

# Compose Yourself: Composition Pedagogy

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## I. Presentation Goals:

- (a) summarize the research on composition in music education,
- (b) redefine what behaviours can be called composition, and
- (c) propose a model of compositional development as the basis for a pedagogy for composition within the music curriculum of public schools in Ontario.

## II. Composition Commandments:

1. Music is NOT a language:

- Language: the method of human communication, either spoken, gestured or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way.
- Languages have both semantics and syntax.
- Music does not have semantics. It is referential, within a cultural or knowledge context, but that is all.
- However: There are parallels in how fluency and literacy in music and language are developmentally acquired. As a result, there are overlapping pedagogical strategies.

2. Music is an innate human capacity:

Evidence of music cognition as a human capacity includes the intuitions, conscious and unconscious, of a listener who is experienced in a musical idiom. The human brain has the ability to organize and make coherent the surface patterns of music (pitch, duration, intensity, timbre, etc.) (Lehrdahl & Jackendoff, 1983)

3. Compositional skill is developmental

Which means all students are capable of the behaviours we call composition.

They have to begin with the simplest skills and attain equilibrium as they develop new skills (Piaget). Triggering behaviours at appropriate milestones throughout a student's development (Erikson) is the key to student success.

### III. CDL Developmental Model: Definitions

CREATIVE POTENTIAL- the presence of a complex web of interconnected skills which can be accessed subconsciously to support many activities, including those purposeful behaviours such as composition and improvisation, and those less structured (perhaps spontaneous) activities such as play.

PLAY- any self-directed activity that brings about sustained engagement with an external stimulus

COMPOSITION- the purposeful creation of a prescriptive set of instructions which, when followed, would lead to an auditory signal comprised of tonal-rhythmic patterns. The developmentally situated behaviours and processes which satisfy this definition can be delineated through an examination of action, mode, and norms:

ACTION - type of observable behaviour involved

Mode - the form the action takes during the composing process

Norms - codified models of appropriate products or processes

### CDL BEGINNING STAGES: CHARACTERISED BY CONTINUUA OF A, M & N

ACTION: Doing & "Active"..... towards.....Thinking & "Knowing About"

MODE: Aural..... towards.....Iconic

NORMS: No awareness..... towards.....Purposeful breaking of norms  
of norms

# Developmental Models:

## CDL I: Compositional Play:

This stage of the model demonstrates expressive creativity (Greenhoe 1972). Typical observable examples include;

- 1) students randomly making sounds with found objects or instruments while disregarding the appropriate technique for playing these instruments;
- 2) students inventing songs while engaged in other forms of play; and
- 3) students who invent sounds that parallel language, using these forms to express feelings or reactions (Berger & Cooper, 2003).

Typically, students constantly create new ideas, and are unable to accurately repeat a just-created musical gesture (Kratz 2001, p. 295)

## CDL II: Directed Focus on Developing Skills

Behaviours in this stage are generally externally motivated, and involve either:

- 1) teaching accepted norms in order to train behaviours in particular desirable directions, designed either to satisfy an aesthetic or curricular objective, or,
- 2) as Regelski (2002) suggests, guiding experiments in musical issues designed to satisfy curricular objectives while helping students learn, from the inside out, what music 'is' or 'might be' (p.31).

-products and processes indicate the achieved level of skill with elements (Wilson & Wales 1995), limitations imposed by the facilitator, contact with environmental factors, and external musical influence or lack thereof.

## CDL III: Using Taught Elements to Compose

This stage can be subdivided into two sub-stages:

- a) competency of idea generation, and
- b) competency in terms of descriptive/prescriptive notation.

A student's placement within this stage depends on to what degree that student is capable of accurately notating his ideas. Without the ability to correctly scribe the pitches and rhythms of a compositional construction, or to accurately depict in some graphic way the steps to re-create a sonic event, a student cannot progress to the next stage.

## CDL IV: Demonstrating Creativity

This stage is all about demonstrating flexibility in the use of taught skills. Students begin to combine the acquired musical elements in new ways — ways that were not expressly taught.

It is this application of symbolic reasoning which characterizes compositional constructions of this stage.

Decisions need to be made on purpose, not by accident.

Conferencing is necessary to support students.  
Maintaining a composition journal or sketchbook is vital..

## CDL IV: Self-Craft

This stage of compositional behaviour can be described as the early development of self-craft.

Students in this stage experience the beginning stages of self-actualization, and of discovering their own voices, and work less to recreate the craft of others. It is at this stage that students find they have the ability to build compositional constructions which accurately represent their musical intentions.

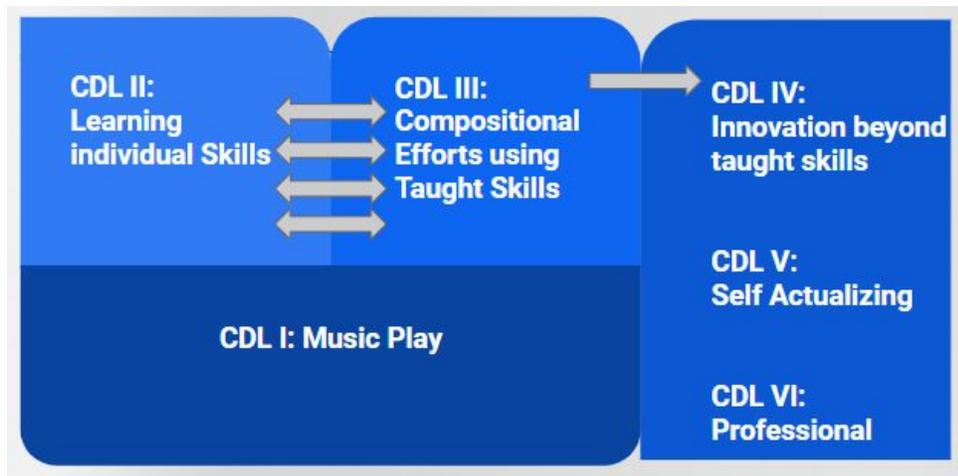
## CDL VI: Craft

Greenhoe chooses to endorse Taylor's poetic View of the composer as genius.

This degree of creativity, referred to by Greenhoe as emergentive creativity, represents the professional level of composition.

This level of ability also necessitates some sense of permanence, and of endurance as one of the masters.

## CDL Model:



## How does it roll out in class:

Teach the instrument notes (band, guitar, strings, bells, voice, etc.)

Compose with the instrument notes and concepts covered in class at least once every two classes. Play compositional statements in class for peers, for ensembles. Write for peers, write for ensembles.

As you gain a skill, write with that skill (as you learn letter names, write letters. As you learn words, write words).

Reinforce the skill daily in both Aural and Iconic modes.

Have students work in Composition journals, on Composition white-boards (ipad capture) etc. Conference at least 5 kids in class each day, focussing on positives, and where to go next.

\*\*\*Cycle back and forth between CDL II and CDL II until creativity carries them into CDL IV etc.

Goal: Write it, play it, change it, play it. Listen, think, revise, capture. Reinforce one-to-one relationship between notation and specific Aural events.

Reinforce composer control over elements to create Aural statements.

Boost compositional skills, reading ability, and playing ability.

Be fully literate in Music.