

CHANGING THE DYNAMICS OF THE CLASSROOM: LESSONS FROM JAZZ

Ivo Soares, Pedro B. Águia, Armindo Frias, Miguel M. Silva,

Abstract

Contemporary education systems face increasing pressure to cultivate creativity, adaptability, collaboration, and critical thinking in rapidly changing social and technological environments. Traditional classroom models, characterized by rigid hierarchies, standardized procedures, and teacher-centred instruction, often fail to develop these competencies effectively, specifically when considering the 21st century skills framework. This paper explores how principles derived from jazz improvisation can transform classroom dynamics and support more adaptive, collaborative, and learner-centred educational practices. Drawing upon theories of improvisation, experiential learning, constructivism, distributed leadership, and organizational creativity, the paper examines the parallels between jazz ensembles and dynamic learning environments. Concepts such as improvisation, active listening, minimal structure with maximal autonomy, collaborative “comping”, acceptance for errors, constructive failure, experimentation, and distributed leadership are analysed as pedagogical tools for educational innovation. The study integrates insights from educational theory and organizational studies on improvisation and leadership. The paper argues that jazz-informed pedagogies foster psychological safety, learner agency, creativity, resilience, and collaborative intelligence. Practical classroom strategies are proposed for implementing jazz-inspired principles and teaching methods in higher education and secondary education contexts. The paper suggests that adopting improvisational frameworks can significantly reshape classroom relationships and prepare students for complexity and uncertainty in contemporary society, therefore fostering performance in face of complex contexts, where cause-and-effect are rarely clear.

Keywords: active learning, classroom dynamics, collaborative learning, creativity, distributed leadership, educational innovation, improvisation.