

Empathy in collaborative Improvisation. An Experiment in Education. (x)

Course innovation: *Ensemble Improvisation Experimentell*

Research project, case study period: 15.02.–03.07.2022

Project design and lead: Univ.-Prof. Dr. Jean Beers (Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna)

This is study 2 within the research project (x) with a music university course for chamber music practice in contemporary music (KEP, künstlerische Ensemble Praxis, Praktikum

Zeitgenössische Musik: Ensemble Improvisation Experimentell, 1 SWS, 1 ECTS), lead by the project leader.

Questionnaire given 21.06.22, Evaluation of answers 03.07.2022 (in blue), summary 21.07.22, answers by 8 out of 13 participants.

Evaluation

Base data

Participants in the project: whole ensemble (13 student musicians; 1 ensemble leader/teacher)

Instruments (whole ensemble): 4 accordion, 1 Jazz piano, 2 contemporary piano/composition, 1 piano/voice, 1 cello, 2 viola, 1 guitar, 1 percussion, 1 ensemble leader (conductor/piano/sound effects)

University departments: Keyboard, Composition, Strings

Questionnaire: 8 returned (<2/3), 5 unreturned (>1/3)

Instruments (of returned questionnaire): 2 accordion, 1 Jazz piano, 2 contemporary piano/composition, 1 piano/voice, 1 viola, 1 ensemble leader (conductor/piano/sound effects)

Questionnaire with summary & provisional evaluation of answers

1. Please rate your previous knowledge/experience of improvisation on a scale of 1–10?

Answers: 3, 7, 2, 9, 6, 5, 4, 5.

2. How many musicians in this group (0–13) did you know socially or professionally before this project? 7, 1, 9, 4, 4, 0, 2.

a. If any, were they in your instrument- or department group? (i.e. same instrument or same category)

Answers: 4 Yes (which: accordion, accordion, viola, piano) 2 No

3. With which other instrument(s) in this ensemble was the musical interaction easiest for you? 4 x accordion, 2 x voice, 4 x viola, 2 x piano, 1 x guitar, 1 x cello
Why?

Answers: 3 x similar musical language; acoustically projecting (easy to hear); previous experience with these instruments; good communication skills; experienced with improvisation.

4. With which person(s) in this ensemble was the musical interaction easiest for you?
Answer anonymised, cannot be displayed.

Why?

Answers: 2 x listens to others; interaction/communication easy; easy to follow; clear eye + facial communication; 2 x cooperative; attentiveness; artistic quality (“very good musicians”); freedom + confidence to be creative possible with these musicians + with group leader.

5. Has your understanding of other musicians, other instruments, other styles, other personalities changed by your participation in this project

Answers: 8 yes 0 No

a. Answers: Increased 8 / decreased 0 / other change? 0

6. If yes, how would you describe the increase in your understanding of other musicians, other instruments, other styles, other personalities, in one sentence please?

Answers: Wordless communication is possible; mental freedom; musical knowledge; learning new aspects of someone’s personality; social interaction + creating meaningful bonds; accepting new things, understanding others; better understanding of musical quality of musical building blocks; responding to non-melodic musical elements (with percussionist); large group is challenging but possible to communicate; same (musical) language is not necessary, just a willingness to listen + “join the wave to help develop an idea together”.

7. Has your empathy increased towards other musicians, other instruments, other styles, other personalities by your participation in this project *Ensemble Improvisation Experimentell?*

Answers: 7 yes 0 no 1 uncertainty of terminology

8. If yes, on a scale of 1–10, please rate your (increased) level of empathy towards:

a. Answers: Musicians 5, 10, 10, 5, 2, 7, 7. Instruments 7, 10, 10, 3, 6, 8, 7. Styles 2, 10, 10, 7, 3, 7, 6. Personalities 7, 10, 10, 3, 4, 8, 6.

9. Has your approach to interpreting notated music (repertoire) been affected by your experience with improvisation? 6 Yes 1 No 1 n.a. because always improvising (Jazz)

a. How? Please describe (one sentence)

Answers: understanding: intention + structure of a musical work/composition is clearer; understanding how graphic notation works (building blocks, structure) through realtime organisation of sounds; curiosity, tolerance, joy through exposure to different styles (newly found interest for contemporary music that was previously hardly known + not enjoyed, now enjoyed); indirectly: more liberty but must respect + react.

10. If you have composed before, has your approach to composing been affected by your experience with improvisation?

Answers: 5 Yes 3 n.a. (do not compose, have not composed before)

a. How? Please describe (one sentence)

Answers: knowledge of style + real-life examples of sounds; learning about own + other instruments sound and technical possibilities; communication with sound; relationship between improvisation + composition; increase of curiosity; motif organisation; changes of emotion; structure + build-up; everyday sounds as inspiration (sound walk); 4 x integration of (collective) improvisation in composed music is OK + interesting.