

Toward jazzing society? Improvisation as capability in inclusive education

Verso una “jazzing society”? L'improvvisazione come “capability” nell'educazione inclusiva

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As Community we have a duty to provide children with a set of capabilities enabling them to adapt to an increasingly diversified and complex environment, in which creativity, ability to innovate, entrepreneurship and a commitment to continue learning are just as important as the specific knowledge (EU 2008). Most of all, what seems to be crucial in our “globalized era” is the persons’ capability to re-invent continuously their “local” functionings toward a flourishing of polyphonic inclusive model communities. Starting from the metaphor of “education as jazz” already explored in a recent book (Santi & Zorzi, 2016), eight “jazzy” ways to escape the monological tradition of teaching and learning in education are proposed, assuming the ephemeral and fleeting concept of improvisation as skeleton of curriculum design and very provoking tool to face the challenge of educating capabilities. In order to translate improvisation into a capability we captured its main feature in a possible profile, with a set of components (processual attitudes, procedural skills, and productive knowledge), considered as ex-aptive functionings useful to transform each moment in our life as an opportunity to live better. A study is presented in which qualitative methodology was adopted to explore if and how improvisation could be considered as an emergent and evolutive human capability for a flourishing development of better societies. During an exploratory phase (Santi, Zorzi 2014), 10 professional experts in improvisation were chosen as witnesses to inquire phenomenologically how improvisation can be considered a capability in creative processes.

Key-words: improvisation, education, jazz.

abstract

Riflessione teorica

(A. incontro con la storia; B. questioni epistemologiche; C. temi emergenti)



1. Improvisational Soundscape

In time of crisis, the quest for education becomes increasingly urgent and crucial, although doubts and pitfalls remain, and the meaning and aim of education need to be clarified. Nevertheless, an increasing number of national and international policies recognize the importance of educational processes for human development in a flourishing society, contrasting exclusion and marginalization of people and communities. Moreover, the need for inclusive models in educational practices and for students learning and teachers training is clearly recognized (European Agency, 2015).

School remains - using terms proper to Sen's approach to education, a concrete *conversion factor* for children and youth *evolving capabilities*, in which external capabilities are difficult to recognize and to be accessible for poor and marginalized people. As Community we have a duty to provide children with a *set of capabilities* enabling them to adapt to an increasingly diversified and complex environment, in which creativity, ability to innovate, entrepreneurship and a commitment to continue learning are just as important as the specific knowledge (EU, 2008). Most of all, what seems to be crucial in our "globalized era" is the persons' capability to re-invent continuously their "local" functionings toward a flourishing of polyphonic inclusive model communities.

Starting from the metaphor of "education as jazz" already explored in a recent book (Santi & Zorzi, 2016), eight "jazzy" ways to escape the monological tradition of teaching and learning in education are proposed (Santi, 2016), which may be offered as a possible response to the risks to which our current instructional systems are liable. The first risk is visible in the *instrumentalisation* of thinking skills training, when transformed into learning outcomes curriculum, that is a *mentalization* of education. This reduction of instructional curriculum into skills/competences programs exposes children's school experience to an exercise in fostering critical skills (Biesta, 2017: 2) in the market of competence. This reductionism is at the base of a second risk, which Biesta (2017: 4) calls the *learnification* of contemporary education (Biesta, 2017: 4). In fact, these reductionisms emerge as consistent risks in many applications of thinking skills curricula, proposed in school as antidote to the commodification of educational systems to market requests, which end up transforming school instruction into a human capital device. More recently, the "human capital" framework and its devices seem less unbreakable as they face a crisis of competence and legitimacy (Biggeri & Santi, 2012). The current contemporary crisis is both cultural and economic and the challenge of public educational systems must be addressed both against the traditional paternalistic view of instruction and the current capitalized "training frame". The various theories of knowledge that lie behind these different frameworks are also responsible for the reduction of education to mere instruction, and for the various methods of teaching and learning applied in school, which are conceived and proposed as monological, dialogical or polyphonic processes (Pasgaard, 2009; Wegerif, 2011).

The upheaval affecting today's globalized world (Henry, 1999; Bakhtiari, 2011) demands new paradigms that afford fresh ways of explaining and orienting human "development" (or even better, history) in accordance with a stochastic, complex and emergent view of evolution in which creativity and emotion play a crucial role. A response to these socio-cultural emergencies demands thought—provoking



proposals for curriculum design, such as have been recently elaborated, for example, by Wiggins & McTighe 1998). The underlying acknowledgment guiding these educational proposals is that instruction, like life, cannot always be planned in advance, especially when students are being taught “skills” for interacting with real-life situations and problems (Donmoyer, 1983; Jackson, 1977; Lortie, 1975; Barab & Duffy, 2000; Herrington et al., 2002). Seen from this perspective, the idea that instruction should be considered both as a system of “ordered experience in the disorder of life” and/or “a disordering experience in the order of life” becomes theoretically and practically interesting, leading to admit to say “yes to the mess” (Barrett, 2012) as educational opportunity. Although these proposals retain the teaching of skills as a fundamental aim of the instructional curriculum, they have the advantage of introducing the idea of “growth” into the educational process, an idea so close to that of “flourishing life” proposed by Sen in the Capability Approach, which is lost in the last century of educational policy, leading to the *commodification* of achievements and *competences* (Santi, 2019a).

In fact, fostering creativity means, not just promoting skills for “innovation”; creativity has more to do with what is *originary* – which emerges from authentic generativity (Ingold, 2014) – than *original* – as obsession for the “new”, in comparison with other products already available on the market. From this perspective, creativity cannot be reduced only to “skills”, but require capabilities, as willing to do something else and to be someone else. As a human expression of the transformative disposition to wonder and respond to the novel, creativity involves critical and emotional dimensions of thinking¹, and calls for educational support, both for the achievement of extraordinary ends (Bailin, 1988) and for the recognition of the extraordinary means offered by the ordinary (Leddy, 2012). Such support presents educators with an interesting design challenge, in which the need to plan the best desirable future intersects with the aspiration to leave behind the better possible past, by living in the moment as an exploring experience. According with Biesta (2017, 6-7), this shows the limits of “adaptive learning” which dominate today’s curriculum design and practice, assuming an evolutionary perspective on education: through being positioned in different learning environments learners can become more effective at adaptation to changing environing conditions, but in fact they cannot nurture the creative capabilities they need in order to change the way of being and doing at the world. In fact, not only the concept of learning can be considered a richer process than what is captured in the idea of “intelligent adaptation”, but this paradigm is significantly lacking, both humanely and educationally (ib). The question that the “intelligent adaptive system” paradigm cannot issue is whether the environment is in fact worth adapting to; neither reciprocity is contemplated: the system cannot be taught, cannot be spoken to, cannot be addressed.

The new paradigm we need for education nowadays challenges an entirely functional paradigm aimed at survival, not life (this is the in-built algorithm); moreover, it contrasts that the world and other human beings can only appear as obstacles—something to adjust to. Human capabilities and functioning cannot be

1 Matthew Lipman (2003) in *Philosophy for Children Curriculum* defines “Complex Thinking” as critical, creative, and caring thinking. In Biggeri & Santi (2012), the fruitful relationship between the Capability Approach and Philosophy for Children, useful to highlight the “missing dimension of children well-being and well-becoming” in the current educational systems.



reduced to operationalizations of an adaptive intelligence: they are means and opportunities that humans have in order to live a worthwhile life in which world and other humans are something/one that counts for me. In fact, we consider these issues – of the relationship with world as more than environment, and with others as much as peers—as the core issue of the global societal crisis which the third millennium inaugurated, and which corresponds, for me, to what Gould and Vrba (1982) called “the missing dimension of evolution” - that is, *exaptation*.

Exaptation (Santi, 2019b) may be viewed as a sort of creative adaptation which is not demanded or elicited by the environment; it consists in a variation in the normalized, regular function, and a veering toward unexplored and “needless” uses; it would correspond to what we would call “functioning serendipity”. In fact, for Gould and Vrba, to miss the dimension of exaptation means to lose the creative and unexpected dynamics of evolution, reducing its development to adaptation and selection. The metaphor “education as jazz” would be considered as a way of escaping the functional, monological, selective framework of teaching and learning.

In order to assume a jazzing approach to capability education, we need to refer to a possible definition of what “jazzing” would mean, among the plurality of meanings that are attributed to the word. Jazz is related, in its etymology and idiomatic slang significance, to a colorful metaphor for copulation and to seminal fluid. *Jazzing* was not just related to the mechanical action of coitus, but with the enjoyment and pleasure of a shared orgasm (in Latin *co-ire* literally means “coming together”) and the promise implied in ejaculation. That’s why jazz and jazzing refer both to intimacy in a solo performance and to the mutual atonement in a jam session. The eroticism of jazz is also recognizable in the musical embodiment that is evident in jazz performances, which are clearly enriched by the psychophysical tensions of musicians toward dialectic oppositions: moment versus duration; difference versus sameness; gratification versus frustration; stability versus stimulation; closeness versus distance (Gustavsen, 2010). When these oppositions are “frozen”, jazzing is in danger; when a dilemma creates flows, the full dynamic potential of jazzing emerges.

It is no coincidence that jazz always triggers a creative process—or better, a *generative* dimension of shared music-making, that gives rise to new melodies and sound experiences, shaping something original that shapes the shapers forever. Jazzing capability education points more to the human potential for creative thinking – which is predominant in childhood - than to the demiurgic power of human-made knowledge- which dominates adulthood. The generativity of jazzing education appears more as a manner of being and doing than the production of individual doers. Jazzing means *enlivening*, and jazzing education with children means surrounding the experience of thinking by childhood vitality and animation, and always with enthusiastically shared enjoyment. Jazzing also appears in the slang meaning as a creative messing about; a chaotic ordering, or a harmonic disordering (Barrett, 2012), which is exactly what transforms the children playing into opportunity of agency. Jazzing is the attitude that seeks to create order in chaos, disorder in harmony, deviation from melody – but never from nothing: jazz emerges when the opportunities offered by the moment are created by the memory of models, which are intentionally challenged through repetition and the infinite alternatives of variation. Jazzing capability education would be summarized into this instrumental dyad: repetition and variation – of rhythms, sequences, chains, riffs or phraseologies – is the main “technique” that generates novelty in jazz, without damaging



spontaneity, which is what characterizes the free play of children, and is their proper way to explore the inner and outer world. Generativity is concretely operationalized in the improvising experience, which sits exactly between technique and spontaneity (Santi, 2010), and is always perfectly balanced between art and heart (Pilc, 2012).

The artistic dimension of jazzing capability education is recognizable in the strong commitment toward repetition, copying and imitation of thinking/agency frames: only through repetition of chain of thoughts as notes, can each thinker/agent, as a musician, find, all of a sudden, her/his own proper sound in reasoning and agency, as if out of nowhere, contributing to the history innovation and invention.

The improvisational nature of jazz is strongly embedded with its erotic component and generative aspiration: repetition and variation are not the condition of a sex habitus, but the opportunities for a sensual re-discovery a new beginning. Improvising is a sort of procedural device preserving the power of beginning in the art, when the work of art is continuously destroyed by the living artwork (Peters, 2009). As Verducci noted, “although the improviser must make meaningful what has come before, every note, every movement and every line of dialogue is, in a way, a beginning. (...) In beginning again (and again and again), improvisers simultaneously preserve and destroy the past” (Verducci, 2015).

What characterizes free jazz and free improvisation is their invitation “to make a transition from a closed conception of the past to one that rethinks it as an endlessly ongoing event or occurrence” (Peters, 2009).

Improvisation pushes us to live in the present, as a “gift” of time, which give value to the past and future of our life. The gift of present in our lifetime is loose by the chains of age and aging; the tension toward future and past memory seems to collapse in a hopefully generative form of temporality- a time in which creativity takes place as something that dissolves the weight of a subject’s age (adult or child) and emerges as *human agency*. As the phenomenologist Bernhard Waldenfels (2004: 242) put it, “*we are older than ourselves*”, that is – as Ingold explained – “*behind the selves we are on the point of becoming, but are not yet, are the selves that we already are without our knowing. In this ongoing, itinerant process of becoming who we were, and of having been who we become, there is no bottom line, no point at which we can uncover some basic human nature that was there before it all began*” (Ingold, 2014: 137).

The relation with time (in terms of human history, where personal/inner capabilities and social/external capabilities could be transformed into communal functionings) is fundamental in the capability education: in fact, it requests a simultaneous tension toward opposites and this dialectic between past and future that fills the present (of education), transform the investment in training for learning achievements, into commitment for growing up people who really “exist”; a real *existence* with its dynamic and shaded meanings, wonderfully expressed by F. Scott Fitzgerald (author of the “tales of the Jazz Age) in the final sentence of *The great Gatsby*: “*So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past*”.

This improvisational struggle disrupts and distract the temptation to sign the route, to fix the way to well-known ports, that nurture the current preference of educational policies for programs which guarantee the successful academic achievement. Thus, the eroticism of jazzing approach to capability education would be the better antidote we could provide in curriculum design against the risks implied



in the capitalization of learning (and learners). The “outing from nowhere” of personal and communal agency which emerges as expression of improvisation, challenging the current obsession of capitalization of knowledge for a “sustainable” future. As noted by Verducci (2015) “improviser cannot be directed by the future, as essential features of this future are contingent on the present moment. Again, there is no specific end to guide them or toward which they might aim. Johnstone describes the improviser as “a man walking backwards. He sees where he has been, but he pays no attention to the future”. Perhaps Johnstone overstates; the improviser knows the general shape and borders of the future (i.e. the curtain falls at 9 pm), but she cannot consider a specific future without compromising and endangering the improvisation. Nor can the improviser depend on a past that is re-originating each moment. Improvisers are jammed into a space between a re-originating past and contingent future. This predicament can only be negotiated if the improviser becomes alive to the present as it unfolds”.

Assuming an ephemeral and fleeting concept as improvisation as skeleton of curriculum design is a very challenging venture, but it seems very provoking to face the challenge of educating capabilities, which share the same ephemeral and fleeting definitions in literature. In fact, improvisation shares with capability a sort of anti-academic conceptual status: they are both “too elusive for analysis and precise description; essentially non-academic”. More than that, as the guitarist Darek Bailey warns “any attempt to describe improvisation must be, in some respects, a misrepresentation, for there is something central to the spirit of voluntary improvisation which is opposed to the aims and contradicts the idea of documentation” (Bailey, 1993).

In order to translate improvisation into a capability we need however to capture its main feature in a possible profile, with a set of components (processual attitudes, procedural skills, and productive knowledge). According to previous remarks, we can consider improvisation as a natural/cultural creative (re)action that remains the basis of evolution, which implies both ad-aptive behavior *in* the environment and ex-aptive agency *with* the world. To improvise we must be open (Verducci, 2015) and improvising imply wondering. The relation between openness and wonder is reciprocal: wonder needs openness, and openness discloses wondering. Wonder, such as openness, is the condition but also the aim of improvisation: wonder at what is happening in the world as given and wonder at what we are reaching for by inventing a possible world.

That’s would be also a possible definition of open-mind in a jazzing term. As noted by Kohan, Santi and Wosniak (2017) if ignorance is a necessary condition for a real teacher, invention is the educator’s main commitment: being open to what is coming into existence. To be open to wonder does not mean simply being able to raise questions (and be prompt to the “right” answers!). In fact, what counts in jazzing is not who raises the better question nor who questions better, or even who is “in question” (Biesta, 2017: 3), but who is *available* (not just *able*) to be involved and to involve others in wondering at the world.

2. Inquiring path

In order to “unpack” the jazz metaphor into educational terms, we explore different declinations in “being and doing”, recognizing them into music tradition. Most basi-



cally, they correspond to different modal qualifiers of a “jazzing way” of living life, even before playing music. The different features identified are, in fact, related each other through the red line of improvisation, as fundamental “jazzing” relationship with time. This relationship is very crucial and very interesting from an educational point of view; in particular, referring to the curriculum design (Dick & Carey, 2004). The six modal qualifiers of jazzing as “improvising capability set” are: *fusion*, *free*, *swing*, *groove*, *soul*, *cool* (Santi, 2016; 2018).

Fusion qualifies the modality of improvisation, addressing it toward melting differences and preferring diversities (Ben-Josef, 2006) to create surprising feelings and works. But mainly fusion implies the abandonment of “purity” and archetypes, the opening up to contamination and promiscuity, leaving the “comfort zone” of a party to live in a *carnival*, what Bakhtin considered the elective topos of creativity: the heterodoxy.

Heterodoxy needs for *free* modal qualifier that leads jazzing improvisation to break the traditional sound—chains of notes (thoughts) in order to explore new harmonic scales (discourses) and melodic landscapes (frameworks). Free jazzing as capability in the school curriculum would be considered the stronger antidotes to *canonical* instruction and a powerful antibody against *academic* pedagogy (in schools just as in conservatories), in which, teaching and learning are reduced to the ‘pure’ reproduction of classic routes and the repetition of standard contents. Of course, being free to transgress fixed rules does not mean being totally free from a framework of regulations and norms, but it does free the system from the risk of becoming dogmatic, bound by fixed aesthetic frameworks and with rigid constraints and criteria for judging predictable results. In this perspective, jazzing freedom is always an “outdoor activity”, which implies caring attitudes in taking responsibility for exploration and experimentation.

Swing is a playful qualifier, understood as a form of primordial fun which is not without commitment. The dynamics of coming and going, proper to jazzing dialogue, are essentially playful and full of fun, recalling the physical evidence of the passing of time, a pendular rhythm and alternation combined with the intentional movement of a body and its force. Swinging is a special experience of embodiment of time, in which mechanical rhythm is transformed into inner movement of emotions (pleasure, but also risk). Swinging is a liberating activity, but it involves the willingness and desire to be freed from the inertia of “dangling,” thus transforming time and a space into excitement and enthusiasm. Although swing movement recalls the dialectics dyad, it really far from resembling the strict dynamics of oppositions in argument, inspiring rather by the indecision which makes the body/mind position changeable, pushed by desire of alternative view and feel.

Groove is the qualifier of community, literally, the spiral track cut in a phonograph record for the stylus to follow; it is the *cursus (curriculum)* within which and along which all players, instruments, notes, points and counterpoints follow each other and find a flux. *Groove* is a common flow, a pole of attraction which requires reciprocal movement and listening to each other’s. In fact, the idiomatic expression “*finding the groove*” means to find a shared direction, a mutual intention and intention “to be” together, rather than “to do with others” and “to have control on others”. As capability, it could be described as a sort of “weak” intentionality which is not oriented to retention (of contents, information, skills, relationships), but which is moved primordially by attention. *Attentionality* is what guides the “undergoing action” before/without it becomes a decision in agency (Masschelein,



2010; Ingold, 2014). Attentionality makes human a vulnerable being, disclosed, exposed to others and to possibilities; a weak position, or better, a non-position that creates the conditions to move and be captured (never passively) in the groove. *Finding the groove* is a positive feeling, which entails listening with emotion, empathy and a caring attitude, and which accompanies the achievement of a common satisfaction without softening the tension of the dialectic. It might represent the best response to Biesta's concern about the "ego-logical" way of being (Biesta, 2017: 9 -10) that dominates education nowadays: being in the groove means to exit egological patterns and share joint capabilities with external community.

The *soul* qualifier has a direct relation with the capability to give values to what happens in our life and with the desire to change and aspire to a something that worthwhile for us. In fact, this soul capability puts aside the priority of "empowering" students in favor of a preference for disarmament. Being in touch with students' soul is not the priority of teachers, who prefer formal relationship rather than the ties expressing the spiritual nature of intimacy in playing together.

The *soul* in jazzing capability is not a concept or an idea, but rather an insight and intuition which guides all forms of human wisdom not grounded on dogmatism, balancing the joint and solitary dimensions of playing with ideas, with a caring disposition towards humanity as community.

The last qualifier is *cool*. In the language of landscapes, cool is the atmosphere created by sunrise and sunset, when the shadows are longer, and the sounds are lighter. This keeps the experience open to a horizon of possibilities, *Cooling* is a capability which allows a peculiar relationship with time and environment of improvisation; it does not mean freezer, but rather diminishing, reducing and lessening the "more". Cool thinking implies committing ourselves to rarefying the sound landscape in order to reveal the delicate lines of melodic discourse. In terms of linguistic discourse it means dilating, expanding, widening and stressing chains of reasoning and harmonic theories so as to create space between thoughts and voices, giving them time to converse and more space to think in.

3. First inquiring chords

The six modal qualifiers represent the conceptual backstage in which the qualitative research on jazzing improvisation as educational capability was conducted.

A study is presented in which qualitative methodology was adopted to explore if and how improvisation could be considered as an emergent and evolutive human capability for a flourishing development of better societies. During an exploratory phase (Zorzi & Santi, 2016), 10 professional experts in improvisation were chosen as *witnesses* to inquire phenomenologically how improvisation can be considered a capability in creative processes. Because of the research emphasis on education and teaching and learning processes, they were chosen for their experience as professional teachers of improvisation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data about: improvisational dimensions; being an improviser; teaching and learning improvisation. Content-analysis were conducted on the transcribed interviews' (Atlas-ti7), following the grounded theory coding-phases, to preserve the meaning of the interviewee as accurately as possible, to produce "an improviser capabilities profile map". The dimension explored in the profile were:



- The improvisational act (*when do you become aware that you are improvising? When can you say that you are improvising?*)
- The improviser (*do you recognize yourself as an improviser? Which kinds of aptitudes characterize you as an improviser?*)
- Quality of improvisation (*if it is possible to say that one improvisation is better than another, when and why do you judge one of yours as being better than another?*)
- Learning – improvising-teaching (*did you learn to improvise? How do you teach improvising?*)
- The improviser and the context (*how important is the context in improvisation?*)

3.1 Teacher's profile: Teacher as improviser

Teacher Improviser profile emerges from the interviews as the profile of teachers who are able to relate ten essential features – constituents - to stimuli seized as opportunities, which promote the improvisational processes during the act of teaching (Fig. 0). Within this relation, improvisation is created every time: it is the result (and the process at the same time) of seizing opportunities in the moment, during the teaching-learning process².

Before describing the essential features that are necessary to be teacher improvisers, the stimuli seized as opportunities are described. These opportunities are recognized by teachers during the teaching-learning process, as possibilities to be explored, researched, discovered, learnt. These are also opportunities for teachers to discover something more about themselves, or also to challenge their limits or abilities.

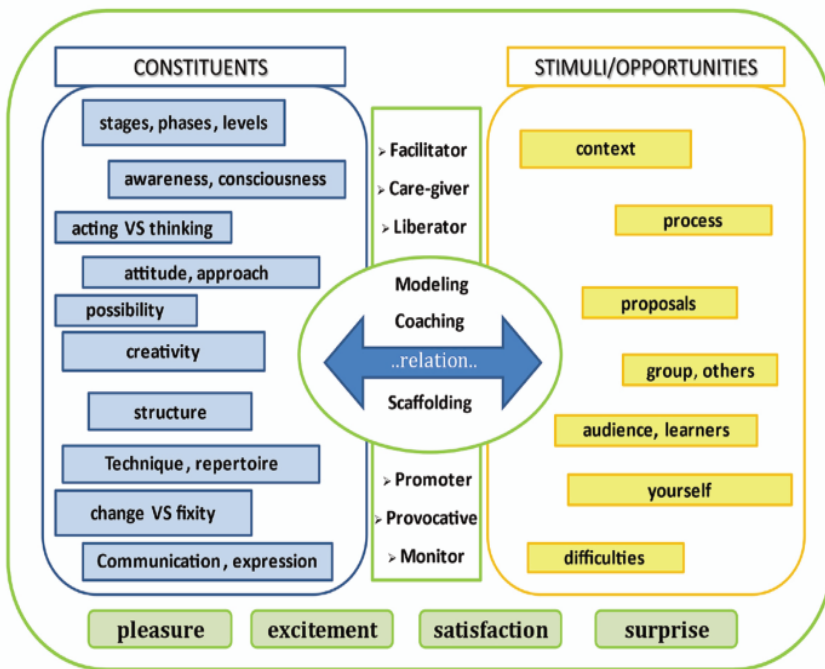
They are: the context, the process, the proposal, the group, the audience/learners, yourself, the difficulties.

- Context. It is the classroom or the environment prepared for the teaching-learning process, or in which the teaching-learning process happens;
- Process. It is the improvisational process created within and from the educational actions, during the teaching-learning activities, but it can be also the teaching-learning process too;
- Proposals. The educational and or didactic proposals involved in the process; these proposals can arise from the teacher or from the group (students or colleagues), if it is actively and consciously involved in the improvisational process;
- Audience/learners. The “audience” is the classroom and students (or student) towards which the educational actions and processes are oriented: their questions, difficulties, curiosities, limits and potentialities;
- Yourself. Teachers can also consider themselves as an opportunity; improvisation

2 Most of this paragraph is proposed and elaborated by the material presented in the chapter E. Zorzi, M. Santi, “Teacher as Improviser: a jazz perspective for reciprocal learning”, in M. Santi, E. Zorzi (Eds.). *Education as Jazz. Interdisciplinary Sketches on a New Metaphor*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing; pp. 177-203 because it is useful to give a more complete overview on the topic; for a deep and extensive reflection about teacher improviser's profile, it is possible to consult E. Zorzi, *L'insegnante improvvisatore*, Napoli, Liguori, 2020.



- involves most of all the person, and so the improvisational process can be taken as a chance to relate, discover, explore, challenge themselves;
- Difficulties. Within the improvisational process, all the difficulties, mistakes, errors, limits are perceived as an occasion to be lived and explored; they can be learners' difficulties, mistakes, errors, but also those of teachers.



E. Zorzi – Teacher as Improviser

Fig. 0: E. Zorzi – Teacher as Improviser

Teacher Improvisers are teachers who look at these stimuli as opportunities. By relating to ten essential features, they are able to transform the teaching-learning process in the spur of the moment into an improvisational possibility.

The essential features which are related through and within the educational process to the stimuli and opportunities, emerged from the interviews, and labelled as ten significant families: stages, phases, levels; awareness, consciousness; acting vs thinking; attitude, approach; possibility; creativity; structure; technique, repertoire; change vs fixity; communication, expression (see Fig. 0).

- Stages, phases, levels. Within this family are collected all the codes that reveal the multiple perspectives through which Teacher Improvisers look at the teaching-learning process. Teacher Improviser is a complex profile: teachers have to be executors, creators, directors, all at the same time. By taking on these different perspectives, they are able to adapt their teaching and its organization, based on the learners' aptitudes or needs, or to what happens in the moment. Teacher Improvisers have a programme, some guidelines which orient their



teaching. They put into action this programme (executors) and thanks to this, they are able to modify and changing their teaching, following learners stimuli and questions, or following some learning discoveries. Having a programme schemes, or check-lists for the teaching is essential for every teacher but this alone does not cover the whole range of events which can happen during a lesson (Sawyer, 2011).

- Teacher Improvisers are teachers who are able to create and invent exercises and new paths (creators), during the teaching-learning process, until reaching the possibility of discovering or creating new proposals for learners, from their improvising. At the end of a school path, or at the end of a school year, teachers should be able to build a book based on what they learnt and created during their teaching, because learning, discovering and creating new things is essential for teaching.
 - Teacher Improvisers are directors. Teachers who are used to improvising are able to feel and manage the passing time, the rhythm of the class, the overview on the classroom and the learners, they are able to maintain the reins without being authoritarian.
- Awareness, consciousness. Teacher Improvisers are aware of what they do not know and that they need to learn, they are aware of what they would like to propose to learners and what is effectively proposed. They are aware also of the differences among learners, because students do not have the same learning styles. They are aware of the achievements they would like to get: identifying desirable results (as deep comprehensions), they design educational paths that learners are able to attain (backward design).
 - Acting vs thinking. Teacher Improvisers are able to rapidly change an approach, register, or rhythm. They are used to thinking and acting quickly, catching input and stimuli from their own action, or from what learners do. Teacher Improvisers are in this way “adaptive learning experts”, not only because they use multiple strategies to be effective, but also because they have a high level of flexibility which allows them to renew strategies when routine ones do not work or are not effective enough (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, 2000; Hattie, 2012). Even if they think and act quickly, there is no fear of emptiness or of silence. They are able to wait, and stay in the empty space and time, because they know that each empty space, empty time, is full of endless possibilities.
 - Attitude, approach. Teacher Improvisers have a different approach to teaching from teachers who are not used to improvising. Non-improvising teachers are less available to learn from students, are less available to be influenced by them, they are focused on the results of teaching-learning process. On the contrary Teacher Improvisers focus most of all on the process, and in this process become open to the possibilities of events. They are open to the occasions of learning, of dialogue with learners; they are able to correct themselves correcting students; they learn to be surprised by what students do.
 - Sensitivity. They are sensitive to the context, to students, to their needs; they are empathetic, because they catch learners’ emotions, diseases, difficulties.



- **Withitness.** (Kounin, 1977; Suosa, Tomlinson, 2011). It means not only being aware about what happens in the classroom, but most of all being there with students, being present within the learning-teaching process. They are able to be there, without being an intrusive presence; they are able to fade out support when there is no need of it.
 - **Listening.** Teacher Improvisers listen to what learners say and they are receptive to what happens. They improvise also based on how learners are acting, they feed themselves off their ideas and freshness. Also the observation is well developed, and exploited by Teacher Improvisers, it is a different kind of listening: they observe what learners do, and explore their actions with them.
 - **Welcome.** Teacher Improvisers welcome what happens: they accept learners, accept learners' errors and mistakes but also their own errors and mistakes. This way of welcoming and accepting, allows them to be comfortable during the teaching-learning process and to maintain an open and flexible way of teaching, without the pressing need to control and manage everything.
 - **Freedom.** They are free to catch stimuli, to try, to challenge, to observe and listen, to talk or to be quiet. Teacher Improvisers are called upon to be authentic in the educational relationship; they always get going again, enjoying the possibilities and risking with students. This freedom makes them enthusiastic in teaching because they can amuse.
- **Possibility.** Teacher Improvisers are aware that the possibilities within improvisation are endless: there is never only one possible or right way to teach and/or learn something; for this reason they develop multiple ways and opportunities to teach what works and what has value, and know that every opportunity offers the possibility to learn.
 - **Creativity.** Teacher Improvisers are creative teachers. In addition to the creation of new exercises or paths, they are able to transform information and emphasize its importance during teaching situations. Also obvious and irrelevant elements can be transformed in an essential part of the teaching process, thanks to this creativity. They create new exercises, propose interesting alternatives. They are teachers able to stimulate others' creativity, maintaining a complex vision of the process, and they have multiple techniques and exercises available to accomplish this (Wegerif, 2010). They liberally steal from other disciplines stimuli or materials, because they are able to create connection with their own discipline. They are creative model in addition to proposing creative teaching styles (Cremin, Burnard, Craft, 2006; Sawyer, 2011; Wegerif, 2010).
 - **Structure.** This constituent involves all the elements which make teachers executors and directors at the same time. These are the elements known to be useful for managing a lesson and developing the teaching-learning process. For example, knowing how to structure a lesson, knowing which strategies are effective to reach specific objectives, having an awareness of the psychological or cognitive process involved in a particular activity; and at the same time possessing the ability to manage the timing and rhythm of the lesson. Teacher Improvisers use guide-lines, employing a complex and dynamic design,



which allows them to improvise and change on the spot during teaching (Hattie, 2012; Wiggins & Mc Tighe, 1998, 2005). Teacher Improvisers' ability to manage the teaching structure in a flexible way is what Sawyer (2011) defines as the "teacher paradox": the ability to constantly negotiate the balance between structure and improvisation within a lesson. He relates this paradox in particular to expert teachers, but the same paradox is present for Teacher Improvisers.

- **Technique, repertoire.** Within this constituent are involved all the tools, techniques, and materials which compose teachers' repertoire: Teacher Improvisers are able to recall these tools, techniques, materials, when they need them during the teaching-learning process.
This richness and diversity of techniques makes it possible to approach the same activity in a variety of ways. Teacher Improvisers wonder about the appropriate way to correct learners; they offer suitable feedback by being not only constructive but also highly effective for learning, within an "assessment *for* learning" perspective, more than an "assessment *of* learning" perspective (Hattie, 2012; Hattie & Timperley, 2006).
- **Change vs fixity.** Teacher Improvisers are evolving teachers, they constantly work to enrich the repertoire, to improve capabilities, to change. They are teachers open to modifying teaching based on stimuli, on learners' proposals, based on their own character.
Teacher Improvisers are not content to consistently engage in the same thing again and again; they need to change, because teachers who always teach the same thing in the same way get bored and may lose motivation. The passion and pleasure that Teacher Improvisers feel for teaching and in the opportunities that teaching offers, are reflected on the teaching's efficacy.
- **Communication, expression.** Teacher Improvisers communicate with learners through improvisation and within the improvisation. They express what they are doing and thinking with the classroom; they reflect upon the choices made with learners, working out the criteria and consequences with them. They express emotions and thoughts, because improvisation offers the possibility to be authentic and to express one's self.

4. Emerging maps from teachers' jamming

In the current research phase, focus groups were conducted to discuss the teacher improviser profile emerged, with expert school teachers. The research aim in this phase was to explore these main questions:

- Which beliefs or implicit knowledges have teachers about improvisation at school in general?
- How does improvisation come alive in school context?
- Which features and attitudes has a teacher who improvises at school, for professional teachers?
- Which similarities and differences does emerge with the teacher-improviser profile we developed?



A qualitative method was preferred in this phase, in order to explore the meanings implied in improvisation as teaching/learning capability, adopting a discovering oriented approach to data collection and analysis.

The research design presents:

- 6 focus group (heterogeneous groups);
- 35 volunteer participants (6 male, 29 female);
- Small group;
- Expert and novice professionals (from 3 to 49 years of experience);
- Different school grades (2 from early school; 8 from primary school; 9 from secondary school 11-13; 17 from high school 14-18);
- Different school role (5 support teachers; 30 regular teachers)

The results of the focus groups were drawn by a content analysis (Atlas-ti7) conducted on the transcriptions. Every focus group started from some general and exploratory questions: what do you think about improvisation in classroom? Do you think you improvise during your teaching? Do you think that being a teacher improviser could be useful in the teaching practice? In which ways? All the information collected, implemented, modified and enriched, the starting theoretical profile with a real school perspective, allowing to develop the features which should be considered as components in improvisation capability. Teacher improviser profile emerges as a set of sub- capabilities from the previous exploratory research: s/he is able to relate improvisation elements to stimuli, seized as opportunities which promote the improvisational processes during the act of teaching and learning, in an inclusive perspective. Within this relation, improvisation is created every time: it emerges both as product and process of seizing opportunities and choices in the moment, during the educational process. Beliefs and practices, emerged from the Focus Groups, about improvisation *as way of being and doing* were compared with the theoretical map-profile, allowing to enrich and implement the teacher improviser profile in an inclusive dimension and functioning operationalization: understanding what does really work, and what does not. The data emerged from the focus group analysis was organized into four maps, presented below.

In the first map (Fig. 1) we present the data emerged in the focus group regarding the question: What is improvisation and when does it happen at school?

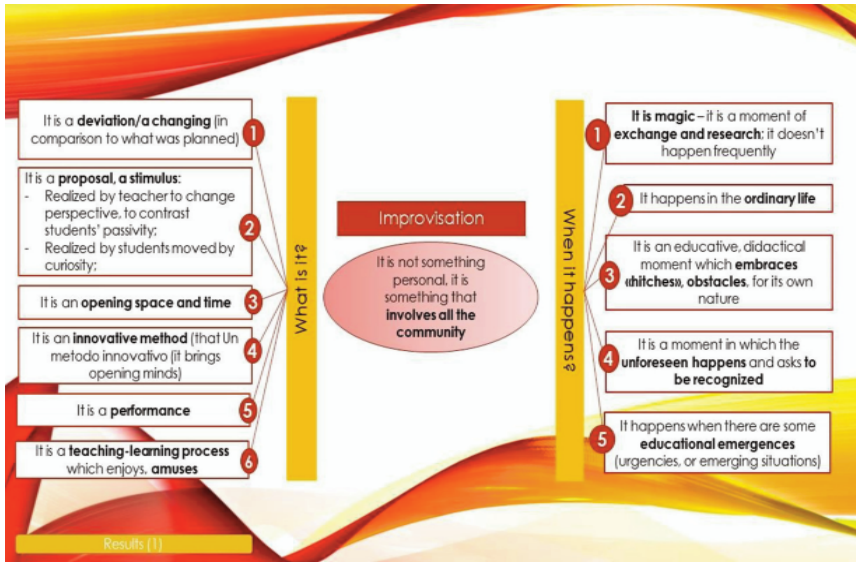


Figura 1

The second map (Fig. 2) presents the analysis of the discourse emerged in the focus group about the issue: Why say yes to improvisation at school?

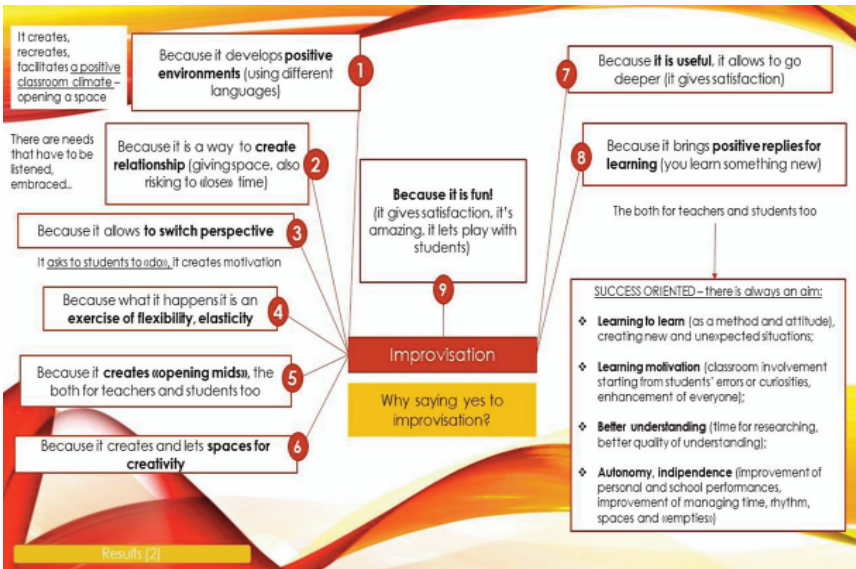


Figura 2

The third map (Fig. 3) presents the articulation of ideas emerged in the focus groups discussion on the question: How improvisation is realized and what does it involve at school?

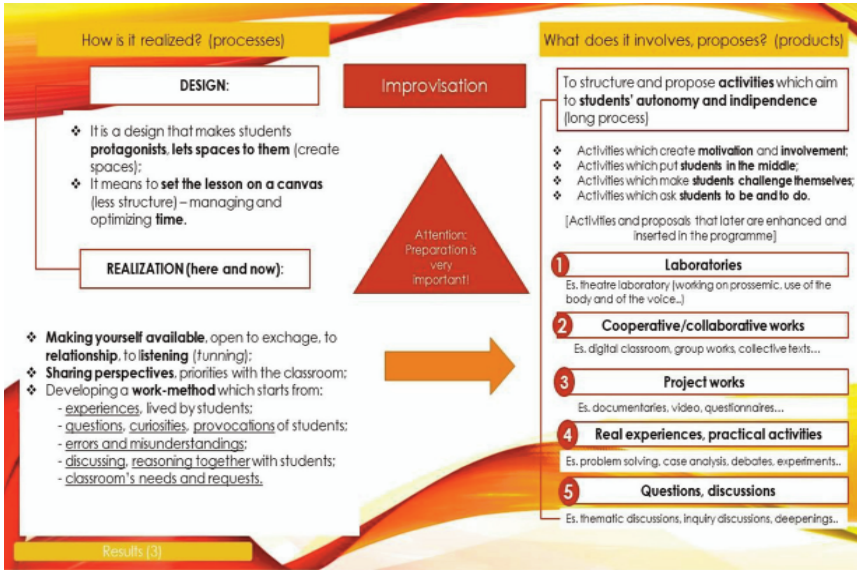


Figura 3

The last two maps (Fig.4) represent the exit from the discourse analysis conducted in the focus group transcription, as regard the question: Who is the teacher that picks up or brings to life improvisational potentialities during teaching-learning process?



Figura 4



The next final map (Fig. 5) compares the result emerged in the previous maps with the “teacher improviser profile” as defined in the first phase of the research:

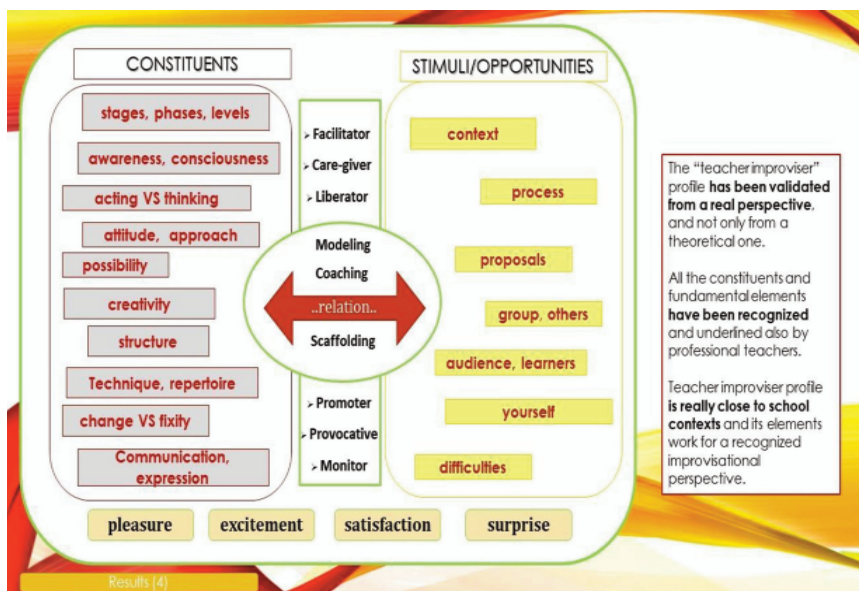


Figura 5

5. Educational “hanging-out” on implications

The main implications which emerge in the first data analysis and discussion seem to be very promising from a capability horizon and show a concrete operationalization of improvisation as educational jazzing capability, both for teachers and for students. In particular, what is emphasized in focus groups discussions is the procedural dimension of this capability, which imposes to improvise not *for* teaching but *while* teaching. The four principal issues to be considered:

- a) Professional teachers recognize dignity and value to improvisation within educational processes (even if it is also recognized the common negative sense to «improvise a lesson»);
- b) They recognized that improvisation, as teaching methodology, opens never-ending possibilities/opportunities and supports differentiation (it’s a practice that invites to be present in the educational relation, embracing it);
- c) «School teacher improviser» is a profile coherent with the teacher improviser profile emerged by the previous exploratory research;
- d) Professionals really appreciated the heterogenous groups, to discuss together – they feel as very important the possibility to compare with colleagues and with the research world.



As regard the educational perspectives, we can emphasize these two dimensions of improvisation, with their specific didactical implication. The first dimension consider improvisation as teaching methodology: professionals recognized the importance of personal attitude towards improvisation but also the importance of preparation and technique: they demonstrated interest for in-service training course (*both, to develop attitude and implement technique*). The second dimension considers improvisation as content of teaching: from the previous exploratory research an important part was dedicated to improvisation as content of teaching and many educational potentialities and implications were emerged. Working with professional teachers to propose some school reflections about this perspective, could be very interesting.

Finally, we need to consider also the national school system, and the final exams that it includes... professionals live a strong incoherency between teaching autonomy and the final national requests, test achievements oriented. Nevertheless, the teacher improviser profile and its operationalization as emerged within the focus groups has very interesting implications especially considering that the internalization of this profile by the students through “cognitive apprenticeship” (Collins et al., 1991) in a constructionist environment (Kenneth & Barnab, 2001) is a conversion factors towards appropriation of positive instrumental capabilities, fundamental for living in a complex society, in an “active” way (Heble, 2017).

Time for recognizing that education needs new emerging capabilities is finally on its way: pedagogical improvisation, with open-ended view of curriculum and learning outcomes, should be considered one of these. Improvising can be viewed as an educational framework and effective tool to realize not only teaching/learning achievements, but the infinite possibilities of people life projects in improving scenarios. Improvisation would be considered as an instrumental capability for children, which emerges from specific attitudes and skills which must be modeled and scaffolded. Improvisation implies involvement, participation, and connective dispositions towards people and environment, enhancing the human agency in social evolution. That involves posing as condition of teaching the capacity to *unlearn*; to unknown not only the content, but also the way of being teachers and teaching, *inventing* with children their own education, become ignorant enough to wonder at the world as children do (Kohan et al., 2017). A jazzing framework for pedagogy developed around the core capability of improvisation, would transform the world complexity into human connectivity. And so, “although an academic exploration of improvisation may not help us *practice* improvisation, it can help us advocate for its practice in classrooms” (Verducci, 2015). In fact, paraphrasing Kanellopoulou (2011), to improve improvisation is the best choice that educational policy would done to promote agency in a world in which everything would happens but not everything goes, and what goes most probably depends from an immeasurable value, a sort of “negative capability” (Unterhalter, 2017; Santi, 2019a) which cannot be measured!

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