CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The intention of this study is to investigate the meaning of jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities for students in beginner jazz ensembles and describe the essence of this experience for them. The study focuses on how the students experience the Dalcroze-inspired activities in learning jazz improvisation. The Dalcroze approach to music education is divided into three parts, namely eurhythmics, solfège and improvisation. Jaques-Dalcroze (1914:92) states:

The study of rhythm (eurhythmics) awakens the feeling for bodily rhythm and the aural perception of rhythm, the study of solfège awakens the sense of pitch and tone-relations and the faculty of distinguishing tone-qualities, and the study of improvisation combines the principles of rhythm and solfège.

University music students in selected beginner jazz ensembles got the opportunity to experience all three aspects of the Dalcroze approach with particular attention to improvisation. The function of improvisation is “to develop rapidity of decision making and interpretation, effortless concentration, the immediate conception of plans, and to set up direct communications between the soul that feels, the brain that imagines and co-ordinates, and the fingers, arms and hands that interpret” (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1932:371). Jaques-Dalcroze (1914:93) also mentions that the purpose of improvisation is to teach students to interpret musical thoughts (melodically, harmonically and rhythmically), and it awakens the motor-tactile consciousness. In the Dalcroze approach, improvisation is at the top of the learning triangle, resulting from interacting pitch and rhythm experiences (Abramson, 1980:62). In other words, improvisation plays a vital role in the Dalcroze approach. This improvisational aspect forms a strong connection with jazz music that also relies strongly on improvisation. It is important to note, however, that the two approaches to improvisation have developed under different socio-historical circumstances.

1 How the students value the experiences, activities and actions presented in the class and how they contribute to their learning (Wayman, 2005:17-18).
2 The term Dalcroze-inspired activities will be used throughout this study because, although the researcher had training in the Dalcroze approach to music education, he is not a qualified Dalcroze lecturer.
3 Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) is often referred to only as Dalcroze, even though his last name is hyphenated (Choksy et al., 1986:27). In this study I refer to his approach to music education as the Dalcroze approach.
Improvisation, in the context of Western Music, is indeed most commonly associated with jazz. The act of musical improvisation is at the core of jazz and this improvisational element, developing and expressing musical ideas in the moment, is definitely one of the most significant elements that has defined jazz all through its history (Alperson, 2010:274; Gridley, 1987:4-5; Iseminger, 2010:297; Norgaard, 2011:109; Rogers, 2013:270). In jazz improvisation the note choices are governed by the underlying chord structure and rhythmic feel. If you do not know the chord structure, your note choices may be wrong, and if you do not have a good rhythmic feel, the execution of your note choices will be poor, therefore it can influence the placement, melodic shape, duration and inflection of the notes (Norgaard, 2011:110). The potentially strong relationship between the Dalcroze approach and jazz can be explained as follows: The chord structure guiding the note choices can be related to solfège (ear training) within the Dalcroze approach and the rhythmic feel with eurhythmics.

Various studies have been conducted on the Dalcroze approach throughout the last century (Alperson, 1995; Daley, 2013; Stone, 1986), but a phenomenological approach has been followed in only a few of these (Alperson, 1995; Habron et al., 2012; Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004; Van der Merwe, 2014). Van der Merwe (2014:1) recently investigated the meaning of Dalcroze-inspired activities for first-year Baccalareus Musicae (BMus) students during a music education module. Another phenomenological research study is that by Juntunen and Hyvönen (2004), who examined how Dalcroze Eurhythmics can facilitate knowing. They argue that “the body is our primary mode of knowing” (Juntunen & Hyvönen, 2004:199). In Alperson’s (1995) doctoral thesis two questions emerged that can be associated with the current study: “How did the students feel when they were moving?” (1995:9) and “What did the experience of moving with the music mean to the students, personally and musically?” (1995:9). Habron et al. (2012) also explored the experiences of student composers who participated in a short course on Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Similarly to music education and composition, the Dalcroze approach can also be applied to group instruction and rehearsal techniques.

techniques in the choral setting and Caldwell (1995) also deals with Dalcroze Eurhythmics for voice instruction.

There is also a vast amount of literature available on jazz education and improvisation within the jazz idiom as well as on the Dalcroze approach, but no literature/studies on the Dalcroze approach in jazz music education. My study will differ from all the above-mentioned studies as it will bring two fields together with a musical element vital to both – improvisation. It will investigate how body movement within the framework of Dalcroze Eurhythmics can possibly facilitate musical knowing in the jazz genre, with a particular focus on improvisation. No phenomenological research exploring peoples’ experiences and the value of the Dalcroze approach within the jazz idiom has been conducted.

I believe the Dalcroze approach can be used to teach jazz improvisation in a more holistic way, since “learning how to improvise is often treated as a process of acquiring stylistic vocabulary and procedural skills” (Monk, 2012:89). Therefore, this study may help music educators to teach improvisation in a more holistic and embodied manner than is possible through mere technical endeavours. It can prove to be very useful for jazz educators as well as Dalcroze practitioners, and can open a whole new direction for further studies. It will also prove to be useful for research on Dalcroze studies, because it extends the scholarly literature on the diverse applications of the Dalcroze approach.

1.2 Purpose statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to understand the meaning students ascribe to their experience of jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities in beginner jazz ensembles at the School of Music, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. At this stage the meanings the students assign to their experiences will generally be defined as “what” they experienced and “how” they experienced it as well as how this contributes to their understanding, playing, expressing and improvising of jazz music within the ensemble. It is the way in which the students value the experiences, activities and actions presented in the class and how these contribute to their learning that creates the meanings (Wayman, 2005:17-18).

1.3 Research questions

- The central research question that guided this inquiry is:
What meaning do students in beginner jazz ensembles ascribe to their experiences of jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities?

Secondary questions that relate to this question are:
- How did the students experience the jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities?
- What did the students experience during the jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities?

1.4 Research procedures

This study adopts a qualitative research design. "Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2013:44). This design will be most appropriate for my study because I will investigate the common meanings that several individuals ascribe to jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities.

I have chosen phenomenology as my research approach, because phenomenology is the study of the common meanings shared by participants who experience the same phenomenon, to create an understanding of the participating individuals’ ‘lived’ experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013:76; Merriam, 2009:24; Van Manen, 1990:9). “Hermeneutic phenomenology is consequently the study of experience together with its meanings” for the participants (Henriksson & Friesen, 2012:1). The following aspects were influenced by this approach: the role of the researcher, participants, data collection and analysis, validation and ethics.

I have identified that the phenomenon of interest to study will be the meanings that students ascribe to their experiences of jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities.

Role of the researcher

I am the director of the newly-established beginner jazz ensembles as well as a part-time lecturer in music education. During an exchange programme between the North-West University and the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, I had the opportunity to receive five months’ training in Dalcroze Eurhythmics with three Dalcroze lecturers. Dalcroze-inspired activities will therefore be used in the rehearsal setting of the
ensembles and I will be the primary research instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009:15).

- Participants

The participants were students at the School of Music, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, who participated voluntarily in newly-established beginner jazz ensembles and experienced the phenomenon. These students had little or no experience in the jazz idiom. Most of the students were first-year students in the University Diploma in Music programme. There were four first-year BMus students and one student enrolled in his final year (third year) in the University Diploma in Music programme. The activities and research were conducted in the scheduled rehearsal times as agreed upon by all the participants. Each ensemble had one rehearsal every week for an hour as well as a combined jazz improvisation class of one hour per week. Data were collected in these scheduled times over a period of ten weeks.

- Data collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, including follow-up interviews (multiple interviews), focus group interviews and reflective descriptions, until data saturation was reached (Creswell, 2013:81; Merriam, 2009:25; Van Manen, 1990:53-54; Willis, 2007:173,203). Two general phenomenological questions were asked in order to collect information that would provide an understanding of the shared lived experiences; these provided textural and structural descriptions of these experiences (Creswell, 2013:80-81). The two questions are: What have you experienced during jazz improvisation through the Dalcroze-inspired activities? What contexts or situations, such as the nature of the activities and the interactive nature of the lessons, have influenced or affected your experiences of jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities? Other open-ended questions were also asked in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of their experiences.

- Data analysis procedures

Data were organised using ATLAS.ti 7 and analysed by means of coding, categorising, and identifying themes (clusters of themes) in order to provide an understanding of how the students experience jazz improvisation through Dalcroze-inspired activities
The notice-collect-think (NCT) model of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis was used in combination with ATLAS.ti 7 (Friese, 2014:12-16). Themes were then used to write a description of what the students had experienced (textural description) as well as how they experienced it (structural description). In this way the shared lived experiences of the students can be interpreted and a composite description can be written, presenting the essential significance of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013:82; Saldaña, 2013:13).

Validity

Several strategies were employed in order to validate the accuracy of the information: validation through member checking, negative case analysis, and rich and thick descriptions (Creswell, 2013:250-252; Willis, 2007:220-221). The findings, conclusions and interpretations were taken back to the participants to validate the data. They could check the accuracy of my findings as well as indicate whether there was something missing (Creswell, 2013:252; Willis, 2007:220). It was possible that not all of the data collected would be positive; all evidence that does not correspond with the pattern of a code/theme was reported in order to deliver a truthful assessment of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013:251). Rich and thick descriptions of the participants, settings, activities and movements used in the study were given in order to provide abundant interconnected details providing opportunity for transferability (Creswell, 2013:252).

1.5 Ethics

The proposal was presented to the Ethics Committee for approval. A form for ethical purposes was designed to protect the North-West University, the participants and myself, the researcher. This consent form (see Annexure A) includes the following elements as outlined by Creswell (2013:152-153):

- The participants have the right to withdraw at any time;
- The procedures of data collection and purpose of the study;
- Protecting the confidentiality of the participants;
- The physical risks associated with participation;
- The expected development of the participants in the study; and
• Signatures of the participants and researcher.

The participants and the North-West University School of Music were asked for permission to conduct interviews with the students. The names of the participants will not be mentioned in order to protect their confidentiality and they could withdraw at any time. Playing in the ensembles is also voluntary; therefore no marks are allocated to the students and no form of assessment takes place during the course of the instruction. This study would no way influence any form of assessment of their studies. Safety measures would be clearly described in order to prevent any possible injuries.

1.6 Layout of the dissertation

This first introductory chapter was dedicated to providing a background to the study. The following chapter offers an overview of the literature on Dalcroze Eurhythmics as well as on jazz improvisation teaching and learning. It also discusses some related qualitative and phenomenological studies. Chapter two concludes by illuminating the connection between these two fields. Chapter three discusses the research design, methods and procedures used for the study, followed by the findings in chapter four. The fifth and final chapter presents the essence of the phenomenon in relation to the literature, the research questions were answered and the implications for different audiences and further research considered. A few summative remarks bring the chapter to a close.