How can improvisation be a safer activity for my students?
Culture. If students feel safe, cared for, and loved, they will be more interested in creating. Use good belonging cues and start simple so they can have success. You can create a culture where failure is part of learning . . . and that’s ok!

Written warm-ups vs. creative warm-ups.
Although written warm-ups can be very effective for teaching fundamentals and can yield outstanding results, using creative approaches can help students stay focused and help them create more music.

Why use improvisation to teach fundamentals?
Improvisation and musical dialogue can unlock a great deal of focus, creativity, and musicianship in our students. Getting away from printed music can allow students to really focus on their sound, tuning, and other fundamentals.

Improvisation ideas over backing tracks
- Call and Echo. Soloist perform a phrase or lick, students echo it back.
- Call and Response. Soloist performs a phrase, the rest create a response answer.
- Sharing ideas. Each person takes a turn performing an idea, other echo it.
- Drones. Using longtones to find lead-tones and progressions.

Improvisation over drones
- Unison Long Tones. Scales, chord tones, digit patterns (1, 2, 5, 1: do, re, sol, do).
- Scales. Play together, or students move at different times, listening to the intervals.
- Chord Long Tones. Students play swells on chord tones, listening to the interval.

The Music Code
The circle of 4ths/5ths exercises provide a logical and simple framework for teaching all kinds of theory concepts. Some include: key signatures, scale spelling, modes, chord progressions, intervals, and can be used to build student knowledge to help them navigate improvising in different contexts.

Circle of 4ths Exercises
Students need to know 3 important pieces of information. 1) Order of Sharps and Flats (BEADGCF), 2) the order of keys around the circle, 3) how many sharps or flats are in each key.
- Longtones. Unisons, chords, intervals, balance, blend, intonation.
- Scales. All modes, digit patterns, melodies, arpeggios, etc.
- Key Signatures. Function of sharps flats.
- Progressions. ii, V, I built right in.

Resources
The Creative Director, Ed Lisk.
The Culture Code, Daniel Coyle

---

1 See The Creative Director, by Ed Lisk.