

**Developing the whole musician:
an investigation into the use of improvisation in piano
lessons**

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Abstract

Many researchers recognise the importance of improvisation in instrumental teaching. Despite the evidence of its many benefits, recent research has revealed that many piano teachers do not include improvisation in lessons with students. This study investigated the influences on piano teachers' pedagogy to determine what factors impacted how frequently they taught improvisation. An online survey of piano teachers was carried out, attracting responses from 134 teachers across the UK. The results of the survey first present data about piano teachers' own experiences in improvisation. Secondly, the influences on teachers' pedagogy are reported. Finally, the results present an insight into how improvisation is taught in piano lessons. The discussion highlights that an understanding of how to teach improvisation is a significant influence on how frequently improvisation is taught. Additionally, the use of improvisation as a teaching method is discussed. The conclusion argues that there is a need for piano teachers to have greater access to taught instrumental teaching courses to encourage them to reflect on their pedagogy and teaching practice.

Contents

List of figures	9
Chapter 1: Introduction	11
1.1 the use of improvisation in piano lessons	11
1.2 Current research into improvisation in piano lessons	12
1.3 Purpose of investigation	13
Chapter 2: Literature Review	15
2.1 History of Improvisation in Piano Teaching	15
2.2 Definition of Improvisation in Instrumental Teaching	17
2.3 Benefits of Improvisation in Instrumental Lessons	18
2.4 Influences on Teachers' Pedagogy	22
Chapter 3: Methodology	27
3.1 Survey design	27
3.2 Ethics	29
3.3 Pilot study and distribution	30
3.4 Data analysis	30
Chapter 4: Findings	32
4.1 What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?	32
<i>Experiences as learners</i>	32
<i>Experiences as musicians</i>	35
<i>Confidence in improvisation</i>	35
4.2 What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?	37
<i>Do piano teachers include improvisation in lessons?</i>	37
<i>Teachers' awareness of current research</i>	40
<i>Teachers' musical experiences</i>	42
<i>Experiences as learners</i>	42

<i>Level of Music and Performance qualifications</i>	43
<i>Experiences as musicians</i>	43
<i>Teachers' musical identity</i>	45
<i>How regularly teachers improvise</i>	46
<i>Level of confidence in improvisation</i>	47
<i>Enjoyment of improvisation</i>	48
<i>How teachers identify themselves</i>	49
<i>Understanding of how to teach improvisation</i>	51
<i>Membership of professional organisations</i>	51
<i>Professional Development</i>	52
<i>Music teaching and instrumental teaching qualifications</i>	54
<i>Training in how to teach improvisation</i>	55
<i>Level of confidence in teaching improvisation</i>	57
<i>Teaching literature and resources used</i>	59
<i>Teaching resources used</i>	59
<i>Resources used in teaching improvisation</i>	60
4.3 How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?	60
<i>Resources used in teaching improvisation</i>	61
<i>How improvisation is taught</i>	62
<i>Teaching beginners</i>	62
<i>Playing with others</i>	63
<i>Providing boundaries</i>	63
<i>Linking it into learning</i>	63
<i>Using stimuli</i>	64
<i>Use of musical devices</i>	64
<i>Improvising within musical genres</i>	64
4.4 Summary	67
Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion	67
5.1 Discussion	67
<i>Piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation</i>	67
<i>Factors influencing piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in lessons</i>	68

<i>Teachers' awareness of current research</i>	68
<i>Teachers' musical experiences</i>	68
<i>Teachers' musical identity</i>	68
<i>Understanding of how to teach improvisation</i>	69
<i>How improvising is taught in piano lessons today</i>	71
5.2 Conclusion	71
5.3 Limitations of the survey	72
5.4 Impact of the survey	73
5.5 Areas for future research	74
References	75
Appendices	79
Appendix 1: Copy of the survey	79
Appendix 2: Ethical approval form	95

List of figures

Figure 1	Circle of development	19
Figure 2	Musical activities included in respondents' lessons as beginners	32
Figure 3	Overall training respondents received in improvisation	34
Figure 4	How often respondents engaged in playing activities on the piano	35
Figure 5	Respondents' confidence in playing activities	36
Figure 6	How frequently respondents include activities in lessons	37
Figure 7	Percentage of respondents who taught improvisation	38
Figure 8	Percentage of respondents according to which statement they chose	39
Figure 9	Respondents' opinions on areas of learning improved through improvisation	40
Figure 10	Correlation between number of benefits indicated and how frequently improvisation was taught	41
Figure 11	Correlation between experience as beginners and how frequently improvisation was taught	42
Figure 12	Correlation between overall experience as learners and how frequently improvisation is taught	43
Figure 13	Musical styles in which respondents had experience	44
Figure 14	Correlation between number of styles respondents had experience in and how frequently improvisation was taught	45
Figure 15	How frequently respondents improvised on piano	46
Figure 16	Correlation between how regularly respondents improvised and how frequently improvisation was taught	47
Figure 17	Correlation between confidence in improvisation and how frequently improvisation was taught	48
Figure 18	Levels of enjoyment in playing activities	48
Figure 19	Correlation between level of enjoyment and how frequently improvisation was taught	49

Figure 20	Respondents' musical identity	50
Figure 21	Correlation between identity as an improviser and how frequently improvisation was taught	50
Figure 22	Correlation between membership of professional organisations and how frequently improvisation was taught	52
Figure 23	Correlation between frequency of CPD and how frequently improvisation was taught	53
Figure 24	Correlation between method of CPD and how frequently improvisation was taught	53
Figure 25	Music teaching and instrumental teaching qualifications held	54
Figure 26	Correlation between teaching qualifications and how frequently improvisation was taught	55
Figure 27	Amount of teacher training in improvisation respondents had received	56
Figure 28	Correlation between teacher training in improvisation and how frequently improvisation was taught	56
Figure 29	Levels of confidence in teaching	57
Figure 30	Correlation between confidence in teaching and how frequently improvisation was taught	58
Figure 31	Resources that influenced lesson content	60
Figure 32	Resources used in teaching improvisation	61
Figure 33	Ways that improvisation was included in lessons	62

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 The use of improvisation in piano lessons

Recent research has reported that many piano teachers in the UK focus on the teaching of notation, repertoire and technique. Skills such as improvisation and composition are less commonly taught. The results of the Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) indicated that whilst the majority (95.6%) of teachers who responded frequently taught note reading, 41.3% reported they rarely included improvisation. These results support the research of Gellrich and Parcutt (1998) who reported that since the mid 1800s classical piano lessons have focused on the reproductive approach of notation and repertoire, and the teaching of improvisation has become less common. In contrast, improvisation is commonly taught in the context of jazz piano lessons. This has resulted in a prevailing mind-set where improvisation is generally associated with jazz piano and classical piano is associated with notation (Ashley, 2008; Beckstead, 2013). This focus on notation at the expense of other skills in traditional piano lessons is problematic for two reasons: firstly an emphasis on note reading has been linked to a number of difficulties in instrumental learning (Chappell, 1999; Priest, 1989); secondly there are many benefits to the use of improvisation in instrumental teaching (Chappell, 1999; Peggie, 1985; Rooke 1991).

A focus on notation has been connected to a number of issues in instrumental learning. Firstly it can lead to increased stress in students, resulting in physical and technical difficulties (Chappell, 1999; Priest, 1989). This is clearly a significant issue for teachers as they endeavour to develop healthy technique in their students, allowing them to play their instrument safely. An emphasis on learning repertoire from notation also limits students' access to music to that which they can read. As their playing ability often surpasses their note reading ability (Rooke, 1991) this can lead to a decrease in motivation and enjoyment for students.

In comparison, there are many benefits associated with the use of improvisation in instrumental lessons. Improvisation places the ear at the centre of the musical experience, developing aural acuity (Chappell, 1999; Peggie, 1985). It gives students opportunities to experience musical concepts for themselves, thereby developing their

musical understanding (Azzara, 1993 and 1999; Rooke, 1991). This increase in musical understanding also aids in the development of note reading skills (Azzara, 1993). Additionally, improvisation provides both students and teachers with a method of assessing and consolidating their musical understanding (Azzara, 1999). Students' technique is positively impacted by regular improvisation, in part because it helps relieve physical tension (Priest, 1989; Rooke, 1991). This relief of tension also has an impact on the general attitude of the student, leading to increased confidence, motivation and enjoyment of playing (Addison, 1988; Rooke, 1991). In addition to these benefits, improvisation is worth teaching in instrumental lessons for its own sake. Azzara argues that 'improvisation in music plays the role that speech and conversation play in language' (1999: 22). This definition asserts the importance of improvisation and its place as a fundamental skill in instrumental teaching and learning. Without learning how to improvise, students are confined to playing music by other people (Priest, 1989). Developing students into complete musicians must involve teaching them how 'speak' on their instrument for themselves by creating their own music.

1.2 Current research into improvisation in piano lessons

Little investigation has been done into private piano teaching in the UK (Cathcart, 2013). This is despite evidence indicating that private piano teachers have a significant influence on the next generation of musicians and music teachers in this country (Cathcart, 2013). Indeed until the last 25 years, little research had been carried out into instrumental teaching and teachers as a whole (Cathcart, 2013). The lack of exploration in this area is evident in the studies available into the teaching of improvisation. Much of what has been written investigates the teaching of improvisation in school music lessons (Addison, 1988; Kanellopoulos, 1999; Koutsoupidou, 2005; Peggie, 1985) or improvisation in teacher training courses (Wright and Kanellopoulos, 2010; Bernhard, 2012). Of the research that has been done into improvisation in instrumental playing and teaching, much of it focuses on the psychological perspective (Odena and Welch, 2009; Kenny and Gellrich, 2002; Ashley, 2008; Sloboda, 2004) or on improvisation in the context of jazz music and musicians (Wilson and MacDonald, 2012; Ashley, 2008). Few studies have been

carried out into the teaching of improvisation in classical or traditional instrumental lessons in the UK.

Much of the research into the teaching of improvisation indicates its many benefits in general music education and instrumental teaching, as summarised in the previous section. Despite these benefits, reports about both classroom music teaching and instrumental teaching reveal many teachers are reluctant to teach improvisation (Cathcart, 2013; Scott, 2007; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Priest, 1989). Whilst some causes for this reluctance have been identified (McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Priest, 1989), little is known about the influences on instrumental teachers' pedagogy or the reasons behind their decision on whether or not to teach improvisation.

1.3 Purpose of the investigation

The current research into improvisation clearly demonstrates its importance in instrumental teaching, both for the impact it has on learning and as a significant skill itself. Despite these benefits, much of piano teaching focuses on notation and many teachers report they do not teach improvisation (Cathcart, 2013). In addressing the imbalance in how frequently improvisation is taught, the first step is to discover the root of the problem: what factors influence piano teachers' decisions on whether or not to teach improvisation? Understanding this issue will help provide a way forward into encouraging more teachers to include improvisation in lessons. Additionally, research into this area will provide more detail on the influences on piano teachers' pedagogy as a whole, something that has the potential to be of interest to future studies on teachers' practice. Currently, little is known about how improvisation is taught in classical piano lessons (Pressing, 2001; Wilson and MacDonald, 2012; Ashley, 2008). Research into this area will provide more detail on how improvisation is taught and the resources that teachers use. This in turn will add to the growing body of knowledge on the content of piano lessons in the UK (Cathcart, 2013).

The aim of the research is to answer the following three questions:

1. What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?
2. What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?
3. How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?

In order to answer these questions a survey of piano teachers in the UK was carried out. The following chapters present the findings and explore the implications of the results. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the current literature on the teaching of improvisation and the influences on teachers' pedagogy. Chapter 3 outlines the research method chosen for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of these results.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 History of Improvisation in Piano Teaching

Research into piano teaching in the UK is limited, with little investigation having been carried out into who piano teachers are and what they do (Cathcart, 2013; Chappell, 1999). This is despite evidence that suggests piano teachers have a significant impact on music education in the UK as a whole (Cathcart, 2013). Cathcart states that:

individual teachers have considerable influence on inspiring the next generation of musicians in the UK and the music teachers of the future (2013: 27).

Recognition of this fact in recent years has led to more investigation into the world of the private piano teacher. A recent survey of UK piano teachers, carried out in 2010 (Cathcart, 2013), revealed much about the current state of piano teaching. As well as looking into the demographics, training and qualifications of individual teachers, the survey also produced significant data on the content of lessons. Cathcart reported that UK piano teaching today is dominated by the reproductive approach, with note reading, repertoire and technique featuring heavily in lessons. 99.8% of piano teachers surveyed reported that they frequently included repertoire in their lessons and 95.6% reported they frequently included note reading. In comparison to this, 57.5% of the piano teachers reported that they rarely included composition in their lessons, and 41.3% reported that they rarely included improvisation. Composing and improvising were both in the three activities (also including sight singing) that were least frequently taught by teachers. So strong was the hold of the reproductive approach on teachers' practice that Cathcart argued a strong catalyst would be required to move piano teaching away from notation-based methods.

This focus on note reading at the expense of creating new music has not always been the case. Gellrich and Parcutt (1998) report that before the 1850s, piano performance was a creative art and it was expected that improvisation and composition were regularly included in the education of pianists. The article highlights the significant emphasis that pianists and teachers placed on improvisation in particular. It was common practice for pianists to improvise their own technical exercises, and teachers

considered it an important skill for students to have. Improvisation ‘was one of the most important means by which pianists developed virtuosity’ (Gellrich and Parcutt, 1998:8), something that is visible in the works of many composers, including Chopin and Schumann. Master musicians and composers, such as Bach, Mozart and Beethoven, were well known for their improvisatory skills (Azzara, 1999), and indeed many pieces and studies started out as improvisations that were refined and eventually written down (Azzara, 1999; Gellrich and Parcutt, 1998).

After 1850, the inclusion of improvisation in ‘classical’ piano lessons gradually became less common as the interpretation and performance of existing music took precedence (Gellrich and Parcutt, 1998). The end result of that shift is that today, improvisation is predominantly linked to jazz and is not often associated with Western Classical music (Ashley, 2008; Beckstead, 2013). Much of the research carried out into improvisation has focused on jazz music and musicians (Wilson and McDonald, 2012; Ashley, 2008). Jazz is the primary way of teaching improvisation and the majority of the teaching literature available focuses on jazz music (Kenny and Gellrich, 2002; Pressing, 2001). The resources produced by instrumental examination boards highlight this distinction between the genres, with the traditional classical exams focusing on notation and the jazz exams including improvisation. It should be noted, however, that Trinity Guildhall does not perpetuate this distinction, with composition and improvisation both included in their regular piano exams. From being a skill that was expected of all pianists, improvisation is now often limited to one musical genre.

In contrast to this, classical piano teaching has emphasised the performance of written music (Gellrich and Parcutt, 1998). This focus on notation has been linked to significant problems in instrumental playing and teaching. An emphasis on note reading leads to physical problems, a lack of awareness of muscular control and increased stress in students (Chappell, 1999; Priest, 1989). It has also been shown to decrease motivation in students (Gordon, 2015; Priest, 1989 and 1993). One possible reason for this is that playing exclusively from notation restricts students to only playing what they can read. In contrast to this, studies have demonstrated that students are capable of playing more complex music than they can read (Rooke,

1991). Limiting their access to more satisfying music in this way could lead to loss of motivation. Another potential reason is that a focus on notation requires players to concentrate on too many skills at the same time, as they attempt to balance the skills involved in playing alongside the skills involved in interpreting notation (Priest, 1993). This may lead to students becoming discouraged in their learning. Priest and Azzara call for the role of notation in music to be returned to its proper place, reminding us that reading notation is not an essential skill for expressive performance (Priest, 1989) but is in fact merely ‘the documentation of creativity’ (Azzara, 1999: 24). One possible way of addressing these issues in classical piano teaching is to raise the status of improvisation in piano lessons.

2.2 Definition of Improvisation in Instrumental Teaching

There are a number of definitions of improvisation, with writers referring to it in different ways. Addison (1988) refers to a closed approach, where improvisation is seen as a means to achieving composition. Swanwick and Tillman include improvisation in their definition of composition, defining it as ‘the briefest utterances as well as more worked out and sustained invention’ (1986: 311). Other writers (Gellrich and Parcutt, 1998) make a distinction between closed improvisation and free improvisation, where the player does not attempt to remember what is played. Other suggestions put forward in definitions of improvising refer to this idea of free improvisation: exploration (Burnard, 2000), expressiveness (Addison, 1988; Azzara, 1999; Peggie, 1985) and spontaneity (Addison, 1988; Azzara, 1993; Azarra, 1999; Brophy, 2001; Koutsoupidou, 2005; Peggie, 1985). Azzara gives a definition that perhaps sums up both the closed approach and the free approach when he says ‘improvisation in music plays the role that speech and conversation play in language’ (1999: 22). Just as some speech happens informally - in the moment - and other speech needs to be rehearsed and remembered, so the same is true for improvisation. This definition also carries with it the implication that improvisation is a natural outcome of playing an instrument, an interesting idea to have in mind when considering its place in instrumental education.

2.3 Benefits of Improvisation in Instrumental Lessons

Improvisation is an effective mechanism for developing aural acuity (Chappell, 1999; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Peggie, 1985; Rooke, 1991). Peggie (1985) and McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner (2012) argue that improvisation is essential in developing aural skills. Chappell agrees, citing a main benefit of improvisation as the fact it ‘places the development of the ear in a central position.’ (1999: 257). Young instrumentalists themselves have attested to this fact, reporting that improvisation encouraged them to listen more (Rooke, 1991). Music is primarily an aural experience (Priest, 1993) and, as such, aural acuity is an essential skill in instrumental playing and one that should be consciously developed by teachers (Azzara, 1999; Peggie, 1985; Priest, 1989 and 1993). Improvisation provides teachers with a method to develop students’ aural awareness, allowing the ear to lead the way in playing (Peggie, 1985).

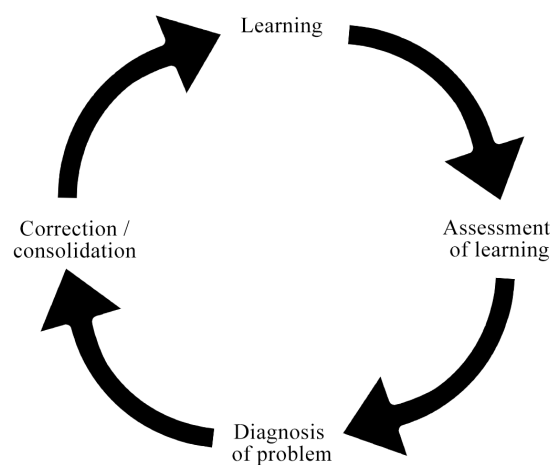
Improvisation also develops musical understanding, by providing an opportunity for instrumentalists to discover and experiment with the building blocks of music. Berkley calls composing a doorway into music, writing:

Composing gives students opportunities to explore music from the inside out and to explore inner worlds of musical expression and meaning (2001: 119).

Whilst this quote was written about composition, the same could be said for improvisation. Involving students in the act of creating music, whether through composing or improvising, allows them to experience concepts for themselves rather than simply learn about them theoretically. This gives far greater relevance to their learning, with concepts such as scales, notation and expressive features coming to life for students and being understood in new ways (Rooke, 1991). Improvisation also encourages the development of higher-order thinking skills (Azzara, 1993 and 1999). The ability to improvise successfully requires instrumentalists to understand the musical concepts they have learnt about, internalise that learning as a ‘music vocabulary’ and then to organise and manipulate those structures in order to express something (Azzara, 1993). The level of understanding that comes as the result of these activities will clearly be greater than if a student has merely learnt something in theory.

In addition to developing musical understanding, improvisation is an effective tool for the assessment of students' musical understanding, by both the teacher and the student (Azzara, 1999). Azzara says that improvisation 'open windows to [students'] musical thinking and their musical understanding' (1999: 24). He uses the example of asking a student to improvise using a similar tonal or rhythmic structure to the music they are learning, indicating how well they have understood those structures. Regular improvising also cultivates a problem-solving approach to students' playing (Rooke, 1991), encouraging them to take greater ownership over their own progress by providing them with the tools to diagnose and address problems in their own playing. Used in these ways, it seems that improvisation could create an effective circle of development (shown in Figure 1), where improvisation not only provides a vehicle for learning, but also a way of assessing that learning, a method of diagnosing problems, and finally an opportunity to correct issues and consolidate learning.

Figure 1: Circle of development



This circle of development could prove an excellent tool for formative assessment, providing a constant loop of development and feedback to both student and teacher.

The use of improvisation is also significant for the development of students' technique (Addison, 1988; Chappell, 1999; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Priest, 1989; Rooke, 1991). In her project on improvisation with young instrumentalists Rooke (1991) found that improvisation led to greater playing facility in students. McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner (2012) support this idea, arguing that

the inclusion of improvisation in instrumental learning is essential for students to reach their full technical potential. One reason for this benefit is the opportunity that improvisation gives students to work on specific motor skills before dealing with them in the context of written pieces (Rooke, 1991). A focus on notation has been linked to physical tension and a lack of awareness of muscular control (Chappell, 1999; Priest, 1989). By improvising rather than reading notation, students can focus on the task at hand without having to divide their attention between the multiple skills of reading and playing (Priest, 1993). Additionally, improvisation has been shown to have a therapeutic effect on students (Rooke, 1991), enabling them to relax and easing tension.

Other studies have demonstrated that improvisation can aid the development of note reading (Azzara, 1993; Azzara, 1999; Gordon, 2015; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Priest, 1989; McPherson and Gabrielsson, 2002). There are a number of reasons for this link. A study carried out by Azzara (1993) suggested that improvisation helped students develop a clearer understanding of the ‘tonal, rhythmic and expressive elements’ of written music (1993: 330), allowing students to be more accurate in their performance. Improvisation enables students to translate ‘signs on paper’ into music, giving them greater ownership over the music they read (Priest, 1989). Improvisation also develops the ability to audiate - or think in sound - which leads to greater comprehension of notation (Gordon, 2015; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012). Additionally, proficient sight-reading is linked to the ability to correctly infer, or improvise, notes when insufficient information has been taken in visually from the score (Lehmann and McArthur, 2002). Increased experience and confidence in improvisation will undoubtedly assist students in the development of this skill.

Improvisation also increases students’ motivation and enjoyment of playing (Addison, 1988; Allsup, 1997; Priest, 1989; Rooke, 1991). It improves students’ confidence in their playing and provides a great deal of personal satisfaction (Addison, 1988; Priest, 1989; Rooke, 1991). It has also been shown to lead to greater motivation in practice time at home, as well as in lessons (Addison, 1988; Allsup, 1997; Priest, 1989). Rooke (1991) discovered that including improvisation in lessons led to a significant

change in attitude in her students. She noted that they were happier, more relaxed and had livelier attitudes, commenting that improvisation seemed to have a cathartic effect on them. Students seemed more engaged in lessons, were more observant and asked more questions. Through improvisation, students have the opportunity to play more demanding music than they can read (Rooke, 1991), leading to greater satisfaction and motivation in their playing. The fact that improvisation has a positive effect on many aspects of instrumental playing may also lead to increased enjoyment in learning. Additionally, it could be argued that the increase in practice that improvisation has been found to cause could result in increased motivation, as students progress faster and find the experience of playing easier.

Much of the available research into improvisation presents its benefits and how it can assist the learning of other musical skills. Whilst these are valid reasons for incorporating improvisation into instrumental lessons, improvisation is also worth including for its own sake. Both Priest (1989) and Azzara (1999) argue that the development of musicianship skills should be the central aim of all music education. This idea shifts the purpose of instrumental teaching from focusing on specific instrumental skills and techniques to instead focusing on the development of the whole musician. That goal must surely involve teaching students how to create music for themselves rather than merely producing instrumentalists who are reliant on music notation. As Priest says, 'If musicianship is the goal playing must not be confined to what has been written by someone else' (1989: 177). If we accept the definition that improvisation is to music what speech and conversation are to language (Azzara, 1999), improvisation moves from being an additional skill that is limited to certain genres to being an essential skill for the development of the complete musician. Improvisation is not only worth including in lessons because it aids in the development of notation reading, technique and aural skills, but also because it teaches students how to improvise. The ability to create music, to 'speak' on the instrument, for oneself deserves to be recognised and valued as a skill, and should be given importance in instrumental lessons for that reason. Paynter argues that 'It is the most natural thing for human beings to make up music' (2000: 6). If this is the case then teachers arguably do students a disservice if they do not make room for this activity in lessons.

2.4 Influences on Teachers' Pedagogy

With the value of improvisation established, this chapter will now examine the literature on the potential influences on instrumental teachers' pedagogy.

One potential influence is the research that has been carried out into music and instrumental teaching. The importance of teachers basing their pedagogy on research is highlighted by a number of writers (Burnard 2008; Cain, 2008; Geake, 2008; Regelski, 1994/1995; Westerlund and Vakeva, 2011). Regelski argues that:

teaching praxis must be predicated on valid and reliable educational theory and in light of a generally accepted knowledge base concerning music, teaching and education... (1994/1995: 69).

In order to base their practice on educational theory teachers must first be aware of the research that has been carried out. The previous section of this chapter demonstrated the wealth of research available on issues pertinent to instrumental teachers' practice. What is unclear is how successfully that research is disseminated to the piano teaching profession, where members often work in isolation. The Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) reported that the majority of respondents taught from their own homes. In addition, 35% of respondents reported that they were not members of a professional organisation and only 44% of respondents attended professional development courses on a fairly regular basis. With so many teachers working in isolation without any input from a wider community of professionals, it is arguable that the opportunities for them to discover current research are limited. Perhaps one piece of evidence of this are the reports that some teachers are reluctant to encourage students to improvise for fear it will negatively impact their reading ability (McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; McPherson and Gabrielsson, 2002; Priest 1989). As studies have demonstrated that improvisation aids the development of note reading (Azzara, 1993; Azzara, 1999; McPherson, Davidson and Faulkner, 2012; Priest, 1989) this fear is unfounded, indicating that not all teachers have been aware of the research into this area.

Teachers' own musical experiences have an impact on their pedagogy (Odena and Welch, 2009; Azzara, 1999; Koutsoupidou, 2005). Koutsoupidou reported that the

most common reason (given by 77% of respondents) for teachers not including improvisation in lessons was their lack of personal experience in improvising. The report also stated that teachers were more likely to use improvisation in their own teaching if their higher education had included it. Odena and Welch (2009) found that teachers who had personal experience in different musical styles and activities were more aware of how students could approach composing. Scott (2007) gave a personal testimony of how her initial fear of improvising came from the fact that it had not been included in her lessons growing up. These studies indicate the importance of teachers' own practical knowledge and the need for teachers to have experience in the activities they are to teach. Teaching improvisation requires teachers to demonstrate their own inventive abilities (Priest, 1989), a difficult task for those with no background in improvisation.

Musical identity has been shown to influence teachers' pedagogy and as a result, the development of students (Lewis, 2012; Winters, 2012). Lewis (2012) and Winters (2012) both link a teacher's identity as a composer with their confidence in teaching composition. In addition, Lewis (2012) argues that this identity also influences a teacher's belief on who can compose, which impacts their teaching practice. She demonstrates how a teacher identifying as a composer results in students becoming more confident in that area themselves. Musical identity is influenced by a number of different factors, one of which is previous musical experiences (Georgii-Hemming, 2011; Evans and McPherson, 2015). With research pointing to the likelihood that few of today's piano teachers would have learnt to improvise in their instrumental lessons (Cathcart, 2013; Gellrich and Parncutt, 1998), it is probable that many piano teachers do not identify as improvisers (Winters, 2012). It is plausible that this lack of identity will have a negative effect on how frequently improvisation is taught.

A fourth factor is teachers' understanding of pedagogy and confidence in how to teach. The need for teachers to have an understanding of pedagogy as well as practical music skills is highlighted in much of the literature (Baker, 2006; Bernhard, 2012; Cathcart, 2013; Paynter, 2000; Winters, 2012). Priest (1989) demonstrates this, giving an example of a teacher who improvised extensively in his personal life but did not feel confident enough to teach improvisation to his students. Whilst he had

advanced practical skills in improvising, his lack of pedagogical understanding of the skill left him unable to teach it. This is interesting to consider in the light of instrumental teaching, a profession in which no formal training is required. Whilst many teachers have experience and skills as performers, it appears that few have any teaching qualifications. The Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) reported that performance qualifications were most prevalent amongst respondents, with 78% of teachers holding one. In comparison, only 28% of the piano teachers who responded had an instrumental teaching qualification. Many of those teachers had a piano teaching diploma, with only 9% holding a qualification from a taught instrumental teaching course. This data is significant as research points to the importance of specific instrumental teaching courses over general music teaching courses. Cathcart (2013) reported that teachers who had attended taught instrumental teaching courses were more reflective in their teaching. Additionally, Baker (2006) reported that general music teaching qualifications, such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), had little impact on instrumental teachers' practice. Both Baker (2006) and Cathcart (2013) have also expressed concern at the lack of status afforded to the development of instrumental teaching skills at university level. Whilst organisations such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) and the European Piano Teachers Association (EPTA) have various Continuing Professional Development courses and workshops available, there is currently no way of ensuring that a base level of pedagogical knowledge and teaching skill is present in all teachers. Without opportunities to develop their own practice and increase their pedagogical knowledge, many teachers may not be confident enough to teach improvisation.

The final area that has been demonstrated to have an impact on teachers' pedagogy is the teaching literature and resources available to them. The Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) reported that tutor books were a significant influence on teachers' practice, with 86% of respondents using them. It was also noted that 98% of those respondents used tutor books that had learning to read notation at their core and were primarily designed to teach notation reading and technique (Cathcart, 2013). This data is significant, as it demonstrates that one of the main influences on the content of beginner students' lessons focuses primarily on note reading at the expense of other

skills. It seems likely that once teachers start down that track they are likely to remain on it as students progress. Indeed, the Piano Survey 2010 found that after tutor books, many teachers looked to the exam system for guidance on what to teach next. The study showed that exams featured heavily in the practice of many teachers, with three quarters of respondents indicating that they regularly entered students. Some teachers reported that they used the exam syllabus as a framework for all their teaching, even when working with students who were not taking exams. The influence of the exam system is clear to see in teachers' practice. As Cathcart comments:

Many of the frequently used elements, in particular scales and sight reading are part of instrumental exam requirements, whilst the less popular lesson elements of internalising, improvising and playing by ear do not form part of the exam structure (2013: 174).

So entrenched is this practice of focusing on exams that Cathcart considers it unlikely that the situation will change unless skills such as improvisation are included in the exam requirements. Certainly it would appear that the exam system is a main influence on piano teachers, and a key reason for the lack of improvisation taking place in lessons.

Other resources are available to teachers that would encourage the use of improvisation in lessons, such as *Joining the Dots* (Bullard, 2010), *Making Music* (Gane, 2006) and the *Pattern Play* series (Kinney, 2010). There are also resources, such as *A Common Approach* (FMS, NAME and RCM, 2002) and the *Simultaneous Learning* approach (Harris, 2008), that present a different approach to teaching and lesson planning. *A Common Approach* was the first national curriculum to be written for UK instrumental teachers and emphasises the development of musicianship skills (including improvising) alongside technical skills and note reading. Despite its uniqueness as a resource in the UK, there was little evidence in the Piano Survey 2010 that it had made an impact on teaching methods (Cathcart, 2013). It could be argued that this is a result of teachers not being aware of the curriculum's existence. However, this does not appear to be the case when one considers the situation of 'Simultaneous Learning'. This teaching approach, advocated by Paul Harris, encourages the use of playing by ear, composing and improvising alongside the teaching of notation and repertoire. Despite the fact that the approach has garnered much attention and seems to be well known by piano teachers, it seems to have made

little impact on how lessons are taught (Cathcart, 2013). It would seem that the issue here is not effective advertising, or lack thereof, but more the strength of tradition and the hold it has over piano teachers. Nevertheless, increased knowledge of these resources would surely bring the issue of improvisation to the attention of more teachers.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) reported that the approach of many UK piano teachers today is largely based on reading notation and that a significant number of teachers do not incorporate improvisation into their lessons. However, the literature (Addison, 1988; Azzara, 1993&1999; Chappell, 1999; Peggie, 1985; Priest, 1993; Rooke, 1991) has revealed much research in support of the inclusion of this skill. Improvisation aids in the development of specific skills such as aural acuity, musical understanding, technique and note reading, and has been demonstrated to increase students' enjoyment and motivation in learning. It has also been suggested that, aside from these benefits to other areas of learning, the ability to create original music is an important skill to learn for its own sake. A first step to addressing this imbalance must be to discover the reasons why some teachers do not teach improvisation. The purpose of the study was to investigate what factors influence teachers' piano pedagogy and, more specifically, their decision on whether or not to teach improvisation. This central purpose led to three research questions:

1. What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?
2. What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?
3. How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?

It was hoped that the study would also give greater insight into the teaching of improvisation and the methods and resources commonly used by teachers.

3.1 Survey design

Answering these research questions required the study to collect information from a large number of piano teachers in order to correlate the relationship between various factors and the teaching of improvisation. The study would also need to ask questions about teachers' behaviour, experiences and their opinions on improvisation. For this reason, an online survey was chosen as the best means of data collection. Surveys are a useful means of gathering 'data on attitudes and preferences, beliefs and predictions,

behaviour and experiences' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2010: 207). Furthermore, surveys can be used to '[describe] the nature of existing conditions' and to '[determine] the relationships that exist between specific events' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2010: 205). More specifically, internet-based surveys have a variety of advantages. As well as being relatively low cost, using an internet-based survey such as SurveyMonkey reduces the time that it takes to distribute the survey and gather responses, and simplifies the design and data management processes. Additionally, an online survey enables a much wider population to be reached and can help ensure greater generalisation of results (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2010). Given the isolated nature of piano teaching, which has already been discussed in Chapter 1, it seemed important to choose a method that would allow easy distribution to a wide population. Personal membership of a variety of piano teaching organisations and groups meant that access to a number of teachers via online distribution methods was likely. This method was not without its limitations, however. Using an online distribution method would preclude any teachers without access to the Internet. Limiting respondents to those who were involved with professional organisations and groups could also lead to bias in the results. However, after consideration it was felt that, on balance, the advantages of this method outweighed its shortcomings.

As the use of an online survey can lead to a high non-participation rate (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2010) it was important that the survey was designed in a way that encouraged completion. Cohen, Manion and Morrison recommend a sequence of questions, where factual questions to do with age and qualifications are asked first, before moving to closed questions involving rating scales, and ending with high interest, open-ended questions that ask for reasons for the opinions given. This sequence was used as the general outline for the survey. The questionnaire was designed in four sections. Section A asked general questions that were simple to answer about respondents' qualifications and membership of professional organisations. Section B ('Information about you as a musician') was interested in respondents' own musical experiences, including what they had been taught as beginners and how much training they had received overall in various musical activities. The activities asked about were limited to those that specifically involve playing the piano: composing, improvising, memorising music, note reading, playing by ear, sight-reading and technique (scales and studies). To ensure consistency, this

list was used in all questions throughout the survey that asked about specific musical activities. Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they had been taught these activities using a four-point Likert scale of regularly included, sometimes included, rarely included and never included. In section C ('Information about you as a teacher') the survey moved on to ask questions about respondents' teaching practices, including their professional development and what activities they regularly taught in lessons. Sections B and C were comprised predominantly of closed questions, with just two text boxes asking respondents to expand on their answers. The final section ('Improvisation in piano lessons') asked respondents' about their opinions on improvisation in piano teaching, including their personal definition of improvisation and examples of resources they used in its teaching. Respondents were also asked to identify what areas of instrumental learning they thought would be improved through the use of improvisation in lessons. All the choices listed were skills that research has shown to be improved through the use of improvisation: aural skills, note reading, problem-solving skills, students' enjoyment of lessons, students' motivation to practise, technique and theory knowledge. Whilst this section predominantly contained closed questions, it did include more open questions than previous sections to allow respondents room to communicate their opinions on improvisation. The full survey can be found in Appendix 1.

3.2 Ethics

As the study was aimed at adult piano teachers there were few ethical concerns and it was given favourable ethical opinion for conduct. In accordance with the University of Reading guidelines, participants were given information about the project and its aims in the initial email they received as well as at the beginning of the survey. They were also provided with the contact details of the researcher in case of any additional questions. It was made clear that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point in the completion process. Their anonymity was guaranteed and whilst there was the option to leave an email address at the end to receive the findings from the study, it was made clear that this was optional. The ethical approval form can be found in Appendix 2.

3.3 Pilot study and distribution

A small pilot study was carried out with five piano teachers in order to review the clarity of the questions and ascertain how long it took to complete the survey. The feedback given by these teachers led to a few small changes. The wording of a couple of questions was simplified to ensure they were easily understood. There was also some confusion as to whether the sections were asking questions about the respondent as a pianist or as a teacher, and so a short introduction was added to each section to clarify what the questions were about. After those changes were made the survey was deemed ready for distribution, and it was made live in July 2015. Initially the survey was distributed via email and Facebook to organisations and groups including EPTA (UK), the Oxford Piano Group and The Curious Piano Teachers, as well as to individual piano teachers. This method elicited a good number of responses and by the end of the first week 61 teachers had responded to the survey. However, it was recognised that only surveying teachers who were members of organisations and Facebook groups might not give reliable data, and so further contact was made with teachers via instrumental teaching websites including pianotuners.co.uk and the ABRSM teaching forum.

The survey was open for a month and in total attracted 134 responses. A few of the responses were incomplete with only the first couple of questions answered, so these responses were discounted. A further number had not answered the questions on the teaching of improvisation and so could not be used for correlation purposes; these were also not included in the data. 117 completed surveys were analysed.

3.4 Data analysis

The data reviewed the impact of five different factors on the teaching of improvisation:

1. Teachers' awareness of current research in instrumental teaching;
2. their musical experiences as learners;
3. their musical identity;
4. their confidence in how to teach improvisation; and
5. the literature and resources they used that influenced their pedagogy.

Each respondent was given an ID number. These respondent numbers were colour coded according to how frequently they taught improvisation in piano lessons, to reveal an overview of the trends emerging when looking at each factor as a whole.

Answers to each question were reviewed individually. The correlation coefficients were calculated in Excel. As the data was discrete rather than continuous it was not possible to observe correlation by using scatter graphs, and so it was decided to present the data through bar charts. Once responses to individual questions had been correlated, this information was reviewed against the five categories to reveal the impact of each factor on the data set. The data analysis is presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

This section will present the findings of the survey. The results will be used to answer the three research questions:

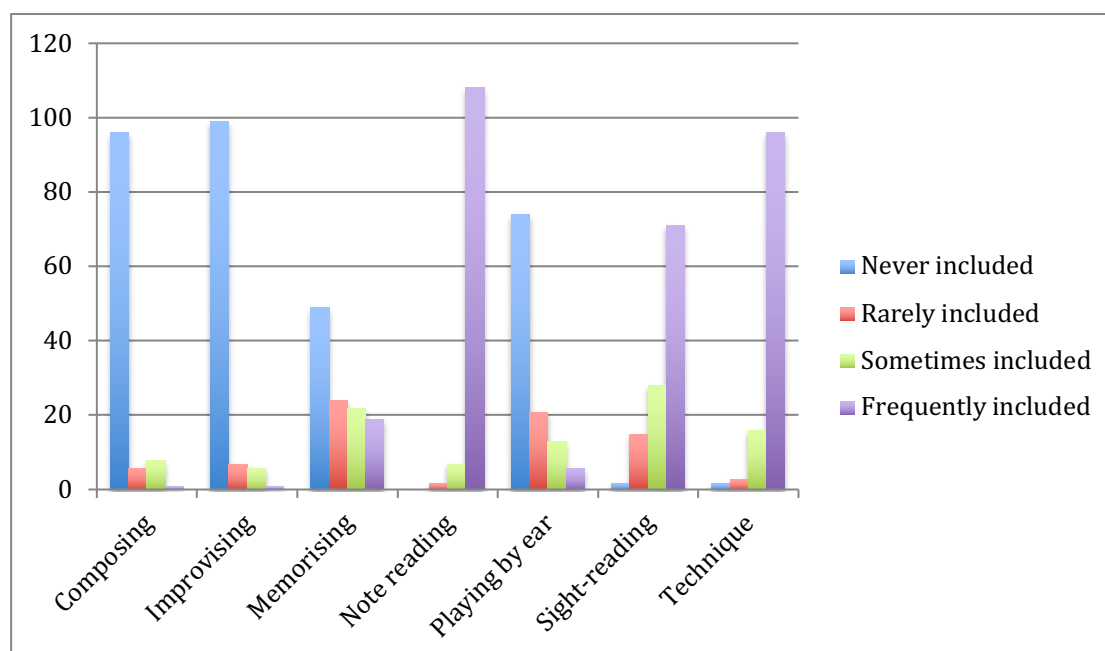
1. What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?
2. What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?
3. How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?

4.1 What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?

Experiences as learners

Respondents were questioned about their experiences as learners and asked to identify what playing activities were included in their piano lessons as beginners. Figure 2 summarises their responses.

Figure 2: Musical activities included in respondents' lessons as beginners



n=117

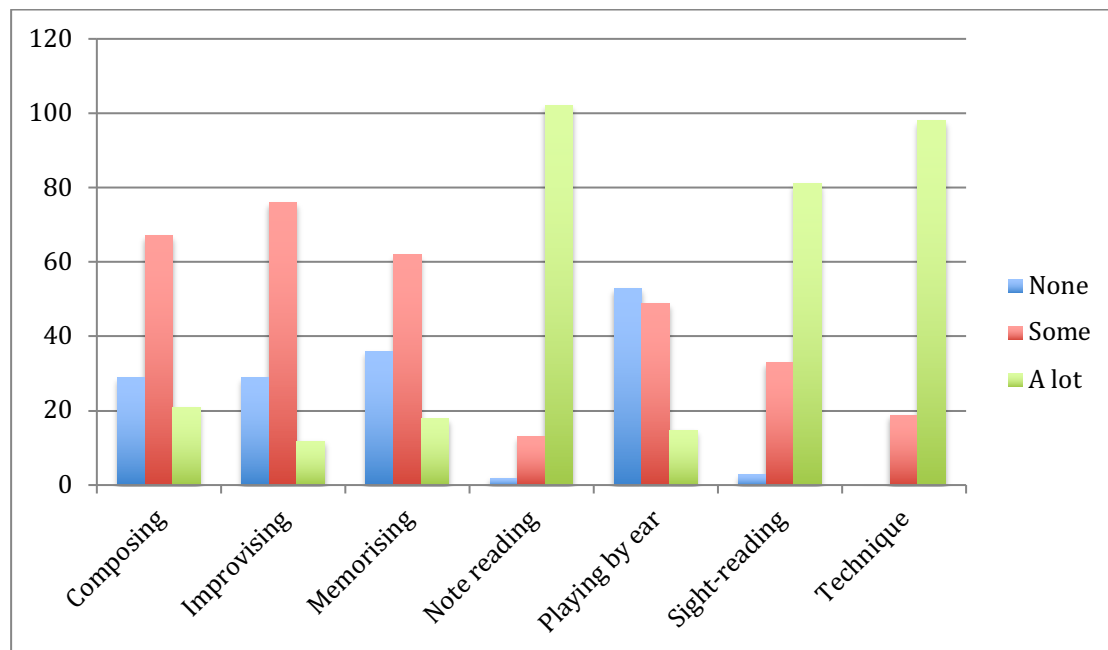
All respondents who answered this question were taught how to read notation at some point in their lessons. Technique and sight-reading were also commonly taught.

Playing by ear, composing and improvising were the least commonly included. Improvisation also attracted the highest number of negative responses, with 84.6% (n=99) reporting it was never included in their lessons.

Respondents reported a strong emphasis on the development of notation reading over the development of skills such as improvising, composing and playing by ear: 'Have always been good at [sight reading and note reading], but would have liked help as a youngster with development of my weaker areas, i.e. improvising, playing by ear and especially memorising' (R119); 'I was not taught it [composing and improvising] or encouraged to do it' (R49). Several respondents attributed this to being taught by a teacher with a classical background despite the research (Gellrich and Parncutt, 1998) that points to the historic trend of improvisation being significant for classical musicians: '[Improvisation] was never included in any of my lessons on two instruments. Both teachers were strictly classical musicians' (R104); 'I was classically trained so didn't have much cause to improvise' (R1). Some respondents commented that they were actively discouraged from learning to improvise: 'I started playing by ear at 5 years old. I still remember the teacher nipping it in the bud' (R52); '[Improvising was] discouraged in early years so have never had the confidence' (R72); '...I practise improvising and composing as much as all the disciplines and always have done, despite my teacher's protestations!' (R8).

Similar themes were apparent when teachers were questioned about the overall training they had received in playing activities. Figure 3 summarises their responses.

Figure 3: Overall training respondents received in improvisation



n=117

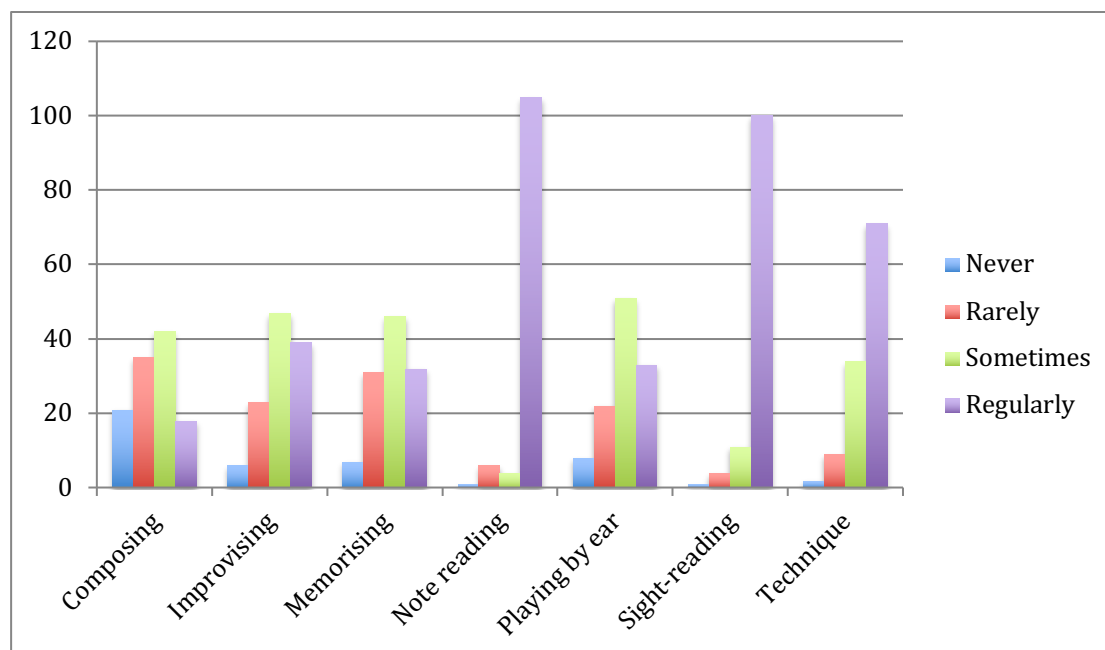
Composing, improvising, memorising and playing by ear remained the activities respondents were least commonly trained in. However, it is encouraging to see that the majority of respondents had received at least some training in these areas.

It is interesting to note the significant jump from the number of respondents who were taught improvisation sometimes or regularly as beginners (5.9%) to the number who reported some or a lot of training in improvisation overall (72.6%). A number of respondents reported that they had worked to develop this skill through courses and self-study after receiving little training in it as students: ‘Non-existent training [in improvisation] as a child and music student - anything I’ve learned has been through self-study over the last decade or so’ (R100); ‘[Improvising and composing] were never really taught and definitely not in a structured way but, as a teacher, I’ve researched various books, been on various training courses etc’ (R116); ‘Note reading is what I was taught. And playing by ear / improvising I taught myself working in a school for children with autism’ (R57).

Experiences as musicians

Question 9 asked respondents how often they engaged in certain activities as musicians. Their responses are summarised in Figure 4.

Figure 4: How often respondents engaged in playing activities on the piano



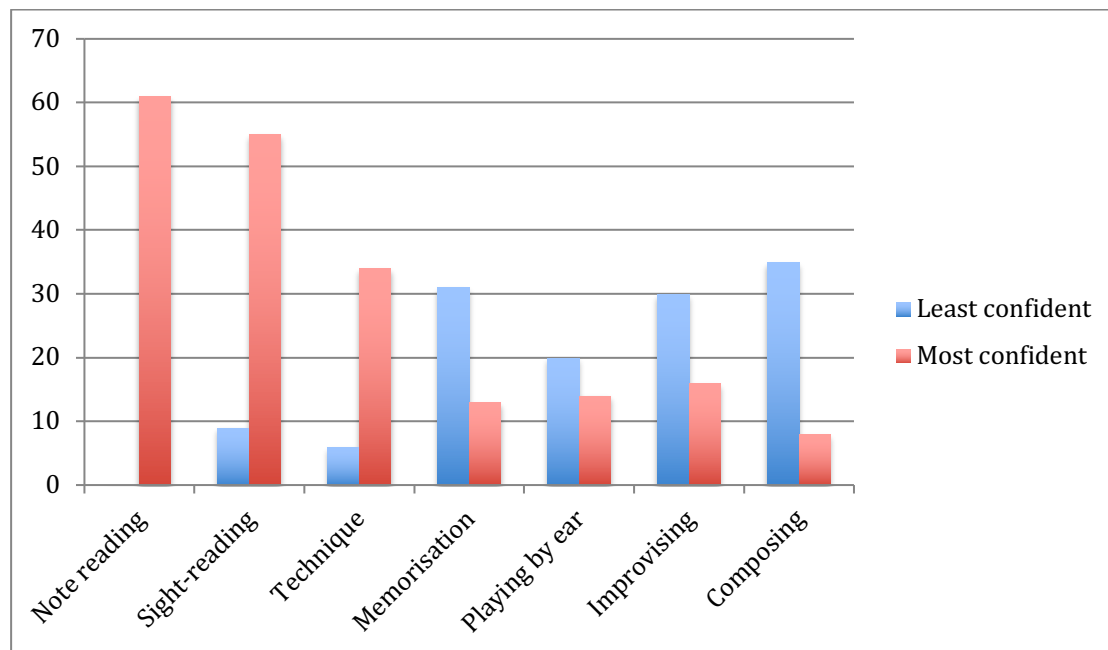
n=116

Note reading, sight-reading and technique received the most positive responses. Note reading and sight-reading also attracted few negative responses, with only 1 teacher reporting in each category that they never engaged in those activities. Composing, improvising, memorising and playing by ear remained the least popular activities. However, in this question improvising was slightly more popular than the others, with 33.6% (*n*=39) reporting that they improvised regularly.

Confidence in improvisation

Questions 10 and 12 asked respondents about their confidence in playing activities. Their responses are summarised in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Respondents' confidence in playing activities



n=116

Playing from notation was the area in which most teachers felt confident, with 52.6% (n=61) specifying note reading and 47.4% (n=55) specifying sight-reading. In addition, no respondents listed note reading as the activity in which they were least confident. In comparison, only 14.1% (n=16) reported they were most confident in improvisation. Improvisation, memorisation and composition received the most negative responses (25.8%, 26.7% and 30.2% respectively).

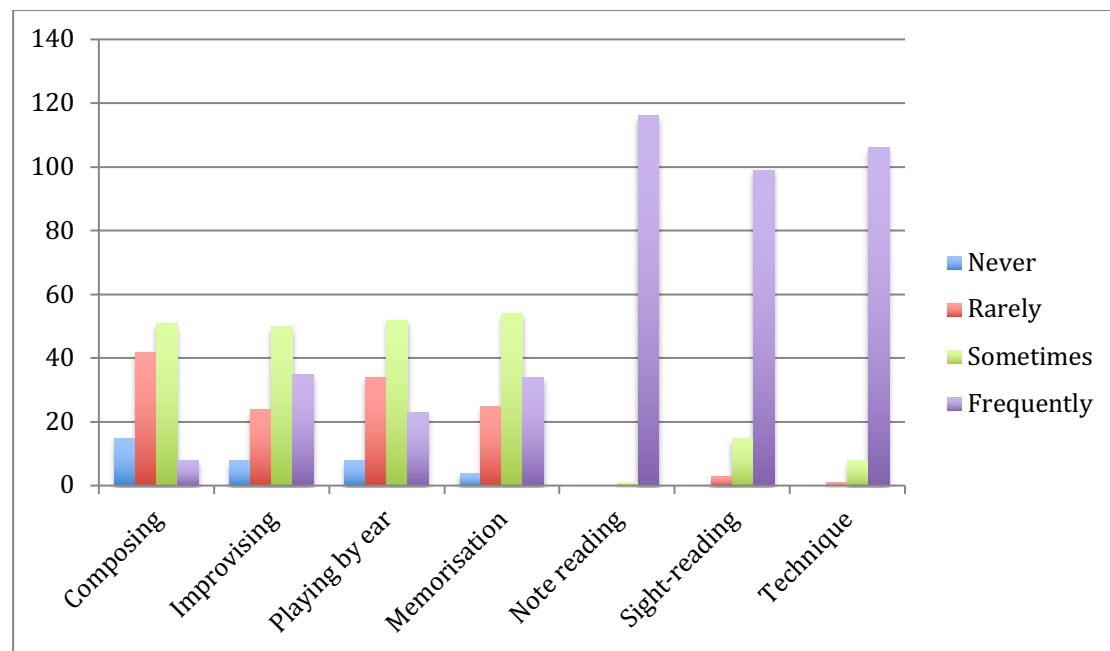
These results indicate that many piano teachers have limited experience in improvisation. Lesson time for respondents as beginners was dominated by notation, with the majority of respondents (84.6%) receiving no training in how to improvise. Whilst 72.6% of respondents reported they had received some training in improvisation during their pianistic career, only 10.3% reported receiving a lot. This lack of training appears to affect respondents' practice in the present, with only one third (33.6%) reporting they improvise regularly and even fewer (14.1%) reporting they feel most confident improvising.

4.2 What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?

Do piano teachers include improvisation in lessons?

Question 23 asked respondents to indicate how regularly they taught playing activities in their piano lessons. Their responses are summarised in Figure 6.

Figure 6: How frequently respondents included playing activities in lessons

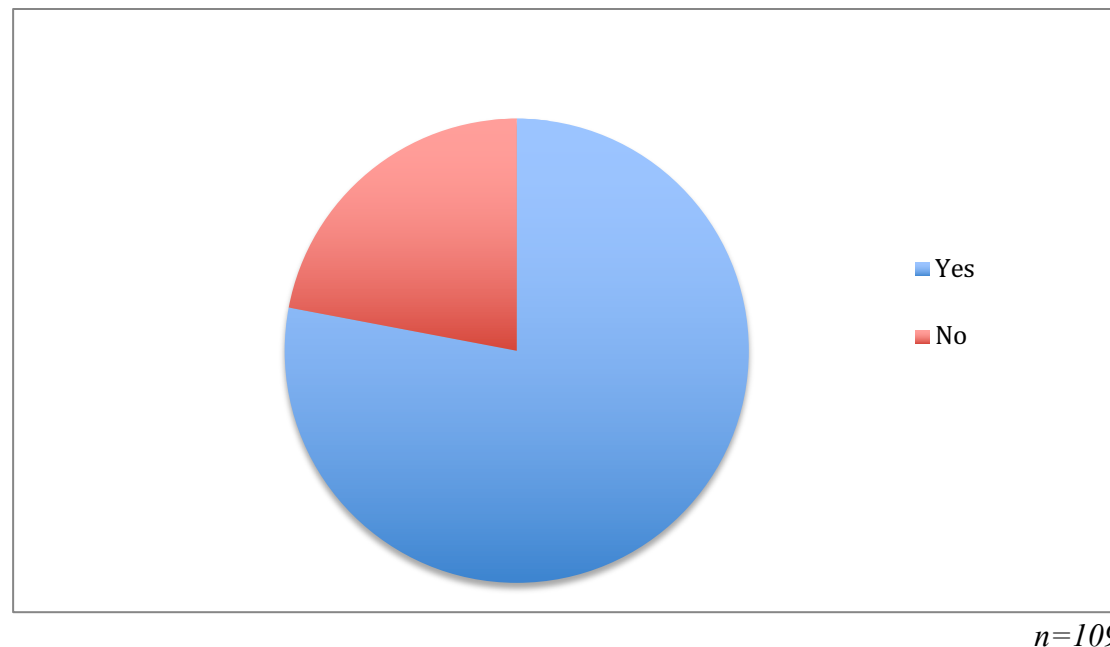


n=117

The most popular activity included in lessons was note reading, with 100% of respondents reporting that they taught it frequently or sometimes. Sight-reading and technique were close behind. These results mirror those reported in the Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013), where note reading, sight-reading and technique were all included in lessons the most frequently. Memorisation, improvisation, ear playing and composition were all included in lessons less frequently, again mirroring the results from the Piano Survey 2010. 72.6% (*n*=85) of respondents reported teaching improvisation frequently or sometimes. Whilst this result does stand in contrast to the results for note reading, nevertheless it was higher than expected as past research (Cathcart, 2013) reported that 41.3% of piano teachers rarely taught improvisation. It is encouraging to see that almost three quarters of respondents in this survey taught improvisation sometimes or frequently.

Question 29 asked teachers to indicate whether or not they taught improvisation. The results are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Percentage of respondents who taught improvisation

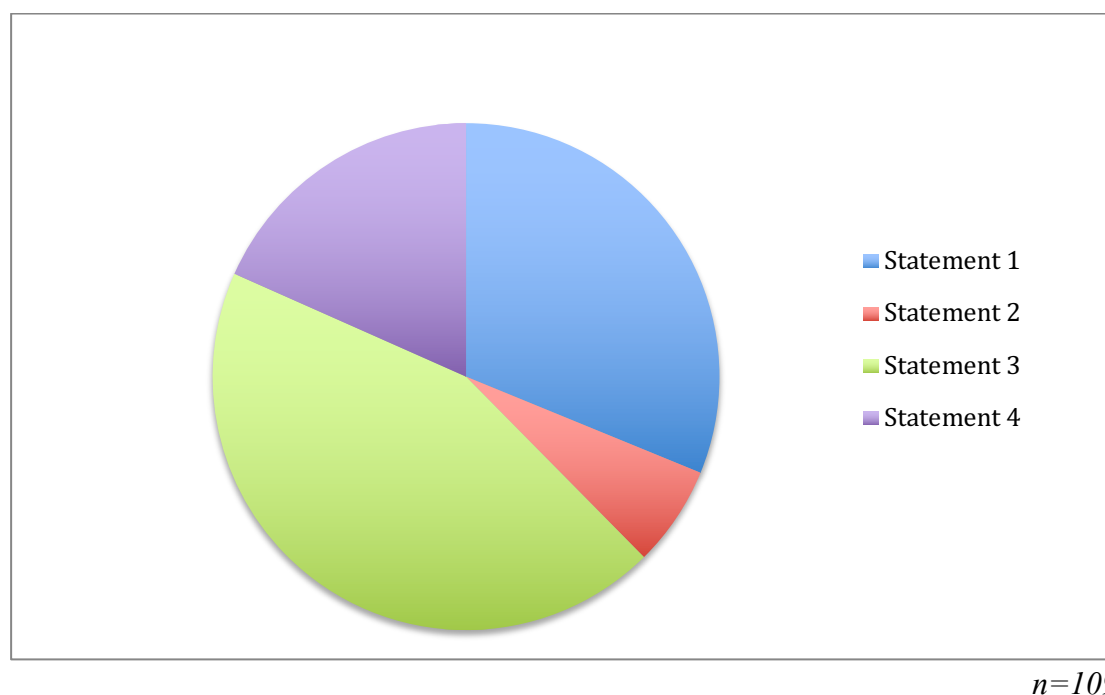


Whilst only 6.8% of respondents ($n=8$) reported that they never taught improvisation in Question 23, 22% of respondents ($n=24$) gave a negative answer to this question. This could indicate that some teachers who answered 'rarely' or 'sometimes' in Question 23 felt that, on balance, improvisation was not a significant part of their teaching and so chose to answer 'no'. In total, 77.9% of the respondents ($n=85$) answered that they did include improvisation in their lessons. As this number also includes some who answered 'rarely' in Question 23, this result mirrors that of the previous question.

Question 30 asked teachers to identify which statement described them most accurately. The four statements given were:

1. I improvise regularly and include it in lessons with students.
2. I improvise regularly but do not include it in lessons with students.
3. I do not improvise regularly but include it in lessons with students.
4. I do not improvise regularly and do not include it in lessons with students.

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents according to which statement they chose



As Figure 8 shows, statement three ('I do not improvise regularly but include it in lessons with students') was the most popular, receiving 44% (n=48) of the responses. Altogether 75.2% of respondents (n=82) answered that they included improvisation in lessons, mirroring the results of the previous questions.

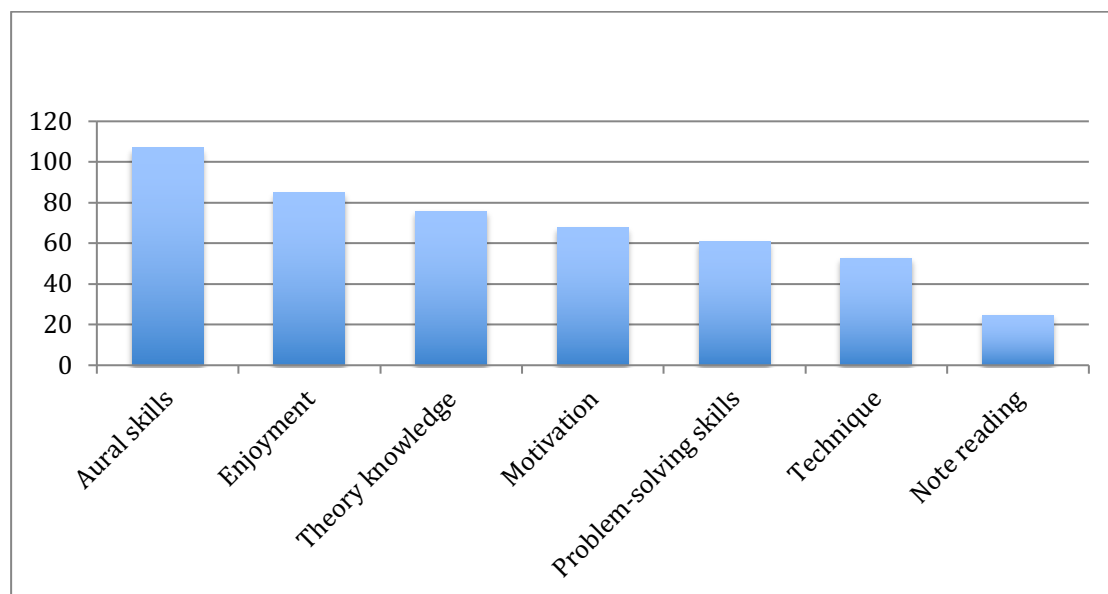
Around three quarters of teachers surveyed did include improvisation in their piano lessons. We now address the factors that influenced teachers' decisions on whether or not to teach improvisation. In investigating this issue five different factors were considered:

1. Teachers' awareness of current research in instrumental teaching;
2. teachers' musical experiences as learners;
3. teachers' musical identity;
4. teachers' understanding of how to teach improvisation; and
5. the teaching literature and resources used in lessons

Teachers' awareness of current research

Much research (Addison, 1988; Priest, 1989; Pegg, 1985; Rooke, 1991) has been done into the benefits of improvisation in instrumental lessons. However, there is little focus on the impact of the research on the teaching of improvisation in piano lessons, or indeed if piano teachers are aware of the research that has been carried out. Respondents were asked about their understanding of the benefits of improvisation to assess their awareness of the research. The hypothesis was that more knowledge of the benefits of improvising as piano pedagogy could encourage teachers to include it more frequently in lessons. The results are summarised in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Respondents' opinions on areas of learning improved through improvisation



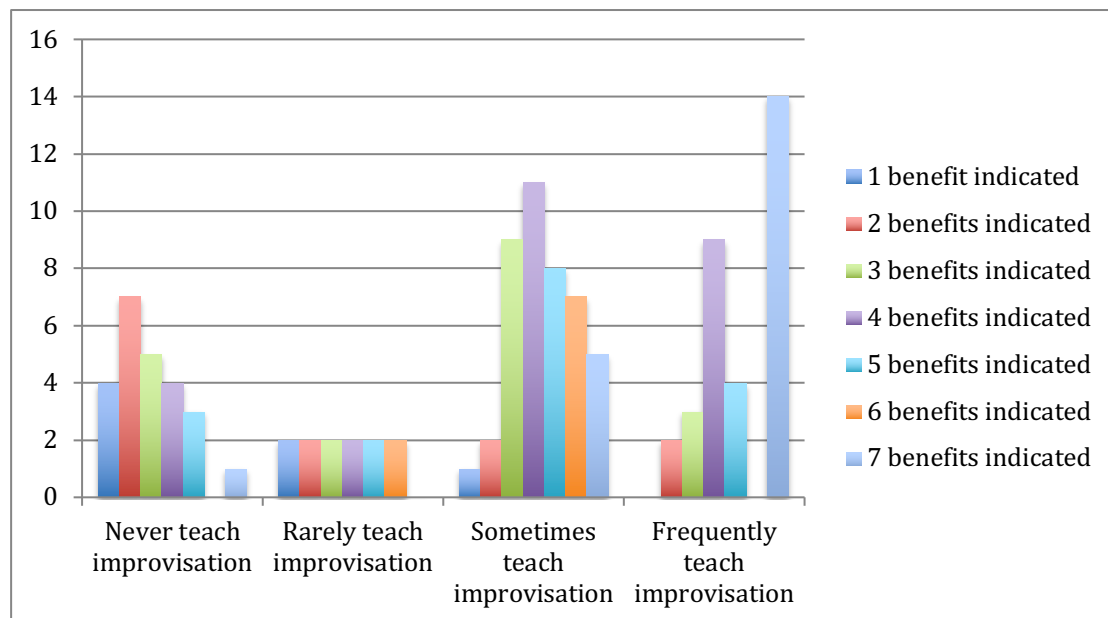
n=112

Opinions of the different benefits of learning through improvisation varied. Improvement of aural skills was the most commonly identified benefit, with 95.5% (n=107) of respondents choosing that option. Note reading was the least commonly identified, with only 22.3% (n=25) of respondents choosing that option. The results indicated there was no relationship between which benefits were indicated and the frequency of use of improvisation in lessons ($r=0.01$).

Respondents were able to choose multiple options. The majority of teachers indicated a number of benefits, with 64.8% (n=72) of respondents indicating four or more. Just

6.3% (n=7) of respondents indicated only one benefit. Whilst there was no correlation between which benefits were indicated and how frequently improvisation was taught, there was a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.46$) between how many benefits were indicated and the frequency of use of improvisation in lessons, as shown in Figure 10. What is not known is whether respondents taught improvisation more frequently because they believed it had multiple benefits, or whether more frequent teaching of improvisation made them more aware of its multiple benefits. Indeed, comments left by respondents who frequently taught improvisation indicated the benefits they had witnessed in their students: '[Students] are inclined to ask questions about theoretical knowledge they might not have otherwise been interested in' (R9); '[It secures] technical elements in a musical way' (R18); 'I can see pupils are motivated to explore and be creative and it often breathes more musicality into their other pieces' (R33); 'Students enjoy it a lot. It also gives me an insight into a student's musical ability' (R 43).

Figure 10: Correlation between number of benefits indicated and how frequently improvisation was taught



n=111

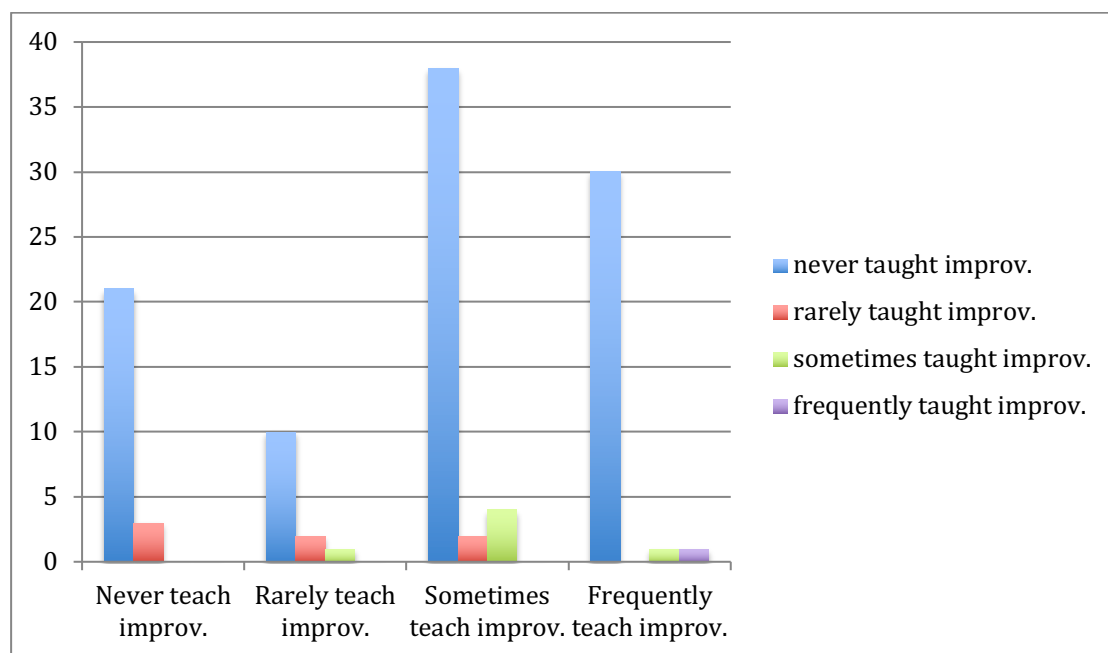
Teachers' musical experiences

The musical experiences of teachers impact their pedagogy (Odena and Welch, 2009; Azzara, 1999; Koutsoupidou, 2005). The survey questioned respondents about their lessons as beginners and the subsequent training they had received to determine if these experiences had an impact on how frequently improvisation was taught.

Experiences as learners

Koutsoupidou (2005) and Scott (2007) both reported that a lack of training in improvisation can lead to teachers neglecting it in their own teaching. As was reported in the first section of this chapter, only 5.9% of respondents stated that improvisation was included sometimes or frequently in their lessons as beginners. The results indicated there was little relationship between these variables ($r=0.009$), shown in Figure 11. However, this could be due to how few respondents were taught improvisation as beginners. It is interesting to note that 85.7% ($n=6$) of respondents who were taught improvisation sometimes or frequently as beginners also taught it sometimes or frequently in their piano lessons.

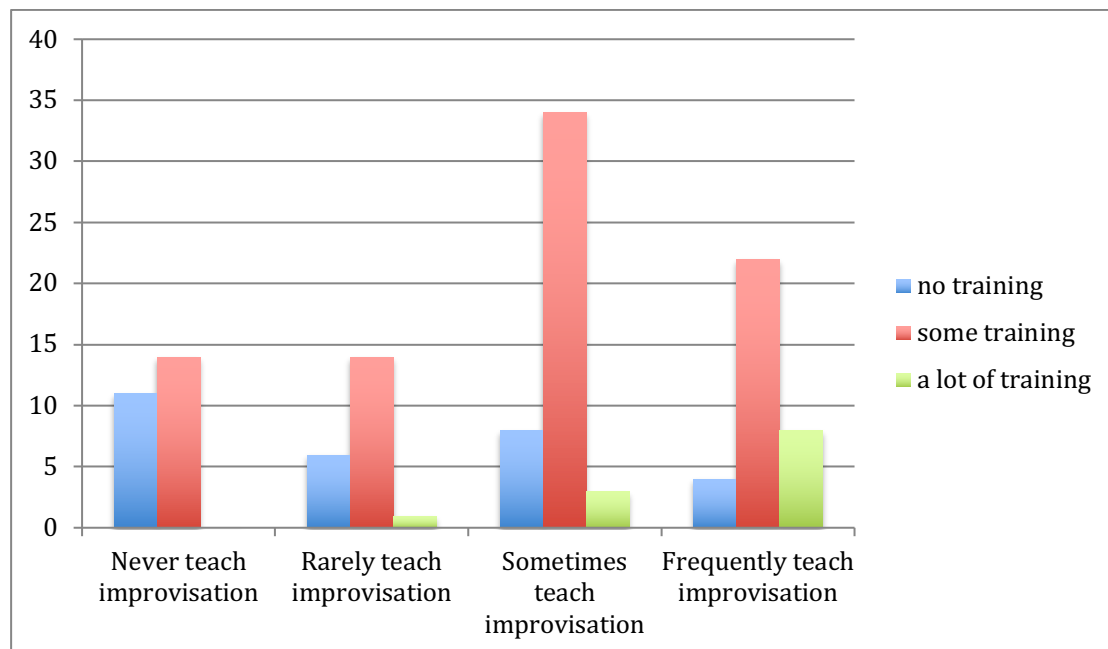
Figure 11: Correlation between experience as beginners and how frequently improvisation was taught



$n=113$

As reported earlier in this chapter, 72.6% of respondents reported they had received some or a lot of training in improvisation overall. There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.34$) between their overall experience as learners and how frequently improvisation was taught, as shown in Figure 12. 91.6% ($n=11$) of those who had received a lot of training also taught improvisation in their piano lessons sometimes or frequently. Additionally, 58.6% ($n=17$) of those who had received no training in improvisation reported they never or rarely taught it in piano lessons, suggesting that those with no training were less likely to teach improvisation themselves.

Figure 12: Correlation between overall experience as learners and how frequently improvisation was taught



$n=117$

Level of Music and Performance qualifications

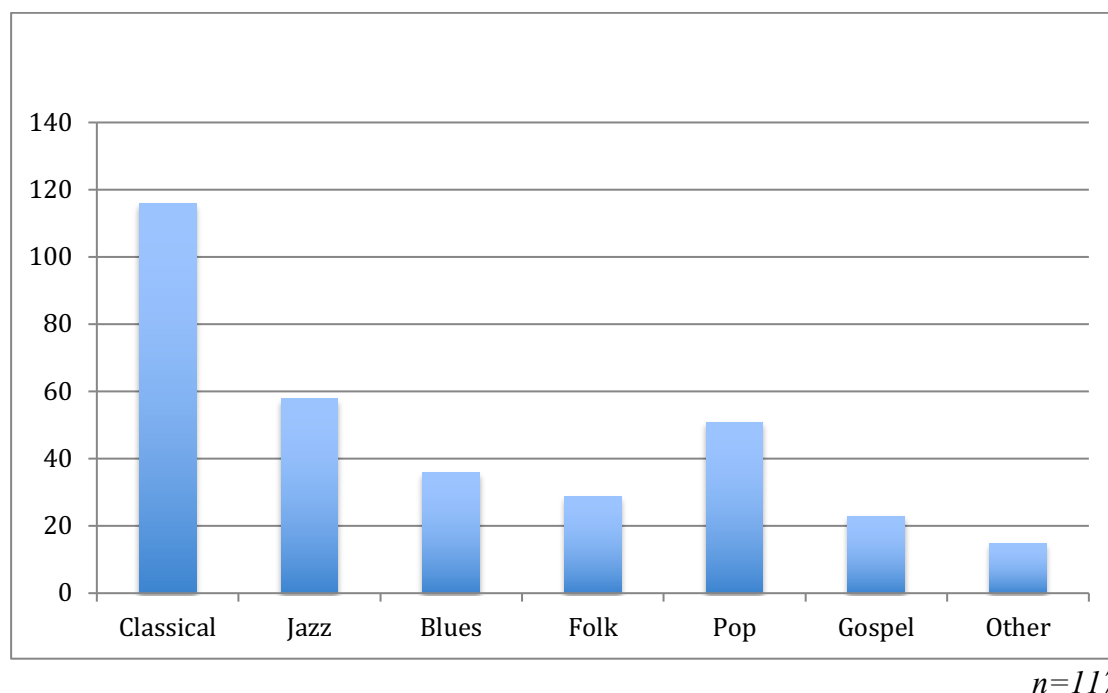
Question 3 asked for details about music and performance qualifications. The qualifications reported included grade exams, music degrees, diplomas and post-graduate courses. However, there was no correlation between the level or type of performance qualification and how frequently improvisation was taught.

Experiences as musicians

Odena and Welch (2009) found that teachers with experience in different styles of music were more aware of how students could approach composing. It was

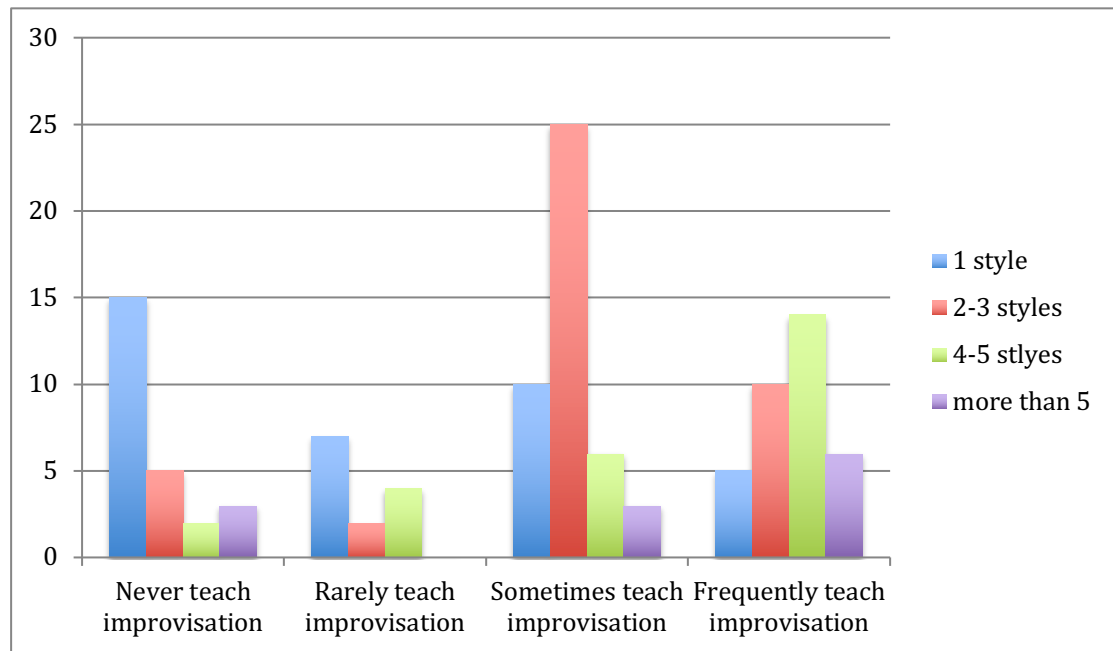
surmised that it could also have an impact on teachers' awareness of how to approach improvisation. Respondents were asked to give details of the musical styles they had experience in. The results are summarised in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Musical styles in which respondents had experience



Classical was the most common style indicated, with 99.1% of respondents ($n=116$) reporting they had experience in that style as pianists. Other styles mentioned specifically by respondents included Latin music, music theatre and religious music. There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.33$) between the number of styles indicated and how frequently improvisation was taught, as shown in Figure 14. The majority of respondents had experience in 2 or more styles of music, with just 31.6% ($n=37$) indicating they only had experience in one style. 57.9% of respondents who taught improvisation rarely or never had experience in only one style of music. In comparison, 57.1% of the teachers who taught improvisation frequently had experience in four or more styles of music.

Figure 14: Correlation between number of styles respondents had experience in and how frequently improvisation was taught



n=117

Teachers' music and performance qualifications had little bearing on their teaching of improvisation. There appeared to be some relationship between their experience as learners and their experience in different musical styles and how frequently they taught improvisation.

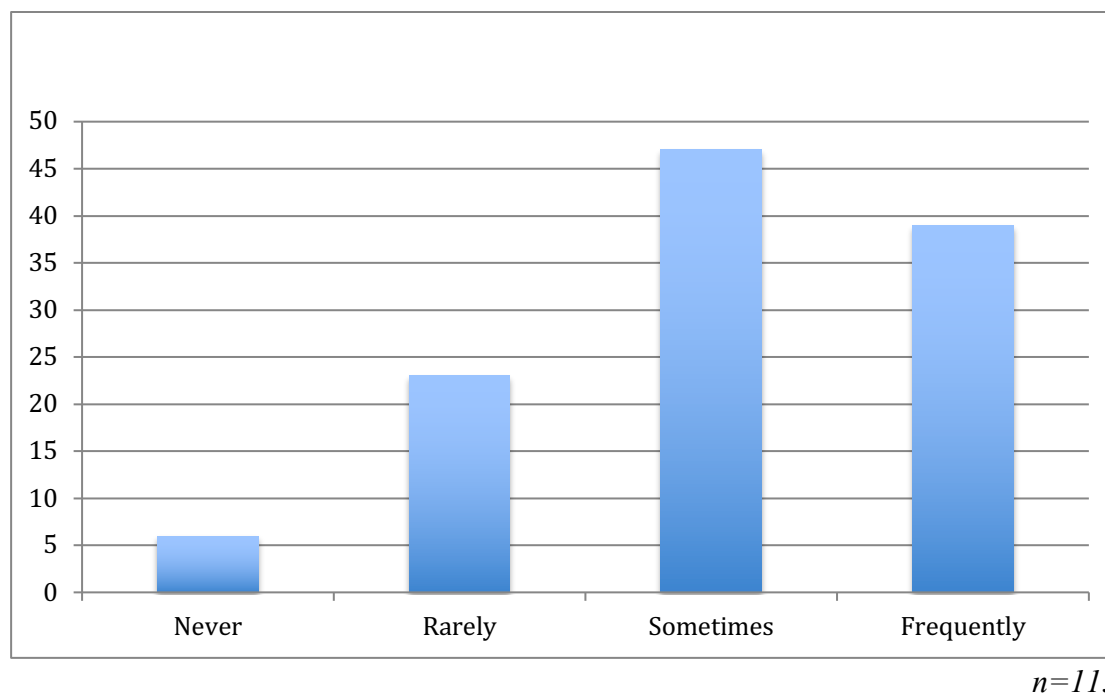
Teachers' musical identity

Lewis (2012) and Winters (2012) both highlight the issue of teacher identity and the impact it has on teachers' pedagogy and student progress. This survey sought to determine if there was any correlation between piano teachers' musical identity and how frequently they taught improvisation. In order to do this, the activities respondents engaged in regularly were surveyed, along with their level of confidence in improvisation and how much they enjoyed improvisation.

How regularly teachers improvise

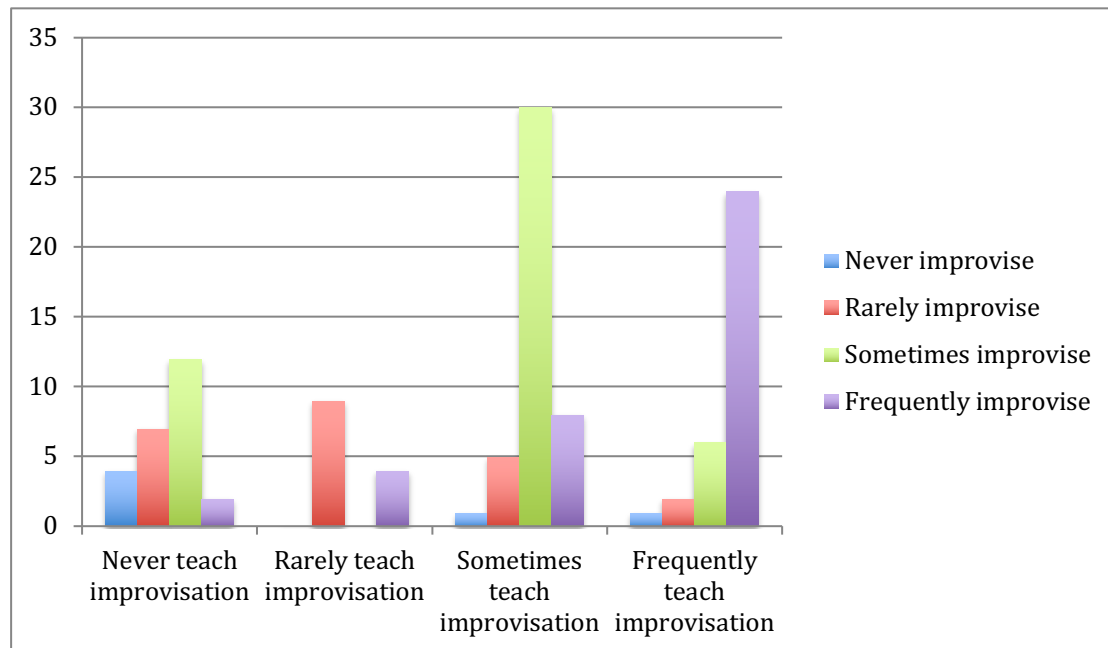
Question 9 asked respondents how often they improvised on the piano. The results are shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: How frequently respondents improvised on piano



There was a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.47$) between how regularly respondents improvised and how frequently they taught improvisation, shown in Figure 16. 79% of those who sometimes or frequently improvised also reported they taught it sometimes or frequently, implying that those who improvise could be more likely to teach improvisation. However, over half (56%) of the respondents who never taught improvisation reported that they personally improvised sometimes or frequently, suggesting that experience in improvising is not always sufficient to encourage teachers to include it in lessons.

Figure 16: Correlation between how regularly respondents improvised and how frequently improvisation was taught



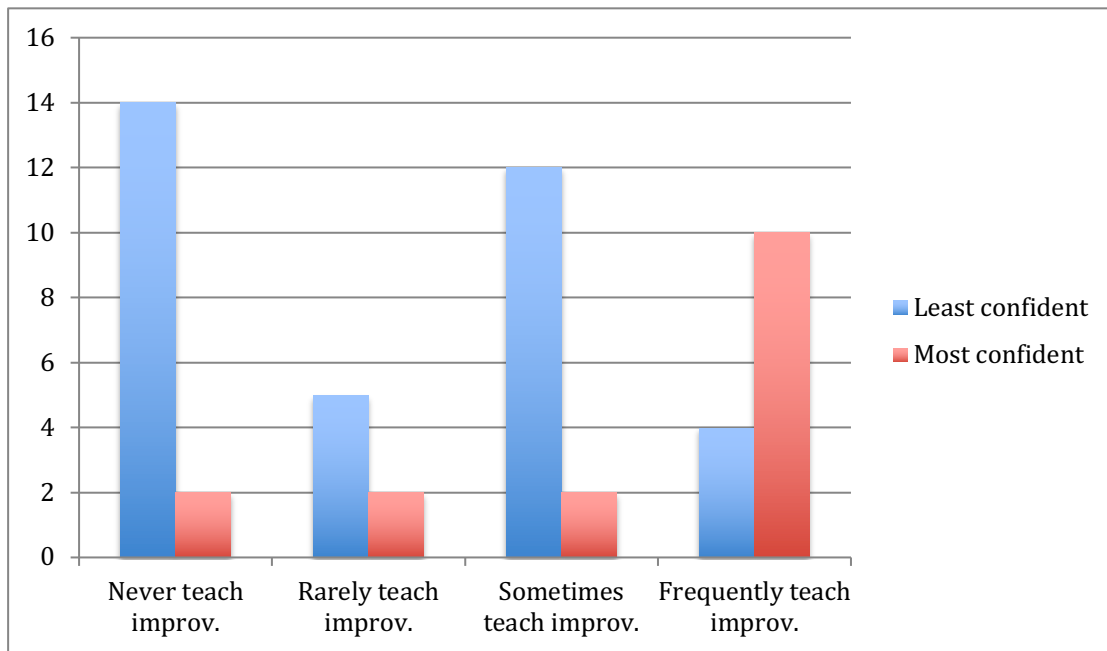
n=115

Level of confidence in improvisation

Questions 10 and 12 asked respondents about their confidence in playing activities. Their responses are summarised in the first section of this chapter (see Figure 4). There was a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.41$) between the respondents’ level of confidence and how frequently improvisation was taught in lessons, as shown in Figure 17. 87.5% ($n=14$) of respondents who never taught improvisation reported that they felt least confident in improvising. In comparison, 71.4% ($n=10$) of respondents who frequently taught improvisation reported they felt most confident in improvising. This was the only category where the majority of teachers indicated they were most confident in improvising.

Respondents’ comments about why they did not teach improvisation supported this link between confidence in improvisation and the teaching of it: ‘I do not have confidence in my own ability to improvise’ (R14); ‘I couldn’t improvise a gin and tonic if you gave me the ingredients and a glass...’ (R97); ‘...it’s not something I’m good at’ (R98). It seems that a teacher’s level of confidence in improvising is a significant factor in their decision to teach improvisation.

Figure 17: Correlation between confidence in improvisation and how frequently improvisation was taught

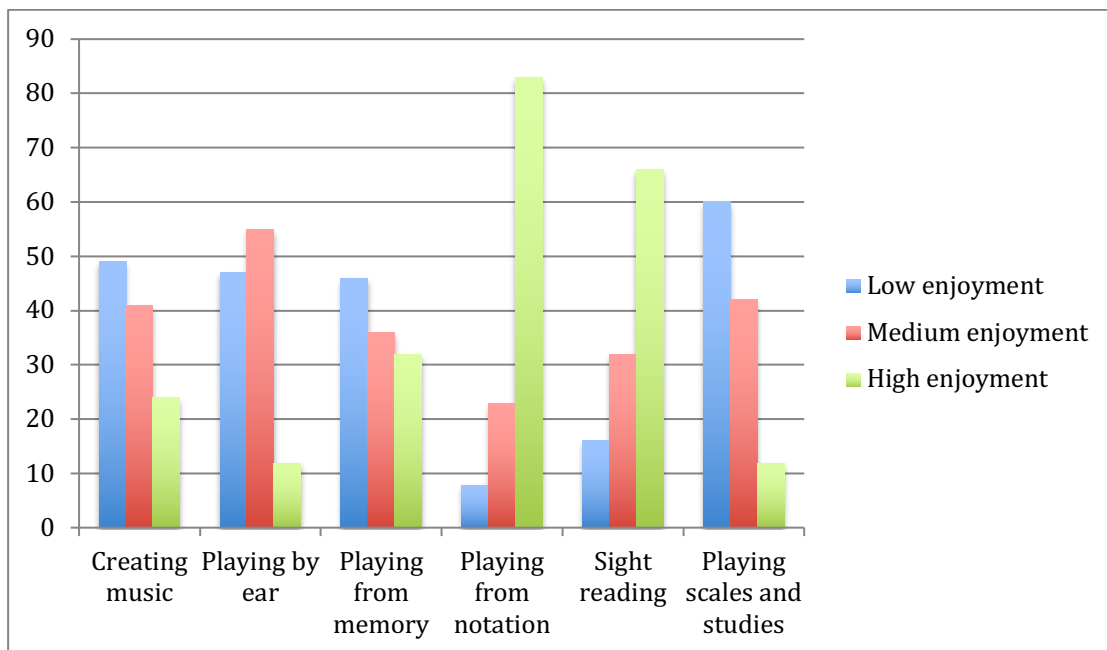


n=51

Enjoyment of improvisation

Respondents were asked to rate how enjoyable they found different playing activities. The responses are summarised in Figure 18.

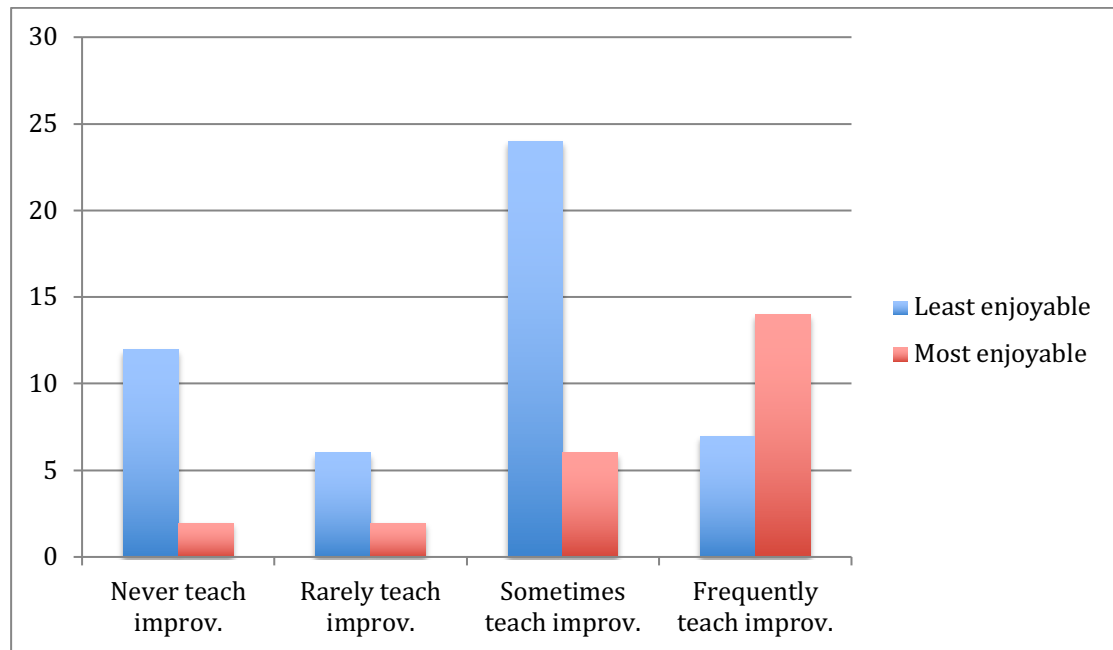
Figure 18: Levels of enjoyment in playing activities



n=114

In total, 21% (n=24) of respondents reported they found creating music most enjoyable, and 42.9% (n=49) reported they found it least enjoyable. There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.38$) between respondents' level of enjoyment in improvisation and how frequently they taught improvisation, as shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Correlation between level of enjoyment and how frequently improvisation was taught



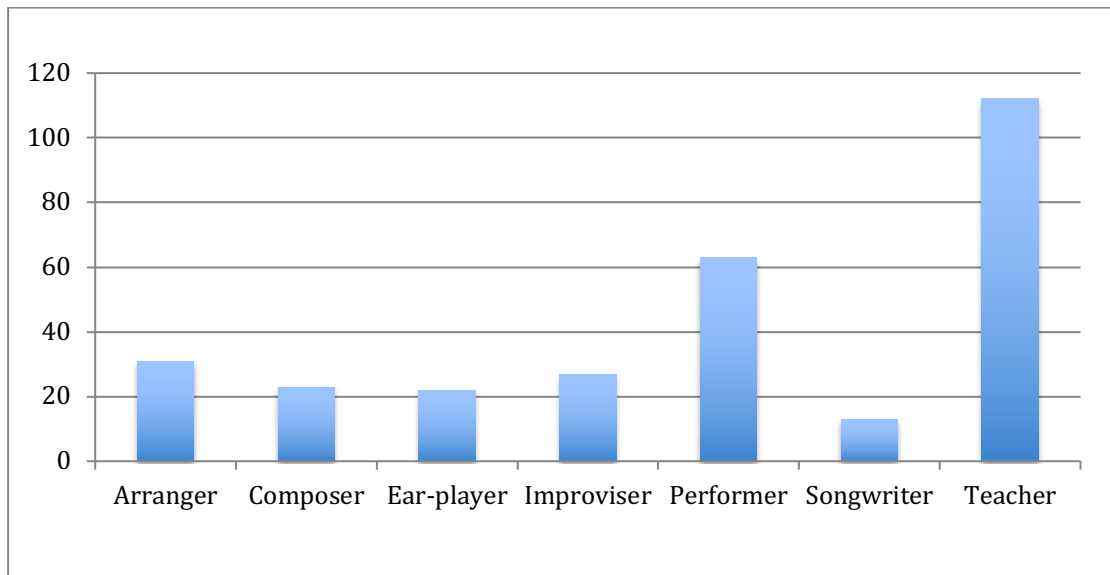
n=73

85.7% (n=12) of respondents who never taught improvisation reported they found creating music the least enjoyable activity. In comparison, 66.6% (n=14) of respondents who frequently taught improvisation reported they found creating music the most enjoyable activity. In addition this was the only category in which the majority of teachers indicated high levels of enjoyment in improvising.

How teachers identify themselves

Question 15 asked respondents how they identified themselves as musicians. Their responses are summarised in Figure 20.

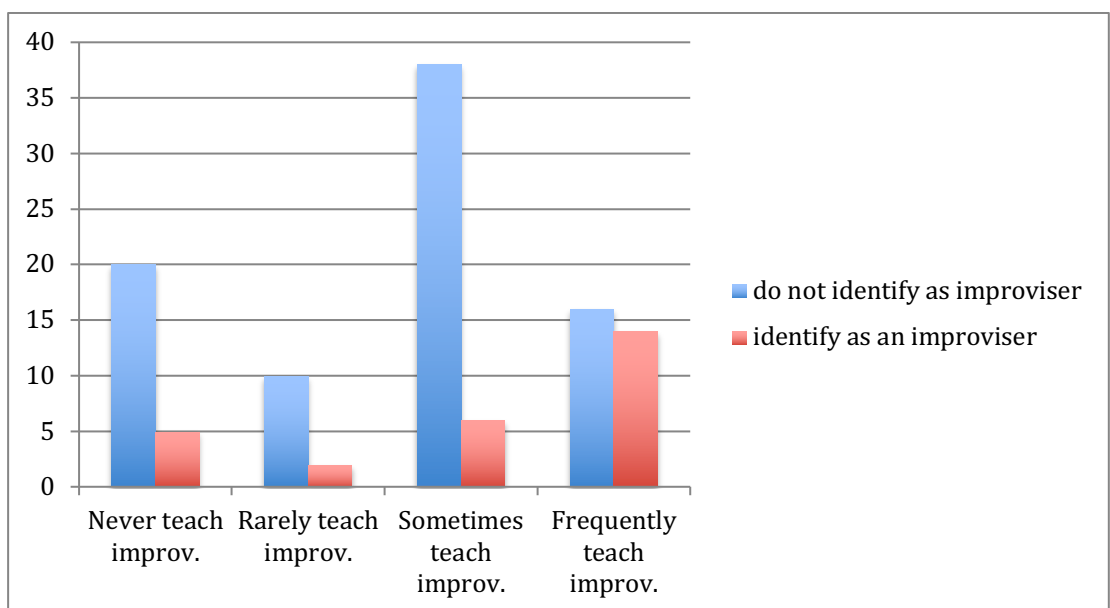
Figure 20: Respondents' musical identity



n=116

23.2% of respondents (n=27) reported that they identified themselves as an improviser. There was a very weak positive correlation ($r=0.18$) between teachers' musical identity and how frequently they taught improvisation, as shown in Figure 21. However, this could be due to how few respondents identified as improvisers. It should be noted that 74% (n=20) of respondents who identified themselves as an improviser also taught improvisation sometimes or frequently.

Figure 21: Correlation between identity as an improviser and how frequently improvisation is taught



n=116

A teacher's musical identity has a significant impact on how frequently they teach improvisation, particularly in relation to how frequently they improvise personally and their confidence in improvisation. However, these results have also demonstrated that individually, these factors are not always sufficient to encourage teachers to include improvisation in lessons frequently.

Understanding of how to teach improvisation

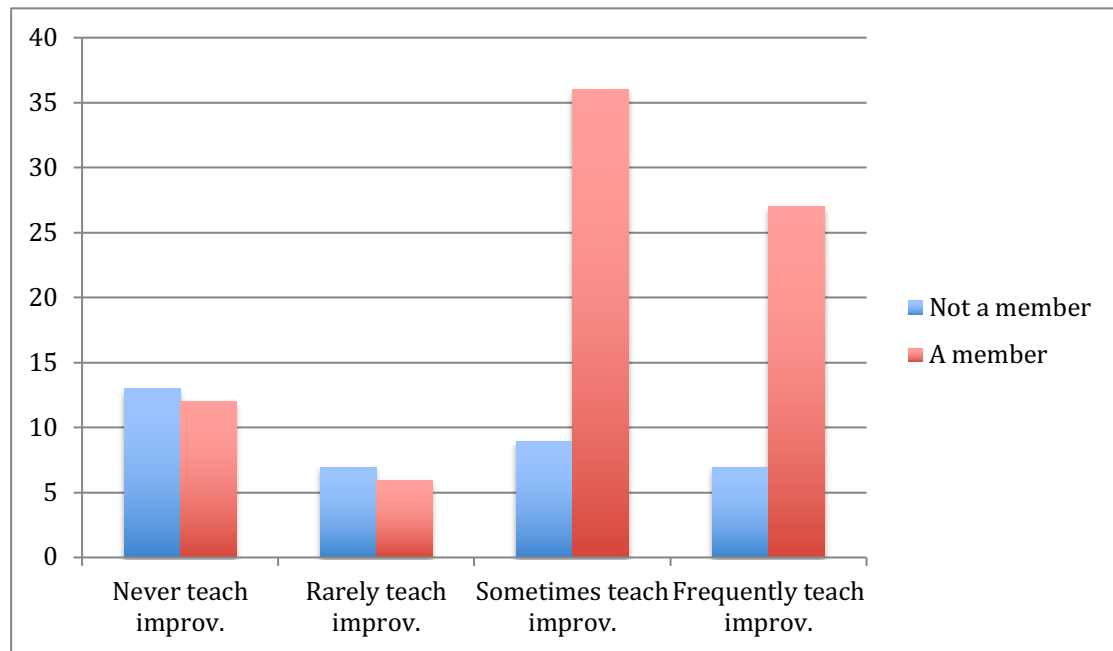
A number of writers highlight the importance of teachers developing instrumental teaching skills (Baker, 2006; Bernhard, 2012; Cathcart, 2013; Paynter, 2000; Winters, 2012). In order to understand the relationship between this factor and how frequently improvisation was taught the survey investigated the teacher training respondents had received and their level of confidence in teaching.

Membership of professional organisations

Professional organisations provide teachers with opportunities to develop their teaching skills. As well as including a wealth of information on their websites, a number of the organisations produce magazines focused on music teaching, and EPTA and the Incorporated Society of Musicians (ISM) both hold national conferences. Question 5 asked respondents to indicate if they were members of a professional organisation. 70.9% of respondents indicated that they were.

There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.28$) between membership of professional organisations and the teaching of improvisation, as shown in Figure 22. 52.6% ($n=20$) of respondents who never or rarely taught improvisation were not members of professional organisations. In comparison, only 20.2% ($n=16$) of those who sometimes or frequently taught improvisation were not members of organisations. In addition, those who were not members of organisations were more likely to not teach improvisation on a regular basis, with 55.5% ($n=20$) of those who were not members also reporting they never or rarely taught improvisation.

Figure 22: Correlation between membership of professional organisations and how frequently improvisation was taught

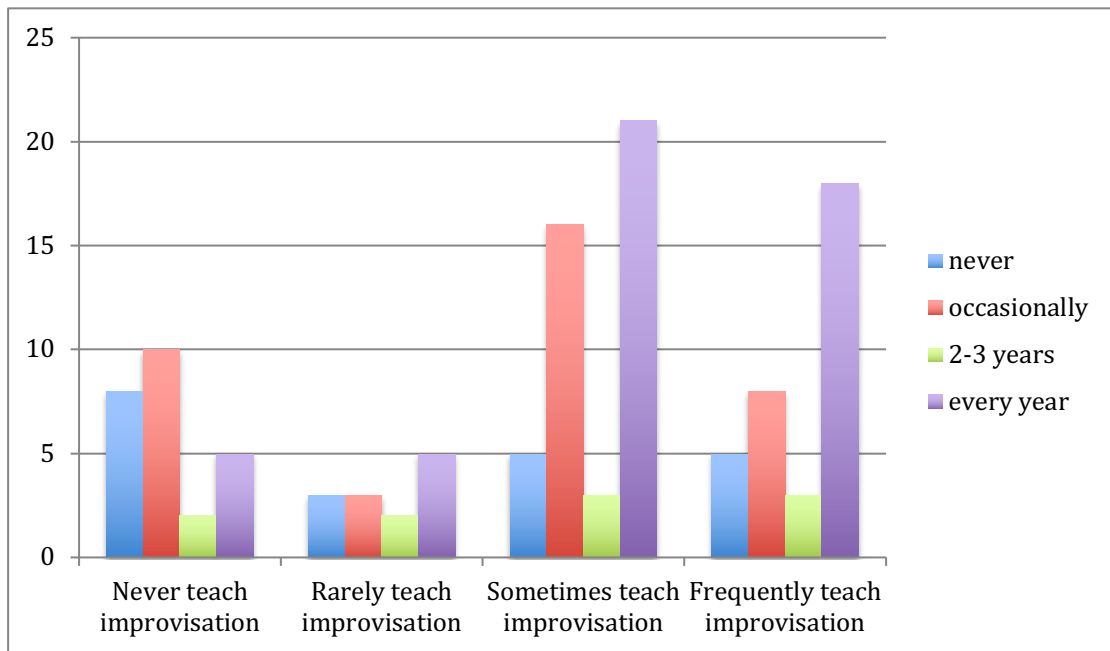


n=117

Professional Development

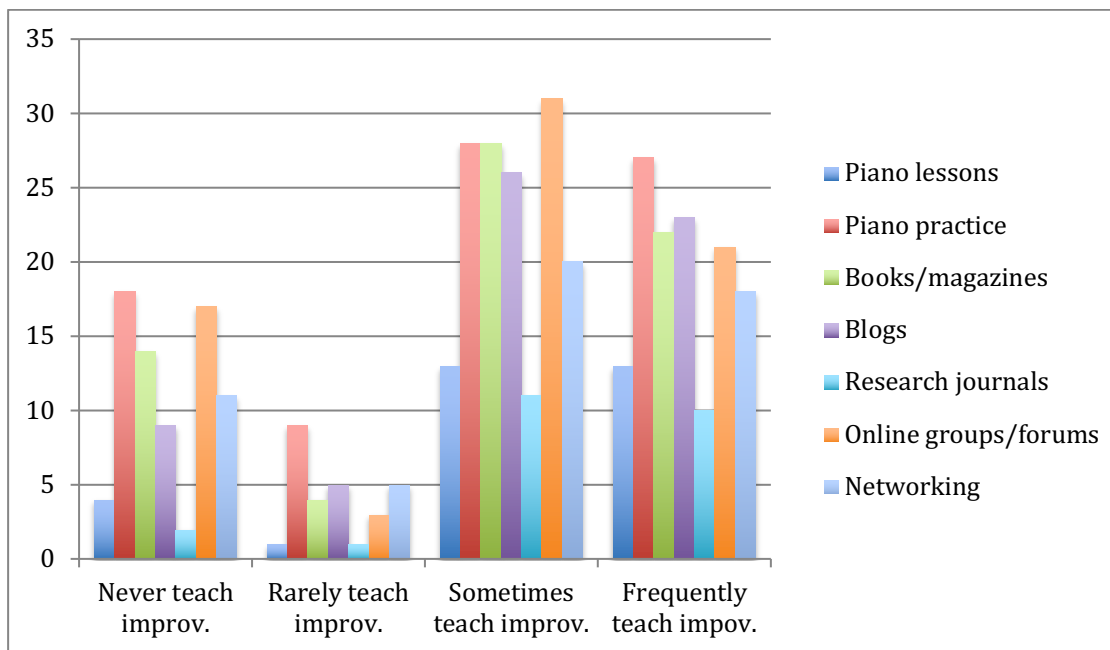
Questions 17, 18 and 19 asked respondents about their continued professional development (CPD). There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.25$) between how regularly respondents attended courses and how frequently they taught improvisation, as shown in Figure 23. 72% ($n=18$) of those who never taught improvisation never or occasionally attended courses. In comparison, 61.7% ($n=21$) of those who frequently taught improvisation attended courses at least every 2-3 years. Figure 24 indicates the respondents who engaged in CPD on a regular basis. These results suggest that the type of professional development had no impact on the teaching of improvisation ($r=0.01$). However, the results do appear to support the results in Figure 23, showing that the majority of respondents who frequently engaged in CPD also taught improvisation sometimes or regularly.

Figure 23: Correlation between frequency of CPD and how frequently improvisation was taught



n=116

Figure 24: Correlation between method of CPD and how frequently improvisation was taught

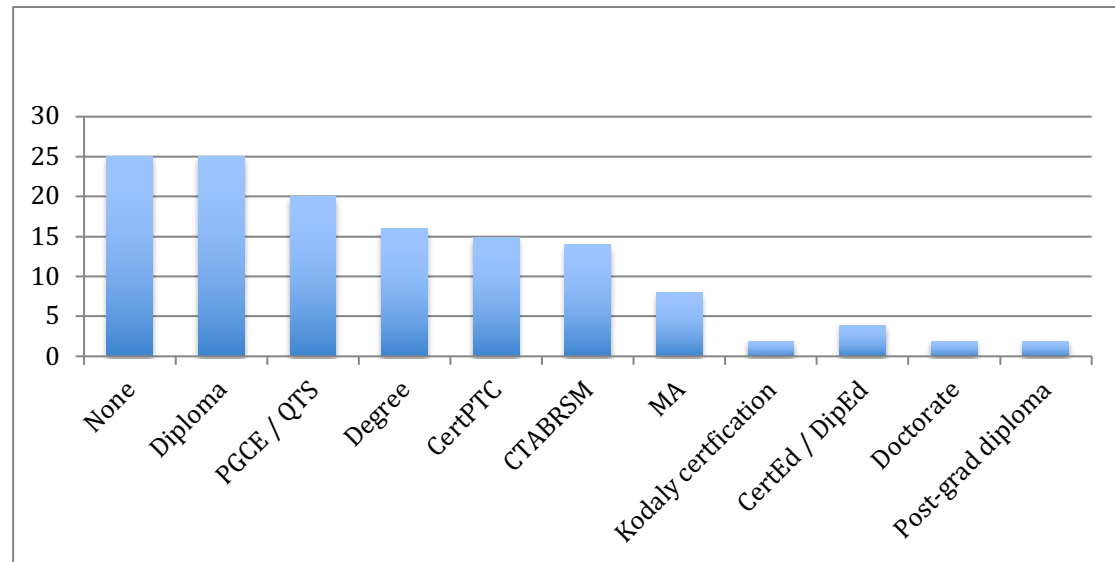


n=116

Music teaching and instrumental teaching qualifications

Question 4 asked respondents to give details about their music teaching or instrumental teaching qualifications. The results are summarised in Figure 25.

Figure 25: Music teaching and instrumental teaching qualifications held



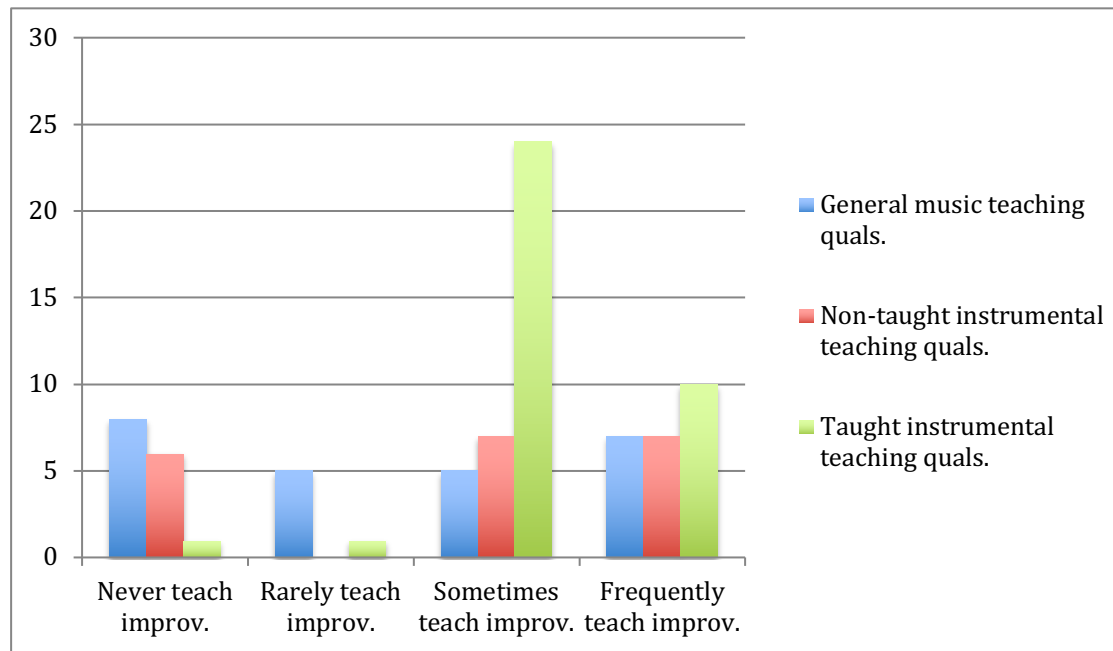
n=116

71.5% of respondents had a music teaching or instrumental teaching qualification. The qualifications reported fell into three categories:

1. general music teaching qualifications, such as a PGCE in music;
2. non-taught instrumental specific teaching qualifications, such as teaching diplomas; and
3. taught instrumental specific qualifications, such as EPTA's Certificate of the Piano Teachers' Course (CertPTC) and ABRSM's Certificate of Teaching (CTABRSM).

There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.31$) between the variables, as shown in Figure 26. The general music teaching qualifications were fairly evenly spread between the four categories of frequency of teaching, suggesting that these qualifications had little impact on respondents' piano teaching practice. In comparison, 94.4% ($n=34$) of those with taught instrumental teaching qualifications taught improvisation sometimes or frequently.

Figure 26: Correlation between teaching qualifications and how frequently improvisation was taught

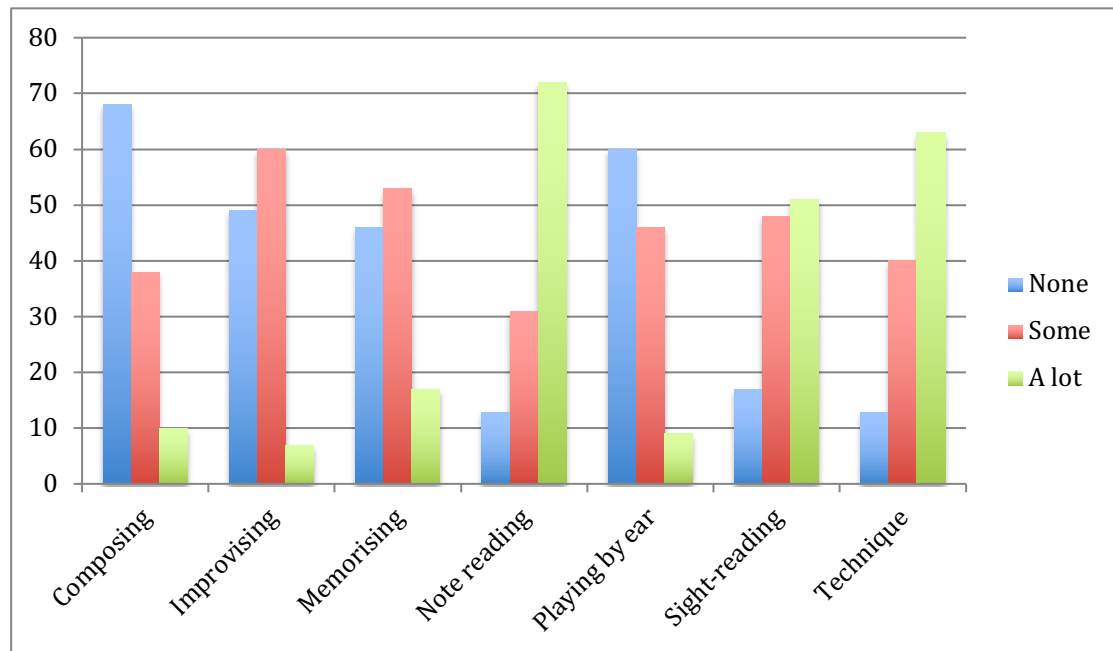


n=81

Training in how to teach improvisation

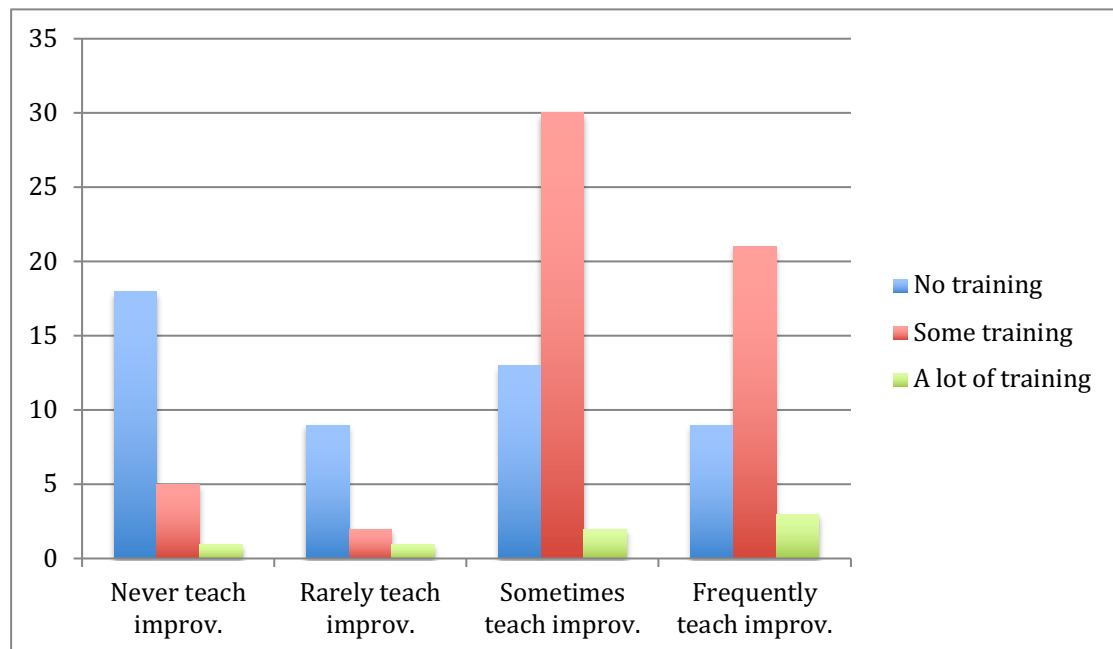
Question 21 asked respondents how much training they had received in how to teach improvisation. The results are summarised in Figure 27. Only 6% ($n=7$) of respondents had received a lot of training in how to teach improvisation, and 41.3% ($n=49$) had received no training at all. There was a weak positive correlation ($r=0.36$) between the two variables, as highlighted by Figure 28. 75% ($n=18$) of respondents who never taught improvisation reported that they had received no training in how to teach it. This category also received the highest percentage of the negative responses, with 36.7% of those who had received no training reporting they never taught improvisation. As only 6% of respondents had received a lot of training in improvisation none of the categories had a high positive response. However, 42.8% ($n=3$) of those with a lot of training also taught improvisation frequently. There was also a significant increase in the number of teachers who had received some training in the two higher categories.

Figure 27: Amount of teacher training in improvisation respondents had received



n=116

Figure 28: Correlation between teacher training in improvisation and how frequently improvisation was taught

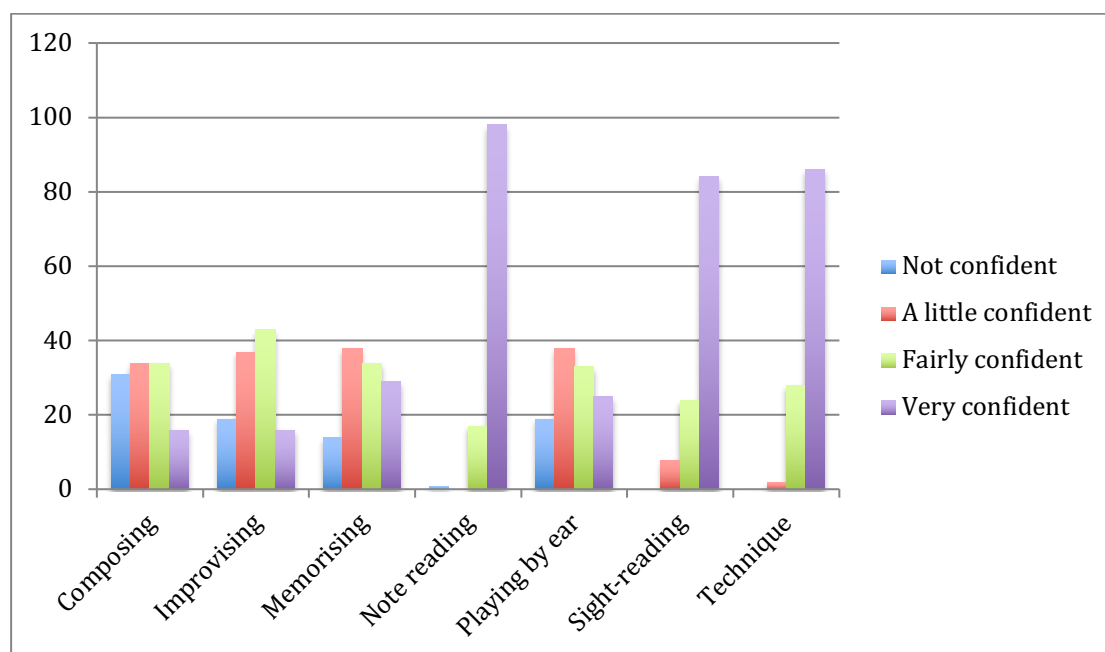


n=114

Level of confidence in teaching improvisation

Question 22 asked teachers to rate how confident they felt in teaching. The results are summarised in Figure 29. The results indicated a strong relationship between the level of confidence in teaching an activity and how frequently that activity was taught in lessons. Note reading, sight-reading and technique (shown in Figure 6 to be the most frequently taught activities) received the most positive responses in this question. Improvising and composing each had the fewest number of ‘very confident’ responses (13.7% each). Along with playing by ear, improvising also received the second highest number of ‘not confident’ responses (16.3%). There is evidence in respondents’ comments to suggest that the lack of confidence in teaching improvisation could be due to the training opportunities available to teachers. Some respondents reported that the training they had received in how to teach improvisation focused on teaching it to beginners: ‘Many training sessions focus on improvisation for lower level pupils so I’m not sure myself on improvising at higher levels...’ (R116); ‘Less experience/tuition on [improvisation and composition] although beginners-intermediate I feel confident with’ (R10). The fact that a number of other respondents reported that they predominantly used improvisation with beginner students suggests that other teachers may have had the same experience.

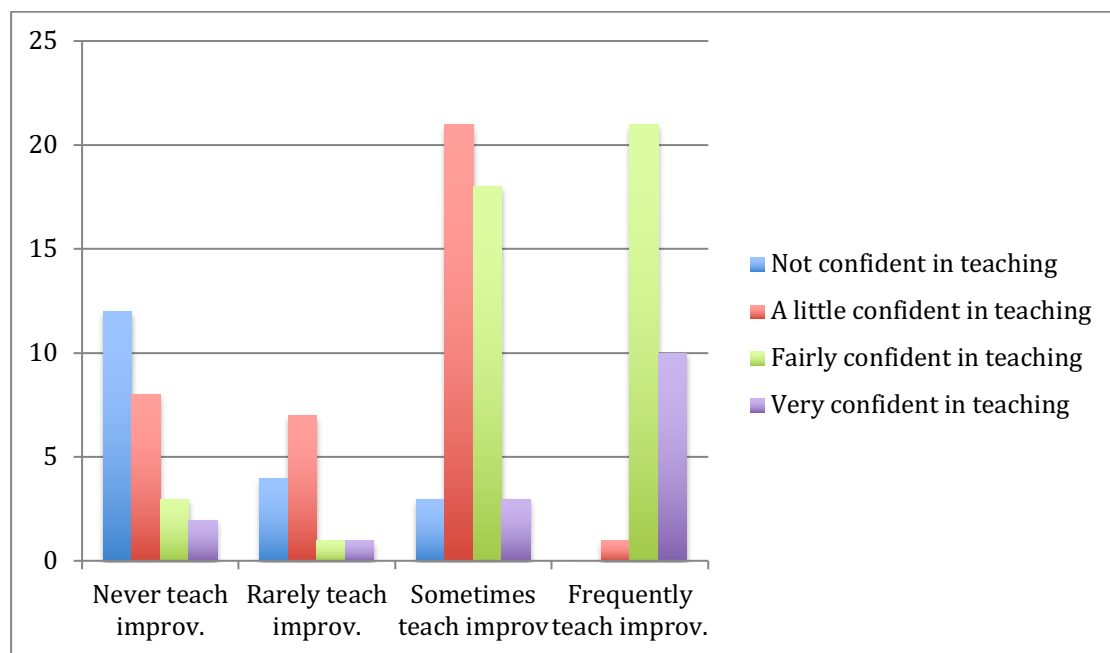
Figure 29: Levels of confidence in teaching



n=116

Figure 30 shows the impact of confidence on the teaching of improvisation specifically. There was a moderate positive correlation ($r=0.57$) between these two factors. 80% of respondents who never taught improvisation reported that they had only a little or no confidence in how to teach it. In comparison, 96.8% of respondents who frequently taught improvisation reported they were fairly confident or very confident in teaching improvisation. Additionally, none of the respondents who taught improvisation frequently reported a lack of confidence in teaching it.

Figure 30: Correlation between confidence in teaching and how frequently improvisation was taught



n=115

It is likely that more experience in teaching an activity leads to greater levels of confidence in how to teach it, which could account for these results. However, respondents' comments indicated that a lack of confidence discouraged them from teaching improvisation regularly: 'Very seldom. I am not confident to teach it and use it at the early stages only' (R63); 'I can improvise but don't know how to teach it' (R94); 'Unsure how to go about it in a constructive way' (R102); 'I rarely include it but I try to as I recognise its importance - I have very little confidence in teaching it...' (R132).

Both the amount of training received and the level of confidence in teaching improvisation have been shown to have a significant impact on how frequently improvisation was taught. The results do indicate that these factors alone are not enough to cause teachers to include improvisation in lessons, as over a quarter (28.5%) of respondents who received a lot of training in how to teach improvisation included it in lessons rarely or never. Nonetheless, they appear to be an important influence on the issue.

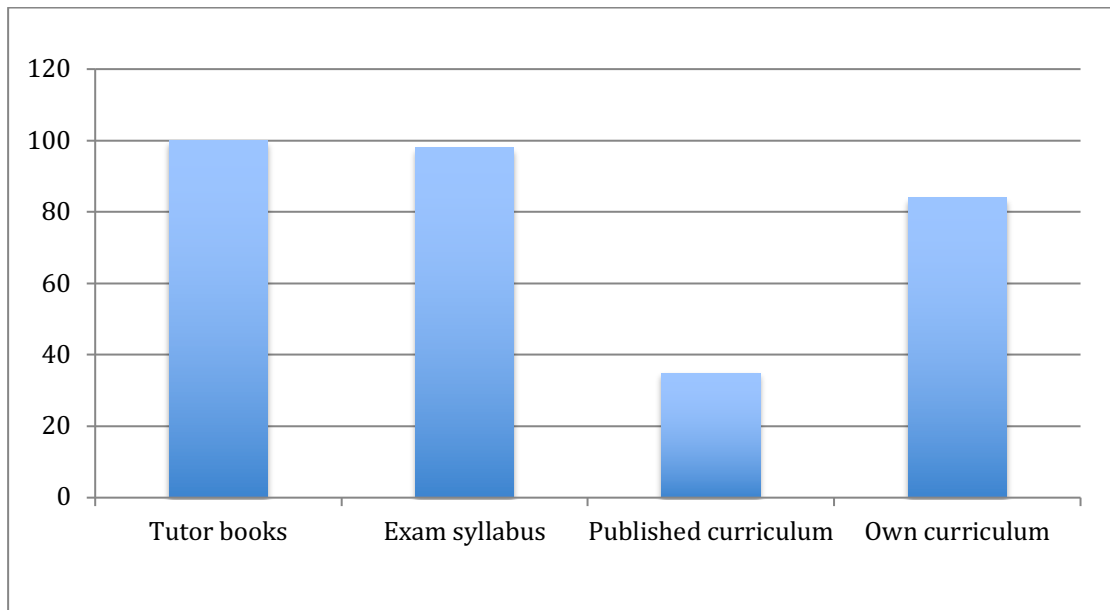
Teaching literature and resources used

The Piano Survey 2010 (Cathcart, 2013) reported that two of the main influences on lesson content are tutor books and the exam system. In order to determine the impact that resources have on the teaching of improvisation this survey investigated the resources that teachers use, both generally and when teaching improvisation specifically. No correlation was found between these resources and the teaching of improvisation.

Teaching resources used

Respondents were asked about the resources that influence their lesson content. The results are shown in Figure 31. Tutor books and the exam syllabus were the most popular options, with 85.4% (n=100) and 83.7% (n=98) of respondents respectively identifying them as an influence. Other resources mentioned by respondents included materials from courses, downloadable resources from websites and students' own interests. There was no correlation between the resources used and how frequently improvisation was taught in lessons.

Figure 31: Resources that influenced lesson content



n=117

Resources used in teaching improvisation

Question 32 asked respondents to give examples of the resources they used when teaching improvisation. 74 teachers offered suggestions. However, as those respondents were predominantly those who taught improvisation it was not possible to find a relationship between the resources used and how frequently improvisation was taught.

4.3 How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?

Gellrich and Parncutt (1998) give an interesting insight into how improvisation was taught in piano lessons before 1850. However, no literature was found on how improvisation is typically included in modern piano lessons. The final aim of the survey was to provide a snapshot of how improvisation is taught by today's piano teachers.

Resources used in teaching improvisation

Respondents were asked to give examples of resources they used in the teaching of improvisation. The full list of the resources is shown in Figure 32. Tutor books that included specific improvisation activities in them, such as the *Hal Leonard Student Piano Library* (Kreader et al, 1996) and *Piano Adventures* (Faber and Faber, 2006) were popular ways to teach improvisation to young beginners. Resources published by the exam boards were mentioned and clearly provided a helpful framework for some teachers. By far the most popular book was Forrest Kinney’s *Pattern Play* series, with almost a quarter of respondents (22.7%) reporting they used them with students. The other most popular category was teachers’ own ideas and experiences, with 22.7% of teachers commenting that they used their own materials or created their own resources.

Figure 32: Resources used in teaching improvisation

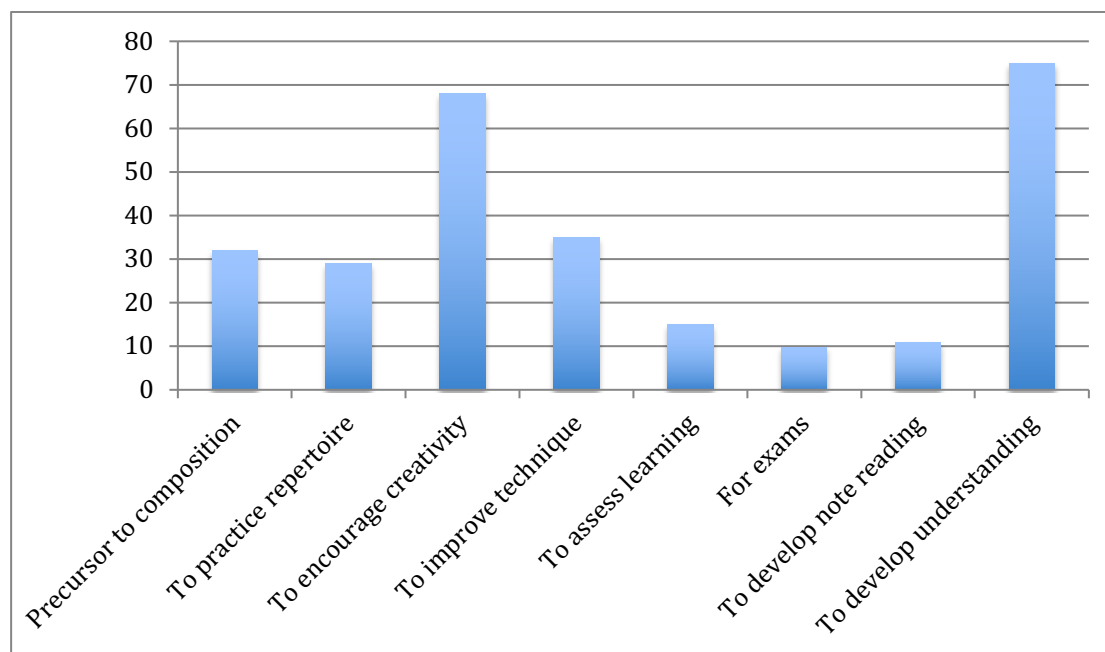
Resources used	Frequency
Pattern Play (Kinney, 2010)	18
Own ideas and resources	18
Tutor books	17
Exam board materials	12
Student’s repertoire	9
Chord progressions (from lead sheets, real books and pop songs)	7
Materials from courses	6
Visual prompts (including photos, patterns, toy animals)	6
Online resources	5
Joining the Dots (Bullard, 2010)	4
Backing tracks	4
Improve Your Sight-reading (Harris, 2008)	4
Higgledy-Piggledy Jazz (Cobb, 2006)	3
Rhythm flash cards	2
The Jazz Piano Book (Levine, 1989)	1
Music Mind Games (Yurko 1992)	1
Microjazz (Norton, 2011)	1
Jazz Piano from Scratch (Beale, 1998)	1
Storybooks	1

n=79

How improvisation is taught

Respondents were asked to indicate how they included improvisation in lessons (Figure 33) and to give an example of a typical teaching activity. These responses, along with the information in Figure 29, help provide a general picture of how improvisation is taught in today's piano lessons.

Figure 33: Ways that improvisation was included in lessons



n=104

Teaching beginners

Many respondents reported that they often included improvisation in lessons with young beginners. For some teachers, this was due to the positive impact they had seen from its use with those students: 'I try to include improvisation, especially for beginners as it gives them the opportunity to play anytime, anywhere' (R11); 'It is an excellent way of encouraging beginners to make music and develop a feeling for rhythm, especially in very young pupils' (R127). Other respondents commented that it was due to their lack of confidence in teaching it at higher levels: 'I am not confident to teach it and use it in the early stages only' (R63); 'Some pupils' lessons, depending on the pupil and also whether or not I can improvise at the appropriate level...I'm not sure myself on improvising at higher levels...' (R116); 'Less experience / tuition on [improvisation and composition] although beginners-

intermediate I feel confident with' (R10). Tutor books were popular ways to teach improvisation to young beginners. Some of the resources, such as visual prompts, toy animals and storybooks, were used specifically with younger beginners.

Playing with others

Many respondents reported improvising together with students. Activities included the teacher providing an accompaniment whilst the student improvised over the top, or improvising in a 'call and response' style. As reported earlier, the most popular resource in the teaching of improvisation was the *Pattern Play* series by Forrest Kinney (2010). A guiding principle of these books is Kinney's desire for pianists to make music with others (Kinney, 2013), which no doubt will have had some influence on the teachers using the books. Other teachers mentioned the use of backing tracks from YouTube or on CDs, allowing students to play with 'virtual' musicians.

Providing boundaries

Asking students to improvise within set boundaries was a common theme. Examples included restricting the notes played (e.g. using 5 finger positions or just the black notes), using a set rhythmic pattern or asking students to improvise over a certain chord progression. One teacher commented on how helpful providing boundaries could be:

I find that giving parameters helps students to relax and focus on one specific thing. It's intended to support not limit their improvisation (R48).

Linking it into learning

A number of teachers gave examples of how they linked improvisation into other parts of the lesson. One way that this was done was by basing the improvisation on concepts being learned: for example using the black keys when exploring keyboard geography, or improvising in the 'scale of the week'. 72.1% of respondents reported that they used improvisation to develop musical understanding, indicating that this was a common way of including improvisatory activities.

The other way improvisation was linked into other activities was by using repertoire as a starting point. This was less common, with only 27.8% of respondents reporting they used improvisation as a way of learning and practicing repertoire. Examples given included taking the bass line of a piece and improvising over the top, or using the rhythm of a phrase and improvising a new melody. Teachers demonstrated how this could be done with students of all ability levels: a number of teachers mentioned doing this with pieces in tutor books, whilst one teacher gave the example of Chopin's Prelude in C minor. It was noted that as well as providing a useful opportunity to improvise, this also aided in the learning and performance of the repertoire: 'We always start with the repertoire they are using at the time: this develops an 'inner' knowledge of the piece in question that undoubtedly enhances understanding and performance' (R8).

Using stimuli

Another starting point mentioned was the use of stimuli, such as pictures or stories. This was often spoken about in the teaching of beginners. Teachers mentioned the use of photos, storybooks or toy animals to spark off students' imaginations. Examples of teaching activities included asking students to imitate animal noises or 'painting pictures' with music.

Use of musical devices

Some teachers talked about encouraging students to consider how they could create a specific sound through the use of different musical devices. Again, this was often related to the teaching of beginners, using pitch, tempo or dynamics to accompany a story. Other teachers demonstrated how this could be done with more advanced students. One respondent gave the example of using musical devices such as arpeggios and plagal cadences to create a sense of calm and peace in the music. Another teacher mentioned the use of musical sequence as a way of showing students how to develop their melody.

Improvising within musical genres

Improvisation is predominantly associated with musical styles such as jazz and blues, rather than with classical music (Ashley, 2008; Beckstead, 2013). This mind-set was

evident in the many of the responses. The most common musical genres mentioned in the teaching of improvisation were jazz and blues, although one teacher did mention asking students to improvise in the style of the repertoire they were learning. A number of respondents commented that they only taught improvisation in the context of jazz: 'I include it with some students, those who are interested in jazz' (R16); 'I do have a few students interested in jazz and I teach improvisation to them' (R73); '[I teach improvisation because] I started teaching jazz' (R39). At least one respondent did not teach improvisation because they considered themselves to be a classical piano teacher: 'I focus on classical music where improvisation is not commonly needed' (R103).

The pentatonic scale, twelve bar blues and walking bass lines were all mentioned as helpful starting points. A number of teachers also reported using resources such as the ABRSM *Jazz Piano Pieces* (1998) and London College of Music's *Jazz Piano Handbook* (Corbett, 2007), real books, or repertoire books such as *Microjazz* (Norton, 2011) and *Higgledy-Piggledy Jazz* (Cobb, 2006) to encourage students to solo within a melody.

4.4 Summary

This chapter has considered the results of the survey in order to answer the research questions:

1. What are piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation?
2. What factors influence piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in piano lessons?
3. How is improvisation taught in piano lessons today?

The results suggest that many piano teachers have limited experience in improvisation. 84.6% of respondents had received no training in improvisation in their lessons as beginners. Whilst a larger proportion (72.6%) had received some training in improvisation since their early lessons, only 10.3% had received a lot. As a consequence, only 33.6% of respondents improvised regularly and only 14.1% were

confident improvisers. Despite this lack of personal experience, 72.6% of respondents reported that they taught improvisation frequently or sometimes.

Five factors were investigated to understand their impact on teachers' pedagogy:

1. Teachers' awareness of current research in instrumental teaching;
2. teachers' musical experiences as learners;
3. teachers' musical identity;
4. teachers' understanding of how to teach improvisation; and
5. the teaching literature and resources used in lessons.

A moderate relationship was seen between awareness of research into improvisation and how frequently it was taught in lessons. However, these results did not necessarily indicate that awareness of research had an impact on teachers' pedagogy. Respondents' musical experiences had some influence on how frequently improvisation was taught, although it was noted that music and performance qualifications had no impact. Musical identity was a significant factor, with all the issues investigated positively influencing the teaching of improvisation. Another significant factor was respondents' knowledge of how to teach improvisation and their level of confidence in it. The final factor investigated, the teaching literature and resources used in lessons, had no bearing on how frequently improvisation was taught. The data also provided examples of teaching activities and resources used in lessons, giving a snapshot of how improvisation is taught in piano lessons today.

The following chapter will discuss the implications of these findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Piano teachers' personal experiences of improvisation

The results from the survey indicate that many piano teachers have very little experience in improvisation. Respondents predominantly came from a traditional background; their lessons as beginners were focused on notation and technique, with few teachers learning how to compose, improvise or play by ear. These results support the findings of Cathcart (2013) who demonstrates how this notation-heavy method has dominated piano teaching since the Victorian era. Respondents rationalised the lack of improvisation in their lessons as beginners by explaining they came from a classical background, demonstrating how this focus on reading notation is often linked with 'Classical' piano lessons. The focus on notation was continued throughout their training and consequently had an impact on their practice in the present. Not only were note reading, sight-reading and technique the areas that teachers had received the most training in, they were also the areas in which the majority of teachers felt most confident. Improvisation remained an activity in which few regularly engaged and fewer felt confident.

Despite these traditional beginnings, it would appear that many piano teachers are not content to continue teaching in the way that they were taught. Although the vast majority of teachers had little experience in improvisation, 72.6% of them reported they included it in their piano lessons sometimes or frequently. Whilst it has been recognised that this figure contrasts with the number who taught note reading (100% of respondents taught it sometimes or frequently), nevertheless it indicates that many piano teachers are committed to developing their skills as musicians and teachers. Cathcart (2013) argued that a strong catalyst would be required for piano teachers to move away from traditional notation-based methods. The results from this survey demonstrate that a number of teachers have moved from a traditional background into new ways of teaching. Of interest to us now is what factors caused this change to happen.

Factors influencing piano teachers' decisions to include improvisation in lessons

Teachers' awareness of research into improvisation

The results in this section indicated that there was a relationship between teachers' knowledge of the benefits of improvisation and how frequently they taught improvisation in lessons. However, as was reported, this correlation does not necessarily imply causation. It is possible that respondents' awareness of the benefits of teaching through improvisation was the result of teaching improvisation more frequently. For this reason, this study is not able to confidently determine if awareness of research influences teachers' pedagogy. Nevertheless, it seems likely that greater access to research into the benefits of improvisation would have a positive impact on how frequently improvisation was taught.

Teachers' musical experiences

With few respondents having much experience in improvisation, the results in this section were mixed. However, they do indicate that those who had received training in improvisation were more likely to teach it in their piano lessons. Experience in a variety of styles and genres also had a positive effect on the teaching of improvisation. This supports research by Odena and Welch (2009) who found that experience in multiple styles increased teachers' awareness of how students could approach composition. It is possible that playing styles such as jazz or blues gave respondents more opportunities to improvise themselves, thereby encouraging them to include this skill more in their lessons. The results demonstrated that experience in improvising at any stage of their pianistic career had a positive impact on how frequently respondents taught improvisation; the benefits were not merely limited to experience in improvisation as beginners. Those teachers who thus far have had no experience in improvisation could find that an opportunity to experience it now would impact their pedagogy.

Teachers' musical identity

Teachers' musical identity was shown to be a significant influence on personal pedagogies, with all the factors discussed positively impacting how frequently improvisation was taught. In particular, frequency of personal improvisation and

confidence in improvising played a significant part in determining how often teachers included it in lessons. However, the results in this section also reveal the complexity of the issue and demonstrate that personal experience in improvisation does not always encourage teachers to include it in lessons. Amongst the respondents were those who frequently improvised, were confident in it, enjoyed it and identified as improvisers, but did not teach it in their lessons. Respondents' comments also indicated that the ability to improvise did not necessarily equate to an understanding of how to teach it. This backs up research by Priest (1989) who also found that teachers who could improvise were not always confident in their ability to teach improvisation. Whilst personal experience in improvising is clearly beneficial, in isolation it may not have a significant impact on teachers' pedagogy.

Understanding of how to teach improvisation

Understanding of how to teach improvisation was a significant influence on the teaching of improvisation. Those with training in this area were more likely to teach improvisation in their lessons, with 86.1% of the respondents who had received some or a lot of training reporting they taught it in their lessons sometimes or frequently. In addition, the majority (75%) of respondents who never taught improvisation reported they had received no training in how to teach it. Confidence in teaching improvisation was also a significant factor, and had the strongest correlation ($r=0.57$) of all the variables investigated. The difficulty in implying causation from these results has already been reported; however, comments from respondents certainly back up the suggestion that confidence in teaching is an important factor.

71.5% of respondents had completed a course that led to a music teaching or instrumental teaching qualification. However, it would seem that not all qualifications were equal in the impact they had on teachers' pedagogy. The general music teaching qualifications such as the PGCE had little impact on how frequently improvisation was taught. This supports research by Cathcart (2013) and Baker (2006) who both found that the PGCE had limited influence on what happened in the instrumental teaching studio. In comparison, 96.4% of teachers who had done an instrumental teaching course taught improvisation sometimes or frequently. Whilst it is not known if all these courses included instruction on teaching improvisation, the two most common courses mentioned by respondents (the CertPTC and CTABRSM)

both do. These results also support research by Cathcart who reported that teachers who had attended specific instrumental teaching courses presented ‘a more reflective and questioning approach to their teaching’ (2013: 373).

The difference in impact on pedagogy between the teaching qualifications and the music and performance qualifications (which had no impact on how frequently respondents taught improvisation) is of particular significance, as the latter were more common amongst respondents. 94.8% of respondents held a music or performance qualification of Grade 8 or above, whilst only 46.5% held a qualification from a taught instrumental teaching course. Other research suggests that the gap between these types of qualifications is even greater. Cathcart (2013) reported that 78% of the Piano Survey 2010 respondents had a performance qualification of Grade 8 or above, whilst only 9% had a qualification from a taught instrumental teaching course. The results of this survey illustrate the importance of instrumental teaching courses and suggest that the piano teaching community would benefit from more teachers having these types of qualifications.

It is also interesting to note the disparity between the amount of training respondents had received in different activities: 62% of respondents reported they had received a lot of training in how to teach note reading, but only 6% had received a lot of training in teaching improvisation. The reasons for this inequality are unclear but it does raise the possibility that the traditional nature of piano teaching has created more training opportunities in teaching notation and less in teaching other skills. The problem is amplified by the fact that, as a profession that requires no qualifications, piano teachers are largely in charge of the training they undertake. As a consequence, it is possible that some teachers may gravitate towards courses on skills in which they already feel confident and neglect other skills in which they are less confident. It is also possible that this is due to the association of improvisation with jazz. If teachers identify themselves as classical piano teachers they may not see the need to include improvisation in lessons with students.

How improvisation is taught in piano lessons today

The results suggest that many teachers predominantly use improvisation as a method of learning and developing other musical skills. The use of improvisation to develop students' musical understanding or to learn repertoire was a common theme in the comments. Few respondents mentioned ways of teaching students how to develop in their improvisatory skills. Of those that did, most approached it at a basic level by discussing tempo or dynamics with young beginners. Only two respondents demonstrated how they would encourage more advanced students to improve their improvisations. It is likely that this is linked to the report from some respondents that they lacked confidence in teaching improvisation at higher levels. Additionally, respondents' comments indicated that improvisation is often taught in the context of jazz and blues and less so with classical music. Whilst the use of improvisation as a teaching method is certainly to be encouraged, this combination of factors could result in a situation where, although improvisation is included in lessons, many students do not develop into confident improvisers and remain unable to confidently 'speak' on their instrument for themselves.

5.2 Conclusion

The results from the survey suggest that the influences on teacher pedagogy are complex, with a number of factors working together. However, a significant thread throughout all the factors examined has been the need for teachers to have more access to taught instrumental teaching courses. Whilst teaching diplomas are a popular choice amongst many piano teachers (Cathcart, 2013), the fact that they are taken by individuals and are not part of a taught course does limit the impact that they have on teachers' pedagogy. Taught courses give participants access to experienced teachers who can provide models of good practice and opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own methods. They also have the potential to encourage teachers to try out new approaches with which they are not currently familiar. Access to these courses would give teachers opportunities to become familiar with current research in instrumental teaching and adjust their teaching practice accordingly. In addition, having a systematic teacher-training programme would address the current imbalance in the training teachers receive, ensuring that skills such as reading notation were not

emphasised at the expense of improvisation, and that teachers were given guidance on how to teach improvisation to all ability levels. As well as providing greater pedagogical understanding for the already confident improvisers, these courses would also provide opportunities for teachers with no previous experience in this area to have a go at improvising for themselves.

As was mentioned at the start of this chapter, the results indicate the strong link in the minds of some teachers between notation and the classical music tradition, and improvisation and jazz. The teaching examples given by respondents indicated that many teach improvisation in the context of jazz music, using jazz teaching resources and books, and musical structures such as the 12 bar blues. Whilst it is undeniable that improvisation is a significant part of jazz piano it is disappointing that the perception that it is not equally a part of classical piano has developed. It is clear from the vast heritage of classical piano works that improvisation and composition are intrinsically linked to classical music. It is equally evident from the research of Gellrich and Parncutt (1998) that it is possible for the teaching and practice of classical music to be immensely creative. An increase in teacher training opportunities could also shift teachers' perceptions on this matter and encourage them to view improvisation as a skill that is essential for developing students into complete musicians, and not one that is limited to particular genres of music.

5.3 Limitations of the survey

The use on an online survey allowed a large number of piano teachers across the UK to be reached. However, this method also had its limitation. The use of Facebook groups and professional organisations to publicise the survey was likely the cause of some bias in the results. It is probable that members of these groups and organisations already had a strong interest in developing themselves as piano teachers. Indeed, some of the Facebook groups were linked to professional development courses, meaning that the members of those groups had received input into their teaching and had been exposed to new ideas and techniques. Consequently, their experiences may not be representative of piano teachers in the UK as a whole. The respondents were also self-selecting and it is possible that the title of the survey

discouraged teachers who were not personally interested in improvisation from participating. Finally, the use of an online survey precluded any without access to the Internet from taking part in the study.

5.4 Impact of the survey

This research has produced findings that have the potential to be of interest to various groups. Firstly, the results are particularly relevant to the providers of professional development opportunities for piano teachers. This research has indicated the importance of raising the status of such courses in the UK due to the significant impact they have on teachers' pedagogy. Furthermore, these results also highlight the imbalance in the training that teachers have received, suggesting the need for more training opportunities in teaching improvisation to students of all levels to be made available. Secondly, this research adds to the growing body of knowledge about private piano teaching in the UK, which will be of interest to those investigating this area of music education. The results demonstrate the influences on teachers' pedagogy in general, which has the potential to have far reaching implications in research into teacher pedagogy and lesson content.

The limitations of using social media as a research tool were discussed in the previous section; despite these difficulties, there were also unexpected benefits to using this method. The use of Facebook and teaching forums allowed 'real-time' contact between the researcher and respondents. Not only did this allow certain difficulties in completing the survey to be addressed, leading to greater participation in the survey, it also enabled respondents to leave comments and feedback on their experience. The comments left by respondents via the social network sites indicated that the act of taking part in the survey gave them the opportunity to reflect on their teaching and consider the influences on their pedagogy: 'Survey done and quite illuminating to me'; 'this survey really made me think and self evaluate'; 'a thought provoking survey'; 'it really made me think about the strong connection between the way I learnt and the way I now teach piano'. Other comments suggested that taking part in the research may have encouraged some respondents to consider changes they could

make to their teaching practice: ‘Survey done – feels like a wake up call’; ‘Really useful to reflect on my teaching and where the gaps are!’.

Cain (2008) discusses the importance of teachers participating in research, specifically action research, as a way of improving their professional practice. The comments above would suggest that taking part in research on any level, whether as a respondent or as a researcher, could cause teachers to reflect on and evaluate their teaching. It is hoped that, as well as having a bearing on the wider piano teaching community, the survey will have had a positive influence on the developing professional practice of the teachers who contributed to the research.

5.5 Areas for future research

The survey has produced a number of interesting findings. However, as an area that has so far received little exploration, it would greatly benefit from more research. Comments by respondents in the open text boxes indicated other influences on their pedagogy that were not explored by the survey. Some respondents touched upon their beliefs on the purpose of piano lessons and the place of improvisation in the context of a complete music education. Other respondents commented on the various pressures experienced in lessons, such as lack of time, expectations of parents, or students’ lack of practice at home, and the impact that these have on lesson content. More research into these areas would lead to a greater understanding of the influences on teachers’ pedagogy.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Copy of the survey

Welcome to My Survey

Dear Fellow Piano Teacher

I am on the Masters in Instrumental Teaching programme at the University of Reading. As part of my dissertation I am carrying out a research study into improvisation in piano teaching.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the reason why teachers do or do not include improvisation in piano lessons. It hopes to make recommendations on possible ways to encourage more teachers to use improvisation with their students. The survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete. It is anonymous and participants can decide to stop at any point in the completion process. The survey will be open until Friday 7th August.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

If you would like any more information please contact me at c.e.cossey@student.reading.ac.uk

**Thank you for taking part,
Catherine Cossey**

Section A - General Information

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire. Please be assured all answers will be treated in the strictest confidence. This first section is asking you for some general information about yourself and your qualifications.

1. Please indicate the age range you fall into.

- under 18
- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-45
- 46-55
- 56-65
- 66 and above

2. For how many years have you taught the piano?

3. Please list any qualifications you hold specific to music or music performance (e.g. grade exams, Music degree, performance diplomas etc).

4. Please list any qualifications you hold specific to music teaching or instrumental teaching (e.g. teaching diplomas, PGCE, CertPPTC etc).

5. Please indicate if you are a member of any of the following professional organisations or groups.

- British Kodaly Academy
- Dalcroze Society
- European Piano Teachers Association (UK)
- Incorporated Society of Musicians
- International Society of Music Educators
- Music Masters and Mistresses Association
- Musicians Union
- National Association of Music Educators
- Other (please specify)

Section B - Information about you as a musician

In this section you will be asked some questions about your own musical experience as a pianist.

6. Please indicate the musical styles you have experience in playing on the piano.

- Classical
- Jazz
- Blues
- Folk
- Pop
- Gospel
- Other (please specify)

7. Which of the following musical activities were included in your piano lessons as a beginner?

	Regularly included	Sometimes included	Rarely included	Never included
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memorising music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Note reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique (scales and studies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. How much training have you had in the following activities?

	A lot	Some	None
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memorising music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Note reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique (scales and studies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. How often do you engage in the following activities on the piano?

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memorising music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Note reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique (scales and studies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Which of the above activities are you most confident in as a pianist?

11. Why is that?

12. Which of the above activities are you least confident in as a pianist?

13. Why is that?

14. Please rate how enjoyable you find the following activities on the piano, with 1 as the most enjoyable and 6 as the least enjoyable.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing repertoire from notation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing repertoire from memory
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sight reading new pieces
<input type="checkbox"/>	Working out music by ear
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creating my own music through improvising and composing
<input type="checkbox"/>	Playing scales and studies

15. How would you identify yourself as a musician? Please tick as many as appropriate.

- Arranger
- Composer
- Ear-player
- Improviser
- Performer
- Songwriter
- Teacher

Section C - Information about you as a teacher

In this third section you will be asked some questions about your experience and training as a piano teacher.

16. Where do you teach piano? Please tick all that apply.

- From home
- Privately at a music studio
- In students' homes
- In a primary or secondary school
- In a university or conservatoire
- For a local music service
- At a local music school
- Other (please specify)

17. How often do you attend professional development courses?

- I attend professional development courses every year.
- I attend professional development courses every 2-3 years.
- I attend professional development courses occasionally.
- I never attend professional development courses.

18. Other than attending courses, what other methods of professional development do you engage in?

	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Piano lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Piano practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading teaching books/magazines	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading teaching blogs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reading research journals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participating in internet forums and Facebook groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Networking with fellow teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

19. Which of the following statements best describes you?

- I am aware of recent developments and trends in piano teaching.
- I am sometimes aware of recent developments and trends in piano teaching.
- I am never aware of recent developments and trends in piano teaching.

20. What resources do you use to decide what to teach your students? Please tick all that apply.

- Tutor books
- Exam syllabus
- Published curriculum (e.g. A Common Approach)
- Own curriculum
- Other (please specify)

21. How much training have you had in how to teach the following activities?

	A lot	Some	None
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memorising music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Note reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique (scales and studies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. How confident do you feel at teaching the following activities to your piano students?

	Very confident	Fairly confident	A little confident	Not confident
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memorising music	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Note reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique (scales and studies)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

23. Please indicate how regularly you include the following activities in your piano lessons.

	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing from memory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing from notation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Section D - Improvisation in piano lessons

Thank you for completing the survey so far. In this last section I would like to find out your opinions relating to improvisation in piano lessons.

24. What do you consider to be the aim of instrumental teaching? Please rate each aim, with 1 as the most important and 6 as the least important.

<input type="checkbox"/>	To develop technical mastery of the instrument
<input type="checkbox"/>	To teach general musicianship skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	To teach instrument specific skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	To teach musical understanding
<input type="checkbox"/>	To teach notation reading
<input type="checkbox"/>	To teach students to create their own music

25. Do you agree it is important for musicians to develop the following skills?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Composing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvising	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Memorisation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Notation reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing by ear	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sight reading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technique	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

26. Do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Improvisation is primarily a method of composing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvisation is the exploration of music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvisation is the exploration of the instrument	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvisation is spontaneous music making.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvisation sometimes leads to composition.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improvisation is a form of expression.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. How would you define improvisation in music?

28. Which of the following areas of instrumental learning do you think would be improved through the use of improvisation in lessons?

- Aural skills
- Note reading
- Problem-solving skills
- Student's enjoyment of lessons
- Student's motivation to practise
- Technique
- Theory knowledge

29. Do you include improvisation in lessons?

Yes

No

Please give reasons for your answer

30. Which of the following statements describes you?

I improvise regularly and include it in lessons with students.

I improvise regularly but do not include it in lessons with students.

I do not improvise regularly but include it in lessons with students.

I do not improvise and do not include it in lessons with students.

31. Which of the following statements describe how you include improvisation in piano lessons? Please tick all that apply.

I use improvisation as a way into composition.

I use improvisation to deal with problem areas in repertoire.

I use improvisation to encourage students to create their own music.

I use improvisation to deal with technical issues.

I use improvisation to assess students' learning.

I use improvisation because students enjoy it.

I use improvisation because it is needed for exams.

I use improvisation to help develop note-reading skills.

I use improvisation to develop musical understanding.

I do not include improvisation in lessons.

32. If you include improvisation in lessons, what resources do you use to help with this?

33. If you include improvisation in lessons, please give an example of a typical improvisation activity.

Thank you

34. Thank you so much for taking part in the survey. If you are interested in finding out the results from my investigation please leave your email address in the box below.

Email Address

Appendix 2: Ethical Approval form

University of Reading
Institute of Education



MA Dissertation Ethical Approval Form B (version February 2014)

NB. This form may also be used for undergraduate work and MA/PGCE assignments where ethical approval is needed

Name of student: Catherine Cossey

Name of course: Masters in Instrumental Teaching

Name of supervisor: Dr Mary Stakelum

Title of project: A survey into the beliefs of UK piano teachers on creativity in music-making

Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf (this checklist should be completed during a meeting with your supervisor.

	YES	NO	
Have you prepared an Information Sheet for all participants (e.g. headteachers, teachers, parents/carers (of children under the age of 16), and children that:			
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	Y		
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	Y		
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	Y		
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	Y		
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	Y		
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	Y		
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	Y		
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	Y		
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email . If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided	Y		
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants			
j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	Y		
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	Y		
Please answer the following questions			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on Blackboard to ensure this).	Y		
2) Will you provide a consent form for all participants (if they are able to provide written consent), in addition to (1)?	N/A		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?		N	
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx)?			
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?	Y		
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?			
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to obtain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?			N/A
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?			N/A
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the			N/A

opportunity to decline consent?			
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data ¹ , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?			N/A
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions, and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			N/A
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		N	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is "yes", does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			
13a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		N	
13b. If the answer to question 13a is "yes": My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University's insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place. Furthermore, this application requires the consideration and explicit consent of the Institute of Education Ethics Committee.			
If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below			

PLEASE COMPLETE EITHER SECTION A OR B AND PROVIDE THE DETAILS REQUIRED IN SUPPORT OF YOUR APPLICATION, THEN SIGN THE FORM (SECTION C)

A: My research goes beyond the 'accepted custom and practice of teaching' but I consider that this project has no significant ethical implications.	Y
Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words. Attach any consent form, information sheet and research instruments to be used in the project (e.g. tests, questionnaires, interview schedules). Please state how many participants will be involved in the project: The aim of the project is to investigate why many piano teachers in the UK report that they do not teach composing or improvising in their lessons. Teachers from across the UK will be invited to fill in a short online survey, which will investigate the beliefs of piano teachers towards creativity in music-making. The survey will be open to all UK piano teachers, regardless of age, experience or gender. The aim is to send a link to the survey via email to organisations and individuals with a request for it to be forwarded on to others who might be interested in completing the survey. Links to a number of organisations and groups (such as EPTA, The Piano Teachers Course, The Oxford Piano Group, The Curious Piano Teachers, Piano Network UK etc) as well as relationships with other individual piano teachers provide me with a number of access points to distribute the survey. I also plan to use instrumental teaching websites (such as musicteachers.co.uk) to contact individuals. The nature of this distribution method means I don't know how many teachers will be reached by the survey, but by looking at the number of members of the various groups listed above it would be feasible to reach 300 UK piano teachers.	
B: I consider that this project may have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee. Please provide all the further information listed below in a separate attachment. 1. title of project 2. purpose of project and its academic rationale 3. brief description of methods and measurements 4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria 5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary) 6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them. 7. estimated start date and duration of project <i>This form and any attachments should now be submitted to the Institute's Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.</i>	

C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

¹ Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

