Lumen Prize Application

Part I: Preliminary Information

Title: The effects of learning jazz improvisation on student performance in second language studies

Names: (Dr. Matthew Buckmaster)

Abstract:

A few decades ago the idea of teaching jazz in a classroom might have been quickly rejected. Early jazz musicians learned jazz primarily through listening to recordings and live performances of the great musicians who came before them (Metzger, 1996). Over time jazz education in the classroom setting has become a widely discussed topic within the music education community (Whyton, 2006). Many jazz educators explain that learning to improvise is similar to learning a second language (Velleman, 1978). Skills involved in learning improvisation are closely related to those involved in second language learning (Velleman, 1978). Listening, building a vocabulary, and practicing the language are crucial factors in learning both improvisation and a second language (Mackenzie, 2000; Velleman, 1978). My research focuses on the relationship between learning jazz improvisation and a second language and how it affects students’ skills – potentially illustrating the benefit jazz education can be to academic studies.

Background Statement:

As the daughter of a music teacher, I was raised in a very musical home. I thrived in my music classes at school and took every opportunity available to experience something new in music. In the sixth grade I heard the school jazz ensemble perform and was determined to join. I could play the flute but decided to learn to play the saxophone – an instrument that caught my
attention at the ensemble’s performance. With some help from my teachers I taught myself how to play the alto saxophone and played with the jazz ensemble the following year.

I loved jazz and enjoyed being in the ensemble. Soon, the subject of improvisation came up during rehearsals and I quickly learned to fear this strange new concept of composing a melody on the spot. All my life I had been taught to rely on the musical notation on a page for the right notes to play, and now the music in front of me had sections of blank measures of music with nothing but chord symbols above them, denoting the progression of musical harmonies. Despite my fear, I knew that improvisation was something I needed to learn to do. While in high school, I attended workshops on jazz improvisation and did my best to understand the theory behind it and conquer my fear; yet, I continued to struggle.

In my first year at Elon University, under the instruction of Professor Jon Metzger, I started feeling more comfortable with jazz theory and improvisation. With my newfound understanding, I discovered an inkling of confidence that truly improved my playing. As an aspiring music educator I am determined to become an effective and inspiring jazz educator as well, so my future students can gain this confidence and learn to improvise before they can learn to fear it.

Throughout the many jazz workshops and classes I attended over the past several years, there was one idea I heard everywhere I went – the idea that learning jazz improvisation is like learning a second language. After some preliminary research on the subject, I discovered many techniques used in second language learning do, in fact, mirror those used in learning to improvise (Mackenzie, 2000; Velleman, 1978). Things such as listening exercises, building a vocabulary, composition skills, and oral practice are common to both the learning of a second language and jazz improvisation (Henry, 1993; Kuzmich, Jr., 1980; Mackenzie, 2000; Murphy,
With this realization, I wondered if these commonalities could result in a student performing well in one subject while learning the other concurrently. If a student excels at aural skills in an improvisation class, would he or she not also do well with listening excerpts in a second language setting? Through my research I hope to find a correlation that will illuminate the importance of including jazz in the music classroom, and that supporting evidence will be found suggesting the importance of music for improving students’ skills in academic classes.

**Part II: Narrative**

**Focus:**

The focus of my research is to explore the relationship between learning jazz improvisation and second language learning. By exploring this relationship, my findings may demonstrate the value of jazz in music education as well as the importance of music education in relation to student performance in their core academic studies. This research will not only contribute to my own developing educational philosophy and approach to teaching music, but also to the knowledge base of the scholarly community of music educators and the ongoing effort to strengthen jazz education.

**Proposed experiences:**

In preparation for the fall semester of my junior year I will spend the spring and summer of 2009 designing a series of workshops on jazz improvisation that I will implement in the fall. I plan to attend the National Jazz Workshops at Shenandoah University and the two-day seminar with Jamey Aebersold, an internationally recognized leader in jazz education, at the University of Louisville. Attending these clinics will allow me to enhance my own skills as an improviser and will assist me in developing the educational pedagogy to design and teach my workshops. I
also plan on observing and working with improvisation clinicians at Western Connecticut State University’s band and jazz camp; I attended this camp as a high school student and have kept in contact with the director of the program. This experience will introduce me to what it is like to be an instructor rather than a student in a workshop.

In the fall I will implement my research at a local middle school, which will follow an experimental design. The data collection phase will commence with a pre-test to evaluate students’ skills and knowledge of jazz improvisation. This evaluation will include a review of each student’s improvisatory skill on his or her instrument and the completion of a written evaluation of their jazz theory. An audio recording of each student improvising, while accompanied by a play-along CD, will be reviewed by Elon music department faculty and evaluated using a rubric that we will design. This will allow me to measure the ability of the students before the workshops and provide me with data I can compare with my results.

To evaluate students’ skills in their second language class I will interview the students’ second language teachers regarding student ability as seen in class and on tests. Observing these performance indicators will allow me to see how each student’s abilities progress throughout the semester. Specific skills areas of focus include listening comprehension, vocabulary, and conversational skills; skills that may be directly related to learning jazz improvisation. I will work with one of the language teachers to design a test targeting these skills to evaluate student ability both before and after the implementation of the workshop series.

Once I have obtained each student’s pre-test evaluation I will conduct the treatment of my research: six workshops on jazz improvisation. These interactive lessons will focus on various aspects of basic jazz improvisation, focusing on listening, building a vocabulary, and playing. It is the goal at the conclusion of the treatment that students will be able to confidently
improvise a melody on their own. Afterward, I will evaluate the students’ knowledge and skills in jazz improvisation using via the post-test. To assess jazz theory knowledge students will re-take the pre-test and play an improvised solo, accompanied by a play-along CD, which will be recorded for evaluation by the same panel of Elon music department faculty. I will also request an evaluation and reflection from the cooperating teacher.

At the conclusion of the workshops I will also meet with the language teachers to discuss the progress of each student. Attention will be given to performance in class and on tests in listening comprehension, vocabulary, and conversational skills. The pre-test will be used as the post-test to evaluate student progress in these skill areas and this will allow for direct comparison of results.

In the winter of my junior year I will study abroad. One program I am considering is the history and culture class in Ghana. Jazz has roots in many styles of music, including music from the indigenous cultures of Africa where repetition and improvisation are especially important (Suhor, 1986). This program will allow me to look deeper into the musical culture and history of native African people. I would like to learn more about the role of improvisation in tribal music and how music and language are interconnected within tribal culture and society. This experience will provide a fascinating historical perspective on improvisation and its relationship to language. Should I choose to study abroad in Greece, in the Classics in Context course, I would attend performances of jazz during my stay there. Since jazz is a truly American music it would be interesting to see how different societies play and appreciate jazz. Either of these study abroad experiences would provide me with a wonderful perspective on jazz’s historical and cultural place outside of the United States.
In the spring of 2010 I plan to analyze and interpret my findings from the fall semester research. I will compile this data into a scholarly article with the goal of professional publication. I will finalize my article and submit it for publication in one of the several journals published by the National Association for Music Education (MENC). The process of submitting my article for publication will continue into the summer.

In the fall of my senior year I plan to apply to present my research at the North Carolina Music Educators Association (NCMEA) Conference. This will be an exciting way for me to share my research and attend other presentations during the conference. Undergraduate research is uncommon in the field of music education, and presenting at NCMEA will be an exciting opportunity for me to share my findings with this community of music educators.

During the following winter term I will be developing my pedagogical methods and designing my focused unit for my student teaching internship in the spring. For this student teaching experience I am required to prepare and teach a series of ten lessons in the classroom, and I plan to create a focused unit on jazz improvisation. This is an exciting opportunity to synthesize my research and preparation for my career as an educator by implementing successful aspects of my workshops into my lesson plans.

In the spring of my senior year I plan on presenting my research at SURF and implementing my focused unit on jazz improvisation in the classroom where I will be doing my student teaching. These will be invaluable experiences in my preparation for my career as a music educator. I am confident the experiences I provide for the students in my workshops will be positive ones that will encourage a curiosity in jazz that will continue long after my workshops are completed.
Proposed products:

The three major products of my research will be 1) my research, including compiled results, observation journal, and evaluations, 2) an article to be published in a professional journal or magazine, and 3) a focused unit on jazz improvisation for middle school band.

During the fall semester of my junior year I will maintain a journal of each workshop in my series and my observations throughout. The evaluations of student knowledge and skills after the workshop series, paired with progress reports from the students’ language teachers and my research literature review, will help me to draw inferences regarding the possible correlation between how students learn to improvise a jazz solo and learn a second language.

After compiling all of the results and observations I will write and submit for publication an article reviewing my research and findings. I plan to submit my article to *JazzEd* and one or more of MENC’s (National Association for Music Education) publications, including *Teaching Music, Music Educators Journal*, and *Journal for Research in Music Education*. I may also submit my article to the *North Carolina Music Educators Association (NCMEA) Journal*.

My final product will be my focused unit on jazz improvisation. The focused unit will address the knowledge learned, key understanding of the content and skill sets, state and national standards, goals of the unit, lesson plan objectives, a universal design for learning, and a description of how students will be assessed. I will implement this unit during my student teaching in the spring of senior year.

Each of these products will strengthen my learning as an aspiring educator. I am an advocate for Elon’s philosophy of “life long learning” and feel these experiences and products will encourage me to continue to pursue my research interests after graduating from Elon and throughout my career as a music educator. It is my ultimate goal to contribute to the ongoing
discussion of how to improve jazz education. This research and its products will act as a genesis for my pursuit of ways to create positive and inspiring experiences with jazz for future students.

**Part III: Feasibility**

**Feasibility statement:**

As a music education major and an Elon College Fellow, my research plan is an ambitious one. I have, however, constructed my timeline and proposed experiences and products to support and enhance my required experiences for both my major and my Fellows program, in order to create a synthesized learning experience that brings all of my interests and programs together. By working with middle school students I will gain classroom experience in addition to those hours required for my major. This will help prepare me for my student teaching during the spring semester of my senior year. In researching aspects of jazz improvisation I will utilize the classes I have taken and will take towards my jazz studies minor. Further, my research will act as my Fellows research project, and by presenting at SURF I will satisfy that requirement of my Fellows program. Finally, this research will be a great asset to me as I construct my focused unit plan for my student teaching. This is a major component of the student teaching experience and it will be rewarding to have the opportunity to create a unit about something I am passionate about. In addition to this, I have the resource of the accomplished music department faculty to aid me in any questions I might have regarding jazz, improvisation, and music education. Several faculty members have already expressed willingness to help me in designing and implementing my research and I look forward to working with them as well as my faculty mentor. With my projected timeline and the support of the music faculty I am confident that this ambitious project is a realistic one.
Budget:

- Tuition………………………………………………………………………………………….$10,000
- Airfare (for Aebersold camp)……………………………………………………………...$500
- Program/workshop costs………………………………………………………………………….$800

National Jazz Workshop at Shenandoah Valley University:

Registration fees, tuition, housing, food, etc. – $400

Two-day seminar w/ Jamey Aebersold

Tuition, airport pick-up/drop-off service, two/three nights at a hotel, food
– approx. $400(+-)

- Study abroad………………………………………………………………………………………….$3,000
- Gas………………………………………………………………………………………………………….$200

To get to and from middle school for all workshops in fall ’09

Gas money for National Jazz Workshop over summer (driving from CT to VA)

and North Carolina Music Educators Association Conference in fall 2010

- Materials……………………………………………………………………………………………….$200

Aebersold books and/or various play-along books/CDs ($15-$20 per book)

(There are over 100 volumes of these books, written and published by Jamey Aebersold. These books are a staple in any jazz educator’s library of materials.)

- Discretionary funds………………………………………………………………………………………….$300

Stamps, letterhead for article submission, application fees, etc.

- Total Budget: $15,000
# Timeline:

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<tr>
<th>Summertime</th>
<th>Proposed Experiences</th>
<th>Proposed Product(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summer 2009</strong></td>
<td>Research design &amp; logistics</td>
<td>Learn about jazz pedagogy and improve my own skills as an improviser</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attend National Jazz Workshop at Shenandoah University (Virginia)</td>
<td>Learn about Aebersold’s technique of jazz pedagogy first hand; feedback on how to structure my workshops</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jamey Aebersold Summer 2-Day Jazz Seminar (Kentucky)</td>
<td>Gain experience helping jazz rehearsals/improvisation workshops</td>
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<td>Western CT State University Summer Band and Jazz Camp (Danbury, CT)</td>
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<td><strong>Fall 2009</strong></td>
<td>Active research</td>
<td>Personal journal documenting observations before and during workshops</td>
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<td>Pre-test to evaluate student knowledge and skills prior to workshops</td>
<td>Preliminary data; statistics analyzing findings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Implement improvisation workshops at a middle school</td>
<td>Journal of student progress in second language classroom as described through interview with teachers</td>
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<td>At the end of the semester gather feedback and evaluate progress</td>
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<td>Interview with foreign language teacher(s) about students’ performance in class, on quizzes, etc. both before, during, and after workshops</td>
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<td>Semester</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2010</td>
<td>Finishing research&lt;br&gt;Study Abroad possibilities&lt;br&gt;- Ghana: History &amp; Culture&lt;br&gt;- Greece: Classics in Context</td>
<td>Outline for article&lt;br&gt;Supporting literature/observations on correlations between music/improvisation and language to include in article</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td><strong>Compiling results/data analysis</strong>&lt;br&gt;Write article&lt;br&gt;Submit article for professional publication&lt;br&gt;Apply to present at North Carolina Music Educators Association (NCMEA) Conference</td>
<td>Draft of article&lt;br&gt;Draft of article&lt;br&gt;Potential publication of article</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2010</td>
<td>Continue to submit for professional publication to various journals&lt;br&gt;Preparation of research presentation for NCMEA Conference</td>
<td>Potential publication of article&lt;br&gt;Presentation of research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fall 2010</td>
<td>Present research at NCMEA Conference</td>
<td>Experience of publicizing my research; receive feedback from discourse community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winter 2011</td>
<td>Developing educational method&lt;br&gt;Design Focused Unit for student teaching</td>
<td>Focused unit prepared for student teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring 2011</td>
<td>Internship (student teaching)&lt;br&gt;Present at SURF day [and potentially at the annual Elon Jazz Festival]</td>
<td>Focused unit on jazz improvisation&lt;br&gt;SURF Presentation</td>
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Reference List


**Personal Information and Signatures:**

Name: Datatel ID #:

Major: Music Education Minor: Jazz Studies

Local Address: Campus Box, Elon, NC 27244

Primary telephone: Elon email:

Started at Elon: 08/2007 Expected Graduation: 05/2011

The student’s typed name below serves as her electronic signature and indicates that the information contained in the application is accurate, and reflects her best faith plans for scholarly activities during the remaining two years at Elon. The applicant hereby gives the Selection Committee permission to obtain a copy of current transcript and to verify that the student is in good standing at the university. Recipients of the Lumen Prize will be asked to sign a Letter of Agreement indicating their commitment to uphold the standards associated with being a Lumen Scholar.

_________________ Date 3/17/09

The faculty mentor’s typed name below serves as his electronic signature and indicates support of the proposal described herein and willingness to serve as an ongoing mentor to the applicant.

Matthew Buckmaster Date 3/17/09