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# *Compositions of elementary recorder students created under various conditions of task structure<sup>1</sup>*

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of various levels of researcher-imposed task structure on the compositional products of elementary school recorder students. Twelve recorder students aged nine to 10 years each completed six composition tasks. Audio tapes of their compositions were given to four musicians who followed a Q sorting procedure to place the compositions in a rank order of recorder musicality. The total length of time spent on each task and the percentage of process stage time spent by the child for each task was compared with the type of task. The results suggest there is a relationship between the type of task and the musicality of the resulting compositional products. Pieces with the least amount of structure often were lowest ranked. The poem task led to compositions of higher musicality. The amount of time children spent on each of the tasks was not significantly different and was not a factor in creating works of higher musicality. Data from post-compositional interviews indicated that different children preferred different types of task structure.

**KEYWORDS:** *children as composers, children's compositional products, children's compositional processes, teacher imposed composition tasks, text setting and musicality in children's compositions*

There must be a great deal of order – then you can be an artist. With anarchy, there is no artistry.

Ferran Adria (cited in Lubow, 2003)

Cultivating and nurturing young composers has its beginnings in school and private study settings. Helping students to develop as composers is a task that benefits from research that identifies the structures that assist that process. Structure issues are of concern to teachers who nurture young creators. Too much task structure can inhibit creativity and personal expression (Wiggins, 2002); however, too little task structure can cause students difficulty because of too many choices (Folkestad, 2004; Regelski, 1981, 2004). For pedagogical purposes, task structures are efficient and expeditious

ways of proceeding with instruction, but educators need to know what impact structures have on children and their compositions. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of various levels of researcher-imposed task structure on the compositional products of elementary school children.

Task structure occurs on a continuum from unstructured to highly structured. Task structure, for the purposes of this study, means the directions for a composition task that specify some parameters for that composition and, at the same time, establish how much of the composition (for example, length of the piece, range of notes to be used, form, tempo, meter tonality, etc.) students can decide for themselves. In this study, unstructured tasks were those where no parameters were given other than the directions to create a piece, the length of time available to work on the piece and/or the instrument or composing media the student was to use.

## *Background*

Many research studies on children and composing could be categorized as product studies. The majority of these product studies focus on the technical devices used in the composition such as range, motivic repetition, tonality or overall length. The product studies that use unstructured tasks (Auh, 1997; Campbell, 1991; Dunn, 1992; Kratus, 1985) addressed these craftsmanship qualities of compositions. They examined the technical aspects of the music the children created, but not the imaginative or idiomatic aspects of the works. The researchers conducting these studies were most interested in what compositional devices the children employed.

A number of product studies examined compositions created under various conditions of task structure (Doig, 1942; Laczó, 1981; Loane, 1984; Rooke, 1991; Salaman, 1988; Scripp Meyaard & Davidson, 1988; Swanwick, 1988; Swanwick & Tillman, 1986; Verney, 1991). These researchers did not examine the impact of the initial directions (conditions of task structure) to the composers on the musicality of the compositions produced. These researchers, too, were focused on the technical qualities apparent in the resulting products. Barrett (1996) examined the compositions of 137 children aged between five and 12 years in order to identify the nature and extent of their aesthetic decision making. For the purposes of this study aesthetic decision making was evidenced in children's 'use of form and structure in their compositions' (1996, p. 43). The pieces were created with the directions that the piece should have a beginning, a middle and an end. The study illustrated that children as young as five years of age are capable of 'making musical and aesthetic decisions as they structure their compositions' (1996, p. 58). Whilst Barrett did not comment directly on the musicality of the pieces that resulted from the children's choices, her linking of musical and aesthetic decision making to issues of form and structure suggests that musicality and children's use of form and structure are intimately linked.

Nilsson and Folkestad (2005) studied the compositional processes nine children employed while composing on computers. They noted that the task itself was one of five phenomena that might take precedence in the children's music-making as they composed. They also noted that unstructured (open-ended) tasks were more likely to be viewed by the children as school tasks than the other tasks they employed. Whilst these researchers referred to the impact of the task on the compositional processes

children employed, they did not comment on the impact of the task on the compositions produced. Again, the musicality of the compositions that were created was not reported in this research.

The product studies that included both unstructured and structured compositional tasks suggested that children with some formal musical background preferred to create pieces when they were given relatively few parameters to include in their pieces (Brinkman, 1994; Smith, 1994). It should be noted, however, that there was some evidence that this was not true for older subjects or for subjects with more musical experience (Van Ernst, 1993). Also, Burnard (1995) suggested that different students may prefer different amounts of task structure. There were no product studies that directly examined products made by the same composer under varying degrees of task structure and also examined those products for musical excellence or expressivity.

## *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of various levels of researcher-imposed task structure on the compositional products of elementary school recorder students. It examined the musicality of children's compositional products created under various conditions of task structure. For the purposes of this study, musicality was defined to include craftsmanship, originality, imagination and idiomatic recorder sound. The specific research questions were:

- What is the effect of imposed task structure on the musicality of compositional products created by elementary recorder students as judged by a panel of experts?
- What are the relationships between the imposed task structures and the students' own preferences for the specific tasks and perceived difficulty of the tasks?

## *Method*

### DATA GATHERING TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES

The subjects for this study were recorder students aged nine to 10 years and in the fourth grade at an elementary school in a small town in New England, USA, where the researcher was their classroom music and recorder teacher. The researcher taught the students in a recorder class that met twice each week during the school day for 35 minutes. In addition, the students had general music classes twice a week for 30 minutes and also may have chosen to participate in a treble choir, which met for 40 minutes each week. These classes were also taught by the researcher. This study was thus situated within the context of a school, but was not conducted as part of the regular general music, choir or recorder classes. The composing sessions took place in the music classroom during summer vacation and at other times when school was not in session. Thus, the sessions were an out-of-school activity (Folkestad, 1998), but in a familiar environment, in the presence of a familiar adult.

All students who could play the C, D, F, G, d natural minor, and e natural minor scales (which were taught and assessed as part of the classes) and who had completed one recorder method book (Burakoff & Burakoff, 1995) and portions of another

(Nash, 1973) were considered to have a sufficient level of mastery of the recorder and were considered for possible inclusion in this study. The names of all students who qualified ( $n = 22$ ) were placed in a box and 12 subjects (five boys and seven girls) were chosen. (There were 33 students in the fourth-grade recorder class.)

Each subject, working alone (with the researcher in the classroom but ostensibly engaged in other work) when school was not in session, completed six compositions. All composing sessions were videotaped. The students knew they were being taped. They were accustomed to being routinely videotaped in music classes and other settings in this school and usually ignored the camera. The students were allowed to work on each composition for as long as they wished during a single session. There

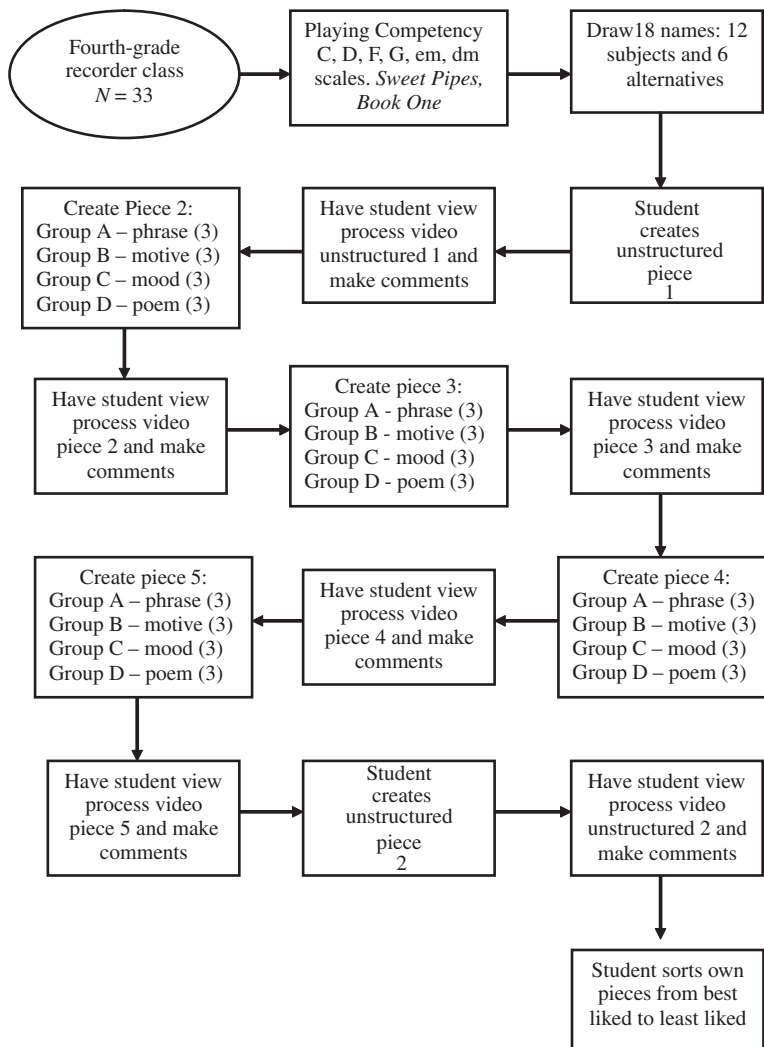


FIGURE 1 Data collection flow chart.

were two unstructured tasks that were completed first and last by every student. The directions for these two tasks were simply to make up a recorder piece. No other parameters were provided. The other tasks were completed in various orders by different students (groups A to D in Figure 1). For the poem task (a), students selected a poem from among six offered by the researcher and were asked to 'create a song out of the poem by making up a piece of music on your recorder that people could sing'. The other tasks were to create: (b) a piece that used a researcher-developed motive somewhere in the piece; (c) a piece that included a researcher-developed phrase; and (d) a piece based on something about which the student had a strong emotional feeling. This last task will be referred to as the mood task.

The tasks outlined above represent a continuum from the most structured (poem task) to the least structured (mood task). The poem represents the most highly structured of the tasks since the rhythm, meter, phrase length and mood are all suggested by the text. The phrase task also should be considered nearer the highly structured end of a structure continuum because it specifies musical parameters such as key, meter and melodic material. The motive task might fall somewhere near the middle of the continuum, and the mood task approaches the unstructured end on the continuum because there are no musical parameters. The least structured tasks in this study were the two tasks where the students were simply asked to create a piece. These two cannot be considered completely free of researcher-imposed structure because the students were not choosing if, when or where to compose or what materials to use.

The following is the researcher-developed motive:



The following is the researcher-developed phrase:



At each session, the students completed only one of the tasks. After each task, the students immediately watched a videotape of themselves as they worked on that task and talked about what they were doing and thinking as they composed. This technique is known as stimulated recall and is based on work by Gass and Mackey (2000). The students' comments were transcribed for further analysis. All videotape viewing sessions and interviews were also videotaped. The researcher then created a score of the piece for the student to take home (and for his or her records). This was done using a computer and a notation program. It was based on an audio recording of the piece made when the student said the piece was finished, and the student's own comments as the transcription proceeded.

After completing all of the tasks, the students were asked to arrange them in an order from the one they liked the best to the one they liked the least. They were also

asked which task they liked the best, which they thought was the easiest and which was the hardest for them. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

#### DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Each piece by each student was recorded onto a cassette tape (six pieces  $\times$  12 students = 72 tapes). The tapes were given to four adult musicians who play recorder and had taught recorder to young children. One of these was a college-level composer and theorist, one was a music education professor, and two were public school instrumental music teachers. They were given instructions to follow for a Q sorting procedure to place the compositions in a rank order of overall recorder musicality. The judges were told: 'Musicality for purposes of this sorting procedure should include your concepts of composer craftsmanship, originality, imagination and idiomatic recorder sound.' It was left to each judge to define what those terms meant in the context of the students' compositions. This is an adaptation of Amabile's consensual assessment technique (1996), in which the term 'musical' is used to rate pieces instead of assessing them based on creativity. This type of assessment, as adapted, assumes that compositions are musical to the extent that appropriate judges agree that they are musical. These judges were deemed appropriate based on their teaching background (see Hickey, 2001).

This study was not intended to create a measure (as with many Q sort studies), but it did use the sorting procedure to determine the preferences of the judges for the various pieces. Often studies of the creations of young composers have used a Likert-type rating system to rate the children's compositions (Hickey, 1995; Kaschub, 1999; McCoy, 1999). Such approaches may indeed create an array of responses from worst to best, but these procedures also allow for ties and for data to cluster. On the other hand, the Q sorting procedure employed in the present study may have provided a more accurate measure of the individual sorter's preferences for specific pieces by creating a rank order array. It also allowed for a considerable amount of disagreement as to the exact placement of any single piece (see Table 1). Inter-judge reliability numbers were rather low. The lowest correlations occurred between Judge B, the composer theorist, and the other judges. This is consistent with findings by Hickey (2001) that suggest that teachers may be more consistent and, therefore, appropriate judges of children's compositions than composers.

This study used a rectangular Q sort procedure (Thompson, 1980). The 72 compositions were copied onto separate cassettes with no identifying features other than a number. Each judge began by selecting a tape at random from a box, which held the tapes in a single layer, and listening to it. The judge then placed it in one of three

TABLE 1 *Correlation matrix between judges as percentages of agreement*

Judge	Judge S	Judge P	Judge R
Judge P	.69		
Judge R	.63	.67	
Judge B	.57	.52	.43



boxes that were labeled 'more musical', 'musical' and 'less musical'. The judges proceeded in the same way with another tape until all 72 tapes had been heard and assigned to a box. They were then directed to put the materials aside for at least 24 hours.

At the next session each box was sorted into three more stacks for 'more musical', 'musical' and 'less musical' within each of the three boxes from the previous session. This resulted in nine stacks of tapes. These stacks were placed in labeled paper bags and the judges were again asked to put them away for at least 24 hours. During the final session, each judge rank ordered the contents of each bag. They were allowed to move tapes from one stack to another in order to create what they felt was a precise rank ordering of items. This sorting procedure eliminated the possibility of tied scores from a judge, but it also forced the judge to make choices and rank order each piece.

The four judges' scores were averaged to determine a ranking of musicality for each piece. This created an order from 'most musical' to 'least musical' of the students' compositions. These mean rankings were used as a measure of compositional musicality.

The pieces, the rankings by each judge, and means of the judges' rankings were studied to see what patterns emerged. The rankings by the judges were compared with the type of compositional task. The rankings of the pieces by each judge were also studied by examining the top eight (11%) and bottom eight ranked pieces.

The students' responses to questions asked in post-composition interviews were tallied to determine which of their own pieces they liked best and least, and which compositional tasks they liked best and least.

## *Findings*

The first research question was: what is the effect of imposed compositional task structure on the musicality of compositional products created by elementary recorder students as judged by a panel of experts? The results of this study indicate that there was a relationship between the type of task the students were doing and the musicality of the resulting compositional products. For these subjects, as ranked by these judges, the poem task led to pieces of higher musicality (see Table 2). The pieces created with the least amount of imposed task structure were often the lowest ranked in musicality (see Table 3). This was true for all four judges and was the tendency across all 12 students.

The second research question was: what are the relationships between the imposed task structures and the students' own preferences for the specific tasks and perceived ease of the tasks. The data from the post-compositional interview indicated that different students preferred different tasks (see Table 4). This finding supports a similar one by Van Ernst (1993). The phrase task was most often seen as the most difficult and the least preferred way of making up a piece. Five of the 12 subjects preferred the unstructured tasks, but four others preferred the poem task. This diversity of opinion is similar to findings by Brinkman (1994), Kaschub (1999), and Smith (1994).

The students were also asked to sort their six pieces in order from the one they liked the best to the one they liked the least. Six students chose their poem piece as the one they liked the best. Five students selected the phrase piece as the one they

TABLE 2 *Top eight pieces by judge*

Rank	Judge S	Judge P	Judge R	Judge B
1	Tape 45 Poem	Tape 45 Poem	Tape 38 Poem	Tape 38 Poem
2	Tape 24 Unprompted 1	Tape 38 Poem	Tape 45 Poem	Tape 45 Poem
3	Tape 38 Poem	Tape 17 Phrase	Tape 21 Phrase	Tape 33 Poem
4	Tape 6 Phrase	Tape 8 Poem	Tape 17 Phrase	Tape 3 Poem
5	Tape 21 Phrase	Tape 9 Motive	Tape 4 Unprompted 1	Tape 18 Unprompted 1
6	Tape 25 Motive	Tape 6 Phrase	Tape 8 Poem	Tape 24 Unprompted 1
7	Tape 9 Motive	Tape 22 Unprompted 2	Tape 65 Poem	Tape 49 Unprompted 2
8	Tape 3 Poem	Tape 4 Unprompted 1	Tape 1 Phrase	Tape 25 Motive

TABLE 3 *Bottom eight pieces by judge*

Rank	Judge S	Judge P	Judge R	Judge B
72	Tape 16 Mood	Tape 30 Unprompted 2	Tape 67 Mood	Tape 30 Unprompted 2
71	Tape 30 Unprompted 2	Tape 23 Unprompted 1	Tape 30 Unprompted 2	Tape 64 Unprompted 1
70	Tape 27 Motive	Tape 27 Motive	Tape 13 Unprompted 2	Tape 50 Unprompted 1
69	Tape 23 Unprompted 1	Tape 29 Mood	Tape 19 Unprompted 1	Tape 58 Unprompted 1
68	Tape 29 Mood	Tape 11 Mood	Tape 63 Phrase	Tape 56 Poem
67	Tape 64 Unprompted 1	Tape 5 Mood	Tape 54 Phrase	Tape 31 Unprompted 2
66	Tape 60 Unprompted 2	Tape 48 Mood	Tape 69 Poem	Tape 61 Mood
65	Tape 67 Mood	Tape 31 Unprompted 2	Tape 27 Motive	Tape 67 Mood

liked the least. No one chose the phrase piece as the one they liked the best, but one student did choose his poem piece as the one he liked the least (see Table 4).

#### SUCCESS AT COMPOSING

Another perspective on the data is to consider which students seemed most successful as composers. One way to view success as a composer is to examine which student had the most pieces in the top third of the ranks and the fewest in the bottom third. From this perspective, Cindy<sup>2</sup> was clearly the best composer among these subjects.

TABLE 4 *Composer preferences*

Easiest task	Hardest task	Favorite task	Least favorite task	Favorite piece	Least favorite piece
7* Unstruct. 4 Poem	6 Phrase 3 Unstruct.	5 Unstruct. 4 Poem	4 Phrase 3 Unstruct.	6 Poem 2 Mood	5 Phrase 3 1st Unstruct.
1 Motive	2 Mood  1 Poem	1 Motive  1 Mood 1 Phrase	2 Poem  1 Mood 1 Motive  1 Undecided	2 2nd Unstruct. 1 Motive 1 1st Unstruct.	2 2nd Unstruct. 1 Mood 1 Poem

Notes: Numbers indicate how many out of 12 children chose this response; Unstruct. = least structured task.

FIGURE 2 *Cindy's phrase piece.*

She had four pieces in the top third and none in the bottom third of the rankings. Her two highest ranked pieces were created from the highly structured tasks: her poem piece and her phrase piece. Her phrase piece (Figure 2), was ranked as the best of that task set. It was in ABA form. The use of the modulation and its responses flowed naturally from the context of the piece. All of Cindy's pieces had a discernable form and balanced phrase lengths. Two of the pieces were in ABA form. One was in an unusual mode (Dorian). One effectively made use of mixed meter and also had a 'blue note' at the end. Her work was consistently ranked as good across all the tasks. However, her last piece and her mood piece were her weakest, as ranked by the judges. Both of these were comparatively unstructured tasks.

Next, in order of composer musicality, are Chuck and Sarah. They each had three pieces in the top third of the rankings, as well as a piece in the bottom third. Chuck's highly ranked pieces were his poem (Figure 3), motive and first unstructured pieces. His lowest ranked composition was his mood piece.

White frost is on the mea-dow. The sum-merbirds have fled. Bare  
 6 fields are cold and si-lent. For win-ter looms a-head. Up-  
 10 on the tall-est pine tree. In chor-us caw the crows. Their  
 14 mu-sic, harsh and mourn-ful. Fore-tells the win-ter snows.

FIGURE 3 *Chuck's poem piece.*

How do you like to go up in a swing, Up in the air so blue? Oh I do think it the  
 6 plea-sant-est thing Ev-er a child can do! Up in the air and o-ver the wall Till I can see,  
 12 Till I can see so wide. Riv-ers and trees and cat-tle and all O-ver the coun-try side. Till  
 18 I look down on gar-den green Down on the roof so brown.  
 22 Up in the air I go fly-ing a-gain, Up in the air and down!

FIGURE 4 *Sarah's poem piece.*

Sarah, however, had both her unstructured task pieces in the top third of pieces as well as her phrase piece. Her poem piece (Figure 4) was her lowest ranked piece. For her, task structure appears to have little impact with respect to the musicality of her compositions as evaluated by the judges of this study.

On the other end of the spectrum is Paul, who was clearly the least effective composer of the group. He had five compositions in the bottom third and none in the top 20. His highest ranked piece was his phrase piece (Figure 5).

The student who was second from the bottom in the rankings was Arlene. She had three pieces in the bottom third and two in the top third. Her lowest pieces were her mood piece and her second unprompted piece. Her highest was her poem piece.

Her pieces were very short. They often consisted of a single phrase (Figures 6 & 7).

Hannah's poem piece (Figure 9) was her only one in the top third. She had three pieces in the bottom third – her two unprompted pieces and her mood piece. Gilbert had two pieces in the bottom third – his mood piece and his first unprompted piece. Gilbert had two pieces in the top third – his phrase piece (Figure 10) and his poem piece (Figure 11).

The pieces created under more conditions of task structure were rated higher for both the top ranked and bottom ranked students.



FIGURE 5 *Paul's phrase piece.*

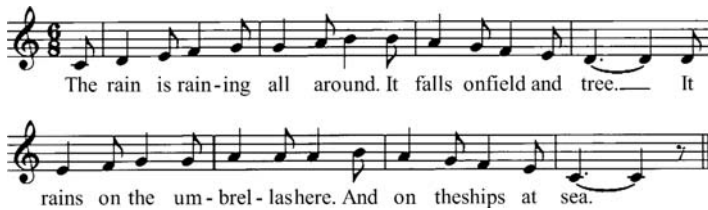


FIGURE 6 *Arlene's poem piece.*



FIGURE 7 *Arlene's mood piece.*



FIGURE 8 *Hannah's first unstructured task piece.*

Mer - ri - ly, mer - ri - ly greet the mom  
 Cheer - i - ly cherr - i - ly sound the horn  
 Hark to the ech - os hear them play, O're hill and dale and  
 far a - way. Mer - ri - ly mer - ri - ly greet the mom.

FIGURE 9 *Hannah's poem piece.*

*trm*

FIGURE 10 *Gilbert's mood piece.*

Mer-ri-ly mer-ri-ly greet themorn. Chee ri ly chee-ri-ly sound the horn  
 5  
 Hark to the ech - os hear them play O're hollanddale and far a-way.  
*trm*

FIGURE 11 *Gilbert's poem piece.*

## Discussion

### POEM PIECES AND MUSICALITY

As noted above, the poem task led to pieces of higher musicality. However, this result should be noted with some caution. All of these students sang accurately, and this may make setting a text somewhat easier for them than it would for non-singers. These students also made a choice among six poems rather than being assigned a

specific text. The poems from which they selected their lyrics were all rhythmic, rhyming, and had regular phrase lengths. The results might have been different had the composers been required to alter the text of the poem in order to form regular length phrases. It is also possible that the poems' formal properties led the students to create pieces with balanced forms, which may have led to higher ratings by the judges. Again, the results might have been different if the phrase lengths or forms of the poems had been less regular. Still, these findings suggest that setting a poem text with regular phrase lengths is a good way to promote initial compositional success for young composers.

#### MUSICALITY AND OTHER FACTORS

One factor that could have impacted the musicality of the pieces was the order in which the students composed them. The two relatively unstructured tasks were done first and last. The other four tasks were done in different orders by different students (see Figure 1). The order of composition numbers for the higher ranked pieces span the range of possibilities. However, there were no first pieces in the top ranked pieces and only one last piece. These are the two least structured tasks in the study.

Conversely for the bottom pieces, the composition numbers 1 and 6 were the most common. The low rank probably has more to do with the lack of task structure than the order in which the students composed them, but future studies should test that theory by moving the unstructured tasks around to vary the order.

#### TASK STRUCTURE PREFERENCE

It was not surprising to find that different students preferred to work under different conditions of task structure. The phrase task was often seen as the most difficult one. It was also the task least preferred by the students. However, the phrase itself may have been a confounding factor, as it modulated to the dominant at the end. This task may have been too 'limiting and restrictive' (Folkestad, 2004) by focusing too much on this detail and thereby interfering with students' musical self-expression. The students had no theory background for working with that type of melodic change other than their own intuitive knowledge of what sounded right to them. Nonetheless, several did successfully negotiate that obstacle. Still, future research might want to use a less challenging phrase to see if that favorably impacted the students' preferences.

Based on previous research (Smith, 1994), it was expected that the students would prefer the unstructured tasks. If the poem, phrase and motive tasks are grouped together as more structured tasks – those with more required parameters – and the mood and unprompted tasks are grouped as more unstructured tasks (those with fewer required parameters), the 12 children split evenly on which they preferred. This finding suggests that it is probably wise to use a variety of task structures when working with young composers. This is consistent with the recommendations of Hickey (2003), who suggested that 'offering a variety will give all students a chance for success' (p. 44).

However, if the goal is compositional musicality, it is clear that the more structured tasks enabled these beginning composers to create pieces with greater musicality as defined in this study. Once the students better understand the principles of balance, repetition and contrast, they might be more successful at the unstructured tasks. Until then, some task structure seems to be helpful.

## *Implications*

### STRUCTURE AND YOUNG COMPOSERS

Since this study only employed 12 subjects, any conclusions based on this sample must be made with reservations. However, combined with the work of Barrett (1996), Brinkman (1994), Folkestad (2004), Kaschub (1999), Kennedy (2002), Nilsson and Folkestad (2005), Van Ernst (1993), and others, it is reasonable to make some suggestions about the use of task structure when beginning to teach composition to young instrumentalists.

Using poetry as a starting place has received mixed reactions from subjects in previous studies. Kaschub (1999) found that her subjects did not particularly like the poem task. She felt that this may have been because of the poem itself rather than the task structure, and she suggested giving children a choice of poems with which to work. This study did exactly that and the subjects produced more musical pieces and pieces that they liked better under that condition of task structure.

Kennedy (2002) suggested that poems needed to be appropriate for the age of the composer and about topics with which the composer is familiar. The students in this study were allowed to select from a half a dozen poems. Interestingly, two of the poems were never used. The other four included the longest and shortest of the poems. Eight of the students chose poems that were exactly four lines long. None admitted to choosing them because they were short. All gave plausible other reasons for choosing the ones they did, such as the appeal of the topic, or hearing tunes in their heads as they read them. The other four students chose the two longest poems. One of these pieces was scored as the highest ranking piece. Apparently, in this instance, the relevancy of the poem was more important than was length to these young composers.

Dunn (1992) found that using words as a starting point for a composition helped less confident children become more confident in their abilities. The present study confirmed this. Several of the students did their best work when working with the poem task. Text setting may be a good place to begin with young composers, but this requires that they have several fundamental musical skills. These skills include beat competency, metrical sense, ability to read or memorize the poem, and possibly singing skill. Teachers can begin using text setting with very young children by modeling it with the whole class, by creating texts to previously known tunes, and by encouraging their students to make up and sing songs for their teachers, parents and others. Singing to create text settings can be a very natural way to compose. Invented systems of notation can be used long before they can accurately notate their pieces in standard notation.

In classrooms where Orff instruments or keyboards are available, setting poems using instruments can be encouraged. Once students have at least three notes that they can accurately play on standard band or orchestral instruments, teachers could model ways of creating a tune for poems and then assign compositions as homework for the next lesson. Each time a new note is mastered, a new set of poems could be presented and a new composition assigned. Similarly, a phrase containing the new note could be left unanswered for the student to complete. Whilst students may regard these exercises as primarily compositional etudes, these exercises have some value as



a way of encouraging instrumental teachers to include compositional activities in their lessons.

#### OTHER PIECES

Several of the subjects in this study used musical quotes from other pieces with which they were familiar as part of their compositions. One of the judges (the general music teacher) recognized these and rated those pieces lower because of it. However, the other judges were less concerned with this manner of quoting material from other sources. Barring evidence to the contrary, using parts of other known pieces may be helpful for some young composers. Stauffer (2002) noted a similar influence of familiar music on the compositions of the student composers she observed. Another possible way of structuring a composition task that deserves further study is using pieces these young instrumentalists already know as the starting point for a piece (see Brändström & Högberg, 1998, p. 93, for one suggestion). The current study did not use creating variations on a theme as one of its tasks, and this might be another interesting task structure to investigate.

#### ALLOWING FOR CHOICE

In this study, students composed under a variety of task structures. This is consistent with recommendations made by Burnard and Younker (2002) and Hickey (2003), who stated that 'children need structure and discipline as well as the chance for freedom, spontaneity and the exploration and manipulation of musical sounds' (p. 35). It is also consistent with recommendations made by Nilsson and Folkestad (2005), who suggested that teachers need to be prepared to vary their methods in order to be supportive of children's compositional efforts.

Exactly when to use tasks that are more unstructured in nature with young composers remains a philosophical question for teachers to answer. Some educators may prefer to use poems and other types of task structures to help composers craft more satisfying compositions initially, and then gradually expand to less structured tasks with more freedom of choice for the composers. Others may prefer to use unstructured tasks from the very beginning and use the resulting pieces as points of departure for teaching the principles and elements of composition. As it is with all music education, the goal is to create musicians who are both independent and expressive.

All young musicians have the ability to compose, and should be given the opportunity to do so with the encouragement and support of their teachers. Their preferences are important, but so is progress toward creating more musically expressive compositions. Variety and choice, combined with the personal preferences of the student and the teaching style of a sensitive teacher, will likely yield satisfying results, regardless of the task structures employed.

Helping music students develop as composers is important. Musical composition can be innately satisfying, because it allows people to express and convey their feelings in sound in ways that are uniquely their own. More composing should be done in schools by children of younger ages. Task structure issues should be of concern to teachers who work with beginning composers; however, it is likely that good compositions can occur under many differing conditions of task structure. The effectiveness of the results probably depends, at least to some degree, on the preferences and experiences of the students and their teachers.

## NOTES

1. This article is based on the author's doctoral dissertation, entitled *Music Compositions of Elementary Recorder Students Created Under Various Conditions of Structure*, accepted in 2006 by Northwestern University, Evanston/Chicago, Illinois, USA.
2. All names are pseudonyms.

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