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Jazz Guitar Improvisation in Kulturskolan Stockholm

A journey to the centre

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ABSTRACT

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Titel Jazz Guitar Improvisation in Kulturskolan Stockholm. A journey to the centre.

Svensk titel Jazzgitarrimprovisation i Kulturskolan Stockholm. En resa till centrum.

The purpose of this study is to distinguish and analyze the pedagogical approaches used by guitar teachers at Kulturskolan Stockholm when teaching jazz improvisation. The research aims to understand how music theoretical concepts and practical methods are incorporated into a teaching context, and how these practices prepare students for advanced music education.

To address this, the reflections of selected guitar teachers have been examined from a situated learning perspective. Using a qualitative research method, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with guitar teachers working at Kulturskolan Stockholm. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically.

The results show that, in many cases, pedagogues use methodologies and approaches very similar to how they themselves learned as students. For example, respondents often recreate or customize the ways they learned to transcribe music or study the guitar neck through scales, patterns, and arpeggios. However, a significant challenge arises when trying to recreate the authentic context of playing music together with peers or experienced musicians outside of the lesson format.

Based on these findings, the study suggests that students, regardless of their level, should have regular access to ensembles or jam contexts as a core part of their jazz education. In conclusion, the research highlights the need for educators who can balance theory-based materials with tools that encourage active listening, music transcription, and collaborative learning.

Keywords Jazz improvisation, situated learning, guitar education, Kulturskolan Stockholm.

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Attachment 1: Invitation letter

1. Introduction

Everyone everywhere has always started everything as a beginner; that can be considered a fact. From learning how to walk and talk to many more complexities in life like learning how to improvise over John Coltrane's *Giant Steps*. Our capacities may differ as much as our personalities, backgrounds and contexts, but what makes us humans a whole unity, is our ability to learn. So, how can we improve whatever goals we have set? What makes us improve and go from beginners to masters? What happens in the middle of our learning processes? These kinds of questions are very common when our set of goals are related to how to learn to improvise music and more specifically jazz. For this reason, I have selected sources that I consider pertinent as background, aiming to find answers to these questions and critically examine the statements made in the results chapter by searching for common themes.

Every time I have met someone with the capacity to improvise in a jazz context, no matter the instrument, I have wondered how they have managed to acquire those skills and tried to find answers to that question. Here, comparing jazz improvisation to learning a spoken language can work as an analogy. How can they "speak" so fluently and why is it so easy to feel like an "immigrant" in comparison? What do we need to actually learn to "speak" and become an established "resident" or "citizen" in this musical context? Is it just music theory? It cannot be, because no one learns how to speak a language just from grammar. It certainly helps, but there has to be something else.

Through my early formative years I have attended a music conservatory, music universities and municipal schools – thereby having the chance to study at classical, folklore and jazz programs on an academic level. With the help of my personal experience and background with music institutions I had the chance to confront how music improvisation is approached in those conceptually diverse institutions. When learning to improvise music, particularly jazz on the guitar, the approaches to what is essential and what is not are practically endless. Many of these approaches involve or are based on music theory, harmony studies, patterns, music analysis from transcriptions of famous solos, practicing with backing tracks, etcetera. What I started to suspect then, and I will try to discuss it through this investigation, is that all these ways of trying to systematize and codify jazz improvisation can sometimes be overwhelming, confusing and in some cases counterproductive to the development of an authentic musical fluency, depending on specific contexts.

When I worked as a guitar teacher at Kulturskolan Stockholm, I had students who wanted to learn jazz improvisation. In those situations I found myself at a crossroads of concepts and approaches; I had very little to share with them other than simply recreating the way I myself had been taught and trained. For these reasons, I wanted to investigate how our life journeys as learners and apprentices condition and influence the

way we teach, with a focus on jazz guitar improvisation at Kulturskolan Stockholm. The inspiration for conducting this research comes from my own desire to confront what I have previously learned as a student-apprentice and how these subjects and approaches can be taught—or not—in Kulturskolan Stockholm.

Learning guitar in a classical context or a jazz context can differ as much as the concepts of performing composed music versus improvising, depending on two different conceptual learning paths. Thomas (1991, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2014) utilizes the concept of "knowing" skills to describe traditional music education. These skills can, for example, be the ability to read and write musical notation, visual recognition of musical symbolism and kinesthetic response to those symbols (Bjerstedt, 2016). When it comes to music improvisation Thomas instead uses the concept of music fluency skills, considering that "they deal exclusively with the language – the sounds of music – rather than with the symbolism and rules of notation" (Thomas, 1991, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2014, p. 28). One distinctive difference with playing and learning guitar in an improvisational context is that theory and execution can be blended in such a way that the act of improvising can, in some ways, *be* the theory of it. To exemplify the conceptual differences between traditional European theory-based methodologies, Sidran (1981, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2014) reformulates the educational concept of learning by doing, which is strongly associated with John Dewey.

I consider that the results from this research may be relevant for understanding if it is possible to customize the contexts necessary for teaching and learning to play and improvise jazz in Kulturskolan Stockholm. These contexts are necessary to ultimately fulfill the pedagogical goal of inspiring students to first find, and then pursue, their own learning opportunities to improvise jazz.

1.1 Purpose and Research Questions

The focus of this research is to distinguish and analyze how certain concepts of jazz improvisation and different music theoretical and practical approaches are used in teaching guitar at Kulturskolan Stockholm. My intention is to examine how these methods help prepare students to continue their studies at a higher level, such as Kulturskolan KAP, Jazzcenter, or a music conservatory.

Since jazz improvisation cannot be fully learned or taught without an adequate context, I have conducted interviews with professional guitar teachers to find tools and answers that help students in Kulturskolan Stockholm develop their improvisational skills and their musicality.

By contributing to guitar pedagogy and introducing alternative didactic approaches, I propose these central questions:

- What pedagogical strategies and methodologies do guitar teachers at Kulturskolan Stockholm describe as central to teaching jazz improvisation?

- How do these teachers balance the use of structured materials (such as method books) with informal or "situated" learning processes?
- How do teachers perceive their role in preparing students for the transition to higher levels of music education?

2. Background and previous research

To begin distinguishing the paths that lead to learning jazz improvisation within a Kulturskolan context, it is necessary to first look at the history of Kulturskolan itself. In Stockholm specifically, the "ladder" of knowledge can lead a student from basic lessons to advanced programs or specialized jazz centers.

2.1 Kulturskolan in Sweden

The Swedish Arts Schools Council (Kulturskolerådet) is a non-profit association that provides a collaborative platform for municipalities hosting arts schools. Their vision is that all children and youth should have equal opportunities for personal development through accessible, high-quality arts activities (Kulturskolerådet, n.d.). This highlights the democratic foundation of the Swedish system, where the arts are seen as a right for all citizens.

The first models for municipal music schools in Sweden were founded during the 1940s. Since the 1960s, they began to spread rapidly due to the country's economic stability. Before this expansion, music tuition was mainly available through military musicians, local bands, or the church, while private lessons were only an option for those who could afford them. The general objective was to provide the younger generation with the opportunity to play or sing regardless of their cultural or social background. This tradition of adult education focused on using learning to improve living conditions and affect society. Today, there is no national legislation for these schools. As a result, each municipality and individual Kulturskola has the autonomy to define its own courses and educational structure. Despite this local freedom, the most common format remains one individual or group lesson per week, with an additional ensemble session (Kulturskolerådet, n.d.).

2.1.1 Kulturskolan's advanced program and Jazzcentrum in Stockholm

Kulturskolan Stockholm offers an advanced program (KAP) for students who wish to immerse themselves in deeper studies. For guitarists, KAP offers levels in Classical, Pop/Rock/Jazz, and Singer-Songwriter. Both KAP Music 1 (ages 10–13) and KAP Music 2 (ages 14–21) require an audition, with the latter being specifically divided by genre. For example, the Rock/Pop/Jazz guitar audition requires a mandatory piece, a freely chosen song, and an ear-training exam.

Additionally, KAP Stockholm Jazzcentrum (ages 15–22) focuses primarily on jazz and the Afro-American tradition. The main difference between Jazzcentrum and the general KAP levels is that Jazzcentrum offers more weekly instruction time and a focus on

improvisation. This creates a more specialized environment compared to the general Kulturskolan goal of broad accessibility (Kulturskolan Stockholm, n.d.).

2.2 Learning and teaching jazz improvisation

How do jazz guitar students learn to improvise? To find answers, it is relevant to first define what improvisation is. The Oxford dictionary defines it as “the act of inventing music [...] while you are playing [...] instead of planning it in advance” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, n.d.). However, the dictionary does not specify how to achieve this skill. Based on the sources selected for this research, I will raise certain teaching concepts to argue for the possibilities and limits of different learning contexts.

As Sidran (1981, cited in Bjerstedt, 2016) suggests, jazz theory often develops through the "doing" of it:

One cannot be taught how to improvise black musical idioms, because the theory of improvisation develops through the doing of it. The act is the theory. [...] improvisation is based on the ability to ‘hear’ with internal ears the sound of an internal voice. (Sidran, 1981, cited in Bjerstedt, 2016)

This implies a distinction between orally transmitted music like jazz and the systematized instruction of the European classical tradition. In his research, Bjerstedt (2016) argues that to develop jazz language, we must consider what Barron (2006, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2016) calls an "ecology of education.” This is described as a dynamic system where people adapt the resources around them to create their own learning opportunities.

2.3 Learning to improvise in jazz

There are many paths to developing musicality and instrumental skills in jazz. In this study, I have chosen to focus on the master-apprentice context, music transcription (learning by ear), and theory-based methods.

2.3.1 Master-apprentice learning process

In the "ecology of learning" mentioned by Bjerstedt (2016), the term *appropriation* is often seen as an opportunity to "steal" knowledge. The concept of "stolen knowledge" comes from Brown and Duguid (1996), inspired by Rabindranath Tagore, who noted that while a teacher "determined to teach" him failed, he still managed to "casually pick up [...] a certain amount of stolen knowledge" (Brown and Duguid, 1996, p. 47).

Applied to jazz education, this suggests that the focus should be on the learner’s *demand* rather than the teacher’s *supply*. For a guitar student at KAP, the goal should be to inspire a desire to learn rather than simply providing scales and patterns. As Brown

and Duguid (2000, cited in Bjerstedt, 2016) point out, the challenge is to provoke the need for learning and then make the resources available for students to "steal."

Furthermore, Berliner (1994) explains that children who grow up around improvisers view the skill as something achievable. He argues that the jazz community's traditional system places the responsibility on the student:

The jazz community's traditional educational system places its emphasis on learning rather than teaching, shifting to students the responsibility for determining what they need to learn, how they will go about learning, and from whom. (Berliner, 1994, p. 51)

This shift in responsibility highlights why the master-apprentice relationship is more about finding a model to emulate than following a strict curriculum.

2.3.2 Learning to play by imitating and copying recordings

When a master-apprentice context is not available, students must find other ways to develop. Learning to play by imitating recordings by ear is a central practice for aspiring jazz musicians (Berliner, 1994). Many famous innovators relied on an "apprenticeship at the gramophone" (Gioia, 1988, cited in Bjerstedt, 2016). Transcription acts as a substitute for a live mentor, allowing the student to sound like the artists they admire while eventually finding their own individuality (Liebman, 1996, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2016).

2.3.3 Theory-based methods for learning and teaching jazz improvisation

Today, college-based programs have largely replaced these traditional grounds (Ake, 2010, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2016). Since the 1960s, jazz pedagogy has been dominated by the chord-scale approach, where improvisers learn to associate specific scales with chords (Monson, 2002, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2016). Many educators, including Liebman (1996, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2016), believe that studying bebop is essential because it requires technical skill, theoretical knowledge, and a trained ear.

One specific method book that codifies this language for the guitar is *The Barry Harris Harmonic Method for Guitar* (Kingstone, 2006). This method focuses on "movement" using diminished scales to create tension and resolution (De Lima, 2014). By using these theory-based methods, the goal is to provide a structured way for the student to eventually achieve the "internal voice" mentioned earlier.

2.3.4 Guided participation in jazz pedagogy

An important contemporary researcher in jazz pedagogy within a Scandinavian context is Guro Gravem Johansen. In her dissertation *To Practice Improvisation* (2013), she investigated the practicing habits of Scandinavian jazz students and found that the

development of improvisation skills is strongly connected to ear training and informal learning practices. Furthermore, Johansen (2021), utilizing the concept of 'guided participation' from sociocultural theory, demonstrated that children are capable of learning sophisticated jazz improvisation. Her research emphasizes the importance of creating micro-communities where students learn through musical interaction and playing together, rather than relying only on abstract music theory. This aligns with the concept of situated learning and demonstrates that one of the main challenges for formal music institutions is integrating these authentic communities into their teaching.

3. Theory

This chapter presents the theoretical frame on which the results of this research will be analyzed: *situated learning*.

3.1 Situated Learning

Education is a social process [...]. Education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living. (Dewey, 1897, p. 2)

Situated learning, through *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP), is an analytical theory developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). By studying different types of apprenticeships and master teaching, they established that learning takes place in an individual who participates in a new social, practical context, also called *community of practice*. In many situations it can mean that the individual in question must learn to practice in a certain profession, such as for example to cook, but it can just as well be about learning social codes within a new social group or culture.

When an individual comes to a new *community of practice*, she begins her participation as a newcomer (beginner) in the periphery. This may mean that the individual is given responsibility for easier tasks or only participates by observing the more experienced participants. She then gradually leaves the periphery by becoming a more active participant. In the end, the newcomer has developed into a full participant and is then in the middle of the community. Learning then arises in the social contexts that are needed. As individuals learn more along the way, they change and also develop the social context (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The fact that more individuals adopt new identities as they approach the center of the *community of practice* will also develop the community itself (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

[...] learning is not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership. We conceive of identities as long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice. Thus identity, knowing, and social membership entail one another. (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.53)

Because a student's identity and sense of belonging are always evolving, merely occupying space in a musical setting is not enough. They need a recognized role and a valid reason to participate, leading us to the concept of legitimating.

3.1.1 Legitimizing

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation requires that the individual must have legitimate access and a reason to participate in the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). The individual can only obtain this by existing in the social context of a

community of practice. For example, a child who is born into a family is a legitimate peripheral participant in the lives of adults and needs to learn the adults' communication and social codes (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In the case of jazz student-apprentices at Kulturskolan Stockholm, they have legitimate access to the Kulturskola (KAP or Jazzcentrum) environment because they have passed an entrance audition to the school.

To be able to participate legitimately and peripherally, an individual also needs to have the opportunity to observe an ideal praxis (Lave & Wenger, 1991). For jazz student-apprentices at Kulturskolan Stockholm, observing this ideal praxis provides a clear, practical understanding of what they can pursue to become. Seeing a master or a more experienced peer work can motivate the individual to want to learn more and give them an ideal image to work towards. Motivation is also created by the individual being allowed to participate in the practice, even though it may only be through easy and simple tasks. There is a value in contributing to the community, and that value increases the more the individual participates (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

If we apply this theory to music, we can see that the historical way of learning jazz—which Berliner (1994) describes as participating in jam sessions or jazz orchestras—is a practical example of a community of practice. In this kind of setting, it becomes clear that a student cannot fully learn just through isolated lessons. As Lave and Wenger (1991) state, "[...] mastery resides not in the master but in the organization of the community of practice in which the master is part" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 93-94). Because this mastery is built into the social environment, apprentices have to actively immerse themselves in the musical culture. This is why researchers who connect situated learning to jazz education, like Bjerstedt (2014, 2016), emphasize that activities like jamming, hanging out, or playing with experienced peers are what actually motivate beginners to "steal" the knowledge that lives within this music tradition.

4. Method

This chapter describes the research process, starting with the methodological approach of focused unstructured interviews. I then explain the selection of participants, the study's design, ethical considerations, and the thematic analysis method used to process the data.

4.1 Focused unstructured interviews

Empirical data for this study was collected through focused unstructured interviews. In this type of qualitative interview, the researcher has a clear central topic in mind—in this case, teaching jazz guitar improvisation—but does not rely on a strict list of pre-determined questions. Instead, the aim is to maintain a natural conversation flow with the participants, allowing space for spontaneity. By giving the teachers the freedom to navigate the discussion based on their own experiences, this lack of a rigid structure helped me gather detailed, personal information while still providing the flexibility to discover unexpected patterns during the analysis stage (Bell & Waters, 2018).

4.2 Selection

To identify similarities in the data, I chose professional guitar teachers as my informants. Invitations were emailed to seven guitar teachers at Kulturskolan Stockholm, with a priority on those who focus on jazz improvisation. One teacher declined, and three others agreed to participate. All three have solid experience in improvisation and teach guitar at Kulturskolan. Below is a brief presentation of the participants (using fictitious names):

- **GT1:** In his thirties; holds a degree from a higher music education institution in Sweden. He has worked as a guitar teacher at Kulturskolan Stockholm for several years.
- **GT2:** In his thirties; has studied at various music colleges in Sweden. He has nearly a decade of experience at Kulturskolan and has taught KAP students with a focus on improvisation.
- **GT3:** In his thirties; has studied at music institutions both in Sweden and abroad. He has worked at Kulturskolan for nearly ten years, focusing on guitar instruction and ensemble directing, including KAP students specializing in jazz.

4.3 Design

I contacted the participants via email to explain the purpose of the research and the ethical measures taken to ensure their anonymity. Once they agreed, we scheduled interviews. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some interviews were conducted in person while others took place via Zoom. The use of video-conferencing tools like Zoom has been recognized as a viable and effective alternative to face-to-face interviews in

qualitative research, offering flexibility while maintaining the necessary personal connection (Archibald et al., 2019).

In-person interviews were recorded using a smartphone (video and audio), while Zoom interviews were recorded directly through the computer. Recording the sessions allowed me to focus entirely on the conversation rather than taking extensive notes, which helped the dialogue flow naturally. The recordings also served as a valuable resource for reviewing details and non-verbal cues during the transcription phase (Bell & Waters, 2018).

I chose to limit the study to three participants to ensure a manageable workload for transcription while still gathering enough data to identify meaningful patterns. In qualitative studies of this nature, a small number of information-rich cases is often preferred over a large sample size to allow for deeper analysis and "information power" (Malterud et al., 2016). Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, a duration sufficient to explore the themes in depth.

To prepare for the interviews, I researched how these distinct concepts connect within jazz pedagogy. Specifically, I examined situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to understand the social environment of the student, "stolen knowledge" (Brown & Duguid, 1996) as the mechanism for learning by ear when a physical master is absent, and the Barry Harris Harmonic Method (Kingstone, 2006) as a contrasting structured, theory-based approach. Together, these interconnected concepts provided the theoretical and practical framework for my interview questions and the later analysis of the results.

4.4 Ethics

Regarding ethical considerations, I obtained informed consent from all participants to record the conversations. They were fully informed about the nature of the research, why they were selected, and how the data would be used. To ensure they understood the implications of their participation, I sent the ethical framework (see Appendix 1) alongside the initial invitation rather than just explaining it verbally. Anonymity was guaranteed to encourage the participants to be as honest and secure as possible in their responses (Bell & Waters, 2018).

4.5 Method of analysis

The empirical data collected from the interviews was processed using thematic analysis. As described by Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis is a foundational qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It provides a highly flexible and systematic approach to organizing and interpreting shared meanings across the data. Guided by this framework, the first step was data familiarization. To process the data, I listened to the recordings multiple times before transcribing them to internalize the information. For the transcription itself, I

used the tool oTranscribe, which allowed me to control the speed of the audio for greater accuracy.

4.5.1 Thematic analysis method

Data collected was processed using thematic analysis. As Bell and Waters (2018) describe, this qualitative method involves systematically organizing and categorizing data to identify recurring patterns or themes. This allowed me to make sense of the shared experiences and collective meanings expressed by the teachers.

Analysis began in the transcription phase. I read through the texts actively and critically, highlighting recurring concepts and formulations. This initial coding phase helped me become intimately familiar with the content and notice details relevant to my research questions.

Next, I identified overall themes and subthemes based on these codes. I assigned different colors to quotes from each informant to easily track their contributions as I sorted them into categories. I then reviewed and refined these themes, removing those that were no longer relevant to the study's purpose. The final themes were developed into the chapters and subchapters of the results. Finally, I connected this empirical data to the study's theoretical framework, Situated Learning, identifying the common denominators between the teachers' statements and the theory.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

As English is not the author's primary language, Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were utilized during the final revision of this thesis strictly for language editing and proofreading purposes. The AI was employed to refine grammar, improve sentence structure, and make sure that it follows academic phrasing and APA formatting. All empirical data collection, thematic analysis, theoretical application, and underlying arguments are exclusively the original work of the author.

5. Results

This chapter presents the analysis of the study's collected empirical data. To directly address the research questions regarding pedagogical strategies, the balance between structured materials and situated learning processes, and the preparation of students for higher musical education, the results are divided into two main sections.

First, I will present how the respondents' own life experiences and learning trajectories have directly affected the way they approach jazz guitar pedagogy. Understanding how these teachers transitioned from beginners at the periphery of a community to established experts provides essential context for their current didactic choices.

Second, I will expose how the respondents currently teach guitar improvisation at Kulturskolan Stockholm. This section will highlight their specific teaching methodologies, how they balance theory-based materials with informal learning tools, and how they perceive their role in preparing students for advanced musical contexts.

All interview transcripts are attached in the appendices. To maintain anonymity, the interviewees are referred to as GT1, GT2, and GT3.

5.1 How the respondents learned to improvise

The questions lifted during the interviews were related to how and when the respondents started their journey to learn to improvise music on guitar, and those first influences that gave them learning trajectories that affected the way they live and experience music. In this chapter, I will display how the interviewees absorbed jazz improvisation language and what inspired them to challenge themselves.

5.1.1 First influences that inspired learning how to improvise

The common ground that all the interviewees share when it comes to learning jazz improvisation is that they started from zero, as mere beginners. Every single one of them had their own learning path, often with the help of a family member, a friend, or a teacher that gave them the initial influences to trigger a desire to explore more.

From a situated learning theory perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991), at this first learning stage, they were still beginners at the periphery of a community. What took them to the “doors” of a community of practice was substantially recorded music.

For GT1, this realization happened in his early twenties when a friend introduced him to Joe Pass's music. GT1 described being "instantly hooked" by the improvisation and developing a deep curiosity about "how he does what he does in his records," which fundamentally changed his learning trajectory.

For GT2, the initial motivation came from specific solos he heard growing up, such as *Nobody Knows You When You're Down And Out* from Eric Clapton's MTV Unplugged album. This desire to learn a "fantastic solo" motivated him to actively search for

transcription help from his Kulturskolan teacher or look for tablatures online, demonstrating an early drive to decode musical language.

GT2 also mentioned that a teacher in his high school acted as a "jam leader," which gave him a bigger perspective of what a community of practice can be. This teacher encouraged young students to share the stage with older musicians at local venues, promoting an environment where GT2 could legitimately participate.

GT3 found his inspiration through his parents' records. Reading about guitar players made him wonder how they did what they did, which eventually led him to jazz. By learning guitar intros and solos, the respondents' conceptualization of music improvisation grew, creating a curiosity that pushed them to look for deeper engagement.

5.1.2 Legitimizing their learning curve

As explained in the theory chapter, legitimate peripheral participation requires an individual to have legitimate access to a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). GT1 realized that to learn how to improvise, he needed a different community than his local friends, leading him to apply to a folkhögskola. Passing the audition legitimized GT1's participation in a new musical setting. He noted that meeting peers with similar interests was highly motivating, and the realization that "there are a lot of really good guitar players out there" pushed him to start "practicing for real".

GT3 had a similar experience, emphasizing how crucial it was to be situated with peers who shared his interests. He highlighted that the students were able to "inspire each other and help each other" by sharing listening recommendations, creating a space where they really learned from one another.

All respondents continued their studies in higher education institutions, gradually leaving the periphery to become more active members in their respective communities of practice.

5.1.3 Music transcription and learning from the masters

To create their own opportunities to learn, the interviewees utilized music transcription—learning by ear. This can be considered a way to "steal knowledge" (Brown & Duguid, 1996) directly from the masters via audio recordings.

GT2 was trained systematically in ear training at his folkhögskola, which significantly improved his capacity to recognize musical languages. He explained that transcribing became progressively easier as his vocabulary grew; by learning specific phrases, such as a Stevie Ray Vaughan classic turnaround lick, he could "remember that sound" and easily identify it in new contexts.

GT3 also emphasized the importance of repetitive, active listening based on advice from his own teacher. He described a methodical approach of listening to a solo "over and over again till you just can almost sing it," and then breaking it down to learn "a small bit at the time" before building the whole piece together.

5.2 Current Pedagogical Approaches at Kulturskolan Stockholm

Having established how the respondents' own learning trajectories were heavily influenced by situated learning and formal education, this section addresses how they currently teach jazz guitar improvisation. The findings are categorized to directly answer the research questions regarding pedagogical strategies, the balance of structured methods versus informal learning, and how teachers prepare students for real-world musical contexts.

5.2.1 Balancing Formal Lessons with Situated Learning

A recurring theme among the respondents is the challenge of teaching jazz improvisation in a one-on-one lesson format. The teachers highlighted the necessity of encouraging a "community of practice" so students can experience music contextually, which is an essential step for transitioning to higher education or real-world ensembles.

GT2 strongly emphasizes the need for students to participate in bands, noting that the isolated guitar lesson cannot provide the full picture of the genre:

[...] when I have an electric guitar student, my general feeling is, all these kids should be playing in bands as well, and when they are not I feel that they are not getting the right image of what the instrument could be.

GT2 also noted that the socio-cultural spaces for this—like youth centers with accessible rehearsal rooms—are less available today than they were in the past. GT3 echoes this sentiment, emphasizing that without a peer group or a safe community context, the student's motivation to learn diminishes significantly:

[...] they don't have that situation where they play with friends, like I used to do, where they rehearse in a garage or in a cellar somewhere... If your only reason to practice and study your instrument is to please your teacher, it becomes not as interesting as it could be.

These responses indicate that a central pedagogical strategy for the respondents is attempting to bridge the gap between the isolated guitar lesson and the communal reality of jazz. They recognize that for students to advance and stay motivated, they must experience music as a social act.

5.2.2 Transcription as a Central Pedagogical Strategy

Another major theme addressing the teachers' pedagogical strategies is the use of music transcription (learning by ear). Transcription serves as a substitute for the

master-apprentice dynamic, allowing students to "steal knowledge" directly from recordings rather than relying on sheet music.

GT1 describes using this method to intentionally limit theoretical input, thereby forcing the student to engage directly with the aural tradition of jazz:

Last semester I had this student who wanted to learn a jazz song [...] I wanted to give as little information as possible, because then you only have to rely on your ears.

By giving "as little information as possible," GT1 shifts the focus away from written material and toward active listening. However, assigning transcription requires the teacher to be deeply involved in the process. As GT3 points out, the teacher must be prepared to guide the student through the material:

If you wanna give an assignment to a student to transcribe a solo it is important to know how to play the solo yourself.

This highlights that while transcription encourages the student's independent aural development, it still requires active, knowledgeable mentorship from the teacher to be an effective pedagogical strategy.

5.2.3 The Role of Structured and Theory-Based Methods

The final theme addresses how teachers balance theory-based methods—such as the chord-scale approach or arpeggios—with the students' current abilities. When introducing improvisation, the teachers carefully select how much formal theory to apply.

GT1 explains how he builds on a student's current knowledge to make complex theories easier to understand:

First I want to see what they play right now... I would probably start with one scale, I would say let's start with only this scale for this song.

Here, the scale is used not as a rigid rule, but as a manageable starting point adapted to a specific song and the student's level. On the contrary, GT3 explicitly tries to move away from the dominant chord-scale methodology, focusing instead on the underlying harmonic structure to build the student's improvisational vocabulary:

What is important for me is to get away from the chord-scales thing... I focus a lot on arpeggios with my students.

These findings show that while structured materials and theory are present in Kulturskolan's guitar education, the teachers actively attempt to balance them. They adapt their methods to keep the learning musical rather than strictly mathematical, recognizing that scales and arpeggios are merely tools, and that a flexible approach is necessary to develop true improvisational skill.

5.3 Result summary

During the interviews, the respondents reflected on their own learning processes and how those situations influenced the way they approach and teach improvisation at Kulturskolan Stockholm. The socio-cultural contexts they experienced initially situated them in the periphery of communities of practice. These contexts gradually provided the challenges needed to legitimize their belonging and establish them as full members. Absorbing musical language from recordings, learning theory-based methods, and playing with experienced peers gave them the necessary tools to steal knowledge.

Today, they attempt to share this acquired knowledge with their students at Kulturskolan Stockholm by acting as guides. However, the results show that replicating this authentic environment within a formal school setting presents challenges. To compensate, the teachers must actively balance structured, theory-based methods with situated strategies—such as collaborative transcription and ensemble playing—to simulate a true community of practice for their students. It functions like a learning circle of communities of practice, allowing apprentices to steal knowledge from within and later contribute what they have learned to the successive community.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to distinguish and analyze the pedagogical approaches used by guitar teachers at Kulturskolan Stockholm when teaching jazz improvisation, focusing on how they balance theoretical and practical methods to prepare students for advanced musical contexts. In this chapter, I will analyze the empirical findings from Chapter 5 through the theoretical lenses of Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and the concept of "stolen knowledge" (Brown & Duguid, 1996).

6.1 Discussion of Results

The results reveal a clear tension between the traditional, community-based ways jazz has historically been learned and the formal, structured environment of a municipal music school. The respondents' teaching strategies represent their attempts to navigate this tension.

6.1.1 Recreating the Community of Practice in Formal Education

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning is not merely the transmission of abstract knowledge from teacher to student; it is a social process where learners move from the periphery of a "community of practice" toward full participation. Historically, jazz musicians developed their skills in socio-cultural spaces such as jam sessions and clubs (Berliner, 1994). However, as GT2 and GT3 pointed out, these physical spaces and youth centers are less accessible for today's students.

Furthermore, while the standard format of Kulturskolan Stockholm consists of 30-minute group lessons, these brief, time-constrained settings can still struggle to establish a genuine community of practice. The findings indicate that simply placing students together does not automatically create a collaborative peer group. Without this supportive dynamic, students often lack intrinsic motivation, or as GT1 noted, they become "afraid to play wrong." If the environment remains strictly teacher-centered and the primary reason a student practices is simply to "please the teacher" (GT3), the learning loses its authentic context.

To compensate for this, the teachers employ a specific didactic strategy: they actively attempt to recreate a micro-community of practice. By organizing ensemble weeks (*samspelveckan*), bringing in drum teachers for mock jam sessions, or encouraging students to form bands, the teachers are trying to provide the necessary context for Legitimate Peripheral Participation. They recognize that to prepare students for higher education (like KAP or Jazzcentrum), the students must experience improvisation not as an academic exercise, but as a communal dialogue.

These results can also be connected to Guro Gravem Johansen's (2021) research on *guided participation* in jazz pedagogy. Just as Johansen observed in her study of

micro-communities, the respondents in this study attempt to act as guides into a musical context rather than strictly traditional transmitters of theoretical knowledge. When the teachers prioritize ensemble weeks and collaborative listening over relying exclusively on chord-scale theory, they are in practice applying the kind of guided participation that Johansen argues is crucial for students to develop a genuine, living jazz language.

6.1.2 Transcription as "Stolen Knowledge"

When a physical community of master musicians is unavailable, how do students acquire the authentic language of jazz? The results indicate that music transcription (learning by ear from recordings) functions as a crucial substitute. In the theoretical framework of this study, this process can be analyzed as "stealing knowledge" (Brown & Duguid, 1996; Bjerstedt, 2016).

In traditional apprenticeships, knowledge is not always explicitly taught; it must be absorbed or "stolen" by observing the master. Today, this theft happens via an "apprenticeship at the gramophone" (Gioia, 1988, in Bjerstedt, 2016). The respondents heavily utilized this strategy both in their own learning and in their current teaching.

GT1's strategy of giving the student "as little information as possible" when assigning a jazz song is a prime example of facilitating knowledge theft. By withholding sheet music or written tabs, the teacher forces the student's inner ear to take over, shifting the educational focus from a "supply-side" (the teacher giving answers) to a "demand-side" (the student seeking and deciphering the sounds). However, as GT3 emphasized, the teacher must still know the solo themselves to guide the student. This shows that in Kulturskolan, the teacher acts as the facilitator of the theft, ensuring the student steals the right tools without getting overwhelmed.

6.1.3 The Didactic Role of Music Theory

The final analytical point concerns how teachers balance structured, theory-based methods with situated, informal learning. Since the 1960s, jazz pedagogy has been heavily institutionalized, leading to the dominance of chord-scale approaches (Monson, 2002, as cited in Bjerstedt, 2016). While methods like the Barry Harris Harmonic Method offer highly codified ways to understand bebop, the results of this study show that the respondents use formal theory with extreme caution.

None of the teachers strictly enforced a rigid chord-scale methodology. Instead, they adapted the theory for immediate musical context. GT1 uses "only one scale for this song," anchoring the abstract theory to a tangible piece of music. GT3 actively avoids the "chord-scale thing," preferring arpeggios to help students outline the actual harmony. GT2 explicitly steers away from excessive scale talk because it confused him during his own education.

This suggests that professional guitar teachers at Kulturskolan view formal music theory not as the starting point for improvisation, but as a supplementary tool. Theory provides a "common language" to categorize what the student is already hearing. The ultimate didactic goal is to develop the student's internal voice (Sidran, 1981, in Bjerstedt, 2016). Therefore, the teachers constantly balance the codified European tradition of systemized instruction with the orally transmitted, ear-based tradition of jazz.

6.2 Discussion of Method

Choosing to use qualitative, semi-structured interviews proved effective for the purpose of this study. Limiting the sample size to three professional guitar teachers provided sufficient "information power" (Malterud et al., 2016) due to the high specificity of their expertise and the narrow focus of the research questions. Conducting some of the interviews via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic did not visibly obstruct the flow of the conversation; the digital format maintained a high level of interaction and produced rich empirical data (Archibald et al., 2019). Furthermore, transcribing the interviews and conducting a thematic analysis allowed for a deep, living relationship with the material, ensuring that the theoretical analysis remained grounded in the teachers' actual lived experiences.

6.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that teaching jazz guitar improvisation at Kulturskolan Stockholm requires much more than transmitting scales and arpeggios. The teachers act as crucial bridges, navigating the structural constraints of the municipal school system to create authentic learning environments. By employing transcription to help students "steal knowledge" from the masters, using music theory as a flexible tool rather than a rigid rulebook, and striving to recreate communities of practice through ensembles, these educators provide the necessary foundation for their students. Ultimately, to successfully prepare apprentices for advanced jazz education, teachers must facilitate not just the learning of an instrument, but the entry into a musical culture.

6.4 Further research

Since this study focused exclusively on the perspectives and didactic choices of professional guitar teachers, a natural progression for further research would be to investigate the students' experiences. Conducting qualitative interviews or observations with guitar students at Kulturskolan Stockholm and Kulturskolan KAP could provide valuable insights into how these pedagogical strategies are actually received. Do the students feel that they are successfully entering a "community of practice," or do they still experience improvisation as an isolated, theoretical exercise?

Additionally, while this research highlighted the structural limitations of the standard 30-minute individual/group lesson, future studies could take the form of action research. For example, a study could implement and evaluate a trial curriculum where ensemble playing and collaborative transcription are mandatory core components of the guitar education, rather than optional extras.

Finally, expanding the scope of this research to a national level could be highly relevant. A quantitative or mixed-methods study involving guitar educators across various municipal music schools in Sweden could determine if the pedagogical tensions identified in Stockholm—specifically the struggle to balance formal instruction with situated, authentic jazz contexts—are a universal challenge in the Swedish Kulturskola system.

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APPENDIX

Attachment 1

Invitation Letter:

Hej XXXX,

Jag heter Leo Blank och jag är student på SMI. Just nu läser jag min sista termin och jag skriver min C-uppsats om jazzimprovisation och lärande i Kulturskolan Stockholm, KAP och Jazzcenter.

Jag skriver till dig eftersom jag gärna skulle vilja intervjua dig för min uppsats. Intervjun tar ungefär 30-45 minuter och den kan genomföras digitalt eller på en plats som passar dig.

Eftersom jag skriver min uppsats på engelska gör jag gärna även intervjun på engelska, men det funkar såklart även på svenska.

Jag planerar att filma/banda intervjuerna för en senare transkribering, men alla som intervjuas är anonyma.

Hör gärna av dig om du är intresserad och kan tänka dig att ställa upp, eller om du har några frågor. Mitt mobilnummer är:xxxxxxxx

Tack på förhand!

*Vänliga hälsningar,
Leo Blank*