Revista Portuguesa de Educação Artística,
Volume 13, N.º 2, 2023
DOI: 10.34639/rpea.v13i2.227
https://rpea.madeira.gov.pt

A Musical Journey: Students' Reflections on the Compositional Process

Uma Jornada Musical: Reflexões dos Alunos Sobre o Processo de Composição

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ABSTRACT

The *New Sounds of Learning: Composing music for young musicians* is a multi-site, multi-year research project partnered with the Canadian Music Centre and the Ottawa Catholic School Board. It seeks to obtain an in-depth understanding of the parameters of writing repertoire for young musicians. Consequently, it examines the conceptualizing, writing, and refining of new string and wind repertoire in collaboration with composers, teachers, and students. Students recorded their compositional experiences in a journal. Data from these journals were examined through a pragmatic lens, revealing the following themes: Conceptualization Stage (Interest, Nervousness, Comfort); Writing Stage (First Draft, Feedback); and Refining Stage (Rehearsals, Growth). The findings will be of potential interest to composers, school music teachers, and post-secondary music educators.

Keywords: Musical Creativity; Collaborative Composing; Composing for Young Musicians; Educational Music

RESUMO

O *New Sounds of Learning: Composing music for young musicians* é um projeto de pesquisa multi-local e plurianual em parceria com o Canadian Music Centre e o Ottawa Catholic School Board. Procura obter uma compreensão aprofundada dos parâmetros de escrita de repertório para jovens músicos. Consequentemente, examina a conceptualização, escrita e refinamento do novo repertório de cordas e sopros em colaboração com compositores, professores e alunos. Os alunos registaram as suas experiências de composição num diário. Esses dados foram examinados através de lentes pragmáticas, revelando os seguintes temas: Fase de conceptualização (Interesse, Nervosismo, Conforto); Fase de escrita (Primeiro Rascunho, Feedback); e Fase de Refinamento (Ensaios, Crescimento). Os resultados serão de interesse potencial para compositores e Professores de Educação Musical.

Palavras-chave: Criatividade Musical; Composição Colaborativa; Compondo para Jovens Músicos; Educação Musical

Introduction

> We were part of recreating someone's idea and bringing it to life. (Student Journal Entry)

Defining the Problem: Music Training & Complexity

Many music courses and programs in Canadian post-secondary institutions solely address music composition on professional level repertoire and not on educational music[1] for young musicians (Andrews & Carruthers, 2004; Carruthers, 2000; Colgrass, 2004; Terauds, 2011). This is due to the perception that educational music is of less quality than music composed by professionals (Camphouse, 2004, 2007; Gershman, 2007; Hatrik, 2002; Ross, 1995). Budiansky and Foley (2005) summarize the problem succinctly:

> Much of the music composed specifically for school band is formulaic, emotionally superficial, monotonously alike, dull, and didactic; that it fails to inspire students ... it fails to provide students with a true musical education or the basis for further independent exploration of music, either as a performer or listener (p. 17).

Moreover, people within the music profession believe most of this music is unsuitable for local contexts and question its educational value (Andrews, 2013; Colgrass, 2004). Consequently, educational music is not emphasized in post-secondary institutions, but rather the need for complex music (Andrews, 2004a; Bowden, 2010; Terauds, 2011). Today, composers have more access to world music that incorporates intricate vocalizations and tuning systems which limits what amateur musicians can play (Andrews, 2004a). Furthermore, electro-acoustic music, initially involving electric sounds and taped music, has rapidly developed (Frisius, 1981). With the frequent rapid advances in technology, electro-acoustic composing now involves computers, the execution of alternate forms of representation, and encompasses digital and analog synthesis (Andrews, 2012). The emphasis on music complexity prevents teachers from including it in the curriculum and students from playing it in their developing years.

Finding the Solution Understanding Educational Music

In order for students to play quality Canadian repertoire, composers must learn to write appropriate educational music. To help professional composers understand how to write educational music, sixteen composers were commissioned by a large urban school board in eastern Ontario, Canada to write new pieces. Sixteen compositions were created: eight for strings and eight for winds over a four-year period with strings and winds alternating (four strings; four winds; four strings; four winds). These compositions were written with the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded project entitled *New Sounds of Learning: Composing music for young musicians*. The project's overriding research question is: What are the parameters for composing new music for young musicians?

1 Educational music supports students' musical development (i.e., discipline-based learning). It is musical language that is comprehensible to young people (Andrews, 2012) and "playable by school ensembles" (Andrews, 2009, p. 6). Much of this repertoire represents arrangements of popular music, film and television shows, or transcriptions of Western-European classics, which are playable by school ensembles (Andrews, 2009; Wendzich & Andrews, 2019b).

Literature Review

Compositional Music

Compositional music refers to "the result of creative thinking in music that takes shape in a process of bringing a musical product into existence by an individual or group of composers" (Randles et al., 2012, p. 686). When composing music for young musicians, such professional composers as Chris Ozley, Kerin Bailey, Elissa Milne, Sonny Chua, and Carol Matz (to name a few) have written repertoire for young musicians. They have realized that music should be meaningful for students; they should be able to relate to it. Karel Husa claims that when writing for students a composer must be aware of the band's limitations (in Camphouse, 2002), and a work must maintain their interest (Bowden, 2010). Other professional composers have also noted the benefits when students, teachers, and composers collaborate in the process of writing educational music. For example, Gary P. Gilroy, when commissioned to compose a piece for the Maryville (Tennessee) Intermediate School band, collaborated with the music students. He realized that beginners – even sixth graders – have the potential to provide valuable input and play challenging works (*The Instrumentalist*, 2014). Even though there are many benefits, when a composer (or a guest speaker/instructor) visits a class, students may be nervous or slightly uncomfortable (Getino et al., 2018). Anxiety may surface due to cold/random calling,[2] or a fear of negative evaluation (Cooper et al., 2018; Percy et al., 2019). However, as time progresses, students may become more comfortable as they build a positive rapport with their instructor (Frisby & Martin, 2010).

Canadian composer Michael Colgrass has also collaboratively written educational music. He claims, "by giving the students a challenge, they will certainly rise to it!" (Andrews, 2004a, p. 150). Although this is the case, it is important for composers to write a technically appropriate work (one that is challenging, but not too challenging or unfamiliar) (Duncan & Andrews, 2015; O'Neill, 2014). When collaborating with composers, students also learn about the role of creativity (Burnard & Younker, 2002). Moreover, they develop instrumental, sight reading, and listening skills (Camphouse, 2007; Davis, 2013; Wendzich & Andrews, 2017), while deepening their relationship with music (Administration, 2017; Hickory Public Schools, 2020). Within a music classroom, they have the opportunity to look at the conductor while playing (Byo & Lethco, 2001), and build a positive rapport with the music instructor (Adams, 2018; Fleming & Hiller, 2009). Building a positive rapport and hearing compliments, motivates students to work hard (i.e., practice and play their best) to master a skill or concept (O'Neill, 2014; Svinicki, 2004; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Through frequent (or the correct type of)[3] practice, a band can manage errors, play together, and adjust to their environment (Bishop, 2018; Esslin-Peard, 2017; McCaleb, 2016). Students can also be motivated to play when hearing a composition's sound and age/grade level (Duncan & Andrews, 2015). Furthermore, students are encouraged when music instructors have a vested interest in them (Adams, 2018; Fleming & Hiller, 2009; Frisby &

2 Cold calling is when an instructor calls students by name to answer a question, or in a music class, asks a student to play solo. Random calling is when an instructor randomly calls on students to participate in front of the entire class (Cooper et al., 2018).

3 Esslin-Peard (2017) claims that it is important to practice in an appropriate manner, not in a repetitive, anxious, neurotic, negative way. Students must use their creative skills.

Martin, 2010); music instructors can divulge their musical backgrounds/experiences and listen to students' input and instrumental abilities (Denner et al, 2005; Wendzich & Andrews, 2017, 2019b). They can also provide students with instrumental and/or musical feedback (Getino et al., 2018; Wendzich & Andrews, 2019b, 2021a). Overall, however, students learn about the compositional process (Wendzich & Andrews, 2017).

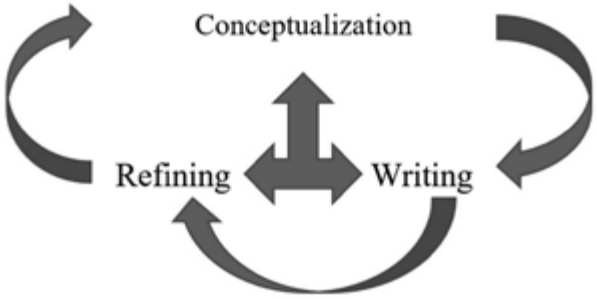

Figure 1 – The compositional process

Compositional Process

The compositional process occurs in stages (Christiansen, 1993; Freed-Garrod, 1999; Roozendaal, 1993; Sloboda, 1985; Wallas, 1926). Early research explains it as a four-stage process: discovering a germinal idea (preparation), a brief sketch or draft (incubation), refinement of a first draft (illumination), and revisions to a final copy (verification) (Bennett, 1976; Graf, 1947). More recently Giesbrecht & Andrews (2016) have identified the compositional process as one that involves three stages: conceptualizing, writing, and refining. Conceptualization pertains to the formulation of the piece based on the composer's imagination, knowledge, and musical skills. The second stage

addresses the development of musical ideas, the overcoming of instructional obstacles, and the implementation of compositional strategies to promote learning. The third stage concerns issues within the piece and any adjustments that must be made throughout the rehearsals and performances. These stages can be viewed as either linear, non-sequential, or cyclical (Freed-Garrod, 1999; Katz & Gardner, 2012) (refer to Figure 1).

Although it is easier to have a linear-like process when writing with young musicians, it is beneficial for students to learn composition in a non-sequential manner; that is, writing whatever comes to mind at a particular moment rather than having certain media, musical forms, or pitches being required of them (Camphouse, 2007). Furthermore, the movement across and between the creative thinking stages among students, often vary. This is likely because of students' diverse experiences and backgrounds (Burnard & Younker, 2002).

According to O'Neill (2005, 2014), as young people participate in the compositional process, they learn to engage more in learning, feel empowered, and are personally fulfilled. Moreover, they learn about musical elements and concepts (e.g., melody, rhythm, balance, syncopation, dynamics, phrasing, accents, rudiments, musical notation, etc.) (Camphouse, 2007; Duncan & Andrews, 2015; Wendzich & Andrews, 2019a). When participating in the compositional process, students also use musical language that has been established for the compositional process (Randles & Sullivan, 2013) and engage in constructive criticism (Getino et al., 2018; O'Neill, 2014). Many note the extent to which this process is enjoyable and fun (Colgrass, 2004; O'Neill, 2014) as they develop skills in sharing, performance, and

exploration (Andrews & Giesbrecht, 2014; Freed-Garrod, 1999; Hargreaves et al., 2012; Hickory Public Schools, 2020).

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

The *New Sounds of Learning* research focused on the four dimensions of creativity: exploration of the creative process; assessments of *environmental factors* that promote creativity; examinations of *creative persons*; and examinations of *creative products* (Amabile & Tighe, 1993; Woodman & Schoenfeldt, 1989). Hence, it reflected the four dimensions of music composition: the *compositional process* (techniques, strategies, sequencing), *pre-requisites for composing* (training, context, emotions), *person* (pre-dispositions, motivation, characteristics, personal learning), and *musical piece/product* (style, features, impact/performance) (Andrews, 2004a, 2004b) (refer to Figure 2).

In the *New Sounds of Learning* project, the constant comparison of these dimensions was employed to analyze and interpret the data (Stake, 1998). Furthermore, unlike mixed methods approaches which require qualitative and quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), Integrated Inquiry[4] using multiple qualitative methods in different time periods was employed in this study (Andrews, 2008).

Integrated Inquiry's multi-dimensional aspect within this study is illustrated below (see Figure 3): the study's secondary questions reflect the four dimensions of musical composition. Further,

Figure 2 – Creativity and Music Framework

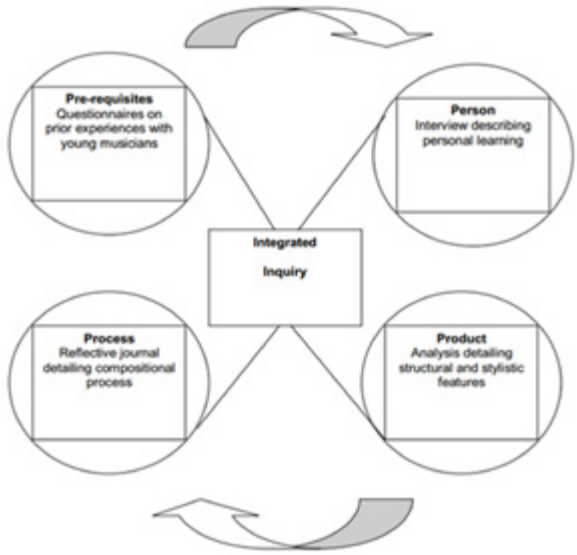

Figure 3 – Conceptual Framework of the New Sounds of Learning Project

it adopted different research protocols to answer these questions: i) process: What compositional strategies are employed to reinforce learning? (*reflective journal*) wherein the composers and students detailed the conceptualization of

4 Integrated Inquiry is a research method that involves combining multiple research perspectives. Moreover, it enables researchers to obtain a thorough understanding of curricular issues and to generate solutions for practice (Andrews, 2008).

the new music, the compositional strategies that are utilized to reinforce learning, and the refinements that are required from testing the compositional work; ii) pre-requisites: How do prior experiences influence the conceptualization of new music for them? (*questionnaire*) whereby the composers noted their prior experiences working with young musicians and the impact of their musical training on composing educational music; iii) person: What do composers personally learn from the experience? (*interview*). The interview emphasized each composers' personal learning from examining the conceptualization, composing, and refining of a new composition for educational purposes; and iv) piece: What are the features of compositions for young musicians? (*analysis*). The analysis focused on an examination of the new work by the composer and detailed the organizational features of the composition. By employing Integrated Inquiry (i.e., multiple data sources – triangulation – congruous with the four dimensions of musical creativity) and member-checking when possible, internal validity and trustworthiness were achieved (Lichtman, 2013).

Participants

The participants consisted of sixteen professional composers (ages 40 to 95 years). All of them received Western-European music training and higher music education degrees in their professional field. Furthermore, all of them had experience composing wind and/or string repertoire. Much of this repertoire reflects the classical and jazz genres.

From the sixteen composers, eight are affiliated with the Canadian Music Centre (CMC). They responded to a call for proposals to write a new string work for students studying music in private studios and schools. These composers were selected for participation in the study as they obtain membership as associates in the organization based on a juried process. This membership ensures a similar level of expertise by all participants in the study (Andrews, 2012). Eight other composers were commissioned by the Ottawa Catholic School Board to write a new wind work for students in school-based music programs. These composers were selected using a snowball technique (Andrews, 2012). The number of composers is appropriate for an in-depth qualitative study of a pragmatic nature where multiple measures are employed (4 per composer x 16 = 64 data sources) (Andrews, 2012).

The sixteen teachers who participated in this study voluntarily responded to a call for participation by the arts consultants of the participating school boards. These teachers collaborated with students and their corresponding composer to write new educational music for school-based programs. Although this interaction occurred in grades six through twelve (students-age 11 to 18), the majority transpired within secondary school classrooms (i.e., grades nine to twelve). Thus, most of the students involved in this aspect of the project were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.

Some students who participated in this project commented upon their experiences in a journal. Their reflections were open-ended. Since these students were from two different music classes, they did not collaborate with the same composer.

Student Journals: Collection and Interpretation

This article focuses on the *process* dimension (see Figure 1) of music composition. Thus, it discusses students' thoughts and reflections on music composition which were articulated in their journals. The student reflections were undertaken in the first year of the project in two different high schools. Data collected from their reflective journals was analyzed through a pragmatic lens as the project was concerned with "what worked" in the classrooms and on identifying solutions to pedagogical problems (Cherryholmes, 1992). The journals also underwent a process of thematic qualitative coding (both inductive and deductive) (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2015). Three main themes emerged from the data: Conceptualization Phase (Interest, Nervousness, Comfort); Writing Phase (First Draft, Feedback); and Refining Phase (Rehearsals, Growth).

Analysis

The students' collaborative musical journey began when the composer walked into their class for the first time: "The first composer visit was a bit nerve wracking. I was worried about how well we could play for him," while other students thought it was "interesting having a piece written for us," or "cool how [the composer] listened to each section of the band to determine our strengths and weaknesses." When conversing with the composer, students began conceptualizing the piece, expressing their musical ideas, hopes, thoughts, and feelings. Once the composer wrote a first draft, students provided feedback and engaged in rehearsals. They then helped refine the composition through practice, which led to their final performance of the piece.

Conceptualization Stage

The Interest.

Many students thought that it was "pleasing," or "nice" to meet a composer who had a vested interest in students: "[The composer] was interested enough in us to share [their] music." They were interested to such an extent that they were "pleasant," "open-minded," and often provided useful strategies for composing or playing a musical piece. "I learned that creating a piece of music can be like a puzzle. You must combine pieces of many things to create a wonderful piece of art," expressed a young musician. While another said, "you could tell how much he loved music." The composer loved music and was interested in students' likes/dislikes that they asked for student input: "We wanted more bass and percussion. We also wanted a cool tempo and not as many woodwinds." Many students also desired to have tempo changes, many dynamics, and some dramatic "dark" moments comprise the composition.

In one instance, a student expressed how humorous the composer was, while another mentioned the composer's professionalism. Conversely, a few students expressed how disinterested the composer was as they did not introduce themselves nor provide any of their musical background/context or accomplishments. Consequently, "it was difficult for me to understand what kind of musician [they were]."

In many instances, the composer listened to melodic fragments that students composed: "While he listened to our pieces, I was very curious

about what he was thinking and if he already had an idea for the song in his head," expressed a student. The composer also listened "intently" to students play, discerning their instrumental abilities. The composer began collaborating with the young musicians, providing constructive criticism, which "was very much appreciated." One student was amazed that the composer "was able to create a piece for us after listening to us only once." Some students expressed that the process of listening to them play may have helped their instrumental abilities; however, it "put us on the spot," which was "nerve wracking."

Nervousness.

During the conceptualization phase of writing a composition, most students were "nervous," "intimidated," "uncomfortable," or "frightened" / "scared." These feelings welled inside as students thought they would have to play solo. They believed they were being musically examined and assessed. They were also frightened about making an instrumental error, or nervous because many students never met a "brilliant," "world class," "important" composer who "knows so much about music"; however, the primary reason the young musicians were nervous concerned a good impression. Many students desired to impress the composer with their instrumental abilities: "We wanted to make the best first impression," many young musicians claimed. In one instance, a student thought that the lead researcher "was making notes on our performance to mention to [the composer]," while other students were more concerned with "living up to the composer's expectations and standards." One student noted their embarrassment after playing a musical piece. They were embarrassed "due to the lack of rehearsals."

While students played for the composer, they encountered many challenges: presenting the crescendos and decrescendos effectively, having proper flow, or executing the clarinet section properly. One student even expressed the extent to which their nerves affected their playing ability: "I played better when I pretended [the composer] wasn't there."

Comfort.

As the first composer-student visit progressed and students demonstrated their instrumental abilities, many of them became less nervous and quite comfortable with the composer-student visit: "I grew more comfortable as the rehearsal progressed. It started to feel less like a performance in front of someone important," expressed one of the musicians. Others claimed that meeting the composer was intimidating at first; however, the professional's "laid-back" nature eased some of their nerves. According to many students, as they became accustomed to the composer, they became more comfortable. Furthermore, playing for the composer became "fun" as they "learned how to use air to make the piece flow." They also learned about timpani and developed new playing techniques "which proved to be educational." In one instance, a student re-learned musical notation by observing other drummers and "following along."

Since the composer did not force students to play solo, a student said that their experience was great. Another student enjoyed the composer visit as it produced excitement. "It was cool having a composer write for our band ... [and]

write a piece to suit the band," many exclaimed. It was exciting to know that "we were the first band to really play the song," expressed a young musician. Students (within the same class) respectfully said, "[i]t was a pleasure to meet the famous Howard Cable [Order of Canada] - and play for him - a real honour." It was pleasurable to meet this professional composer as they complimented the students. According to some young musicians, the compliments were gratifying and motivating. The positive comments motivated students to play their best. Excitement grew to such an extent that a student concluded, "[i]t was so awesome meeting Howard Cable," while many others mentioned looking forward to playing at the next rehearsal.

Writing Stage
The First Draft.

Once the composer heard the students' instrumental abilities, they wrote a musical piece integrating the students' input. This musical piece was both exciting and confusing for many students: "I was excited because I was rearing to go, but also confused because the style was very foreign (Arabic) to what I'd ever heard or played." Although this was the case, the young musicians noted the extent to which the composer wrote a piece that was appropriate for the band: "The song suited the band very well because of our talent for playing loudly." Moreover, the composition suited the band because of the students' energy and drama. One of the dramatic parts symbolized a dragon's sadness and therefore had to be played slowly. "The objective of that part [was] to make people cry," expressed a student. This particular musical piece also included crescendos and decrescendos, causing the composition to be more fluid. There was also an intro-melody which blended with the main melody. Furthermore, the composer considered students' musical suggestions:

> I suggested many different ideas, and I wondered which ideas he would incorporate: battle music, romantic, horrifying or majestic music. I wanted a song rich in bass and percussion ... Indeed, the song did indicate a strong percussion and bass part. It does sound quite like a battle song. It is one of those pieces you can really feel. It tells a story, and you can really hear the action inside of it.

The composer also included notes that were an octave lower in the last three bars to accommodate the musicians' skills. Although this was the case, the composer asked many students to challenge themselves to play the higher notes. Although many student suggestions were incorporated into the first draft, not all were addressed, "because that would have been impossible," expressed one of the musicians. The piece was also difficult, but manageable and "we were ecstatic at the results." Students described the piece as fun, beautiful, captivating, suspenseful, dramatic, creative, elaborate, and exciting. "It kept changing so it wasn't boring and mundane." It addressed a range of emotions and "goes from calm to loud," expressed a young musician, while another student claimed that the piece was symbolic.

Feedback.

The composer and teacher considered the students' abilities as well as their musical suggestions. Although some students struggled with sight reading, and playing the bars without the other tenor saxophones, "we were beginning to

work them out." "It was also exciting to watch [the composer] edit his piece with us, making a variety of small adjustments as we played," expressed another student. The composer informed the young musicians how to improve particular sections. For example, "the awkward chords and abrupt dynamic changes were explained ... and therefore, the quality of our playing improved dramatically." Moreover, the composer singled out sections and "cleaned up" sections which resulted in a better musical flow. They explained how the students, as performers, could improve the sound. They commented on style, accents, and dynamics. One student was hoping for more notational changes in their part. Unlike many of their peers, this student said that the composer did not ask for much student advice. Although this was the case, many young musicians said that their teacher provided feedback to the class. For example, they taught students how to sit and breath properly during rehearsals. "[The teacher] touched upon everyone one of Mr. Cable's comments," expressed a student, while others mentioned the teacher helping students with accents and dynamics.

Refining Stage

Rehearsals.

The composer emphasized the importance of practicing the piece. When students practiced their piece in class, the composer challenged students to work more diligently on melody, rhythm, blend, syncopation, dynamics, phrasing, playing accents effectively/accurately[5], articulating rudiments, sight reading, listening to their peers play, deepening their relationship with music, playing multiple instruments, and looking at the conductor while playing. As a result, "I learned a few notes and scales that I had not practiced before," expressed a student, while others learned to play drum rolls, read music while simultaneously watching the conductor, or just develop "an overall feeling of the song." One student said that they practiced counting by clapping. According to many young musicians, with every rehearsal, they improved instrumentally and "began sounding like one band." Consequently, the young musicians began enjoying the piece more. "It had an interesting sound, which motivated me to focus during rehearsals," a student expressed. Other musicians were motivated because the piece was "at an appropriate level of difficulty" for them. One student said that the notes were in their range, while another claimed that the composer "knew how to compose for my strengths and hide my weaknesses." Another student similarly noticed this, saying that the flute sections had to be easy due to the mixed ability group.

After the first draft was written and students practiced it in class, one young musician expressed, "I thought of Dr. Cable as more of a teacher than a professional composer, so it was easier to play in front of him." Some students were so comfortable and enthusiastic that they could not wait until practicing at home: "After rehearsal, I decided to work on my part at home and remember [the composer's] suggestions." It seemed easier to practice at home for some of these musicians since they were not concerned about the speed of the band; they were able to solely focus at their own pace. Although students practiced the piece in class and at home, some wished for more rehearsal time and thought the

5 When playing accents effectively or accurately, a musician can add more excitement to a piece, expressed a student.

band was not playing the piece very well.

The Growth.

At the beginning, many young musicians did not like the musical piece because it "sounded funny," it did not make sense, the melody was strange, or they did not enjoy playing the same parts "over and over;" however, as time progressed, most grew to enjoy it. The random articulations began to make sense. Students began feeling as though they "owned" the piece as they polished and perfected it: "One of the things that stood out was how much we improved as a band." The band improved because students practiced their parts. Many of them rehearsed the piece a couple times a week and ensured to work on their instrumental/musical weaknesses. One even used a metronome. Rehearsal time provided students with time to consider their parts and overcome their weaknesses: "It gave me time to think my part through and nail it for rehearsals. There was nothing but pride and determination." Through practice, the "group overcame the difficulties of the song," a young musician expressed. Students became motivated to play the piece, not solely because the band sounded good or they were prideful about the piece, but because they desired to impress the composer: "I knew he was coming back to hear us, and I wanted to play well." Some students even expressed the extent to which they enjoyed playing their musical part: "I love[d] playing my part. It [was] fast, interesting, and really drives the song forward."

Most students thought that the premiere performance was "fantastic" or "one of our best run-throughs" because the band "perfected" the piece. "We sounded awesome!" a student exclaimed, while others said it sounded wonderful, amazing, fantastic, delightful, flawless, or beautiful. The band started and ended together, played together, and concealed errors fairly well. The young musicians were also able "to adjust to the acoustics in the church." "Everyone knew their part very well," expressed another student. One young musician, in particular, stated:

> I remembered all my notes and I put a lot of effort into listening to the balance of the band and feeling the rhythm. I think my increased practise and Mr. Cable's suggestions made a huge difference in my playing.

According to another student, the performance also ran smoothly because the "conductor made it so that we didn't see the audience." The premiere was also a memorable experience for the young musicians since the composer attended the performance. One student, in particular, was so proud because not only did the performance run smoothly and the composer was privy to that, but the student's family was present to witness their successful performance: "It was nice hearing good feedback from friends and family in the audience." According to another young musician, the collaborative compositional process was so successful that "the new band students (first year's) … want to join band next year."

Many young musicians concluded that this process was beneficial since they: developed musical techniques, were challenged, and were able to relate to the piece. "I think [this process] will also allow students to learn how to love music (since they may enjoy new, modern music more than the old pieces)," a student expressed, while many others said:

> Thank you for letting us participate in this research ... I would recommend this program to my friends, and I hope that [these types of] programs continue so that other children have these [compositional] opportunities as well.

Discussion

As students collaborated with composers and teachers to produce a musical piece, they became engaged in creative thinking[6] (Carlisle, 2011; Menard, 2013; Webster, 1990, 2011). Since creativity was applied in the *New Sounds of Learning* project, the four dimensions of creativity (in relation to music composition) frames this section: the *pre-requisites for composing*; *person*; *compositional process*; and *musical piece* (Andrews, 2004b).

Pre-requisites for Composing

The composer's love of composing shone as they divulged their professional life-styles and experiences to the students, which is reflected in Denner et al. (2005) and the *Making Music Project* (Wendzich & Andrews, 2021b). According to Hargreaves et al. (2012) and Her (2010), when a composer is extremely passionate about writing music, they express their love of music to others: informally (i.e., one-on-one) or formally (i.e., in their repertoire, the number of pieces they compose, etc.). This passion can be infectious and motivate students to learn and/or participate more in class: a "composer's presence provides a unique opportunity for students such that their attention, interest, and levels of participation often grow" (Getino et al., 2018, p. 34). According to students, this type of interactive setting, coupled with a genuine interest in the subject matter is quite motivating (Woods, 2023).

Students may also become encouraged to study (or in this case, play) harder, when classroom guests speak and relate to students (Percy et al., 2019). When speaking to students, a composer may ask for their musical, creative opinions (Camphouse, 2002, 2007; Colgrass, 2004; *The Instrumentalist*, 2014). They may also ask for in-class brainstorming sessions and discuss themes, tempo, rhythm and dynamics (Wendzich & Andrews, 2017, 2021a, 2021b), which is replicated in this study. Composers listened to students' suggestions concerning theme, tempo, dynamics, mood (e.g., dramatic), and types of instruments. Most of these suggestions likely derived from their musical backgrounds, experiences, and what they enjoy (Stauffer, 2002). Asking for student-input helped the composers write meaningful repertoire – something to which they could relate, which is consistent with the findings of Camphouse (2002), O'Neill (2014), *The Instrumentalist* (2014), and Wendzich and Andrews (2017). Consequently, the classroom compositional experience maintained student interest (Bowden, 2010).

Not only did student-input help craft the composition, but also teacher feedback (Randles & Sullivan, 2013; Wendzich & Andrews, 2021a). Composers considered and valued the teachers' musical training and experiences to such an extent that they incorporated their suggestions into the composition (Wendzich & Andrews, 2021a). Composers also considered students' musical backgrounds and playing abilities as they listened to the students play. Listening to them play helped the composers discern the band's

6 Creative thinking transpires when internal musical skills are coupled with outside conditions (Webster, 1990).

limitations (Camphouse, 2002; Wendzich & Andrews, 2017, 2019a).

Person

Most students were nervous and slightly uncomfortable during their first composer-student interactions, which confirms Getino et al. (2018). Anxiety welled as many thought they were being evaluated or believed they would have to play solo (Cooper et al., 2018; Percy et al., 2019). When a classroom guest (in this case, a composer) has a laid-back character, is pleasant, open-minded, humorous, and spends enough time with the students to build a rapport, students often become more comfortable with them (Frisby & Martin, 2010). According to Coupland (2003) as well as Frisby & Martin (2010), building rapport not only potentially minimizes anxiety, but it can increase student participation, encourage social interaction, and foster a positive learning environment. As students became more comfortable with the composer, they began correcting, developing, and tweaking how they played their musical instruments. According to Getino et al. (2018), when students write and perform a musical piece (especially in front of a composer), they learn from their errors and grow as musicians. Moreover, the quality of playing often improves because a music instructor explains how students, as performers, can improve the sound, which transpired within this study.

Correcting students in a constructive manner (i.e., constructive criticism) motivated students to play their best which is replicated in other studies (Getino et al., 2018; O'Neill, 2014; Svinicki, 2004; Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012). Motivating and encouraging students are skills that many instructors have and employ in their classrooms on a daily basis (Svinicki, 2004). The music teachers and composers employed their own teaching skills (motivation, encouragement, etc.), concepts, and strategies, to show young musicians how to compose interesting and exciting music, which is consistent with Hickey (2012). Moreover, composer Aaron Perrine claims that when his director "encouraged and fostered" his compositional interests, Aaron became motivated to learn and play a composition (*The Instrumentalist*, 2014, p. 22). Hearing a composition's sound and age/grade level may also motivate students to play (Duncan & Andrews, 2015).

In order to provide compositional input, students had to draw upon their own personalities and characteristics. They desired to incorporate that which they liked or with what they were familiar. According to Stauffer (2002), young musicians enjoy using familiar melodies and employ social and cultural cues related to school and home life to create musical works. When the composer incorporated their suggestions into the composition, they created a piece that was both innovative and unique (Getino et al., 2018). Consequently, students learned about creativity (Burnard & Younker, 2002) and developed instrumental, notational, sight reading, and listening skills (Camphouse, 2007; Davis, 2013; Wendzich & Andrews, 2017). Students also deepened their relationship with music (Administration, 2017; Hickory Public Schools, 2020) while having "fun." According to such composers as, Kerin Bailey, Elissa Milne, Sonny Chua, and Carol Matz, it is important for students to have fun, and thus compose that which is fun and exciting for them (Bowden, 2010). The students within the *New*

Sounds of Learning project also began taking pride in their work, as is reflected in Getino et al. (2018) and O'Neill (2005, 2014). Overall, the students gained insight into new concepts and/or behaviours when listening to the composer's, teacher's, and their peers' ideas (as in Denner et al., 2005; O'Neill, 2012; Paynter, 1982; Schafer, 1977).

Compositional Process

The students engaged in the compositional process, "with the beginning stages to the actual publication – and performance" (Hickory Public Schools, 2020). In other words, they engaged in a three-stage compositional process: conceptualizing, writing, and refining (Giesbrecht & Andrews, 2016). Although this process was executed in a very linear fashion[7] (Freed-Garrod, 1999; Katz & Gardner, 2012), the process had non-sequential elements (Berkley, 2001; Emmons, 1998). The non-sequential aspect was within the "refinement" stage as the composer and students wrote and re-wrote musical ideas to create a final product. Pedagogically speaking, the creative compositional process (whether it be linear or non-sequential) can benefit amateur musicians as they develop concepts and skills when specific media, forms, or pitches are not required of them. Because these students were not constrained with predetermined pitches and forms, they were able to select their own balance of freedom (selecting notes, pitches and melodies with which they were familiar) and constraints (range limitations) as creative boundaries that guided their compositional strategies.

Students mentioned that the creative compositional process gave them many opportunities, including the use of musical language that has been established for the compositional process (Randles & Sullivan, 2013). Moreover, it provided them with the opportunity to play multiple instruments. The latter is uncommon within music classrooms as many band ensembles within music classrooms are encouraged to play one instrument (Save the Music Foundation, 2019; The Music Studio, 2019).

After students shared ideas, the composer wrote a first draft. This draft was then played by the students which enabled them to hear their piece for the first time. According to Katz and Gardner (2012), hearing an initial piece helps one shape and reshape the material. The piece was being shaped and reshaped as students learned to master their instrumental parts. Their motivation to learn, coupled with their creative input, helped craft the composition.

Piece

The final compositional product was technically appropriate (both challenging and familiar) (Duncan & Andrews, 2015; O'Neill, 2014). Many composers, who have written for young musicians, have learned the importance of striking this balance (Colgrass, 2004; Camphouse, 2002; Duncan & Andrews, 2015); however, they have also realized the importance of writing that which is more challenging than familiar. American composer Gary P. Gilroy wrote a very challenging score for students:

7 According to Kennedy (2001), time constraints often impede one's lengthy non-sequential creative process. Composing on demand can cause stress and inhibit the flow of musical ideas. Learning to be innovative takes time and tools (Smith, 2015). Moreover, rushing to complete a musical piece prevents a student from refining their piece (Kennedy, 2001). Since many instructors (including music teachers) complain about time constraints within a classroom setting (Nazareno, 2016), it is likely that this contributed to the linear compositional process.

> I was worried that people might think ill of me for writing such a challenging work for sixth graders, but, if you were at the performance … you would know that they did a great job with everything they played that day (*The Instrumentalist*, 2014, p. 20).

Canadian composer, Michael Colgrass, said, "by giving the students a challenge, they will certainly rise to it!" (Andrews, 2004a, p. 150). Many students within the *New Sounds of Learning* project noted the challenges associated with the piece (e.g., the awkward chords, abrupt dynamic changes, fast tempo, and high notes, to name a few); however, many were determined to overcome them through practice and *formal* talk[8] (Eidsaa, 2018). Although abrupt dynamic changes were considered a challenge, frequent changes within the composition ensured that it was not boring nor mundane. Students would rather have a more interesting work than one that is mundane (Wendzich & Andrews, 2021b). According to Byo and Lethco (2001), frequent change is also more conducive to observing the conductor; viewing the conductor was mentioned by students within this study.

In order to master the musical piece, the composer encouraged the students to practice. Students practiced counting by clapping, using a metronome, and overcoming their weaknesses through repetition. According to Wood (2013), hand clapping helps young musicians develop a sense of rhythm; however, this coupled with a vocalized rhythm[9] is even more effective. When teaching rhythm, pulse, and time, metronomes can be a helpful tool, but require coaching and practice to use efficiently (Jacklin, 2020). Thus, it is recommended that students tap and clap along with a metronome "away from the instrument at a wide range of tempos [as this] can help students feel comfortable at creating a steady pulse" (Jacklin, 2020, p. 18). Another practicing strategy involves repetition. Repetition is often used by many young musicians when rehearsing a piece on their own as it helps them memorize their musical parts (Leon-Guerrero, 2008).

Encouraging students to practice is reflected in *The Instrumentalist* (2014) and Getino et al. (2018). Frequent (or the correct type of)[10] practice may help many musicians; however, the art of listening to each musician within the ensemble can help the ensemble perform (Esslin-Peard, 2017): "Because of the weakness in the second violin, we controlled the music from the lower strings and supported the first violin to our best ability" (p. 126). Listening to each other was mentioned by students within the *New Sounds of Learning* project. Moreover, rehearsing on own's own and with the ensemble was mentioned, which is replicated in the *Making Music* project (Wendzich & Andrews, 2017, 2019b, 2021a, 2021b).

It was important that students rehearsed as "practice makes perfect" (Esslin-Peard, 2017). This so-called perfection was alluded to by many students. Through practice, they played as one band, concealed errors, and adjusted to their environment (i.e., the church acoustics). Managing errors and playing together is replicated in Esslin-Peard (2017) and McCaleb (2016). Adjusting to one's environment is replicated in Bishop (2018). Many practiced to such an extent that they developed skills in sharing and performance

8 Formal talk refers to information shared among those involved in the collaborative project or instructions given to the pupils (Eidsaa, 2018).

9 A vocalized rhythm is a system of percussive syllables that students can verbalize while clapping. According to Wood (2013), "the act of vocalization adds a step in this [rhythmic] process and confirms an understanding of the rhythm (p. 63).

10 Esslin-Peard (2017) claims that it is important to practice in an appropriate manner, not in a repetitive, anxious, neurotic, negative way. Students must use their creative skills.

(Freed-Garrod, 1999; Hargreaves et al., 2012; Hickory Public Schools, 2020). Moreover, their skills shone as the performance was successful. A successful performance is congruous with Gary P. Gilroy's experience with his grade six band mentioned above (*The Instrumentalist*, 2014). Although the students (within the *New Sounds of Learning* project) reported a successful performance, they mentioned the need for more rehearsal time. More rehearsal time would have provided them with time to adjust and fully understand the piece. When students understand a musical piece, they are more likely to react and connect to it emotionally. For this reason, it is important that enough time is allotted during rehearsals to "strive for an understanding of the essential building blocks of music ... and prepare our music for our students by deconstructing it into essential parts to foster critical thinking and problem solving" (Kluck, 2020, p. 57). According to Wilkinson (2000), in order for an arts-related project to be quite successful, students within these creative learning environments must have sufficient time and space.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study, *New Sounds of Learning: Composing music for young musicians*, was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the parameters of writing repertoire for young musicians. In so doing, it examined students' experiences conceptualizing, writing, and refining repertoire in collaboration with composers and teachers. Their experiences were written in a journal. These journals revealed composers having a vested interest in the students' musical ideas and abilities. Although this was the case, students were nervous; however, as time progressed, they became comfortable with the composers. During the writing stage of the compositional process, the composers introduced students to the first musical draft, which was both exciting and confusing/challenging. Students, composers, and teachers discussed the draft, suggesting ways of improving it. During the refining stage, composers mentioned the importance of rehearsals. As students practiced their musical parts, they developed musically, resulting in a successful performance. The project was, as students expressed, "fun [and] enjoyable ... I feel lucky to have participated in such a wonderous event. I appreciate this experience and am thankful I could participate in this event/study."

Students contributed to producing the compositional piece; however, did all of them feel as though they owned it? Perhaps future research could focus more on authorship. Do students consider that they are authors of these collaborative compositional pieces? How do students and composers deal with collaboration and authorship? Future research could also explore students' emotions throughout the creative compositional process. How do they feel during the early rehearsal period, later rehearsal period, the performance, and immediately following the performance?

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