

# **Improvisation as Critical Practice in Higher Music Education**

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

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# Roadmap — Five movements

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

## Where I speak from

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

## Guiding question

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# Can everyone improvise?

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

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

# **The institutional obstacle**

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

# **Why freedom becomes asymmetrical**

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

# **Critical pedagogy as a practical lens**

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Not “politics” added from outside

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

# Three shifts in the classroom

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

# **Improvisation as Critical Practice**

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

## **Indicator 1: Norms become audible**

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

→ therefore: **norms can be questioned**

## Indicator 2: Agency redistributed

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

## Indicator 3: Quality criteria shift

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

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

→ to **care for the shared space**

# Methodological pivot

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

**TRICK**

# TRICK as Pedagogical Infrastructure

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

From educator **Esther Wojcicki**

Re-contextualized here for **improvisation pedagogy**

Not **what to play**

→ but **conditions for participation**

Pedagogical **infrastructure**, not a style

# TRICK in Practice: What Each Value Enables

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**TRICK = conditions we design**

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

# Classroom Practices: How to Read the Examples

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

# Classroom Practices:

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## Identity & Constellation Shifts

- **Sonic “Business Card”**

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

**Values** → Trust · Independence · Kindness

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

- **Solos within the Tutti**

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

**Values** → Trust · Independence · Collaboration · Respect

**Effect** → constellations shift; silence becomes action

# Classroom Practices:

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## Listening & Feedback

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

**Task** → performers play; peers listen; roles rotate

**Values** → Kindness · Respect · Trust

**Effect** → listening becomes creative; criteria become horizontal

# Implications: Autonomy & Shared Space

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## Core claim

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

## Institutional role

A shared space across:

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

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

# **From Classroom Practice to Institutional Change**

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## **Three roles of Improvisation in Academia**

### **1.Epistemological**

Emergent & situated knowledge (beyond score-only knowing)

### **2.Ethical–political**

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

### **3.Pedagogical**

Agency + co-responsibility + critical listening

# From Decorative to Structural

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**If the institution takes these roles seriously:**

Improvisation stops being decorative

→ becomes structural

## Final question

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

**Thank you**

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**Improvisation — pedagogy — critical listening**

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