentaalinen monitapaustutkimus, jossa pyrkimys on tunnistaa improvisaation monimuotoiset ja kokonaisvaltaiset tarjoumat musiikkikasvatukselle. Kolmessa osatutkimuksessa kuvataan improvisaatiota ilmiönä siten, että ensimmäinen on kollektiivinen tapaustutkimus musiikkikasvatuksen tutkimuskirjallisuudesta. Toinen osatutkimus on empiirinen tapaustutkimus taideinterventiokuorosta ja kolmas on empiirinen tapaustutkimus improvisaatiokuorosta, jossa väitöskirjatutkija toimi tasavertaisena jäsenenä. Taideinterventiossa tutkija toimi kuoronjohtaja-kehittäjänä yhteistyössä Ylioppilaiden terveydenhoitosäätiön (YTHS) asiantuntijoiden kanssa. Kuorojen sosiaalista vuorovaikutusta ja pedagogista ilmapiiriä tuettiin soveltamalla improvisaatioteatterin luovaa ja refleksiivistä ajattelutapaa. Empiirinen materiaali koostui haastatteluista,

havainnoinnista ja tutkijan päiväkirjoista. Tutkimuksen tuloksia tulkittiin Tia DeNoran sosiologisen ja sosiaalipsykologisen teorian sekä Christopher Smallin musikoinnin (*musicking*) näkökulmasta. Tässä sosio-ekologisessa näkökulmassa korostuu musikoinnin sosiaalinen ja suhteellinen prosessi sekä musiikin ja hyvinvoinnin keskinäinen riippuvuussuhde.

Ensimmäinen osatutkimus on meta-analyysi, joka tarkastelee käytännöllisiä ja käsitteellisiä lähestymistapoja improvisaatioon sekä improvisaatiopedagogiikan asemaa musiikkikasvatuksen tutkimuksessa. Tulokset tuovat esiin improvisaation moninaisuutta ja siten myös tarvetta tarjota oppijoille mahdollisuuksia osallistua monimuotoisesti improvisaatioon. Yhtä lailla painottuu tarve ymmärtää improvisaation opettamiseen liittyviä arvoja ja uskomuksia, jotka voivat aiheuttaa jännitteitä ja ristiriitoja. *Toinen osatutkimus* on narratiivinen tapaustutkimus, joka tarkastelee taideinterventiokuoroon osallistuneiden yliopisto-opiskelijoiden kertomuksia kokemuksistaan kuoroprojektissa sekä sosiaalisesta jännityksestä yliopistoympäristössä ja laajemmin heidän elämässään. Kokeellisessa projektissa yhdistettiin kuorolaulaminen, improvisaatio ja terveydenhoidon asiantuntijuus. Tulokset osoittavat, että kuoro tarjosi osallistujille turvallisen ympäristön ja sosiaalisen tilan, jossa kehittää vuorovaikutustaitoja ja sosiaalisen jännityksen kanssa selviytymistä. Tulokset korostavat sosiaalisen vuorovaikutuksen laadun ja jokaisen oppijan yksilöllisten ja erityisten tarpeiden tunnistamisen merkitystä sekä opetuksessa että oppimisessa. *Kolmas osatutkimus* on instrumentaalinen tapaustutkimus, joka tarkastelee yhteistoiminnallisen, kehollisen ja vapaan kuoroimprovisaation käytäntöjen tarjoumia yhdessä aikuiskuorossa. Tulokset osoittavat, että improvisoitu musikointi tarjosi osallistujille resursseja sosiaalisen ja musiikillisen toimijuuden rakentamiseen sekä leikilliseen ja yhteistoiminnalliseen musiikilliseen oppimiseen. Näin ollen osallistujille tuli mahdolliseksi syvemmän hyvinvoinnin saavuttaminen. Tapaus toimii esimerkkinä siitä, miten vapaa improvisaatio sopivissa olosuhteissa ja turvallisessa oppimisympäristössä voi edistää tasa-arvoista osallistumista musiikkiin riippumatta aiemmasta osaamisesta, taidoista tai tiedoista, mikä myös lisää musiikkikasvatuksen oikeudenmukaisuutta.

Väitöstutkimus tuo improvisaation esiin kokonaisvaltaisena, sosiaalisena ja pedagogisena toimintana sekä ajattelutapana. Tulosten perusteella musiikillisten oppimisympäristöjen rakentamisessa on tarvetta painottaa vastavuoroisuutta, vuorovaikutuksen laatua ja kokonaisvaltaista, kaikenlaiset äänet hyväksyvää ilmaisua. Kun oppimisympäristössä tuetaan turvallisuuden kokemuksen syntymistä, osallistumista ja oman pystyvyyden kokeilemista, on mahdollista kohdata improvisaatioon liittyvä luontainen epävarmuus. Tukemalla oppijan luovan, sosiaalisen ja improvisoivan toimijuuden rakentumista yksilöllisesti voi oppijan toimijuus omaan tulevaan hyvinvointiin ja oppimiseen mahdollistua. Tunnistamalla oppijan yksilöllinen tarjouma ja toimijuuden rakentuminen voidaan mahdollistaa myös oikeudenmukaisuuden toteutuminen musiikillisissa oppimisympäristöissä.

Asiasanat: Hyvinvointi, improvisaatio, kuorolaulaminen, leikki, musiikkikasvatus, oppiminen, sosio-ekologia, tarjouma, vuorovaikutus, yhteistoiminnallisuus

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Published articles by the author as part of the dissertation

I. Siljamäki, E., & Kanellopoulos, P. A. 2020. Mapping visions of improvisation pedagogy in music education research. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 42(1), 113–139. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X19843003
(As included in Appendix 1)

II. Jansson, S-M., Westerlund, H. & E. Siljamäki (2016). Taide sosiaalisena oppimismuotona – opiskelijoiden kokemuksia jännittämisestä [Art as a social learning form – students' experiences of social anxiety]. *Aikuiskasvatus*, 36(1), 37-49. https://doi.org/10.33336/aik.88473
(As included in Appendix 2)

III. Siljamäki, E. (2021). Free improvisation in choral settings: An ecological perspective. *Research Studies in Music Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X20985314
(As included in Appendix 3)

Statement of contribution to the co-authored articles

I co-authored **Article 1** with Prof. Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, who is also a member of my supervision steering group. The analysis and writing process in the course of the research was open and collaborative. The division of contributorship is estimated as follows: MMus Siljamäki - 65%; Prof. Kanellopoulos - 35%. As the first author I was the main person responsible for the research project as a whole, but both authors were equally accountable for the integrity and accuracy of the work in all stages of the process.

In **Article 2**, my co-authors were Dr. Satu-Mari Jansson and Prof. Heidi Westerlund, who is also my responsible supervisor. I was responsible for the design and implementation of the arts intervention, while Dr. Jansson was the principal investigator in the research process and conducted the interviews. The research project was an open and collaborative process, wherein all writers were involved in analyzing and writing the research report from beginning to the end. The division of contributorship is estimated as follows: Dr. Jansson - 50%; Prof. Westerlund - 25%; MMus Siljamäki - 25%. All authors were equally accountable for the integrity and accuracy of all parts of the work in all stages of the process.

In **Article 3**, I was the sole author and was responsible for all parts of the work.

Additional published articles by the author relevant to the dissertation

Siljamäki, E. (2021). Improvisaatio musiikkikasvatuksessa - katsaus tutkimukseen ja tulevaisuuteen [Improvisation in music education – Perspectives for the future]. *Finnish Journal of Music Education, 24(1), 90-99.*

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Presentations by the author relevant to the dissertation

Cremades-Andreu, R., Lage-Gómez, C., MacGlone, U., Treß, J., Schunter, J., & Siljamäki, E. (2021). Improvisation in music education – a cross-border perspective (Symposium). 8th ISME European Regional Conference/EAS Conference 2021. Freiburg, Germany (online), 24.-27.3.2021.

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Siljamäki, E. (2020). Yhdessä laulaen ja improvisoiden - vuorovaikutuksen laatu hyvinvoinnin ja oppimisen ytimessä [Collaborative singing and improvisation - quality of social interaction at the core of wellbeing and learning]. Lauluntutkijoiden seminaari [Seminar for researchers of singing]. University of Helsinki, Finland (online), 9.10.2021

Siljamäki, E. (2019). Vapaa kuoroimprovisaatio – musiikillisia ja sosiaalisia taitoja oppimassa [Free choral improvisation – learning musical and social skills]. IV

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Siljamäki, E. (2016). Educational potentials of collaborative creativity and play - a case of free choral improvisation. European Association of Music in Schools (EAS), Vilnius, Lithuania. 16.-19.3.2016.

Siljamäki, E. (2015). Learning in improvisation and playful choral practices – Arts intervention for university students living with social anxiety. International Society of Improvised Music (ISIM). Chateau D'oex, Switzerland, 9.-12.7.2015.

Siljamäki, E. (2015). The interface of improvisational theatre and music in collaborative free vocal improvisation: Exploring the pedagogical implications. Reflective Conservatoire Conference (RCC). London, England, 26.2.-1.3.2015.

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accepting social anxiety – A narrative study on participant experiences]. Työelämän tutkimuspäivät [Working life conference]. Tampere, Finland, 6.-7.11.2014.

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Siljamäki, E. (2013). Negotiating practices in an improvising choir. Creating music through theatre improvisation principles. Changing Face of Music and Art education. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow (CFMAEYTT). Tallinn, Estonia, 18.-19.4.2013

List of tables and figures

Contents

1 Introduction

Current theorizing on learning typically emphasizes social aspects and cooperation. Consequently, creativity, collaboration, and communication are regarded as being in the top five 21st century skills (Binkley, et al., 2010). At the same time, coping with a constant state of flux and diversity has come to challenge everyday social practices and work. While collaboration and uncertainty could be seen as common features of present-day educational contexts, they are also features of the phenomenon explored in this inquiry – improvisation. In this dissertation I understand improvisation not only as a musical and creative practice still in the pursuit of establishing a stable place in music education, but also as a fundamentally social endeavor; just as improvisation is a social activity, so are collaboration and everyday social actions improvised (Erickson, 2011; Sawyer, 2003a). As one reacts and responds within the multimodal social interactions of everyday life, this is done not simply by following social rules but also by improvising as time unfolds. Indeed, in prior research it has been suggested that improvisation could potentially help us understand not only teaching and learning (e.g. Sawyer, 2004, 2007b, 2008, 2011) but how to respond and react to a volatile world (Sawyer, 2005b), how to adapt to complex environments, and how to enable the expression of inner "complexity through the performance of our interaction with the world" (Montuori, 2003, p. 241). Hence, I argue in this inquiry that by developing the pedagogical understanding of improvisation as it pertains to social processes and how one responds to their inherent uncertainties, music education can also develop great potential to prepare learners for not only for musical and social learning and agency, but also collaboration and creativity, as well as the immanent uncertainty of life.

In this dissertation I will assert that the full potential of improvisation and its plural affordances and interrelation with musical learning and social processes have not yet been recognized in the research and practice of music education. For instance, Sawyer (2004) has claimed that children learn best in creative and collaborative classrooms, and deeper musical understanding can be gained through collective improvisational activities (Sawyer, 2006, p. 162). However, the phenomenon of musical improvisation has been characterized by contrasting understandings related

to teaching and learning, and explorations of this topic are dispersed throughout multiple fields of research (see Johansen et al., 2019). Furthermore, the inclusion of improvisation in curricula has not self-evidently transferred to the practice of musical education. For example, in Finland, which is the context of this inquiry, musical improvisation has been included in the national curriculum for basic education for over half a century - and yet, it has not attained an established place in music education practice (Juntunen, 2011; Partti, 2016). By addressing the uncertainty of improvisation theoretically and pedagogically, the aim of this inquiry is to expand the understanding of how music educational contexts (and beyond) could contribute from early efforts to support the inner, natural creative growth and musical potential of learners of all ages towards inclusiveness and equality. However, this inquiry also aims to contribute to the effort to dispel the common assumption that virtually any participation in musical practices automatically functions as a source of positive wellbeing, a tempting belief that contradicts the possibility that not all (social) learning is necessarily "an absolute good" (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 12).

Whereas it is commonplace for music education research to focus specifically on music in teaching and learning situations, in this dissertation the interest is in a wider social ecology in which music and improvisation are important - but not the sole - constituents. In a social ecological framework (DeNora, 2013a; Small, 1998, music (more specifically improvisation), learning, and wellbeing can be seen as shaped, enabled, and alternatively undermined by their constituent interactions and relationships with people and environmental factors, as well as by prior understandings and experiences (see also Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; DeNora, 2013a). Thus, improvisation can also be viewed as social action that is guided, supported, and developed by the context towards the desirable content and the emergence of each participants' creative agency. Hence, this dissertation arose from the need to understand theoretically how the socio-ecological conditions in one's immediate environment - such as the social climate, interaction with peers and/or teachers, and the overall surroundings - or the participants' prior experiences and feelings provoked through them, can affect one's learning, improvisation, and wellbeing. By adopting a socio-ecological framework, this inquiry is in line with

recent efforts in educational research and learning sciences that have approached the interrelation between pedagogical approaches, learning, and wellbeing with a view on the contextual, spatial, emotional, and situational dimensions and effects on learning (e.g. Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Barnett & Jackson, 2020; Lerner, Geldhof & Bowers, 2019; Osher et al., 2020; Soini, Pyhältö & Pietarinen, 2010; Talvio et al., 2013; Tynjälä et.al., 2019). The aim of this dissertation is to understand how musical learning environments can be constructed that, firstly, support the experience of safety, participation, and capabilities in encountering the inherent uncertainty of improvisation, and secondly, provide each learner with the possibility and capacity to perceive their potential avenues of conduct as social, creative, and improvisational agents of their own future, wellbeing, and learning within their social ecology. Thereby, this dissertation highlights the importance of social practices, interaction among participants, and the complexity of social systems in improvisation (Sawyer, 2005b; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009), as well as music teaching and learning at large.

Taking a socio-ecological approach, I will investigate the phenomenon of improvisation within the conceptualizations of scholarly music education research and in the musicking (Small, 1998) practices of two choirs, each explored in separate sub-studies. The two choirs applied a social and creative mindset deriving from improvisational theatre (Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015; Johnstone, 1981, 1999); one of the choirs is an arts intervention choir, "the Beat", and the other an improvisation choir, "the IC51". Considering my subjective position as an insider in these two empirical 'choir cases' and their research contexts, the process of inquiry has been one of "reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationships of research and practice, analysis and action, inquiry and experience, theorizing and doing" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2007, p. 31). By taking an instrumental approach in this inquiry, I will first explore the three sub-studies separately and then jointly (Stake, 2005, p. 446), which allows me to reach beyond the individual sub-studies and empirical cases to theorize about broader music education and improvisation contexts, as well as social and collaborative learning and teaching in general. I will begin by presenting how my own journey in and experiences of improvisation have shaped my understanding of the phenomenon and the inquiry process.

1.1 The researcher as an improviser, and research as improvisation

As Liora Bresler (2013) writes, "[t]he very engagement with qualitative research… parallels the engagement with the arts with their focus on presence, intensified perception, interpretation and understanding" (p. 61). For me, this research process has been one of improvisation with an active way of living, dealing with the uncertainties and complexities of the research process (Bresler, 2013; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2010). Although today I define myself as an improviser, this has not always been the case. My musical journey began with piano lessons when I was 7 years old, and was expanded to include classical singing when I was 15. By the time I was 17, I was singing solos in musicals and played Schumann beautifully in the exams for the music teacher education program at the Sibelius Academy in Finland. At the same time, I had come to the point where I did not think of myself as creative, and often felt "I was completely unable to improvise: 'locked'", as I wrote in my master's thesis (Siljamäki, 2002). Although I am quite confident that my teachers have introduced me to creative and improvisational tasks during my musical education, I have almost no recollection of creating music, composing, or improvising during my youth; in the light of current research, this situation was not unique (see Juntunen, 2011). With this background, I began my journey into what I now would call rehabilitating my creative and improvisational agency. Since this journey has been strongly tied to the practices and mindset of improvisational theatre, this field as an applied art has become a major component of this process of inquiry as well.

1.1.1 My journey into improvisational creativity

I began to explore the world of improvisational creativity as a freshman in the 5.5-year music education program at the Sibelius Academy. In a compulsory course called "Holistic expression" I was led into embracing an improvisational theatre mindset (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015) by two actors. Instead of the ordinary one-to-one instrumental lessons, our group of young music education teacher students

began to learn the basics of improvisational theatre.[1] We always started the class with standing in a circle and collaborative games, which included cheering, laughter, and movement. Although we had music-and-movement as a mandatory class as well, this was different. We were using our bodies in a different way, exercising spontaneous reacting, responding, and acting, as well as trying to understand how our own and others' actions were interrelated with our own actions while making up scenes with imagined relations and places. We also improvised pieces of music in many musical styles, creating improvised parts and lyrics while one of us was accompanied by the piano. I felt a sense of pleasure, release and bafflement after these sessions - especially when I was able to overcome or dismiss the self-criticism in my own mind, be present and spontaneous with the others, and not focus on my own doing. However, after years of one-to-one instrumental lessons and following sheet music this sudden jump into a world of embodied expression and creativity was somewhat anxiety-laden. I was unsure of what I was expected to do and how, and was constantly thinking to myself: "Am I doing this the right way? Is this how I'm supposed to be, and, what's the point?" Yet, through repeated practice and particularly through improvised singing, I noticed that my level of comfort was increasing. Although the issues of combativeness and discomfort were never wholly overcome within our group, I noticed myself feeling joy not just in my own actions but also those of others, as well as our collaborative accomplishments, as I was learning to support my partners in improvisation.

My initiation into music education studies and repeated exposure to the improvisational theatre mindset not only developed my confidence and skills as an improviser and an improvisational singer, but also expanded my musical horizons. I wanted to learn more, and consequently changed my main instrument from

1 This approach to improvisational theatre by Keith Johnstone (1981, 1999) was introduced to the Finnish theatre scene in the 90's by Stella Polaris, a seminal improvisational theatre group in Helsinki. The actors have been involved in developing courses for musicians at the Sibelius Academy since 1994, and in 2002 *Creative Musicianship Skills* was integrated into the Sibelius Academy higher education curriculum (Joukamo-Ampuja, 2010).

classical piano to singing in popular music and jazz styles,[2] and complemented my music education studies with courses at the University of Applied Sciences in the Popular Music Pedagogy program. In the meantime, repeated exposure to more sessions and courses on improvised theatre and music at the Sibelius Academy finally led to the forming of an improvisation group with my fellow students, and to studying expression and improvisational theatre under the supervision of different professionals in theatre and music. In my master's thesis I wanted to explore how and if other music education students had experienced lockdown moments or discomfort in improvisation, and how they described the factors that were influential in their own processes. I found a strong link between the surrounding social environment, school, and prior experiences of music and creativity. Peer-pressure and adjusting to school life had a strong influence on the participants' loss of playing and creativity when they were of school age, while in their experience music in educational contexts had been more-or-less focused on technical matters and achievements (Siljamäki, 2002).

After graduating in 2003 (Master of Music) improvisation was an important tool in my professional work. I continued my improvisation journey as a freelance singer in an improvisational band that focused solely on improvised popular music, and performed occasionally. In this band I felt that I was free to move and express myself, to use my voice with a range of dynamics, and to combine my experience and knowledge of music for the making of music on-the-spot in collaboration with the other musicians. Meanwhile, my main work consisted of conducting choirs, arranging choral music, and performing as a freelance singer – all of this in the style of nonclassical music. I often noticed that I would draw on the knowledge I had embodied through improvisational theatre to enhance my stage presence as a performer, and to guide my reactions and responses to other professional musicians in our musical collaborations, as well as during moments of sudden change in pre-made plans such as when lyrics were forgotten. In my work with the choirs, I also

2 Drawing on Mesiä (2019), popular music and jazz is used as an overarching term for "all musical styles and their subdivisions under the rubric popular music, such as pop, rock, rhythm & blues, hip hop, dance, and all styles of jazz" (p. 12), also known as contemporary commercial music, rhythmic music, popular culture musics, light music, popular music, or Afro-American music (p. 10-12).

applied improvisation in the teaching of music theory and for enhancing general social cohesion. Still, I often felt I needed to justify and explain the use of improvisation to my choral singers, as well as the reasons why the interaction between singers was important in music, and I found myself lacking in arguments. Since my exposure to improvisational theatre had supported the development of my own improvisational and creative agency, I was increasingly interested in finding out more about how the processes of improvisation could be applied to support everyone's innate creativity from early in their own journeys, not only in specifically improvisational settings but in the context of music education in general. This question, and my keen interest in learning more about this phenomenon, led me to apply to the doctoral program and to the development of this inquiry.

1.1.2 Applying improvisation in a wellbeing context

The prime movers of this process of inquiry have not been limited to improvisation activities - they have also included many coincidences. Quite early in my music education doctoral studies, I was invited by my supervisor to participate in a meeting with the Finnish Student Health Services (FSHS). The FSHS had a history of offering a variety of treatments for social anxiety such as individual or group psychotherapy, medication, advice on self-care, and online therapy. However, motivated by the recent reports on the positive health and wellbeing effects of choral singing (e.g. Williams, Dinge & Clift, 2018), the FSHS was interested in collaboration with the University of the Arts Helsinki in the context of higher education students' wellbeing. I was open to developing new practices, and when I brought in my experience and understanding of how an improvisational theatre mindset (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015) can be used to develop interaction skills, we collaboratively came up with the idea of offering an arts intervention in the form of a choral course with improvisation for students who needed help with social anxiety and fear of social situations. I discovered that social anxiety touches the lives of over 12% of the overall general population (see Henderson & Zimbardo, 2010). Thus, it is clear that social anxiety is a very common problem that can cause a severe decline in quality of life, as one lives with concerns related to interaction and the fear of being negatively

evaluated. Furthermore, due to the fear of stigmatization it is often a concealed or hidden condition (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2010).

In collaboration with a psychologist and physiotherapist of the FSHS we developed and led a choral course in which the students' formation of social relations, as well as learning of social interactions skills and tools for coping with social anxiety, were supported and developed in the framework of a choir and choral singing. In our trans-professional collaboration (Hulme, Cracknell & Owens, 2009) we shared our knowledge and professional practices with each other, which meant that when I was alone with the choir we not only made music, improvised, and learned social skills, but also discussed experiences of social anxiety and coping with it in relation to the musical practices. As a choral conductor, I gained a hands-on experience of how difficulties in social processes and living with social anxiety can inhibit the expression of emotions and social behavior, and indeed have significant consequences in life such as prolonged or interrupted university studies. During the intervention, my professional identity was expanded as I was able to apply my knowledge of improvisational theatre, interaction skills, and choral conducting at this interface of wellbeing and art. I felt that I was able to better extend my focus on both the collective and individual levels, to include the group as a whole as well as the individual needs of the singers. As participation was not compulsory, I was able to provide the participants with freedom of choice and suggest alternatives, and help the participants in finding motivation within themselves. With the help of an improvisational theatre mindset, I directed the singers' attention to seeking power from each other and within themselves, to noticing the power of eye contact, and to collaboratively taking everybody in without leaving anyone behind.

The change in the participants' approach to social anxiety during the intervention and the way they excelled at performing in a final concert organized at the end of the course inspired me and my colleagues to conduct an interview study on their experiences. This intervention was not initially planned to be part of my dissertation, but was chosen due to the significance of the substantially positive results of the intervention. Consequently, this arts intervention choir project, referred to in this synthesizing text as Beat, became the first choir case and second sub-study in my

doctoral inquiry; due to its unique circumstances, it only includes post-intervention interviews made by another researcher who was not part of the choir project. Furthermore, this study became one of the sub-studies in the ArtsEqual initiative, in which arts and healthcare were put in dialogue.

1.1.3 In our collaborative vocal playground

My keen interest in improvisation and choral conducting led me to join a new improvisation choir at the beginning of my doctoral studies. This choir was initiated and led by a musician and theatre improviser who had also worked as a choral conductor. The participants consisted of singers with all kinds of backgrounds in music and/or theatre, which I found intriguing and different from my earlier experiences with choirs. In this choir, collaborative singing practices were developed under the guidance of the artistic director by employing what I have called an *improvisational theatre mindset* (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015) with freely improvised vocal music. This meant that the musical landscape and material in the choir included all kinds of sounds and ways of sounding that could be described as experimental or *avant garde*. We were playing collaboratively with and in music, exploring the world of musical sounds and choral singing with an improvisational theatre mindset, which channeled the focus towards each other and onto the social process of music making. Through this experimental practice, I noticed how my musical horizons and my vocal range were expanding. I felt my creative agency was also gaining new ground, as the music we made expanded the rules and structures of my prior musical landscape. As a member of the choir, I was able to explore the role of a choral singer as the two roads of choir conducting and improvised theatre were merging in this practice in a way unprecedented to me. By this time, I began to generate empirical material for my doctoral inquiry as an insider in this group. But soon, as has been the case with many free improvisation groups, this choir was dismantled. Still, I owe this first choir, its artistic director, and each individual member my gratitude for the eye- and ear-opening introduction into the world of free choral improvisation.

With the desire to continue developing improvisation choir practices, a small group of singers from the first choir, myself included, founded a new group, IC51,

which also performed at the final concert of the arts intervention choir Beat. IC51 organized sessions irregularly and opened its doors to any interested parties. We took turns facilitating the sessions as we reminisced about some of the practices from the first improvisation choir, and collaboratively developed new practices by negotiating, experimenting, and repeating. This was different from the first group, as we were now equal members without a responsible director. As a collaboratively-led choir, we negotiated all decisions and collaboratively upheld the spirit of non-authoritarian work. We found ourselves gaining joy, pleasure, and liberation in the deviation from norms, as if it was our collaborative playground where we could include all kinds of sound and ways of using the voice, the body and the space we were in, moving and playing. In these sessions our connection with each other was strong, and I noticed how my skills and mediums for making, facilitating, and approaching music were expanding while experiencing joyfulness and pleasure. At this time, I asked for permission from the members to start generating empirical material for my doctoral dissertation as an insider in this group, which led to it becoming the second choir case and third sub-study of this dissertation.

1.2 The two choir cases

By employing an instrumental multi-case study design (Stake, 2005), the goal of this inquiry "is not to represent the world, but to represent" the three sub-studies as 'cases' (p. 460) in order to facilitate our understanding of the shared phenomenon of collaborative improvisation. Here I will present the two empirical choir cases and how their musical practices were transformed when an improvisational theatre mindset was placed at the center of their practices. Although one could assume that applying improvisational theatre methods would mean performing role-play or improvised scenes, in the two choir cases even the contextual features of dramatic performances were effaced in such a way that the approach resembled a mindset or an attitude for how the social processes and musical creation and engagement was approached. In this inquiry, I define a choir as a group of people that come together for the purpose of singing together collaboratively. Hence, choral singing is understood as "cooperating to produce something that none of them could produce

by themselves" (Brewer & Garnett, 2012, p. 259). This definition comes close to an ensemble (Jansson & Balsnes, 2020), but the noun choir was chosen as representing the approaches to singing taken in the two choir cases, and was also defined as such by the singers themselves.

I will next present the contextual details of the two choir cases according to my insider (Greene, 2014) view. The first choir case in this dissertation is the Beat (a project choir active in 2013-2014), which was formed as an arts intervention project at the interface of arts and wellbeing, as will be presented in Chapter 1.2.2. The second choir case is an improvising choir performing without composed scores or conductor, IC51 (active in 2014-2017), as will be presented in Chapter 1.2.3. The members of both choirs were adults with mixed skill-levels in music and/or choral singing. An overview of the choirs is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 An overview of the two choir cases: the Beat and IC51

	BEAT - Arts intervention choir	**IC51 - Improvisation choir**
Sessions	Weekly sessions during a period of 8 months	Irregular meetings 1 to 3 times a month, a continuing practice
Singers	14 higher education students at later stages of their studies and with mixed backgrounds in music from none to semi-professional	12 active (out of 20) adults with mixed backgrounds in music and/or theatre from none to professionals
Singer selection	Selected by the psychologist on the basis of motivation and need of help in coping with social anxiety	No singing auditions, but level of commitment evaluated in 1 to 2 sessions before inclusion in the group
Leaders	Trans-professional collaboration between music pedagogue/choral conductor, psychologist, and physiotherapist	Collaboratively-led, no artistic director nor a conductor, participants taking turns in facilitating exercises, sessions and performances
Performance	One (1) public performance as a choir with three other choirs or vocal groups, singing rehearsed songs and improvising	Several public performances of free improvisation as an ensemble, flexible and open configuration with movement
Repertoire	Re-creating pieces of popular music, in 1 to 5 parts, improvisation and free improvisation, music learned by ear, movement and expression included	Solely free improvisation, creating pieces of music free of or in any style, mostly in multiple parts, but also solos, duets etc., free movement can be included
Approach to vocal instrument	Guidance offered in developing vocal production, diction and interpretation, breathing and posture, blend, rhythmic precision, as well as extending the voice to unconventional sounds and movement	All kinds of sounds and ways of using the voice, speech and movement, individual sounds embraced, blending and precision not obliged
Conducting and configuration	Flexible choir configuration; conducting ranged from using expressive gestures and beat patterns to the conductor being blended into the group, as well as both unconducted and conducted improvisation	No conducting cues for musical improvisation, expression or performing, open to all kinds of configurations, often in a circle or half-circle
Approach of practices	Exercises on embodied social interaction and performance with and without singing, physical and vocal warm-ups, relaxation, collaborative discussions and management of social anxiety, as well as debriefing	Exercises on embodied social interaction and performance, physical warm-ups, collaborative discussions and decision making, debriefing

1.2.1 Context - improvisation in choral singing

Choir singing is a widespread musical activity involving a number of musical genres and types of choirs (Jansson & Balsnes, 2020), and has been increasingly researched in the context of wellbeing and health (Clift et al. 2010). The conductor's tasks in a choir can be manifold, but in relation to the music it could be comprehended on a continuum. On one end is "the non-singing designated leader" (p. 13) where "the choir is cast in the role of the conductor's "instrument," to be acted upon by the musical will of the conductor" (Brewer & Garnett, 2012, p. 263). On the other end could be the conductor as a facilitator of music or as a co-singer (Jansson & Balsnes, 2020, p. 13). A choral conductor could be seen as shifting her position between these two poles. Furthermore, the choral conductor can also find new positions in relation to the choral singers, since the basic education or starting platform of a conductor can vary greatly, and many choirs have no conductors at all (Jansson & Balsnes, 2020). In the case of Beat, I define myself as the conductor of the choir, but my task was integrated with the tasks of a music pedagogue as well as a facilitator of interaction skills and improvisation. In the case of IC51, no single member took the role of a designated choral conductor; hence, I was an equal member in this choir. The two choirs could be defined as choral ensembles, but a choice was made in this inquiry to refer to the two groups as choirs and the practice as choral singing.

Musical improvisation, in general, has not yet gained an established place in the choral context, but it has been employed in warm up's (Farrell, 2016; Freer, 2010) or in short-term experimental projects (Yun & Willingham, 2014). Linked to the rise of free jazz vocalists' communal projects from the 1970s onwards (Tonelli, 2020), an improvisation choir movement emerged, however such practices have not yet entered into educational contexts in general. In this way this study continues the work of Tonelli (2020) in expanding understandings of choral improvisation, which has previously been defined by Freer (2010) as "individually vocal, often demonstrated as a solo or occasionally as a loosely structured heterophony of multiple singers" (p. 21). Instead, choral improvisation could be seen as embracing "any kind of vocal sound" a participant chooses to employ in a choir (Tonelli, 2020, p. 141).

In Finland, the context of this inquiry, improvisation has not yet found an established place in choral conductor training. However, progress can be seen in the newly founded Global Music Department of the University of the Arts Helsinki, which is now providing courses on choral improvisation and Global choir leadership. Also, the creation of popular music programs in choral conducting, particularly in Denmark, has introduced new methods and practices of improvisation. This is in line with Freer's (2010) and Farrell's (2016) concerns about how the use of improvisatory approaches can either be inhibited or enabled by the chosen repertoire and aesthetic goals of the chosen style of music, and hence the suggestion of including popular and global music in choir repertoires. In a similar way as the conductors' task is represented as a shifting position, so can the conductor in improvisation vary from pursuing equal participation to employing conducting cues, such as the recently developed practice of vocal painting with its roots in sound painting (Hjernøe, n.d.; see also Coskuner, 2016). Improvisation in the Beat was explored both individually and collaboratively, and ranged widely from limited structures to free improvisation. In IC51, improvisation was only 'free' in the sense that it could include or exclude any style or genre of music as well as including sounds, linguistic fragments, movement, and singing in any kind of way.

1.2.2 Choir case I: The Beat

As already mentioned, the first choir case is an arts intervention choir project[3] with the name of Beat, organized in collaboration between the University of the Arts Helsinki and the Finnish Student Health Services (FSHS) for higher education students living with social anxiety. The goal was to dispense concrete tools and techniques for coping with social anxiety[4] and fear of social situations that, according to Almonkari and Kunttu (2012), are not only experienced in academic performance situations, such as presentations and seminars, but extend to all social life as well. Together with this trans-professional team we developed and executed an 8 months long choir project in

3 The original name of the project was 'Kuorolaulu kouraan' [Grapple Choral Singing]

4 According to the Finnish Student Health Survey (Kunttu, Pesonen & Saari, 2017) social anxiety is experienced as a mild problem among 36% of male and 39% of female higher education students, and as a big problem among 11% of male and 17% of female higher education students.

2013-2014 for 14 university students from diverse disciplines and study subjects, with diverse backgrounds and mixed abilities in music. Prior experience in singing was not required from the participants, and the students were chosen for the intervention based on their motivation and diagnosed level of social anxiety. In weekly choir sessions, the students convened with one to three facilitators for 2 hours of vocal training, choral singing, collaborative and individual improvisation, games and exercises on social interaction, peer support, and education on coping with anxiety and relaxation. In the middle of the project, a goal was set with the participants to organize a performance at the end of the project. It was considered both a goal and a valuable means for developing the participants' skills in coping with social and performance anxiety. This meant that all the preparations for the concert were done with the goal of not only performing, but also developing the participants' attitudes towards performing and coping with possible anxiety related to it. In the end, the choir performed with three other vocal groups at the Helsinki Music Center under their self-selected name, the Beat. A week after the performance the group gathered for the last session of the project, where the experiences of the performance and of the intervention project as a whole were discussed and feedback was collected from the participating university students.

Throughout the project, the trans-professional collaboration of the instructors was intensive and included peer-mentoring. At the beginning of the intervention project each facilitator provided input from their own field of expertise, but as soon as the project started responsibilities were shared and exchanged among each other. The main responsibilities were as follows:

- psychologist - educating on issues related to anxiety and facilitating discussions.
- physiotherapist - relaxation, tensions in the body, and breathing.
- music pedagogue - artistic processes, as in planning, arranging, teaching, and conducting the music, as well as facilitating the learning of social interaction skills through improvisation exercises, choral singing, and reflective discussions.

Professional guidance was ensured at all stages of the intervention, particularly when I was alone with the group in one-third of the sessions. When present, all instructors

took part in the activities, extending our familiar practices into new areas, such as the physiotherapist singing with the students and myself facilitating the discussions on experiences of social anxiety and exercises on relaxation. Furthermore, this approach allowed the students to see the facilitators as vulnerable, and with our own statuses lowered from being an expert in our field to being a learning participant.

With myself as the main facilitator of the project, the overall pedagogical approach leaned heavily on developing and upholding an improvisational attitude and mindset. This aligned with the special focus throughout the course being on creating an environment that supports overcoming fear of mistakes and failure. A basic tenet or mindset we wanted to share with the participants was that mistakes are ephemeral, and happen to all of us, and can act as opportunities for something new and positive. In practice this meant that space was given for focusing on transforming mistakes into celebrated accounts, developing an understanding of the impacts of bodily posture and status changes in encountering and communicating, both in music and social situations, as well as becoming aware of our own reactions, impulses, and presence. The focus was on upholding (but not forcing) the "good feel" and team spirit along with the practicing of the music. Thus, my comments mostly focused on the social and musical process, such as presence, engagement, and a possible sense of belonging, which I saw as transferring to the quality of the music. In this way, my role as the choral conductor expanded to facilitating interaction and coping with social anxiety, as well as to finding new ways to uphold and develop music-making through those processes.

Each choir session was planned to support the social coherence and social space in the choir by including social activities related to choral practices, such as the singers organizing the furniture in the practice room before and after each session, an intermission with snacks, and a full-day session with the other three vocal groups preparing and rehearsing for the collaborative performance. The space, which was at the beginning of the course in the facilities of the FSHS and later on moved to the University of the Arts Helsinki, was a large room with enough space for movement and to place all of the chairs in a circular pattern, the most often-used configuration for both discussions and musicking. In all of the sessions, including the full-day

session with the other vocal groups, reflective pairs and whole-group-discussions for sharing feelings and thoughts were interlocked with functional exercises and musicking.

In addition to the musical and social processes in the choral practices, other events and issues, such as the media's interest in the project and the upcoming performance, were employed as material for the exercises and discussions from the perspective of the students' experiences, anxiety, and coping, as well as social skills training. Each step towards the concert was prepared with the students so that they were fully aware of the process and able to train their skills in coping with possible anxieties. This included familiarizing the students with the concert hall in time, talking through the activities of the performance day, and discussing how to mentally and physically prepare oneself. Throughout the intervention simple acts that could have an impact on the singers' participation were considered, such as: making latecomers feel welcomed; making sure everyone's voices were heard in the discussions by giving room for those less talkative and opportunities for discussions, first in pairs and then sharing with the group; and, keeping all singing as collaborative as possible, avoiding individualized evaluation. Furthermore, all facilitators placed themselves equally under the risk of failure in the exercises and improvisations, and also shared their own experiences of uncertainty and social anxiety during the sessions.

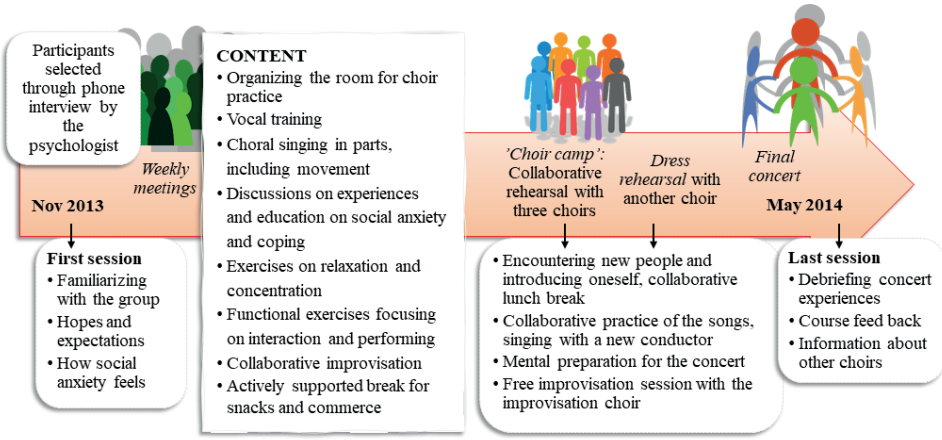
Since I was responsible for the overall artistic process, I planned and arranged all of the musical material and vocal warm-ups to fit the needs of the choir. In every session, the focus of attention in voice production and singing was first guided towards the individual's voice and body, with the goal of feeling secure or safe in one's own body and space. Then the attention was opened up towards collaboration, such as supporting each other musically, listening, blending, or physical movement, with the goal of crossing one's own boundaries. The music included easy to learn canons as well as familiar and unfamiliar *a cappella* pieces of popular music, both in Finnish and English and arranged into 1 to 5 parts. All pieces and parts were learned by ear, and often included rhythmic feel and feasible, collaborative movement. Musical improvisation was incorporated into every stage of musical and social learning in

order to allow playing with the musical material, the social space, and the voice, both collaboratively and individually. Improvisation ranged from freely chosen tones and ambitus in voice warm-ups, simple structured patterns, and conducted group improvisation with speech and sounds, to individual and collaborative free improvisation and sound exploration. By both conspicuously and imperceptibly incorporating improvisation and an improvisational mindset into the practices and gradually diminishing the role of the facilitator to trend towards collaborative free improvisation, by the end all of the students were able to participate. The focus in all of the choral singing was on co-operationality, which was supported by the chosen repertoire and by taking the role of a co-singer and supporter for the conductor.

Throughout the eight-month intervention, the process included an awareness of being exposed and challenged to take risks, however without being faced with too high of a risk of humiliation or embarrassment that could prevent participation. Many of the exercises and playful games were derived from improvisational theatre, and some were applied to and developed with musical elements, such as passing on a message around a circle of people in a fluent chain of quick reactions. At first the message could be a clap, and was then altered to sounds, and further on to vocal tones from short to long, and then expanded to allow chords. In the process of facilitating an exercise, participants could be guided to focus on different issues in the social process, such as how their own participation is upheld, how physical status or bodily posture and bearing can generate diverse interpretations and influence their own and others participation, how to progress taking more risks and coming closer to allowing oneself to make mistakes. Another important element was giving the students the opportunity to withdraw from the exercises and the performance, even at the last minute, if they so wished. Two participants decided early on not to perform in the final concert, while the others met on the stage. Since performing is a chance to train those skills required in social situations, preparing for the performance became an elementary part of the practices for approaching negative emotions and the anxiety related to it, and for developing coping skills. Therefore, the upcoming performance was repeatedly raised in discussions and exercises, and particular care was placed on preparation for the performance by designing the most supportive activities for

the students' processes and level of anxiety. In the end, an overarching frame for the trans-professional collaboration of the facilitators and the pedagogical approach to the practices under development was collaborative improvisation, which was shared with the students as the project progressed. Figure 1 illustrates the chronological progression of the intervention and the content of the weekly sessions.

Figure 1 Chronological progression and content of the arts intervention



The choir performed in the finishing concert, titled "Let's sing and goof together", organized in a fashion that aimed at a relaxed atmosphere. The gap between the performers and the audience was bridged with participatory actions such as including the audience in the singing, creating soundscapes and body percussion, and by singing some of the songs in the midst of the audience. The three other vocal groups included one traditional choir and two improvisation groups, the IC51 improvisation choir and a musical playback theatre[5] group, which engaged the audience in their solely improvised and unconducted performances. Although the final concert was also intruded upon by the presence of a television production group and cameras in addition to the audience, these above-mentioned precautions, among others, were made with the aspiration of transforming the traditionally anxiety- and tension-

5 Playback theatre is a form of performative improvised drama in which the audience is engaged to tell stories that are then enacted, offering individual audience members "the chance to rescript personal experience" (Frost & Yarrow, 2007, p. 115).

laden performance situation into a more comfortable setting, with mutual trust between the singers, the conductors, and the audience, as all of these positions were expanded upon from their familiar roles.

1.2.3 Choir case II: The IC51

The second choir case is an improvisation choir, the IC51, a collaboratively-led community of enthusiasts in improvisation of which I was a member. The singers were a versatile assembly of mixed-abilities and skills in both music and theatre, with prior experience in improvising and music-making outside school contexts ranging from none to amateurs and professionals. The IC51 practiced and performed only freely improvised vocal music as a choir, but without a conductor. As explained earlier, we collaboratively developed and practiced by applying an improvisational framework and mindset from improvisational theatre[6] in free improvisation. This means that the practices did not include theatrical scenes per se, but the improvisational attitude and holistic view of one's own presence combined with all kinds of sounds and ways of singing, as well as bodily movement and improvised lyrics or texts. Hence, an embodied improvisational mindset (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015) was a tool for keeping the focus on the collaborative and social process.

The IC51 convened for improvisation sessions 1-3 times a month during its active existence in 2014-2017. Approximately 4-12 members participated in each session, with possibly one or two members taking responsibility for introducing ideas for new techniques or testing and developing prior ones. The group also offered open-access workshops for other enthusiasts and more traditional choirs for a commission, and performed in different locations such as art festivals and in the final concert of the arts intervention project (see Chapter 1.2.2) free of charge. All activities were facilitated by members of the choir on a volunteer basis, hence the irregularity of the sessions. Without a permanent location, sessions were held in free-of-charge spaces, such as in university gymnasiums or office spaces after working hours. While developing a performance, the number of sessions increased as the group prepared themselves by

6 This was a legacy from one of the first improvisation choirs in Finland, as explained in Chapter 1.2.3.

choosing appropriate techniques for the improvisations. A technique could include seemingly simple rules, such as 'follow everything', which could mean focusing for instance on reacting to the first impulse and building upon that. In a technique like this the number of impulses could be overwhelming, since the whole body, expressions, sounds, and interpretations intertwine on many levels of interaction. The complexity of these situations could allow one to make undeliberated moves and decisions as well as get involved in the moment.

In the IC51 the voice could be used in a variety of ways, and singing could range from bel canto or belting to all kinds of sounds or non-vocal elements (see Tonelli, 2015 & 2020, on *soundsinging*). The use of space, or the choir configuration, included the possibility of moving freely in the space, changing places, sitting or standing. Oftentimes the ensemble improvised in a circular formation, which enabled eye contact and co-operation when improvising, while choral blending or conduction cues were not employed. Operating without a nominated leader, collaborative discussions and improvising itself were an important tool for developing the practices. During these sessions, discussions were intertwined with improvising and could focus on issues such as how listening, visual contact, or the emotional qualities of the practices were experienced, what felt good or not, and why. The discussions focused on the quality of personal experience and how each piece was felt, or what was easy or difficult (the practices and processes of improvisation in the IC51 are elaborated in detail in the third sub-study, see Appendix 3).

1.3 Previous studies on music improvisation

In this inquiry, improvisation is seen as a feature of performing music regardless of musical style or genre. Still, as Bailey (1993) summarized already in the 1990s, "improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being the most widely practiced of musical activities, and the least acknowledged and understood" (p. ix). Although a commonly agreed-upon definition for musical improvisation is still missing (MacDonald, Wilson & Miell, 2012), improvisation has been recognized as being "distinct from other areas of musical activity" (MacDonald & Wilson, 2014, p. 1). Musical improvisation has been studied for the further understanding of the

processes of creativity and learning (Sawyer, 2003b; 2004; 2008), and research on improvisation is also a growing area of interest beyond music and music education. Many other disciplines outside the music field have not only studied musical improvisation as a process, tool, or medium, but also as a metaphor for teaching (Sawyer, 2011) and leadership (e.g. Furu, 2013).

Since studies on vocal improvisation in music education are scarce (see Siljamäki, in print), here I will draw on the wider literature on improvisation in order to map the collaborative, vocal, and pedagogical aspects, with the lens particularly on free improvisation. While aware that in the case of Beat, improvisation was employed in a wide range of practices, the most employed in the two choir cases was related to free improvisation, since it was the only practice of the IC51 and was also featured in my pedagogical approach with the Beat. I will begin with a historical consideration and socio-musical perspectives in Chapters 1.3.1-1.3.2 and then turn to the egalitarian and democratic aspects of free improvisation in Chapter 1.3.3. Musical improvisation in education is then reviewed from the perspective of curricula and pedagogical approaches in Chapters 1.3.4-1.3.5. In Chapter 1.4 I will address improvisation and its applications in theatre and drama, as well as the formation of an improvisational theatre mindset and its pedagogical considerations. In this way, a holistic view of the phenomenon is composed with knowledge from multiple fields of research, which aligns with the ecological framework adopted in this inquiry.

1.3.1 Historical perspectives on free musical and vocal improvisation

Free musical improvisation, often referred to simply as *free improvisation*, is a practice that has emerged in the late 20th century. At that time musicians with diverse backgrounds began to explore "performance practices that relied less on preconceived musical models and explicitly defined ensemble roles" (Borgo, 2002, p. 166). This approach has been defined as connected to a change "in the way musicians thought about the music" (Schroeder, 2019, p. 5). Free improvisation is frequently referred to as a musical practice that attempts to avoid references to musical genres and idioms (e.g. Bailey, 1993, p. xi), but free improvisation has also included performing with

instrumental virtuosity and techniques that extend the capacities of the instrument (Borgo, 2002, p. 169, 174, 182). The historical roots of free improvisation derive from the contemporary musical practices of experimental composers, free jazz, and classical music (Rose & MacDonald, 2015). Improviser and scholar George Lewis (1996) has conceptualized free improvisation as divided into two strands: 1) the Afrological perspective, giving priority to interaction and personal sound while posing questions of personal and cultural identity, and 2) the Eurological perspective, grounded in hierarchies derived from Western classical music tradition. Still, according to Bailey (1993), free improvisation professionals of that time shared the general desire to "escape from the rigidity and formalism of their respective musical backgrounds" (p. 84). The notion of freedom, referring to the understanding of 'free' improvisation, is also related to the political roots of the time with its egalitarian pursuits (Rose, 2012 as cited in MacGlone, 2020, p. 23). Lewis (2007) has thus characterized the practice of free improvisation as blurring "the boundaries between improvisation as performance, as critical musical inquiry, and as political and social activism, all in the course of researching new sounds and modes of communication" (p. 1).

Free improvisation with the voice,[7] in particular, has also developed since the late 20th century (Tonelli, 2020), but research in this area is scarce. The pioneering free improvisation vocalists were mostly women who also incorporated approaches from other fields of art, such as embodying theatrical roles during musical improvisations (p. 33-36). Interestingly, the vocalists experienced increasing resistance from the free improvisation communities due to a conflict with the ideology of musical modernism, the "absolute music" (Tonelli, 2020, p. 33). A notable characteristic of free improvisation with the voice was an advocacy of finding meaning through and in vocal sounds that could be described as worthless or even dangerous (p. 3). Hence, an endeavor to rehabilitate unconventional sounds that are seen as purposeless became "an ethical necessity" (p. 1) to some improvisers, to make "marginalised sounds, voices, and people heard" (p. 3). These approaches can be seen to come close to what today is called community music, where improvisation is said to be

7 Also referred to as soundsinging, free jazz, and free jazz soundsinging (Tonelli, 2020).

significant and is sometimes even a core practice of dedicated community musicians (McKay & Higham, 2012, p. 96).

The rise of improvisation choirs in both conducted and unconducted forms can be traced back to the 1970s, with a mix of professional and non-professional singers improvising together in "inclusive spaces" (Tonelli, 2020, p. 140-141) at the time of the free improvisation movement. Without excluding the possibility of negative experiences in improvisation, the choral improvisation gatherings aimed at, as Tonelli (2015) writes, "a safe space to explore the voice both for those who consider themselves 'singers' and for those who do not yet see themselves as such." (p. 1). Research on free choral improvisation is also scarce, as it has remained a marginal practice primarily situated outside the dominant choral culture (Freer, 2010; Tonelli, 2020), although there are many improvising choirs all over the world (Tonelli, 2020, p. 149) - including in Finland, the context of this inquiry. The few examples of research on *free choir improvisation* state that the hierarchical positions of conductors and choral singers are shifted into a more balanced mode, resulting in a sense of empowerment and agency for the singers (Tonelli, 2015; Ferret, 2014; see also Farrell, 2018). Still, further probing on the choral singers' experiences of free improvisation is needed.

1.3.2 Sociomusical perspectives on improvisation

Improvisation has been theorized as being essentially social or collaborative (Wilson & MacDonald, 2015). Learning theorist Keith Sawyer's (1999; 2000; 2003a; 2003b; 2007a; 2008) extensive research on jazz musicians and improvisational theatre actors has paved the way for further studies on the role of collaboration and interaction in the emergence of creativity in improvisation. On the one hand, Sawyer (2003a, p. 5) found that collaborative improvisation builds on complex communication and the emergence of group creativity, and on the other that collaboration, process, unpredictability, and emergence are key characteristics of musical communication (Sawyer, 2005a, p. 48). Sawyer's research was focused on improvisation in the idiom of jazz, while the most recent research in music psychology has been extended to include free improvisation (Linson & Clarke, 2017). Utilizing an ecological

theory, Linson and Clarke (2017) found free improvisation a collective process of "listening-while-performing" (p. 57). In their study, Linson and Clarke frame improvisation conceptually as ecological interdependence "between perception, action and the socially elaborated musical context" (p. 57). Linson and Clarke's distributed and cognitive model of creativity moves away from seeing improvisation as a conversational act, which has often been the focus in studies on improvisation (see also Sawyer, 2003a; 2003b). Moreover, they extended general theories of perception, cognition, and action as well as bringing forth the value of individuality in collective processes, as "each improvising player may have their own distinct understanding of the given situation rather than viewing it in the same way" (Linson & Clarke, 2017 p. 64).

Wilson and MacDonald (2017) present a model of the process of how making individual choices in free collaborative improvisation are shaped by the social context, personal musical tastes, and the identities constructed for other participants of the group. Thus, the focus moved away from individual creativity to collaboration and exploring the communicative process "of social creativity in real time" (p. 136). Emphasizing the contextual and social dimensions of improvisation, Wilson and MacDonald (2012) suggest that in order to understand the collaborative process of improvisation the entirety of the practice should be "taken into consideration and its various contexts (musical, physical, cultural and interpersonal) acknowledged" (p. 570). In collaborative free improvisation an improviser is reacting to the people in addition to the sounds they hear, as Wilson and MacDonald (2017) have claimed. Still, more research on the social processes in free improvisation is needed, and particularly on the contextual dimensions and how the social processes are supported, and in particular what these mean in a free choir improvisation context.

1.3.3 Egalitarian and democratic values in free improvisation

Free improvisation as a practice has a history in which equality, authority, and autonomy are negotiated, and in which even the very practice and its premises have been questioned. Hence, research on free improvisation has simultaneously posed

such questions about egalitarianism, social relations, and empowerment (see e.g. Burnard, 2002; Ford, 1995; Hickey, 2015; Lange, 2011; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). One of the central researchers in music education and free improvisation, Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (2007), drawing from an Arendtian perspective, theorizes free improvisation as action. He found the "improvisation ethic" as seeking "to transcend skill-based hierarchies" with an understanding of presupposing "that all participants act in ways which entail shared responsibility for the creation of the music" (p. 106). Kanellopoulos (2007) states that free improvisation can be seen as a process of shaping particular ways of "being together in and through music" (p. 101). In a similar vein, Thomson (2007) connects free improvisation with ethics and politics, as he found that the basic substance of music is formed by social relationships manifested through sound (p. 4). According to Thomson, in collective free improvisation any gestures showing authoritarian musical power can be seen as "antisocial negation" of "the possibility for socially responsible negation of musical difference" (p. 6). Therefore, he suggests that "musical authority" (Thomson, 2007, p. 4) needs to be circulated in the group. The specific value of free improvisation for Thomson (2007) lies in the possibility of performing without preconceived or external standards of quality (p. 4). The aforementioned writers and improvisers have been influential in my forming of an understanding of free improvisation as a social process in this dissertation.

Music scholar Borgo (2002, 2007) was one of the first to discuss an ecological approach to music education by referring to the complexities of learning and knowledge through free jazz. Hence, Borgo attests the most prominent characteristic of free improvisation is "the ability to incorporate and negotiate disparate perspectives and worldviews" (Borgo, 2002, p. 167). He argues that free improvisation can play a role in "coping with complexity" (p. 185). According to Borgo (2002), "in the moment of performance and through the act of listening, our personal, social, and cultural understandings – and interpersonal and intercultural sensibilities – may be powerfully changed in the rapture and rupture of improvisation" (p. 178). Hence, he sees free improvisation as a transformative practice. Furthermore, in free improvisation the voice can be used in ways that extend culturally constructed norms, and in this way

the practice can open up spaces for "nonnormative voices and bodies [which] are easily left outside the realm of aesthetic expression" (Tarvainen, 2018, p. 91). This viewpoint is also assumed in this dissertation.

Still, as Saladin (2009) has pointed out, the practice of free improvisation does not exist until people come to put it into action. Following this thought, Saladin reminds the reader of the humane aspects of free improvisation, which "does not mean that it can be some sort of pure openness, but rather, that its empty space supposes an indefinite plurality" (p. 148). Hence, although the practice of free improvisation has a history of egalitarian ideals, the cultural and social context of the practice itself has not escaped inequality. For instance, professionally the genre or practice of free improvisation has been historically dominated by males and instrumentalists (Wahl & Ellingson, 2018). Moreover, these inequalities have not all been relinquished, particularly in the field of free vocal improvisation, as according to Tonelli (2016) attitudes and prejudice towards the voice "still linger and prevent the voice from becoming an equal player in the field of improvised music" (p. 1). In free improvisation, singing as an instrument has often been presumed for females (p. 1) and attitudes towards women among professionals of free improvisation have been described as being discriminating (McKay, 2005, n.p.). Furthermore, assuming that improvisation is inherently positively transformative and empowering, regardless of the physical and social context, might dismiss its possible interdependence with potentially negative experiences and transformations, as Henley (2018) has argued, or Tonelli (2020) with regards to vocal improvisation. Thus, it could be said that the ideal of seeing free improvisation as "inherently democratic, since everyone is welcomed to participate in creating it" (Niknafs, 2013, p. 30), can in fact be questioned, if race, gender, instrument, technical skills, disability, or any other quality or trait is considered or treated as a hinderance to full participation.

The political potential in free improvisation as a source for questioning and challenging "the dominant educational ideology" and advancing "the democratic imperative" (Kanellopoulos, 2007, p. 100, 106) has been recognized in music education. Framing music education as a form of political practice, for instance, Kanellopoulos (2007) argues for "the potential of improvisation in transforming music classrooms from places where knowledge is transmitted to open contexts for acting and thinking—an

orientation that can form a basis for political thinking" (p. 98). A space where attitudes and identities are developed and "hierarchies of musical and social values constructed" (p. 97). This idea has been further developed by Wright and Kanellopulos (2010), who write: "Learning to set the rules through interaction and not through reference to some universal musical norm is what improvisation might offer to education and this is one way in which music education might be linked to emancipation." (p. 83). In the light of these perspectives, further probing needs to be conducted in order to better understand how music is always interrelated with the humane aspects of free improvisation, which makes its social processes open to all sides of being human - negative and positive.

1.3.4 Improvisation in music education curricula

The inclusion of improvisation in the curricula of music education is said to have begun as part of the creative music movement in education in England in the 60's, and for American and Canadian schools in the early 70s (see e.g. Hickey, 2009). It was influenced by the works of Paynter (1992), Schafer (1976) and others who contributed to the development of explorative improvisation, and particularly composition, with the desire to transform classrooms into spaces of experimentation and creative group work (Finney, 2011; Kanellopoulos, 2007). Following egalitarian ideals, according to Kanellopoulos (2007) this movement supported the creative potential of children by blurring the "distinctions between music and noise" and offering improvisation as "a tool for exploration, a way of getting back to the roots of music" (p. 99). In Finland, which is the context of this inquiry, improvisation has been included in the training of general music teacher educators already since 1958 (Tikkanen & Väkevä, 2009). However, it was not included in the national curriculum for music in comprehensive education until 2004. Furthermore, the great influencers on the Finnish music education scene have been Orff-Schulwerk and Dalcroze (Tikkanen & Väkevä, 2009). Both of these methods feature improvisation, with the first being focused on using patterns and imitation, question and answer, as well as posing musical tasks to be solved (Frazee, 1987), and the second combining real and imagined bodily movement (Abramson, 1980; see also Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004).

Although free expression, creative action, and creating musical material with the voice were the foundations of the Finnish national curricula, according to Muhonen (2016), more support for developing pedagogical approaches is still needed. Furthermore, difficulties in understanding how improvisation can be evaluated and its connection to the learning outcomes and goals in the Finnish educational context, and teacher education in particular, have most likely had an impact on how reluctant teachers have been to use improvisation in their teaching. A survey conducted by Partti in 2012 showed that only 14% out of 600 music educators teaching in schools in Finland employed improvisation in their teaching regularly, and 38% only rarely. Similar accounts have been found in the UK (see Koutsoupidou, 2005). A national assessment of learning outcomes in Finnish music education in 2011 by Juntunen (2011) revealed that 47% of the 9th grade students that participated in the study (N=1609) reported that they had never participated in musical inventing (including improvising) during their 9 years of basic education. The teachers' conceptions (N=144) were also explored in Juntunen's study, and the findings indicated that 49% of their students from 7th to 9th grade had never or only occasionally participated in musical inventing. Although improvisation in the current national curriculum in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016) has been raised to the same level of emphasis as singing, playing, and listening to music, it is still bundled under the umbrella term "creative generation [luova tuottaminen]" along with composing (Partti, 2016, p. 9). Hence, there is a clear need for pedagogical practices and understandings of improvisation, and particularly free improvisation, in the context of Finland, where both the national curriculum for basic music education and general music teacher education are affirmative of improvisation.

Improvisation is included in the music education curricula in general education in several countries worldwide (see e.g. Larsson & Gerogii-Hemming, 2019), but many researchers have reported that teaching improvisation faces a number of challenges. These include the lack of teacher training and confidence (Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007); teaching resources (Byo 1999); a preoccupation with composition, and narrowly defined values and standards (Burnard, 2000); regarding improvisation as "not real" music (Seddon & Biasutti, 2008, p. 418); the lack of understanding of creativity; the

fear of losing classroom discipline during improvisational activities, and teachers' lack of experience and familiarity with improvisation (Koutsoupidou 2005). This pervasive list helps explain why improvisation might still be avoided in music education, and may even be a feared subject, while also still being regarded as the least important skill by classical musicians (Creech et al., 2008). Yet, these surveys and studies report on improvisation or musical creation in general. Hence, reports on how free improvisation has been adopted in education are needed in addition to expanding understandings of what free improvisation is and how it could be applied in everyday music education.

1.3.5 Pedagogical approaches to (free) improvisation

Although different metaphors co-exist for teaching and learning, and how knowledge is viewed (Sfard, 1998), the critical views on improvisation pedagogy tend to oppose approaches that suggest transmission of knowledge (Hickey, 2009; Kanellopoulos, 2007). Researchers and practitioners are increasingly developing approaches and methods for improvisation pedagogy (Heble & Laver, 2016; Johansen et al., 2019). Many researchers have claimed that teaching musical improvisation requires moving away from standardized procedures of delivering pre-established information to facilitation and process-centered pedagogy (Addison, 1988; Ford, 1995; Hickey, 2009; Kanellopoulos, 2019; Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Hickey (2009) goes so far as to state that "[t]he current methods do not 'teach' improvisation per se and, I believe, are more likely to hamper any creative disposition to improvise freely" (p. 292). The idea of 'teaching' in connection with free musical improvisation has also induced discomfort among practitioners of free improvisation (Lange, 2011; Schroeder, 2019). Hence, conceptions of teaching in the context of free improvisation need to be elaborated and more research is needed, particularly on social processes and collaborative modes of improvisation.

Furthermore, polarizations are found in how the teaching of improvisation is defined, as either student-directed or teacher-directed (Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019). For instance, Hickey (2009) considers transmission of knowledge and teacher-directed practices as unsuitable for improvisation and, instead, presents the idea of teaching as "enculturation through exposure to cultural exemplars and the subsequent

development of a disposition to understand" (p. 286). In a similar sense, structure and freedom are often presented as dichotomies (Hickey, 2009; Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019), which might also pertain to viewing learning as non-formal/informal or formal (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Still, as the Finnish educational researcher Kansanen (2003) has pointed out, difficulties in understanding the processes of teaching and learning arise if the totality of an educational process, which includes the social, mental, physical, and pedagogical contexts, are not taken into account. Furthermore, difficulties in applying improvisation in everyday music teaching practice can occur, if knowledge is only viewed as transmission (Kanellopoulos, 2007, p. 98). Although there are guides on facilitating free improvisation available, such as Stevens' (2007) 'Search and reflect', and creative approaches have been implemented under the influence of Schafer's (1976) and Paynter's (1992) works, this review will focus on some of the most recent developments in the area of research on free collaborative improvisation and its pedagogy.

In their search for pedagogical models or examples to be applied in educational contexts, researchers have turned to professionals and practitioners in the field of free improvisation. MacGlone and MacDonald (2018) explored the learning by professional free improvisers and found that it was occurring in three ways: through mentoring, autodidactism, and in social contexts (pp. 288-289). The development of improvising musicians was vitally influenced by their improvisation communities of practice (pp. 284-287). According to MacGlone and MacDonald, "taking equal creative responsibility" for the improvised music that was produced was particularly learned through the "complex and distributed social processes" (p. 290) of the improvisations of the community. The improvisers approached teaching with the goal of "engender[ing] sense of agency" (p. 284) in the learner through collaborative creative music making. MacGlone and MacDonald therefore suggest that this kind of approach pertains to the teaching of improvisation particularly if the music is what could be referred to as outside the mainstream or experimental (p. 281), which is often the case in contexts of free improvisation. In sum, learning is closely interrelated with the social context and the improvising activity itself. It can be concluded that if free improvisation is a means to "supporting the development of musical relationships

rather than simply the playing of music" (Wilson & MacDonald, 2019, p. 224), more research on how the social processes enable and permit processes of participation and learning is needed.

Wilson and MacDonald (2015) studied musical choices in group free improvisation with professional improvising musicians and "visual artists working with sound performance" (p. 1031). Their study brings out the social complexity of improvisation processes. They found that the evaluative process of an improviser during improvisation was influenced not only by the individual's own musical tastes but by "the tastes and identities they constructed for other members of the group" (p. 1039). The use of the psychological model for collaborative group creativity developed in the study was later used in a new study as a pedagogical tool in teaching group improvisation in a higher education context (Wilson & MacDonald, 2019). Based on their study, Wilson and MacDonald (2019) stress that a curriculum for group improvisation in higher education should be composed of supporting students in gaining confidence, strength, sophistication, and coherence in making artistic choices in real-time, as well as the facility to accommodate unexpected events. Furthermore, they find it possible to support the students' ability to integrate these skills in the context of group work in any context (p. 218). The results of Wilson and MacDonald's study are promising, and support the foundations of this dissertation.

Hickey's (2015) study was one of the first to explore pedagogical practices of free improvisation among higher music education teachers in a systematic way. Using a multiple case study design, Hickey found themes in relation to the pedagogical practices: 1) pedagogues' personal toolkit of techniques and short exercises; 2) a vocabulary based on metaphors and the avoidance of common music terms; 3) a circular physical setup; and 4) constructive feedback without qualitative assessment. The improviser-pedagogues in her study found that sensitivity in creating a psychological space of safety and comfort with empathy towards the students was of core importance (p. 438). Hickey further found that none of the pedagogues employed conduction cues with the student ensembles, which differs "from what one might consider typical for an ensemble conductor" (p. 437). A common feature in the pedagogical practices was collaborative improvising with the students while being

consistently flexible and spontaneous in session plans, as well as being comfortable with spontaneity. In this respect, Sawyer's (2004; 2011) theorizing of teaching as an improvisational practice, and the teacher as an improviser, can be seen as linked to being a reflective practitioner and professional (Schön, 1987). Likewise, in the context of music education, this has also been proposed by Westerlund, Partti and Karlsen (2015) in the context of intercultural outreach projects.

Schroeder (2019) conducted an ethnographic study of how free improvisation is taught in the context of Brazilian higher education by interviewing 50 musicians, out of which 95% were male due to the existing imbalance in the demography (p. 10). In line with the earlier studies presented here, Schroeder found that the majority of the improvisers stressed the importance of creating an environment or a culture in which listening, trust, and learning from each other on equal terms are emphasized over competition or teaching particular formulas or material (pp. 17-22). This in turn highlights the importance of understanding how such environments that support participation in free improvisation could be constructed in music education.

One of the rare studies on free improvisation ensemble work for middle and high school children was conducted by Lange (2011) in Houston, Texas. Using a case study design, Lange explored what she calls "the dichotomy between ideals and practice in teaching free improvisation" (p. 1). By ideals or ethics Lange refers to egalitarianism and collectivity, for instance each participant's possibility to exercise autonomy within their culture (p. 3). Lange pinpoints that the goal of egalitarian culture and ideals can be contradicted by the very teaching practices used by facilitating/teaching free improvisers themselves. Lange compared the teacher-student relationship in the ensemble under study to Freire's (2000) "banking model", and grounded this in the way the facilitator shared his knowledge of music *to* the students. The teacher was consistent in what specific models of improvisation, such as jazz or avant-garde from Europe, are of importance (Lange, 2011, p. 3), and made the students practice jazz practices such as modal scales. An incident where the teacher objected to the students playing their favorite riffs with their instruments in the class, as "just jamming", resulted in one student's absence from subsequent improvisation classes (p. 3).

Still, participation in free improvisation as it was presented in the study was reported as changing "students' musical practices, their senses of themselves, their understandings of power relations, and their experiences of the city in which they lived" (p. 7). Lange (2011) thus brings about the possible negative influence of social contexts and the possible disconnection between conceptual and practical ideals.

From a philosophical vantage, interconnectedness and holistic perspectives can be found, for instance, in the writings of Borgo (2007) and Thomson (2007). Thomson (2007) calls the process and engagement of free improvisation in itself pedagogical, and states that learning is simultaneous with performing (p. 6). This is grounded in the idea that free improvisers learn from each other while part-taking in collaboratively creating music in real-time responsibly and responsively, and that the socio-musical skills are simultaneously learned and employed in performance (p. 1). For this purpose, music educators' facilitation skills of not only improvisation but also musical processes could be developed, with a view towards the social undertaking (p. 2). At the same time, Borgo (2007) emphasizes the ecological nature of educational contexts in how every musical practice is situated in social spaces and shaped by social factors, hence requiring awareness of racial, cultural, and gender-based power inequities (p. 8-9). Borgo thus suggests that the focus in improvisation pedagogy could be on facilitating "learning in a dynamic context that is shaped and negotiated by all of the participants" (p. 7), which requires creating contexts of safety and feeling comfortable with experimenting together. A similar attention to the ecological nature of social dynamics is utilized in this inquiry with respect to improvisation.

1.4 Locating the improvisational theatre mindset

In order to comprehensively present the unique aspects of the two empirical choir cases of this inquiry, I will first introduce the roots of the approach that was applied in the musical and social processes of the two choirs. I will first present a short review of prior studies of the intersection or interface of music and theatre in improvisation (Chapter 1.4.1), and then move on to an overview of applied improvisational theatre

(Chapter 1.4.2). Lastly, I will introduce the basic principles of the improvisational theatre mindset and some pedagogical features (Chapter 1.4.3). As explained in Chapters 1.2.2-1.2.3, the approach in the choirs did not include dramatic scenes or role play, but rather comes closer to an attitude, hence referred to in this inquiry as an improvisational theatre mindset.

1.4.1 At the interface of improvisation in music and theatre

Music and drama, or theatre[8], are valued disciplines of the arts that have their own distinct histories and pedagogical approaches. Hence, they are generally taught separately (see Mourik, 2008). In Finland, "forms of participatory theatre for educational purposes" (Lehtonen et al., 2016, p. 558) are employed in the comprehensive school system mostly in connection with literature or the teaching of interaction skills. According to Avci (2020), research on influences from educational drama that have been taken into music education practice is scarce. Legg and Green's (2015) proposition for "music theatre" as the future of music education could be considered as a primer, but since it lacks a deeper understanding of drama as an art form and what it could provide to music education, it is more of an advocation to replace avant-garde music materials employed in creative practices in music education "with those that engage learners in musical traditions of their own choosing" (p. 523). Hence, more systematic inquiry into how music and theatre or drama may complement each other in the education of future learners could be conducted. Collaborative work between students of classical music and acting has been studied by Ford and Sloboda (2013) in the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Their findings suggest that musicians' awareness of on-stage-presence, management of risk-taking, as well as skills of collaboration and interaction with other performers and the audience were enhanced by this collaboration (Ford & Sloboda, 2013; Rea, 2015).

8 On the history and development of improvisation in theatre and drama please see *Improvisation in drama* (2007) by professors and historians Frost and Yarrow. For the history of applied improvisation see Dudeck & McClure (2018).

Although the improvisation process in improvisational music and theatre shares similarities in the collaborative emergence of creativity according to Sawyer (2003a), one of the differences between these two art forms is the way that "the performer's body (including [the] voice) is itself the experienced site of performance content" in improvisational theatre, as Zaunbrecher (2011, p. 49) argues. Improvisation has been used in drama and theatre for decades, but as performance art it became popular from the 1950s onwards in Europe and in North America. The purpose of music in improvisational theatre performances is generally as a sonic feature made by an instrumentalist seated outside or at the edge of the stage, with a focus on suggesting musical elements for the scenes or accompanying the actors singing improvised pieces in a wide range of musical genres (Siljamäki, 2013; see also Pollock, 2003; Sawyer, 2003a). Meanwhile, music assuming features of drama or embodying role-play in free jazz performances, as presented in Chapter 1.3.1, has been interpreted as downgrading some of the values associated with music as a sounding object (Tonelli, 2020, pp. 33-36). Hence, this interface is not without conflict. The current inquiry, where improvisation in music and theatre are combined in free improvisation with bodily engaged collaboration, aims to provide new knowledge of this intersection and its applications.

Monk's (2013) theoretical study suggested strategies for collaborative improvisation with references to improvisational theatre and symbolic interaction. Moreover, improvisation has been argued to be a professional skill of teachers (Holdhus et al., 2016), and it has been reported that improvisational theatre training and a familiarization with the principles of its practice can aid in the learning of facilitation skills. Similar accounts were found in Barker's (2018) study, which showed a significant change in how the facilitation of discussion evolved towards open-ended and authentic questions, providing room for students to speak as well as encouraging skills for uptake and elaboration. This inquiry hints at how the improvisational theatre mindset can be an aid in creating pedagogically safer environments for collaborative learning in music education and beyond.

1.4.2 Applied improvisational theatre

Theatre and drama have been applied in contexts beyond mainstream theatre, for example for educational or political purposes, but the roots of a particular focus on improvisation can be seen as originating in Moreno's psychodrama (Frost & Yarrow, 2007), the theatre in education movement (Dudeck & McClure, 2018, p. 8), and Boal's forum theatre (Frost & Yarrow, 2007). Its major contributors, among others, have been Viola Spolin (1999) with her work with refugee children and their families, and Keith Johnstone (1981, 1999), whose pedagogical goal was to relieve actors' fears or stress related to performing. Currently known as Applied improvisational theatre (AIT) or Applied improvisation (AI), the field has been defined as "an approach using the principles and processes of improvizational theatre for non-performance-based contexts" (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2013, p. 74).

Applied improvisational theatre has been used to develop flexible mindsets with resilience and a range of other inter- and intrapersonal skills required in today's complex and volatile world (Dudeck & MacClure, 2018, p. 1). In addition to organizational contexts and leaderships skills, AIT has been applied and studied in wellbeing contexts, such as children with special needs (Corbett et al., 2016), adolescents with social anxiety (Felsman, Seifert, & Himle, 2018), treatment of depression and anxiety (Krueger, Murphy, & Bink, 2019), as well as in the promotion of good health among older adults (Morse et al., 2018). These studies are only a few examples of the wide array of the applications of improvisational theatre in the training of skills "needed for people to communicate effectively across differences" (O'Neill & Hastings, 2019, p. 557). Furthermore, the learned or assumed skills have been reported to transcend from the training context to the participants' everyday life, and cultivate for example dialogic learning (ibid.). In the 21st century, improvisational theatre has been appreciated both as a form of performance as well as a resource for studies on organizational development (Vendelø, 2009; Vera & Crossan, 2005; Koivisto & Myllyoja, 2011), organizational leadership (Gagnon, Vough & Nickerson, 2012), academic development (Rossing & Hoffman-Longtin, 2016), teacher education (Barker, 2018, Holdhus et al., 2016; Mæland & Espeland, 2017; Sawyer, 2011; Shem-Tov, 2011; Seppänen et al., 2019), medical education (Fu, 2018; Gao et al., 2018; Hoffman-Longtin, Rossing & Weinstein, 2017), humanitarian and peace work (O'Neill & Hastings, 2019; Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015), psychology (Bermant, 2013), and

psychotherapy (Felsman, Seifert, & Himle, 2018; Phillips Sheesley, Pfeffer & Barrish, 2016). Furthermore, Sawyer's extensive research on interactional dynamics in improvised jazz and theatre has been the inspiration for a theory of collaborative creativity applied in business teams, classroom teaching, teacher development, and collaborative learning (Sawyer, 1999; 2000; 2003a; 2003b; 2004; 2005a; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2011; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009).

1.4.3 An improvisational theatre mindset

Considering improvisation in general, one is bound to take risks and leap into the unknown each time one participates. To address this, the field of improvised theatre has developed conventions that are used for supporting the constructive process of interaction (Sawyer, 2003b) and building a space of safety and trust among those participating. An improvisational theatre mindset is rooted in, and trained through and with, a flexible set of principles that encourage collaboration, spontaneity, and playfulness (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015, p. 80). These principles are context- and user-dependent. Hence, a comprehensive list of these principles or tenets would be impossible to provide, but an outline is presented here based on several key writings on the subject (see Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Johnstone, 1999; Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015).[9] These principles of practice consist of:

- Spontaneous reacting without censoring one's own ideas
- Being physically and mentally present in the moment
- Focusing on and supporting the partner
- Commitment and reciprocity
- Awareness of accepting, adapting, and blocking in interactions
- Letting go of and tolerating mistakes, or reframing them in the moment of action
- Openness to change
- Awareness of status expression
- Awareness of how own reacting and participating interrelates with collaboration

9 For a more thorough account, please refer to Dudeck & McClure (2018), Johnstone (1981, 1999), and Tint, McWaters and van Driel (2015).

As Dudeck (2013) has argued, the use of the principles of practice is not enough to comprehend the improvisational mindset or pedagogical approach used in improvisational theatre; a broader understanding of the system is required. A key characteristic of constructing an environment for improvisational theatre is relieving the pressure of making mistakes (Johnstone, 1981, 1999; see also Dudeck, 2013), because in a comfortable and safe space the participants can be invited to get out of their comfort zones (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015), encounter their discomfort, and become open to change. As an example, improvisational theatre pioneer Johnstone's (1999) approach is to make himself responsible when the students make mistakes, hence balancing between hierarchical positions, status changes, and power. Johnstone (1999) writes, assuming "responsibility for the students' failures makes me seem very confident. Soon even shy students will volunteer, knowing that they won't be humiliated, and the class begins to resemble a good party rather than anything academic" (p. 60). The pedagogical approach includes reflection and debriefing, which often includes a series of probing questions related to the experience after each exercise, and in this way allows reflection on the activity (Dudeck & McClure, 2018). Debriefings on and discussions about the experiences have been found to enable deep learning, and linking the lessons learned to issues and skills outside the context at hand (Berk & Trieber, 2009). In addition to asking questions, both the mindset and attitude of the teacher/facilitator and how an environment for debriefing is created is of importance to learning. For instance, by giving room for silence one can develop a heightened sense of nonverbal communication and the ability to allow time for observations by one's self and others (Dias, 2018).

1.5. Focus of the inquiry

This inquiry focuses on the phenomenon of improvisation and its plural affordances for music education; and further, on the significance of social ecology in improvisation, learning, and teaching writ large. While there are different schools of thought and disciplinary backgrounds in the social ecology literature (e.g. Binder et al., 2013), and many of them increasingly relate to the wider ecological crises and the relationship

between humans and nature (e.g. Kramm et al., 2017; Laininen, 2018), in this inquiry I will use the term to refer to the sociological and social psychology perspective of Tia DeNora (2013a) in particular. Moreover, the ecological framework utilized here also stems from Christopher Small's work on 'musicking' as a social, relational, and active process (Small, 1998), which has its roots in ecological anthropology and aids in theorizing how music is extended from sounds to how one relates to them, how participants relate to each other, and to the environment wherein the interaction in the process of music making, partaking, or listening occurs (Small, 1998; see Odendaal et al., 2014). According to Odendaal and others (2014), Small's (1998) musicking is "a discursive shift" (p. 165) from Elliott's (1995) concept of musicing, and is "considering musical action as an action that pertains to musical 'listenables' to considering it as a multi-levelled set of dynamic relationships situated in sonic, social and physical spaces" (Odendaal et al., 2014, p. 165). By using this ecological framework and social ecology in particular, I aim to highlight how human life and being can be seen as inseparably connected and interrelated with not only social processes of musicking but with the surrounding environment and society as a whole (Barnett & Jackson, 2020). Thus, conceptions of music can be extended to viewing music as one element in the ecosystem where practices, embodiment, social interaction, feelings, institutions, patterns of action and the material world (see DeNora, 2013a, p. 5) are all interrelated and constituting each other.

The ecological approach has crucial consequences for how knowledge and learning are understood. Leaning on educational theorists Barnett and Jackson (2020), I will understand learning as "an ecological phenomenon" within which identities are being shaped (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 2), and hence as connected with the construction of social agency and wellbeing (DeNora, 2013a). In an ecological frame, learning "transforms us and the world around us" (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 2). In this way, if one was to define a learning ecology, it would be seen as "present at all levels of social interaction, including the societal (and even the global) level, and [...] deeply embedded in infinitely complex eco-systems" (p. 3). Learning is not only "taking place in complex, extended systems, which include human organisms [...] in interaction with their environments" (Lemke, 2013, p. 73), but these systems "are

organized on and across multiple levels of organization in terms of processes on multiple timescales" (p. 73). In this framework, in which learning intertwines with social ecology, wellbeing manifests as performance, while consisting of attributions assigned to it by ourselves as well as others and having meaning as a lived experience (DeNora, 2013a). In other words, through musicking both learning and wellbeing can emerge, while being interconnected with and affected by the elements in the social ecology of each learner. In this framework I understand a pedagogue and pedagogy as an enabler of learning within one's own social ecology (DeNora, 2013a) for learning (Barnett & Jackson, 2020).

In this inquiry I aim to contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of improvisation in music education practice and theory by exploring instrumentally (Stake, 2005) two empirical cases and interpreting them together with the findings of three qualitative studies. This multi-case design involves a collective case study on the context of research literature in music education, and a single case study on the two empirical 'choir cases'. Each of the studies are expected to function independently as well as to provide new information and create diversity for the overall phenomenon, in this way enabling an analysis *within* each empirical case and chosen perspective as well as *across* them. In both choir cases epistemological interest was expanded well beyond music to the quality of social interaction and the pedagogical atmosphere, which were further supported in the choirs' practices by applying an embodied mindset deriving from applied improvisational theatre (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015). Using DeNora's expression, the choir cases are characterized by "the social and communicative use of voice" with the "unity of sound and sounder" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 83). Both choirs in this inquiry consist of adults with mixed skills in singing and music. The improvisation ranged from simple structures to free improvisation, playful exercises and an improvisational atmosphere, as well as improvised movement, singing, and sounds in all kinds of ways. The free improvisation of the two choirs is seen as what Kanellopoulos calls a collaborative experiment, with the ways of sound organization not bound by idiomatic or disciplined structures (Kanellopoulos, 2007, p. 101; see Schroeder, 2019). Yet, the free improvisation in the choirs included the diversity and sonic-

musical identity of the singers, which means that the improvisation could include all kinds of styles and practices depending on the singers' prior history (Bailey, 1993, p. 83). Hence, this inclusiveness can be referred to as trans-stylistic (Sarath, 2010). The free improvisatory aspect brings about sounds and ways of singing that could be described as extended or avant-garde. In this way, the inquiry challenges those mainstream cultural ideals or pedagogical norms that can both implicitly and explicitly create and maintain inequality if vocal sounds seen as immature or disabled are excluded (see Tarvainen, 2018), or are seen as a violation of symbolic order and operating beyond dominant norms (see Tonelli, 2016). Hence, this inquiry responds to the lack of studies on vocal improvisation, vocal free improvisation, and pedagogical processes of free improvisation, as presented in Chapter 1.3.

Furthermore, I will highlight that free vocal improvisation in an ecological framework is not free of its social context and ecological interrelations, but rather seen as a phenomenon of complexity. What is considered music or musicking (Small, 1998) is extended to holistic expressions with bodily forms of both interaction and music. The inquiry, therefore, brings about the already recognized potential of individual and embodied expression in music and music-making (Sutela, 2020; Westerlund & Juntunen, 2005), and creative and improvisational social agency (DeNora, 2000; see also Karlsen, 2011), specifically in singing. Prior studies have theorized improvisation as real-time social action and intercourse (Erickson, 2011; Sawyer, 2003a; 2003b), as explaining the social interactive nature of music and participation (Sawyer, 2006; Small, 1998), teaching (Holdhus et al., 2016; Sawyer, 2011) and collaborative creativity (Sawyer, 2007a). With the applied improvisational theatre mindset, improvisation extends from a musical tool and performance medium to a social process and pedagogical approach, embodied mindset, and practice. With this frame and a social ecological approach (DeNora, 2013a), this inquiry aims to explore the teaching and learning of social skills or socio-musical skills that have been claimed to be difficult to teach (Biasutti, 2015). The way in which social interaction and the social skills within those interactions become central to social and collaborative learning and creativity (see Sawyer, 2006; 2008) in the two choir cases also elaborates on sociocultural

theoretizations of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and thereby this doctoral dissertation also aims to contribute to and merge the ongoing scholarly debate on the instrumental and intrinsic values of the arts, the social impact of the arts, and collaborative and social learning, as well as improvisation pedagogy, both theoretically and practically.

1.6 Structure of the dissertation

The chosen form for this doctoral dissertation is an article-based research project, which allows me to report on the results of the empirical work in three separate sub-studies and to aggregate the findings in this synthesizing text. Since this inquiry follows an instrumental multi-case study design (Stake, 2005) with insider research (Greene, 2014), the structure of this synthesizing text is as follows: I have begun by introducing my insider position and a personal narrative of my journey in improvisation (Chapter 1.1), and have continued by presenting the two choir cases in this inquiry (Chapter 1.2) and my practitioner role in them. In this way I wish the reader to recognize how the research work arose from my prior experiences and further nurtures my practical interests as a musician and music educator. Before turning to the focus of this inquiry and elaborating on the main concepts (Chapter 1.5), I have introduced the reader to previous studies on music improvisation with historical, socio-musical, egalitarian, and pedagogical considerations, and also introduced improvisational theatre and applied improvisation, which are central in the practices in both choirs (Chapter 1.3-1.4)

In the second chapter, I will introduce the theoretical starting points of this inquiry with a focus on the socio-ecological framework. I begin with an introduction to learning and its transformational (Mezirow, 1997; van Manen, 1991b, 2012; Dewey, MW9) aspects (Chapter 2.1), and then move towards expanding the view of the construction of agency (DeNora, 2013a) and identity (Wenger, 1998) (Chapter 2.2), concluding with an introduction to the socio-musical perspectives, e.g. seeking asylum and affordances of music (DeNora, 2013a) (Chapter 2.3.) Lastly, I will introduce some preliminary consideration of the social ecology of musical learning (Chapter 2.4).

In Chapter 3, I will present the research design (Chapter 3.1), research objectives and questions for each sub-study (Chapter 3.2) and reflect on the methodological choices of the sub-studies (3.3-3.5), as well as providing reflections on the methodological and ethical decisions made in the research process (Chapter 3.6). In Chapter 4, I will present the findings of the sub-studies that were published in the three separate articles in academic journals, ending with a summary of the findings (Chapter 4.4). In Chapter 5, I will further discuss the findings of each sub-study, linking them to wider theoretical considerations and suggesting implications for future research and practice. I begin with a discussion of the state of the art in terms of improvisation in music education research and the challenges of social improvisation in teaching and collaboration (Chapter 5.1), and safe collaborative learning environments with equal possibilities to learn (Chapter 5.2). I will then continue by discussing the construction of agency and identity through vocal playgrounds (Chapter 5.3). Lastly I will consider the theorizing of play and asylum in relation to learning and the means-ends-continuum (Chapter 5.4), and discuss the socio-ecological perspective of learning in improvisation and music education (Chapter 5.5). I will conclude this synthesizing text in Chapter 6 with some final thoughts considering my role as an insider with regards to reflexivity and ethics in the whole research process.

2 The socio-ecological framework

The conditions that framed the improvisation and singing in the two choir cases in this dissertation are seen as forming what in ecological theorization is called 'the social ecology' (DeNora, 2013a; see also Lemke, 2013 and Oishi & Graham, 2010). While a *learning ecology* is a framework for understanding those environments that are interrelated and interconnected in "an ecology of practice in which the primary purpose is learning" (Jackson, 2020, p. 86), a *social ecology* is here conceptualized as the social, physical, and mental spaces where singers are engaged in embodied social processes with each other and the immediate material environment in the "meaning- and feeling- mediated interaction" (Lemke, 2013, p. 84) in those spaces. This means that a singer or learner is not only connected to the immediate material environment but also to her own and others' social learning ecologies, which enables an understanding of how thought, culture, and behavior are interrelated and effected by macroenvironments and human behavior in both present and recent environments (Oishi & Graham, 2010, p. 361). In this sense one's learning, in general, is linked in an indivisible manner with the social and physical environment where one's values are being created and situated and "new meanings are sought and grown" (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 2). According to Jackson and Barnett (2020):

> *The idea of ecology [...] breathes a sense of life and living, of relationships, of connectivity and interdependence, of growth and renewal, of sustainability, of evolution and resilience, and of elements being configured and working together to achieve something that the individual parts cannot achieve alone (p. 1).*

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical starting points that have shaped my understanding of how the phenomenon of improvisation relates to social ecology; more specifically, learning and social interaction. Since improvisation has been theorized as social action (Erickson, 2011) and the focus of this inquiry is on collaborative improvisation in particular, social ecology was chosen as the theoretical

framework in order to encompass the complexity of social systems in improvisation (Sawyer, 2005b; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009), and more particularly free improvisation (Bailey, 1993; MacDonald & Wilson, 2015).

The socio-ecological framework for this inquiry was built through the following dimensions - learning as a willingness to transform (Mezirow, 1997) (Chapter 2.1), as becoming (van Manen, 2012), and lastly as growth (Dewey, MW9) (see Chapter 2.2). Although the inquiry was conducted among adults, learning is viewed from different angles and ages in order to theorize the phenomenon for music education contexts in general. The chapter continues by expanding on understandings ranging from the individuality of learning to contextual and relational aspects (Chapter 2.2.); the focus is thus turned towards interaction and the quality of social interaction, identity (Wenger, 1998), and agency (DeNora, 2013a).

2.1 Transformational learning and growth

Within an ecological framework, human development, growth, and learning are seen as processes of change or transformation accomplished through interaction between individuals and their immediate surroundings, as well as the broader surroundings and macro-social structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Barnett & Jackson, 2020). Mezirow's (1997) theorizing of learning reveals the change processes of learning on an individual level. Every learner holds a *frame of reference,* which is a body of experience that forms the basis of and defines one's life world. This frame of reference is "the result of cultural assimilation and the idiosyncratic influences of primary caregivers" (p. 6). From an ecological perspective, this could be seen as the societal and cultural influence induced from the first moments of life, upon which an improviser starts to build her or his understanding of the world through their relationship with their immediate environment and family, their microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1643). Mezirow (1997) describes habits of the mind as "the constellation of belief, value judgement, attitude and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation" (p. 6). Hence, through the process of elaborating and establishing new points of view through discussion and critical reflection, transformation of one's own point of view can be achieved and, finally, transformation of one's habit of mind

(p. 7). Learning is not an isolated cognitive process but involves thoughts, feelings, and disposition, as new information is incorporated actively into an existing frame of reference (Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). The process builds on the interaction through discussion and debriefing – something that in a general music classroom with a traditional teacher-student model might be overlooked, but in the two choirs in this inquiry (see Chapter 1.2.2-1.2.3), as well as in improvisational theatre practices in general, is a foundational aspect.

While Mezirow's theory reaches for the transformation of habits of the mind on an individual level, with Dewey's theory of experiential learning it is possible to expand this view to take into account the social aspects and interaction with the environment, thus moving towards an ecological perspective. Dewey's theory has been noted as one of the roots of ecological thinking about learning (Barnett & Jackson, 2020). According to Dewey, society does not only exist through a process of transmission but "*in* transmission, *in* communication [original italics]" (Dewey, MW9: 7), and "all conduct is *interaction* between elements of human nature and the environment, natural and social" (Dewey, MW14: 9). Similarly, a community is not built upon the mere presence or location of people, but through the activity of communicating and the building of relations. Through interaction with the environment one learns "to see and feel one thing rather than another" (Dewey, MW9: 15), and subsequently "a certain system of behavior, a certain disposition of action" (ibid.) is produced. Even the concept of mind is understood "as a system of beliefs, desires and purposes which are formed in the interaction of biological aptitudes with a social environment" (Dewey, MW14: 3). Hence, the "formation of habits" (Dewey, MW9: 57) takes place in interaction with the environment, and "transmission occurs by means of communication of habits of doing, thinking, and feeling from the older to the younger" (Dewey, MW9: 6). Therefore, learning is extended from communication and talk to active interaction, and extends through all life regardless of age as both a life-long and life-wide process. Dewey's theory also allows us to understand how all activity and communication are in fact changes in one's experience, and thus educative (Dewey, MW9: 8). Hence, the role of plasticity is emphasized in the ability to change, grow, and develop through "exploration,

discovery and creation", the "power to re-make old habits" and "to re-create" (Dewey, MW14: 70). In this way transformation and learning are seen as continuous through the interaction between people and the environment.

Dewey's theory paves the way for understanding the value of improvisation and creativity in musical education, not as mere "accommodation, assimilation and reproduction" but as a way "to form habits of independent judgment and of inventive initiation" (Dewey, MW14: 70). Stagnation, according to Dewey, refers to adult convenience, but an explorative and innovative approach with a reference to children is suggested to be of core importance for learning regardless of age. Dewey writes:

> *Active habits involve thought, invention, and initiative in applying capacities to new aims. They are opposed to routine which marks an arrest of growth. Since growth is the characteristic of life, education is all one with growing; it has no end beyond itself. The criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies means for making the desire effective in fact. (Dewey, MW9: 57-58)*

These two theorists, Mezirow and Dewey, together provide the starting points for this inquiry's perspective on the change processes and transformations required in learning. From improvisation's pedagogical perspective, Mezirow's (1997) understanding of the educator's role is apt for helping the learner to "become aware and critical of their own and other's assumptions" (p. 10). This is done through facilitating and creating situations in which frames of reference can be recognized and through participating in the discourse, in an atmosphere where the imagining or assuming of alternative perspectives can be safely practiced. Furthermore, Mezirow's (1997) definitions of the characteristics required for settings suited to learning are also suited to improvisation pedagogical practices, such as fostering spaces that allow full participation, are free from coercion, and offer equal opportunity, empathy, and openness towards other perspectives, critical reflection, and a willingness to listen "to become critically reflective of one's own assumptions and to engage effectively in discourse to validate one's beliefs through the experiences of others who share universal values" (p. 9).

Dewey, on the other hand, sees the role of education as nurturing and cultivating a process, attending to "the conditions of growth" (Dewey, MW9: 14). Dewey extends the perspective from that of the student-teacher to account for the role of an educational environment where constancy can become a restriction on learning, by noting that "the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming" (MW9: 54). Also, van Manen (2012) highlights the relational and situational aspects in learning, as he suggests that it is "affected by the contextual details of the living situation and relation in which the learning occurs" (p. 31). Still, van Manen (2012) draws attention to the ethical and relational dimensions of pedagogy, how "[t]hrough the tonalities of our words, through the affects of our gestures, through the sensuousness of our presence, and through the sensitivities of our perceptions, we practice our teacherly tact and thoughtfulness" (pp. 30-31). A "pedagogical moment" (van Manen, 1991a, 1991b) that is characterized by presence, contact, and care for the learner is particularly important for van Manen (2012), as he attests by noting that "learning means that whatever is learned becomes part of the personal being of the student" (p. 31). Hence, the considerations of transformation and conditions of growth from the theorizing of Mezirow, Dewey, and van Manen lead to the question of how identity and agency are constructed in musicking, improvisation, and learning.

2.2 Learning and agency

The construction of agency (DeNora, 2013a) and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) are embedded in learning and participating in music and musical improvisation. Social agency is perceiving one's possibilities for action (DeNora, 2000, p. 17). "Learning […] changes who we are by changing our ability to participate, to belong, to negotiate meaning" (Wenger, 1998, p. 226). Hence, social music making and improvisation are viewed as processes of becoming. According to Wenger (1998), identities are constructed in an ongoing process of negotiating the self in relation to other people as one is situated in the social context: "we interact with each other and with the world and we tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly" – and learn (p. 45). In this way, the surrounding and experienced

"systems of relations" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53) are not only constituents of learning, but enable or hinder our provision from and affordances of improvising and musicking. The social learning ecology can be seen as defining what we become in respect to identity and how learning is taking place. Furthermore, "this ability is configured socially with respect to practices, communities, and economies of meaning where it shapes our identities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 226), thus forming a web of interrelations that shape one's identity and learning.

The musical presentation of self through singing (DeNora, 2013a, p. 83) can be seen as an ongoing transformative process of constructing one's musical (Karlsen, 2011) and social agency (DeNora, 2013a), a way of being and becoming. Muscial improvisation can signify and promise "ways of being in and acting in the world" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 74) and "be used to shape self-identity" (Karlsen, 2011, p. 116). Being able to change one's perspectives of oneself is also related to what has been referred to as a growth mindset: an understanding of intelligence and personality as something that can be developed along the lines of abilities, rather than as stagnated or unalterable qualities (Dweck, 2006; see also Rissanen et al., 2019). This could also be seen as related to theorizations about the creative mindset (Karwowski, 2014), the improvisational mindset (Tint, McWaters & van Driel, 2015), and the reflective practice mindset as characterized by open-mindedness, tolerance for ambiguity, and an openness to change and growth combined with conscious attention and reflection in and on action (Henriksen, Cain & Mishra, 2018; Schön, 1987; van Manen, 1995). A mindset is understood as extended to an embodied approach and attitude in free choral improvisation, where the instrument is embodied by the improviser and the musical material in the musicking can take on unpredictable forms, as one responds and reacts to impulses from the environment and social space one is in. Furthermore, as an embodied mindset, with one's attention on reciprocity, acceptance, and supporting those that one is collaborating with and perceiving "(consciously or subconsciously) potential avenues of conduct" (DeNora, 2000, p. 17), it can be seen as linked to social agency as defined by DeNora (2000): "feeling, perception, cognition and consciousness, identity, energy, perceived situation and scene, embodied conduct and comportment" (p. 20).

Learning is a practice of constructing agency in an ecology of learning, which is present with or without an awareness of it, occurring through different activities and places in many circumstances and contexts (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 2). At each moment of life, social and musical improvisation is connected to one's previous experience, social context, practices at hand, and the ecological environment, which extends "far beyond the immediate situation directly affecting the developing person - the objects to which he responds or the people with whom he interacts on a face-to-face basis" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 7), as well as the connections between people in the setting, the nature of these connections, and the indirect influences of these connections. Hence, the freedom of improvisation in an ecological perspective can never actually be 'free' in an absolute sense, but an experienced quality of freedom could be provided or afforded through music as a "framework for the organization of social agency" (DeNora, 2000, p. 17). According to Karlsen (2011), music and improvisation can be employed in the exploration and affirmation of identity on a collective level and to reinforce "a sense of community" (p. 116). Hence, a level of nonadherence to or deviation from a musical and social framework, which includes specific musical traditions and conventions along with their delineated and inherent musical meanings (Green, 1999), can offer surprising avenues for individuals – without which the platform of free improvisation could not have been made available. This is supported by studies that report how agency is shaped by the chosen musical repertoires, as in how the voice is used and what kinds of music are produced, and how it is understood in the social space (see DeNora, 2013a, p. 86; Tarvainen, 2018) of collaborative improvisation. Furthermore, DeNora (2000) points out how "control over music in social settings is a source of social power; it is an opportunity to structure the parameters of action" (p. 20). Hence, this inquiry aims to inquire into how musical and social agency are constructed in free improvisation practices where all kinds of sounds and ways of making sounds could be explored.

Ross (2012) advocates improvisation-based pedagogies as approaches that "embrace the indeterminate, unscriptable interactions of collaborative knowledge construction as dynamic opportunities to create" (p. 56). Borgo (2007) argues that free improvisation is at the core of a paradigm in which "learning is not a matter

of what one knows, but who one becomes" (p. 1-2). Learning in free improvisation cannot be accounted for merely from the perspective of transmitting or receiving knowledge; it is understood as a relational process of identity formation: "a process that involves becoming a different person with respect to possibilities for interacting with other people and the environment" (p. 1). Nonetheless, as Henley (2018) has noted, the transformation in and through improvisation is not always positive. This is connected to an important aspect to learning, as noted by Jackson and Barnett (2020), that not all (social) learning is "an absolute good" (p. 12), and by Lemke (1997) that "not every activity, not every practice we learn matters equally to us or equally shapes our identities" (p. 52). As learning is interrelated with the social conditions, practices, context, and environment, these aspects have the capability of enabling learning, but also interfering or hindering it to the point that may damage one's quality of life (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 12) or be defined as an act of symbolic violence (Kanellopoulos, 2019). Particularly in improvisation, where one is situated in uncharted territory and faced with feelings of discomfort, vulnerability is one way to describe the state of an endangered sense of security. As Lemke (1997) has noted: "[h]ow we play our parts in these micro-ecologies depends not just on what the other parts do to us, and us to them, but on what these doings mean for us" (p. 37). Hence, the interdependence between the learner and the environment needs to be taken into account when safe learning environments, pedagogical tact, and supportive teacher-student relationships in the teaching of improvisation are constructed with an understanding of one's "pedagogical power" (van Manen, 2012, p. 12).

Taking an ecological perspective on the phenomena of learning and improvisation, this inquiry brings forth the significance of interaction with the environment one is situated in, as well as the practices and social processes in it. If conceptions of music are expanded to seeing it as one element in the ecology of learning and life, the role of practices, embodiment, social interaction, institutions, patterns of action and the material world could be understood more clearly (see DeNora, 2013a, p. 5). Learning can be seen as a "lifewide" activity (Barnett, 2012; Jackson, 2020), as it ranges across multiple spaces in the life of one person. It prompts a change in life, but it is also "learning amidst a changing life" (Barnett, 2012, p. 12), which is never still and takes

place in multiple spaces simultaneously. This inquiry therefore views social interaction and adjusting to the complexities of the social and material world as improvisation with the goal of understanding how learning, musical agency, and identity construction exist in relation to the environment one acts in and through, the social context where musicking is an embodied, socially shared, and meaningful cultural practice, an "active ingredient for wellbeing" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 6) and change.

2.3 Musicking, affordance, and asylum

The socio-ecological perspective on music assumed here builds upon the work of anthropologist Christopher Small (1998), who recognizes music as extending into social action rather than being an individual thing or taking place autonomously in a vacuum (p. 6). Small's anthropological concept of musicking was ahead of his time, working as he did in the era of aesthetic philosophy and music education philosopher David Elliott's praxialism (see Odendaal et al., 2014), as it allows us to see the complexity of relationships and social meanings constituted in a musical performance as taking place in both physical and social settings (Small, 1998). According to musicologist John Blacking (1995), music is social behavior in which the social cannot be separated from the musical. Hence, music is viewed as socio-musical by nature. These social or socio-musical aspects of music making have traditionally been thought of as "extra-musical consequences" (Westerlund, 2008, p. 88), however, following Westerlund (2008), "in a holistic approach they form the bedrock of any experience" (p. 88). Due to the social complexity of the process of music making, and particularly improvisation, the need to account for two different outcomes, musical and extra-musical, could result in limiting the possibilities in those processes rather than creating them (see DeNora, 2013a; Westerlund, 2008). It has been stated that music and the so-called extra-musical aspects of life, such as wellbeing, are in fact interdependent and the result of the same development, while, as Henley (2019) states, no automatic connection with, for instance, emotional development and music can be made. Furthermore, as long as socio-musical aspects are referred to as secondary (Cunha & Lorenzino, 2012) or paramusical (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016), the music is situated above the social; hence, this might lead to disregarding these inherent aspects of music. In order to harness the possibilities inherent in music and

improvisation, music should be seen as a fluid and continuous element "within human experience" (p. 35). This means that the meaning of music is not tied to musical works per se, but to the totality of the eco-social system in a musical situation with a focus on the experience. As Jackson and Barnett (2020) have suggested:

> *We cannot learn without doing something. Learning involves us in interacting with the world and the people and the things in it, by perceiving and experiencing situations, trying to understand them, and responding in ways through which new meaning emerges. (p. 2)*

Studying the social function of music could be extended to seeing the social process as the starting point to music making – to understanding the totality and interrelation of social context, music, and learning. As Henley (2019) has stated, "[l]earning lies in the socio-musical relationships" (p. 276).

DeNora's (2000) socio-musical research shows how music works, in other words its function as an affordance structure within an ecological framework. In the two choir cases of this inquiry, improvisation is viewed as an affordance structure, a resource "for world building" (p. 44). From this ecological perspective, the 'purely musical' and 'extra-musical', or non-musical, can be seen as aspects of musicking (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016, p. 35). Hence, that which the practice of improvisation and choral singing offers to those participating in it is seen as an internal feature of the experience rather than external. According to DeNora (2013a), only when music is coupled with other things, such as expectations, physical practices, or beliefs, is it activated and enabled. This is based on the understanding of music being an element in an ecosystem, where people and things are interrelated. Hence, an ecological framework allows us to see how "culture and agency mutually constitute each other" (p. 75). Improvised music is but one element in the social ecology of the group.

In DeNora's theorization, music can afford certain acts or things depending on how it is either connected or disconnected to other things, and how it is appropriated in the particular situation one is in (DeNora, 2013a). This refers to the way in which the improviser and improvising cannot be separated from the social and

physical environment one is in and how the environment enables certain acts. By using musical resources (p. 95), such as through musical activity and engagement, many types of affordances are deliberately and undeliberately generated, such as wellbeing and sociability (DeNora, 2000, p. 11). Gibson sums up the ecological interdependence of an affordance as "neither an objective property nor a subjective property. [...] It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behavior. [...] An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer" (Gibson, 1979, p. 129). The theory of affordances thus brings out how the perception of music is dependent on what it offers to the improviser as well as the needs and intentions of the improviser. DeNora's (2013a) theory explains how it is not the music alone that works on one's agency or identity, but the whole system in which one is situated in each moment: whom one is with, or where and how, is interrelated with learning, and the construction of identity and agency. All in all, this view of music emphasizes learning environments as social environments that support positive growth and provide a wide range of opportunities for music making.

However, DeNora (2013a) argues that the repertoire, or musical material, and musicking can even be a "means by which to occupy the social space and means by which to furnish that space in ways that render it hospitable to self over time (p. 86)". This means that improvising a song can be both presenting ones' musical self to others and furnishing the social space the group is in through the sounds one projects in that space (p. 85). Thus, music can afford certain things, but it can also be used for transforming the social environment, "as a means for creating, enhancing, sustaining and changing subjective, cognitive, bodily and self-conceptual states" (DeNora 2000, p. 49). Hence, music can be employed as a medium for impacting one's wellbeing by remaking or changing social environments for one's wellbeing, as DeNora (2013a) states. This action is referred to as asylum-seeking (DeNora, 2013a), as in affecting an environment individually or socially, materially, or symbolically. It is being engaged in remaking the environment through removal or refurnishing, "acting in and on that environment" (p. 50) in moments of disturbance or insecurity, or in ways to assure one's wellbeing in any situation. Asylum can be created anywhere and anyplace. It is a conceptual space where

> *individuals and groups can establish ontological security, a sense of at least partial control, opportunities for creativity, pleasure, self-validation, a sense of fitting comfortably into some space, scene or milieu, flow and focus. (DeNora, 2013a, p. 55)*

The concept of seeking asylum refers to the way in which one pursues creativity and flourishing, and thus distances one's self from factors that hinder one's wellbeing. Asylum-seeking can be seen as an everyday element of wellbeing through which one balances feelings of comfort and discomfort, calm and stress, in response to the social environment. Feelings are understood as not being limited to emotions, but can also be bodily states and experiences, "processes with ebb and flow, duration, variable intensity" (Lemke, 2013, p. 72). In a social and physical space one can seek asylum through removal; this occurs when one attempts to recover personal rhythm and time by, for instance, discontinuing improvised singing, being silent, or protecting oneself by changing physical location away from a momentary cause of distress (DeNora, 2013a, p. 55). However, seeking asylum through *refurnishing* can also be done, by engaging in the construction of the social time and space, collaborating in play, and renegotiating the social world, such as by making contact with others and musically responding to impulses from others. Hence, removal is seeking asylum, by creating safety away from the social space, while refurnishing is seeking of asylum upon and in the social space. These two strategies of asylum-seeking allow us to understand the opportunities for action in social spaces as they are carried out in the moment-to-moment of everyday life, both consciously and unconsciously. As argued in this dissertation, ecological theory is therefore an aid in theorizing how music can be viewed as action and as interrelated and connected with other people, wellbeing, and the entire social environment (DeNora, 2013a; Small, 1998), the social ecology of one's learning, and the construction of identity and agency.

2.4 Towards a social ecology of improvisation and musical learning

Our understanding of learning is moving beyond human centeredness towards a relational perspective. van der Schyff and others (2018) have employed perspectives from embodied cognition and dynamic systems theory in developing a relational framework for musical creativity where musical systems are seen as extended to encompass not only the individual and the music but also the surrounding world and connectedness with, including in educational contexts (p. 7). van der Schyff and others (2018) theorize the mind as being embodied by referring to how the simultaneous perception and action in real-time improvisation unfolds, based on the available affordances and responses, from the environment towards one's intentions (p. 5); By this they mean the way one's body reacts to and feels the activity, and how this in turn influences the players' or singers' subsequent responses and actions. Aligning with the ecological framework, van der Schyff and others (2018) emphasize "the inseparability of organism and environment" (p. 6) and the value of creativity as a dynamic interactivity that is "not limited to the sonic dimension [but] including bodily engagements, social and cultural developments, and the ways creative activity extends to the objects and other agents that constitute the musical ecology" (p. 12). They refer to social dynamics by referring to an improvising group's continuous renegotiation of individuality and collectivity, which occurs in the "musical environment being enacted" (p. 6) while the "temporal and social dimensions of musical interaction are highly interrelated" (p. 10). Hence, this connects the history of each participant to both the moment of improvising and learning as well as the social environment, which in this inquiry is referred to as the social ecology. van der Schyff and others (2018) have developed the relational framework of instrumentalists to encompass different dimensions of dynamics as embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended (p. 10). This study aims to elaborate on the issue of social ecology with the voice as the instrument.

According to Sawyer (2008), learning is more effective in social, participatory, and collaborative processes, "in which the whole class collaborates in each student's learning" (p. 58). Hence, Sawyer (2008) has argued for the inclusion of collective

processes in education through which children could learn a deeper musical understanding as well as interactional skills such as listening and responding, and communicating in social contexts (p. 57). Collaboration, and more specifically social interaction, could be seen as mediators of both learning and improvisation, while social interaction in itself is improvised (Sawyer, 2003b). Both an improvisation performance and collaborative learning could be theorized as emerging "from the collective actions and interactions of the entire group" (Sawyer, 2008, p. 50), as "the entire improvising [...] group learns, and the knowledge acquired is group level knowledge" (p. 51). Interestingly, only recently has social interaction been lifted to the forefront in the learning sciences as the key to the success of collaborative learning (Järvelä et al., 2015), or more specifically the quality of social interaction (see Barron, 2003). Constructing positive relationships between the students supports learning and co-operation (Johnson & Johnson, 2009), while psychological safety has been singled out as a key element in facilitating learning, "because participants are then more likely to take risks and think freely" (Miyake & Kirschner, 2014, p. 422). Since learning is taking part in collective actions (Green, 2008), it is not tied to music alone, but occurs "during music-making, through watching, listening to and imitating each other. It also involves learning before, during and after music-making, through organizing, talking and exchanging views and knowledge about music" (Green, 2008, p. 120). Learning as a collaborative effort occurs both through musical activities and the collaborative dialogue and negotiation of meaning in joint learning activities, as theorized by Wenger (1998). Thus, emphasis should be placed on the social ecology of musical learning, on one's ability and capacity to partake in the social space where interactions between the students and the teacher are occurring and are interrelated with the immediate material environment of the collective practice.

The way in which openness to the unexpected and change is required in free improvisation is also related to the way in which lack of control is heightened (Schroeder, 2019, p. 3), not only musically but socially. The social process becomes the center of attention, as learning is seen as "embedded in [the] ensemble" (Sawyer, 2008, p. 56). In both of the choir cases in this inquiry, the pedagogy of music and improvisation could be viewed as moving away from and questioning traditional

teacher-student models and acquisition of knowledge. This is in accordance with sociocultural theories suggesting that the focus should be moved from formalized, person-centered education and the transmission of musical knowledge to "interaction, shared practices of meaning making (knowing), and learning from joint problem solving efforts" (Hakkarainen et al. 2013, p. 58), and to creating "musical communities of practice" (Sawyer, 2006, p. 162). Hence the need to inspect and understand the social ecology that surrounds the micro-, macro-, and meso-levels of music education.

According to Jackson (2020), "[t]eachers create ecologies of practice to enable students to learn" (p. 87), and within the teacher's ecology of practice the learner creates their own learning ecology where the primary purpose is learning (ibid.). The multimodal and complex pedagogical interaction, which is a central part of a teacher's pedagogy (Toivanen, Mikkola & Ruismäki, 2012) and ecology of practice, is part of the social ecology of learning, where social dimensions and context are interrelated with other things such as resources, space, places, and other contexts (Jackson, 2020, pp. 86-88). Hence, learning is not an isolated activity but occurs in interrelation with the surrounding environment, practices, processes, and people: "a function not only of experiences in that setting but the full range of settings experienced by the person" (O'Toole, Hayes & Halpenny, 2020, p. 22). Similarly, in collaborative musical improvisation, which is seen as a performance emerging "from the collective actions and interactions of the entire group" (Sawyer, 2008, p. 50), the participants are surrounded by a web of interrelated social ecologies of learning that include not only the immediate social, cultural, and physical environments but also the interconnections with the wider institutional, societal, and global levels.

An ecological perspective expands the idea of learning as life-wide (see Jackson, 2020), and allows seeing each learner and person as an individual with their own history and experience, but also as connected and interrelated with others, building a future for themselves and others. Sociocultural theories of learning tend to emphasize the matter of social context, but with an ecological framework this understanding is expanded to acknowledging the ecological interrelation of living and non-living things in musicking: music, social interaction, instruments, people, environment, as well as each participant's history and prior experiences, and how they are interrelated with

each participant's own micro and macro-level social ecology. The learning process is individual, but also interrelated with the collective, as Lemke writes:

> *What we have already learned and experienced influences our future learning, in individual and idiosyncratic ways, but also in ways that mark us as more or less typical products of cultures, communities, histories. Our trajectories are each unique and individual, but they are also molded by the social systems around us to conform to prevailing social types by age, gender, class, and caste. […] We embody our past, as our environment embodies its (and so our collective) past, and in our interaction not only memory but culture and historical and sociological processes are renewed and continued, diverted and changed." (Lemke, 1997, p. 52)*

With a socio-ecological understanding of learning, collaboration and social interaction become the foundation for constructing agency and a sense of ability – who I am and what I am capable of doing and being. "As we participate, we change. Our identity-in-practice develops…" (Lemke, 1997, p. 38). Therefore, learning and its requirements are viewed as an experiential process, and in this process music unfolds over time, structuring embodiment, being both an unobtrusive and imposing medium (DeNora, 2013a), while also being an active object, "a place or space for 'work', meaning and life world making" (DeNora, 2000, p. 40). In sum, these theorizations point towards the recognition of a socio-ecological framework in the contexts of music education and improvisation pedagogy in particular, as the complex process by which musical and social identities and agencies are constructed and the learning of musical and social skills, in addition to wellbeing, are afforded.

3 Research task and methodology

This inquiry is designed as a multiple case study (Stake, 2005). Qualitative inquiry, as a naturalistic approach and a constantly evolving field of research, was chosen because of its focus on "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 43). The three sub-studies are individually and collectively viewed as instrumental, rather than intrinsic (Stake, 1994), and in this sense the cases are "of secondary interest" (Stake, 2005, p. 445). They are explored with the goal of instrumentally facilitating knowledge of the phenomenon of improvisation, and for exploring the overarching research task in this inquiry, which is *to understand the holistic affordances of improvisation by highlighting the significance of social ecology in music education and musicking*.

I will begin this chapter by considering the role of instrumental multi-case design in this inquiry (Chapter 3.1), and then move on to presenting the specified research questions posed on the basis of the research objectives designed for each sub-study (Chapter 3.2). I will continue by elaborating on the methodological choices and generation of empirical material for each sub-study (Chapters 3.3-3.5) and end this chapter by reflecting on the methodological choices and ethical decisions made during the research process (Chapters 3.6).

3.1 Instrumental multi-case study

This synthesizing text for the dissertation consists of three individual and separate sub-studies (Appendices 1-3) that have been published or are accepted for publication in national and international scholarly journals, one article for each sub-study. In accordance with instrumental multi-case design (Stake, 2006), all three sub-studies are viewed as 'cases', as objects of study and bounded systems shedding light on how the phenomenon of improvisation "performs in different environments" (p. 23). In this inquiry each of the three cases is seen as "a complex entity located in its own situation" (p. 12) and was chosen on the basis of their unique contribution to understanding the phenomenon. Sub-study one, as the first case of this inquiry, is in itself a collective case study with a selected sample of music education research literature treated as an "integrated system" (p. 3), and was chosen on the basis of providing a holistic perspective on improvisation in music

education research. This case, as a literature review, provides resources for understanding the field and reviewing how this inquiry as a whole is situated within music education research. Sub-studies two and three are viewed as 'choir cases' with empirical material, and were chosen on the basis of providing "experiential knowledge" (Stake, 2006, p. 44) of combinations of collaborative singing and improvisation, and the possibility to obtain subjective testimonies and interviews with the researcher as an insider (Greene, 2014).

All three cases were looked at in depth and their contexts were scrutinized (Stake, 2006) with the goal of better understanding and theorizing the phenomenon under study. It has been stated that a case study design is suitable and effective for exploring and illuminating understandings of complex phenomena (Harrison et al., 2017). By seeking out both the common and the "particular about the case" (Stake, 2005, p. 457), this research acknowledges "the importance of looking at things in some particular way, which allows a new understanding of the empirical situation concerned" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 306). Thus, the aim is not to generalize (Stake, 2006) or offer any "definite statements about 'how things are'" (Biesta & Burbules, 2003, p. 80). Rather, in this synthesizing text I will draw together the two empirical choir cases and one collective case study with the aim of offering new light on and "resources for dealing with the always unique problems with which educators are faced" (p. 80). Hence, my subjective insider position in the empirical choir cases (see Chapters 1.2.2-1.2.3) in sub-studies two and three can be seen as an asset in understanding the phenomenon from a practitioner perspective with "a priori knowledge" (Greene, 2014, p. 2) of both communities and their members, and with the practices at hand, aligning with Dewey's suggestion of teachers becoming "investigators" (Dewey LW5: 23) of their own practice and disseminating the scientific results in practice. In this way, an "integrated, holistic comprehension" of the cases (Stake, 2005, p. 453) and the phenomenon under study can be gained.

The empirical material generated in the two choir cases (Sub-studies 2 & 3) can "be "seen as an argument in efforts to make a case for a particular way of understanding social reality" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 304). Aligning with Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), the empirical material functioned generatively "as a springboard for interpretations" (p. 305), providing inspiration and arguments, enabling and supporting "interpretation rather than unequivocally lead up to it" (p. 305). In the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2018):

> *Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. (p. 43)*

Hence, in this inquiry the two empirical choir cases can be seen as spaces for experimentation, an "indispensable element of the way in which we gain knowledge about reality" (Biesta, 2010, p. 495). Dewey's understanding of knowledge and action as inseparable (Biesta & Burbules, 2003) also aligns with this type of insider research where artistic practices are being explored. Thus, by utilizing practitioner research and 'inquiry as stance' in education and teacher research (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2007), the artistic practices, pedagogical work, and research are intertwined on multiple planes, and have further elaborated each other during the process of completing this inquiry. Furthermore, the insider perspective has provided additional in-depth knowledge of the arts intervention and facilitation processes used in the two choirs, which were bounded by ethical principles. As Biesta and Burbules (2003) state,

> *"[t]he ways in which the world can surprise us always provide input into the cycle of inquiry and action, forcing us to change our knowledge of the world and our ways of acting within it (which, in turn, can yield new experiences to learn from)" (p. 13).*

Thus, methodologically speaking, the overall aim is not in offering certainty, truth, or representational epistemology, but in considering the two choir cases of this inquiry as experimental, since "every natural object is in truth an event continuous in space and time with other events; and is to be known only by experimental inquiries which will exhibit a multitude of complicated, obscure and minute relationships" (Dewey, MW14: 41).

Each of the three cases is understood as unique, and their contexts have been scrutinized in the sub-studies and published in separate scholarly articles. For the purposes of this inquiry as a whole, and in line with multi-case study design (Stake, 2005, 2006), the three sub-studies as cases are studied jointly and serve the purpose of offering opportunities

to learn and study the phenomenon of improvisation. In this synthesizing text of the dissertation the cases and their situational complexity are explored with the primarily external and instrumental interest (Stake, 2005, p. 445; Stake, 2006, p. 8) of effectively illuminating the common phenomenon - improvisation. Each of the cases provides an opportunity to study the phenomenon of improvisation in different contexts: first, in music education research (sub-study 1), second, in free choral improvisation (sub-study 2), and third, when living with social anxiety (sub-study 3). The cases are first presented separately and then placed in dialogue with each other in order to apply their findings and "situated experience" (Stake, 2006, p. 47) to the main task of this inquiry.

3.2 Research objectives and questions

The above-stated research task of this inquiry is approached through three research objectives, one for each case. However, each of the three cases were guided by specific research objectives and reported on by answering specific research questions for each sub-study. The individual methodologies were chosen with respect to each sub-study's empirical material, objectives, and research questions, with the main aim being to contribute to the overall research task of this dissertation. In the first sub-study the objective was *to recognize the state of the art in music education research in terms of improvisation* with an instrumental literature analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012, p. 5) in the context of music education scholarly research. In the second sub-study (Choir case I) the objective was *to better understand the significance of social ecology in learning, and collaborative learning in particular, when musicking with adults living with social anxiety*. For this purpose, qualitative methods featured by narrative methodology were employed in the context of an arts intervention choir project, the Beat. In the third sub-study (Choir case II) the objective was *to discern individual and collective experiences as transformed by an improvisational theatre mindset in and through social ecology*. For this purpose, an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) design was suitable in the context of an improvisation choir, the IC51.

Table 2 provides an overview of the research objectives and specific research questions for each sub-study, the context of the research and the generated empirical material, as well as details of the publication of findings for each sub-study.

Table 2 Research context, objectives, questions and design, empirical material and articles for each sub-study

	Overarching research task	The task is to understand the holistic affordances of improvisation by highlighting the significance of social ecology in music education and musicking.		
	Design of the inquiry	Instrumental multi-case study (Stake, 2005)		
		Case 1	*Case 2*	*Case 3*
Case studies 1-3	*Context*	**SUB-STUDY I** Improvisation research in music education scholarly articles.	**SUB-STUDY II - Choir case (Beat)** An arts intervention choir project with improvisation for higher education students living with social anxiety.	**SUB-STUDY III - Choir case (IC51)** An improvisation choir applying an improvisational theatre mindset for facilitating the social and musical process of free improvisation.
	Objective of the sub-study	The objective is to recognize in terms of improvisation the state of the art in music education research.	The objective is to better understand the significance of social ecology in learning, and collaborative learning in particular, when musicking with adults living with social anxiety.	The objective is to apprehend transformed individual and collective experience in and through social ecology in free choir improvisation with an improvisational theatre mindset.
	Research questions of the sub-study	1) What are the main features of studies that address issues of musical improvisation and have been published in peer-reviewed music education journals? 2) What visions of improvisation pedagogy emerge through the approaches to improvisation that these studies take?	1) How do the university students who participated in the arts intervention narrate their experience of social anxiety in the university context? 2) What type of meanings do they assign to the intervention?	What are the social and educational affordances of engaging in free improvisation choir? 1) How is an asylum constructed and supported within the social processes of a free improvisation choir? 2) What kind of asylum-seeking strategies (e.g. removal and refurnishing) are employed by its participants? 3) What kind of affordances are provided by engaging in collaborative free vocal improvisation?
	Research design and generation of empirical material	Instrumental and critical literature review. Research studies on improvisation in music education scholarly journals (N = 77).	Qualitative study with features from narrative methodology. Individual interviews (N = 7) with participants.	Researcher's diary, visual and audio recordings of sessions and group interview with participants (N = 5). Instrumental case study with gentle empiricism and ethnographic features.
	Published results - article	**I Siljamäki, E. & Kanellopoulos, P. 2020** Mapping visions of improvisation pedagogy in music education research.	**II Jansson, S-M., Westerlund, H. & Siljamäki, E. 2016** Taide sosiaalisena oppimismuotona – opiskelijoiden kokemuksia jännittämisestä [Art as a social learning form – students' experiences of social anxiety]	**III Siljamäki, E.** ***Forthcoming*** Co-creating a safe space for learning through free improvisation choir: An ecological perspective.

3.3 Sub-study I: Literature review of music education studies on improvisation

In the first sub-study, the process of research was guided by two research questions: *1) What are the main features of studies that address issues of musical improvisation and have been published in peer-reviewed music education journals,* and *2) What visions of improvisation pedagogy emerge through the approaches to improvisation that these studies take.* For this purpose, an extensive content analysis on selected articles was implemented by employing the frame of an instrumental literature analysis (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012, p. 5) and combining a systematic literature review with a collective and instrumental multi-case study (Stake, 1994, p. 237) in this particular sub-study. This approach allowed us to go beyond summarizing, shedding light on and theorizing how these studies construe the role, value, and educational potential of improvisation. It allowed us to look at the studies both at an individual and collective level while exploring them from the perspective of music education and learning.

Data selection started with choosing a sample of peer-reviewed articles with some impact (see Diaz & Silveira, 2014; Rutkowski et al., 2011) in the field and published between 1985 and 2015. Leading music education scholarly journals with a ranking between levels 1 to 3 were drawn from the system of the Finnish Publication Forum (JUFO). Using online search engines and manual inspection with the headword improvis* in the title or the abstract, a total of 185 articles were found in the selected journals. A rule of excluding articles with less than 10 citations at the time of conducting the study (2015-2016) was created, in order to emphasize general trends in the studies that already had some existing impact. Furthermore, this enabled control over the size of the data set. These criteria resulted in excluding papers post-2011 due to the gradual increase of citation frequency (Hancock, 2015). The number of included studies was thus decreased from 185 (in 17 journals) to 77 (in 11 journals). The content analysis was initiated by reading the material and organizing the data under rubrics with subcategories as inspired by previous content analysis studies (Ebie, 2002; Kratus, 1995; Rutkowski et al., 2011; Diaz & Silveira, 2014; Tirovolas, & Levitin, 2011; Yarbrough, 1984). As a result of the analysis,

condensed descriptions of the 77 articles were formed and employed for answering the first research question in the study with descriptive statistics.

In the second stage of the analysis, which also aligned with an instrumental case study approach, a list of possible approaches to improvisation, inspired by interdisciplinary research literature on improvisation, was created and used as an instrument for abductive reasoning (see Stake, 1994, p. 243). Cross-checking, repeated visits to the original article texts, and continued reading of the material throughout the analysis process ensured the accuracy of interpretation in detail. As a result, 11 interrelated approaches to improvisation were identified with five overarching themes, conceptualized as *visions of improvisation pedagogy*. In this way, the first stage of the analysis provided information that enabled critical reflection on music education from the perspective of the visions found in the whole data set.

3.4 Sub-study II: Narrated experiences of social anxiety and an arts intervention

The second sub-study and first choir case in this dissertation explored higher education students' personal experiences of social anxiety and social interaction in two separate environments: higher education and an arts intervention. The research process was guided by two research questions: *1) How do the university students who participated in the arts intervention narrate their experience of social anxiety in the university context*, and *2) What type of meanings do they assign to the intervention?* The empirical material was formed from individual thematic interviews with 7 out of 14 student participants of the intervention. The interviewees were both male and female between 25 to 35 years of age, from different disciplines and universities, and at later stages of their studies or entering work life. The interview questions were developed collaboratively for the interview focusing on their studies and work life: how social anxiety is experienced and addressed, how it manifests in concrete situations, reasons for participating in the intervention, and experiences at different stages of the intervention. The focus was on reflective narrations of their experiences, insights, and newly discovered procedures as well as feelings of weakness and failure.

The interviews were held in the Finnish language and lasted 1-2 hours each, and were conducted at the premises of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The interviews were conducted within 2 months of the end of the intervention by a member of the research group who had not participated in the planning or execution of the intervention, thus offering an outsider view of the object of study. As the music pedagogue and interaction designer in the intervention, I was the third author of the article that later was decided to be integrated as a part of this dissertation. A detailed list of the interview questions is presented in Appendix 7 and a sample of the interview material is presented in Appendix 9.

The qualitative content analysis (Tracy, 2013, pp. 188–197; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) was initiated by reading through the interview material, and then utilizing processes of condensation and abstraction (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The interview material was treated as narratives describing the participants' world of experiences (Erkkilä, 2005, pp. 200-201), with the narrated experience as the unit of analysis. Based on the research questions, *narrated experiences of social anxiety* and *the arts intervention* were chosen as the prime categories. The words and statements associated with experienced social anxiety and the intervention were coded as meaning units (see Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), which were then combined into sub-categories and named based on the content throughout the empirical material. This process led to a group of sub-categories describing the university students' experiences of social anxiety and the arts intervention. The experiences of social anxiety included sub-categories such as "Aspiring perfection", "Need to control performing", "Difficulty of presence in social situations", and "Learned ways of coping". For experiences in the arts intervention, sub-categories such as "Creating a positive contact in the group and public", "Regularity supporting wellbeing", "Experience of belonging in a group and peer support", and "Breaking own boundaries", were included. During the intervention I kept a practitioner diary with personal notes, in which I wrote regularly about my plans for the sessions and also reflected on my own experiences after each session. This practitioner diary was not used as a material source in the analysis of the publication. However, it has been used in this synthesizing text to frame the overall inquiry and my position in the practices of the two choir cases.

3.5 Sub-study III: A case study of free choral improvisation

In the third stub-study and second choir case in this inquiry, I explored participant experiences of *what are the social and educational affordances of engaging in free improvisation choir?* This overarching research question was divided into three sub-questions: *1) How is an asylum constructed and supported within the social processes of a free improvisation choir, 2) What kind of asylum-seeking strategies (e.g. removal and refurnishing) are employed by its participants, and 3) What kind of affordances are provided by engaging in collaborative free vocal improvisation?* With an emphasis on theoretical contribution over generalizability (Creswell, 1998), I chose an instrumental case study design (Stake, 1995) for this particular sub-study. Utilizing gentle empiricism (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2010) and ethnographic methods, empirical data was generated over the course of one year with myself, the author, as an insider researcher (Greene, 2014) and member of the choir. The empirically generated data included field notes, a researcher diary, one focus group interview, visual and/or audio recordings of sessions and performances, and my personal notes. During the generation of the empirical material twelve members of both sexes between 25-45 years of age participated actively in the practices, with their backgrounds varying from holding a degree in higher education in the fields of music or theatre to inexperienced singers and amateur musicians. Five members took part in the focus-group interview. In order to ensure ecological validity (DeNora, 2013b) the interview was conducted after a two-hour improvising session in the facilities of the University of the Arts Helsinki. In the interview, I assumed the role of a facilitator of the discussion with questions probing the participants' experiences and processes of improvising in the IC51. A detailed list of the interview questions is presented in Appendix 8 and a sample of the interview is presented in Appendix 10.

The process of analyzing the empirical material combined thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with musical event schema (DeNora & Ansdell, 2017) and was conducted as a recursive process throughout the course of the research. Original words and phrases were used in the condensation of the material and then organized

in emerging themes with sub-sections. Patterned regularities and additional themes were coded and confirmed by actively re-visiting the whole data set (Creswell, 1998, pp. 148-149). Reorganizing the data according to the musical event schema enabled a deeper understanding of the processes of change and connections made by the participants themselves. In the end, three overarching themes were selected to represent the main features of the generated empirical material.

3.6 Methodological and ethical choices

This inquiry was conducted with an understanding "of the historical and changeable nature of social phenomena: what might be 'true' in one context may not be so in another" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, p. 301). This means that the goal has not been to either prove or disprove theories with empirical data, but to "generate *arguments* for or against the championing of theoretical ideas and a particular way of understanding the world" (p. 303). In keeping with this perspective, the empirical material was generated for the purposes of developing insights and seeking to problematize "established ways of thinking" (p. 305) not only about improvisation but also about music and the role of social context in educational settings. Thus, the inquiry has sought to go "beyond what the empirical material (preliminary, first-order interpretations) is able to say" (p. 305). In this way, this inquiry has attempted to overcome the problems related to the limited amount of empirical material.

Interviewing was the main method for generating the empirical material, and was viewed as a social practice (Stake, 1994) and social knowledge production (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 82). Interviews were seen as providing "access to the meanings people attribute to their experiences and social worlds (Silverman, 2016, p. 53). All of the interviews were recorded on a Zoom recorder and transcribed by an externally certified company with a confidentiality agreement, resulting in a total of 443 transcribed pages using 2pt. line spacing. In the case of the group interview, I personally cross-checked overlapping turns of speaking and made sure to identify who was speaking each time in order to avoid loss in data, as well as reading and seeing the physical interaction and expression of the interviewees. Practitioner diary written during the second sub-study, as well as the researcher diary and personal

notes written during the third sub-study were employed in writing this synthesizing text, taking care not to reveal the identity of any of the participants and ensuring their anonymity. These personal texts functioned as a reminder of the practices used and of the feelings I myself experienced during the interventions. The diary work, therefore, proved to be very valuable for the research process as a whole, both in writing this dissertation as well as for developing the theoretical contribution of this inquiry, in addition to being a tool for reflection and further reflexivity as a practitioner.

While some participants in this inquiry expressed their openness to being exposed or identified, as in being less in need of 'protection', a decision was made by me in the third sub-study, and in the second sub-study by the research team, that the participants' anonymity would be preserved as far as possible. Hence, for reasons of anonymity detailed background information on the interviewees was not presented in the published results in either of the choir cases. Nevertheless, the anonymity of the participants was difficult to maintain, and this was discussed with the participants. In both sub-studies pseudonyms are used, and in the third sub-study the text was member-checked for possible challenges to research integrity and the anonymity of the participants. In the end, my goal has been to respect the participants' autonomy and privacy with an understanding of the risks and possibilities of both failing and succeeding to do so.

In the first sub-study, undertaken during the years 2014-2019, I collaborated with Professor Kanellopoulos of University of Thessaly, Athens, Greece. As practitioners and researchers of improvisation, we both held a unique and wide experience of the phenomenon before commencing the study. At first, we sought to efface our subjective positions by selecting the data on the basis of specific criteria, such as citation count, but in the second stage of the analysis we employed our subjective positions as professionals of improvisation and our theoretical knowledge of the phenomenon. Through this combination we were able to produce qualitative findings that not only represented the content, but also raised it to another level through the theoretical basis we employed. We collaborated throughout the entire analysis process, comparing our interpretations and reflections through discussion. In writing the research report we aimed at transparent descriptions of the steps taken, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

The first sub-study functioned as a basis for grounding the relevance of this research as a whole. Furthermore, reviewing the literature systematically enabled an overview of the field of music education not just from the perspective of research, but also how improvisation is situated in the field and how it has been studied and approached. The use of citation count as an indicator of research impact in the selection of articles for the systematic review could be seen as problematic (Bornmann & Daniel, 2008), since it may result in the exclusion of possibly relevant publications. However, the use of citation count can also be justified, since it does emphasize those studies that have been employed in affirming other research results and the building of theories, by providing "indicators of international impact, influence" (van Raan, 2004, p. 27). Due to the relatively small size of the field of music education research, it is my and my co-author's understanding that the various aspects of international academic research on improvisation in music education were sufficiently represented through the 77 included studies, thus answering the demands of the research task. Furthermore, the 77 articles provided an ample view of the research field and also allowed us to focus on the content analysis of these articles instead of merely descriptive statistics. Hence, the research method in this first sub-study resembled interpretive synthesis (Dixon-Woods, 2016), with the aim of producing insights for deepening knowledge in the field of music education research. This included subsuming issues identified in the primary studies into the wider frame of visions of improvisation pedagogy in music education (Dixon-Woods, 2016, pp. 385-386). Notes made during the systematic review included an observation of how citation count could be seen as bringing about a rather narrow representation of nationality, hence revealing possible biases in the academia in the favor of North American scholarship in the field of music education research. Conducting the review also showed the importance of the accessibility of scholarly articles in digital form, especially open access, since those journals without a digital form were excluded from the study. This raises the question of how both citation count and publications and publishing with fees, as well as the choice of language have an impact on the equal, valid, and rigorous representation of scholarly research.

The second sub-study and first choir case in this dissertation is the Beat. The research process was co-authored and commenced only *after* the choral project had ended. Still, some ethical challenges that were faced during the choral project also affected the research process. For instance, the media's interest in the intervention resulted in popular articles as well as an insert broadcast in the evening news, which subsequently appeared for two whole years on the internet. This not only compromised the anonymity of the research participants but all those partaking in the course, which was carried out as a wellbeing course in the facilities of a health organization. Therefore we, the three instructors of the Beat, made sure each decision about publicly performing was collaboratively discussed and decided, with the possibility of withdrawing, in order to make sure the participants' wellbeing always outweighed the interests of the media. Towards the end of the arts intervention, two students decided not to participate in the final concert, in which they would have been exposed to not only publicly performing, but performing on television. Yet, these two participated in all the preparations for the concert, and in the end one of them participated in the audience. Only one student decided not to participate in or attend the event, however they did participate in the last session after the concert. However, their hesitance in partaking in the concert was not solely based on the media interest, but on a wider issue, which was discussed and pondered upon in the sessions with the whole group under strict confidentiality, as were many other issues regarding the status of the participants.

The seven individual research interviews that were part of sub-study 2 were conducted in June and July 2014. For this purpose, a statement from the ethical board of the University of the Arts Helsinki was sought by our research team regarding the ethical integrity of the project, and was received in June 2014 (see Appendix 4). Ethics permission was also sought from the Finnish Student Health Services, although the study did not at any point examine social anxiety from a medical point of view or as an indication of illness. While waiting for the permission from the ethical board, I introduced the participants to our initial thoughts about conducting research in the choir's last session before the project ended, and asked for volunteers to be interviewed by an outside researcher. A formal and signed informed consent

was sought at the beginning of each individual interview (see Appendix 5) by the researcher who conducted the interviews.

Interviewing as a method was well suited to exploring and generating experiential and narrated material of the participants' life stories (van Manen, 1990). Rather than capturing 'real', private experiences, or gaining "unmediated access to a participant's 'lived-experience'" (Kohler Riessman, 2016, p. 368), the narrative approach allowed us to see the interviews as not simply records of past experience of the arts intervention participants, but as purposefully "composed for the listener/questioner and perhaps other invisible audiences to accomplish something – to have an effect" (p. 368). With an understanding that the social context of the interview might be a hindrance to participation for those living with social anxiety, a specific focus was put on creating a safe environment characterized by trust between the interviewees and the interviewer. The interviews were conducted by a member of the research group who had not participated in the development or execution of the intervention. This choice was made to encourage new insights and a more liberated expression of opinion, while being aware of some participants' difficulties in social situations such as meeting and discussing with an unfamiliar person. Although the participants were used to sharing their experiences in environment of the Beat, individual interviews were seen as well suited to allowing the participants to express their individual views without fear of social judgment, as far as possible. In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees as far as possible, I myself abstained from listening to the interview recordings, thus reducing the possibility of recognizing the interviewees or disclosing their identities to anyone other than the interviewer. To avoid bias, the interviewer also took the primary responsibility for the analysis of the data, whilst all three researchers were involved in the analysis and the final interpretation, and the writing of the report was conducted collaboratively.

The third sub-study is the second choir case in this dissertation, and was single-authored by myself. As an insider I was "an actor within the setting" (Teusner, 2016, p. 86), hence the validity of the research was complicated by my own relationship with the phenomenon and the participants. I did not enter the field with ready-made plans about methodology, but with an open, ethnographic attitude towards the variety

of empirical material that could be collaboratively generated in this sub-study. In this way, I approached the research environment with a level of uncertainty, crafting the procedures in accordance to the environment in which I was operating and "a functioning constituent" (Attia & Edge, 2017, p. 33). I first introduced the IC51 members to the idea of conducting research via email, and then we collaboratively discussed it in a session with the group. Formal consents were given by the actively participating improvisers via email prior to beginning the generation of empirical material, and a recorded verbal consent was sought in the group interview (see Appendix 6). Not all members participated in all the sessions, and one member declined. Hence, when and how the study was conducted (such as field notes taken or sessions recorded) required meticulous consideration on my behalf, since for an insider "established trust is the foundation upon which [I] construct [the] research" (Attia & Edge, 2017, p. 38). Because I had previous experience of collecting data as an insider from an improvisation choir, which in the end was not admitted as part of this inquiry, I was well aware of the potential difficulties and ethical dilemmas in field work with such a delicate phenomenon as improvisation, and furthermore involving a group of people with practices under construction and development. I was also aware of how the researcher is often seen to construct ownership of the innovative and novel phenomenon beyond that of the practitioners, which can cause conflicts and unnecessary tension, again affecting the practice itself.

In the case of the IC51, I made a deliberate decision to exclude those members from my field notes or research diary who had not consented to take part in the study, and not to record any empirical material when such members were present. Also, when newcomers joined the practice sessions, which took place quite often, I informed them of my research informally at the beginning of the sessions. Nevertheless, I did not seek formal signed consent or record those sessions in order to avoid alienation on the part of the newcomers, because the non-normative nature and features of the practices and the freedom required to participate in those practices can make one vulnerable to outsider views. Furthermore, although seeking informed consent is an ordinary process in research, it includes hierarchical positioning and power issues, which could have distorted the equal participation that was so highly valued

in our improvisation choir practices. Indeed, the origins of confidentiality can be viewed as suggesting that the researcher is more powerful than the others, who are in need of the researcher's protection (MacFarlane, 2010, p. 21).

The pervasiveness of the case study methodology was in accordance with my insider position in the IC51, as it allowed me to collect in-depth information about the case, its "uniqueness, particularity, diversity" (Stake, 1994, p. 238), including the nature of the case, the physical settings, historical background, contextual issues and informants. The empirical material included a two-hour group interview and participant observations, with record keeping relying on hand-written field notes and computer processing after each session, with the support of video- and audio-recordings of the sessions, researcher diary and personal notes. The field notes ranged widely from overviews of actions to detailed information related to meanings, activities, and feelings. Two improvisation choir sessions were recorded by choosing the most unobtrusive way in which to do so; for instance, by using two fixed standing cameras set up in the space prior to the group being convened. One of the two recorded sessions was in the form of making a commercial video about the IC51. Hence, the session became a performance itself in some ways, while recording the live negotiations of the process in the making. The audio data was recorded in three sessions and amounted to 7,5 hours in total.

In the IC51 group interview, I assumed the role of an interviewer and facilitator of discussion, which differed from my customary position in the group as an equal member. I aimed to avoid imposing hierarchical positions and power relations on the group by remaining as an open listener, posing supplemental and probing questions in addition to the planned questions. Although I am aware of the criticism of focus group interview as a method in case study design (Stake, 2006, p. 29), the group interview was chosen as a form of empirical material generation with the goal of allowing the participants to co-construct knowledge in similar associative ways as in the usual ensemble sessions, but also creating new ones. During the interview, spontaneous and emotional views (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 150), as well as differing viewpoints, were expressed, of the sort that might be bypassed in the improvisation sessions. In the interview it was established that gaining consensus

was not the aim of the process, and, surprisingly, many differing opinions were given. However, towards the end of the interview consensus was more evident than divergence or disagreement. Although adding another group interview could have been beneficial, I found the single group interview to be rich enough from the perspective of the goals of the study. For this reason, and also due to time constraints, no more interviews were conducted.

The video material recorded in the IC51 sessions supported developing the theoretical contribution of the third sub-study and was valuable for gaining an understanding of the practices and processes of negotiation from an embodied perspective. Recording the IC51 sessions was a delicate process, since each session could have newcomers participating, such as the collaborative and open sessions with many participants that were held in a community center. During the research process I found the practices of free improvisation very vulnerable to exposure, as was the case with the Beat as well. Both choirs required a level of safety and trust among those participating. Hence, exposure to the visual recording of the sessions needed to be carefully planned. Therefore, in the end, only three sessions were recorded during the research process.

The value of the video recordings was particularly evident in describing and understanding the practices and embodied processes in-depth. Although not analyzed in the sense of video-based research (Heath, 2011), the visual material allowed us to examine embodied action and the use of space in the IC51 in a way audio material and simply participating would not have. The embodiment of the practices was evidenced through the video material, while the audio recordings enabled exploration of the entirety of musical pieces and their layers without the visual contact. Both perspectives were valuable in understanding the phenomenon, while supporting and guiding the research process towards making insights about the practices and processes in the group. Thus, the ethnographic generation of empirical material and its versatile emergence was applicable for this case study. Although the musical event schema (DeNora & Ansdell, 2017) as the method of analysis could be seen as suitable for grounded theory research design, in sub-study three it was applied for providing the temporal view needed in organizing the empirical material.

Furthermore, this method of analysis has provided an understanding of the change processes on a deeper, embodied level, and could be seen as linked to the theorizing of transformational learning (see Chapter 2.1).

The recordings were a valuable tool in gaining an expanded view on the phenomenon and triangulation of empirical material, as well as viewing my own role in the practices and group processes. Due to my own immersive participation in the practices, the field notes were always written *after* each session and were unavoidably colored by the researcher's insider perspective, missing points that could have been seen by an outsider. The video recordings allowed me to inspect my own behavior and participation in relation to the other participants, which allowed further reflection and shifting between the insider-outsider perspectives, and the triangulation of different materials. The video material also allowed new insights to be made by gaining distance from the phenomenon relative to my researcher's position and enabling observation from a new angle. Furthermore, it allowed me to recall and review the material also after some time had passed.

4 Published results of the three sub-studies

This chapter provides the main findings of the three sub-studies (Chapters 4.1-4.3) that were published in three separate peer-reviewed articles in national and international journals (see Appendices 1-3 and Table 2). The objective of this inquiry is to examine the plural possibilities and affordances of improvisation for music education and the significance of social ecology by exploring the social and music creative practices in two choir cases.

The first sub-study (Appendix 1), co-authored with Prof. Panagiotis Kanellopoulos, reviews the literature on improvisation and improvisation pedagogy in music education research, and also conceptualizes visions for improvisation pedagogy in music education based on the review. The second sub-study (Appendix 2) presents the first choir case of this inquiry, the Beat, which is an intervention with choral singing and improvisation in the context of wellbeing contributing to theories of collaborative learning. This article is co-authored with a researcher who had not been involved in the intervention, Dr. Satu-Mari Jansson, and with my supervisor, Prof. Heidi Westerlund, who had participated in the initiation of the intervention. The third sub-study (Appendix 3) presents the second choir case of this inquiry, the IC51. The single-authored article describes and theorizes the educational value of free choral improvisation as well as further elaborating upon the ecological perspective on music education and the affordances of improvisation. All three studies provide different but complimentary views on improvisation, learning, and musicking. An overview of the findings in light of the main task for each sub-study is provided in Chapter 4.4.

4.1 Sub-study I: The plurality of improvisation pedagogy in music education research

The first sub-study (see Appendix 1) was guided by the objective of r*ecognizing the state of the art in music education research with respect to improvisation.* We discovered through the literature review that improvisation is viewed in music education research as a versatile phenomenon with a multitude of possible approaches

and pedagogical practices. The main features of the studies that address issues of musical improvisation were reported in descriptive statistics, showing that the use of qualitative methods in research on improvisation in music education have significantly increased since the year 2000, until qualitative methods outweighed quantitative methods (11,7%) by 1,3% between 2005 and 2011. The most popular foci in the 77 studies were musical development (31,2%) and improvisation ability (15,6%). In studies utilizing empirical data (52 out of 77), improvisation was mostly studied as an individual effort with solo improvisation tasks in 40,4% (21) of the studies, while group improvisation was only studied in 9 (17,3%) of the studies, and exclusively with qualitative methods. Exploration of types of improvisation showed an emphasis on instrumental (40,4%) and individual (55,8%) improvisation, rather than collaborative or vocal/choral improvisation. Furthermore, most of the studies with participants were conducted in North America (53,8%), which highlights the lack of studies in other parts of the world and the existing bias in the publication systems of academia. For their part, our findings support the choice of research on collaborative and vocal improvisation taken in this inquiry.

In this sub-study, we provided an illustration of the various approaches to improvisation and visions of improvisation pedagogy that represented general trends of how music education research addresses improvisation. The mapping of visions also aimed to conceptualize ways of working with improvisation in everyday teaching – the values, tensions, and beliefs underpinning educational work in practice. In the pedagogical moment (van Manen, 1991a) of improvisation, an improviser and pedagogue is seen as responding based on value-laden and immediate decisions about how to proceed in each situation. In these kinds of moments, one is being pulled in several different directions and towards making both conscious and unconscious decisions about the approaching improvisation. These decisions lead to new decisions and ultimately point towards constellations of particular visions of improvisation pedagogy. Employing the concept of a *pedagogical moment* as defined by van Manen (1991a) can be seen as providing the possibility to grasp the constraints on the temporal and social dimensions of collaborative improvisation, which are highly interrelated (see van der Schyff et al., 2018). Furthermore, the

concept provides an avenue into understanding how one's history is connected to pedagogical interaction, and further to the social ecology of improvisation pedagogy, as presented in Chapter 2.4. The mapping visualizes the plurality of how improvisation has been understood by presenting eleven ways of approaching improvising and improvisation in a circular map, and suggests five visions of improvisation pedagogy emerging from the studies included. The visions are not meant to be clear cut, but are seen as bringing out the role of improvisation as a way of addressing and cultivating important qualities of what it means to be musical, as well as what it means to be human. Hence, the educational value of improvisation is not only in its possibilities for musical development, but in the plural ways that it can be approached and the different visions improvisation pedagogies can produce.

The approaches to improvisation and visions of improvisation pedagogy are presented in more detail in the sub-study (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020) and are discussed with reference to prior literature, thus linking the inquiry to a wider review of research and theory on improvisation. The cross-referencing of data in both stages of the analysis revealed an imbalance between model-bound practices and improvisation as an open form. Furthermore, the findings showed that the collaborative and social aspects of improvising could be further probed in music education research. Further probing could also be done into how this mapping could be employed in practice as a reflective lens for understanding one's own and others' pedagogical or improvising practices. Since the initial idea for this sub-study was to review the literature with a wider scope from different research disciplines - such as musicology, music sociology, and music performance - further probing could be conducted to more thoroughly explore how the mapping is related to the wider literature. Nevertheless, this sub-study provides a broad view on improvisation in music education scholarly research and on the justifications that support the inclusion of a variety of improvisation practices in music education. Furthermore, from the perspective of the inquiry, this sub-study opens up avenues for understanding the many ways that improvisation can support not only musicianship but also growth in a wider sense.

4.2 Sub-study II: Wellbeing through a safe space in a choir

In the second sub-study (see Appendix 2) the objective was *to better understand the significance of social ecology in learning, and collaborative learning in particular, when musicking with adults living with social anxiety*. By exploring participant narrations of their experiences with the non-clinical arts intervention and social anxiety in the university context and beyond, the findings of this sub-study suggest creating positive learning environments in higher education and creating spaces with good quality interaction. Whilst proposing arts interventions with improvisation as one, albeit not the only, possibility for unlocking vicious circles of social anxiety, the study makes a wider claim that it is vital for advocates of collaborative learning to recognize the importance of the quality of social interaction in educational contexts at all levels, including higher education and music education, since not all students are equipped with the same experiences and may experience collaborative spaces in vastly different ways. Thus, the sub-study can be seen as advocating for the recognition of each student as unique, with different backgrounds and needs in learning, including in music educational contexts. The findings show that the arts intervention, as an experimental project combining choral singing with health care expertise and improvisation focused on social interaction, offered the participants a safe environment and social space for training interaction skills pertaining to how to socially interact without fear of being ridiculed. During the eight-month project with the Beat, positive experiences of social reciprocity were made possible through a sense of belonging in a group, which enhanced learning about oneself, about others, and with others, including the facilitators. The quality of the interactions and social processes were supported in the Beat with the improvisational theatre mindset, as presented in Chapters 1.2.2 and 1.4. This could be seen as providing the participants with the possibility to engage in collaborative practices and encountering their fear of mistakes.

Despite the interventional nature of the choir project, the aim of the sub-study was not to present a narrative of success. As would be expected, social anxiety was experienced even after the intervention and participation in the choir. Furthermore,

although positive experiences of the arts intervention were narrated in the interviews, it does not mean that anxiety or discomfort were nonexistent in the choir sessions. Rather, the safe environment allowed the participants to better cope with their symptoms, to not be afraid to let them be visible to the others, to understand that they were not the only ones with such symptoms, and even to accept social anxiety as part of life. Hence, this sub-study as part of the inquiry paves the way for understanding the arts intervention as a social space that can break the vicious circle of social anxiety: while social anxiety can cause a cycle of negative feelings and experiences, positive emotional experiences of belonging and functioning in a group in an arts intervention can be initiators of not only social participation and self-esteem, but social learning. The study thus highlights the value of quality in social interaction and experiencing a sense of belonging in a group in collaborative learning situations in general, and music educational processes specifically.

One feature of the intervention worth highlighting is the regularity of the choir sessions. The regularity was as an aid to wellbeing in that pleasure was achieved from sharing experiences of social anxiety in discussions with peers, learning through others, and pursuing musicking activities as well as embodied and creative exercises instead of merely talking, the typical approach in the students' healthcare services. Positive connections were made in the group during the sessions, and were experienced even with the audience in the final performance at the end of the intervention. Students told of shifting their perspectives and experiencing acceptance of themselves and their insecurities, letting go of aspired perfection and creating an accepting attitude towards mistakes. Furthermore, when commenting on the presence of discomfort during the course, the interviewees told of noticing their own development in breaking through inhibiting boundaries, in gaining the courage to bring forth their own voice and to participate in playful exercises, and to accept how their own voice sounds. The reciprocity of improvisation was even experienced as therapeutic. The Beat thus provided a safe space for practicing social interaction in a real social space that, theoretically speaking, expanded the social ecology of their everyday life, but at the same time provided exceptional participation in musicking.

In sum, the Beat provides an example of how an environment experienced as safe can enable positive experiences of reciprocal social interaction without fear of being judged or evaluated, which are immanent aspects of social anxiety. A positive cycle of social participation can be induced by the experience of belonging to a group that as a whole strives towards experienced quality, respect, and mutual understanding about fear of social interaction. In addition to university and higher education contexts, this sub-study, as part of the inquiry as a whole, suggests that the quality of interaction can have straightforward effects on not only learning, but also more widely on the students' understanding of their own potential, wellbeing, and future possibilities in life. For music education, this sub-study highlights the significance of the quality of social interaction and the social nature of musicking as well as the necessity of pedagogical facilitation of such skills. These are not irrelevant issues, bearing in mind that the same fear of making mistakes and being judged and evaluated that characterize social anxiety in general are the core problems in music performance anxiety (e.g. Dobos, Piko, & Kenny, 2019) and in negative experiences of music exams more widely (e.g. Lehtonen & Juvonen, 2009). Furthermore, this sub-study offers an example of how wellbeing can be connected to music making and how wellbeing can potentially be increased, if certain conditions for the learning environment are fulfilled.

4.3 Sub-study III: Musical and social learning in a co-constructed safe space

In the third sub-study (see Appendix 3) my objective was *to apprehend transformed individual and collective experience in and through social ecology in free choir improvisation with an improvisational theatre mindset*. The case of IC51 was found to afford the participants wellbeing and a sense of belonging, as well as leading to a transference of social skills and musical agency to everyday lives outside the sessions. The social and educational affordances were theorized within an ecological framework by exploring the construction of a safe space and strategies of seeking asylum (DeNroa, 2013a) in one adult choir, the IC51. Through the application

of an improvisational theatre mindset (see Chapter 1.2.3 and 1.4) in free vocal improvisation the choir collaboratively created and upheld a safe musical space with a playful atmosphere. Detachment from everyday responsibilities and life was experienced in spontaneous and free vocal playing as a sense of ease and pleasure. The social process of creating was described as offering and acceptance, with bodily awareness and holistic expression, while negotiations of meanings and values were complex and occurred on multiple planes simultaneously. As a group with mixed skill levels and differing backgrounds, negotiations of the shared socio-musical space induced feelings of discomfort or balancing between insecurity and safety. This movement back-and-forth between insecurity and safety was theorized as adapting and developing in relation to the environment (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016, p. 41), or as seeking asylum (DeNora, 2013a) in or away from the social space.

The case of free choral improvisation is an example of how social skills and techniques with reference to improvisational theatre can be employed for overcoming the conflictual processes and insecurity inherent in free improvisation. Although the co-creation was reciprocal and playful, feelings of discomfort were found to be an individually experienced and recurring element, affecting and challenging participation and co-construction. This discomfort could be experienced as awkwardness in bodily engagement, inflicted by diverse understandings of improvisation or by becoming aware of one's own thinking. The participants coped in these situations by employing different techniques, which were compared to DeNora's (2013a) understanding of asylum-seeking strategies. Remaking the environment, as in refurnishing, was seen as deliberately neglecting negative thoughts or tolerating chaos and unfamiliarity by focusing on the social process, while removal, as in withdrawal, was found in how the participants told of techniques such as keeping their eyes closed, thus blocking the flood of cues and impulses. By becoming aware of their own techniques in moments of discomfort, the participants found themselves able to let go of the ways of working that had a negative impact on participation.

Drawing on DeNora's (2013a) theorizing of affordances, the free choir improvisation in this choir was seen as providing the participants leading to the transference of social skills and musical agency to everyday lives outside the sessions. Although the

practices were collective, the manifestation of affordances and different learning opportunities were dependent on the individual's past experiences and history, grounding the learning outcomes on an individualized basis rather than a generalized approach. The improvisation choir provided a platform for meaningful and self-directed musical learning with music as "an active ingredient" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 6) of both wellbeing and construction of embodied social and musical agency. While affording inspiration to further music making and learning outside the sessions, the collaborative leadership of the practices also enabled the development of facilitation skills in music even without prior experience in formal music education. This was also theorized as being linked to the development of process-focused pedagogical thinking and growth mindset following Rissanen and others (2019). The diversity within the group and the expanded use of the voice, sounds, and body afforded the participants openness to diversity and social attunement in a way that transferred beyond the choir context to the participants' daily lives in both professional and family contexts. For instance, improvising in the shared socio-musical space was found to expand understandings of beauty in music and to include all kinds of ways of sound-making.

The IC51 exemplified that, when meeting the conditions of a safe learning environment, free improvisation can enhance the construction of musical and social agency, as well as equal participation in music regardless of prior cultivation of musical skills and knowledge, and thus equity. Depending on the social ecology of each situation, the musicking afforded the participants resources for constructing both social and musical agency, as well as playful collaborative musical learning and therewith wider wellbeing. This sub-study suggests that more emphasis could be placed in spaces of musical education on starting from the assumption that everyone is a musician and singer in order to avoid boundaries that hinder participation in music making. In educational contexts, the teacher's or conductor's role could be seen as facilitating the learning of socio-musical skills, hence providing resources for seeking asylum through refurnishing in the social space. The findings of the sub-study imply that various affordances, including musical agency and wellbeing in music educational contexts, could be made available if more emphasis and

support could be placed on the *co-creation of safe explorative musical spaces* in and through bodily inspired free improvisation. On the basis of these findings, this sub-study as part of the whole inquiry suggests a wider application of an ecological framework for music education and improvisation in order to consider the ways in which musicking with a focus on social processes that create a safe and playful learning environment in all music educational contexts could be supported.

4.4. Summary and reflection on the main findings

All three sub-studies contribute to the theorizing of improvisation as a musical form, social practice, and pedagogical approach, and also demonstrate how improvisation can contribute to the quality of human life and musical (and other) learning on multiple levels. The first sub-study contributed by visualizing and conceptualizing the ecological nature of improvisation, as was apparent in the extent and complexity of the types of musical improvisation in the music education research. Thus, the literature review and mapping of visions grounded the need to understand participant experiences, which was accounted for in sub-studies 2 and 3. Sub-study 1 highlighted the need to develop possibilities for learners to engage in a variety of approaches to improvisation. Furthermore, the mapping of the first sub-study provided more understanding of the tensions and conflicts that can arise in the teaching practice of improvisation in music educational contexts.

Sub-studies 2 and 3 explored participant experiences of collaborative singing and improvising with the application of an improvisational theatre mindset, as presented in Chapters 1.2.2-1.2.3 and 1.4. The findings of sub-study 2 with the case of Beat indicated how social processes are connected to music making and how wellbeing is potentially increased if certain conditions for the learning environment are fulfilled. The connection between music, wellbeing, and learning was further theorized in sub-study 3 with the social ecological framework and the interrelation of wellbeing and musicking, seeking asylum, and the construction of agency (DeNora, 2013a; Small, 1998). This allowed a deepening of the view on the process of improvising from the perspective of social ecology, by acknowledging personal hindrances and possibilities, as well as how the environment can have an effect on one's opportunities.

In an ecological framework, human beings are seen as interrelated and affected by people, things, and prior experiences they have encountered (Barnett & Jackson, 2020). This view was exemplified in how the two choirs with mixed skills were able to collaborate, and how the individuality of the learners led to versatile experiences and affordances, as was found with the improvising choir in sub-study 3. Since neither Beat nor IC51 were taking place in conventional educational contexts, the inquiry as a whole supports views of learning as not being reserved for formal educational contexts alone, but as entailed in all kinds of situations of music making.

Since the findings in sub-study 2 showed mainly positive experiences of participation in the Beat and contribute to social learning theories, the relevance of sub-study 3 comes out in providing more detailed knowledge of the related discomfort aspect through DeNora's (2013a) theory of seeking asylum. Hence, both sub-studies inform our understanding of inhibitions related to collaborative situations and improvisation, and of the versatile strategies employed in situations of discomfort, mostly induced by the interrelation of prior experiences and the current social context, or in anticipation of it. Sub-study 2 elaborates this from the perspective of those who might fear social situations or feel unable to collaborate, or even do not possess any prior positive experiences of being in a group. It highlights the significance of the quality of social interaction in education, in particular, throughout the life course, and the potential for improvisatory musicking to provide a safe environment even for those who feel discomfort in social situations. By theorizing the connections between wellbeing, music making, and improvisation, sub-studies 2 and 3 contribute to our further understanding of the social ecology of music making in general. Furthermore, these sub-studies contribute knowledge about how such pedagogically safe spaces can be constructed in order for them to support positive wellbeing in music making, and improvisation in particular. Although sub-studies 2 and 3 took place among adults, and the latter outside of school settings, viewing them instrumentally yields knowledge and theorization on how the discomfort of improvisation is encountered and on the role of the social context and feelings of safety in those processes, particularly in improvisation.

5 Discussion

Examined through the social ecology perspective, and by recognizing the multidimensional nature of human experience, the objective of this multi-case study has been to understand the potentials of improvisation in music education and the significance of the social ecology in the learning of music and musicking in general. For this purpose, the literature of music education research and the collaborative, vocal, and bodily improvising practices of two choirs have been explored. It should be noted that the social ecology of the learner is about being part of a larger ecological and sociocultural whole (Lemke, 2013) that includes not only the music and the students, but the individual, interpersonal, community, and intercultural systems, present and past, on micro, macro, and meso levels (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that influence each participant's behavior, interaction, and learning – indirectly or directly (Osher et al., 2020).

This chapter interprets and discusses the key findings of the three sub-studies and how their particularizations relate to theorizations of learning, teaching, and improvising practices within a socio-ecological paradigm, and what implications may be valuable for future research and practice in music education, improvisation, and social theories of learning. Following the multi-case study design, I will bring about what is unique to each case and sub-study (Stake, 2006, p. 39), with the objective of informing music learning and musicking practices towards inclusiveness, equality, and the wellbeing of participants at large. This is done by first discussing the state of the art in music education research in terms of improvisation in Chapter 5.1. Second, the significance of social ecology in learning and collaborative learning, in particular, is reviewed in Chapter 5.2, and third, the discussion is extended to the transformation of individual and collective experience through the socio-ecological perspective of free choral improv isation with an improvisational theatre mindset in Chapter 5.3. I will continue with the theorizing of DeNora's concept of asylum, the concept of play, and Dewey's means-ends continuum in Chapter 5.4, in relation to the findings of the empirical cases. Finally, I will synthesize the theoretical considerations of a social ecology of learning in improvisation and music education in Chapter 5.5.

5.1 The challenge of improvisation in collaboration and teaching

This inquiry has aimed to further understanding of the challenges and opportunities of collaborative and vocal improvisation, especially of an open form such as free improvisation, especially as scholarly work on the subject was found to be scarce in the sample of music education research (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020) in sub-study one. The conclusions of the literature review, conceptualized in the mapping of visions, can be seen as disputing normative claims that improvisation, learning, or teaching can be framed by any single approach that claims to be authentic or true (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020, p. 114; see Hickey, 2009). This indicates that improvisation pedagogy requires an understanding of multiple metaphors of teaching and learning, which is in accordance with the prior literature (Johansen et al., 2019; Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019; Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020), as well as acknowledging the plurality of metaphors for learning and the danger of choosing just one, as argued by Sfard (1998). Although a small step in this direction, this dissertation has employed an ecological framework for furthering understanding of the complexity of improvisation, as indicated by the conclusions in sub-study 1 on the plural approaches to improvisation. Within an ecological framework, learning can be viewed as "a living emergent process" (Jackson, 2016, p. 24) in which we continuously change understandings and apply what is known in new situations. The pedagogical moment (van Manen, 1991a) of improvisation that was used for conceptualizing how individuals are pulled in different directions in sub-study 1 could be seen as a manifestation of the socioecological nature of teaching and learning alongside that of social improvisation (Erickson, 2011) on a temporal continuum. Meaning, the plurality of approaches, experiences, musical skills and knowledge that an individual brings to learning and teaching, and how the social and musical dimensions of improvisation are interrelated with an individual's history, result in them being pulled in several directions simultaneously and being presented with choices as time unfolds.

An ecological approach is suggested for further research on improvisation and music education in general, since, as theorized in this inquiry, it holds the potential for alleviating some of the difficulties in learning and teaching by enabling a view of the totality of the educational and learning process (Kansanen, 2003). This is in line with prior research suggesting a paradigm shift towards an ecological framework (Borgo, 2002; van der Schyff et al., 2018; van der Schyff, Schiavio & Elliott, 2016; Wakao, 2019). Further research in music education could be carried out particularly on vocal free improvisation, where the human body is the musical instrument, in order to provide opportunities for exploring the ecological and embodied nature of multimodal social action and experience in improvising moments. One could even argue that the full potential of free collaborative vocal improvisation has been left unrecognized in music education research, as indicated by sub-study 1. Further research on soundsinging and free vocalizing, as well as women and transgender improvisers, could be conducted in music education in order to delineate such attitudes that regard the voice or vocal sounds as "marginal" or "worthless" (Tonelli, 2015), or gender as a marker for strength or lack of it in musical improvisation (McKay, 2005, n.p.).

As noted in Chapter 1.3.3, prior research and writings on free improvisation have brought out the potential of free improvisation for enhancing egalitarian and democratic values, such as ensuring an open attitude towards music and other people (see Verducci, 2016; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). The findings in sub-studies 2 and 3 indicate that reflective discussions about the experience and a focus on social processes opened up avenues in the adult choirs for transformative learning, as the participants were able to become aware of their own assumptions and habitual ways of thinking and acting as well as the assumptions carried by others, since the process included observations made in the group on how others behave and react. This exemplifies the value of collaborative discussion and reflection in and for improvisational learning and teaching, as has been argued in prior research (Sawyer, 2004; 2011; see Schön, 1987). More specifically, discussion in musical learning need not only be in and about the musical experience, but the social and individual experience as well, and the feelings related to the experience. In this

way the transformational perspective of learning, not only on the musical level but also the social and personal levels, could be explored, and the wellbeing of the participant could be enhanced - if an experience of safety is also provided. Further research could be carried out on exploring how the delineated and inherent musical meanings in the practices of improvisation and the teaching of improvisation arise, and how ambiguities contribute to the holistic musical experience of the participants, as suggested by Green (1999).

Pedagogical perspectives on reflective discussion about the experience of musicking, and reflective discussion in general, could be viewed within the frame of improvisation. If social action is improvised (Erickson, 2011), then engaging in collaborative learning and discussions can be viewed as improvising and collaboratively creating while also being both constrained and enabled by the frame that emerges during the collaborative discussion (Sawery, 2003b, pp. 241-242). A music pedagogue is improvising on multiple levels simultaneously - within the social and musical interactions, and through nonverbal and verbal means. Consequently, as Cohen and Duncan (2015) have suggested, drawing on Mezirow's habit of mind: "when both teachers and learners are mindful of their personal frames of reference and habitual thinking, they can more easily connect with others and transform themselves through learning experiences" (p. 559). This relates to the way in which improviser pedagogues often refer to the teaching of improvisation as creating music with the students on equal terms, and avoiding the manifestation of hierarchical statuses in the musical collaboration, as indicated in Chapter 1.3 on pedagogical approaches. If all discussion, dialogue, and social action among and between those participating, be it a teacher or students, is improvisational, then perhaps collaborative improvisation could be seen as a frame for understanding the social interrelations and social ecologies in the shared co-constructed space.

Furthermore, if learning is viewed as a transformational practice constructing agency (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 2), then the pedagogue's ecology of practice could be seen as including responsibility for offering learners space for reflection (Schön, 1987) and opportunities to change their perspective and understandings, to process and learn in an environment where limiting and fixed norms can be dismantled and

new ones constructed, and hence social and musical agency constructed (DeNora, 2000; Karlsen, 2011). Free improvisation in particular, where the musical material emerges from the sonic and embodied collaboration and where delineated and inherent meanings of music, as Green (1999) has described them, can be rearranged or transformed, could be seen as both constrained and enabled by the socio-ecological frame that emerges through the social and musical dialogue of those collaborating on multiple levels, multimodally and simultaneously. Hence the complexity of free improvisation and improvisation pedagogy, and thus the need to develop skills of musical and social improvisation that take into account the many levels of interpretation and multimodality of social and musical interaction. This multimodality of interaction and interpretation was exemplified in how silence in the IC51 improvisations could be interpreted in contrasting ways, either as a feature of giving room for others or as heightened listening, or as blocking the musical offers of others or a removal from the social musical space. In line with prior research on creating a non-evaluative environment for free improvisation (Hickey, 2015), and expanding on it, the pedagogical implications could include giving room for learners to express their *social and musical experiences and feelings*, and to discuss the multiple interpretations raised in and through the improvisation without judgment or evaluation on the part of the teacher, and letting the learners process these in relation to their further socio-musical actions in improvisation.

Yet, prior research shows that free improvisation cannot be regarded as self-evidently democratic, as suggested in Chapter 1.3.3, and neither is creating spaces for positive transformation, as reviewed in Chapter 1.3.2. Hence, explicit care needs to be taken when creating environments and social learning ecologies where this kind of cultivation is enabled, such as "deliberative democracy emphasizing dialogue, thoughtful analysis, and choice making" (Woodson, 2015, p. 86), and treating all participants as "artists - even if they do not self-identify as such" (p. 87). Furthermore, if considering the ways in which free musical improvisation can operate on multiple levels of interaction simultaneously, as indicated in sub-study 3, then could improvisation pedagogy, and furthermore all teaching with the goal of transformational learning, require multimodal interaction skills on behalf

of the teachers and pedagogues as well as the support of those skills in students. Hence, social ecology could be used as a reflective thinking tool in future research and practice for understanding the interrelatedness of prior histories and current practices with delineated and inherent musical meanings (Green, 1999) in the ecosystem of improvisation. An ecological framework holds much potential for guiding improvisation pedagogy, teaching as improvisation, and future research on improvisation in music education towards seeing teachers and educational systems as supporters and nurturers of environments that provide learners "a sense of physical and psychological safety for learning to occur" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 102). This means taking into account the complexity of pedagogical improvising situations and the interrelation of things and people, and how learning and participation in improvisation and in musical learning can be both enabled and hindered through pedagogical practices.

5.2 Equal possibilities to learn through reciprocal collaboration

As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the learning environments in the two choir cases were socially constructed in a way that safety and a sense of community were experienced in the mixed-skill groups, with an emphasis on collaboration that took place on multiple levels of interaction. This provided the participants with various affordances, such as musical and social learning, in addition to wellbeing. In the first choir case of this inquiry, the reason that the participants joined the Beat choir was to seek help for social anxiety, which has been reported to be learned and accumulated, and to have a connection with prior experiences of being bullied (Pörhölä, Almonkari & Kunttu, 2019). Since social anxiety has been diagnosed as early as in eight-years old children (Pörhölä, Almonkari & Kunttu, 2019; see also Kunttu, Pesonen & Saari, 2017), it is of central relevance to music education to consider how learning environments could be created that support participation for every student equally.

While collaborative learning is recommended widely in the music education literature, in light of recent research (Timonen, 2020) students are often assumed

to be naturally able to participate and collaborate. This kind of preconception views all students in the same light, and might neglect the individual differences of the students in their abilities to participate. Furthermore, it raises the question of what the role of educational contexts in students' development of social skills and agency is. The case of the Beat could be seen as an example of how social ecology, from the perspective of prior experiences, emotions, and memories, in addition to physical and mental readiness, is interrelated with one's capabilities to participate socially. When living with social anxiety, social fitness is low, as the fear of mistakes and being evaluated by others is heightened (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2010) while making mistakes in public can only be avoided at a high cost (see Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016).

However, the ability to err and make mistakes has been considered as at the core of learning (Davis, 2016; Henley, 2019; Johnstone, 1981, 1999; Kanellopoulos, 2007; Dewey, LW8: 206). Furthermore, making mistakes has been valued in creativity research as the driving force behind thinking anew and finding innovative alternatives (Sawyer, 2003a, p. 60). In the case of the Beat, social fitness was used as a lens for the ability to reflect and use errors as a tool for improvement, which "implies some measure of learned skill and a belief that one is 'fit' enough to slip and fall, [...] and not only recover but learn from the experience, trusting that one can still play, individually and on the team" (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2010, p. 86). As explained in Chapter 4, the findings showed that the participants of the Beat were able to develop their social fitness in the choir and were also able to interact socially without fear of being ridiculed, regardless of their social anxiety. Hence, implications of how learning environments are designed could be drawn for educational contexts, particularly music education. As explained in Chapter 1.2.2, in the case of the Beat social processes were placed at the center of the collaborative improvising, singing, and discussions, with the aim of supporting the development of social skills and interactions, and thereafter construction of social agency (Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016). The improvisational theatre mindset, as presented in Chapter 1.4.2, could be described as the music pedagogue's tool for facilitating learning and singing. Through exercises, discussions, and musical practices the students' development

of an improvisational mindset was supported, which in turn enhanced reciprocity in the social processes and the ability to perceive mistakes as opportunities rather than hindrances (see Dudeck & McClure, 2018) – and hence, social fitness. Drawing on Jackson (2020), it could be theorized that the facilitator's "ecology of practice" (p. 87) was designed to support the learners' social ecology of learning, and their construction of "new meanings and understandings of the world and of one's being and identity in and with the world" (Jackson & Barnett, 2020, p. 1).

As indicated, learning and teaching in collaborative situations have been found to be both social and improvisational (Sawyer, 2004; 2011), but as Miyake and Kirschner (2014) have noted, "social aspects of collaboration are often taken for granted" (p. 418). If collaborative learning is defined by "mutual influence and equality of participation" (O'donnell & Hmelo-Silver, 2013, p. 16), then it could be argued that in order to promote equality rather than inequality, collaborative learning environments need be designed to take into account the individual differences of and in learners and their abilities to participate, as indicated in the findings of this inquiry and suggested by prior research (Henley, 2019). In the case of the Beat, feelings of discomfort were not avoided, but were embraced as a feature of the process, since it was known that the mere presence of other people, or even entering a social space, could be an induction to feelings of discomfort and an inhibition to participation or collaboration (Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016). Based on the findings of sub-study 2 and the further elaborations of feelings of discomfort made in sub-study 3, the learning space can be seen as a discursive and pedagogical safe space which, according to Roestone collective, is "not static, but a constant movement between safe and unsafe, individual and collective, agreement and disagreement" (Roestone collective, 2014, p. 1355). In line with prior research, the learning environment in the two choir cases was collaboratively constructed in a way that social, emotional, and musical conflicts were all seen as natural parts of a functioning group, learning, and human nature, as suggested by Henley (2019), rather than something to be avoided or hidden. Therefore, differences were promoted or even taken as stances, hence acknowledging the interrelation of individuality and collectivity.

This aspect was further explored in the case of IC51 in sub-study 3, which could be used to view how feelings of discomfort related to improvising - and hence social action (see Erickson, 2011). Drawing on DeNora (2013a), social processes, and feelings of safety - are at the core of how individuals acted in moments of discomfort. Similar indications can be found in how a member of the Beat describes a meaningful moment in the process, which also relates to Lemke's (2013) theorizing of the interrelation of feelings and meaning making processes in a social ecology.

> *One of the star moments was when we started to come together and become free in the playing. They were happening simultaneously. I could tell from the games, because the same ones were used until the end. We were so much more liberated. People made a lot more mistakes, 'cause in the beginning everyone evidently tried to avoid making them until the last bit. (an interviewee from the Beat in sub-study 2)*

Since fear of mistakes can be counterproductive to learning, and even the cause of psychological problems (Henley, 2019), both collaboration and collaborative learning could be seen as requiring a level of safety where fear of mistakes is reduced. The findings of this inquiry, however, indicate an interrelation between experiences of safety and reciprocity in collaboration This is in accordance with prior research arguing that safety can be imperative to any collaboration (Hunter, 2008, p. 6), and how the quality of interaction on both the individual and group level is related to learning. A group can be seen as a social system where the interpersonal context, as in "beliefs about the relations among the team members" (Miyake & Kirschner, 2014, p. 422), plays an essential role in either stimulating or inhibiting learning behavior (ibid.) and fear of mistakes. This is supported by the work of Scager and others (2016) on the importance of positive interdependence in collaboration, which is not constituted by a single factor or student, but through the interaction of the whole group. With an ecological framework, this view is extended to understanding learning development "as shaped by interactions among the environmental factors, relationships, and learning opportunities they

experience" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 97). Hence, environments and social ecologies on a micro-level that support the ability to redefine and overcome experiences of failure and face them without embarrassment and shame, as has been suggested by Schulz (2010), could be further theorized as vital to creating equal opportunities for learning, and drawing on DeNora's (2013a) theory of asylum, to wellbeing at large.

Hence, one could argue that if participation is hampered by the interrelation of individual and social circumstances, such as social anxiety or bullying, then opportunities for learning are hampered in a similar vein. Fear of social situations and social anxiety is a growing problem which has been described as a "hidden disability" (Topham & Russell, 2012; Russell & Topham, 2012), since it is often concealed due to fear of stigmatization. It is also often falsely assumed to simply be a part of the process of learning or academic challenges, and is likewise falsely believed to be a personality trait or attributed to behavioral characteristics such as shyness (ibid.). This implies that in educational situations it is important to notice that individually the students are arriving at the situation from different starting points, and to work towards ensuring the social conditions for each individual to thrive. Pedagogical examples for music education could be drawn from the field of inclusive pedagogy, of how difference (also in terms of social fitness) can be taken as a baseline stance and common assumptions about everyone possessing similar skills and abilities can be overcome (see Florian, 2015; Henley, 2019). Further research could be done on how similar attention to difference as a stance could be considered in music educational contexts in general, and in this way promote the achievement of equity (Espinoza, 2007).

In the two choir cases, the collaborative construction of a safe space was emphasized and consciously constructed with the help of playfulness derived from improvisational theatre, which is also in line with recent research on innovative social anxiety treatments (Phillips Sheesley, Pfeffer & Barish, 2016). Interestingly, a pioneer of improvisational theatre, Johnstone (1981), has suggested that "instead of seeing people as untalented, we can see them as phobic, and this completely changes the teacher's relationship with them" (p. 31). This accurately pinpoints

the empathy and pedagogical approach of an improvisational mindset, which was applied to support the social improvising process of discussions and music in the practices. This approach was not only used between the pedagogue and students, but also between the students and each other, and equally so for the facilitators. This implies a level of reciprocity where the needs of both students and teachers are taken into account on some level in spaces of trust, community, and commitment, as suggested by Silverman (2012, p. 111-112), and an understanding of how emotions and feelings are interrelated with learning, interaction, and meaning making (Henley, 2019; Lemke, 2013). Nevertheless, as suggested in sub-study 3 and in line with prior research, a safe social space for creativity and transformation cannot be created by one person or pedagogue alone, but must be the collaborative effort of all those participating. Therefore, it is important to note that learning environments are not to be considered self-evidently safe and supportive of learning, or to be provided by the music alone, but are actively and passively, socially and individually co-constructed.

Hence, the findings of this inquiry are supported by research advocating for musical and general learning spaces to be designed and implemented with the possibility of embracing errors as opportunities, with trust for taking not only musical but also emotional and social risks (see Davis, 2016; Henley, 2019, p. 274-275). For music educational purposes it could be considered how a realm of "intentional insecurity" (see Felsman, Seifert & Himle, 2018) can be co-constructed in and through improvisation: a space where rules are negotiated through interaction, individual limits or boundaries on learning can be overcome, and the pursuit of social learning by allowing for making mistakes (see Davis, 2016) can be enabled. The findings of this inquiry also indicate that emphasizing the social aspects in musicking, not only through facilitated pedagogy but particularly through free improvisation and the use of an improvisational theatre framework, has the potential to support the integration of learning empathy and social skills, as well as the construction of social agency.

5.3 Constructing agencies in vocal, embodied, and collaborative playgrounds

The findings of this inquiry imply possibilities to support the holistic and embodied expression and construction of creative and improvisational social and musical agency in musicking through the multimodal combination of theatre and music. One could argue that the improvisational theatre mindset, as presented in Chapter 1.4, in the two choir cases (see Chapters 1.2.2-1.2.3) was an inspiration to vocal play and bodily presence in a way that singing alone might not have been (see Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016; Siljamäki, in print). Support for this claim can be found in writings on improvised drama as spontaneous physical expression "in response to the immediate stimuli of one's environment" (Frost & Yarrow, 2007, p. 4) and "whole body listening" (Dudeck & McClure, 2018, p. 281), as well as research on singing as "the multimodal experience of vocalizing and listening" (Tarvainen, 2018, p. 121). This is also supported by writings advocating that theatre and music skills could complement each other in musical education (Legg & Green, 2015). Through the multimodal and bodily engaged experience, identities and agencies were shaped and constructed in the two choir cases through collaborative singing and improvising in relation to the environment and associated discussions. In the case of the Beat, this was as exemplified in how social anxiety was described as being born through the dialogue between the physical sensations and mental interpretations, as a state of alarm. Moving and bodily engagement were always included in the musical practices and interaction exercises in the arts intervention, and individuals' understanding of themselves were changed so as to not be defined by mistakes, giving themselves "the possibility to slip up" (Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016, p. 43). This relates to what Stubley (1998) has defined as "an identity in the making" (p. 101), when one is able to be open in a playful space "to the possibilities of another" (p. 101). DeNora's (2017) understanding of identity change as stemming from an appropriation of affordances, as well as both attachment and detachment (p. 49), can also be seen as suitable for theorizing these malleable and ecological change processes.

As presented in Chapter 1.2.2-1.2.3 and 1.4, in both choir cases of this inquiry improvisational theatre was used for the inspiration of presence and engagement with an improvisational theatre mindset, which could be referred to as constructing improvisational and social agency (see Chapter 2.2). Although none of the practices in either of the choirs included dramatic scenes or "generative role-play" (Legg & Green, 2015, p. 524), elements of play (Huizinga, 1950) were featured in the practices in the way the choirs were experienced as being different from the participants' ordinary life and characterized by intensity (Huizinga, 1950, p. 8). For instance, in the Beat, the combination of improvisation, discussions, and music allowed for the playful testing of one's own actions in relation to the others, identifying oneself anew, trying out new ways of being, and new roles and identities in collaboration with peers in a safe environment (see Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016); hence, redefining ones' identity and social agency (DeNora, 2013a). As the findings in both choir cases indicate, this daring to act in ways not normal to oneself, and differently than in everyday life, transformed the way the participants thought of themselves socially and in everyday life outside the choir (Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016; Siljamäki, in print). This comes out, for example, in how a member of the IC51 noticed a developing "sensitivity to others" (Siljamäki, in print, n.p.), and how a member of the Beat told of having more courage to do things in social spaces that she perhaps otherwise would not have done (Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016, p. 45). In addition to being related to DeNora's (2017) theorizing of identity as taking shape relationally in ecological contexts, these recollections indicate acts towards social spaces rather than away from them, hence relating to seeking asylum through refurnishing, rather than removal (see DeNora, 2013a), as explained in Chapter 2.3.

Through free choral improvisation, some members were able to extend their embodied social agency even towards surprising avenues, and towards social and musical agency that could be defined as improvisational - becoming aware of their own boundaries and extending them through their actions and participation. This was seen, for instance, in how Lumo, a member of the IC51, testified that his experience of bodily liberation in free choral improvisation was instigated by the way he felt

that normative assumptions of how the voice should be used were relinquished in the IC51 (see Siljamäki, in print). By this he meant the way that singing could include sounds and vocalizations, such as yelling, growling, or gibberish, which are usually employed by children and, perhaps, are ignored by adults or thought of as inferior (see Countryman, Gabriel & Thompson, 2016, p. 1, 16; Tonelli, 2015). Lumo's experience could be theorized as an opportunity to rearrange the personal framework for social action, and thus affording liberation from the learned parameters of action (see DeNora, 2000, p. 20). Furthermore, it connects the singing voice closely with one's bodily engagement (see DeNora, 2013a). Since movement and bodily engagement have been the essence of music educational approaches such as Dalcroze for decades (for instance a recent doctoral study examines the possibilities of Dalcroze-based music education to foster the agency of students with special needs, see Sutela, 2020), and bodily engagement with music is familiar to music educators (e.g. Bowman & Powell, 2007; Burnard & Dragovic, 2015), it could be worth considering the potential for constructing social and embodied agency in musical education through the improvising of sounds that extend the conceptions of music and go beyond scales and tonality, and through movement that rises from the learner's own potential and needs.

Prior research has reported that children integrate bodily engagement with the vocal sounds that they make (Countryman, Gabriel & Thompson, 2016, p. 10; see also Burnard, 1999), play with musicking (Stewart Rose & Countryman, 2020), and construct singer identity socially and psycho-acoustically (Welch, 2017, p. 554). Furthermore, improvised vocal play has been defined as "a key way in which children learn to know the self as a self" (Knudsen, 2008, p. 291). Although the findings in the case of IC51 point towards affordances of musical and social agency and learning through free improvisation in certain conditions with adults, further research is suggested on the social-ecological conditions required for grasping the full potential of free improvised and embodied vocal play with school-aged children. The findings in the case of IC51 also imply that the use and creation of playful sounds in free improvisation under certain conditions holds the potential to reshape fixed mindsets of "culturally shared attributions about talent-based musicality and singing

skills" (Numminen et al., 2015, p. 1671) and, thus, enhance equality of learning and music making. Since free improvisation can allow the playful use of voice and sounds undefined by mainstream ideals, as demonstrated in the case of IC51, further research could be conducted on how free improvisation practices in certain conditions could support those who claim to be "non-singers", experience singing anxiety, or decline any musical participation (see Abril, 2007, p. 13). Nonetheless, no overly broad generalizations should be made on the basis of the findings, since they arise from unique cases. Consequently, such affordances as Lumo's bodily liberation cannot be claimed to be self-evident, but are rather dependent on the social conditions of an individual's environment as well as their prior experiences - their social ecology, which is connected to micro, macro, and meso levels of their life's ecology.

As concluded in sub-study 3, affordances and transference from learning were unique to each participant in free choral improvisation, since each learner held individual needs and backgrounds: the same music and practice means different things to different people, because "we embody our past" (Lemke, 1997, p. 52). In the IC51, individual differences arose in how, for some members of the CI51, movement and bodily engagement were not easy or naturally connected to singing - as in the case of Lumo - but required expanding their own comfort zones and encountering their feelings of discomfort through conscious effort (Siljamäki, in print). Hence, in line with prior research and an ecological framework, the importance of taking into account not only embodied agency in music educational contexts, but also how learners "have individual needs and trajectories that require differentiated instruction and supports to enable optimal growth in competence, confidence, and motivation" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 98). The implications could also be extended to choral contexts, where, according to O'Toole (1994; 1998; 2005), the neglect of the different needs and trajectories of individual participants can be a cause for frustration and other negative experiences. For these purposes, safe learning environments could be provided for learners to afford ample possibilities for expressing their individuality and differences, while the energy required in adjusting to the group could be used for learning and social participation, as indicated in the case of the Beat (Jansson, Westerlund & Siljamäki, 2016). Furthermore, if identity takes shape

in relation to the social and ecological context, as DeNora (2017) has suggested, then educational spaces should consider emphasizing reciprocity in social processes in order to provide learners space for furnishing "the lifeworld with opportunities for action" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 42) with resources for constructing socio-musical agency and identity (see DeNora, 2000). Moreover, by furnishing the space with holistic (embodied), playful, and free (welcoming all kinds of sounds) expression, space for constructing creative and improvisational agencies and identities could be provided.

5.4 Generating resources for growth and wellbeing through play

As a continuation of the work of several researchers that have also been inspired by Small's theory (Odendaal et al., 2014; Stewart Rose & Countryman, 2020; Varkoy, 2009; Wright, 2010), I have argued in Chapter 2 that when explored within an ecological framework music and improvisation can be conceptualized as a social activity - as Small (1998) puts it, musicking. This means that pedagogical practices in music educational contexts should be supported towards engaging in social processes and spaces, and also implies the recognition of music first and foremost as a medium and resource for constructing agencies and identities (DeNora, 2013a). This, again, turns the focus of attention to the findings of this inquiry and to social ecology, and more particularly to social processes and the quality of interactions and experiences. In this way, this inquiry continues the work of previous researchers on the value of positive interdependence, social cohesion, and quality of social interaction in collaborative learning (Barron, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Miyake & Kirschner, 2014, p. 423).

In order to grasp the complexity of social processes and interrelations, DeNora's (2013a) theorizing of asylum was taken as the frame of reference, which refers to "a conceptual space, anytime/anyplace of health promotion and maintenance and a set of practices for achieving (locating, maintaining, discovering, inhabiting) this place" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 136). As explained in Chapter 2.3, asylum can be sought through refurnishing or removal, i.e. through making efforts either towards the

social space or away from it. In sub-study 3, the IC51 is an example of how asylum is sought when one encounters discomfort in improvisation. Similar accounts were found in the case of the Beat, as the participants encountered their fear of social situations in the choir. Although generalizations are not to be made from these two individual cases, the findings imply that supporting social processes and the learning of social skills and reciprocal support could enable learners' ability to seek asylum through refurnishing in challenging moments of uncertainty and discomfort that encompass not only improvisation but also learning in general. By using DeNora's (2013a) ecological perspective I have highlighted how a safe space is not something easily placed or simply assumed, but is a physical, metaphorical (Hunter, 2008), or conceptual (DeNora, 2013a) space for encountering risk and seeking asylum (Siljamäki, *in print*; see DeNora, 2013a) on one's own terms, empowered by the social environment (see Hunter 2008, pp. 18-19) and interrelated with one's wellbeing.

As explained in Chapter 1.2.2 and further theorized in Chapters 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2, in the case of the Beat the learning environment was carefully constructed and designed to ensure the participants and their individual needs were heard by including whole group, small group, and pair discussions exploring the social and musical experience of the project's collaborative singing and musical and social improvisation. As an example, developing the learning environment to meet the participants' needs included the planned performance at the end of the project, and challenging the participants to encounter their fear of performing and social situations from within the safety of the social group, although physically on the stage of a large performance hall - and, as in all practices, treating it as a voluntary action. The resulting performance provided a musical goal for the practices, hence possibly increasing motivation. Yet, it was also guided by an understanding that the quality of a performance can be defined by the means and the interrelations within the social ecology. Therefore, careful consideration was taken over the environments and means of directing the action and achieving the pursued outcome, "the means [became] vital ingredients of what will follow and come about" (Westerlund, 2008, p. 86). In the IC51 this was exemplified in how Tuli, for instance, a member of IC51, noted in sub-study 3 that "…the aesthetics come more from, not beauty, but the fact

that we do it collaboratively and believe in it, and it receives some kind of credibility and direction from us" (Siljamäki, in print, n.p.).

Blacking (1995) argues that the goodness in "music is inseparable from its value as an expression of human experience" (p. 31). This indicates the difference between a purely musical perspective on quality versus a perspective in which value, quality, and experience coincide. In the two choirs featured in this inquiry, the social environment was designed to support the quality of social interaction and reciprocity. This can be seen to align with how Dewey defines the means as being "weighed and judged on the express ground of the consequences it is likely to produce" (Dewey, LW13: 351). Nevertheless, this acknowledgment of the importance of social interaction and its quality as one kind of means in the process does not mean that the musical outcome has to be poor in quality or lacking musical rigor. Indeed, it could be said that if the experience affords positive feelings, it can have a straightforward effect on the quality of the outcome, and vice versa. As a practice centered upon musicking, the case of the Beat exemplifies how different desired ends-in-view can coincide with personal goals for the practice. The desired end-in-view of the participants, for example being able to cope with social anxiety, was not straight-forwardly linked to music making as such, and yet the participants came to the sessions for 8 months and embraced not only musicking and choral singing but also being exposed to the uncertainties and discomfort of free improvisation, as well as performing in a concert. Any of these means could be something that a person with social anxiety would prefer to ignore. On the one hand, musicking in the Beat may not have been a successful experience if it had not been connected to the wider personal aims and goals of those participating. On the other hand, as Westerlund (2008) notes, the desired end in musicking can equally well be of producing excellent musical quality without any experiential quality on the performer's or learner's side. In this means-ends continuum, as Dewey called it, "the learner's foreseen ends are ends-in-view while the actual end, such as a performance, is not the same as these ends-in-view" (Westerlund, 2008, p. 87). Thus, as crystallized by Westerlund (2008), "the whole view of what the purpose of music education should be is in the learner, not in the subject matter per se" (p. 89). Multiple interactions qualify these processes, and

therefore also the experienced value of the actual end, which again functions as a means for further attempts, goals, and potential action. Therefore, for its part this inquiry has emphasized the importance of understanding growth as *the desired end* (Dewey, MW9: 54) in musicking and music educational practices.

Play in the asylum - seeking asylum in vocal play

In this inquiry the concept of play as a feature of asylum (DeNora, 2013a) and asylum-seeking practices in the IC51 can be seen as providing implications of how such learning environments could be constructed that are pedagogically safe but also allow risk-taking and exhibiting individual differences, as well as incorporating resources for asylum-seeking and construction of agency. As presented in Chapter 4, central to the practices and construction of the collaborative learning space in both choirs was a sense of freedom from everyday responsibilities, collaborative and voluntary engagement, presence and sense of connection, relaxation, and also a sense of wellbeing. These particularities align with how the concept of play has been theorized by Huizinga (1950) and Stubley (1993). Furthermore, it related to the improvisational theatre mindset which was explained in Chapter 1.4 and further discussed in Chapter 5.3. Features of play can also be found in how the potential of free improvisation has been said to lie in its characteristics, such as awareness of presence, openness to the unknown, playfulness, and social quality (see Rose & MacDonald, 2015). Hence, play in the two choir cases of this inquiry could be seen as the construction of identity and agency as "a way of negotiating social worlds, a realm in which possibilities of difference and change [were] broached in safe ways" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 42). In this way, asylum relates to a core feature of play, which, according to Huizinga (1950), is how one acts in moments of uncertainty: "To dare, to take risks, to bear uncertainty, to endure tension - these are the essence of the play spirit" (p. 51). Hence, theorizing about asylums and play could be employed as a starting point for critically analyzing and developing the daily practices of teachers and teachers' ecologies of practice from the perspective of how safety and wellbeing, and hence learning, is supported in music education in general.

Albeit different compared to conventional choirs or more common forms of music education, the free improvisation of the IC51 and collaborative singing and improvising of the Beat were not only social spaces of joy, but also spaces for the members to "play with their potentials and ultimately commit themselves to learn, develop, and grow" (Kolb & Kolb, 2010, p. 27). According to Singer (2013), in educational contexts the essence of play can be lost if and when the purpose is shifted from pleasure and freedom to educational benefits. This relates to Huizinga's conceptualization of play as not a "task" to be performed, but something that is "only urgent to the extent that the enjoyment of it makes it a need" (Huizinga, 1950, p. 8). This means that the freedom of play lies in the experienced enjoyment of the activity of playing itself, and that if this enjoyment is decreased over some other purpose, that freedom, as the main characteristic of play according to Huizinga (1950), will be lost. In the Beat, the balance between freedom of play and the social quality of musicking was constantly being challenged by the overarching goal of relieving the participants' fear of social situations, as well as the musical goals of the practice sessions, which were to develop choral singing skills and perform. For instance, two members of the Beat decided not to participate in the performance, and therefore it could be said that their agency over their own wellbeing and musical learning was supported by the voluntary nature of the choir practices. The interviewees from the Beat told of being allowed to participate or not participate in the practices and free improvisations according to their own will and level: "There was the group's support for everything I did. But there was also space to be quiet. If I felt like it, I didn't have to do anything. And then there was space to try out something else and become affirmed by others." (an interviewee from the Beat in sub-study 2)

According to Soini, Pyhältö and Pietarinen (2010), wellbeing has been considered "as an unintended by-product of pedagogical processes and school practices" (p. 737). However, with an ecological understanding of interrelatedness, the concept of wellbeing is extended to include an interactional process involving the whole learning community, since wellbeing and learning are afforded from one and the same learning activity (DeNora, 2013a; Henley, 2019). In this sense, a music teacher's ecology of practice is always interrelated with the learners' ecologies, and hence

interrelated with all of the learners' wellbeing. This interrelation of learning with interaction and wellbeing entails the need to design future learning environments in a way that supports physical and emotional safety, with "a sense of belonging and purpose" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020, p. 99). Since the single characteristic that permeates wellbeing, learning, and music alike is social interaction through improvisation, the quality of social interaction and support for social processes is thus elevated in importance. As Dewey has noted, "[a]cts of social intercourse are works of art" (LW10: 69). In a similar sense as an improvised performance emerges from the interactions among performers, subjective wellbeing can be viewed as defined *in relation* to others as a socio-cultural construction, characterized by transformation and change through interaction with the social context and the environment (see DeNora, 2013a; Jackson, 2016; Dewey, LW10: 71). Social, collaborative, and musical learning can thus be viewed as participation in practices that improve one's own competences through the support of others and the transformation of one's own identity (Mezirow, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991), as well as the construction of agency (DeNora, 2013a). As a result, social interaction skills and social competencies could then be seen as pivotal to not only social and collaborative learning, but also for constructing a meaningful life and future for oneself in the current state of society (see Nangle, Erdley, & Schwartz-Mette, 2020; Tynjälä et al., 2019).

5.5 The social ecology of learning in improvisation and music education

By means of an instrumental multi-case study design of two improvising choirs and research literature of music education I have discussed in this inquiry how certain social-ecological conditions can support and hinder, or enable and disable, social and musical improvisation, the co-construction of safe-spaces, equality, and learning. The collaborative singing and improvisation in the two choir cases was found to provide knowledge of how a group can provide a space for learners to be holistically in interaction with people and things, how it can shape the future of individuals with the choices made in each moment, in relation to past experiences,

and how future opportunities are offered and provided by and for oneself, others, and the environment. In this web of interrelations, learning is "shaped by interactions among the environmental factors, relationships, and learning opportunities [one] experience[s]" (Darling-Hammond et al. 2020, p. 97). Furthermore, in the ecological context, social, musical, and creative identities and agencies are taking shape and being constructed (DeNora, 2000, 2013a). Analyzing the findings of the two choir cases through an instrumental approach revealed that it is not only singular issues of content or the interaction between a facilitator and learner, or between participants, that are game-changing elements in the processes of learning - or, more specifically, music education. Rather, the whole social ecology of the learner and the learning environment, or ecological context, can be seen as providing the 'means' for learning and quality of experience in music education (Westerlund, 2008), and therewith most likely also the quality of the outcome of the teaching and learning processes. In other words, there are many parts that are quintessential to the process as a whole: how social engagement is supported in student-student and student-teacher -relationships; how an atmosphere of openness and dialogue is created; and how the practices and facilitation processes are selected so that each learner and their learning can be appreciated for their differences in the ecological context. Considering the way in which free improvisatory practices and singing in the two choir cases was designed in relation to an ecology of learning (Barnett & Jackson, 2020), identity transformation, agency construction, and wellbeing (DeNora, 2013a, 2017) demonstrates the possibility of actualizing equal treatment of all individuals by placing the focus on designing musical learning environments where reciprocity, play, and whole-body expression in multimodal social processes is supported. Taken even further, an ecological approach to music and musicking could lay the ground for considering individual circumstances, thus promoting equity and inclusion (see Espinoza, 2007).

This kind of ecological understanding of learning allows music educators to ensure environments that support the wellbeing of students, the practice of (free) improvisation, and consequently the relationship between creativity and learning. Each pedagogical moment of improvisation and music can be viewed as a system,

and learning as the construction of agency and identity, wherein music is a relational activity the meaning of which is expanded from being an object or merely 'musical' to being conceptualized as a social activity. An ecological framework therefore suggests that music, wellbeing, and learning are interrelated fluid and temporal concepts, dependent and taking shape in relation to the environment and social conditions, open ended and experienced (see DeNora, 2013a, pp. 25-27). The medium that permeates all three concepts is social interaction, which also connects improvisation and creativity (Erickson, 2011; Sawyer, 2003a) to this equation. By exploring the two choir cases in this inquiry I have argued that a collaboratively constructed improvisatory learning environment can enhance not just musical learning, but also social learning, growth, and wider wellbeing. Consequently, the interaction within the social ecology may become the most valuable elements for musical success, while affording the participants not only musical learning but also wellbeing. Therefore, this inquiry suggests that equality, wellbeing, and learning could be better supported if the relational and social aspects of activities were emphasized in music education practices in general by creating pedagogically safe learning spaces and embracing improvisation as a core activity in all music making. Further towards this goal, this inquiry has argued for expanding musical education practices with an improvisational theatre mindset, which in certain conditions potentially brings forth reciprocity in social interaction as well as bodily engagement. In this way, music education practices could respond to the increasing need for creative and collaborative skills and agency and the state of flux in late modern society.

By exploring research literature of music education and two empirical choir cases, I have highlighted the significance of social ecology and the holistic affordances of improvisation. As argued in this inquiry, improvisation is a manifold phenomenon, which can explain why it has been thought of as too complex of an issue and practice, while it actually can be seen as a simple everyday action that can be guided, supported, and developed through the ecological context towards desirable contents. At the same time, the outcomes of improvisation practices cannot be predicted, since each learner holds their own ecological frame of reference where things and people are interrelated with their prior experiences and learning. As argued in this study, the

findings of this dissertation along with the theorizing of social ecology indicate that if the understanding of musical improvisation is expanded from sounding objects to being interrelated with the social quality and process, then the ways in which these social processes are supported in improvisation pedagogy can become elementary to musical learning in those moments. The social ecological framework provides the means for understanding how the social conditions can be manipulated either in favor of or contrary to not only musical learning but also wellbeing, both in improvisation pedagogy and music education at large. Furthermore, it brings about the need to consider how teachers and educational contexts take responsibility over the provision of such spaces for learners where quality of interaction is supportive of encountering the uncertainties of not only improvising but also social action more generally.

More specifically, in this dissertation I have argued theoretically for the recognition of a social ecological framework in the contexts of music education, and improvisation pedagogy in particular, as a complex process by which: musical identities are shaped and musical and social agency are constructed; knowledge can be collaboratively produced; and learning of musical and social skills as well as wellbeing are afforded. I have further argued that this could be done by way of placing more emphasis on the collaborative construction of safe spaces with features of play in order to support individual and emotional development through holistic (embodied), playful, and free (all kinds of sounds) expression, and the acknowledgement of individual affordances of music and music making for each learner in order to achieve equity. By recognizing how socio-ecological features are interrelated and effective in each pedagogical moment, it would be possible to take into consideration, both in research and practice, how the contextual features and prior experiences and feelings that arise in moments of activity are interrelated with learning, musicking, and wellbeing. Furthermore, understanding social ecology implies that if musical improvisation and learning are social and collaborative activities in groups, then discussion and pedagogical practices need to be expanded from an individual focus towards incorporating social and holistic conditions and affordances. As argued in this inquiry, the theorizing of social ecological conditions implies that feelings of discomfort induced by, for

example, the experienced uncertainty of improvisation or social anxiety, could be potentially increased or decreased through not only pedagogical means but also through the design of the ecological context and social ecology within it. For music and improvisation pedagogy, this could mean that when creative and improvisational agency is expected, by placing emphasis on the quality of social interaction between the participants, safe spaces could be collaboratively constructed where it is possible to test one's abilities to encounter uncertainties, redefine mistakes, and construct socially musical identities and agency, as well as social agency. By embracing a social ecological perspective in music education, the holistic affordances of improvisation and music become comprehensible as the focus is turned towards the interrelations and ecological conditions that guide the processes of learning and wellbeing and, thus, the experienced quality of the process which comes to define the outcome.

In addition to what has been brought up about how the three sub-studies viewed instrumentally can contribute to the understanding of learning and agency in music education at large, and specifically for improvisation pedagogy, a socio-ecological framework provides the means to make visible the challenges related to the teaching of improvisation, as both teacher and learner are not only in interaction with each other, but in interaction with the immediate environment and the ecological context and wider social ecology. It also points out the need to emphasize a sense of care and empathy in improvisation pedagogical moments and ecological contexts, where the learner can be expected to bring about and reflect on very personal and highly intimate experiences, in order for their identities to take shape and their agencies to be constructed in a creative and improvisational light. Understanding that both the teacher and learners are equally faced with uncertainty, and how the teacher is potentially required to provide the learners with resources for encountering that uncertainty, illustrates the value of understanding those situations within a socio-ecological framework. It allows us to see how humane aspects of participation, interaction, and collaboration - such as emotions, attitudes, and feelings - are interrelated with one's behavior and actions both implicitly and explicitly in those social moments of improvisation and the uncertainties they are characterized by. These conclusions indicate that a teacher should not only be experienced in music technical matters and be able to participate as a co-improviser, as indicated by prior

research in Chapter 1.3., but also be able to include care and empathy for the learner as an individual with diverse needs and experiences, as well as to care for the potential futures that are being defined in the pedagogical relationship in relation to the learner's own motivation and goals. In this way the potential improvisational and creative agencies could be supported. Furthermore, if improvisation is essentially a social activity, and group creativity is referred to as an emergence where "the whole is greater than the sum of the parts" (Sawyer, 2003a, pp. 10-11), then it is of essence in educational contexts to consider how the learning environment is designed so that one is able to support not only oneself but others reciprocally, in order for everyone to thrive. Moreover, as argued in this inquiry, this approach could be seen as expanding and transferring from musical contexts into any socially interactive moments – and thus contributing to how one is and acts in society as a whole.

6 Concluding thoughts

I will end this dissertation with reflections on my insider role in this whole research process, which has required reflexivity and continuous deliberation of ethical issues, both internally and externally (see Floyd, 2012). My own journey from the first moments of my doctoral studies to this moment - writing the last chapter of my dissertation - has been one of transformation and improvisation. In Liora Bresler's (2015) words, research has allowed me to "see more" (p. 6). In combination with my personal and mental growth as a parent, these past eight years have expanded my horizons as I have begun to understand the complexity of life and learning and how it relates to behavior in social and improvised processes, including research. This transformation would not have been possible without a continuous reflection on my own actions, revealing and dismantling my own prejudices and biased perspectives even up to the last moments of writing this synthesizing text. Here, I render my reflections on the journey to this point, how "[u]ncertainty [has led] to the necessity of making decisions, of making choices about how to conceptualize and carry out qualitative research" (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2010, p. 172).

Unpredictability and uncertainty are inherent elements of improvisation, but they have also been underlined as elements of research when dealing with human participants (MacFarlane, 2010). Both process and outcome were unpredictable in this inquiry, since I entered into the research as an insider in two unique cases of improvisation and choral singing combined in experimental ways, in two different groups of distinct individuals in the midst of the development of their practices. Hence, the characteristic best describing this inquiry would be "uncertainty as a state of being" (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2010, p. 3). This uncertainty is not the kind that dismisses the value of the findings and the theoretical contribution of this inquiry. Rather, it can be seen as the kind of uncertainty that I, myself as a researcher, live through and have encountered every time something previously known is shaken-and-stirred to become something more, or transformed from what it was into something new. It is something I have encountered as I have made choices about stance, method, and space (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2010), interrelated with wisdom, as it "emerges [...] through

managing uncertainty in research" (p. 2). In order to cope with the uncertainties of this specific qualitative research process, I have drawn on reflexivity in all stages of the research as an "active, ongoing process [...] of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). According to Guillemin and Gillam, "[a]dopting a reflexive research process means a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and the data but also to the researcher, participants, and the research context" (p. 275).

In this research, my subjective involvement in the process could be viewed as ranging from that of an immersed insider to less intensive levels of involvement, but never reaching or fully embracing an outsider perspective (Greene, 2014). This comes with an understanding that qualitative research is never objective in the sense that "our view of the world is always from within it, and what we see, or what we erase from view, will be framed by our cultural resources, particularly our language" (Cousin, 2010, p. 10). Reflexivity is thus one of the researcher tools I have employed in moving through the fluctuations of my subjectivity, which has not been fixed but were interrelated with the level of objectivity required in the research process or the practice at hand. Aligning with Mercer (2007):

> *The researcher's relationship with the researched is not static, but fluctuates constantly, shifting back and forth along a continuum of possibilities, from one moment to the next, from one location to the next, from one interaction to the next, and even from one discussion topic to the next. (p. 13)*

During this research process, I have developed my researcher position and deconstructed the familiar while taking numerous precautions. I have participated in different improvisation practices and discussions on matters related to improvisation, such as organizing three improvisation seminars at my home university and participating in international conferences, which have enabled not only development in the field but also knowledge of how practitioners approach improvisation in different ways, and of the trends in the discussions in this field. This was helpful in gaining an understanding of the plural forms of improvisation, which was the core focus in the first sub-study.

Peer debriefings with research colleagues, supervisors, and professional and amateur improvisers in the fields of both theatre and music have been a valuable resource for challenging the researcher-practitioner role as well as safeguarding against possible bias and assumptions. In this inquiry as a whole, reflexivity has been the "sensitizing notion that can enable ethical practice to occur in the complexity and richness of social research" (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 278). Thus, through time I have gained distance from the phenomenon in order to view the field as a whole instead of only from my own perspective. My personal notes and practitioner diary consisted of notes on the content and practices, experiences, and observations made by myself, as well as my emotional experiences and feelings. They were a tool for reflexivity and for framing a picture of the events, feelings, and attitudes in the two choir cases. When writing the notes and diary, I found myself often making notes more freely than when writing specific field notes, since I did not feel obligated by a methodology but acted as if I was writing notes for myself about myself and my journey. Hence, they were an important addition to the formally written field notes and observations.

My closeness to the phenomenon required continuous reflexivity and sensitivity on my part as a researcher, in both choir cases. I had access to intimate knowledge of the past and present of the choirs, but in the sessions themselves I was present as one of the members, since the process of improvisation primarily required full immersion without outside distractions. Since the research process with the Beat was begun only after the project had ended, as explained in Chapter 1.1.2, this challenging dichotomy of involvement and detachment was faced particularly (see Greene, 2014) in the third sub-study with the IC51, where I was studying the very phenomenon we were generating together (Taylor, 2011, p. 9). Before the analysis process in the third sub-study was completed I had a two year break during which I stepped back from the phenomenon as well as research work. This break could be described as a liminal space, or a "suspended state" (van Niekerk & Savin-Baden, 2018, p. 32), during which I moved from being a practitioner-researcher to being a researcher, and my own practices and thinking were affected by this transition (ibid.). The break allowed a certain distancing from the phenomenon, and the ability to see the once familiar as not something strange (Foster, 2006, p. 59) but from new angles, and combining both insider and outsider perspectives

for the benefit of the research. Furthermore, in the analysis process I triangulated the data by confirming my interpretations and findings through multiple sources, while dependability was established through regular sessions with my supervisors (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). On the other hand, in the case of Beat, the combination of researchers from outside the project and myself as an insider enabled a perspective on the case from multiple angles. Despite the challenges experienced during the research process with the IC51, through the knowledge gained from my insider position with the empirical material, even if it was somewhat limited, I am confident that I was able to form a thick description of the case with details of the practices, processes, settings, and reactions observed during the inquiry. For this purpose, I have also used my diaries and notes from both choir cases in order to provide a thick description of the context of the cases.

As an insider, I have drawn on ethical deliberation throughout the research process, which has been characterized by uncertainty. It has required me to critically recognize and reflect on the factors and limitations influencing the construction of knowledge, and how they are revealed in the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, pp. 274-275). Although I followed the ethical guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (2012) during all stages of the inquiry to the best of my knowledge, this inquiry has required me to develop "a deep, personal understanding of virtue" as argued by MacFarlane (2010, p. 26). This means that as a researcher I have constantly been making conscious and unconscious decisions that may or may not have had an effect on the research process, but more important were the possible effects on those who participated in the research I conducted. Drawing on MacFarlane (2010), it is indeed a matter of research ethics *after* the initial approval has been sought and granted (ibid., p. 19), how I as a researcher deliberate, make the decisions, and act upon them. Since "wisdom comes with practice and experience" (MacFarlane, 2010, p. 26), I acknowledge the process as involving the making of both good and not-so-good choices on my path towards completing this research. In this way, I have learned something new from each decision-making process that will hopefully inform the next one. As MacFarlane (2010) has noted, "[g]etting better at handling ethical issues only comes with practice, experience and learning from the good (and bad) example of others" (p. 26) - and my own, I would add. The many ethical dilemmas I encountered during this inquiry led to

an increased interest in ethics, hence joining the newly founded University of the Arts Helsinki's Ethical Board. As an active member of the Ethical Board from 2014 to 2017 I participated in writing the "Ethics Code" for the whole university, which was published in 2016. Furthermore, I collaboratively taught the research ethics course to doctoral students with two professors in Music Education, for one year. However, my immersion in this subject has taught me that ethics is more than following a code. The uncertainty of making ethically sound choices has been described as demanding "improvisation and an ability to be an interpreter of moods and situations" (MacFarlane, 2010, p. 26). It is a matter of experienced responsibility and deliberation over one's own actions.

At this stage, I find this final report very adequately represents the reality of the growth in my interpretations and my process of becoming a researcher through this inquiry with "a 'developmental approach' as one which foregrounds the continuing growth of the whole-person-who-researches as integral to the research process" (Attia & Edge, 2017, p. 34). Still, this critical reflection on the inquiry is not drawing on ready-made protocols or checklists, which have been rightly criticized as such, but rather on approaches of critical reflection on the inquiry from the perspective of "meaningful research", which according to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) "makes it impossible to lay down any simple or unambiguous rules for evaluating the research in question" (p. 303).

I want to leave the readers of this dissertation with a quote from a participant of the last vocal improvisation course I was able to facilitate before the state of flux overtook the world with the advent of the COVID-19 epidemic, a time when skills of social improvising and creativity have been needed more than ever. I chose this testimony because I strongly relate with her experience, which for me also inhabits features of the ecological nature of vocal and embodied improvising:

> *To me, improvisation is a way of being with people. Vocal improvisation is a way of being in touch with your voice and feeling free, but part of this world. It unites the soul to my body in wonderful way when I sing. (Testimony of a vocal improvisation course participant)*10

10 With permission, this quote is from participant feedback on a vocal improvisation course facilitated by the author in 2020.

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Appendix 1: Article I

Mapping visions of improvisation pedagogy in music education research

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Abstract

This systematic literature review aims to identify and critically examine the prevailing general trends of music education research that addresses issues of improvisation from 1985 to 2015. The study examined the main features of studies with impact that focus on musical improvisation and have been published in peer-reviewed music education journals. Data were organised on the basis of the following: 1) General publication features; 2) Topic; 3) Methodological approach; 4) Participant features; 5) Type of improvisation; 6) Definition of improvisation; 7) Findings; 8) Suggestions for practice. The study also takes a close look at the construction of the discourses through which improvisation has been framed in the field of music education, providing insights on how such discourses create particular pedagogical visions of improvisation. To this end, we have created a map of the different visions of improvisation pedagogy that the studied works point towards. These visions have been clustered in the following five categories: (i) from rupture of certainties to creative problematisation; (ii) return to the "natural" beginning—in search of humanness; (iii) improvisation as a learning tool; (iv) conserving and enlivening traditions; (v) improvisation as an impetus for creativity. The map proposed in this study is meant as a possible representation of the general trends that underpin music education research focusing on improvisation. This map can also be seen as a "tool" through which music educators can situate their practice and reflect on their particular ways of working with improvisation, possibly envisioning alternative ways forward.

Keywords: improvisation pedagogy, improvisation research, instrumental literature review, music education, music improvisation

Introduction

That improvisation should be part of music education is now rather commonplace. We frequently hear that "[i]mprovisation is an important part of the young child's life" (Brophy, 2001, p. 36) and therefore should be part of her/his education in music because it "is an essential feature of the art of making music" (Campbell, 2009, p. 140). At the same time, criticisms over the ways in which improvisation can and has been incorporated into education have sometimes led to rather aphoristic positions: "what we claim to be 'teaching' as improvisation in schools is not true improvisation. True improvisation cannot be taught – it is a disposition to be enabled and nurtured" (Hickey, 2009, p. 286). Although such concerns may not be unjustified, we nevertheless believe that, as researchers, we should refrain from normative claims that frame improvisation in any singular way. This study, therefore, explores the ways in which music improvisation has been approached in studies published in peer-reviewed music education research journals from 1985 to 2015. Our broader goal is to provide a map of visions of improvisation pedagogy that emerge through these studies.

While being aware of the contingency of our thinking, we aim to resist oversimplifications that create barriers to a critical approach of the educational relevance of improvisation. As Blum (1998) argues, improvisation has advanced through modernity as a "marked" term, that is, as a term always defined and construed in relation to a set of relevant "unmarked" terms, i.e. composition and performance. As Wegman (1996) suggests:

> *the concept of "the composer" emerged in direct conjunction with a perceived opposition between "composition" and "improvisation." It was in the decades around 1500 that new ideas began to be articulated, not only about musical authorship and the distinct professional identity of composers, but also about the difference between the composition as object, on the one hand, and improvisation as a practice, on the other. (p. 477)*

As a result, improvisation has often been understood as the opposite of careful performance preparation ("on the spur of the moment"), unforeseeable, ("ex-improviso"), random ("fortuita"), an act deprived of reflection, an act that ignores any notion of adherence to rules ("sine meditatione", "sans régle ni dessein") (Blum, 1998). These conceptualisations, however, have advanced side by side with a perception of improvisation as a window towards unmediated freedom, as an act of transcending boundaries, imposed logics, and calculated modes of conduct (Blum, 1998; Kanellopoulos, 2013; Kramer, 2008; Landgraf, 2011; Piotrowska, 2012; Woodring-Goertzen, 1998).

It could be argued that this ambivalent perception of improvisation is a manifestation of the irreconcilable struggle that is the result of core modernist dualities: originality vs. stylistic meticulousness, immediacy vs. thorough planning of large forms, breaking away from habits and memory vs. creating perfection that endures in the form of complete musical works in accordance with the *Werktreue* (Goehr, 1992) ideals. Landgraf (2011) suggests that improvisation has played a central role "in the articulation of what summarily we might want to call 'modern subjectivity'", serving "as a model to elicit the complex relations and interdependencies between oppositional poles, such as those between freedom and constraint, between the personal and the societal, and more generally between the particular and the general" (p. 18). More specifically, as Kanellopoulos (2013) has argued, inherited conceptual representations of the improvisation phenomenon within modernity have often construed it as a moment of rupture:

> *This largely modern sense of improvisation is built around a core antinomy: improvisation is recognized as a process that makes inroads towards musical, personal and sociopolitical freedom, and at the same time it is cast as a "pre-artistic", fatally incomplete and largely marginal creative process. (p. 42)*

The view of improvisation as an always-incomplete glimpse into unchartered freedom, and at the same time as a dangerous pathway to triviality and a threat to disciplined musical conduct might partly account for the—until recently—characteristic neglect

of improvisation in musicology and philosophy of music (Bertinetto, 2013) and also for the rather defensive and resistant approach to improvisation that many music educators often adopt. We feel, nevertheless, that the ways in which this general condition has influenced music education requires a nuanced and systematic look at the ways in which music education practice and research have approached improvisation. This research is but a small step in this direction.

Research questions

This systematic literature review aims to identify and critically examine prevailing general trends of music education research that addresses issues of improvisation.[1] As an indicator that an article has had some impact in our field, we have used the 10-citation rule. Furthermore, this study takes a close look at the construction of discourses through which improvisation has been framed in the field of music education, providing insights on how such discourses create particular pedagogical visions of improvisation. In this sense, it comes close to Mantie's (2013) critical examination of discourses constructed through "popular music pedagogy" scholarly studies.

This aim has led to the formulation of the following research questions:

1. What are the main features of studies that address issues of musical improvisation and have been published in peer-reviewed music education journals?
2. What visions of improvisation pedagogy emerge through the approaches to improvisation that these studies take?

The contribution of our study to knowledge advancement may be seen as twofold. First, we aim at identifying general features of music education studies that address issues of improvisation. This has been the result of an extensive content analysis and the descriptive statistics it yielded. In this sense, this study complements review studies such as those of Running (2008), Henry (1996), Rohwer (1997), and more recently Chandler (2018), who have focused on creativity, composition,

creativity assessment, and improvisation in elementary general music respectively. Secondly, and on a more interpretative level, we aim at understanding how the notion of improvisation, its role and value for musical practice, and its educative potential have been construed through these studies. To this end, we will propose a conceptual map that dynamically represents (a) the different *approaches* to the notion of *improvisation* that these studies adopt, and (b) the visions of improvisation *pedagogy* that these studies point towards.

Research design

In this study, our ambition has been to go beyond summarising research findings in the area of improvisation pedagogy. This research can be seen as an *instrumental* and *collective* case study (Stake, 1994b). Stake defines an instrumental case study as one where "a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory" (Stake, 1994b, p. 237). In *collective* case studies, "researchers may study a number of cases jointly in order to inquire into the phenomenon, population or general condition" (Stake, 1994b, p. 237). In this sense, music education studies that address issues of improvisation are our constellation of "cases"; these are examined with the aim of shedding light on the larger issue of how music education research constructs particular framings of (a) the notion of improvisation, and (b) improvisation pedagogy, thus offering music educators various possibilities through which they could situate, but also shape, their teaching practice. Treating the corpus of music education studies that focus on, or address issues of, improvisation as our case, our study might be seen as an "*instrumental literature analysis*" (Onwuegbuzie, Houston, Leech, & Collins, 2012, p. 5), insofar as data are examined in order to answer a larger question, leading to the proposition of a map that captures the prevailing visions of improvisation pedagogy that emerge through music education peer-reviewed articles.

Method

Our study focuses on improvisation studies published in music education scholarly journals between 1985 and 2015. We have included studies from the mid-1980s onwards since it was during that time that music education research began to

exercise an increasing and considerable influence on the content and rationale of music education curricula on an international scale. From the mid-1980s onwards, scholarly research journals began to give voice to research developments that reflected the lessons learned from the radical initiatives that had been growing since the 1960s (Finney, 2011; Paynter & Salaman, 2008). It was during that time that music education steadily advanced towards acknowledging the need for a sustained and critical dialogue between (a) psychologically informed research traditions, (b) radical teaching initiatives stemming from the creative music in education movement, and (c) everyday multilevel actual teaching concerns (Grashel & LeBlanc, 1998; Roulston, 2006; Swanwick 2008; Welch et al., 2004; Yarbrough, 1984, 1996)[2]. These advancements gave rise to the publication of a variety of music education research journals in the 1990s and the 2000s; moreover, numerous music education research methods textbooks began to appear internationally, acknowledging the need both for more diverse methodologies and for studying a greater variety of music education practices (Colwell, 1992; Kemp, 1988, 1992; Phelps, 1980; Phillips, 2008)[3].

Sample selection

The sample of our study consists of papers published in leading music education journals. The journals were drawn from the Finnish Publication Forum (JUFO)[4]. Eighteen music education journals were identified by this system, out of which twelve are ranked by JUFO as level 1, five as level 2, and one as level 3, the highest level of the ranking. Online search engines such as Jstor, Sage, ProQuest, Cambridge, Taylor&Francis, and Informit as well as the journals' own web pages were used. In those cases where online access was not available, searches were performed manually. When possible, multiple sources were used in order to crosscheck findings. The headword used was *improvis** in the abstract or title of the article, in order to include all inflections of the word *improvisation*. In those cases where abstracts were not available (common in philosophical articles and publications prior to the 1990s), articles with improvis* on the first page were included[5]. Only peer-reviewed studies were included, excluding editorials, forums, and book reviews. Articles that used the

word *improvis** in their main text but not in the title or abstract were also excluded from the study. On the basis of these criteria, a total of 185 articles were identified.

Our decision to study works with some impact on the field of music education led us to use the 10-citations rule, meaning that articles with less than 10 citations at the time of conducting this study (academic year 2015–2016) were excluded from our analysis. To discover the citation count for each article, we used Google Scholar[6]. Citation analysis has previously been used in journal content analysis as a tool for identifying journal prestige in music education research (Hamann & Lucas, 1998), and influential studies and prominent trends of music education research (Diaz & Silveira, 2014; Rutkowski, Thompson, & Huang, 2011; C. P. Schmidt & Zdzinski , 1993). Although not unproblematic (Bornmann & Daniel, 2008; van Raan, 2004; Woolgar, 1991), citation count is considered to be a fairly reliable indicator of research impact (Bornmann, Mutz, Neuhaus, & Daniel, 2008): "Citation-based bibliometric analysis provides indicators of international impact, influence" (van Raan, 2004, p. 27).

The use of this tool allows us to create a representative picture of prevailing trends in music education research that addresses issues of improvisation, leaning on studies that can be seen as having a strong impact in our field. However, the use of the 10-citations rule induces a limitation: as citation frequency increases gradually over time (Hancock, 2015), post-2011 papers had less than 10 citations, and had to be excluded from our analysis. This selection process decreased the number of studies included from 185 (published in 17 research journals) to 77 (in 11 journals). Table 1[7] shows the music education journals we looked at based on JUFO; it also shows *frequency and relevant frequency* of (a) articles per journal published between 1985 and 2015 (articles with improvis* in the title or abstract) and (b) articles that remained after applying the 10-citations-rule. This led to the exclusion of relevant articles published in journals that come from countries beyond the US and the UK (*Australian Journal of Music Education*, *Nordic Research in Music Education Yearbook*, *Finnish Journal of Music Education*, *The Changing Face of Music and Art Education*, *Problems in Music Pedagogy*) and from *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*, a US journal that focuses on practice-

oriented research articles. All those journals, with the exception of *FJME* (whose web accessibility was very limited until recently, something that might partly explain why none of the improvisation studies published in it have more citations), contained a relatively small numbers of relevant articles. One journal (*Musikpedagogik*), with no online access or hard copies available in any of the libraries of our universities, was excluded from the study.

Table 1 List of music education journals (n=18) in Finnish Publication Forum (in 2015), country and ranking in JUFO, frequency and relative frequency of articles ascertained based on search criteria and articles included in the study

	Country	JUFO rank	Articles ascertained*		Articles included**	
Music education journals			*f*	*rf*	f	rf
Journal of Research in Music Education (JRME)	USA	2	27	14,6%	22	28,6%
British Journal of Music Education (BJME)	GBR	2	29	15,7%	15	19,5%
Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education (CRME)	USA	2	25	13,5%	15	19,5%
Music Education Research (MER)	GBR	3	20	10,8%	9	11,7%
International Journal of Music Education (IJME)	GBR	2	19	10,3%	5	6,5%
Philosophy of Music Education Review (PMER)	USA	1	10	5,4%	4	5,2%
Action Criticism and Theory for Music Education (ACT)	USA	1	3	1,6%	2	2,6%
Research Studies in Music Education (RSME)	AUS	2	8	4,3%	2	2,6%
Contributions to Music Education (CME)	USA	1	4	2,2%	1	1,3%
Journal of Music Teacher Education (JMTE)	USA	1	5	2,7%	1	1,3%
Visions of Research in Music Education (VRME)	USA	1	7	3,8%	1	1,3%
Australian Journal of Music Education (AJME)	AUS	1	2	1,1%	0	0
Problems in Music Pedagogy (PMP)	LVA	1	5	2,7%	0	0
Update: Applications of Research in Music Education (UPDATE)	USA	1	3	1,6%	0	0
Nordic Research in Music Education Yearbook (NRMEY)	NOR	1	3	1,6%	0	0
Finnish Journal of Music Education (FJME)	FIN	1	9	4,9%	0	0
The Changing Face of Music and Art Education (CFMAE)	EST	1	6	3,2%	0	0
Musikpedagogik (MP)	SWE	1	x	x	x	x
Total			185	100%	77	100%

* Frequency and relative frequency of articles published in 1985-2015 with the headword improvis in the title or abstract.
**Frequency and relative frequency of articles with = > 10 citations (Google Scholar in 2015) and included in the study sample.

Analysis procedures

The analysis began with reading each of the 77 articles a minimum of three times. Data were organised on the basis of a rubric used to record each article. This rubric included the following: 1) General publication features, 2) Topic, 3) Methodological approach, 4) Participant features, 5) Type of improvisation, 6) Definition of improvisation, 7) Findings, 8) Suggestions for practice.

The methodological approach used in each study (no. 3 in the list above) was further categorised as follows: quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, practice-driven descriptive essays, philosophical, or literature review. Type of improvisation (no. 5 in the list above) included instrumental improvisation, vocal improvisation, solo improvisation formats, group improvisation, and improvisation genre. The latter was further categorised as: western art music; popular; jazz/blues; world musics; children's songs/singing games; tonal, non-genre-specific; "free"[8] music; not specified. For studies that focused on more than one genre, a mark was placed in all relevant categories.

In studies with empirical data, participant features (no. 4 in the list above) were categorised as follows[9]: 1) level of education, 2) gender, 3) ethnicity, 4) marginality[10], and 5) music involvement. In addition, we recorded the country where the data were collected. In order to refrain from making assumptions, only specific information regarding gender, ethnicity, and marginality was used. If no details were given, data were classified as "not specified", aligning with Ebie (2002). If the information aligned with more than one category, a mark was placed in all relevant categories. Level of education was categorised in the following way: birth to kindergarten (ages 0–6), primary (ages 6–12), secondary (intermediate, high school, ages 12–18), tertiary (college/university, 18–), and professional (teachers, musicians).

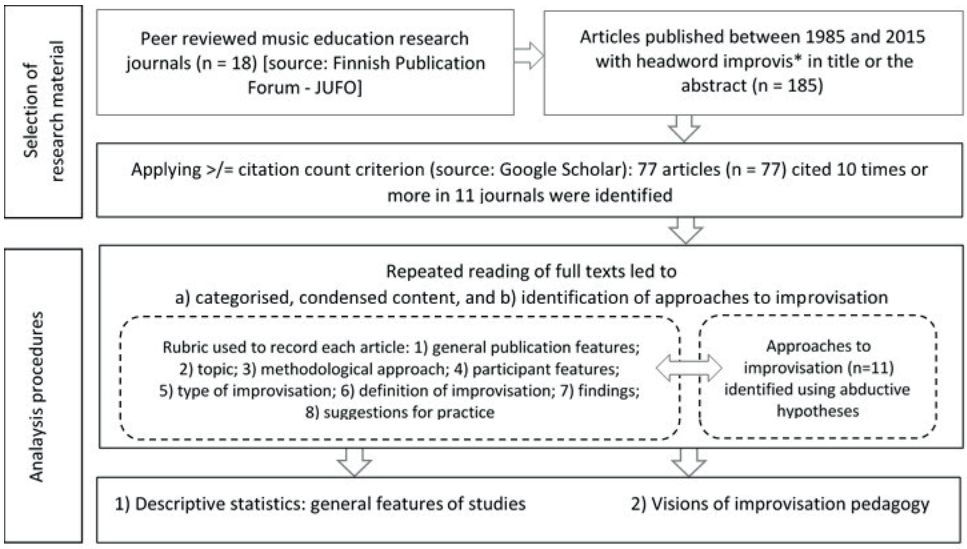
Participants' music involvement was coded as systematic (instrumental tutoring of more than 1 year, music teachers, or further education in music) or casual (general teachers, non-music majors, no or less than 1 year of experience in learning a musical instrument). For studies that had participants with a variety of music involvement and/or main instruments a mark was placed in each relevant category. The categories used in our rubric were decided on the basis of a brief review of content analysis

studies (Ebie, 2002; Kratus, 1995; Rutkowski et al., 2011; Silveira & Diaz, 2014; Tirovolas, & Levitin, 2011; Yarbrough, 1984). The first stage of the analysis resulted in condensed descriptions of each of the 77 articles. To answer the first research question, descriptive statistics were elicited on the basis of the rubric presented above.

The second stage aimed at identifying the visions of improvisation pedagogy that emerged (research question 2). We first created a list of possible approaches to improvisation inspired by interdisciplinary literature on improvisation (including historical and cultural musicology, ethnomusicology, theatre studies, literary theory, music education, and music therapy). The list served as an abductive hypothesis, enabling the researchers to "enter the field with the deepest and broadest theoretical base possible and develop their theoretical repertoires throughout the research process" (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 180; Agar, 1999). Thus, our study borrows the logic of instrumental case studies, where abductive reasoning can be employed using already developed "instruments and preconceived coding schemes" (Stake, 1994b, p. 243) in the process of analysis.

Supplementary visits to the original articles were made in order to crosscheck and crystallise our interpretation of the approaches that prevailed in each study. The emerging characterisations of the approaches were compared against and parallel to each other, ensuring comprehensiveness and accuracy of interpretation. As Timmermans and Tavory (2012) have argued, "abduction reflects the process of creatively inferencing and double-checking these inferences with more data" (p. 168), with the aim of looking for plausible "new concepts" that might meaningfully account for new data. This process of analysis (see Figure 1) led to the identification of 11 approaches to improvisation. Exploring the pedagogical implications of these 11 approaches, and the ways in which they were related to each other in the data, in pairs or groups, led to the proposition of five overarching themes that describe the visions of improvisation pedagogy in these studies.

Figure 1 Selection of research material and process of analysis



Results – Research Question 1: What are the main features of studies that address issues of musical improvisation and have been published in peer-reviewed music education journals?

Topics studied

The scope of the studies proved to be broad, employing a number of theoretical and methodological perspectives informed by a variety of disciplines. In order to present an overall view of the studied topics, we compared and grouped all relevant information, ending up with nine headings that include subtopics addressed (see Table 2). Each article was placed under one particular heading. Topics related to musical development were the most frequent (31.2%), steadily attracting music education researchers (for an overview of changes in topics studied across time see Figure 2).

More articles dealing with practical teaching methods seem to have been published at the beginning of the period under study, while studies dealing with how teachers feel about teaching have been more frequent in recent times. A focus on issues of meaning-making in improvisation and musical responsiveness has also been

a rather recent development. Also, four studies, three by a prominent scholar in music education (Bresler, 2005, 2006, 2009) and one by an important theorist of qualitative research (Stake, 1994a), draw on music improvisation as a metaphor and model for understanding the creative fluidity that inheres in the process of carrying out qualitative research.

Methodological approaches

Quantitative methods had the highest representation (36.4%), followed by qualitative approaches (24.7%) (Figure 3). Prior to the year 2000 only three studies (3.9%) employed qualitative methods. However, after 2000 employment of qualitative methods began to rise significantly. Qualitative research approaches include ethnography, grounded theory, action research, case study, naturalistic inquiry, and narrative inquiry. Practice-driven descriptive essays (19.5%) reached a peak prior to the year 2000, gradually decreasing afterwards, possibly due to the rise in qualitative studies as well as to an increasing interest in the pursuit of philosophical approaches to improvisation (11.7%). Studies with empirical data (n=52, 67.5% of the studied sample) employed quantitative (53.8%, n=28), qualitative (36.5%, n=19), and mixed methods (9.6%, n=5).

Table 2 List of topics studied and subtopics addressed, frequency and relative frequency of topics studied in the data sample (N=77)

Topics studied	Subtopics addressed	f	*rf*
Musical development	Music performance skills; rhythmic and melodic elements; influential factors; achievement; learning strategies; creativity	24	31,2%
Teaching practice and competence	Teachers' perceptions and perspectives of musical improvisation, creativity and composition; factors influencing ability and confidence to teach improvisation; teaching approaches	12	15,6%
Improvisation ability	Factors influencing the development and achievement (e.g. confidence, anxiety, gender, pedagogical material); evaluation; cognitive processes; gender differences	12	15,6%
Values and meanings of/in improvisation pedagogy	Values and meanings of improvisation practice in relation to music education, improvisation pedagogy and society	9	11,7%
A metaphor for understanding research practice	Research review; improvisation as a model for qualitative research	5	6,5%
Sociality of improvisation	Shared understanding; social and musical interaction; modes of communication	4	5,2%
Meaning-making in improvisation	Musical thinking; perceptions and assigned meanings in improvisation; personal experiences	4	5,2%
Teaching Methods	Practical suggestions and descriptions of how to include improvisation in music teaching	4	5,2%
Musical responsiveness	Response to musical stimuli in relation to previous experience in music and/or improvisation	3	3,9%
Total		77	100%

Figure 2 Relative frequency of topics studied in the data sample (n=77, 1985-2011)

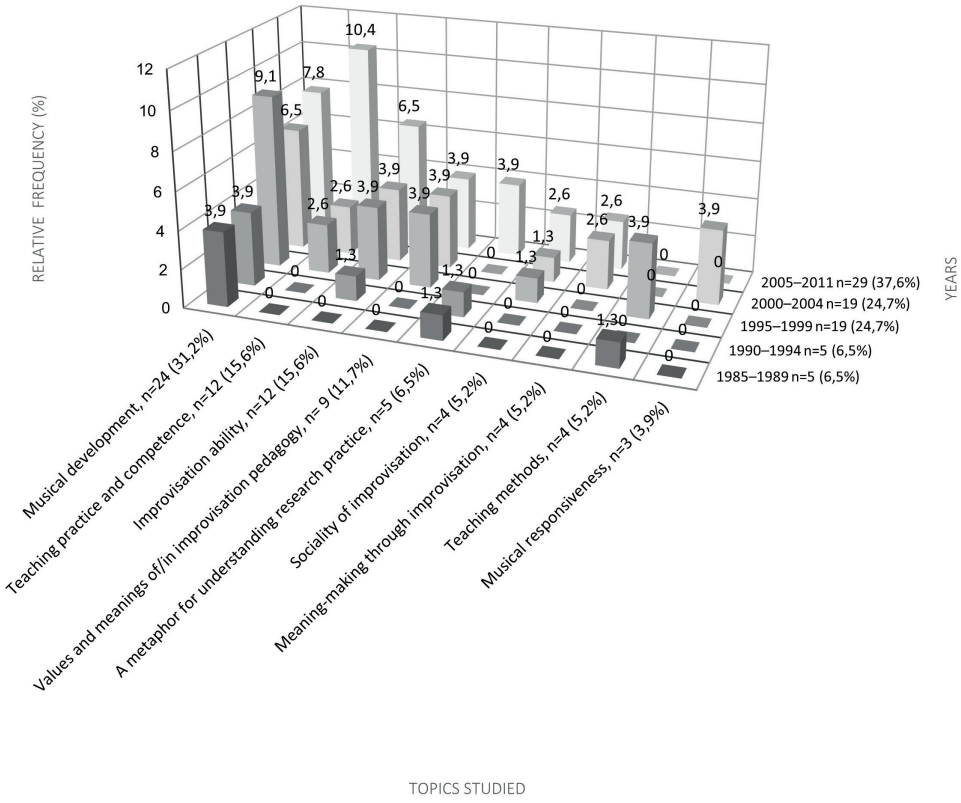
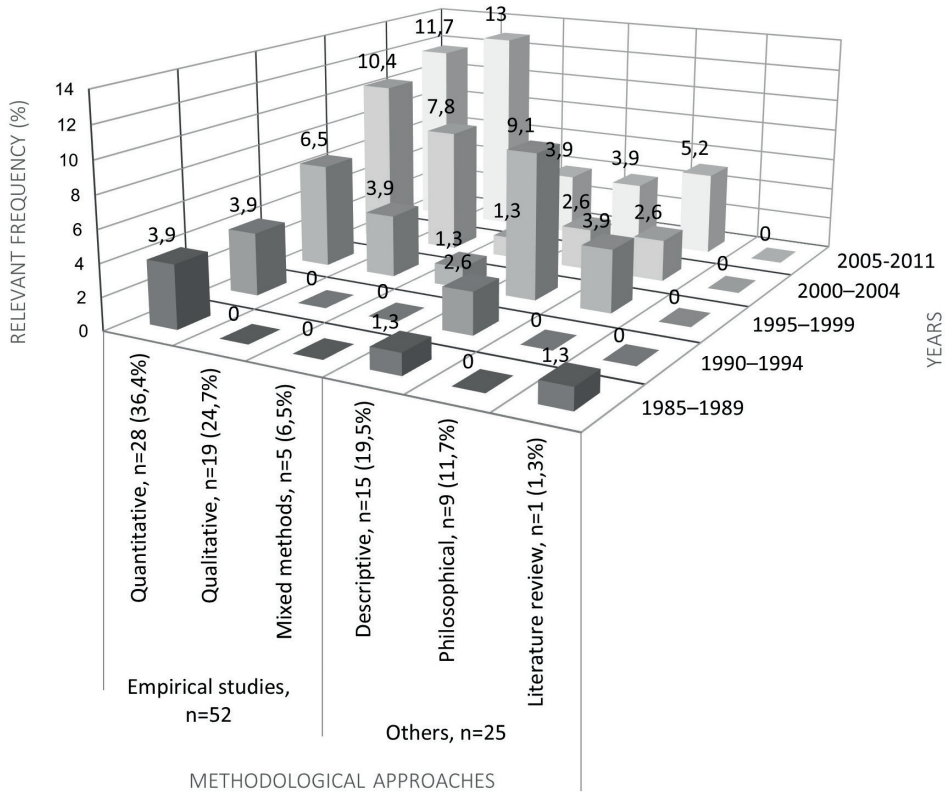


Figure 3 Relative frequency of methodological approaches in the study sample (n=77, 1985-2011)



Features of the empirical studies

Data generation techniques. Solo improvisation tasks were the most popular data generation technique, measuring individual effort with or without an accompaniment. This was used in 40.4% (n=21) of the studies—only one of which was qualitative (that of Norgaard, 2011). Survey techniques were used in 21.2% of the studies, in the context of both mixed and quantitative methods. Most of the qualitative studies employed ethnographic data collection methods, such as various interview techniques, including stimulated recall (see Rowe, 2009; Tobias, 2014), collection of field notes, participant journals, and observation techniques. Observation was mostly conducted in naturalistic settings. Most empirical studies of jazz improvisation (30.8%, n=16 of the total amount of empirical studies we looked at) employ quantitative methods (n=13). Interestingly, group improvisation (which was the focus of 17.3%, n=9, of the studies) has been studied exclusively with qualitative methods (ethnographic, grounded, naturalistic, and narrative methods).

Participants. School students (primary and secondary) were the focus of 44.2% (n=23) of studies, and tertiary students were the focus in 30.8% (n=16) of the studies (Figure 4). It is notable that in 54% of the studies, gender was not specified. Looking at those studies where participants' gender was mentioned, we found that 54% were male and 47% female. None of the studies focused on participants that could be identified as belonging to marginalised or at-risk youth groups.

A total of 61.5% of the studies focused on participants with systematic music involvement (Table 3), with a prevalence of wind instruments (31.3%). Instruments were not specified in 53.1% of studies with empirical data, particularly in studies with music teachers or tertiary music education students. Only four studies (Burnard, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Mang, 2005) provided a detailed description of the participants' ethnic background. Most studies (53.8%) were conducted in North America (Figure 5), 30.8% took place in Europe, while one study employed distribution of questionnaires in North and South America, as well as in Australia (that of Madura Ward-Steinman, 2007).

Type of improvisation. Instrumental improvisation was the focus in 40.4% (n=21) of the articles; 23.1% (n=12) examined vocal improvisation. In many cases, improvisation activities involved both instrumental and vocal aspects. Solo improvisation formats

with or without accompaniment were used in 55.8% (n=29) of the studies, mostly in task-related activities.

Most studies (38.5%) focused on tonal but non-genre-specific music (Figure 6); 30.8% of the studies focused on jazz and blues improvisation genres. This was followed by "free" music (19.2%). An explicit focus on western art music, world musics, and popular musics was particularly rare.

Figure 4 Frequency and relative frequency of participants' level of education in empirical studies (n=52)

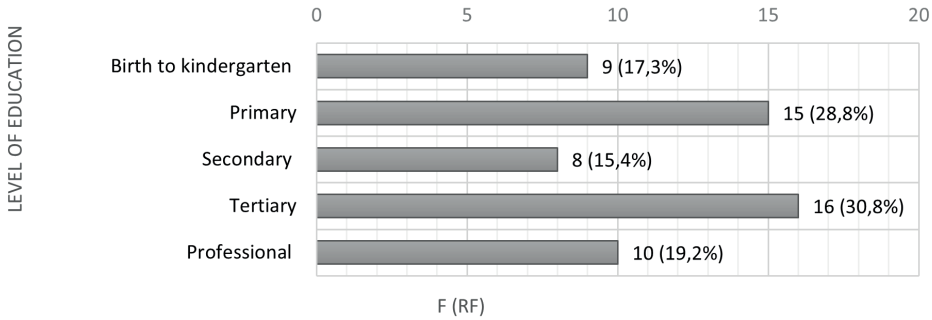


Table 3 Frequency* and relative frequency of level of music involvement in empirical studies (n=52) and main instrument of participants in empirical studies with systematic music involvement (n=32)

Level of music involvement	*f*	*rf*	Main instrument of participants with systematic music involvement	*f*	*rf*
Systematic	32	61,5%			
			Keyboard	4	12,5%
			Wind (clarinet, trumpet, saxophone, trombone, flute, tuba, French horn, euphonium, vibraphone)	10	31,3%
			Percussion, rhythmic section, MIDI drums	2	6,3%
			String (violin, cello, acoustic bass)	3	9,4%
			Band	3	9,4%
			Choir	2	6,3%
			Voice	5	15,6%
			Not specified	17	53,1%
Casual	12	23,1%			
Not specified	16	30,8%			

*If the information aligned with more than one category, a mark was placed in all categories

Figure 5 Frequency and relative frequency of country where data were collected in empirical studies (n=52)

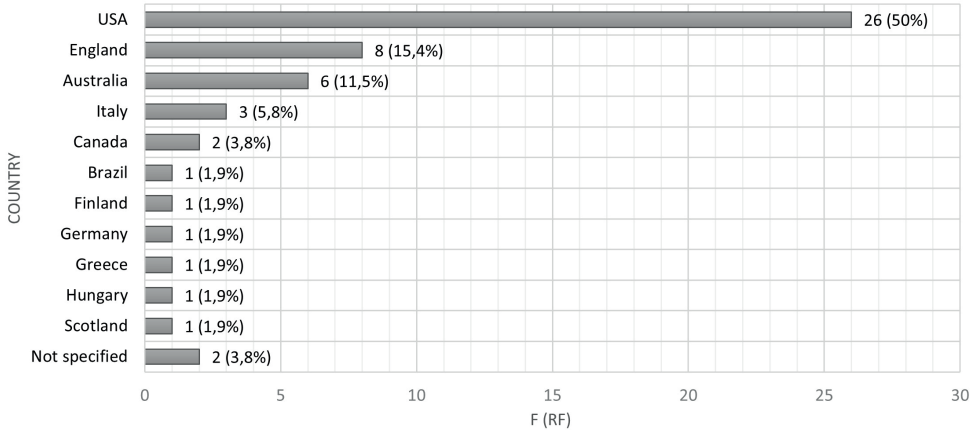
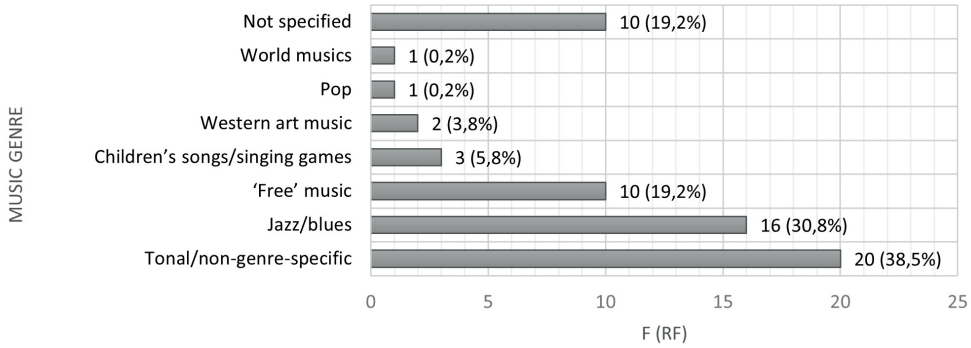


Figure 6 Frequency and relative frequency of music genre in empirical studies (n=52)



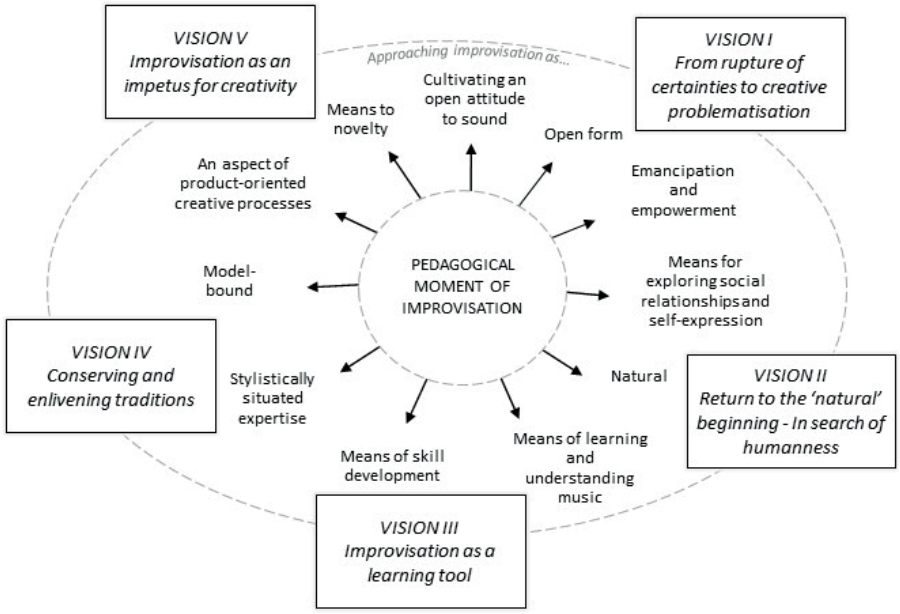
Results – Research Question 2: What visions of improvisation pedagogy emerge through the approaches to improvisation that these studies take?

Visions of improvisation pedagogy in music education research

Our analysis yielded a set of five visions of improvisation pedagogy, which manifest themselves through eleven ways of approaching improvisation and improvising. In this paper we argue that particular visions of improvisation pedagogy lead to concrete pedagogical actions that take place in *the pedagogical moment of improvisation*. The latter is an abstraction based on van Manen (1991), and refers to "that situation in which the pedagogue does something appropriate to learning" (van Manen, 1991, p. 515) on the basis of immediate pedagogical decisions that are based on perceived ideas about the educational value of improvisation. These visions are, in turn, based on particular constellations of approaches to improvisation (Figure 7). The proposed map is not, obviously, a representation of "real life", but a conceptual lens through which we can frame and situate particular music education creative practices on the basis of possibilities opened to us through music education studies that address improvisation. Pedagogical moments are moments of educators' "active encounter" (van Manen, 1991, p. 510) with the question of creating educationally valuable contributions through immediate and appropriate modes of response. At those moments, one is concurrently—consciously or not—being pulled towards a variety of ways of approaching improvisation and improvising. The choices made at each *pedagogical moment* between different approaches to improvisation inform one's vision of improvisation pedagogy.

Below, we present the five visions of improvisation pedagogy and the approaches to improvisation in a non-hierarchical order.

Figure 7 A map of prevailing visions of improvisation pedagogy as they emerge through the approaches to improvisation that music education research studies address



Vision I: From rupture of certainties to creative problematisation. This vision of improvisation pedagogy sees improvisation as a means for cultivating a more *open attitude to sound* through free instrumental exploration (Koutsoupidou, 2005). It encourages teaching practices that open up "the question of what counts as musical material and the relationship between intentionality and creation of shared conceptions of what sounds can be heard as music" (Kanellopoulos, 2007b, p. 129). Approaching improvisation as an open attitude to sound leads to improvisational practices that are not bound by culturally and educationally framed "adult" criteria, rejecting adherence to preconceived forms and placing less emphasis on inherited style-derived criteria (Burnard, 2002; Kanellopoulos, 2007b; Koutsoupidou, 2005). Thus, by encouraging rupture, this vision is at the same time emphasising the need to search for the child's authentic "voice", thus casting school as "a site for cultural reconstruction as much as a site for cultural reproduction" (Kennedy, 2006, p. 166).

The roots of this vision can be traced back to the experimental music practices of the postwar era (Kutschke, 1999; Nyman, 1999; Reynolds, 1965). Envisioning improvisation in education as a means of creative becoming is closely connected to approaching improvisation as an *open form*, as a particular way of approaching time and musical material in improvisation, an attitude that figures prominently in non-idiomatic, free improvisation contexts (Ford, 1995; Hickey, 2009; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). It understands improvisation as a disposition that needs to be nurtured and enabled, and therefore can be facilitated but not taught in a traditional sense (Addison, 1988; Hickey, 2009; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010).

An emphasis on rupture entails an approach to improvisation as a mode of music making that poses and problematises issues of how we live together, addressing issues of personal freedom and socio-musical inequalities: *emancipation and empowerment*. It becomes a pathway towards liberating oneself and others from oppressive structures and habits, as well as overcoming personal inhibitions (Mawer, 1999; McMillan, 1999). Improvisation thus becomes a way of conscientisation, of recognising oppressive musical and social structures, thus casting music education as a form of critical pedagogy (Abrahams, 2005; Allsup, 2003; Freire, 1965; P. Schmidt, 2005). This vision sees improvisation as leading towards authentic learning, based on the belief that all students "are capable of the pursuit of freedom, regardless of the forces that oppress them" (Allsup, 1997, p. 84). The pedagogue's task is seen as giving students personal responsibility in an atmosphere of trust, empathy, and dialogue (Burnard, 2002; Hickey, 2009). This pedagogical vision highlights the potential political significance of improvisation, and its relevance to exploring and enacting notions of democracy (Kanellopoulos, 2007a).

Vision II: Return to the "natural" beginning—in search of humanness. This vision rests on a more psychologically-oriented stance, paying particular attention to a student's personality and its moulding. It is shaped by an understanding of improvisation as *a means for exploring and developing social relationship*s, and as a means for cultivating free self-expression that reshapes personal identities and ways of understanding musical selves (Addison, 1988; Allsup, 1997). This approach understands improvisation as a means for balancing the process of life (Boyce-Tillman, 2000), actualising a kind of collectively-shaped sense of unity where

individual and collective freedom co-exist, resulting in a "union of minds in music" (Ford, 1995, p. 106) where communication can override technique. This approach shares important commonalities with literature that links improvisation with self-exploration, the exploration of one's relationships to others, as well as community building (Doffman, 2013; MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell, 2002; Magee, 2002; Pavlicevic, 1995; see also Peters, 2009). This understanding of improvisation as a mode of elementary creativity, as a primordial creative practice, can be seen as part of a long tradition of literature that considers improvisation as a central element of the human disposition to living and creating, as a natural springboard for individual artistic development, but also "as a slow process through which particular musical practices are being born and crystallised" (Kanellopoulos, 2013, p. 42).

This vision adopts a broader view of improvisation as a *natural* human predisposition that can lead to immediate forms of musical communication. It encourages music teachers to employ improvisation in their everyday work as a means of countering the feeling of alienation that is produced in learning theory and notation. This view rests on the belief that music learning shares important similarities with language learning, where use comes first while grammatical explanation follows later (Harrison & Pound, 1996). Therefore, by acknowledging improvisation as a natural ability (Addison, 1988; Burnard, 2000b), it calls for modes of teaching that remain close to what is believed to be a "natural" mode of learning. The pioneering work of Coleman (1922), Moorhead and Pond (1941), and Doig (1941) might be regarded as precursors of this vision of improvisation pedagogy.

Vision III: Improvisation as a learning tool. This vision approaches improvisation as a *means of learning and understanding music*. Campbell (2009) refers to this vision as "improvising to learn music" (p. 120; see also Elliott, 1995; Martin, 2005; and more recently, Wall, 2018). Here, improvisation is understood as a pathway that leads to a deeper understanding of syntactic and expressive qualities of music, as "the meaningful manipulation of tonal and rhythm music content created in ongoing musical thought" (Azzara, 1993, p. 330). One could trace the roots of this vision to the classic efforts of Dalcroze (1932; also Anderson, 2012) to bring to music education that "aura" of musicality and musical sense that resides in a hands-on

approach to music. Intuitive work on the employment of musical codes is seen as leading to the situated development of musically satisfying ways of enculturation through the gradual internalisation of musical-cultural codes, which is itself the result of a constant interchange between memorisation and transformation.
Studies that adopt this vision value improvisation as a *means of skill development*. They stress its usefulness as a way of developing accuracy in the instrumental performance of notated music, enhancing parts of the brain in ways that technique-oriented learning does not. What is more, they see improvisation as fostering the development of performance skills in ways that result in greater learning motivation (Azzara, 1993; McPherson, 1997; McPherson, Bailey, & Sinclair 1997; McPherson & McCormick, 1999). Furthermore, improvisation is seen as a means of cultivating an enhanced ability to communicate feelings to the audience (Chappell, 1999).

Adherence to this vision leads to pedagogical work that uses improvisation as a means for deepening and expanding learned skills (Addison, 1988), focusing on technical and psychological skills that are integral to music-making (Addison, 1988; Beegle, 2010), leading to musical development (Harrison & Pound, 1996) as well as contributing to an enhanced appreciation of music (Parisi, 2004). Furthermore, this vision has significantly contributed to the development of a body of research that uses improvisation as a tool for assessing aspects of musicianship, or for determining the level of musical or skill development (e.g., Beegle, 2010; Guilbault, 2004; Paananen, 2006); this has also contributed to a body of literature that relates to the content and the structure of aural skills curricula (Azzara & Grunow, 2003; Spiegelberg; 2008). It must be noted, however, that concerns have been raised as to whether music educators' employment of improvisation as a learning strategy does justice to the complexities of improvisation practice (see, e.g., Hickey, 2009).

Vision IV: Conserving and enlivening traditions. As a result of the intersections between ethnomusicology, jazz studies and music education (Berliner, 1994; Elliott, 1995; Nettl, 2012; Sudnow, 1993), a growing body of music education studies seem to acknowledge the various roles that improvisation plays in a variety of musical traditions. Thus, they approach improvisation as a *stylistically situated* form of *expertise*, and therefore construct a vision of improvisation pedagogy that aims at

conserving particular musical traditions and the role that improvisation plays therein. Improvisation is understood as a particular discipline with its own hierarchies and standards of excellence, emphasising professionalism and instrumental virtuosity (Naqvi, 2012; Peters, 2009; Prouty, 2006; Racy, 2009). In order to be faithful to established improvising traditions, a player must learn to observe every minute stylistic convention while creatively moulding it in nuanced and flexible ways. Through such a conceptual lens, the development of the ability to observe stylistic conventions (Madura Ward, 1996; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2008) and to achieve stylistic nuance in a purposeful but effortless manner (Kratus, 1995) is seen as a crucial task of improvisation pedagogy. This pedagogic vision rests on an approach to improvisation as *model-bound*, as a mode of musical behaviour that relies on stylistically determined rules (Kratus, 1995; McPherson, 1993) and culturally framed musical structures (Kratus, 1995). It therefore emphasises internalisation of style-specific building blocks and formulaic patterns (Bent, 2002; Elliott, 1995; Nettl, 2009; Rice, 1994; Tirro, 1974). Students learn how to be faithful to the tradition specifically through the development of a creative relationship with its rules: in the words of Early Harp virtuoso Andrew Lawrence-King, "to be faithful to the spirit of the music one must be prepared to alter the written notes" (Sherman, 1997, p. 165).

Vision V: Improvisation as an impetus for creativity. This vision values improvisation for its contribution to the generation of ideas, and as *a tool for eliciting novel* responses. Here, adherence to stylistic norms and instrumental virtuosity are of lesser importance. Emphasis is placed on improvisation as a process of discovery. As such, it is thought of as sharing the same skill-set as composing, in effect being a compositional process that occurs in "real time" (e.g., Addison, 1988; Strand, 2006). This vision emphasises the educational value of enabling students to arrive at new—for them—ideas, freeing the mind from linear processes, thus allowing for the unexpected to occur (see, e.g., Webster, 2012). It thus values improvisation as a source of creativity (Hargreaves, 1999), a means of invention. Approaches that rest on such views have been central to school music projects that encourage *product-oriented creative processes*, paying significant attention to hands-on composing, reserving for improvisation the role of experimenting in the search for musical ideas (see, e.g., Bunting, 1987; Odena, Plummeridge, & Welch, 2005; Swanwick & Jarvis, 1990).

Discussion

A call for broadening the scope of research

In this article we have explored some general features of studies with impact that address music improvisation and were published in peer-reviewed music education journals between 1985 and 2015. Our study shows that research that addresses improvisation in secondary school and community music contexts, as well as studies that focus on participants with varied musical backgrounds and experiences are still far from becoming a widely acknowledged and discussed subfield. Important inroads might also need to be paved by future studies on improvisation in world musics (including western art music) and popular music genres, traditions where improvisation has in many respects played a stronger role than is usually assumed (see Berkowitz, 2010; Borio & Carone, 2018; Gooley, 2018; Solis & Nettl, 2009). This might lead to a greater emphasis on connecting creative pedagogical work to the wealth of extant musical traditions. In addition, it would also take us beyond restrictive views of improvisation in music education as leading to "tonal, non-genre-specific", or "classroom music" (Finney, 2011; Swanwick, 1994).

Furthermore, future research might need to pursue more closely intermedia improvisation practices in education, as well to develop "practice as research" perspectives (Cook, 2015, p. 12). Moreover, in the sample of studies investigated in this research, we show that although the sociality of improvisation has been widely recognised, studies that focus on the collaborative aspects of improvisation were still limited. Further, the results of this study raise the question of unequal representation and dissemination of research carried out in different countries, and the effects of this imbalance on music education research at large.

Our study demonstrates that the role of improvisation in inclusive practices, and its potential contribution to social cohesion through empowering students who can be described as socially, economically, or culturally marginalised, has not achieved the prominence we feel it deserves. To argue for more research in that direction does not of course imply that improvisation should be seen merely as a remedy to issues of community building. There is a need for critical approaches to improvisation and

its relation to notions of power, and to how improvisation creates its own (hidden or explicit) hierarchies. To that we should add the value of researching improvisation as a mode of creative practice in the face of contemporary educational contexts, which have imposed dramatic changes in the role of creativity in education (Kalin, 2018; Kanellopoulos, 2015).

Moreover, it seems to us that future music education research might need to develop stronger links with the burgeoning field of improvisation studies, with experiments with improvisation and radical problematisations that come from the fields of critical musicology (e.g., Stefanou, Ragkou, Peki, Pazarloglou, & Papoutsi, 2016; Székely, 2008), historical musicology (e.g., Wegman, 1996), and philosophy of music (e.g., Goehr, 2016). It is noteworthy that, with one exception (MacGlone & MacDonald, 2017), none of the important edited volumes that focus on improvisation and were published after 2015 contain a single essay on its educative dimensions (Born, Lewis, & Straw 2017; Caines & Heble, 2015; Lewis & Piekut, 2016a, 2016b; Siddall & Waterman, 2016)[11].

A tool for further reflection

In response to our second research question, this paper has also proposed a map of different visions of improvisation pedagogy that the investigated studies point towards. The proposed five visions of improvisation pedagogy, with the 11 different approaches to improvisation towards which they point, illustrate the plurality that exists in how improvisation has been understood in the literature reviewed in this study. One important conclusion that can be drawn is that music education studies have moved beyond the mysticism that used to surround past approaches to improvisation, a mysticism that denied any sort of role for improvisation in the process of education (see Watson, 2010).

Our data show a strong preference for model-bound approaches, while approaches to improvisation as an open form were the least common (see Figure 8). The relation between the studied topics and the 11 approaches to improvisation shows that when the pedagogic focus is on musical development model-bound definitions seem to dominate, emphasising the need for skill development and the development of

musical understanding (Figure 9). On the basis of such comparisons, it is possible to conclude that issues of value and meaning-making in improvisation, as well as its collaborative, social aspects, are in need of further attention by future studies. Also, research on improvisation as an ability, as well as on teaching practice and teaching competence, might need to pay more attention to free improvisation aesthetics, as well as to the emancipatory and collaborative aspects of improvisation. It is encouraging that more recent studies in music education are already beginning to tackle some of these issues (e.g., Hickey, 2015; Hickey, Ankney, Healy, & Gallo, 2016).

Figure 8 Frequency and relative frequency of approaches to improvisation adopted in the study sample (n=77)

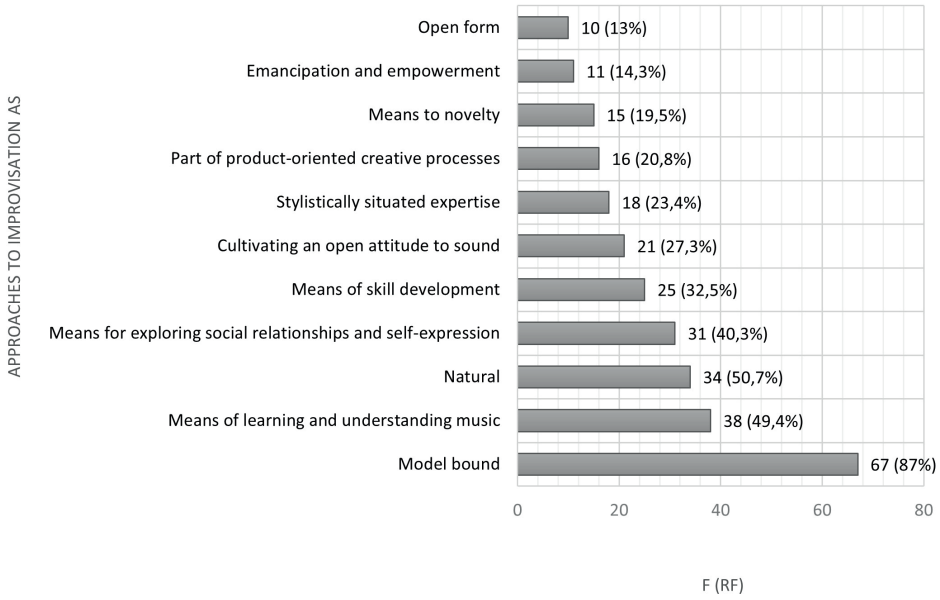
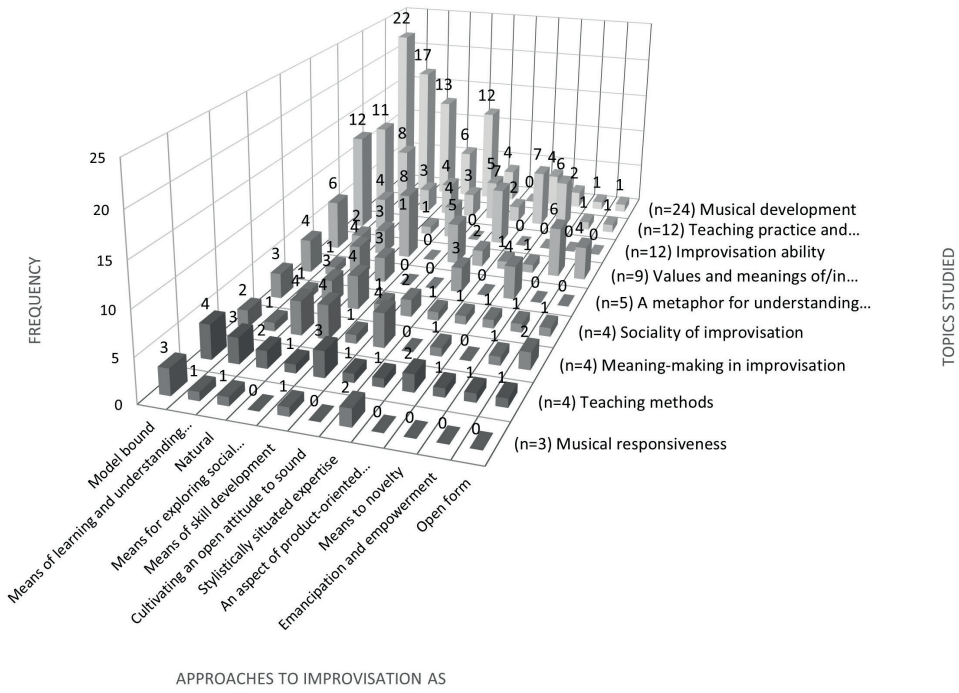


Figure 9 Frequency of approaches to improvisation in studied topics



Our data confirm that, far from being a marginal and peripheral mode of musical practice in music education, improvisation has become a way of addressing, highlighting, and cultivating qualities that are of core importance to music and its role in human lives. It can therefore be said that music education studies that address issues of musical improvisation have indeed tried to inquire into improvisation's links to core aspects of what it means to be musically educated, and the sometimes irreconcilable struggle between conflicting forces that this process induces: how to enable students to delve into extant modes of musical practice without impeding their spontaneity; how to enable critical reasoning while fostering community building; how to develop modes of study that are close to students' natural learning processes while advancing technical mastery; how to allow for innovative thinking while preserving long-cherished traditions "authentically". Thus, music education's apprehension of improvisation seems to have gone beyond the freedom vs. triviality polarity mentioned at the start of this article.

The map proposed in this study is meant as a possible representation of general trends that underpin music education research that addresses improvisation. In addition, we suggest that this map may also function as a way of conceptualising the tensions that arise in different music education situations where improvisation plays a part. Thus, it can be used as a framework for situating our particular ways of working with improvisation in our everyday teaching practice. In this sense, the visions of improvisation pedagogy proposed in this paper might work as a map that assists our reflection on the pedagogical moment of improvisation (based on van Manen, 1991). Whenever teachers and students come together to work on the basis of improvisation, their practice lives in the midst of tensions that arise as a result of the different approaches to and beliefs about improvisation on which their educational work may be based.

In this sense, in her/his everyday engagement with improvisation, every music teacher "produces" a new version of the map. However, as van Manen (1991) aptly states, "[a]s I reflect pedagogically on my daily living with children I discover my pedagogical nature, its present limits and possibilities" (p. 532). Thus, every version of the map may be subject to change, as one reflects upon and experiments with different approaches to the question of what role improvisation should play in our everyday teaching practice. Different answers to the question of the educational value of improvisation produce different visions of improvisation pedagogies, thus creating distinctive "pedagogical moments" of improvisation. Our map can be seen as a tool through which music educators can situate their practice and reflect upon it, possibly envisioning alternative ways forward. As such, it is an example of how theory might inform practice.

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Notes:

1. In this study we take a broad view of the notion of research, as the in-depth and systematic inquiry into questions, phenomena and issues, using a variety of approaches to knowledge building, i.e. empirical methods of data generation and collection as well as various forms of conceptual inquiry (philosophical in a strict sense but also practice-based reflective inquiries). As Reimer has long ago argued: "it would seem reasonable to conceive science as an endeavor, carried out in a great variety of ways, to achieve conceptual clarity about ourselves and our world. That allows for philosophy and history to be part of the endeavor while also honoring the distinctions between science and those fields clearly not science, such as art and religion" (Reimer, 1985, p. 10).
2. Keith Swanwick notes: "At the time of the launch of the BJME [British Journal of Music Education] in 1984, music education was in a state of transition" (2008, p. 223). A year earlier the International Journal of Music Education (IJME) launched its inaugural issue, widening the scope and role of music education research that had been almost thoroughly dominated by experimental psychology and quantitative research methodologies through the long tradition of Psychology of Music (that commenced publication in 1973) in the UK, the Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education (BCRME, launched in 1963), and the Journal of Research in Music Education (JRME, launched in 1953) in the US.
3. Phelps' 2nd edition of his pioneering A Guide to Research in Music Education appeared in 1980. Tony Kemp published an edited volume that acknowledged the need for more diverse methodologies in music

education research in 1992, at the same time when the first edition of the Handbook of Research in Music Education went to print (Colwell, 1992).

4. JUFO "is a rating and classification system to support the quality assessment of research output. To account for the different publication cultures characteristic of various disciplines, the classification includes academic journals, book series, conferences, as well as book publishers. The three-level classification rates the major foreign and domestic publication channels of all disciplines as follows: 1 = basic level; 2 = leading level; 3 = highest level. The evaluation is performed by 23 discipline-specific Expert Panels composed of some 200 distinguished Finnish or Finland-based scholars. Publication Forum operates under the auspices of the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (TSV)" (http://www.julkaisufoorumi.fi/en/publicationforum). The decision to work with this particular ranking system rests on the institutional affiliation of the first author of this paper.
5. Improvisation in music education has also been researched and discussed under the umbrella of composition-based creative music-making (e.g., Hopkins, 2015; Loane, 1984; Odam, 1995; Paynter, 1992), or through reference to notions such as "generative song making" (Barrett, 2006, p. 202), "spontaneous play" (Young, 2003, p. 45), invented songs (e.g., Barrett, 2006; Davies, 1986, 1992; Ilari, 2014), spontaneous vocalisations (Countryman, Gabriel & Thompson, 2016; Dowling, 1984, 1988), or spontaneous musical behaviour (Miller, 1986). However, an examination of the various pedagogical, aesthetic and epistemological reasons for this variety of terminologies lies beyond the scope of this study.
6. Although Google Scholar has been criticised for not being an accurate search tool (Gray et al., 2012), it has been seen as a more favourable tool for measuring citation counts for the more "disadvantaged" disciplines of the humanities and the social sciences (Harzing, 2013) than indexing tools such as Web of Science or Scopus.
7. The overall sums in the tables and figures may not equal 100% due to rounding.
8. "Free" music, in this context, refers to a kind of improvisation that consciously posits itself beyond the stylistic conventions of any particular musical idiom, stressing the musicians' liberty to draw on a wide variety of resources and techniques.
9. Our categorisation is based on Kratus (1992).
10. For more information regarding the notion and the study of marginality see Gatzweiler and Baumüller (2014), Rimmer (2012), and Pelc (2017).
11. Having said this, it must also be mentioned that Critical Studies in Improvisation / Études critiques en improvisation, a new improvisation studies online journal, has devoted a whole issue (Vol. 3, No. 2, 2008) to improvisation pedagogy; and one must also not neglect the two edited volumes on improvisation co-authored by ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl, which do address issues of education in a most significant manner (Nettl & Russell, 1998; Solis & Nettl, 2009).

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Appendix 2: Article II

Art as a social learning form – students' experiences of social anxiety

[Taide sosiaalisena oppimismuotona – opiskelijoiden kokemuksia jännittämisestä]

Satu-Mari Jansson, Heidi Westerlund & Eeva Siljamäki
[Translation by Veera Hämäläinen]

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Social anxiety and public speaking anxiety are common and harmful problems among university students. Universities should acknowledge the different needs of students not only as learners but also in social interaction.

> *"I was so nervous there [at a university lecture] that I'd have to say something. It's a really high threshold you have to cross to go to the class, and you really want to skip them [lectures] because you're so anxious. I never participate there. All classes where you have to speak in public, I've not taken them. -- or [I have] changed my secondary subject when I've realized that oh damn, you have to speak in public here." (011)*

In this study, we examine students' experiences of social and public speaking anxiety at university and in an arts intervention intended for those experiencing social anxiety. The arts intervention arose from the initiative of The Finnish Student Health Service (further FSHS). It was carried out as a cooperation between the FSHS and the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts during the academic year 2013–2014. The intervention was a choral singing course targeted for those who experience social anxiety.

It has been indicated that social anxiety and fear of social situations is as common among university students as it is among the entire population, in which the share of those experiencing such anxiety is approximately 16 percent (Tillfors & Furmark 2007). Even though social anxiety is a universal phenomenon (e.g. Almonkari 2007; Tillfors & Furmark 2007; Bhamani & Hussain 2012), its manifestations may vary from a light sense of insecurity to paralysing and life-limiting anxiety. Only a constant, strong sense of social anxiety or complete lack thereof can be seen as unusual experiences (Almonkari 2007, 9).

Because of its impacts, there has been widespread interest in social anxiety within the fields of speech communication and music, and within the latter, the so-called fear of public performance, or stage fright, has been studied significantly (see e.g. Papageorgi, Hallam & Welch 2007). Learning is, to an increasing extent, understood as social, interactive and participatory activity, and thus the negative consequences of social anxiety should be taken into account in other fields as well.

For over ten years, the FSHS has developed group activities to help those who suffer from social anxiety also through multi-professional means (Kunttu, Martin & Almonkari 2006) and has been involved in producing research information regarding social anxiety and means of solving it (Almonkari & Kunttu 2012; Martin 2011a; Martin 2011b; Kunttu & Huttunen 2005; Kunttu, Almonkari, Kylmälä & Huttunen 2006). However, municipal student health care has only recently taken an interest in the social anxiety of university students (e.g. Kunttu & Huttunen 2005; Almonkari 2007).

In this interview study, the interest is in the lived experience of the students who participated in the arts intervention as they describe it as a part of their life and in interaction with the interviewer (Erkkilä 2005, 196–198). On the whole, there is only little research information about the experiences of participants of arts interventions (however, see Jansson 2013). At the end of the article, we raise some points regarding how the needs of students who experience social anxiety can be taken into account in the university context.

Social interaction and emotions in learning

Studying at university is a multi-stage and long-term process that builds the student's own future and is supported with various structures, services and procedures (Nummenmaa & Lairio 2005, 10).

Many university contexts are social by nature. Also learning is, according to the current view, seen as sociocultural. Learning is considered to be constructed as part of social interaction, cultural practices, and mutual individual and social transformation (e.g. Hakkarainen, Paavola, Kangas & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen 2013). Students share their expertise with one other by discussing and thus also broadening and supplementing their competence (ibid.; also Lindblom-Ylänne, Hailikari & Postareff 2015).

Learning is considered to take place as a result of interaction and participation. Learning situations that implement the principles of collaborative learning thus require careful planning and guidance, because the pedagogical solutions aim to support not only teacher-student interaction but also interaction among students. (Hakkarainen, Paavola, Kangas & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen 2013.) Factors that affect the success of collaborative learning have, however, only rarely been studied from the point of view of students' experience (Vuopala 2013).

Learning situations can strengthen or change students' view of themselves and emotional experiences are significant in this process (Nummenmaa & Lairio 2005). The impact of emotions in learning that takes place in an academic environment has been studied to some extent (Ingleton 1999). It is known that there is a link between shame and social interaction (Scheff & Retzinger 1991).

The (physical and mental) distance that forms between people in social situations represents either acceptance or rejection. Feelings of shame thus create distance between people in social situations either by the individual him/herself or by others. Because shame is a part of social processes, feelings of shame are therefore also centrally linked with collaborative and sociocultural learning. Shame and pride are thus part of the experience that a student forms of social processes that enable or, equally, prevent learning. Students may avoid risk-taking and failure in social

situations to avoid shame. (Ingleton 1999.) In collaborative learning situations, avoiding failure may be presented as passivity, withdrawing and being silent.

Positive emotional experiences have a significant role in university studies. According to studies, positive emotions support well-being and individual potential, such as social skills and resources. The more students experience positive emotions, the more inspiring teachers are considered to be. Those who experience positive emotions during their studies may also graduate faster. (Lindblom-Ylänne, Hailikari & Postareff 2015.)

Experiencing social anxiety as part of collaborative learning

The multidisciplinary description of social anxiety includes, for example, the concepts of fear of social situations, shyness, reticence, fear of public speaking and stage fright, foreign language anxiety, and evaluation apprehension (Almonkari 2007). The manifestations of social anxiety may vary from slight nervousness or symptoms to a mental disorder.

The umbrella concept of *social anxiety* (see Almonkari 2007, 32) can be used to refer to the above-mentioned various manifestations of anxiety on a general level. Also this study leans to the concept of social anxiety. It refers to university students' *experiential state, in which feelings of fear and anxiety of various degrees are involved in social interaction* (ibid., translation by the translator of this article). It is typical for people experiencing social anxiety to spend time wondering what others think of them and to question their own worth, significance and resources (ibid., 41).

To understand the social interaction of university students who experience social anxiety and the subjective experiences of those who sought to participate in the arts intervention, we present two research questions:

1. How do the university students who participated in the arts intervention describe their experiences of social anxiety in the university?
2. What type of meanings do students give to the arts intervention?

The grapple choral singing course for university students experiencing social anxiety

The study is based on an arts intervention on the initiative of the FSHS Helsinki-Espoo service unit targeted for university students experiencing social anxiety and carried out as a choral singing course. The arts intervention combined improvisation, singing together and healthcare expertise.

The arts intervention differed from traditional choirs and FSHS social anxiety groups, as the different methods used in the choral singing course – singing, functional exercises and common discussions – supported one another. Toward the end of the course, a public performance as a choir was carried out.

The choir director (a member of the research team) was largely responsible for the planning and implementation of the arts intervention, supported by a psychologist and a physiotherapist from the FSHS. The intervention was named the Grapple Choral Singing course. It was advertised for, for example, the FSHS website and with posters in the premises of the FSHS and universities in the Helsinki metropolitan area with the title *Afraid of speaking? – Try singing!*

A psychologist interviewed the university students of different disciplines who had applied for the course, and the selected group of 16 began the six-month course in November 2013. Only some of the students had previous experience in singing or music.

Instead of the musical end result, the work concentrated on the process and creating an accepting atmosphere and positive peer support by applying the principles of constructive interaction in both the singing and functional exercises (Johnstone 1997; Sawyer 2003; also Siljamäki 2013).

Research data and methods of analysis

The research data consists of the individual thematic interviews i.e. narratives of the university students of different disciplines who participated in the arts intervention, which are thought to depict their experiences (Erkkilä 2005, 200–201). Altogether 14 students completed the course, of which seven expressed an interest to participate in the study. The students who participated in the voluntary interview study were

23–25-year-old representatives of both genders who were at the end of their studies or had already transitioned to working life.

For research-ethical reasons, we do not present background information of the interviewees in more detail nor do we examine social anxiety from a medical point of view or as an indication of illness.

The interviews were done about 1.5 months after the end of the arts intervention. The interviews were carried out by the first author[1] of this article who had not participated in the planning or implementation of the arts intervention. It was thus natural for the interviewee to ask further questions about the course during the interview.

The interview questions were related to studies and work, the manifestations of social anxiety in concrete situations, experiencing social anxiety, dealing with social anxiety, reasons for seeking to participate in the arts intervention, and experiences about the arts intervention in different stages of it. The aim of the interview was to produce reflective narratives of experiences of success, epiphanies and new operational models as well as feelings of weakness and failures. The interviews lasted for about 1–2 hours and they were carried out in the premises of the University of the Arts. All interviewees gave their consent to the research[2].

The data was analysed using the method of qualitative content analysis. (Tracy 2013, 188–197; Graneheim & Lundman 2004). The unit of analysis in the content analysis was the experience narrated by the participants of the arts intervention.

Adapting Graneheim and Lundman (2004), from the experiential narratives data, sentences and words were picked and then coded as meaning units, with the research questions serving as upper categories (experiencing social anxiety and experiencing the arts intervention).

The analysis of the data (Table 1) was started by reading through the interviews, summarizing the contents and classification (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 188–190). Only those meaning units that were related to experiencing social anxiety or experiences of the arts intervention were selected in the analysis (Graneheim & Lundman 2004, 194–197). The meaning units selected from all of the interviews were combined into categories and named according to their content.

Table 1 An example of summarizing the contents, a meaning unit and creating a category.

Summary of the content	Meaning unit (content described in one sentence)	Category
I can get through a public speaking situation that causes social anxiety as long as no-one notices that my hands are shaking. I can plan the situation so that my social anxiety does not show to others, as I can express myself orally fairly well. My social anxiety is physical. If I must use a paper when performing in public, I prefer to write on cardboard so that you can't see my hands shaking. I go through everything beforehand, I have "a pack ready for everything" and I memorize what I'm going to say by heart.	I can get through a public speaking situation as long as others do not notice my hands shaking – I therefore plan such situations carefully.	Need to be in control when in public and performing

Results of the study

The results are presented so that they answer the posed research questions. The individual perspective of the interviewees and the polyphony of the data has been emphasized in presenting the results.

1. Experience of social anxiety[3]

Striving for perfection. According to our data, some of the university students who experience social anxiety demand a lot from themselves, which results in an exceptionally strong aspiration for perfection:

> *"I want to be perfect, I somehow always strive for that." (007)*

> *"And it feels like really often they judge how others come through there [at university]. And it really causes me a lot of anguish." (011)*

> *"It feels like I don't belong. That I'm far inferior to all the others." (011)*

For someone striving for perfection, receiving negative feedback is hard.

> *"I'm afraid I'll be criticized. And then I'm always really offended if I get remarks on something." (007)*

Need to be in control when in public and performing. The students related that when performing or speaking in public, they felt like they were the centre of attention.

> *"The absolute worst in performing in public is if you have to do it alone." (011)*

In these situations, the students felt like they were under the microscope: others are observing them in the same way that they observe themselves. When performing in public, they try to hide their anxiety from others to the very last. They get through the situations with careful preparation, memorizing things by heart or, for example, using cardboard cards as aide-memoirs to hide their hands shaking.

If performing in public is done with a group, the one experiencing social anxiety may make sure that they will not be responsible for the situation.

> *"[when performing] with someone else, I've made sure that my part is really short." (011)*

The students also select their courses according to the method of completion: the less the teacher seems to involve students, the more likely the course is selected. First lectures cause particular social anxiety.

> *"Panic, -- thinking about if I have to say something takes up all my energy. And then it's impossible to learn. Being afraid takes up all the energy; if he says something to me, do I just walk out the door or really, what will I do." (011)*

If the teacher turns out to be too participatory, the student may drop out of the course. Many also told that they prefer courses based on book examinations. On

the other hand, some of the students said that they like small group work where discussing the specific subject and establishing a contact with other students is easier than in a large group.

The students also spoke about study-related practical training and work situations. Students in practical training and transitioning to work do not yet feel that they are professionals but still want to perform well, which creates an internal conflict and increases social anxiety.

> *"They [meetings] do make me really apprehensive maybe because I'm really new in the field." (011)*

> *" I was kind of giving a speech to people who know more about the subject than I do. Or at least that was my feeling or set-up with myself." (009)*

Difficulty of being present in social situations. In addition to courses, the students also experienced that seminars and meetings with supervisors where interaction is intense caused social anxiety.

> *"I once went to his [supervisor's] consultation. It was in a small room where there wasn't even a table between us, and he was sat – there – I was, like, how am I meant to be in this situation." (010)*

Social anxiety is not necessarily related only to presentations but also to informal social situations, large groups or, for example, coffee break discussions and casual parties.

> *"What is most difficult is that suddenly the attention is somehow on you and then you should spontaneously say something." (005)*

Experiencing social anxiety is like an internal state of alarm in which it is impossible to relax. Then, for example, laughing with the group is impossible, as one's body is a state of stress.

> *"In situations where there's even just one person who's not that familiar, the anxiety is there somehow because of even just that one person." (010*

Social anxiety arises from the interaction of physical reactions and interpretations. The students described social anxiety as a dialogue between physical reactions and their own interpretations. The physical symptoms included, for example, heart palpitations, blushing, hands shaking, and ears becoming clogged.

> *"It then kind of becomes a vicious cycle, that it [the reaction] itself causes anxiety. And then it just goes on and on." (007)*

However, just thinking about performing in public can cause social anxiety. The first symptoms may occur up to a month before the actual situation. One cannot stop thinking about the situation, and at the latest about a week before it, insomnia and stomach problems may occur. Many said that they take beta blockers before performing in public.

> *"If there's a public performance coming up, you just think and think and think about what I'm going to do even though I've prepared for it very well. You can't sleep because it's on your mind all the time." (005)*

Processing social anxiety is like battling with a force that cannot be influenced with certainty. When the anxiety takes over, panic ensues:

> *"And it's really awful. It pounds over me so that I can't get any hold of it any more. It takes the reins, the panic." (008)*

Learned methods to cope with social anxiety. The students had acquired various ways to cope with social anxiety. They explained that it had affected their choice of courses and led to avoiding or dropping out of such courses where they would have to speak in public or where participatory methods are used for studying. They told that they had created methods, the most typical of which were avoiding or postponing speaking in public and social situations and also meticulous planning in advance.

> *"Avoiding has been my tactic of choice for really long." (011)*

> *"Usually I've just avoided them." (006)*

Prior processing of social anxiety supported applying for the course. The participants of the *Grapple Choral Singing* course had already processed their social anxiety prior to the course. Psychotherapy, reading books on psychology, and supporting peace of mind and physical relaxation with meditation exercises were mentioned as means to influence social anxiety. Some of the students had joined informal social anxiety groups that meet, discuss and practice public speaking. Some had also tried public speaking coaching.

The methods had helped the students to reach a point in handling their social anxiety where they had the courage to apply to the *Grapple Choral Singing* course. Without prior attempts to work on their social anxiety, participating in a functional course might not have necessarily been possible for some of them.

2. Experiences of the arts intervention

Permission to be insecure. With the choral singing course, the students said they had learned to accept themselves and their insecurity. Speaking about social anxiety also generated a new kind of satisfaction.

> *"That I can be a little insecure and it doesn't matter. Like magically the situation's not stressful after all. It makes it easier, like the beta blocker,*

when I know that I always have that option that I can say it out loud [that I'm feeling anxious], and then, it turns out, I'm actually just fine." (008)

Some of the students told that they had changed their attitude toward mistakes during the arts intervention.

"I've maybe given myself the possibility to slip up, or that I've learned – well, I don't know if I've fully learned it yet but at least it the idea has taken shape – that maybe it's OK if you slip up every now and then." (011)

Everything does not need to be done perfectly and under control.

"If I make a mistake in some situation, the situation will always pass. And it doesn't define me as a person in any way, really. It doesn't make me a bad person. That has maybe been quite a big realization [that] I don't have to blame myself for anything. It's such a short moment in a person's life that you can get over it." (008)

Mistakes do not define a person. Students who participated in the course no longer feared making mistakes as they had done before, which, in turn, had made them more relaxed when doing things. They no longer attempted to control and plan every instance of performing in public and every social encounter, but tried to rely on situations taking their course and reduce the need for control.

"A new kind of trust [has] come about maybe in myself and also in letting the situation lead the way." (009)

"[...]be, if not caught in the current, but something like that." (005)

Establishing a positive contact with the group and the audience. The students recounted having learned that it is important to seek strength from members of the group or the audience, i.e. to make contact with the audience or the group and relate to them positively. A positive feeling is deliberately sought in advance in the situations.

Previously, the experience was that the group and the audience are a distant crowd that evaluates the performance of a lone performer. The students now understand that the person performing is in active contact with the group and the audience:

> *"If you can build the contact onto the other side and you notice that there's just a regular person there, not a monster, then the situation will become easier in a flash. I've never before realized it in the same way as now, that there's a person looking back at you and you have the contact and responsibility just the same there in the audience; that their role is just as important in the situation." (008)*

Regularity supporting well-being. The course was held once per week and it supported well-being in the everyday life of the students. They felt good and relaxed after the course.

> *"Right from the first times [there was] a good feeling that it'd be one of the high points of the week: you looked forward to the event." (005)*

> *"The choir kind of became a lifeline, and I felt really relaxed on the day after the exercises." (007)*

The experience of belonging to a group and peer support. It is noteworthy that, unlike in individual therapy, in the arts intervention the students felt that they were part of a group.

> *"Everyone in that group are more or less in the same situation, so you didn't feel like you're an outsider." (011)*

"It was nice being a part of that group." (006)

"I was part of a community. It was a really nice feeling and it also gave a whole lot of strength." (011)

The experience of an accepting atmosphere and belonging to a group was described to be important.

"[in the arts intervention] I had a social contact with other people my age in a similar life situation and I felt like I was accepted there. Felt good and [it] was important." (010)

With the help of peer support, some of the students understood that they are not alone with their emotions.

"You got to share experiences and it felt like maybe [I'm] all normal with the problem, after all." (011)

For some, the experience of belonging to a group was unique.

"I don't really have any [previous] positive experience of being in a group." (006)

You learn about yourself through others. The course made it possible to consciously observe the interpretations of classmates in a different way than, for example, in one-on-one therapy discussions.

"Some maybe felt the same way as me and some differently, so maybe you saw the spectrum of what it can feel like for others; that my perspective on the situation is not the only reality." (006)

While observing others, the students also learned to observe themselves and their own interpretations. One student sums this up as follows:

> *"And then when I saw from the other person that I don't think of them at all that they'd said something stupid. But that they were dwelling on it just the same [like me]. So that put it in perspective: you somehow of course consider yourself a really central character in your own life." (008)*

Breaking one's own boundaries. The arts intervention offered the interviewees a safe environment to experiment with crossing the boundaries of their comfort zones. The students told that they now better recognized their established ways of thinking, for which they have not always had a rational explanation. During the arts intervention, they were able to practice shifting their perspective.

> *"It's kind of a sandpit so you can romp about there; you can test the limits; find a new perspective on all interaction, social contact and performing." (008)*

It was positive that the course did not focus on dialogue but was functional and practical instead.

> *"What was really good about the choir was that even though it centred around anxiety, they [the exercises] didn't centre around anxiety, that we did things there." (011)*

The students' views of themselves changed through realizations.

> *"Social anxiety can partly be because you prepare for all of those situations too much and try to plan them, the whole situation becomes like a performance; so maybe it'd be better to just trust that it [the situation] will work out one way or another." (005)*

The students reported that changes had taken place during the course in their courage to bring out their own voice and ability to accept what it sounds like. Also others taking to one's own aural initiative when improvising was experienced as therapeutic.

> *"It was immensely empowering that if you made a sound yourself and then noticed that all of the others join in. And even if it was a just a stupid sound - at first you were a little critical, "that sounds all stupid" – I felt that there was something immensely therapeutic and empowering in it." (008)*

Changes happened in interaction exercises, too. Some told that they had noticed their own development during the course, because toward the end of the process they were able to do exercises that they would not have been able to do in the beginning of the course.

> *"Towards the end, we had quite a lot of stuff, you had to look people in the eye, which at least I have maybe usually found quite unpleasant." (005)*

Courage – despite social anxiety. Even though the students said that they still experience social anxiety in social situations, they try not to care about it.

> *"Just faith in that even if I encounter those [social anxiety related] problems that I've avoided all of my life, life still goes on." (011)*

> *"You have the courage to do things even though you feel anxious; that you don't concentrate on the anxiety but if you want to do something then you should do it even though at first it feels awful. Or you have the courage to say something even though your voice trembles." (006)*

Some had learned to accept social anxiety as a part of life during the course.

> *"You should feel anxious if it's an important thing for you." (008)*

Some told that, after finishing the course, they no longer concentrated on the physical symptoms of social anxiety nor did they avoid anxiety-causing situations any more. The course had given them courage.

> *"I went on a gig alone, which I would've not had the courage to do [before]; I would've maybe thought that I draw too much attention." (010)*

The course had started a new stage in their life.

> *"It [the course] began a stage that is a good start. But I do believe that there's a lot of work ahead for me, but at least it provided a good basis." (011)*

Table 2 Categories of experiencing social anxiety and the arts intervention generated as a result of the study.

Experience of social anxiety	**Experience of the arts intervention**
Striving for perfection	Changing the perspective on yourself and situations that cause social anxiety: Permission to be insecure
Need to be in control when in public and performing	Mistakes do not define a person
Difficulty of being present in social situations	Establishing a positive contact with the group and the audience
Social anxiety arises from the interaction of physical reactions and interpretations	Regularity supporting well-being
Learned methods of coping with social anxiety	The experience of belonging to a group and peer support
Prior processing of social anxiety supported applying for the course	You learn about yourself through others
	Breaking one's own boundaries
	Courage – despite social anxiety

Conclusions

This study has examined students' experiences of social anxiety in two different environments: university and an arts intervention concerning social anxiety. The analysis of the data yielded a group of categories that describe university students' experiences of social anxiety (Table 2).

Students who participated in the arts intervention felt themselves to be different from other students because of their social anxiety. The work in the arts intervention was based on mutual interaction within the group and peer support. It thus offered the students a safe environment to practice social interaction. Also previous research of arts interventions has found that group learning forms in arts can be used to handle emotions, knowledge, and actions as well as to kindle learning that encompasses the entire personality (Jansson 2015).

The arts intervention enabled an experience of positive social reciprocity without evaluation and judgement. The students thus gained positive emotional experiences of acting in a group and of themselves. It was not, however, only about peer support and positively perceived interaction between members of the group, but, arising from this, about the experience of belonging to the group, which promotes learning about oneself, about others and with others.

In the light of the results of the study, the significance of the quality of interaction in collaborative learning, i.e. in situations that are social by nature, can thus be underlined. Because the backgrounds and needs of students are different, not only in absorbing contents but also in social interaction and communication, the quality of positive interaction in the university environment plays an important role. The quality of interaction may have a direct effect not only on learning, but also more widely on students' view of their own potential and future.

For some of the university students who participated in the study, social anxiety was related to extreme perfectionism as well as the fear of mistakes and being the centre of attention. The fear of mistakes and failure manifests itself as physical or psychological symptoms of social anxiety and reactions that one tries to cover. Social anxiety, thus, arises from the fear of failure and shame. These emotions prevent

participating in social situations and thus collaborative learning (also Scheff & Retzinger 1991).

This study has strived to make visible the significance of belonging to a group for learning. As much as shame and social anxiety can, at worst, create a negative vicious circle, a positive emotional experience of working in a group and belonging to a group may create experiences that increase self-confidence and bring about a positive circle that strengthens social participation (also Lindblom-Ylänne, Hailikari & Postareff 2015). A positive emotional experience can, for its part, support interaction that is significant for learning.

According to our current view, the university environment is largely based on social interaction and participation (e.g. Hakkarainen, Paavola, Kangas & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen 2013). The collaborative learning concept underlines the idea of a common intellectual effort that takes place in cooperation between students (and teachers). In collaborative environments, students can bring their differing view points, learning styles and experiences to the learning situations. (Smith & Macgregor 1992, 1–2.) Students collaborate sharing a common goal (Gokhale 1995) and shared learning gives students the chance to take responsibility for their own learning (Totten, Skills, Digby & Russ 1991).

The definition of collaborative learning concentrates on examining cooperation as cognitive and intellectual information processing. In the background, there is thus Vygotsky's (1978) idea that students have the capacity to perform intellectually when they are requested to work in collaboration. However, the theoretical examination of collaborative learning should take into account the quality of interaction in learning as well as emotions and experiences that enable and limit participation and, at the same time, learning. When theoretically examining collaborative learning, students should be seen as equals, regarding the different starting points of students to participate in social interaction and common production of information.

Our research highlights that for some students, participation as such may be difficult or even impossible. In the light of the results, it would seem that the pedagogical processes of collaborative learning should not only create collaborative

processes, but also take into account how to create and maintain positive emotional experiences of collaboration in these processes.

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Notes

1. The researcher who carried out the interviews also performed the data analysis.
2. As requested by the FSHS, a preliminary ethical evaluation was carried out for the research by the University of the Arts Ethics Committee, the statement of which was favourable.
3. For readability, the language of the quotes from the interviews has been corrected to some extent or words have been removed. The removed parts (.../ --) are not shown in the final quotes.

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Appendix 3: Article III

Free improvisation in choral settings: An ecological perspective

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Abstract

This instrumental case study explores and theorizes on the educational potential and value of free collaborative vocal improvisation, a process that enables equal access to music regardless of musical skills. The focus of the article is on the musical activities of an adult choir in Finland that applied tenets from improvisational theatre to facilitate the social and musical processes of free improvisation. This study applies an ecological perspective to understand how improvisation can offer asylum—a physical or conceptual safe space within which an individual can flourish socially and musically—and explore how it is sought, constructed, and supported, and what opportunities it can afford to those participating in it. The analysis shows how the participants used various techniques for seeking asylum, both in and away from their shared social space, when they encountered the inherent discomforts of improvisation. Depending on the social ecology of each situation, the musicking activities provided the participants with the resources to construct both social and musical agency as well as experiences in playful collaborative musical learning and wellbeing. The present study calls for an ecological framework for music education and improvisation that supports musicking in a safe and playful learning environment with a focus on social processes, and which could be considered the starting point for music education at all ages.

Keywords: affordance, asylum, free improvisation choir, improvisational theatre, music education, social ecology

Introduction

Improvisation can be learned by anyone, regardless of technical proficiency or age. Therefore, it has long been recommended that it be considered a core element of music education syllabi (Borgo, 2007; Sawyer, 2008). Yet, the actual practice of improvisation is still a rare occurrence in most Finnish schools (Partti, 2016). Research on improvisation in music education has been mostly focused on idiomatic, individual, and instrumental practices (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020), and has been heavily influenced by cognitive studies with quantitative methods (Biasutti, 2017). In addition, studies on collaborative free improvisation are scarce, despite its potential for posing questions on egalitarianism, social relations, and empowerment (see Hickey, 2015; Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010). Hence, this study calls for a more holistic and multidisciplinary understanding of improvisation in music education by exploring the educative value and potential of collaborative free vocal improvisation, a musical practice that is situated at the interface of music and theatre, from the perspective of the social ecology of education.

Free improvisation is understood as a mode of performance that collaboratively experiments with ways of sound organization not bound by idiomatic structures (Kanellopoulos, 2007b, p. 101; see Schroeder, 2019). The present study explores the case of an adult choir in Finland that takes its guiding tenets from improvisational theatre (see Johnstone, 1981). This choir, hereafter referred to by the pseudonym IC51, uses collaboratively improvised free polyphonic vocal music, without a conductor or a leader, as its sole method of practice. This practice neither includes nor excludes existing musical styles or genres, and enables childlike play with equal access to music, regardless of musical skills. As a member of the improvisation choir and a music professional, the author is an actively immersed insider (Greene, 2014) in the choir's practices and is thus able to offer a distinctive on-site perspective on this complex phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, p. 58). Drawing on gentle empiricism (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2010) with ethnographic features, an ecological perspective is assumed to understand how music matters in these particular social settings (DeNora, 2013a).

In this study, free vocal improvising—as a form of free improvisation that incorporates the tenets and mindset of improvisational theatre—is here recognized as "musicking," "a mode of communicative action, a way of sharing time and space" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 141). Musicking is understood as a transformative practice (DeNora, 2013a) that shifts the focus from mastery of technical skills, musicality, and performance as the sole definers of quality toward embracing social skills and interaction. The ways in which the participants support the construction of a safe space, or an asylum (DeNora, 2013a), are examined by exploring what happens when the focus is turned from musical parameters to "the way [these] musicians [think] about the music" (Schroeder, 2019, p. 5). The present study advocates that social, personal, and musical growth should be placed at the heart (Westerlund, 2008; see also Davis, 2016) of creative and collaborative learning (Borgo, 2007), while also fostering learning spaces that are suitable for developing the musical and social self (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010) and wellbeing (DeNora, 2013a).

The case of IC51: A free improvisation choir

IC51 is an independent and collaboratively led free improvisation choir that organized open and free-of-charge improvisation sessions and performances from 2014 to 2017. It was a recreational community of improvisation enthusiasts founded by six members of a former improvising choir in Finland (2011–2014), with the aim of continuing the legacy of developing free choral improvisation practices based on facilitating musical processes through the use of improvisational theatre tenets. The number of active members comprised approximately 12 adults, with varying backgrounds, including inexperienced singers and those without a formal education in music, to those holding a degree in higher music education or the performing arts. The collaboratively led improvisation sessions could be called together by anyone in IC51; the choir thus convened on an irregular basis 1 to 3 times a month, typically with four to 12 participants, in frequently changing free-of-charge locations (e.g., university gymnasiums or office spaces). No singing auditions were held, but an individual's

preparedness for cooperation and group work was informally and collaboratively evaluated in one to two sessions before being included as a new member.

The IC51 improvisation choir did not conform to traditional choir configurations or voice types, and the sessions always included bodily warm-ups and exercises. Simple structures with flexible boundaries were used for initiating improvisations, such as limiting the number of singers in a piece or starting the improvisation with a vowel or consonant. The improvisations often started with the singers standing in a circle, and could vary from minimalistic musical explorations of sounds to alterations of chaotic soundscapes, from rich harmonies to prolonged silences. The aesthetic material (see DeNora, 2000) consisted of all kinds of sounds—singing in traditional and nontraditional ways, optional improvised text and lyrics, as well as bodily movement and the versatile use of space—and could include references to existing musical styles without prescribed parts or voice leading. Individual sounds and solos were embraced, whereas choral blending and precision were not required. Instead of using conducting cues or authoritarian musical leadership, the choir improvised collaboratively with the support of guiding tenets derived from improvisational theatre (see Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Johnstone, 1981) (see Table 1). This approach included an understanding of improvisation as a skill, and the inspired application of both bodily and verbal elements in improvisation.

Table 1. Examples of the Tenets Used in Improvisational Theatre to Guide the Process (e.g., Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Johnstone, 1981).

Tenets of improvisation
• React spontaneously without censoring, blocking, or negating either your own or others' ideas
• Focus on supporting the partner
• Accept and adapt to offers or ideas (say: yes, and . . .)
• Commit to the moment with physical and mental presence
• Mistakes are gifts
• Be aware of how interactions can be affected by bodily posture (status)
• Play the game

These tenets were not employed in the form of strictly formatted theatrical scenes, or taught as such, but were rather adopted as a mindset for initiating and upholding social processes in the improvisations. For instance, one technique for improvisation was to accept everything, which allowed the group to focus on following and agreeing. Because no imitation of another is ever exactly the same, a piece usually started to develop on its own, and featured speedy collaborative transitions between whatever aesthetic material was contributed and the singers' perceptions and reactions to that material during the collaborative creation. These practices and techniques were tested and further developed through collaborative discussions and decision-making in each session.

Conceptualizing free vocal improvisation

Earlier research

Although improvisation has been argued to enhance creative ability, musical growth (cf. D. Hargreaves, 1999; Harrison & Pound, 1996), and musicianship (Farrell, 2016), it is still regarded as the least important skill (Creech et al., 2008), and improvisatory music is often seen as "not real" music (Seddon & Biasutti, 2008, p. 418). The focus of this study is specifically on free vocal improvisation, where the focus is turned toward "the actions and attitudes involved among the participants" (Johansen, 2014, p. 14) as knowledge "emerges from the need to act in the environment" (Borgo, 2018, p. 1025). Free improvisation has been reported to provide a greater sense of freedom, with enhanced "ownership for musical tools for expression" and agency (Johansen, 2014, p. 14), as compared to vocal jazz, which requires deep immersion in a stylistic musical knowledge base (Madura Ward-Steinman, 2014). The scarcity of studies in music education on both collaborative and individual free vocal improvisation is evident (Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020).

The few studies that have researched collaborative improvised singing share an understanding of creating a safe and playful environment without criticism or judgments on musical value (Farrell, 2016; Yun & Willingham, 2014), which concurs with the understanding of professional free improvisation pedagogues (Hickey,

2015; Tonelli, 2015). It has been reported that the experiences of vocalists in jazz improvisation are different from those of instrumentalists, as the human body is their instrument and their sense of personal risk is thus heightened (W. Hargreaves, 2013). Hence, there is need for studies such as this one in terms of bringing forth the role of the voice as "an equal player in the field of improvised music" (Tonelli, 2015), as well as exploring unconducted and collaborative forms of improvisation with both traditional and nontraditional uses of the voice.

Earlier research suggests that the pedagogy of free improvisation requires facilitation skills and a process-centered pedagogy (Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010), an inclusive and generous mentorship (MacGlone & MacDonald, 2018, p. 285) or avoidance of preconceived notions of musical quality and the inclusion of the teacher in the improvisation as an equal-status collaborative partner with the students (Hickey, 2015, p. 440). Still, the question of how to facilitate free improvisation with beginner level skills in music is left unanswered (Hickey, 2015), while greater understanding of free vocal improvisation's pedagogical potential and theoretical underpinnings is needed. Furthermore, feelings of discomfort or fear related to improvising are common and stemming from "not knowing what to sing" (Farrell, 2016, p. 35), being "judged by peers" (Yun & Willingham, 2014, p. 241), or associating imperfections in improvisations as related to one's character (W. Hargreaves, 2013, p. 391). Although various strategies for reducing the negative feelings or fears associated with improvisation have been suggested (see Farrell, 2016; W. Hargreaves, 2013) theoretical understanding of how challenging moments during improvisations are encountered is needed, specifically in the context of free improvisation with the voice.

Beyond the field of music, improvisational theatre has a history of understanding improvisation as a skill of intuitive and imaginative responses to people and things in the environment, which is trained through basic tenets such as spontaneous reacting without censoring one's own ideas, being physically and mentally present in the moment, and focusing on supporting the partner (see Dudeck & McClure, 2018; Johnstone, 1981). Meanwhile, vocal improvisation has been approached as a skill oriented toward learning and mastering specific musical styles and

elements, such as jazz (W. Hargreaves, 2013), although attaining "interactional synchrony"—also known as "shared groove"—has also been reported as a core goal (Madura Ward-Steinman, 2014, p. 355). Nevertheless, both improvised music and improvised theatre have been recognized as "self-organizing" performances emerging "from the collective actions and interactions of the entire group" (Sawyer, 2008, p. 50). However, social skills are referred to as "traditionally difficult to teach and develop" (Biasutti, 2017, p. 3), or thought of as simply assumed, or simultaneously learned and employed during the "pedagogical engagement" of free musical improvisation (Thomson, 2007, p. 1). Because creative, collaborative, and improvisational ways of working have been claimed to enhance learning and a deeper musical understanding (Sawyer, 2006, pp. 162–162), improvisational theatre has likewise been suggested as a means for learning the skills required in collaboration and group work (Sawyer, 2011, p. 20).

An ecological perspective on collaborative free vocal improvisation

Drawing on DeNora's (2000, 2007, 2013a, 2013b) work, this study moves away from "music itself" to "describing music's semiotic force in social life" (2000, p. 23). Rather than being a closed entity or merely a stimulus, music is always "with" something that is added during engagement with the music (DeNora & Ansdell, 2014, p. 6), and likewise affects "the social processes between the individuals" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 143). This means that musicking in free vocal improvisation entails not only making sounds but also engaging with others and, furthermore, "with things outside the self" (DeNora, 2013a, pp. 139–140), while using the human voice and body as the musical instrument. In this way, the music and the interactions between the singers are expanded from being mere sonic phenomena to being seen as the bodily reception and perception of impulses from various sources, with unconventional and contemporary techniques and sounds, including movement and words. The concept of what counts or does not count as music can thus be blurred and expanded, while personal and collective intentionality and experiences become central to defining what music is within the "complex process of interdependent interactions between people, practices and things within a particular

place" (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016, p. 41). In an ecological framework, music education is seen as an open system, where one is interrelated and connected with all things in life, and the musical experience is defined in relation to factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to individuals (see DeNora, 2013a, p. 26). If one aspect is changed or affected, it will also resonate in other parts of the ecosystem.

Music, more specifically improvisation, as an active object, is an affordance structure, and provides resources for "world building" (DeNora, 2000, p. 44). As music is coupled and interrelated with other things and cultural practices, such as when one talks about it or experiences it through bodily movements, music begins to "afford opportunities and possibilities for action, experience and relation to others" (DeNora & Ansdell, 2014, p. 7). Hence, music can afford pleasure, opportunities for musicianship (DeNora & Ansdell, 2014), or resources for negotiating and crafting one's social (DeNora, 2013a, p. 77) or musical agency (Karlsen, 2011). This aligns with the notions of experiential and transformative becoming (see Borgo, 2007; van Manen, 2012) and social learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), where the experiences of undergoing transformations through social processes are at the heart of learning. Furthermore, musical improvisation can be employed to configure a space to afford some particular activity or use (DeNora, 2000, pp. 60–61), as a medium for furnishing (DeNora, 2013a) a social environment so as to make it more habitable or comfortable. In other words, seeking asylum (DeNora, 2013a), "in or away from a social world" (p. 74), is a way "to maintain the space or room for self, security, flow and belonging" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 50). Asylum can be sought through removal, as when seeking shelter or escaping from a social environment to obtain some privacy by establishing some distance from others. Asylum can also be sought through refurnishing, by making an attempt to remake the sociomusical space by adding something (e.g., sounds through singing) that others will then encounter. In this context, singing is both "the musical presentation of self and the reflexive furnishing of socio-musical space through that presentation" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 82). In the ecological framework, free collaborative vocal improvisation can also offer asylum, as in a physical or conceptual space "within which to play on/with one's environment" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 47), a space that offers momentary or long-lasting "respite from

distress and a place and time in which it is possible to flourish" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 1). While acknowledging the connotations attached to the notion of asylum, DeNora's (2013a) it is a possible conceptual avenue for understanding the core features of improvisation in the arts, including the deeply paradoxical process (Montuori, 2003, p. 239) of facing the unknown (D. Hargreaves, 1999) in which feelings of uncertainty and insecurity are induced. Furthermore, the ecological framework links music education to the discussion on how wellbeing is pursued and afforded in music classrooms. Free improvisation might therefore provide tools and methods to better understand how to coconstruct safe learning environments where positive rather than negative wellbeing is afforded, not only in music classrooms but also across all music educational contexts.

Methodological approach and empirical material

Adopting DeNora's (2013) theory of social ecology as a frame of analysis, this study explores the case of an adult improvisation choir (IC51) in Finland and documents some of its participants' experiences over the course of a year. The research task of examining "what are the social and educational affordances of engaging in free improvisation choir" is further explored through three subquestions:

1. How is an asylum constructed and supported within the social processes of a free improvisation choir?
2. What kind of asylum-seeking strategies (e.g., removal and refurnishing) are employed by its participants?
3. What kind of affordances are provided by engaging in collaborative free vocal improvisation?

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) aims to build an in-depth view of the case while emphasizing the richness of the practice and the theoretical contribution over generalizability (Creswell, 1998). The stance of the author as an insider enabled an immersion in the practices and interactions in natural settings, and enhanced the ability to describe and understand the phenomenon through this particular social choir (Creswell, 1998, p. 58). The empirical material was generated with "gentle

empiricism" (Ansdell & Pavlicevic, 2010) through ethnographic methods over the course of 1 year in 2015, however with no particular moment representing the beginning of the data collection (Stake, 1995): a "considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case" (p. 49). Within this period, IC51 performed in three art festivals and offered one open workshop for the residents of a local community center. During that time, 12 members (six males and six females, including the author) between the ages of 25 and 45 years with varying occupations and musical backgrounds participated in the study, as these members were the most active in the choir. A thick description of the local conditions, conventions, practices, and environments associated with these events was recorded through a researcher diary, field notes, visual and/or audio recordings of the sessions and performances, the author's personal notes, and one focus group interview (see Supplemental Table 1). The interview was the main source for documenting and recording the "connections made by participants themselves" (DeNora & Ansdell, 2017, p. 241), and followed a 2-hr improvisation session to promote ecological validity (DeNora, 2013b). Five IC51 members (two males, three females) with experiences in these practices ranging from 6 months to several years were chosen for the interview, to represent the diversity of the members of the choir. The author assumed the role of a facilitator, with a set of questions guiding the interview such as "When you improvise, how does it happen and why?," or "Has vocal improvisation affected your life outside the sessions, and how?" This enabled a collective interaction and the emergence of spontaneous, expressive, and emotional views (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 150).

The empirical material was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which continued throughout the research period as a recursive process. All the written material was condensed by dividing the sets of diaries and interview transcripts into smaller meaning units, which were then reduced further. During this phase of the analysis, the participants' original quotes were used to avoid an overinterpretation of the empirical material. In particular, the meaning units were organized inductively into naturally emerging themes that included "moments of discomfort" and "communal experience," while the emergent subthemes included

"interaction skills" and "diversity of rules". Detailed accounts of the contexts, observed practices, environments, and the participants' social engagements were written up using DeNora's (2013a) ecological framework as a reference point. All the empirical material, including the video and audio recordings and the author's own experiences of improvising over two decades, was actively revisited to confirm the themes and findings; to code additional themes if needed; and to identify patterned regularities (Creswell, 1998, pp. 148–149). Influenced by DeNora and Ansdells' (2017) notion of a musical event schema, the empirical material was reorganized into three groups—past, present, and future—to respectively (a) draw out the participants' retrospective accounts of their experiences from the interviews, (b) provide observations on the participants' real-time actions and musical engagements, and (c) identify particular experiences in terms of what the free improvisation practices have offered or provided to the participants (see Table 2).

This analytical step enabled a deeper understanding of the underlying processes of change, including the connections between "relevant (linked) pasts and futures," and of "what gets accumulated and changed when music is invoked" (DeNora & Ansdell, 2017, p. 241). This recursive process included refining the emerging themes, which finally led to the identification of four overarching themes with subthemes (see Table 3).

Table 2 An Example of Applying DeNora and Ansdell's (2017) Musical Event Schema as a Frame of Analysis.

Lumo's process of change	
Time I: Past Before the event	(group interview) Lumo confesses that he does not dance or see himself as a physical being: "Like I said, I don't dance. [. . .] I'm very self-conscious about my body [. . .] Like, physical walls and barriers."
Time II: Present During the event	(2 min of a video recording from an IC51 session) We are standing in a circle in the empty gym hall with a soundscape imitating a lively forest, standing quite still and gazing at each other. Lumo closes his eyes and starts to move his hands at his sides. Somebody takes an impulse and starts to imitate the movement, as others join in. In a matter of a few seconds, we are all moving our hands up and down. Lumo possibly senses that we are moving and opens his eyes. As if saying "yes, and . . ." his movement expands to swaying his body with wiggly sounds going up and down, which immediately expands to the whole group, with each making their own variations of the movement. New suggestions and impulses are taken in, and the musical soundscape has new elements coming in every second, so that it is difficult to say who is offering and who is accepting, as in following. Everyone is now moving in a way that could be described as dancing, as their movement is conjoined with the sound and the group spreads throughout the whole gym.
Time III: Future After the event	(group interview) Lumo relates how his understanding of himself has changed through participation in free collaborative vocal improvisation, where any sounds can be projected and be accepted in the shared creation: "this is bodily extremely liberating. [. . .] [In IC51], when I get going and am excited, I notice that I move! [. . .] It's exciting that the acceptance of sound transfers to movement. [. . .] that I don't have any pressure about how I move either."

Table 3 The overarching themes with sub-themes and their interrelation with the research questions

Overarching RQ:	What are the social and educational affordances of engaging in free improvisation choir?			
Sub-questions	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	
Overarching themes	Coconstruction of a safe musical space	Entering the zone of discomfort	Seeking asylum through removal and refurnishing	Affordances
Subthemes	• Playful and embodied practices • Reciprocal support and immersion in social process, collective flow • Atmosphere different from everyday life, pleasure, redefined aesthetics	• Observing conflict or challenge • Moments of discomfort and their interrelations	• Strategies and techniques used	• Wellbeing and sense of belonging • Social skills and agency • Musical agency and learning

Note. RQ: research question.

Table 3 above presents four overarching themes that best capture the participants' lived experiences of the social processes, asylum seeking, and affordances of the practice. Of these four overarching themes, the first one addresses the first research subquestion, the second and third themes address the second research subquestion, while the fourth theme addresses the third research subquestion. Furthermore, each of the overarching themes features one or several subthemes. In the fourth overarching theme, the subthemes are indicated in the main text with italicized subheadings (see pp. 15–18). Together, these overarching themes and subthemes collectively address the overarching research question (RQ) which is presented at the top of the table.

Ethical considerations

Insider research poses unique challenges, and requires a thorough engagement with and deliberation of both internal and external ethical issues (Floyd & Linet, 2012). Instead of trying to avoid the dichotomy of subject/object or attempting to overcome insider or outsider perspectives (Greene, 2014), the author aimed at acknowledging the permeability of the boundaries in such a position (Taylor, 2011) and its effects on conducting and reporting a case study. To conduct valid research and still claim the benefits of insider research, the author executed reflexive and self-conscious positioning while acknowledging intertextuality as part of the data gathering and writing process (Taylor, 2011, p. 9). Safeguards were established against distortions—such as the possibility of bias, making assumptions, and assuming participant views due to closeness to the phenomenon—by challenging the researcher/practitioner's subjective roles through constant reflection, peer debriefing, writing a researcher journal, triangulation of data, deconstructing the familiar world through participating in other practices, and engaging in discussions on the phenomenon of improvisation (see Greene, 2014). While written informed consent was sought from the actively participating improvisers (N=12), Ethical Committee approval was not required. Due to the unique nature of the group, the participants' anonymity was maintained as far as possible while informing them of the possible risks in reporting the study. Pseudonyms were chosen by the author for the choir and its members. Although these pseudonyms may pose a limitation to the study, providing individualized contextual information about each of the members was not possible due to the scarcity of similar groups or choirs in Finland. The use of pseudonyms thus assured the anonymity of the participants. The final report was member checked.

Findings of the study

RQ1: Co-construction of a safe musical space

The process of unconducted musical interaction in IC51's musicking activities takes place on multiple levels, as the practice includes a wide variety of aesthetic

materials and no preset signs or conduction cues are used when improvising. The coconstruction of a safe musical space is supported by the participants' references to the social and musical forms of "accepting," "offering," and "playing," which are characteristics that are similar to the fundamental aspects of improvisational theatre. The participants strive to offer reciprocal support by focusing on participatory coconstructions, and emphasizing on the social processes of the group's collective playfulness over the members' individual actions within the ensemble. These feelings of playfulness and collectiveness that the members associate with the choir's improvisation practices reduce the pressure on participants to invent something novel, in real-time, as Essa notes:

> *It's enlightening, relaxing, and soothing, realizing that it's born without inventing. Kind of like collaborative play—flowing, relaxing, and a delight. [. . .] And when I don't have to invent, I'm not responsible for anything that goes on here. I'm enjoying the collaboratively engendered music that takes place instead of my own achievements.*

Social engagement is not solely dependent on listening and producing sounds, but also includes bodily awareness, as interaction and expression are extended to an embodied experience. This is described as a "kind of a dance" (Lumo), as well as making contact that "starts to ignite something in our bodies too" (Dara). Hence, silence and being silent become active elements of the embodied interaction of musicking. As Dara describes,

> *If I'm silent in the middle of a piece, I'm present with doubled senses, ready to jump in [while] listening, and [the sense of] being [bodily] awake is extremely heightened. It's definitely not being stuck on what will I eat next, but being crazily focused. You just listen in silence, and through that silence you find the focus to go along.*

In this shared sociomusical space, the emergence of aesthetic elements is socially negotiated between the participants in each session, which are then balanced by their manifold preferences, past experiences with music, and goals for the practice. The space is held open for any sounds, as the participants have varying backgrounds ranging from having no prior experience in music to being professionals, and the interaction is occurring on multiple planes simultaneously. It is described as negotiating and exchanging, offering and blocking impulses and ideas from oneself and others, as well as a nonverbal sharing of meanings and values. In the shared negotiations, the valuation of aesthetics and understandings of how music should and could sound have been expanded from previous understandings to include all kinds of sounds and ways of using the voice, while making it possible for anyone to be musical. As Dara explains, "Ugly is beautiful, and anybody can sing." In a similar sense, understandings of how a choir should sound or look are opened up to discussion, as space in the collaborative vocal improvisation is used in a multitude of ways (see Figure 1), from standing still in a circle to moving around or spreading out in the space; moving in nontraditional or expressive ways; or altering the distances in between or the positions in relation to others. In doing so, this sociomusical space differs significantly from a traditional music class or choir configuration.

A distinctive feature of the atmosphere in free vocal play is how rules agreed upon at the onset of an improvisation can be interpreted and mutated through reciprocal understanding during the improvisation without verbally communicating with each other. This means allowing what the participants call safe changes of direction to occur within the real-time musical negotiations that take place during the improvisation. These moments could be understood as peak moments, where the experience is described as being deeply immersed in the improvisation: "kind of like losing oneself in it . . ." (Lumo), and what Tuli refers to as "the collective mash." It is connected to the experience of being relieved from norms or conventions, as well as being freed from adhering to some form of "adult" criteria (Essa). In these moments, the collective flow enables the overriding of previously established rules, and suddenly the improvisation proceeds in unforeseen directions based on the members' collective acceptance and social engagement.

> *When [the improvisation] proceeds so well that everyone has this kind of collaborative feel, then intuitively and totally naturally it breaks, and something else is born. It's the greatest of all. [. . .] people are so into it that it falls apart on its own. (Lumo)*

This means that the initial socially agreed-upon rules that gave the improvisation a recognized form can be broken and transformed through collective agreement during the improvisation, which then gives way to an increasing amount of unexpectedness. Hence, it is not surprising that improvising in IC51 is experienced as being deeply immersive, in a way that allows one to rediscover a highly unique yet intensive form of the collaborative process. It is described by members as "a primitive communal experience" (Lumo), where one is committed to the coconstruction of a collaborative creation, yet also experiences it as being fun, playful, at ease, and feels a sense of relief from the responsibilities and seriousness that one faces in everyday life. Tuli shares this sense of freedom in her experiences of musicking with IC51:

> *Sometimes I think about the image of a crowded bus, when children are like tiidiidii [makes sounds and wiggles her hands] and the grown-ups just sit still [laughs]. The kind of a mental image that all adults suddenly create from the uncomfortable feelings they are experiencing [wiggles and moves sideways]. And the kids would just watch. Here, it's allowed for an adult to [express] that "I feel like göögöö."*

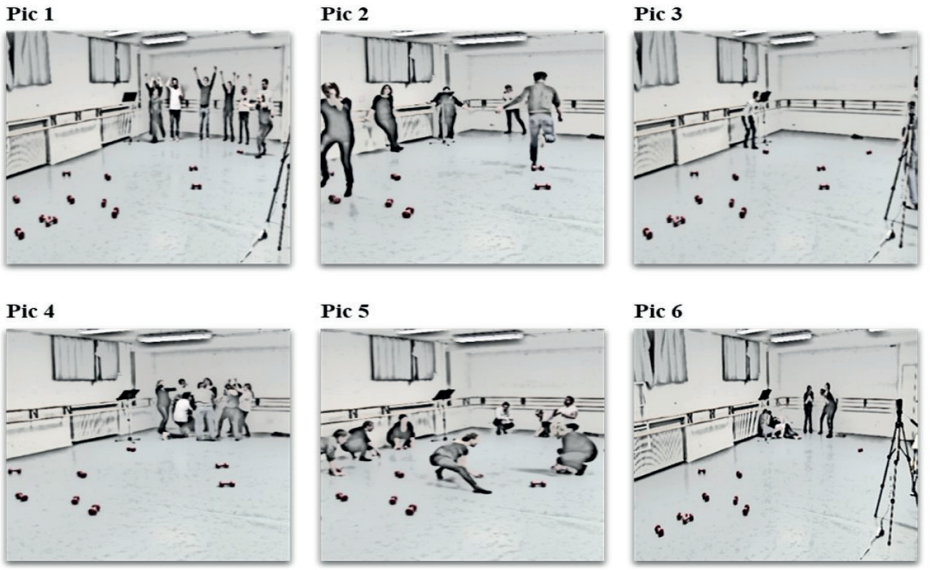
This sense of playfulness is featured in the practices of IC51's musicking, where one is "allowed" to express oneself "comprehensively" (Tuli). It means allowing oneself to laugh and play like a child without normative inhibitions, or even "going crazy," as Tuli remarks. In this sense, a recurring feature of engaging in asylum-seeking actions during improvisation is "stepping outside normative demands and frames" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 65) in a playful atmosphere, that is distinct from the participants' everyday lives and their prior experiences of collaborative music making.

Figure 1 On the Use of Space and Body—A Series of Selected Screenshots from an Improvisation.

Parveilu (Flocking)

[five-minute-excerpt from a twelve-minute-long improvisation]

The context: Visa gives instructions to the group: "Work as animals in this room, like birds or a flock of fish, like you don't know who actually leads. You are fully allowed to use the whole space, all material here is equal, and the leader can be inspired by anything in this room. Anyone can take the lead at any time and the group follows all together."



RQ2: Entering the zone of discomfort

Free improvisation in IC51 musicking consists of balancing between and within the different aspects of the aesthetic material and the multiple levels of ongoing social interaction in real time. From an ecological perspective, this can be seen as the need to adapt and develop in relation to the "ever-changing physical, social and cultural environment" (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016, p. 41). This process involves challenges, as the participants bring their deep well of individual history into the shared negotiation of the sociomusical space, combined with their own ideals of

improvisation and music, their visions of possible futures for themselves or the group, and their own goals, expectations, preferences, and identities. A "zone of discomfort" (Tuli) is described as balancing between feelings of insecurity and safety, or the fear of failure and the experience of pleasure, within challenging moments. The importance of these sometimes difficult moments is in their ability to affect one's presence, potential, and participation in the collaborative improvisation, and their ability to challenge the moment of cocreation. A "zone of discomfort" (Tuli) is induced when one becomes aware of, or is overly aware or self-conscious of, their own thoughts during improvisation, in relation to how they are seen or perceived by others, or by one's own expectations. For example, Tuli describes how her focus often turns toward a negative valuation of her own musical efforts:

> *[It felt like] a dreadful and wrong sound came out . . . And even though I had previously performed and sang and everything, it was somehow a really difficult threshold [to make the sound]. You start to analyze yourself—can I say this out loud, and what do the others think—which then destroys the flow.*

Feelings of discomfort and fear are aroused in different situations, such as bodily engagement, performing for an audience, aesthetic valuation, the need to abide by rules, or stressing and coercing creativity. Situations that arouse negative emotions, feelings, or interpretations of oneself or one's own or others' actions take the attention away from the improvisation process itself. As an example, Essa explains how her previous ideals affected her ability to participate:

> *. . . improvisation, to me, was like perfect musicians in a jazz band making perfectly improvisatory executions out of the blue [. . .] kind of a bubble, an achievement. [. . .] I was afraid of making the wrong sounds—am I doing it properly? I was simply afraid of screwing up, that I might not be able to make a perfect performance. [. . .] It was like a choker around my head [laughs], the feeling that I need to do this correctly!*

Interestingly, although discomfort might be sensed during real-time improvisations, it might not be apparent from an outsider's perspective, when one is focusing solely on the sonic environment. This effect unfolded when the author was watching visual material from an IC51 session:

> *It looks like we're nervous about encountering each other. The bodily postures are not open and functional [. . .] I still remember the feeling, how we were stuck somewhere at the limits of our courage. [. . .] But now, if I listen only to the music, I can't tell that we were nervous. The music, in fact, sounds more or less interesting. (Researcher diary)*

Likewise, personal experiences may vary within a group, even within one and the same activity. An individual's insecurities or discomfort can affect not only themselves but also the whole group, and these feelings in such moments can steer the flow of the collaborative improvisation, depending on how they are perceived and acted upon within the group. Instead of gradually becoming extinct, feelings of insecurity and discomfort can arise even after several years of experience in improvising. It is a recurring element, an inherent part of the process of improvising and development as an improviser.

RQ2: Seeking asylum through removal and refurnishing

The ways in which the participants cope with these moments of discomfort can be interpreted as balancing between the desire to escape from (e.g., removal) and remake the environment (e.g., refurnishing) (see DeNora, 2013a). From an ecological perspective, collaborative singing and sharing of sound are understood as transforming shared spaces, seeking asylum through refurnishing (DeNora, 2013a). Therefore, socially engaging with the environment, such as offering a musical idea or moving in a space with others during an improvisation, can be seen as ways of refurnishing the public asylum, making it "more conducive to wellbeing so that one feels less need to escape" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 68).

Indeed, when they encountered moments of discomfort, the participants would consciously make allowances for occurrences that at first might not seem pleasant, or even familiar; these often included the types of chaotic soundscapes that are a common feature of free improvisation. As an example, Tuli finds it important not to focus on the first negative thought or feeling because improvisation requires an acceptance of "allowing that it can get more or less out of hand." She describes how the sounds can "create a world of their own [. . .] when you allow it for yourself, and others allow it." Hence, the importance of acceptance in the social process of free vocal play is similar to refurnishing, in terms of making an effort to open one's mind to collaboration through both silence and sounds. This in turn makes room for pleasure, sociality, and breaking away from old limiting habits, as well as challenging oneself through collaboration:

> *What makes these chaotic [moments in music] great, is when we do it together, and it gets some direction at some point. [. . .] (Tuli)*

Interactions at multiple levels can simultaneously create a flood of impulses or cues and elevate the risk of discomfort, especially when visual contact is made. Blocking visual cues can create a momentary safe space (e.g., an asylum) through removal. As Lumo explains, "I think it's easier with my eyes closed. It's easier to forget myself. I'm less conscious of myself, and my reactions come more automatically and naturally." This desire to "retreat from the [visual] environment" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 50) was shared by all the participants. Passivity, or what might be termed stagnation, can also be a means of removal:

> *. . . if I feel like I look like a jerk when I'm moving, then I give it up. Likewise, if I sound like a jerk [. . .] I give up singing. (Noe)*

Yet, how others respond to an individual's process of removal can also result in a transformation of the social space through refurnishing. For instance, a retreat can be interpreted by others as an offer to follow those actions. If the others join in

and close their eyes after seeing someone do so, or if they also "give up singing" in a similar way, the initial removal can become a form of refurnishing.

Becoming aware of techniques for seeking asylum in moments of discomfort can enable one to let go of limiting ways of working. This can be seen in Tuli's battle against her fixation on following rules: "It's been kind of a conscious breaking away, like: What if I just let go? Realizing that, for some reason, having rules brings me a sense of safety." In a negatively experienced moment, gaining control over one's own participation can be assumed by ceasing to focus on the more difficult things, or sticking to familiar elements, as Dara explains: "I always want to tell a story, 'cause it's kind of safe and familiar [. . .] then I don't think so much about how I sing." The ways in which the participants manipulate the shared media, negotiate and innovate, express themselves, and perform in both comfortable and uncomfortable moments, are all means to achieve asylum (DeNora, 2013a, p. 56).

RQ3: Affordances—from free collaborative vocal improvisation to everyday life

Engaging in collaborative free vocal improvisation has enabled the IC51 participants to make connections between music and life in ways that have furthered their musical learning, their wellbeing, and their construction of "who one knows one is" (DeNora, 2000, p. 63). Table 4 shows examples of what kind of individual and diverse affordances have benefited the participants over time as they engaged with the free improvisation choir (see Table 4).

As shown in Table 4 above, there are three subthemes for affordances, which are unpacked in the following subsections (see also Table 3). The first subtheme addresses the participant wellbeing and sense of belonging; the second subtheme addresses their social skills and agency; and the third subtheme addresses musical agency and learning. Together, these three subthemes address the overarching theme of what kind of affordances are provided over time when participants engage in free collaborative vocal improvisation.

Table 4. Examples of Affordances Under the Three Subthemes for Affordances.

Affordances of collaborative free vocal improvisation over time		
Wellbeing and sense of belonging	Social skills and agency	Musical agency and learning
• Self-experienced wellbeing • Positive emotions such as joy, ease, and pleasure • Respite from distress and responsibilities • Safety • Playing and flow-experiences • New modes of expression, such as bodily liberation • Letting go of fears • Ambiance of familiarity and sense of belonging • Communal experience and social acceptance • An asylum	• Transferable skills of social Interaction • Group skills and open-mindedness • Social attunement, letting go of fixed control • Positive change in habits, attitudes and personal behavior • Pedagogical mindset and thinking • Ability to adjust in uncomfortable moments • Opennes to new directions in the moment • Ability to apply play as a tool in pedagogical work • Capacity for refurnishing in socially shared spaces	• New perspectives on aesthetic valuation, understanding and appreciation of versatility in music • Redefining of aesthetic priorities • New ways of attending and relating to the world • Recources for constructing musical agency, and inspiration and motivation to continue music studies • Artsitic sensitivity, pleasure and interest in music • Development in musical skills and understanding • Control over one's own voice, vocal technique, and self reflection • Creative harmonising skills • Pedagogical mindset and facilitation skills • Socio-musical skills • Self-directed learning • Un-stressed co-creating

Wellbeing and sense of belonging. The musicking of IC51 can be seen as an activity that affords asylum: a "space or room for self, security, flow and belonging" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 50). This was evident in how the participants described their experiences of the musicking as opportunities for self-experienced wellbeing and positive emotions such as joy, ease, pleasure, and unstressed co-creating, as well as for seeking and receiving momentary respite from distress, responsibilities, and control. Even though the participants' primary goals in engaging in free vocal improvisation were not related to therapy or wellbeing, but rather to vocational or musical development for some members and recreation for others, the participants described the practices in a way that resembles therapeutic experiences. As Tuli says, ". . . the allowance that exists here is like a treatment [gently strokes herself from the shoulder to feet]."

According to Tuli, the atmosphere is safe, with the ability to express "all sides of being a human," as new modes of expression are afforded through playing. Similarly, Lumo claims to be very self-conscious about his body, but finds the practice to be

> *bodily extremely liberating. Like I said, I don't dance. [. . .] But . . . [in IC51], when I get going and am excited, I notice that I move! [. . .] It's exciting that the acceptance of sound transfers to movement. [. . .] that I don't feel any pressure about how I move either.*

Thus, an ambience of familiarity and a sense of belonging, social acceptance, and communal experience are afforded through engaging in free vocal improvisation, even though both the space and the participants may vary in each session. The participants speak about becoming aware of and letting go of their own fears, being brave and experiencing the flow. However, it should be noted that affordances are not perceived equally by everyone, but instead are dependent on the social ecology of each moment, which includes prior experiences and understandings. For example, Lumo's perception of bodily liberation was not experienced by everyone in the same manner. While Tuli and Essa aspired to engage in bodily experiences during improvisation, they found it difficult because they conceive of sound and body as separate "pieces" (Tuli).

Social skills and agency. All the interviewees found that the interaction and group skills involved in free choir improvisation transferred into their everyday lives in terms of listening attentively, keeping an open mind toward others and their differences, having the ability to adjust to a group, and allowing room for others in situations where they were not able to do so before. The participants spoke of perceiving changes in their own behavior or attitudes in relation to other things and people, depending on the requirements of the situation. This kind of social attunement, including being able to act and see things differently than before and challenging one's own preconceptions, can be seen as a type of social learning, where one is "becoming a different person with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). This transference was

experienced in both the participants' leisure and professional lives. As an example, Lumo describes how he felt transformed through the IC51's musicking sessions:

> *. . . the listening in choral singing and developing a sensitivity towards others [. . .] has helped my overall process of reducing an inherent or typical trait of my personality—being overly individualistic [laughs]. I realized that I don't have to be different from others in every area of my life.*

Improvising together in a choir afforded the participants opportunities for developing the ability to let go of fixed control, moving toward what could be theorized as a type of process-focused pedagogical thinking and mindset of growth (see Rissanen et al., 2019, p. 205) that encourages people to be flexible in their attitudes and to move beyond inhibiting hierarchies and rules, according to the needs of the moment. In this sense, Essa has been able to apply the abilities of playing within flexible rules and being sensitive to social processes to pedagogical situations with children.

> *I don't have a clue where this game is going, but I just agree and go along. [. . .] It's no use trying to tell someone to brush their teeth in the middle of playing with Legos, so we just play a while, and then the playing just leads towards brushing the teeth [laughs].*

Similarly, Tuli mentioned a situation in her work life when she was leading a group where the individual members did not "possess a similar understanding of the game's rules or being in a group," or even speak the same language as Tuli. She felt uncomfortable when she was not able to follow the rules with this group, but she discovered new ways of working with this issue when she "allowed" the social process to proceed on its own terms, where "it just exploded. We just improvised. [. . .] They invented their own and totally new exercises." In this challenging situation, she let go of being in control and allowed the emergence of something surprising and new. Both Tuli and Essa give credit to IC51's musicking sessions for their abilities to successfully adjust and adapt to these uneasy moments. Their views can be interpreted

as an affordance structure that endures after engaging in improvisation, where the participants reuse the resources they have acquired for refurnishing as well as make use of the knowledge and capacity for transforming social-shared spaces with/of others to achieve a state of asylum in future settings (DeNora, 2013a, p. 56).

Musical agency and learning. IC51 musicking afforded the participants opportunities to develop their aesthetic understandings and valuations, and an appreciation of versatile musical practices and talents. The foundations of "what makes music beautiful" are challenged as the quality of the collaboration becomes an aesthetic priority in itself. As a result, the "goodness of a musical event is defined in terms of the quality of the relational experiences of participants and the overall social enhancement achieved" (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016, p. 171) instead of using musical technique as a sole criterion, as Tuli explains:

> *. . . the aesthetics come more from, not beauty, but the fact that we do it collaboratively and believe in it, and it receives some kind of credibility and direction from us.*

In a similar way, Noe was able to be more open to new and unfamiliar territories in music; free improvisation has afforded him new ways of perceiving, relating, and attending to the world (see DeNora, 2013a, pp. 130–131) outside the sessions.

> *. . . I've become more tolerant. I used to think of rap music as totally crap. But now, when I listen to it, I realize the guy may be quite talented, and uses his voice well, and has some interesting things to say. [. . .] that it's kind of nice, even though I don't like the style of music. [. . .] I can find something else in it.*

For both Lumo and Noe, the IC51 musicking sessions have afforded them resources for constructing musical agency. Lumo had no prior experience in studying music, but engaging in collaborative free vocal improvisation provided him with a gateway to musicking, and has inspired him to actively pursue his pathway in music.

> *. . . throughout my adulthood I've had this extreme but always postponed need for musical expression. [. . .] A lot of other things are coming along with [IC51 musicking]. Now I am going to adult singing lessons, and will continue it next spring as well . . . Finally. [. . .] through this choral hobby I have gained assurance of music's value to myself.*

The members have afforded opportunities to extend their individual musical knowledge into unfamiliar territories and awaken their interest in exploratory musical creativity. In addition, the IC51 musicking sessions have afforded the development of "artistic sensitivity" for the members, which, according to Lumo, has introduced fun and pleasure into music and exploring the voice.

The participants also recognize how IC51's way of musicking, such as experimenting with the voice or following and imitating each other, has helped them to develop their musical skills and understanding. Furthermore, the participants experienced moments of personal realizations stemming from connections that were made during the sessions, such as a discovery that Kira had made in an improvisation session: "For the first time, I noticed how different postures [in the body] affect the sound. Totally new sounds came out, and new ways of producing sounds" (Field notes). In Dara's case, the learning could be described as an experiential and selfdirected process, where she challenged her own familiar ways of improvising by gravitating toward different vocalization techniques instead of relying on lyrics and narratives. Dara felt that the IC51 musicking sessions afforded her opportunities for professional development, such as gaining greater control over her voice and vocal technique, as well as self-reflection skills, learning to listen to what she needs or wants to develop in her singing.

Similar to the development of the pedagogical mindset, as introduced earlier, is the development of facilitation or pedagogical skills through free vocal improvisation, even for those without prior experience in formal music education or teaching in music. For Noe, vocal improvisation offered a "low threshold" into musicking: "If I can't even play the recorder, at least I can make sounds. It's awakened my interest in my voice. I've started learning some music theory, and how to really sing." He

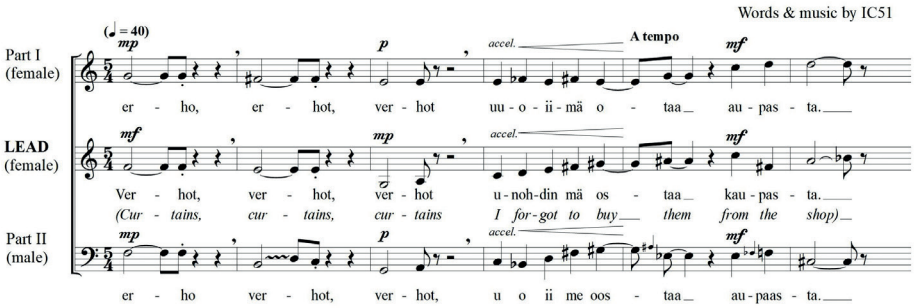
became interested in learning more about music through his experience of free vocal improvisation, and has also volunteered to facilitate exercises for IC51. One exercise (see Figure 2) that Noe developed featured a vocal harmonizing technique that was challenging even for professional musicians, such as the author. Tuli welcomed the exercises in terms of sharpening her listening skills, as well as training her in both improvising and arranging skills: "How to listen and harmonize on the fly, beautiful and not beautiful [. . .] without any musical [elements] upfront."

Figure 2 Facilitation of a Harmonizing Exercise.

Miks' ei ole kotiinkuljetusta? (Why isn't there home delivery?)

[transcription of the first six bars of the song]

The context: Noe asks three singers standing in a curved line to sing a song with lyrics and harmonised parts, while the other session participants sit on the floor as an audience. Next, Noe asks everyone in the room to sing Pienen pieni veturi, a Finnish folk song, while he advises on how to harmonize. He then gives instructions for some of the participants to stay on the third tone, and for everyone else to start singing the same song, but now in parts. After the song has been sung through, he points out that this is how you try to keep the distance from the lead singer, as in creating harmonies. Then he instructs the singer (LEAD) standing in the middle of the three to create lyrics and a lead melody, while the two singers on the sides (Parts I & II) simultaneously create parts, while harmonising, with identical text and rhythm to the lead singers' improvisation. The lead singer is hesitant, but gives it a go and starts to sing as the two other singers on the sides jump in as well.



Dara presents another example of a member who has developed her pedagogical skills through IC51, and who now uses her experiences to help people who have been through "trauma from singing, [. . .] where an elementary school teacher had told them they are lousy and will never be anything." Although Dara had no previous experience in teaching music, she acquired some of these skills through musicking with IC51:

> *All of the knowledge I have gained from here, what we've done in our improv choir: the exercises, doctrines, and how I was as a leader, how I supported [others], and my own thinking; [it has influenced] how I teach singing.*

Hence, the choir afforded new ways to make and facilitate music, and to develop a pedagogical mindset for achieving musical growth (see Davis, 2016). It can be said that through the IC51 musicking sessions, Dara, Lumo, and Noe, among others, were supported by the safe environment and playful collaboration of their intensified experiences (see Tuli's feelings of collaboration on p. 11–12) and transformative becoming (see Noe's feelings of changes in his attitude on p. 17) (see van Manen, 2012). In summary, through IC51's activities, these participants learned sociomusical skills, transformed their identities, and constructed their musical and social agencies—even those who did not have prior experience in formal music education. The process of musicking in IC51 provided them with the motivation to continue their musical development and learning outside the sessions; to follow their own pathways in music; and to share their learned skills through their own pedagogy.

Discussion

This study has demonstrated how engaging in and acquiring a holistic and multidisciplinary understanding of free vocal improvisation can empower individuals to create safe and meaningful spaces for engaging in collaborative musical learning and for experimenting with a playful use of the voice. In this process, the development of sociomusical skills is placed at the heart of the musicking. As this study has shown, incorporating aspects of improvisational theatre into free vocal improvisation can

provide musicians with resources and tools that can in turn be used to develop a wide range of sociomusical skills, as well as to adapt them to various learning environments. The case study of a choir that regularly practices free vocal improvisation showed how engaging in playful music making can afford its participants resources for constructing musical agency as "a way of negotiating social worlds, a realm in which possibilities of difference and change [were] broached in safe ways" (DeNora, 2013a, p. 42). Even though the IC51 is an adult choir, the improvisation practices interconnect with the "naturally multimodal way that children musick, holistically incorporating movement, gesture, language play and dramatic explorations to make sense of their personal and social worlds" (Countryman et al., 2016 p. 7; see also Tonelli, 2015). As has been reported earlier, bodily engagement is an essential part of children's improvising experiences (Burnard, 1999). Hence, the body's latent "expressive potential" (Lockford & Pelias, 2004, p. 434) in adult musicking could be enabled by combining bodily engagement with freely improvised and playful use of the voice, as was exemplified in the case of Lumo (see p. 15).

The findings of this study support the inclusion of free vocal improvisation in music education practices, with a focus on the quality of the social process rather than musical quality. As the case study shows, adopting a playful and collaborative approach to free vocal improvisation can dismantle inhibiting conventions, responsibilities, stress, and competitiveness while empowering individuals through interactive collaboration and emphasizing the acceptance of oneself and others as imperfect human beings. This supports an understanding that the innate creative musical potential in everyone could be reciprocally supported if every child and adult would be considered a singer, and musical per se, regardless of prior experience or training in music. Through this approach, a platform for embodied and situated social learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; see Wright & Kanellopoulos, 2010) in and through music making could be created, and with an instrument every individual possesses. Both the body and voice could be used playfully, and explored in unconventional and disruptive ways, regardless of one's age—in the same way that a child uses their voice as the first toy in playing (Papousek & Papousek, 1986), which is the most natural mode of learning (Addison, 1988, p. 258).

This case study of a free improvisation choir provides an example of how strategies of seeking asylum are employed when individuals encounter the inherent discomfort of improvisation, and brings forth music's potential role as an active ingredient of wellbeing in all music pedagogical and musically inflected spaces, including classrooms and beyond (see DeNora, 2013a, p. 6). IC51's free vocal play sessions were featured as a creative, collaborative, expressive, and joyous practice in an ambience of acceptance, affording the participants a safe sociomusical space and an asylum, as was similarly portrayed in DeNora's (2013a) work: "an anytime/anyplace of health promotion and maintenance and a set of practices for achieving (locating, maintaining, discovering, inhabiting) this place" (p. 136). The sociomusical skills that were required for refurnishing safe spaces were simultaneously developed and employed in and through musicking. This enabled the formation of a safe space for encountering the inherent challenges of improvisation (see Farrell, 2016; W. Hargreaves, 2013; Johansen, 2014; Madura Ward-Steinman, 2014) within the zone of discomfort. An asylum was collaboratively and reciprocally created and reconstructed in every musical session through reflective discussions and free improvisation, without imposing either a glossary of music theory or hierarchical positioning.

These findings suggest that establishing a feeling of safety in any musical space, be it free improvisation or a general music class, should not be presumed as a default value, or be subordinated to authority. Rather, the teacher's, choir conductor's, or facilitator's role could be seen as providing the students and participants with resources for social refurnishing and seeking asylum. This process can be furthered by organizing possibilities for practicing collaborative free improvisation with a focus on the social process. The potential effects of engaging in simple acts could easily be explored, such as being allowed to make music with one's eyes closed, musicking in a different space from the ordinary classroom, or providing room for movement, listening, and both visual and physical contact.

Based on the findings related herein, this study urges the reconsideration of music classrooms as spaces that embrace explorative, experimental, and collaborative approaches, as well as bodily engagement in free improvisation. In addition, music classrooms might adopt a learning culture where any object could be used as if

it were a musical instrument (Kanellopoulos, 2007a, p. 129), and "mistakes, instead of being regarded as signs of failure, are thought of as opportunities for the development of musical imagination" (p. 132). When liberation from enculturation and the task of mastering an instrument are realized, a wide variety of affordances can be made available, and be suited to different needs and contexts. Furthermore, the boundaries between experts and novices can be effaced, providing room for empowerment, agency, and novel creations. Thus, the novice as well as the experienced musician can be empowered to find countless uses for the voice and body—rather than being "put in their place" by limited notions of music—and likewise, the expert can be empowered to explore novel uses for and expansions of her professional skills. Individuality could be embraced by approaching perceived differences in vocal skills and quality as resources and opportunities, not only for learning but also for redefining the quality in music and making music through those differences. This is supported by the way in which the discrepancies in the IC51 choir members' varying backgrounds and skills resulted in a variety of affordances and learning. As the affordances are not isolated from the music, and are not "extra-musical" but instead are inherent aspects of musicking (Ansdell & DeNora, 2016, p. 35), we should recognize that neither learning, wellbeing, nor any other affordances or outcomes can be presumed to be collective or universal, and be applied to every individual in the same manner, or equally so on the basis of what is taught. Rather, affordances and outcomes are dependent on the social ecology of each situation: the participants' backgrounds, previous experience, environmental features, and social settings, as well as their goals for the activity. As DeNora (2013a) notes, "It is this totality of connections that we should include in our attempts to understand what music is and how it works" (p. 6). Hence, the larger question of possible bias in the standards for measuring learning outcomes is raised because one activity can afford multiple opportunities, and the outcome of learning cannot be predicted or generalized. Moreover, the case study of this free vocal improvisation choir's focus on the social processes between its members shows that groups with vastly varying skill levels and diverse backgrounds in music making and singing can

create a shared musical space wherein motivational collaborative learning leads toward individually satisfying affordances.

In this study, the diversity of the members and the variety of sounds that were produced in their choir appeared to enrich the processes of music making and collaboration. In addition, this case study presented new ways of thinking about and in music, affording tolerance of diversity and seeing beauty where it did not appear before, as the "musicians actively learn from their collaborators during [the improvised] performance" (Thomson, 2007, p. 1). The incorporation of free (vocal) improvisation into music education is a possibility to further justice and equality by refuting simplistic dictates of how the voice should sound and be used (Tonelli, 2015, p. 1). Free vocal improvisation can be used to explore what happens when traditional categorizations based on developmental stages and earlier experience and competences are abandoned, and instead our practices and collaborations are built upon a foundation of equality—the assumption that every individual is a singer and a musician in the here and now of musicking.

Conclusion

This instrumental case study has introduced an ecological perspective on music education, which suggests that playing and improvising in a safe and playful learning environment with a focus on social processes could be considered the starting point for music education and musicking for all, at all ages. The coconstruction of safe learning environments is required for improvisation and collaborative learning situations, as conflicts arise when understandings and interpretations of different identities, pasts, and trajectories enter simultaneously into the collaborative work on multiple planes of interactions. Acknowledging this ecological perspective on musicking, learning, and life in general allows us to see that a forced entry into the world of improvisation in an unsafe social setting or an established, prescripted environment may result in a less-than-ideal state that is the opposite of achieving an improvement in one's wellbeing. However, establishing a reciprocal system of support that provides an asylum and a playful space can enable the dismantling of issues related to learned ideals and barriers to creativity, as well as allowing

participants to experience some freedom from the conventional constraints of music and everyday responsibilities. The strategies that the participants used to cope with difficulties can be seen as developing process-focused pedagogical thinking and a growth mindset (see Davis, 2016; Rissanen et al., 2019) with the ability to see challenges as opportunities for learning. This process of constructing a pedagogical mindset was further evidenced in the skills and knowledge that were accumulated and transferred to helping others in a much broader sense—not just in improvisation, but in everyday life. Free improvisation in general could thus be seen as affording equal access to music making and achieving improvements in one's wellbeing, as well as providing inspiration for music making, musical learning, and the construction of musical and social agency. In light of these findings, further studies on the pedagogical implications of the implementation of ecological interrelations, affordances, and safe spaces should be conducted. Moreover, there is also a need for the further exploration of the process-focused pedagogical thinking and mindset of growth that is enabled in/through collaborative free vocal improvisation, particularly among school-aged children, in music teacher education, and among music teachers.

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Ethical Approval

The research in this project adhered to the ethical regulations of the University of the Arts Helsinki as well as those outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study.

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Appendix 4: Statement of the Research Ethics Committee (Beat)

[Translation by Veera Hämäläinen]

Helsinki
19/06/2014
Lauri Väkevä

Statement of the Research Ethics Committee

Based on the research ethics statement request and the research plan, it can be stated that the *Vuorovaikutteinen kuorotoiminta yliopisto-opintojen tukijana: narratiivinen tutkimus jännittäjien oppijakokemuksista [Interactive choir activity in supporting university studies: a narrative study of the learner experiences of those experiencing anxiety]* research project is committed to complying with the instructions of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity on research integrity and the ethical principles in human sciences as well as data acquisition, research, and evaluation methods that are in accordance with the criteria of scientific research and ethically sustainable. A research permit can be granted to the research based on the ethical review.

Lauri Väkevä, PhD
Professor
Chair of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Arts Helsinki
[contact information]

Appendix 5: Information letter and consent form (Beat)

[Translation by Veera Hämäläinen]

Research information sheet

This project studies the experiences of university students of the practical project 'Kuorolaulu kouraan' [Grapple Choral Singing] carried out in cooperation between the Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) and the Sibelius Academy. The target group of the Kuorolaulu kouraan project included students within the FSHS services who need tools to develop their interpersonal skills and manage social situations, fear, and anxiety. In the joint project between the Sibelius Academy and the FSHS, a choral teacher (Sibelius Academy), a psychologist (FSHS), and a physiotherapist (FSHS) developed an interactive form of choir activity where themes related to social anxiety were processed with participants through discussions, psychoeducation, making music, improvisation, relaxing, and breathing. A goal was set together with the group to perform as a choir at the end of the course. The performance took place at the Helsinki Music Centre on 07/05/2014 together with three other choirs.

The students' narratives are analysed and reported anonymously, and details that make it possible to recognize individuals will be omitted. Written agreements between the interviewees and the researchers are made regarding matters related to research ethics, and the data can only be accessed by the researchers. Transcribers will sign a confidentiality agreement. All in all, the project will comply with the research ethical guidelines of the Academy of Finland (Academy of Finland 2003).

One researcher has access to the data code keys. For other members of the research group, the interviewees will be anonymous. No medical records are used in the research.

Personal information will not be brought up in the interviews so it is not possible to link data and individuals. The research group will generate code numbers for the interviewees.

The researchers are bound by research ethical responsibilities.
The data is stored in a locked file cabinet at the Sibelius Academy.

Contact person:
Satu-Mari Jansson
[contact information]

Informed consent to the study to be carried out

1. Title of the study:
Vuorovaikutteinen kuorotoiminta yliopisto-opintojen tukijana: Narratiivinen tutkimus jännittäjien oppijakokemuksista [Interactive choir activity in supporting university studies: A narrative study of the learner experiences of those experiencing anxiety]

2. Research group and unit:
University of the Arts Helsinki, Research Centre CERADA (Center for Educational Research and Academic Development in the Arts)
The researcher in charge of the research is Professor Heidi Westerlund (Sibelius Academy). The researchers in the project are Master of Education, (adult education) Doctoral Student (University of Helsinki) Satu-Mari Jansson (Project Researcher, will be employed to the project, Sibelius Academy) and Master of Music, Doctoral Student Eeva Siljamäki (Sibelius Academy).

3. Consent clause, (to be complemented, if necessary):
I have read and understood the study information sheet given to me and I have sufficient information on the process of the study. I have understood that my participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I have the right to discontinue my participation at any stage without any consequences. It has been explained to me that the researcher designated below will, at my request, provide

me with additional details of the general principles of the study and its progress or of the results concerning myself.
I have understood that all of the data gathered in the research is gathered for scientific purposes only and it will not be given, even in part, to the study subject him/herself.

The research results related to me are available only to the researchers of the research group. The researcher in charge of the study may, however, give permission to his/her other cooperation partners to analyse the research results related to me for scientific purposes without separate consent. In such cases, it must made sure that the anonymity of the results has been ensured. Any type of commercial exploitation of the research data is prohibited.

By my signature, I confirm my participation in this study and agree to volunteer as a study subject.

Place and date:	Research subject:
Signature:	Date of birth:
Type or print name	Address
Email	Telephone number

Researcher in charge:
Signature:
Type or print name

Appendix 6: Information letter and consent form (IC51)

[Translation by Veera Hämäläinen]

Information about the research and confidentiality agreement

I am carrying out my doctoral research on improvisational choir activity as a music education postgraduate student at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The aim of the study is to produce new information regarding improvisation and improvisation pedagogy as well as new meanings for choir culture and singing in a choir. My research is supervised by Professor of Music Education Heidi Westerlund (Sibelius Academy), Associate Professor of Music Education Panagiotis Kanellopoulos (University of Thessaly, Greece), Assistant Principal, Doctor Helena Gaunt (Guildhall School of Music & Drama, England) and Adjunct Professor Ritva Engeström (University of Helsinki).

For the research, I will record activities of Helsingin improkuoro [Helsinki improvisation choir] (HIK) with a video camera and a recorder during 2015. I will also write down my own observations regarding the activities of HIK, interview members of the choir, and use other possible public voice, picture, and text materials about the activities of HIK as research data. Individual interviews are set up flexibly according to the schedules of the members of the choir.

I, the researcher, promise not to, in any way, report information regarding individual people appearing in the research data to anyone outside the research project. I understand that all communication, official and unofficial, oral, electronic, and written, are considered reporting. I will not use information arising from the research data regarding the research subjects, their next of kin or other individual people to harm, degrade or insult them. I promise not to give access to or copy the research data or parts of it to any third parties.

Information arising during the study regarding the research subjects is confidential. No other authorities or third parties will be given access to it. The research material is stored and filed at the MuTri doctoral school of the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. The research material is used only for research purposes unless otherwise specifically agreed with those concerned. The research material is entered into text files and in that process any names of people that come up will be replaced with pseudonyms. If necessary, I will also change/remove location information and other proper nouns (names of work places etc.) to protect anonymity. I will report matters arising from the study in research publications in such a way that research subjects or other mentioned individuals cannot be immediately recognized. In addition, in the research publication, I will strive to write in a manner respectful toward individual research subjects. As a researcher, I commit to complying with the current guidelines regarding research data storage and data protection legislation (e.g. confidentiality regulations).

Eeva Siljamäki, research assistant, MuTri doctoral school, Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki
Eeva Siljamäki [contact information]
Professor Heidi Westerlund [contact information]

Permission for the collection of research data, sound and video recording, and the use of the recordings

I have read the information sheet regarding Eeva Siljamäki's doctoral thesis project and its objectives. By my signature, I give Eeva Siljamäki from the Sibelius Academy MuTri doctoral school the permission to video and record the activities of Helsingin improkuoro for her doctoral research and I confirm that I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I have the right to revoke my consent at any stage. I am aware that if I have any questions regarding the study I can contact

researcher Eeva Siljamäki or professor Heidi Westerlund. I have been given a copy of the doctoral research study information sheet.

I am aware that because of the special nature of HIK, it is possible that despite all of the precautions, some of the members of the choir may be recognized, and therefore the researcher will make sure that the results are published with objective arguments and equally illustrating different viewpoints. In addition to this, a person/s selected by the choir has the right to read all material for publication and comment it prior to publication.

I am aware that, after a section has been videoed or recorded, I have the right to inform the researcher if I do not want the section in question to be used for the aforementioned purposes. I am also aware that I have the right to revoke this permission, in which case the already collected data, however, remains at the use of the researcher.

By my signature, I give Eeva Siljamäki from the Sibelius Academy MuTri doctoral school the permission to use the research data collected for her doctoral research of the activities of HIK for scientific publications and presentations (e.g. articles, electronic publications, congress presentations) and educational purposes regarding the subject. It has been promised to me that the collected data and handling it will comply with responsible conduct of research and research ethical guidelines. The permission takes effect retroactively from the beginning of 2015.

Other wishes and limitations regarding the recordings

□ I give my permission for the recording and further use of the data also after the doctoral research

Place and date Signature Type or print name

Appendix 7: Interview guide (Beat)

Research

- Couple of words about the research
- Informed consent and signature

Back ground information

- Main subject, secondary subjects
- Stage of studies
- Why did you attend the choir activity?

Social anxiety

- Can you tell what kind of social anxiety do you experience?
- How would you describe social anxiety – social situations (face-to-face – in group – in front of group)?
- What is challenging? At what stage did you notice this?
- In what kind of situations does social anxiety manifest itself?
- How do you relate to social anxiety – social situations – how do you interpret it?
- Can you tell an example/s of situations where social anxiety has disturbed your studying?
- Can you tell an example/s of situations where you have succeeded to overcome social anxiety?
- Have you tried to solve anxiety issues – how?

Choir activity

- Can you tell what happened in the choir activity?
- Can you tell what was your star moment – can you describe it concretely with an example?
- Can you tell what was your weak moment – can you describe it concretely with an example?
- What has been the best?
- Can you tell about/can you describe the first session? How did it go? What did you feel?
- What about the last session? What did you feel?

Impact of choir activity

- What did you gain from the choir activity? Concretely…
- How did the choir activity have an impact on social anxiety? Can you give examples.
- Have you employed what you have learned in your studying? If you have, how?

Appendix 8: Interview guide (IC51)

Supportive questions:

- What is your favorite technique in choral improv? Why?
- What attracks your attention or what do you notice when you see improvisers or someone improvising?
- What good or bad aspects of choral improvising can you name? What is best in choral improvisation?
- What is the feeling when you improvise? What effects/constitutes that feeling?
- Has choral improvisation effected or had an impact on your life otherwise and how?
- Has you perception of improvisation or singing changed during your initiation to choral improvising? How?
- End the open sentence: ”(Choral) impprovisation is…”
- Does improvising with your eyes closed or open differ? Why and how?
- Do you use your body somehow when you improvise? How does it show? Does it effect or have an impact on improvising?
- What do you think about or how do you relate to using text or making lyrics?
- When you improvise, how does it happen? How do you relate to silence in improvising?
- Is there anything you’d like to add as to why you improvise chorally?

Appendix 9: Interview excerpt (Beat)

[Translation by Veera Hämäläinen]

This excerpt was selected as it demonstrates how issues related to affordances of the arts intervention were asked and narrated.

H = researcher
V = interviewee

[…]

H: Yeah. (pause) Well about that choir project still, so can you think of a highlight for yourself in it? (a little laugh) And, and then if you can, could you tell me what situation it's related to? You can define it yourself here what that highlight is.

V: Many kinds of a bit different highlights come to mind. (laughs) I think that the atmosphere there was that you didn't really say 'no' to anything, that everything was just accepted, so at least for me it felt like kind of a highlight sometimes to say, (a little laugh) when a psychologist there, when we all were in the circle, like, said that (a little laugh) do it again now, we were meant to do some activities, taking turns there, and they were, like, do it once more and then I just said (a little laugh) that no, I won't do it once more. (laughs)

H: And then it was accepted. (a little laugh)

V: (a little laugh) Yeah.

H: What other highlights come to mind? When you said that there might be more than one of them.

V: (pause) Like many such good moments, like, right at the start of the project it felt impossible that I'd, in the first time when we had to in those small groups in front of everyone, (pause) I'd say something, that especially then, like, tell the whole gang what we had come up with, and in the beginning it was just my goal, that I don't have to say anything in front of everyone, that that's really frightening. Then towards the end or probably pretty fast it started to get easier that you didn't

fear it as much, though it did of course make you feel nervous. But like if you said shared even something really personal. And it felt that it was like accepted. (pause) Then a little different kind of a (pause) different kinds of highlights are those that have been alone with someone, that it has felt like you have, (pause) like you have got, have had the courage to establish a contact with another person. And then it has felt like that social situation has gone alright. And like I've got one person who I keep in touch with from there, so that I guess is (pause) a big thing that, that has been a success there, that you've managed to create that.

H: Well that's kind of quite a big highlight.

V: Yeah.

[…]

Appendix 10: Interview excerpt (IC51)

[Translation by Veera Hämäläinen]

This excerpt was selected as it demonstrates the collaborative nature of the group interview.

V2 = participant
V3 = participant
V5 = participant

[…]

V5: That in a way that you get to be in the sound, you get to like be inside the sound.

V2: Mm.

V3: and then the accep..

V5: ..and you get to like be inside the sound.

V2: and share it with others…

V3: And then of course the acceptance…

V2: Acceptance!

V5: Yes.

V2: That's really good yeah.

V5: yeah

V2: And that you build something together.

V3: You said kind of that you mean that there [is] always the pressure of what great stuff we're going to come up with. And then it may be that you yourself do something small and then how great the feeling is when it's accepted.

V5: Yeah.

V2: Mm.

V3: That what you said that, that primal, like what, what did you say, tr-tr-tribe (-) [laughter].

V2: Something like that, like that could be like..

V3: (--). Yeah. Like that's true that in the, in the non-verbal ones it goes onto some other level. It goes onto another level-

V2: Yeah. Exactly like it goes directly to (--).

V3: And I understand what you mean that it's on another level as sometimes it feels like then it comes onto like a conscio-, a more conscious level when (the lyrics) come there. And the-

V2: Yeah then it fixes the meaning

V3: Yes. And I understand it like (-) you mean by that difference. But like, yeah. But still like their, their like combination is also good I think. But yeah I understand that, so I concur.

V5: Primal. Maybe I'd add to my own statement this that, that you don't have to come up with anything so you don't have to be responsible. I'm not responsible for anything that happens here. Like in a way-

V2: So so so you can kind of like lose yourself in it as well.

V5: Yeah, yes you kind of can. That you enjoy what you create together and not that what you do yourself.

V3: But on the other hand I feel that the responsibility is also in that I am, my responsibility is to be..

V2: ..Part of it.

V3: .to listen and to be part of it..

V2: Yes to listen yeah.

V3: ..somehow like and to be, to take the responsibility that I can't do just whatever. Like in a way it-, so like you can do solos but that

V2: Oh yeah.

V5: Mm

V3: ..but that you still keep your ears open to it, that we're doing it together. So that responsibility is on everyone but then that the responsibility..

V5: Mm.

V3: ..then the pressure that, now you should come up with something really great.

[...]

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