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# Demystifying jazz

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*“The school boy learning physics is a physicist, and it is easier for him to learn physics behaving like a physicist than by doing something else.”*

- Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education*

## Premise

The fundamental priorities represented in the thinking of experienced jazz improvisers can, and should, be reinforced in the thinking of even the most novice learners. This can occur by providing targeted experiences that encourage the learner to approximate the same modes of thought associated with improvising at the highest levels of performance.

## Discussion of research findings

Jazz in the headlights (Fidlon and Duke, 2008)

Neural substrates of spontaneous musical performance (Limb and Braun, 2008)

Attention and automaticity during improvised jazz (Fidlon, 2009)

## Behaving like a (jazz) physicist

Great jazz musicians demonstrate:

- “automaticity” at the primary levels of production, which enables...
- freer and more flexible focus of attention, which enables...
- broader awareness of performance context, which enables...
- all the “good stuff”: interaction, longer-range developments, and, potentially,
- effortless spontaneity; F L O W

## Suggestions for thinking like an expert improviser

Improvising is about communicating intentions. Great improvisers are able to effectively convey their intentions to other musicians and to listeners.

- Sacrifice complexity for clarity. Recognize the difference.
- Listen. Did you hear what you just played? (use the rear-view mirror)
- Impose structure on your musical ideas. Leave space around them. Repeat them. Develop them.

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