

Improvisation as Critical Practice in Higher Music Education

**TRICK as Pedagogical Infrastructure
for Inclusion, Agency, and Listening**

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Roadmap — Five movements

1. Framing the problem: “Can everyone improvise?”
2. A critical pedagogical lens
3. Operational definition (3 indicators)
4. TRICK + classroom practices
5. Institutional implications

Where I speak from

- Musician / improviser / teacher
- Performance ↔ Mediation
- Teaching as **designing conditions to enter a shared musical experience**

Guiding question

Can everyone improvise?

- Who can improvise *in an institution*?
- Under what conditions?
- Inclusion $\neq$ “freedom for some”

Under what conditions does improvisation become teachable, and genuinely inclusive?

The institutional obstacle

- Correctness / control / predictability
- Stable frameworks: score, style, dominant repertoire, exams
- Error becomes “threat”, not “material”

Why freedom becomes asymmetrical

- Risk → defensive behavior
- Hierarchies → hidden classroom micro-politics
- Dominant repertoire → what counts as “valid”

Critical pedagogy as a practical lens

Not “politics” added from outside

- Focus: **how learning happens**
- Focus: **who has agency**
- Focus: **which norms shape participation**

Three shifts in the classroom

1. **Transmission → Practice** (do–listen–reflect–retry)
2. **Agency as a competence** (real-time decisions)
3. **Listening as critical practice** (other / silence / environment)

Improvisation as Critical Practice

- **De-naturalizes norms**
- **Redistributes agency**
- **Legitimizes situated, embodied, relational, and ephemeral knowledge**

Indicator 1: Norms become audible

- norms appear through practice
- rules are constantly negotiated
- hierarchy becomes perceptible

→ therefore: **norms can be questioned**

Indicator 2: Agency redistributed

- Real-time decisions shape collective form
- Enter / exit — sustain / step back — respond / resist
- Agency becomes a **competence**, not a privilege

Indicator 3: Quality criteria shift

From **correctness** and **control**

→ to **responsiveness, listening** and **emergent coherence**

→ to **care for the shared space**

Methodological pivot

If we want these indicators to appear **consistently**,
we must **design conditions**.

TRICK

TRICK as Pedagogical Infrastructure

- **T**rust
- **R**espect
- **I**ndependence
- **C**ollaboration
- **K**indness

From educator **Esther Wojcicki**

Re-contextualized here for **improvisation pedagogy**

Not **what to play**

→ but **conditions for participation**

Pedagogical **infrastructure**, not a style

TRICK in Practice: What Each Value Enables

TRICK = conditions we design

- **Trust** → (self / others / materials) → duration of ideas
- **Respect** → ethics of listening
- **Independence** → agency within the collective
- **Collaboration** → composing in real time
- **Kindness** → feedback beyond exam logic

Classroom Practices: How to Read the Examples

- **Task**
minimal instruction
- **TRICK values**
(1–3 predominant)
- **Observable effect**
agency · listening · quality shift
- **What it counters**
exam logic · hierarchy-by-default · fear of error

Classroom Practices:

Identity & Constellation Shifts

- **Sonic “Business Card”**

Task → short solo (2–3 min), no aesthetic instruction; brief peer feedback

Values → Trust · Independence · Kindness

Effect → identity becomes audible; risk is held; agency grows

- **Solos within the Tutti**

Task → group improvises; teacher cues a solo; group reconfigures

Values → Trust · Independence · Collaboration · Respect

Effect → constellations shift; silence becomes action

Classroom Practices:

Listening & Feedback

- **Small-group improvisation** (*duos or trios*) + listeners + peer feedback

Task → performers play; peers listen; roles rotate

Values → Kindness · Respect · Trust

Effect → listening becomes creative; criteria become horizontal

Implications: Autonomy & Shared Space

Core claim

Improvisation is not only a **tool**
→ it is an **autonomous practice**

Institutional role

A shared space across:

- musical traditions,
- study profiles,
- and artistic disciplines

A pedagogical space to explore new forms of
listening, interaction, agency and co-creation

From Classroom Practice to Institutional Change

Three roles of Improvisation in Academia

1.Epistemological

Emergent & situated knowledge (beyond score-only knowing)

2.Ethical–political

Alterity + micro-politics of sound (space, roles, value)

3.Pedagogical

Agency + co-responsibility + critical listening

From Decorative to Structural

If the institution takes these roles seriously:

Improvisation stops being decorative

→ becomes structural

Final question

What minimal changes
in **assessment**,
curriculum,
and **classroom culture**
would be needed
for improvisation
to become a **structural part**
of musical formation?

Thank you

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Improvisation — pedagogy — critical listening

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