

Fostering Creativity through Improvisation

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Abstract

Most music educators would agree that the development of creativity in students is an important goal and that the music curriculum offers a unique opportunity for its cultivation. But the American public schools do not appear to be succeeding in fostering creativity, and in fact may be having some detrimental effects on creative behavior. Many researchers tell us that creativity can be fostered over a period of time, and many use improvisation as an important part of measuring creativity—citing improvisation as a highly creative endeavor.

Although improvisation is currently a strong part of elementary music education, it is not an integral part of secondary school music education, where students often participate in directed recreative activities through traditional large ensemble performance. Perhaps a solution lies in jazz education.

Unfortunately, most high school jazz band programs, like concert band and orchestra programs, appear to place emphasis on the performance of orchestrated arrangements which may limit creative opportunities. Is the standard 17-piece jazz band a valid medium for teaching jazz improvisation? Can a better jazz curriculum be developed that places more emphasis on creative improvisation? One possible solution may lie in the utilization of the jazz combo as a positive environment for creative activities—where improvisation might be a prerequisite for the occurrence of jazz.