Instrumental Dance improvisation

Introduction
The purpose of this work is to create a new method for teaching dance improvisation. I have chosen to build my method on something I already are familiar with to facilitate and not complicate the method. The choice is not only based on my own experiences, but by working with something that also is familiar for the students makes it easier for them to understand the work.

Method
Music is something that most people is surrounded by daily both on the radio, music contests on TV, in clothing stores, on the club, the gym, and so on. Music is also something that people can relate to, which has made it so popular, that it evokes feelings both in words and melody. Dance is also associated with music in many ways as they work together very much with the beat, pulse in the body, counting etc.

I have for many years been a trumpet musician, both as a soloist and in an orchestra, and has been introduced to various methods of improvisation in music. Therefore, I have chosen to build my teaching method on different musical categories that musicians are already working with. The categories are musical parameters, ex; dynamics and timbre, Ensemble interaction, Sound (audio), listening and composition methods. This because most people have some kind of "musical backpack" with them when they enter an improvisation class of dance and can, based on their own experiences of music, work with improvisation on a personal level, without me as a teacher being too controlling. The idea of the method is to let the students be instruments and therefore I have chosen to call this method for Instrument improvisation.

Each category should be introduced by giving an example of working with this as a musician so the students both get knowledge in music and understands the parallel work with that and the body.

1. Musical parameters
As musical parameters, I mean the building blocks that help to form a musical ensemble. Musical parameters can be pitch, tone, tempo, timbre, dynamics, articulation and harmony. The exercises will be based on various parameters such as; scales (pitch), rhythmic motifs and structures (note length).
For example; To dance after a certain harmony in the music as well as dynamics and tempo exercises. Even the shape and mood can be seen as musical parameters.

Depending on the age of the students, the choice of parameters are very important. If this exercise would be for children from 5-6 years, I might decide to work with pulse which is a clear exercise where you can play any song, and the exercise is to play/dance/mark the pulse with their bodies.

2. Audio / Sound
This exercise is to establish a sound / timbre that makes identity.

Pauline Oliveros is a Swedish musician who has made 108 instructions that everyone has with the processing of the sound based on opposites (Nunn 1998b, p.38), for example;
1. Do a familiar sound strange.
2. Do a strange sound familiar.
3. Make a quick sound slow.
4. Make a slow sound quick.

The idea of this exercise is to move this instrumental work to the body, just replacing the word sound to movement.

1. Do a familiar movement strange.
2. Do a strange movement familiar.
3. Make a quick movement slow.
4. Make a slow movement quick.

If we continue to imagine the exercise for children between 5-6 years, you can ask the children to think of a typical dance steps, or introduce, for example, "sidestep" (step side, step side), which is a classical dance movement, and thereafter ask them to develop the step into an unfamiliar step, or move fast versus slow when working with the movement, then they are working with the sound of the movement.

3. Ensemble interaction
This is a central activity in free improvisation for musicians. Musicians often play in ensemble as well as a group of dancers are an ensemble. Therefore, to work with improvisations by the ensemble interaction is a good way to establish a team spirit in a group (which can be very important while working with children).
Different exercises for this category can be to get a group to just improvise a meeting (voice), interpolation, which divides the ensemble into two parts playing opposites, one group improvise and then the other group is answering by improvising in the opposite to what the other group just danced, which is very individual and personal, an exercise that I would not have chosen for children between 5-6 years, but older, more experienced dancers that can improvise freely without the teacher's direction.

But a method that Mark Bradlyn (1998b Nunn, p.34) have invented is an exercise where you divide the group into three parts/roles; "figure, ground, field". In the world of music, this would be compared that the figure is the soloist, ground is the bassist and the field is the drummer, but as a dancer you have to use your imagination and create an own sense of what the role might imply. The exercise then goes on to switch between the roles in the group.

I would introduce this exercise for children between 5-6 years calling it; Bird, fish, or in between (high, low or in-between), where the figure would be the bird, ground, the fish and the field is what happens in between while improvisation.

There is actually no end for the number of exercises that you can work with in an ensemble. But the foundation/main point of the exercises should be to strengthen the interaction between group members (dancers).

4. Listening

Listening can be one of the most central area in all music. Most of the exercises I studied requires active listening. I still want to take it up as a separate category to highlight its importance in improvisation. It is also very important in the audio / sound / exercises. Mark Bradlyn says that if improvisation is going to have any success as music, listening must be equal to playing. Step one is to stop playing and open your ears (Nunn 1998, p.34).

Exercise for this category can be to listen to the inner drives and then portray it or interpret it with the body. An exercise for children between 5-6 years would be to ask the children to become aware of the sounds in the environment and depending on what they hear, act along it.

5. Composition methods

Making use of composition methods is common in music improvisation. Methods for composing music can for example be:

Conductor; a person acting conductor and directs the others.
Picture/movie; to portray an image or a movie clip.
Text; use poetry as inspiration for improvisation.
Context; experimenting with acoustic environments in the room or an environment where music is not normally played.

This method is already used in dance improvisation and musical composition and it can relate very easily in the body. Ex; Portray a picture with the body, to improvise a poem, imagine a context or environment to dance in or perhaps visit such a place to make it more interesting.

**Summary**

To sum up, the improvising method is based on music categories that orchestras or musicians already is working with. Depending on what age or level the students are, I can adapt the difficulty in this method and depending on which musical "backpack" you as a student have when entering the class, you can challenge your work further if you have good musical knowledge, or hopefully you will learn a lot about different music categories you did not know about earlier.
Sources