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Reflections on Freirean Pedagogy in a Jazz Combo Lab

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Abstract

Paulo Freire was an important figure in adult education whose pedagogy has been used in music education. In this act of praxis (reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it), I share an autoethnography of my teaching of a university-level small ensemble jazz class. The purpose of this autoethnography was to examine my teaching praxis as I integrated Freirean pedagogy. There were two research questions. To what extent were the teachings of Paulo Freire applicable or useful for a university-level, improvisational, small ensemble class? How do students' confidence and ability at improvisation improve during the class? Data sources included teacher reflections, video-recordings of each class, and conversations on a Facebook page. In the Jazz Combo Lab, students who were unable to successfully navigate the competitive audition process were empowered to develop as jazz musicians and become critically reflective. A narrative of my own evolving praxis is shared around the themes "Freirean Pedagogy as Increased Conversation," "Empowering Students to Critique Their Worlds," "Pedagogical Missteps," and "A More Critical Praxis."

Keywords: *music education, Freire, jazz, pedagogy*

Paulo Freire was an important figure in adult education whose pedagogy has been used in music education. Working within a Critical Pedagogy framework derived from Freirean theorists, Henry Giroux and Michael Apple, Elliott (2013) proposed that a "primary" way music education can serve humanity is by, "enabling the development of students' character, identities, empathy, happiness, health and well-being, personal and social agency, and ethical dispositions to oppose all forms of oppression and injustice with and through critically reflective and creative music making" (3). This quote resonated with me, because my aim for my own teaching praxis is to facilitate these qualities, and my research has focused on realizing how to enable the development of students' confidence to improvise music (Shevock, in-press). In this act of praxis (*reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it*), I share an autoethnography of

my teaching of a university-level small ensemble jazz class, while, at the same time learning and implementing Freire's pedagogy.

Freirean Pedagogy

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) was a dominant and often-mythologized figure in 20th century educational philosophy. Giroux (2011) explains, "Paulo Freire occupies a hallowed position among the founders of critical pedagogy" (152). Freire implemented and oversaw nation-wide adult literacy programs in South America, Africa, and Central America. His pedagogy evolved and changed through his experiences and his scholarship. In this paper, I will share an autoethnography illuminating my initial experience with Freirean pedagogy and my attempt to incorporate Freire's theories into my own teaching praxis.

I find it important to make a distinction in this paper between how I'm using the terms *Freirean* pedagogy and Critical Pedagogy. Paulo Freire provided a language and theoretical framework for Critical Pedagogy (Giroux 2011; Macedo 2000). Critical Pedagogy can be understood as a Freirean pedagogy, however not all expressions of Freire's theories have been Critical Pedagogy. For instance, there are distinctions that might be made between the places of teaching for critical pedagogues in the U.S., Europe, Australia and Canada, and Freire's places of teaching—national adult literacy programs in Chile, Brazil, Guinea Bissau, and Nicaragua. In conducting this autoethnography, I did not use the literature of Critical Pedagogy broadly (which is often already modified for a so-called *First World* context), or music education Critical Pedagogy, but designed my Jazz Combo Lab pedagogy on my readings of Freire's writings and relevant critiques on Freirean concepts.

The context of a performance ensemble also provided unique challenges. Cho (2010) stated that a banking education teaching approach dominated in performance settings. "This traditional manner of teaching and learning has been passed down through time" (3). I believe university jazz instruction can also be affected by a tradition of banking education. Therefore, modifications were made. I will use the term *Freirean* to refer to Freire's writings and large-scale adult literacy campaigns he designed and implemented during his lifetime, and to the literature that critiques Freire's pedagogy, and not to *Critical Pedagogy* or critiques of *Critical Pedagogy*

broadly. Because of the focus of this research on (what is here labeled) *Freirean* pedagogy, the challenges, successes, and critiques in this research are specific to *Freirean* pedagogy and how I applied Freire's theories to a specific music performance ensemble. I hope this paper, therefore, will provide meaningful information for other teachers approaching Freire's writings for the first time, as I was at the start of this study.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Freire 1970/93) was written after Freire implemented nation-wide adult literacy programs in Chile and Brazil, programs that ended when right wing political parties were elected to power. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* represents the most complete description of Freire's pedagogical concepts and later Freirean writings draw heavily from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and expect readers to have a strong grasp of prior Freirean concepts (Kirkendall 2010). It is impossible to fully grasp Freire's theory without understanding *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and, because of its importance, many contemporary critical educators base their understandings of Freirean pedagogy *entirely* on this text, which Roberts (2000) describes as unfortunate; Freire's pedagogy grew throughout his life in response to what he considered fair criticism—especially from critical race theorists and critical feminists. Still, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* contains Freire's foundational concepts of *humanization, banking education, problem posing pedagogy, conscientization, and the oppressed/oppressor binary*.

Freire (1970/93) believed that because the world can often dehumanize oppressed people, education must be a humanization process, a process advancing from reflection, to action, to transformation. This process requires *the oppressed* to become “restorers of humanity to both” (44) themselves and their oppressors. But there is a real danger, in Freire's mind, that when given power the oppressed might themselves become “sub-oppressors” (45). Rather, the key to overcoming oppression lies in praxis, which for Freire is “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (51), rather than simply changing the balance of power. Transformation comes in two stages, (1) the oppressors unveil the oppressive nature of the world and commit themselves to change the world, and (2) the world enters a state of permanent liberation for all people.

For Freire (1970/93), many teachers problematically use a banking concept of education, which positions teachers as possessors of knowledge; knowledge is then

deposited into the students who are mere consumers (empty of knowledge) rather than producers of knowledge. Banking education alienates students from knowledge. As opposed to the banking model, problem-posing pedagogy addresses real problems and positions knowledge as constructed rather than something *out there*.

A Freirean pedagogy is based on dialogue. Dialogue is conversation, but to distinguish his concept of dialogue from other philosopher's use of the term, Freire (1970/93) describes the "correct method" (67), as "the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world" (88). This requires reflective action, courage, and love. Through dialogue, students are viewed as historical—as Freire (1974/2006) wrote, "Men exist in time. They are inside. They are outside . . . Men are not imprisoned within a permanent 'today'; they emerge, and become temporalized" (3–4). Dialogue occurs with critical thinking, and can lead to *conscientization*—movement from magical thinking, to naïve thinking—thinking in which the oppressed are not empowered to change the world—to critical thinking—"thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits no dichotomy between them" (Freire 1970/93, 92).

Freire's pedagogy also had an artistic component. To Freire, "what is fundamental in the role of the teacher is to help the student to discover that inside of the difficulties there is a moment of pleasure, of joy" (Freire and Horton 1990, 23). Freire found artistic "sensualism" in the act of reading. A similar *sensualism* can be found in musical action. Also, Freire identified schools during his own learning as "killing creativity" (28), through "bureaucratization of the mind" (37). Freire suggested creative action provides opportunities for "*ruptura*" (38)—a *breaking* from old beliefs, and an internal and personal *conflict*. Perhaps, creative, improvised musical action can facilitate opportunities for *ruptura*.

Postmodern, feminist, critical race, and ecological education scholars criticized Freire's writings throughout his life. For instance, Freire's pedagogy seems to present either/or binaries (the most pertinent is the distinction between the *oppressed* and *oppressors*), and conscientization (as distinct cognitive stages) seems to present a universal metanarrative. Lyotard (1979/84) defined *postmodernism* as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (xxiv), so, quite naturally, postmodernist critique should call into question our metanarratives, possible negative consequences

and solutions. Postmodernist-Freirean scholar, Roberts (2000) reinterpreted Freirean concepts through multiple-subjectivities; we are an “amalgam of many different ‘selves’” (147). Freire’s description of magical, naïve and critical thinking as distinct cognitive stages of conscientization seems particularly modernistic. Roberts recommended an alternative, “a dialectical representation of conscientization as a continuous reflective process” (147). These modifications of Freirean theory seem apropos. In response to critics, Freire (1998) later discussed his ethics, democracy, critical reflection, race, right thinking, and conscientization in his most postmodern words. He addressed the problems of neoliberalism to freedom and equated democratic teaching praxes with “critical capacity, curiosity, and autonomy of the learner” (33). A postmodern modified-Freirean pedagogy might put emphasis on *autonomy*, democratic teaching praxes, and respecting students’ *different selves*.

One particularly powerful critique came from Esteva, Stuchul, and Prakash (2005), who presented Freire as conservative and as a “colonizer” (13). They suggested conscientization is “new wine for old bottles—the bottles of colonization” (16), by positioning the teacher as the mediator who “conceptualizes the category or class of the oppressed in his or her own terms, with his or her own ideology” (16). The mediator status of teachers creates a moral obligation to change, or *evangelize*, the students, who lack something, “and even more, that what their oppressed lack is this specific notion or stage, they assume and legitimate their own role as liberators” (17). This critique may help explain Freire’s failed literacy program in Guinea Bissau, and his seeming insistence that students learn to read and write Portuguese rather than their native languages. Portuguese was the language of the Guinea Bissau government and the colonizer’s language.

Undoubtedly, the decision to use the colonial language as the means of instruction was, ultimately, the major reason why the literacy program in Guinea-Bissau failed. As in most postcolonial African countries, leaders preferred to use the language of the colonizer as the new national language . . . Creole might have had somewhat more potential as a unifying force, as the use of it had spread during the war for liberation. (Kirkendall 2010, 111)

It may be that the use of the language of the oppressor was detrimental to the students. It may also be possible that the very need for a *unifying force* represents what Esteva, Stuchul, and Prakash (2005) called a “universal ethic” (16), one that seems to have been unsuitable for Guinea Bissau, even if it had been suitable for

Freire's previous teaching contexts in Brazil and Chile. Was I employing jazz as a *universal ethic* in the Jazz Combo Lab? As a university teaching assistant, course descriptions are out of my control. The course instructor provided me much freedom when teaching this class, and only observed me during a few periods during the semester. We talked weekly about what I was trying, and he made suggestions, but he took a *laissez-faire* approach, respecting my teaching experience while providing guidance based on his own experience as a jazz professor. I did not, however, feel the freedom to change Jazz Combo Lab to Pop Music Lab, and so did not explore that possibility with the students. In higher music education, the dominant pattern has been Western Art Music, with jazz having a place at the table at many institutions (and possibly considered the dominant pattern for teaching music improvising, though improvising is not a dominant pattern for musicking in higher music education), and other musical styles being taught seldom, if ever.

Like Freire, I chose to use jazz (as a *dominant pattern* for university instruction). Though Freire suggested that the government insisted on implementing his literacy program in Portuguese, Freire continued to defend teaching the "dominant pattern" (and perhaps the dominant language) years later.

Do you see, it's impossible to think of language without thinking of ideology and power? I defend the duty of the teachers to teach the cultivated pattern and I defend the rights of the kids or of the adults to learn the dominant pattern. But, it is necessary in being a democratic and tolerant teacher, it is necessary to explain, to make clear to the kids or the adults that their way of speaking is as beautiful as our way of speaking. (Wees 2012)

Freire seems to suggest that the learning of the "dominant pattern" is a "right," when, in the case of Guinea Bissau, requiring the learning of Portuguese seems to have been an unnecessary burden to students wanting to become literate. The issue of a mediator, whose view of conscientization places "the oppressed" into a less advanced "stage of awareness," seems unanswerable within the context of Freirean pedagogy, as I understand it.

Freirean author, McLaren (2007), admitted three critiques "worthy of consideration" (101) in discussions of Freire's pedagogy:

- 1) that the languages of indigenous cultures often encode ways of protecting the environment and animals, 2) that Freire's belief that all change is linear and progressive might recapitulate a Western colonialist understanding of the world and its peoples, and 3) that Freire's commitment to "critical reflection" without a grounding in local culture or tradition can too easily become future

justifications for technological advancement, war and even geopolitical manipulation. (101)

In connection to the lack of Freirean pedagogy for the *environment and animals*, McLaren (2007) suggests teachers, “do best to open a dialogue with students about the environments they live in, rather than by imagining that some sort of ideal tradition will take care of environmental crisis by itself” (102). Dialogue, then, is the method through which a Freirean teacher would address the environmental crisis. It might also be said that our field, music education, lacks much discussion on the protection of the environment and animals. And the current research did not approach environmental issues, ecological literacy, or ecopedagogy.

Esteva, Stuchul, and Prakash’s (2005) concern for Freire’s *universal ethic* seems to align with what McLaren (2007) described as the possibility for *recapitulation of Western colonialist understanding of the world and its peoples*. McLaren points readers to Pedagogy of Hope (Freire 1992). Freire suggested:

I cannot understand human beings as simply *living*. I can understand them only as historically, culturally, and socially *existing*. I can understand them only as beings who are makers of their ‘way,’ in the making of which they lay themselves open to or commit themselves to the ‘way’ that they make and that therefore remakes them as well. (Freire 1992, 83, emphasis in original)

In this excerpt, Freire makes it clear that he is emphasizing his students’ choice (*makers of their way*) through his humanistic conception, within historical, cultural, and social contexts. McLaren (2007) continues, “We critical educators are universalists, yes . . . But we begin from somewhere, from concrete spaces and places where subjectivities are forged and commodified (and we hope de-commodified) and where critical agency is developed in particular and distinct ways” (103). Perhaps Jazz Combo Lab can improve critical agency in the particular and distinct ways the jazz tradition provides.

Freirean Pedagogy in Music Education

Freirean pedagogical ideas are present, but not widespread, in music education, and have expanded our music education philosophical discourse (e.g. Abrahams 2005a; Allsup 2003a; Benedict 2006; Benedict and Schmidt 2007; Jorgensen 2010; Schmidt 2005; Spruce 2012). Allsup (2003a) used Freire’s understanding of *praxis as non-neutral* to widen the use of the term praxis in music education. He clarified Freire’s inseparability of theory and practice (praxis) when he suggested, “we disavow the

traditional separation between abstracted learning and real life . . . acting upon our world requires inaction: thinking, perceiving, reflecting, reconceptualizing, connecting” (158). Benedict (2006) used Freire’s theory to critique the essentialist philosophy used to construct 1994 U.S. National Music Standards. And Jorgensen (2010) used Freire to discuss how we might dialogue and act to address current issues in music education, including inequities such as “the unevenness of musical opportunities” (22), which I consider university jazz to be (my Jazz Combo Lab students¹ would be unable to participate in jazz if it weren’t for the creation of this opportunity).

Freirean pedagogy has been used to develop music education lessons in general music settings (e.g. Abrahams 2007; Allsup 2003a; Spruce 2012). Allsup (2003a) described a lesson in which he had university music education students compose a “requiem for the missing and dead” (158) of September 11, 2001. In opening space for dialogue and *reparation*, this lesson seems to have had the power to incorporate (in the classroom) students’ lived experiences of tragedy (outside of the classroom). Spruce (2012) provided examples of Critical Pedagogy –having students write “musical biographies” (192), motivating students to improvise musically by improvising a “Hip-Hop type riff” (193), and reworking the lyrics of an English folk song into an anti-war song. He also voiced a belief that “music provides the possibility of a much richer discourse between teacher and student” (193) than discourse based on spoken language.

In 2005, Schmidt (2005) recognized that music educators still did not commonly read Freire. The author’s goal was to use Freirean concepts to “develop frameworks that define the philosophy of a Critical Pedagogy for Music Education” (2). Schmidt’s concern was that in music education, “Authoritarian pedagogical models and objectives . . . are expected” (4), and recommended that music education might grow to be *for* social and personal transformation. Freirean conscientization, for Schmidt, is a process in which a learner, “become[s] conscious of one’s knowledge, by engaging in learning that connects concepts to the learners’ own realities, leads students to the point where they ‘know that they know.’ Music education, centered upon conscientization becomes powerful” (6). According to Schmidt, this *power* is a consequence of culture and social relationships. In other words, music is a way in which students encounter the world interactively.

Abrahams (2005a) constructed a Freirean framework for lesson planning in music education. The author suggested a critical approach relates music in students' personal lives to empower students in the classrooms, and "does not advocate a particular body of repertoire or specific teaching procedure" (63). He outlined, "Five key principles of critical pedagogy" (64), education as (1) conversation, (2) broadening students' view of reality, (3) empowering, (4) transformative, (5) and political. Scheib (2012) suggested that, because they were shared in the widely distributed *Music Educators Journal*, these five principles are employed in music teacher training. It may be that by 2012 (15 years after Freire's death), Freirean pedagogy was becoming more common (though not necessarily common or well-implemented) in music education, at least in university teacher training programs.

Purpose

At the beginning of this research, I believed Freirean pedagogy might provide a useful lens through which to consider teaching praxis in a music-performing ensemble. Freire's literacy campaigns were highly politicized and promoted his method as able to teach literacy "in only forty hours" (Kirkendall 2010, 41). The dual purpose of Freirean pedagogy (of efficiently teaching adults to read and write and of conscientization) seemed to echo the dual-purpose in my ensemble. It was my aim to design *Jazz Combo Lab* to develop both skill and critical reflectivity. My teaching had for years been influenced by John Dewey (1910/2005), who said, "To cultivate unhindered, unreflective external activity is to foster enslavement, for it leaves the person at the mercy of appetite, sense, and circumstance" (52). Critical reflectivity might, then, have the potential to free students from their enslavement—e.g. to a competitive audition process. To Freire (1970/93), "Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (72). This *curious* nature of knowledge, knowledge based on curiosity, was a guiding thought for my weekly teaching of *jazz combo lab*. "A person learns to swim in the water, not in a library" (137).

The purpose of this autoethnography was to examine my teaching praxis as I integrated Freirean pedagogy in a small ensemble jazz class. Freire (1998) described critical reflection as "a requirement of the relationship between theory and practice"

(30). The conducting of this research on my own teaching praxis, as well as the presenting and writing of this current paper, then, can be described as an act of critical reflection and of praxis. There were two research questions. How appropriate did I find the teachings of Paulo Freire (a full-spectrum of his work and not just *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) for a university-level, improvisational, small ensemble class? How do students' confidence and ability at improvisation improve during the class? Over the course of the semester my teaching praxis evolved through discussions in an *Adult Education* course on Freire in which I was enrolled, critical readings of Freirean texts, studying music education thinkers who have used Freirean frameworks, and reflective teaching in the *Jazz Combo Lab*.

Method

The opportunity for conducting this autoethnography arose as I enrolled in an *Adult Education* course on Paulo Freire and began teaching a section of *Jazz Combo Class* for students who were unable to successfully audition into one of the ensembles. Prior to 2013, I knew very little about Freirean pedagogy. Through the course, I studied Freire's books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire 1970/93), *Pedagogy in Process: The letters to Guinea Bissau* (Freire 1978), *We Make the Road by Walking* (Horton and Freire 1990), *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire 1992), and *Pedagogy of Freedom* (Freire 1998); a book placing Freire in historical context of Cold War politics (Kirkendall 2010); a book-length case study implementing Freirean pedagogy (Purcell-Gates and Waterman 2000); and critiques of Freire's pedagogy such as those by Bowers and Apffel-Marglin (2005), Roberts (2000), Esteva, Stuchul, and Prakash (2005), hooks (1994), Ismail (2003), Rivera (2004), and Weiler (1991). Freire (1998) suggested the teacher must also be a researcher. I challenged myself to try to apply Freire's ideas on literacy in the *Jazz Combo Lab*. At the same time, I hoped to familiarize myself with Freirean music education writings.

Autoethnography. At MayDay 25 in Vancouver, BC, Peter Gouzouasis and Danny Bakan (2013 June) presented, "An ethos in music education: Where are teachers and learners in music education research?" Their paper inspired me to employ autoethnography as a self-reflective research method. Autoethnography has recently emerged as a viable method for music education research (e.g. Kruse 2012; Nethsinghe 2012), and autoethnographies are reflective "case studies" (Kruse 2012,

297) describing subjective, setting-specific experiences. Similar to Nethsinghe (2012), the present study explored my development as a teacher. Like Kruse (2012), I am interested in challenges and successes that I experienced over a fixed period of time, in this current case, a university semester. Autoethnography was chosen (over Action Research, Phenomenology, or Grounded Theory) because it provides a method for self-study, such as in Nethsinghe's and Kruse's research, which allowed my initial foray into a new pedagogy (Freirean) for me to be illuminated subjectively. The subjective nature of the autoethnographic method has strengths and weaknesses. Other research methodologies might better be able to get to the experiences of the other participants in a study (such as how the students felt about the experience), but by being honest about my successes and failures as a teacher with a history and evolving opinions, autoethnography is able facilitate my sharing of my evolving praxis.

Because "culture and individual are intricately intertwined" (44) this study employed Chang's (2008) autoethnographic method. This approach to autoethnography can be distinguished from other self-narrative methods like autobiography, personal essay writing, and performative storytelling by its goal, attaining "triadic balance" (48) between self, culture, and process; the three parts of the word *auto-ethno-graphy*. The basic unit of analysis was the researcher acting within his sociocultural surroundings, and the primary data were the researcher's personal experiences. In this research, there were sociocultural surroundings at play—my history as a public school teacher in a large, urban school district, my history as a jazz performer, how I perceived the socioculture of university level jazz instruction, and the actual mini-culture created in this classroom, among the four students and myself as teacher.

Data and Analysis. I used three sources of data—journaling, video-recordings of each class, and a Facebook group page. Methodologically (Chang 2008) internal data (journaling) were "compliment[ed]" (55) with analysis of external data, including video-recordings of each class session and dialogue occurring on the social media site Facebook. During the first week of class, I created *Jazz Combo Lab* Facebook group and invited students to join. Data were collected and analyzed throughout the course of a 16-week university semester, between September and December 2013. My primary purpose in the class, *Jazz Combo Lab*,

was to facilitate an ensemble experience for students who were unable to successfully navigate the audition process into one of the university's jazz combo ensembles, and help them build their confidence and ability to perform. I video-recorded each teaching session to reflect on my success at facilitating robust dialogue, increasing student agency, and avoiding authoritarian educational models. I also created a Facebook page, for the dual purposes of extending classroom conversations and sharing small ensemble jazz YouTube videos. Finally, I implemented Freirean pedagogy into my lessons throughout the semester as I became aware of it through reading Freirean texts.

Data were coded and interpreted. Videos of teaching sessions were used to inspire reflection in the journal. These journal entries were coded descriptively (a noun or short phrase describing the data). Descriptive codes were gathered into larger themes in relation to the focus of the research—my evolving teaching praxis. The primary themes of this research considered my evolving praxis and were *Freirean Pedagogy as Increased Conversation, Empowering Students to Critique Their Worlds, Pedagogical Missteps, and A More Critical Praxis*. Additional analysis was conducted through writing exercises suggested by Chang (2008)—chronologically listing events in my life connected to learning (and considering Freirean theory), “list five personal, familial, or social rituals, in order of importance” (78) (in this case social rituals of jazz teaching in the U.S. educational institutions), “list five artifacts, in order of importance, that represent your culture” (81) (the culture being the Jazz Combo Lab culture I was cultivating), creating a list of values that are important to my teaching, and creating a list of “textual artifacts” (108) I used in class (e.g. the Real Book, the apps).

I also analyzed data artistically (as suggested by Chang 2008) through the writing of modified-*haiku*. Formally, *haiku* have followed three conventions since around the sixteenth century, (1) they describe a single thought or occasion, (2) they are about the present moment, and (3) they employ seasonal imagery like cherry blossoms (Hoffmann 1986). According to Hoffman, *haiku* are also notable for leaving something unsaid, and that being central to the poem. My modified-*haiku* followed the first two conventions but not the third, and were about instances that happened during class, difficulties I had implementing Freirean pedagogy, or challenging Freirean theoretical points. I came to believe *haiku* provided me an

artistic representation of my thinking about data that was limiting enough (5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the second, 5 in the third) to force me to synthesize my thinking. In this research I will share raw data (teaching episodes and haiku from the journal) as well as my interpretation of these data. The first haiku represented how I viewed my role as an autoethnographer-teacher.

*Researcher-teacher –
Right thinking is right doing,
Curious person
(November 6, 2013)*

Jazz Combo Lab Students. There were four students who registered for *Jazz Combo Lab*. The names, Ronan, Caitlin, Malachi, and Aiden are pseudonyms. One of the participants, Aiden, was a music major. He played electric violin during the semester. He had some experience with free improvisation, but very little experience playing jazz. He hoped to widen his perspectives as a music performance undergraduate student. Ronan was a trumpeter who began playing with one of the university big bands during that semester. He was perhaps the strongest jazz musician, and hoped to become a music major. Caitlin was a violinist, and an adult learner with experience playing classical music and bluegrass. This helped her during improvisation activities, because she had developed a strong ear. Malachi was a classically trained pianist, and a graduate science student. He worked extensively on comping (accompaniment) throughout the semester.

Prior to this study, I had little experience with Freire, and did not consider myself a Freirean or a Critical Theory music teacher. One difficulty I found was that I was learning about Freire (I had not read any Freirean books prior to this research) while I was writing lesson plans and implementing Freirean ideas in a university-level performance ensemble. This difficulty is also, I believe, a strength of this research, because I hope to identify some of the challenges to the early implementation of these ideas into my teaching praxis. During the early part of the semester, I was most influenced by Freire's writings. However, as the semester continued, I became increasingly influenced by criticism's of Freire, and, since the study and not the purview of this research, Esteva, Stuchul, and Prakash's (2005) critique, described above, which had already taken root in my thinking during the semester, has led me to seek other educational theorists. I modified my praxis,

during the semester, using the Freirean theorist, Roberts' (2000), lens of multiple subjectivities.

Findings

Lesson Planning. On the top margin of each lesson plan, I wrote a guiding quotation from one of the Adult Education course readings for the week, and then constructed a lesson plan, aiming to help students improve musically and also to empower students in a Freirean sense. In other words, the inspiration for these teachings came from Freire's pedagogy, and not from Critical Pedagogy more broadly. For instance, on the lesson plan written on September 22, 2013, I wrote, "to conquer THEIR WORLD" (Freire 1978, 72, emphasis in the original), "with the intention of creating a lesson plan that will help these musicians wrest more control of the class from me, the instructor" (Shevock reflective journal, September 22, 2013). The idea of *conquering their world* continued to influence my thinking about Freirean pedagogy throughout the semester. I believe that the students wrested more control from me during the semester, and by the end of the semester (especially with the free improvisation classes discussed later in this paper) they began to conquer their world as confident improvisers.

Freirean pedagogy is designed to help avoid *banking education* and increase student *conscientization* (Freire 1970/93, 67; Roberts 2000). Improvisation is an essential part of the jazz music tradition. At the start of the semester, in the *Jazz Combo Lab*, I hoped to create a safe environment (by deferring my judgment of student *mistakes* early in the semester) where students would develop confidence to improvise, experiment, talk, grow musically, and be empowered to make judgments and express musical and verbal positions. Writing about improvisation in Canadian schools, Giacomelli (2012) wrote, "Improvisatory modes of music making within the classroom can be used as a form of critical pedagogy to liberate students from the current text dependence and 'correct' instrumental technique in Ontario music classrooms" (8). At the start of the study, I believed that the improvisatory nature of jazz musicking might be uniquely able to accomplish a type of empowerment. As the semester progressed, students chose much of the instructional material.

Freirean Pedagogy as Increased Conversation

*Empowered students
Dialogue to name their world,
Through words and music
(November 22, 2013)*

In early September, in the Adult Education class, the instructor facilitated a discussion of what constitutes Freirean education. Much of this discussion centered on the idea that Freire's teaching evolved throughout his career, and it would be helpful for those teachers labeling their classes as "Freirean" to:

Identify which Freire is being used. There are multiple Freires. There are better and worse interpretations of Freire's theories, but no single bad or good interpretation. At some point, pedagogy becomes no-longer Freirean, but Freire-inspired—drawing on the works of Freire . . . Where is this line between Freirean pedagogy and Freire-inspired pedagogy? (class notes, September 4, 2013)

Throughout the semester, I worked under the assumption that my pedagogy in the Jazz Combo Lab would be Freire-inspired, and not purely Freirean, and since this exists on a continuum, I used my previous experience as a teacher and jazz musician to guide my evolving understanding of what makes a "better and worse interpretation." Four themes arose to demonstrate how my thinking evolved throughout the semester. The first of these themes was *Freirean Pedagogy as Increased Conversation*. Abrahams (2005b) wrote of Freirean pedagogy, "Education is a conversation where students and their teachers pose problems and solve problems together" (3). At the start of the semester, on September 5th 2013, I taught my first *Jazz Combo Lab* class. I had begun reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, at this early point in the semester. Just as Freire's literacy campaigns began with asking students questions to get a sense for what the students knew,² I began the first class with a series of questions written on a sheet of paper. After giving students time to write answers to the questions, I read from the sheet:

DS: Name. Instrument. How long have you played the instrument? How long have you been playing jazz? How did you learn jazz? What do you like about jazz? If you play other instruments, what do you play? Who's your favorite jazz musician and why? What do you most want to improve about your playing this semester? And finally, what is the blues? Okay, who wants to start? Just answer some of the questions. What was most important, to your mind?

Ronan: My name is Ronan. I play trumpet. I like playing drums as well. My favorite jazz musician is Miles Davis. It was the first album I ever bought.

One of the things I want to get out of this course is to learn more harmonic things to do when you improv, rather than just sticking with the notes in the chord.

DS: What's your favorite Miles Davis album?

Ronan: The one with *My Funny Valentine* on it. My second favorite song is *Blue in Green*.

DS: Do you feel like your tone is? Do you want your tone to be like Miles's?

Ronan: Ah. I do, but I don't know. He said something like, "it takes a long time for you to sound like yourself," so I'm still on that path of finding my own sound. I try to emulate it [Miles' tone], but I don't want to.

DS: So, you want to develop your own sound?

Ronan: Yeah.

DS: [After a pause.] Who's next?

Malachi: I'm Malachi. I didn't really start listening to jazzy stuff until freshman year of college. So, that's four years ago. And it's not the typical jazz stuff. It's more like rock with jazz mixed in.

DS: Can you give me an example?

Malachi: Jamie Cullum.

DS: [Not hearing the last name] Who?

Malachi: Jamie Cullum. Not many people listen to him.

DS: That's okay. I need to go look him up [clarifies the spelling].

Malachi: He's British. He's a good performer. I saw him live, and I want to be able to play [like him]. A lot of his stuff is improvised, and mixed. But I'm here to learn how to comp so I can be part of jazz band and hopefully solo eventually. (September 5, 2013)

By asking these questions, I was able to begin to understand what my students wanted to learn (improvising on more than the notes on the chords, and comping), and I was able to develop future listening lessons around musicians students were interested in (for these students, Miles Davis and Jamie Cullum). Using Schmidt's (2005) terminology, I wanted to know what the students knew to connect my teaching to the "learners' own realities" (6). I wrote in my journal,

My goals for this class are to explore some of the Freirean concepts I began to learn in the Adult Education course . . . I believe at the minimum, employing a more dialogical method will increase the democratic-ness of my teaching. So, this is not only a laboratory for the students, but it is a laboratory for myself . . . The introductory discussion seemed a little long, but maybe that's what dialogue is all about, giving people time to think about ideas and values surrounding this music. How else will they build identity? After listening to Thelonius Monk's *Blue Monk* I had to push them a little to take over the conversation, and form a plan for playing it. Their playing wasn't very good [in my opinion]. [I believe] They knew that. (September 5, 2013)

By the first class, I was aware that *Jazz Combo Lab* was a laboratory for my own teaching. I was aware that conversation in the form of class discussion (this early in the semester), allowing students to talk during class, was taking up instructional time. I seem to have been biasing my own opinion above the students' opinions about how the music should be played. This may be because of the little experience they have had with the jazz combo tradition. Still, with Freirean democratic teaching aiming to increase "critical capacity, curiosity, and autonomy of the learner" (Freire 1998, 33), cultivating in the students the ability to express their opinion seemed to, over the course of the semester, empower them as autonomous learners.

Listening lessons were an important part of learning the jazz combo tradition, and I wanted to sequence these as much as possible, as *listening* and *sequential experiences* had arisen as themes of confident music improvising in my previous phenomenology (Shevock, in-press). I chose to listen to *Blue Monk*, but the students' interests guided future listening lessons, but not all of them. I chose many listening lessons throughout the semester. I believe this was consistent with Freire's discussion of students' right to learn the *dominant pattern* (Wees 2012). At one level, I wanted students to develop agency to choose music, but at another level, I was the expert in the *dominant pattern*, which was, for this class, jazz combo music.

Much of the talk early in the semester was about musical-structural issues.

We began to talk about framing solos, and thinking about an overall structure, or having a plan for the solo. Most often [the structures] turned out being, playing some slow notes for a while, speeding up, and expanding the motivic ideas, then slowing down a bit at the end [an organic structure]. We also talked about starting phrases near the end of one head when you want to continue on into the next head, and curving the solo off if you want it to end. (September 12, 2013)

I came to believe conversations in class could improve student leadership skills—
"improving their leadership skills, because it is democratically conceived and hinges

on dialogue” (September 30, 2013). This is consistent with Allsup (2003b), who discussed Freire in terms of “the interdependent nature of democratic learning environments” that emphasize “open and honest discussions” (27). Class conversations were facilitating *interdependence* between me, as the teacher, and the students, fostering what I referred to, in my journal, as *student leadership*. I was aware of the potential for my leadership in class to go awry in Freirean terms. Freire (1970/93) suggested, “The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own conscientização” (67). By moving leadership responsibilities to the students, I hoped to facilitate, in students, their *fight* toward conscientization.

I also wrote in my reflective journal about instructional time because I was aware of my own unease with dedicating this much class time to talking, not to music making. I discussed this concern with the Jazz Combo Lab course instructor. As discussed earlier in this paper, Roberts (2000) represented conscientization as “a dialectical representation of conscientization as a continuous reflective process” (147), and I was experiencing my own conscientization during this semester as I was talking about how to best teach this course with the course instructor (who does not self-identify as a Freirean teacher), learning Freirean pedagogy, and bringing in my own history. As I taught for twelve years prior to entering graduate school at Penn State, I had long held, preset notions about what activity should be taking place in a music class. In that, I valued music above talking. I continued, throughout the semester and since then, to reflectively think about the balance between producing sonic music and talking in class. I have come to believe (as I wrote in my reflective journal), “With too much sonic-music, class can become disempowering and unreflective. With too much talk, making music in class can become a rarity, and class can become about music instead of musical action in practice” (November 2, 2013).

Often having students make decisions through conversation proved difficult because students are used to having teachers make decisions. For instance, after playing a new song, *Straight No Chaser*, I wanted students to choose the final piece to practice.

Caitlin: [to Ronan] That song was really fast. Good song. Excellent solo.

DS: That was a fun one, wasn't it?

Malachi: Yeah.

Ronan: [Singing the melody]

DS: So one more. Something we've played before. What do you want to play?

Malachi: [Doodling on the piano]

DS: Because we don't want to drop the songs we've already played.

Aidan: Ahhh.

DS: [Pause] What have we played that we want to play again?

Caitlin: [Flips through her music]

Malachi: What?

DS: What have we played before that we want to play again?

Ronan: What we played last week. *Blue Monk*. *Blue Bossa*.

DS: [Pause] Is that what you want to play again?

Malachi: We can play one of the songs we did not get to play last week.

Ronan: Yeah.

DS: So, one of the ones you do but you didn't get to.

Malachi: Yeah. What. *How Insensitive*?

Ronan: Was that on there?

DS: *How Insensitive*? *Blue Bossa*?

Malachi: We could do *Blue Bossa*.

DS: What's a fun one to do?

Ronan: They're all fun.

Aiden: Let's see. We have *Blue Trane*, *How Insensitive*, *'Round Midnight*. What is a fun one? They're all fun.

DS: [Pause] You guys get to choose.

Caitlin: [to Ronan] You should choose.

Ronan: No. Malachi, your choice.

Malachi: Don't leave it to me.

DS: [after another pause] *Blue Bossa*.

Ronan and Malachi: Alright.

Ronan: *Blue Bossa*. (October 24, 2013)

This video transcription demonstrates how difficult it was, at times, to allow students to wrest control from me, as the teacher. It may be that the students were uncomfortable making the choice for the entire group. I felt this was a necessary conversation, though it took a lot of class time. I also felt this instance was a *pedagogical misstep* (and this was coded within both themes), because I eventually gave up, telling the students what song to play (admittedly a song initially suggested by a student) at the end of rehearsal.

As I continued reading Freire and teaching, I realized conversation is not enough to make classroom dialogue Freirean. Freirean dialogue is both empowering to the students, but also toward changing the world. As such, it is political. Definitions of *political* involve systems of government, the state, and the public; and historically, the word *political* originated in the word *politicus*, Latin, “pertaining to a polity, civil affairs, or government” (political 2014). In this way, the university is inherently a political institution, and teaching is a political act. *Political* also implies an act as being not neutral. Political parties take political positions. For Freire, dialogue is a way for students to politicize their worlds. Primarily because *Jazz Combo Lab* is a performance ensemble, and one in which students, who I initially viewed as *oppressed* by the audition process (Freirean pedagogy is a “*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*” and not a “*Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*” (Macedo 2000)) wanted to improve their playing skills, I wanted a more subtle way to express the political content of Freirean pedagogy in the *Jazz Combo Lab*. Dedicating large segments of time in *Jazz Combo Lab* talking about politics might be oppressive to unconfident students yearning to develop their musical skill.

I believe, to some extent, it is through developing musical skill that these students would be able to overcome their oppression. And yet, each class needed to allow some space for students to voice their awareness of political matters, and develop communally. A balance needed to be found. Christopher Small's (1998)

musicking provided the theoretical framework for the type of representative-political musicking I appreciated as a teacher in the *Jazz Combo Lab*. According to Small, the ways in which we choose to music are a ritualistic performance, and “. . . to take part in [ritual] is to take part in an act that uses the language of gesture to explore, affirm, and celebrate one’s concepts of ideal relationships” (98).

*Musicians music
In ideal relationships;
A just classroom/world
(November 19, 2013)*

In some ways, I used Small’s *musicking* concept to curb my political understanding of Freirean dialogue. In discussing what conversation might enable, Giroux (2011) explains, “such conversations have for the most part failed to consider more fundamental issues about the need to revitalize the language of civic education as part of a broader discourse of political agency and critical citizenship in a globalized society” (174). I do not believe these conversations approached Giroux’s suggestions. Abrahams (2007) recommended “composing and improvising music in styles consistent with who the students are and the contexts in which they live” (228) as consistent with critical conversation. In *Jazz Combo Lab* I did not have control over the *styles* of music performed (the style of music was in the course description), but the democratic context (allowing students room to talk) of my classes seemed to benefit students. Students seemed to be more confident students—confident to improvise music, and to critique themselves, each other, and the teacher. In my reflective journal, I wrote, “While Freire was teaching literacy, I am teaching music. Music is not as directly *about* an idea as language is. A word symbolizes a mental concept, while music might at best allude to similar concepts” (October 28, 2013).

My conception of conversation continued to evolve during the semester. By the beginning of October I was incorporating Small’s thoughts on ritual as affirming beliefs that the *Jazz Combo Lab* be able to facilitate an ideal belief of negotiation and empowerment. “My hope for the macrocosm of the world demands a complex relationship where power is negotiated daily, where teacher and student voices are empowered throughout [the microcosm of] the class time” (October 1, 2013). But by the end of the month, the political nature of Freirean dialogue seemed like a paradox.

As I am attempting to apply Freirean pedagogy to my jazz combo lab class I am beginning to realize that because Freirean pedagogy is explicitly political, I have come to a paradox that I am yet unable to solve. A number of questions

need to be addressed as I continue to construct this class.³ Can a Freirean pedagogy that is overtly political, where dialogue is about the oppressive nature of the world, be employed in a jazz combo lab where the primary objective is creating small ensemble music? How much talking is too much talking, and when does dialogue limit the experiences the students want? Is it equally oppressive to force overmuch verbal discussion, as it would be to shut it down through incessant direct instruction? Is instrumental dialogue, improvised creation, Freirean in any way or form? Should students explore the oppressed/oppressor Hegelian binary that Freire saw as central? Am I doing Freirean pedagogy, or is being *aware* of Freire enough? (October 28, 2013)

Empowering Students to Critique Their Worlds

The second theme of my evolving praxis was *Empowering Students to Critique Their Worlds*. By my September 19th journal entry, the students seemed to be showing signs of improvement, both musically and in their ability to dialogue (though they did not seem to feel empowered, yet). Performing music with the iPhone app *iRealb* seemed to have proven an effective (and fast) tool for learning jazz combo music without a bassist or drummer. The students seemed somewhat more comfortable with talking in class, since I was insistent on providing time for conversation throughout. One difficulty inexperienced jazz improvisers have is constructing a solo that is interesting and lasts longer than one time through the head (beginning of the composition). This problem might be compounded by the prevalence of big band music in school jazz, because big band music emphasizes improvised solos less than jazz combo music. I had each student talk through a guiding framework for an extended improvised solo. I then allowed each student to perform the solo. After each solo, the other students assessed their classmate. Since I played vibraphone along with each class, I also participated in this activity, submitting myself to the verbal construction of an extended solo, performance of that solo, and assessment by each student. This activity had mixed results.

I also tried to have them critique each other's solos. I'm not sure how well it worked. It definitely seemed to help Caitlin. I'm not sure Ronan was happy with it; he seemed uncomfortable with receiving criticism from his peers . . . The goal of having peer assessments was to empower the individuals. Their opinions mattered. They were the authority able to judge their own and other's work . . . it was a challenge of social-cohesion; not necessarily painless. (September 19, 2013)

After this first *not painless* peer assessment, students seemed uncomfortable around each other. However, I continued using peer assessment throughout the semester. By the second peer assessment, perhaps because I submitted myself to the same scrutiny; perhaps because they understood this would be expected, students were noticeably more comfortable with taking and giving criticism, and I feel this became an important key to their development as musicians. Students were empowered as agents, judging their and other improvisations based on criteria that were socially constructed.

As a doctoral student who was the course instructor I had difficulties unrelated to teaching. I presented research three times from the end of September to the beginning of November, in North Carolina, Nebraska, and Ireland. Each of these presentations meant that I missed class time. The students met to rehearse without me during these weeks and continued to develop, but not as quickly as they had developed⁴ in September, nor as quickly as they would during the free-jazz lessons I taught in November. On October 17th, Malachi posted a recording he made of the group performing *Blue Monk* to the *Jazz Combo Lab* Facebook page and it was nice to hear them reflectively playing, a point I lauded on the Facebook page. Students were expressing their agency, a concept Giroux (2011) connects to transformation. I came to believe *Empowering Students to Critique Their Worlds* (an agentic act) is a step toward transformative pedagogy.

There are also structural inequities involved in teaching at a university. As a teaching assistant, I had less power than other teachers.

When I was at [a conference], the students were kicked out of their room by a faculty member who had double booked the room through [the administrative assistant]. I'm not sure how this happened, but the students felt powerless. This week, since they needed the room again, we went to the first half of 'Passport's' [one of the other jazz combos] performance at the . . . Museum of Art. We then came back and played one of the songs they played, 'When You Wish Upon a Star.' [I feel that] listening to jazz combo music is important in addition to just trying to play it. We then had a conversation about being kicked out of the room. Caitlin in particular was upset. I had to ask [the course instructor] to help by talking with her. [The following day, the course instructor] and I explained to her that being flexible about the room is part of being a jazz person, being flexible. (October 26, 2013)

I wasn't happy about this situation either, as I had reserved the classroom for the entire semester. However, this type of situation has occurred to me in the past, and was not uncommon in the evenings among rehearsing groups. The ethic of *flexibility*

in jazz has helped me to accept the things I cannot change while changing those things I can. It may be said that this ethic of flexibility is, in itself, oppressive because it allowed the teacher (who out-ranks the students) to take the room and force adaptability. However, it is not the ethic of flexibility that created the injustice within the university structure, but the structure itself. Freire has been described as “a man of hope, simulated by realistic and attainable aspirations” (Rossatto 2008, 157). Still, such flexibility may be at odds with Freirean pedagogy in that it does not increase students’ belief that they can change the structure. Perhaps, flexibility and realism might be balanced against hope and action for change. It is possible to be too flexible, accepting too much the structure and, resultantly, stifle student agency. This instance was also coded under the next theme, *pedagogical missteps*, because it represents a missed opportunity for me to find some way to empower the students.

Students had more opportunities to lead conversation as the semester continued. After listening to John Coltrane’s *Impressions* in December, Caitlin (not me, as the teacher) began the conversation.

Caitlin: So, they’re writing like one chord, but the piano’s playing two chords, using the notes of the mode and playing as many chords as he wants, perhaps.

DS: Right, within the Dorian mode. It’s written as chords here, but really he’s thinking modes.

Malachi: [Doodling on chords within the D Dorian mode]

DS: So, the piano has a lot of leeway within that Dorian mode.

Caitlin: How interesting.

Malachi: I understand that he was changing stuff, and it sounds like there are more chords than are written.

DS: [Goes over to the piano to demonstrate the Dorian scales]

Malachi: So with a raised 6. [Doodles and finds a repetitive pattern that works]

Caitlin: [Comes to the piano]. At the end I was hearing this [plays a pattern in the higher register]

[Malachi and Caitlin play back and forth on the piano and figure out a pattern that works. I walk back to my vibraphone and allow them space to work]

Caitlin: That's kind of interesting because in the whole piece is A-B-A, and there's just a half step in-between tonalities, and these chords, again, just a tone between them.

Malachi: [Toward DS] I know it's D Dorian, but we're not really just limited to just these notes, right?

DS: You have to make it interesting, even though it only has two chords in it. So we're going to pull from everything that we have done so far, which is playing chordally, you might pull from the blues, and the free jazz stuff we did, where you had to create ideas off of nothing. (December 5, 2013)

Caitlin, by the end of the semester, seemed to really find her voice as a leader during interactions like this. In a way, she was empowered to critique her world through the jazz combo, by being empowered to take lead in class. Two of the students, being violinists, had little opportunity for previous jazz instruction.

For the two violinists, jazz combos might be the only jazz performing opportunity they have, since those instruments are not usually part of the big band tradition. This is one of the reasons I listen to so much jazz combo music; as a vibraphonist, most of the repertoire I most appreciate is small ensemble jazz like Modern Jazz Quartet, Gary Burton, Caribbean Jazz Project, and Roy Ayers. (October 29, 2013)

My own performance experience as a vibraphonist dictated my appreciation for jazz combos. I began to view my praxis as providing an opportunity "that affords them agency and opportunities to improvise on their instrument that might not be part of the big band tradition" (October 29, 2013). The increased opportunity for improvisation in a jazz combo (in comparison to big band), and the small class sizes might have helped facilitate student comfort with critiquing their worlds, musically and through talking. In this way, this theme connects to the first, as an evolution of my understanding of dialogue.

Pedagogical Missteps

*Not tyrannical
Nor a laissez-faire approach,
Walking a tight rope
(November 15, 2013)*

The third theme of my evolving praxis was *Pedagogical Missteps*. Many missteps were due to not knowing a lot about Freire's thinking until mid- to late- semester, after engaging with his work. In these missteps, I embodied the "unfinished" (Freire 1998, 52) nature of the teacher/student, essential to Freirean pedagogy. Two

pedagogical missteps were discussed above. The first, my inability to have the students chose songs early in the semester, resolved itself during the semester as students felt more *empowered to critique their worlds*. The second possible misstep was my handling of the room situation; I applied an ethic of flexibility and may have missed an opportunity to foster activism. I will share a third *pedagogical misstep* here. By November 8th, the *Jazz Combo Lab* was working on jazz ballads, which were particularly challenging for Malachi, because the piano voicings were causing problems. After playing through *My Funny Valentine*, we returned to *Blue Monk*, and I had the students improvise a pattern, which could then be taught to the whole group and used as a comping figure during some of the solos. In my journal I wrote,

Next I had the students improvise, and then write out a harmony part for *Blue Monk*, and of the three, we all learned Malachi's. I'm not sure how democratically I handled this, because when ultimately the three members weren't able to decide on one to do, I chose Malachi's because I thought it would work best for . . . a composed line to be played behind soloists. I then comped on the piano while Malachi taught the group his part. (November 8, 2013)

Another reason I chose Malachi's harmonic line was to empower him, after he had difficulties with the ballads. I share this reflection because it demonstrated one of the times I feel I left a democratic teaching style. Freire (1998) suggested that both authoritarian and *laissez-faire* teachers hinder students' freedom. A balance of authoritarian and *laissez-faire* pedagogy became an issue for me as I tried to implement Freirean pedagogy, as my own teaching might at times lean toward the *laissez-faire*.

A More Critical Praxis

*Teachers and students
Are people, improvising
Co-forming meaning
(November 30, 2013)*

The fourth theme of my evolving praxis was *A More Critical Praxis*. I dedicated two weeks to free-jazz in November. During the week before the second free-jazz class, I had students find free-jazz tunes they liked, and post them to the *Jazz Combo Lab's* Facebook page. Both Ronan and Malachi posted videos. In class, we talked a little about the Ronan's Facebook post—*Pithecanthropus Erectus*, by Charles Mingus. I gathered some information about it from Wikipedia, which I read to the students,

According to Mingus' liner notes, the title song is a ten-minute tone poem, depicting the rise of man from his hominid roots (*Pithecanthropus erectus*) to an eventual downfall due to "his own failure to realize the inevitable emancipation of those he sought to enslave, and his greed in attempting to stand on a false security." (Wikipedia.com, *Pithecanthropus Erectus* (album))

This provided the class with fodder for critical dialogue, including how Mingus's composition ends in such a way that it sounded, to the *Jazz Combo Lab* students, hopeful—perhaps that humankind might *evolve* past its desire to enslave others.

Ronan: It translates to upright ape-man, which holds a dual meaning mainly because Charles Mingus plays an upright bass.

Me: They're improvising on this idea, and in the beginning it sounds like pretty standard stuff. And then whenever it comes to man's "failure to realize emancipation," it seems to become really chaotic, and almost ugly. But it comes back together at the end.

Aiden: It might also mean the enslavement of plants and animals. We need plants and animals to survive, and eventually all of the resources we need to live, eventually they'll run out and that's it. No more man. (November 21, 2013)

We ended up talking about historical slavery, social slavery, and wage slavery. Giroux (2011) suggested Freire's teaching is about "soaring beyond the immediate confines of one's experiences, [and] entering into a critical dialogue with history" (155). This was the first point in the semester where I felt our dialogue began to approach the historical nature of Freirean praxis.

Since Freire's teachings are also about "imagining a future that would not merely reproduce the present" (155), I directed students—as a group—to compose a free-jazz piece around licks (motifs) and chord progressions they improvised, which I then wrote on the chalkboard (see figure 1). For an example of what one of these sessions sounded like, listen to "Riley's Colorful Socks" (<http://youtu.be/lqoVXuAlAF0>). In "Alone for Thanksgiving [No Home]," Ronan expressed his disappointment at being unable to afford returning home for Thanksgiving break. He felt he was fortunate though, because he would return home for winter break. He asked the other combo lab members to consider, while they performed, students whose homes were even more distant, such as international students, who often are unable to return home even for the extended winter and summer breaks. These conversations required "incalculable personal and social

investment” (Benedict and Schmidt 2007, 33) among the students/teachers and teacher/student, and seemed to move toward Freirean dialogue as transformation. After performing “Alone for Thanksgiving [No Home],” the students had this conversation:

Ronan: Yeah, that was cool.

Aiden: It was more melancholy, I would say, than depressing. It wasn’t like, “oh my life sucks.” It was like, “I guess I’ll be alone for a week and then . . . happy ending, I guess.” (November 21, 2013)

The students seemed to have different intentions for performing the piece, which unfolded first through conversation, and then through improvising together, and finally through conversation.

These conversations may have provided an example of Freirean “*ruptura*” (Freire and Horton 1990, 38), a breaking with beliefs through creative action and dialogue, because these students were considering the dehumanizing nature of loneliness inherent in the structure of the traditional college experience in America. Abrahams (2005b) wrote, “Believing that teaching was a conversation or dialogue between the teacher and the student, Freire posed problems for his students that caused them to take what they already knew and understood from their world outside the classroom and connect it to the goals of literacy, namely the abilities to read and write the language” (3). Viewing the free improvisation lessons as problem posing pedagogy, the students/teachers and teacher/student co-posed problems (in this case licks and chord progressions) that were co-solved through musical performance. Further, these student-composed free improvisations were connected to their experiences—in the case of “Alone for Thanksgiving [No Home]” the experience of loneliness—and began to humanize and transform their worlds. As Freire (1970/93) wrote, “It is to engage in authentic transformation of reality in order, by humanizing that reality, to humanize women and men” (183).



Figure 1: "Alone for Thanksgiving [No Home]"

*Demanding freedom,
Jazz, as critical subject
Democratizes
(November 21, 2013)*

Conclusions

This autoethnography provided an opportunity to document my initial experience with Freirean pedagogy as well as my using of Freirean ideas during the semester. It should, therefore, be read not as an advanced Freirean application in a jazz ensemble, but as an initial experience with and step toward Freirean praxis. This, taken in conjunction with the subjective nature of self-study, and with the lack of a clear Freirean method for such an ensemble in music education literature, shows the possible necessity for Freirean applications for music outside of the general music setting.

How appropriate did I find the teachings of Paulo Freire for a university-level, improvisational, small ensemble class? Ultimately, I believe Freirean pedagogy

expanded my thinking and, to a lesser extent, teaching praxis, but there were difficulties. Many difficulties I experienced were developing an understanding of Freire during the semester, and challenges to Freire's pedagogy I shared in the introduction. "One of the biggest difficulties with Freirean pedagogy I needed to overcome was my incredulity toward the oppressed/oppressor Hegelian binary, central to Freirean pedagogy" (October 26, 2013). Macedo (2000) argued that Paulo Freire's pedagogy is a "Pedagogy of *the Oppressed*" (not merely of disenfranchisement among university students), and therefore was understood variously as appropriate and inappropriate for my praxis. At an American university the students are fairly privileged—especially in comparison to *the oppressed* in Chile, Brazil, Guinea Bissau, or Nicaragua, where Freire implemented his adult-literacy campaigns (Kirkendall 2010).

Macedo (2000) described the oppressed/oppressor binary as an essential part of Freire's analysis.

If you have an 'oppressed,' you must have an 'oppressor' . . . '*Pedagogy of the Disenfranchised*' dislodges the agent of the action while leaving in doubt who bears the responsibility for such action. This leaves the ground wide open for blaming the victim of disenfranchisement for his or her own disenfranchisement. (21)

Conceiving critical consciousness through the lens of multiple subjectivities (Roberts 2000) allowed me to conceive how individuals might be *the oppressed* in one arena, but an *oppressor* another. Both myself as teacher/student, and the four Jazz Combo Lab students/teachers can be understood as oppressors and oppressed in various arenas on a dialectical experience of evolving conscientization. This exploration of Freirean praxis in my own teaching empowered me to begin to consider teaching music to be about more than mere sonic matters. The discussion of Charles Mingus's *Pithecanthropus Erectus*, in both my success and where I could have done better as a teacher/student, opened my mind to possibilities for a more critical music praxis that considers racism in its historical and present-day relevance. Ultimately I viewed my teaching praxis as a modified-Freirean praxis—modified for my evolving understanding of the oppressed/oppressor binary, and began to construct a praxis appropriate for a performance ensemble.

Regardless of whether this autoethnographic reflective teaching experiment can be viewed as a successful implementation of Freirean pedagogy in a university-level jazz combo laboratory, my personal teaching praxis was enriched, taking the

thoughts of an important pedagogue in adult education and making an effort to incorporate some of his pedagogy. I learned, first hand, that this type of pedagogy is difficult (for me) to implement in a musical performance ensemble, and that Freirean pedagogy requires continued reflective praxis. Since the completion of this study, I attended a number of workshops conducted by Freirean teachers. On reflection, it is essential to see Freirean teaching in action to truly understand some of the more difficult (and not well described) Freirean pedagogical techniques such as codification and the development of generative themes. Throughout the semester I made choices to incorporate some aspects of Freirean pedagogy and to discard others. These decisions were based on what I felt I understood at that point during the semester. How successful was I at implementing Freirean pedagogy? To answer this question I have to explicate my goals as a teacher of a performance ensemble. I felt my most successful lessons were the free improvisation lessons. The existing literature on Freirean music education described how lessons might be incorporated in general music settings. Also, I was never able to incorporate generative themes (Freire 1970/93; Freire 1978; Purcell-Gates and Waterman 2000) since my initial learning about Freirean pedagogy began with the start of the semester. I only began to grasp this concept near the end of the semester, and began to allow students to choose more of the repertoire (a weak substitute for fully generative themes).

In future semesters, co-constructing the syllabus with students might make an interesting exploration into incorporating generative themes in this ensemble. Poetry is often used in classroom settings to generate the generative themes because these themes need to be tied to 1) the students' personal experiences and 2) be emotionally expressed. In redoing this laboratory, beginning with free improvisation might provide a way for students to compose their generative themes. My use of conversation as dialogue, and also music improvisation as a form of dialogue, while in line to Spruce's (2012) understanding of music as *much richer discourse*, seemed to fall short of Freirean dialogue, which is expressly political. While both improvised music and verbal dialogue can be humanizing, words have definite meanings that can clearly express injustices. The problem with music improvisation as dialogue (for Freirean pedagogy) comes in codification of generative themes—if the generative themes are going to explore political inequities then codes need to be explored for their root causes and those things that cultivate the code. And further, the university

structure, which set this course as a jazz course, may have set me in the position of an evangelizer (Esteva, Stuchul and Prakash 2005), evangelizing these students to a musical style they might not have listened to regularly. Certainly, I introduced them to much jazz music. Nonetheless, the idea that jazz improvisation democratizes a performance ensemble seems in line with the literature that suggests, “people *learn* democracy just like we learn all important things” (Minch and Sanders 2009, 239). In this way, it may be that student/teachers and teacher/students are forming habits of democracy through the style of music chosen.

How do students’ confidence and ability at improvisation improve during the class? My teaching of student confidence was guided by pedagogical themes from my previous research in confident music improvising (Shevock in-press). The essential themes of that research were *listening*, *sequential experiences*, and *criticism-free environment*. I dedicated a healthy amount of class time working on developing the student ears through listening (to recordings and listening/responding across the ensemble). I sequenced instruction by choosing music with less-complex chord changes early on, to allow confidence to develop before I introduced more complex chord structures over which to improvise. I created a *criticism-free environment* through my aims to create a safe classroom space. When I had students critique each other (and me), my goal was to move them toward a more critical perspective (about the music) and empower them as agents. Since empowering students as agents is important in Freirean theory, it may be that Freirean theory is, at least at times, at odds with my previous work on confidence. Alternatively, it may be important for students to challenge their confidence to develop a more robust agency. *Criticism-free environment* might therefore be understood like an educational scaffold, which at some point must be removed.

As an autoethnography, the primary data for this is my judgment of the students’ confidence and ability. I was able to stimulate robust dialogue among students to enhance student confidence and ability. Each of the students seemed (to me) to improve as improvisers and confident musicians, crafting improvisations that employed more musical elements (pitches, dynamics, rhythmic content, structure, etc.). According to the course instructor, the four students improved considerably as jazz musicians, and according to the course evaluations, the students greatly appreciated the course design (around Freirean pedagogy). Ronan went on to play in

more advanced jazz ensembles the following semester, and I attended a performance by Malachi in the student common area, where he was playing (and singing) improvisational music confidently.

This autoethnography adds to a body of Freirean music education literature, and shares successes and challenges unique to constructing a Freirean performance ensemble, and especially as it pertains to an ensemble teacher approaching Freirean theory for the first time. An obvious limitation was the use of *jazz* only, though in line with Freire's insistence on using the *dominant pattern* (while *jazz* isn't the dominant pattern in university music departments, it is the dominant pattern for learning improvisation, and it is a dominant pattern in comparison with other musics), and future research might allow students to choose improvisational styles early in the teaching semester. Further research might also extend this current study by further implementing Freirean pedagogy into a performance ensemble, whether jazz or not.

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Notes

¹ It may seem that using the colloquial “my students” here (I also use “my students” on the 17th page of this paper) would be un-Freirean because “my” implies possession. It would be possible to use “students/teachers,” which I use later in the paper. However, using Google Scholar, a search of *Freire + “my students”* reveals many results. In fact, the phrase “my students” is used in Freirean author Shirley Steinberg’s (1995) interview of Freirean teachers Peter McLaren and Joe Kincheloe. The use of “my students” here is not intended to express ownership, but rather is used in common terminology (*my in being with the students*).

² Freire's goal was to understand where his students were in relation to critical thinking. For instance, in Brazil, students were "asked if they believed in werewolves" (Kirkendall 2010, 48). I assume students who believe in werewolves fit into the category, magical thinkers. At this point in the semester (9/5), I did not know enough about Freirean critical thinking to design survey questions to get at conscientization.

³ Learning is often co-constructed in Freirean pedagogy (but not always—see some of the issues with Freire's implementation of the adult literacy program in Guinea Bissau described in Kirkendall, 2010), especially through generative themes (see discussion later in this paper about my hopes for future implementations of Freirean pedagogy). However, in this October 28 journal entry, I am referring to the larger construct of class format. Even providing room for development of generative themes, the space for and format of the co-construction of generative themes must be planned (constructed) by the teacher.

⁴ In this case *developing* is viewed as confidence at improvising, performing the pieces, and playing together well as subjectively (as an autoethnography, by myself) judged.

About the Author

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