Preservice Music Teacher Perceptions of Mentoring Young Composers: An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract
Case study techniques were used to investigate perceptions of undergraduate music majors participating as teacher/mentors for elementary students in a university sponsored music composition program. Data included teacher interviews and observation of teacher training and composition mentoring sessions. Teacher perceptions were categorized as challenges and benefits for the young composers they worked with and for themselves as mentors in the program. Benefits to young composers were identified as social development, pride in accomplishment, and promotion of musical learning. Challenges to young composers were perceived as: expression of musical ideas and concern with finding “correct” ideas. Personal challenges for teachers were time commitment and encouraging students without influencing their ideas. Teachers cited benefits of participation as: teaching experience, understanding compositional process, improved composer identity, and appreciation for composer intent. Teachers envisioned possibilities for composition instruction in their future teaching situations. Implications for improving composition training for preservice teachers are discussed.

Keywords
mentoring, music composition, music teacher preparation, preservice teachers, service learning

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Music composition is a meaning-making process, which is basic to the intellectual, social, and emotional life of children (Barrett, 2003). Barrett stated, “If education, and by extension music education, is the development of children’s capacity to construct their worlds in meaningful ways, then a view of composition as a form of meaning-making seems a worthy enterprise” (p. 6). However, when challenged to include music composition activities in the classroom, teachers often identify lack of time, technology, and training as reasons that composition is not a meaningful activity in their classrooms (Kennedy, 2002; Menard, 2009; Strand, 2006). Music teacher educators have similar reservations about including composition as part of preservice teacher development programs (Kaschub, 2013).

In an examination of research in compositional processes, Wiggins (2007) identified three important considerations. First, all people are capable of creating musical ideas, therefore “all music learners should, at some time in their education, have opportunities to explore this capability as part of their learning” (p. 465). Second, compositional opportunities should be designed to foster musical thinking, and finally, students bring musical knowledge to their classrooms on all levels and that “creating original music provides opportunity for nonverbal expression of musical understanding, with all of its complexity” (p. 465). In the present case study, perceptions of preservice music teachers were examined as they participated as mentors for young composers in a university sponsored composition program.

**Review of Literature**

**Compositional Process and Pedagogy**

**K–12 Settings.** Contemporary research in the musical creativity of children has often focused on examination of creative musical processes (Burnard & Younker, 2002; Kennedy, 2002; Webster, 2013; Wiggins, 2007) and assessment of the creative musical product (Hickey, 2001; Menard, 2009; Smith, 2008). Smith (2008) investigated the relationship of task structure with the musicality of recorder compositions by elementary students, finding that presenting composition tasks with more structure (i.e., composing based on a poem) led to pieces evaluated as more musical. Kennedy (2002) analyzed compositional process in four high school musicians identifying a model including four steps: listening as preparation, listening as stimulation, experimentation, and finishing off. Time was identified as a critical component of this process. Researchers have also investigated the connections young composers make to personal life experiences (Burnard & Younker, 2002; Green, 2008; Stauffer, 2002). Burnard and Younker (2002) identified models of student composition noting that the compositional pathways were individual and “firmly rooted in their musical biographies” (p. 257).

**Higher Education Settings.** Compositional process in higher education settings has also been explored. Hewitt (2002) investigated group composition process and product in university preservice teachers (both music specialists and generalists). Results indicated that generalist preservice teachers were less confident than the music specialists,
However, the generalists were enthusiastic about the use of composition activities such as they had experienced in the study. Bamberger (2003) traced compositional process in two musically untrained college students and discovered that “the basic characteristics of tonal structure are already part of musically untrained students’ intuitive knowledge-in-action” (p. 34). Instead of needing structural music knowledge prior to the composition experience, musical elements and knowledge emerged through the process for these students.

Investigations into composition pedagogy have also been conducted, focusing primarily on the instruction of composition majors with master teachers. Through an analysis of selected literature, Lupton and Bruce (2010) constructed a pedagogical model for composition instruction, which contained four interconnected themes. The first two themes dealt with learning content: learning from the masters and mastery of techniques. The second two themes dealt with combining content and creativity: exploring ideas and developing voice. The authors identified the theme of exploring ideas as being “particularly prominent and developed in the school-based music composition literature” (p. 275). Additional research in composition pedagogy includes direct examination of the eminence model of composition instruction. Barrett (2006) examined the beliefs and processes of an eminent composer, working one-on-one with a university composition student to identify strategies that might provide a better understanding of the composition instruction process. Composition teacher and student in this setting were viewed as a “dyad working toward shared goals in a process characterized by collaboration, joint effort, and social support” (Barrett, 2006, p. 195). Barrett suggested that the process of teaching and learning in composition is actually a form of creative collaboration, and that this “eminence” model has the potential to inform music educators in ways that composition activities might be included in the classroom.

Perceptions of Composition Instruction for Practicing Teachers

Less frequently studied are the opinions and perceptions of teachers using composition in the classroom. Strand (2006) investigated the status of composition instruction in K–12 music classrooms by surveying Indiana music educators about their use of composition activities. Eighty-eight percent of respondents indicated that they used some composition in the classroom, but only 5.9% felt that they used it often. More than one third reported using composition very rarely, or never. Reasons given for not using composition in the classroom included: too many other learning activities, lack of technology, composition is not an appropriate activity for the type of classes taught, and lack of comfort in teaching composition.

Odena and Welch (2007) investigated the relationship between secondary school music teacher backgrounds and their perceptions of musical creativity. Teachers completed a “Musical-Career-Path” summary, noting important musical events in their life experience. The teachers were interviewed and observed through video recordings of composition teaching units. Three influential strands emerged: the musical strand, the teacher-education strand, and the professional-teacher strand. The musical strand was
identified as the most influential on teacher perceptions of creativity. Study results indicated that participants with composing experience and experience with differing musical styles could more successfully envision a creative environment and possibilities for creativity in their student’s works.

**Purpose**

The purpose of the present study was to investigate perceptions of undergraduate music majors as they participated as composer/mentors for fourth and fifth grade students enrolled in a composition instruction program held at a Midwestern university. Specific questions shaping the data analysis were

1. How did undergraduate music majors perceive the challenges and benefits of participation as composition teacher/mentors for elementary students?
2. What visions do undergraduate music majors have for use of composition instruction in their future teaching situations after the experience of mentoring fourth and fifth grade students in the composition process?
3. How did undergraduate music majors perceive the challenges in and benefits of composition instruction for the fourth and fifth grade students they worked with?

**Method**

**Defining the Case**

The Very Young Composer Program of Central Wisconsin (VYC) was considered the exploratory case for this research. Yin (2009) identified case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (p. 18). In this case, preservice teachers were trained as composition mentors for young, novice composers. This represented a relatively unique educational setting, with implications for curriculum development in music education. This VYC program is an outgrowth of the Very Young Composer Program run by the New York Philharmonic. In this university model, fourth and fifth grade students interested in composition registered for an after-school class conducted at the university and were mentored in the composition process by undergraduate music majors. Previous musical experience was not required for participation in the program.

Participants ($N = 10$) in this study were undergraduate music majors: music education ($n = 6$), music performance ($n = 2$), and Bachelor of Arts in music ($n = 2$), who volunteered to serve as teachers in the VYC program. They were trained as composition mentors, which offered opportunity for these aspiring music teachers to experience the challenges and benefits in nurturing creativity through composition in a classroom setting. Participants were trained in a workshop conducted during the fall semester. Workshop goals were to provide historical background and general information about the program along with role-playing experiences in all aspects of the
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composition mentoring process. With the understanding that they would be presenting composition ideas to fourth and fifth graders, the undergraduate music majors participated in group exercises such as creative movement activities connecting common human movements with emotional context (i.e., run angrily, walk joyfully), vocalization of graphic notations ideas (swirls, mountains, valleys), and rhythm pattern echoing and creating. The activities were designed to inspire creativity and introduce musical concepts. Training also included modeling of instrument interviews and the scribing process. The teachers took turns acting the roles of young composer and composition mentor. Short musical examples were presented in graphic notation by role-playing composers and then scribed as traditional notation for performance. Training sessions ended with group discussions allowing composer mentors to reflect on their experiences.

The composition program was conducted during 4 weeks of January. It consisted of 12 two-hour sessions and ended with a public performance of student works. There were 28 young composers participating in the program. Teachers introduced musical concepts in group activities and musical instruments in the “instrument interview” sessions. The young composers were introduced to several wind, percussion, and string instruments through teacher demonstration and then asked to compose their first musical idea—one for each of the instruments they “interviewed.” Students were provided with keyboards to take home, allowing exploration of compositional ideas outside of class. In one-on-one sessions with their composition teacher/mentor, students explored and presented their musical ideas. When students could repeat a musical idea multiple times, the idea was “scribed” by the teacher, using music notation software (Finale). The young composers used graphic notation, singing, demonstration at the keyboard, and verbal descriptions to communicate musical ideas to their teachers. A few, with limited musical experience, used traditional notation for communication of ideas. Each teacher worked as a mentor for two or three students. When a young composer was not working individually with his teacher, a piano lab, supervised by area general music teachers, was provided allowing individual work and additional composition support. The composition teachers/mentors performed the compositions at the concluding program and young composers introduced their compositions to the audience. The teachers met as a group following each session to discuss successes and challenges faced during the day’s activities. This program involved collaboration of university students and faculty, as well as area general music teachers. Examples of composer notation and Finale scores, scribed by teachers, can be viewed in Appendix A in online supplemental material, available at http://jmte.sagepub.com/supplemental.

Procedure

For this case study, the researchers used an “embedded design” (Yin, 2009). The VYC program served as the context for the study. The 10 teachers in the program served as embedded units, which helped to focus the inquiry on teacher perceptions. Case study techniques included multiple sources of evidence. Focused interviews were conducted
with each teacher following their participation in the program. The video-recorded interviews were open-ended and casual, but followed an established line of questions, which were “derived from the case study protocol” (Yin, 2009, p. 107). Interview questions can be viewed in Appendix B, available in online supplemental material at http://jmte.sagepub.com/supplemental. Field observations were conducted in teacher training sessions, teacher strategy meetings, and in composition mentoring sessions. All data were transcribed, analyzed, and coded. Codes were identified using “pattern matching” logic (p. 136). Coinciding patterns were organized around the themes of challenges and benefits of participation in the composition instruction program—for the teachers and the young composers they worked with. Using multiple data sources allowed for the “development of converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation, and corroboration” (Yin, pp. 115-116). Triangulation occurred through linking codes identified in multiple teacher interviews, in field observation, and in a member-check process. Interviewed teachers were contacted to verify tentative findings of the research. Pseudonyms are used throughout this article to protect the identity of the participants.

Discussion

Teacher Perceptions of Personal Challenges and Benefits

Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about their experiences as mentors in the VYC program. They identified more benefits than challenges in the process. However, when encouraged to share challenges, teachers identified two important areas for discussion—time and valid representation of student ideas. The challenges are presented first and followed by a discussion of four areas of perceived personal benefit to participation in the program.

Time. Instruction for young composers in the VYC program began during the final 3 weeks of the university winter break, but continued 1 week into the spring semester. Students commented on the challenge of the time required to work in the program. They mentioned class schedules, personal teaching responsibilities, practicing, graduate school auditions, and even student teaching responsibilities as difficulties they faced while managing their participation.

While teachers identified time as a challenge, they also generally believed that the commitment was worthwhile. Sam explained,

In the end it is worth it. I don’t know of any time that I put into it that wasn’t worthwhile. It all pays off in the end. There is always a time issue, as with anything like practicing or going to class.

Time was also a challenge for the teachers as they planned scribing sessions for their students. Class sessions were 2 hours in length, but some teachers expressed that it was a struggle to find enough time to effectively mentor all of the students. Ashley
explained, “A big challenge was time. When you are scribing with a student, the time flies! It was challenging to get all of that music done in such a short time.” “Lack of time” as a challenge to the composition process has been documented in previous research (Kennedy, 2002; Menard, 2009; Strand, 2006). Creative thinking in music—imagining musical ideas, communicating those ideas, revising and notating the ideas—is a time intensive process.

**Valid Representation of Student Ideas.** The main goal of this program was to provide opportunity for young composers to express their musical ideas—even when they had little or no musical training. For these teachers, scribing exactly what the young composers imagined was often perceived as a challenge. Sean shared,

> Sometimes the way that I thought they wanted it organized wasn’t the way they wanted it, so I would have to go back and redo it all again. You want to make the piece the way the young composer wants it to be. Sometimes I felt like I was failing them when I couldn’t put down what they wanted down. I didn’t give up, but I didn’t want them to see that I was struggling.

Encouraging the students, without influencing their creative ideas was a related area of concern for many of the teachers. Teachers felt that it was important to validly represent the ideas of the students, but they were often challenged by how to ask questions without providing “answers” for the young composers. Kelly explained: “The biggest challenge was trying to get them to make decisions without influencing that. I had to be careful what adjectives I used in describing musical possibilities—even my tone of voice or my facial expression could influence them.”

A positive result from meeting this challenge was identified as the teachers learned how to ask questions in a way that encouraged student decisions. Sean described the process:

> I didn’t want to give them an idea that they would just repeat back to me. I wanted them to think of the idea on their own and then let me know what that was. It was important to use phrases like do you want that higher or lower, and not phrases like do you want an A there?

During the training workshop, the idea of valuing student creativity and validly representing student ideas was presented as an important ideal of the VYC program. During their work with the students in the program the teachers experienced the challenge of this goal, and also realized just how much the children desired to please their instructors. These were significant discoveries for novice teachers.

**Gaining Teaching Experience.** For most of the teachers, gaining experience working with students of this age and gaining experience in teaching composition were the leading reasons for participation in the program. During concluding interviews all 10 teachers commented that participation as a composition mentor in the VYC program
did indeed provide teaching experience that would be valuable in their future teaching careers. First, the teachers felt that they gained a better understanding of how children at this age think. Sean stated,

This helped me to understand what they [young composers] were thinking and why they were thinking certain things—just the natural purity of their ideas, expressions, and thoughts. It has helped to find ways to relate to them.

Several teachers commented on the importance of developing relationships with the young composers they worked with. Olivia spoke of this, saying:

I think I developed a really good relationship with both of my students. This helped me to realize how important this is. If students trust the teacher and understand that the teacher is there to help you learn, it makes teaching and learning a lot easier.

Teachers also gained understanding of the composition process for their elementary aged students. They were impressed with the musical ideas expressed by the young composers and the compositions that they were able to realize. Sarah explained, “Getting them to compose music seems like a pretty crazy idea, but they actually did it and they did a really good job! That was super cool to see.” Several teachers expressed surprise at the innovative and distinctly different ways that students used in approaching the composition process. Brittany shared,

One student wrote a song about math and how it was really frustrating at times, but also how much she liked it. My other young artist wrote about her hamster and her hermit crab. Seeing those two different approaches to the same experience was amazing.

**Development of Composer Identity.** During the training workshop, some of the teachers expressed concern that they might not be able to teach composition effectively, since they were not composers themselves. After participation in the program, the teachers experienced real change in how they viewed themselves in the area of composition. Sarah stated,

I think I could be a composer now. I took a composition class and felt like I didn’t know what to do. There were all these things to think about. Now I know that if I hear something, I should just write it down. It is as simple as hearing a melody and putting it on paper.

Ashley also expressed this belief, explaining: “I identify myself as a composer now. Before, I felt that I was just a violinist and a teacher. But no, we are all composers.” Musical identities are often defined by the social and cultural roles within music and composing is a role often felt to be quite distinct from the role of performer or teacher (Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald, 2002). Working with students in this process helped the teachers to identify themselves as composers, therefore providing possibilities for their work as both composer and teacher in future classrooms.
Increased Appreciation for Composer Intent. Closely linked to composer identity, yet distinctly different in nature, is the perception that teachers developed increased appreciation for composer intent through participation in the program. Teacher connections to the students they mentored were strong. During the performance of student compositions, the teachers felt compelled to honor the young composers with accurate representations of their music. Ashley shared, “I had the opportunity to rehearse some of the student pieces. I was just so much more diligent about expressing their ideas. I guess it was being more aware of what the composer wanted.” For other teachers it was just a greater awareness of the composer and the duty they have as performing musicians to relay accurate and meaningful performances of every composition. James said, “Performing is trying to find out what the composer meant. It is an interesting process—a really fun process—to go through and discover what they were getting at and making those decisions as an artist.” The perception of improved appreciation for composer intent after experience in the composition process has also been documented in high school band students, after their participation in a 6-week composition program (Menard, 2009), and in secondary school music teachers, who felt that their personal compositions improved after their experiences of working with students (Odena & Welch, 2007).

Visions for Future Use of Composition Activities

In the final interview, all 10 teachers were asked to describe a vision for use of composition activities in their future classrooms. Several of the teachers described ways in which the VYC curriculum could be replicated with elementary and high school students. Sean believed he could implement this program if “I get a job where I am the general music teacher and the band director at the same time. This is the way I would see doing it.” Other teachers offered more imaginative ways of using composition in their future programs extending beyond the experience in which they had just participated. Ashley stated,

I want to be a Suzuki teacher when I ‘grow up.’ I plan to obtain my masters in Suzuki and feel that this is something that the Suzuki method is lacking—composition. I plan to write my thesis on this.

Some teachers explained that they were already using composition activities with their private students and others had designed composition lessons as part of their student teacher placements. After the experience of teaching composition all 10 of these undergraduate musicians had visions for the use of composition in their future teaching situations and a clear understanding of the value this could bring to the classroom. James explained, “It could even be something with non-instruments. As long as there is a decision behind the sound, I think it counts.”

Teacher Perceptions of Challenges and Benefits to Young Composers

After working closely with the young composers and sharing in the performance of their compositions, the teachers were clear that composition instruction provided
benefits for their students. They also understood the challenges faced by their students. When speaking of benefits, many teachers referred to the fun students had and the excitement they saw on young composer faces as they experienced success in the composition process. These successes occurred within scribing sessions and in the final performance of student works. When discussing challenges, one predominating and important theme emerged. This critical challenge is discussed and followed by a discussion of teacher perceptions of student benefits in composition.

**Challenge in Student Communication of Ideas.** Eight of 10 teachers identified “communication of musical ideas” as the biggest challenge the young composers faced in the composition process. Some young composers had an overabundance of ideas and others were hesitant to share ideas that they had. Olivia stated, “One of my students had an extremely introverted personality and it was hard for her to express what was inside. It took a lot of positive reinforcement.” Sarah’s student faced the challenge differently, “My young composer was all over the keyboard and had so many ideas. It was an obstacle for her to maybe get only a couple of ideas out.” Connecting students’ musical ideas into a cohesive piece of music was an additional struggle for some young composers. Ashley stated, “I think the hardest thing for them was knowing what they wanted to do next and how their ideas were going to flow together. The flow of the piece—they were always worried about the flow.”

The teachers worked to make sure student ideas were validly represented, however they often felt that young composers struggled with finding a “correct” answer to the musical problem. Sam shared, “I had one student that wasn’t really sure of himself. He was never sure whether what he was doing was right. Really there is no right or wrong answer when you are composing.” Kelly, a teacher with some previous composition experience, explained,

> One obstacle is the notion that there is a right way to do it. I don’t think we put that in their heads. I think they came in with that. In general music class, they look at great composers like Beethoven and Mozart and then students think that there is a right way to go about it. I think that in some cases, made it hard for them to make decisions.

Working with the students as they used varied communication strategies and as they struggled to communicate musical ideas also provided opportunity for the teachers to better understand the young composers’ musical thinking. James said: “The polar opposites . . . one was so concerned with getting it ‘right’ and another one used Finale—whatever she clicked first was right and she didn’t care. They are each going to do it their own way.”

**Social Development.** Young composers in the program came from different schools in the area and most did not know each other before they began the class. The teachers identified social development in their students as a positive aspect of working in the program. They felt that as the children participated in group activities, and worked on their compositions, they gained improved acceptance of one another and of the
different compositional styles demonstrated by their peers. Sarah said, “They just bonded as a group. They were all composers.” Kelly agreed, saying, “The young composers got to see each other’s growth and celebrate that!” The teachers also observed social development in the young composers as they prepared notes on their pieces and presented them to the audience, prior to the performance. Elizabeth was impressed with the poise of the young composers in this situation and related this to the importance of professionalism in her own life, explaining,

They got to speak in front of a large audience and introduce their own pieces, using their own words. After seeing the students present themselves in a way that was so professional at that age was a reminder of how important it is to be professional and articulate in describing your ideas.

Pride in Accomplishment and Building Self-Esteem. The teachers expressed great pleasure in viewing the pride and accomplishment that the young composers felt in celebrating their victories—both in the final program, where their compositions were shared with the public, and in teaching moments, when young composers realized a particular musical success. Sarah described one of her teaching moments:

My student would play something and say: I really like that! It was cool to see his face light up. It was kind of an “aha” moment when he found an idea he really liked. I think this was the moment he realized that he was in charge.

The teachers valued all of the moments when student musical ideas were successfully realized. They also felt that the night of the performance was a critical part of the composition process. Sean explained, “Having the audience be very receptive was important. I think this builds self-esteem. They are composers!” Teachers felt that while some students may have begun the process without confidence, they all ended the process with a strong pride in their accomplishment as young composers. Ashley shared her experience:

Concert night was one of the most electrifying things I have ever been a part of. The students were so excited to present their music. They wanted their families to hear their music. Seeing the smiles on their faces . . . it was like they said, “Yeah! Look what I did! I composed this and this is MY music!” It was a moment I will never forget.

Musical Development. This program was offered for students that were interested in composition—with no previous musical experience required. The teachers in the program believed that one of the most important benefits for the young composers was musical development through the process of composition. Teacher comments indicated that this development occurred in two areas: in the area of understanding the role of a composer and compositional process, and in the area of general musical understanding. Some teachers felt that learning about the compositional process was important for their students. Kelly enjoyed observing the composition process in her students, explaining,
Small steps along the way could be really rewarding. If they were stuck on something, I sent them home with a few ideas, or we listened to some recordings, and talked about different ways to do variations. They would struggle with that for a couple of days and then would come back and say, “Look at all this stuff I have!” It was rewarding watching the ideas germinate.

Several teachers described the musical benefit as “musical enrichment” and “focused musical learning.” Other teachers were more specific in their descriptions of general musical understanding. Olivia felt that “this was a chance for students to learn in depth about the instruments and the interactions they can have.” Throughout the instrument interview process, the young composers gained knowledge about individual instruments including the sounds the different instruments were capable of making, as well as proper terms associated with each instrument. For example, in one instrument interview session with the violin, we observed the teacher describe terms such as pizzicato, spiccato, and detaché. She demonstrated these techniques for the students on her violin and the young composers used many of these techniques in the final compositions. James stated the benefit of musical understanding clearly:

It opens up new worlds to them. Here they are able to meet a violin and see what it actually does and talk to someone who actually plays a trumpet and find out just what the trumpet does. It gives them a new perspective on music: how music is created, why it is created, and what it is like to be a performer, conductor, and composer. In public school general music classes, you may talk about music, but you don’t go through the roles of doing it. This was learning by doing, which is ten times better than any other experience you could give them.

Conclusions and Implications for Music Education

For too long, music composition has been put on a pedestal and viewed as a special skill that only an elite few could do. It is time to dispel that notion and offer classroom and studio teachers not only reasons for making music composition an integral part of their curriculum, but also provide ideas and activities for doing so. (Hickey, 2012, pp. 13-14)

It was easy for the authors to observe the enthusiasm demonstrated by all stakeholders (composers, teachers, and administrators) for this program devoted to creative musical thinking through composition. Undergraduate music majors serving as composition mentors were from different types of degree programs: music performance, Bachelor of Arts in music, and music education. Most, if not all, students completing degrees in music will be called to teach music in varied settings—making this valuable field experience for all participants. Data revealed that participating undergraduate preservice music teachers were amazed at what musically untrained fourth and fifth grade students were capable of and they perceived great personal value in mentoring the young composers. The challenges encountered during the process helped them to improve both interpersonal relationships with their students and their ability to provide composition instruction. This partnership of young composer and mentor must
certainly resemble the collaborative and socially supportive relationship Barrett (2006) identified in eminent composition teachers and their students found in higher education settings.

Although not generalizable, results from this study indicated that these preservice teachers believed experience in mentoring young composers was important to their personal development as teachers, helped them to better understand compositional process, and improved their identity as composers. Helping preservice teachers construct social identities as music educators is an important challenge for music teacher education programs. Undergraduate music educators may not automatically construct a personal professional identity, but rather just emulate previous teachers (Woodford, 2002). Woodford explained that while it is impossible to become skilled in all musical roles, “it is important that undergraduates realize the full compass of music teacher practice available to them, while progressively trying to explore, develop, and broaden their expertise” (p. 690). The newfound composer identity of these preservice teachers should encourage music teacher educators to develop field experiences for preservice music teachers, which broaden expertise and improve confidence in planning composition activities for their future students.

Throughout our observations and analysis of the data, the importance of the service-learning setting for this case study was evident. This university offered the VYC program to students in the community because organizers believed in the importance of creative thinking in music for young composers. This collaborative relationship of community and university also created a service-learning partnership benefitting all participants. The teachers finished their work in the program with an improved understanding of compositional process and a vision of composition activities that might be used in future teaching situations. Service-learning projects in music education settings offer music learning for community members; as well as opportunity for preservice teachers to develop teaching skills, teacher identities in varying content areas, and social integration into the field of teacher education (Burton & Reynolds, 2009). Music teacher educators are often challenged to find enough time for all content that must be presented. Field experience is critical to the process of developing music educators, yet placements offering experience in all dimensions of music teaching are often difficult to schedule. We must accept the challenge of creating a broader range of opportunity and experience for our preservice teachers. Exploring creative field experience settings that provide experience in composition and other dimensions of music teaching and learning is a certainly a critical area for future research. In the Very Young Composer program, examination of preservice teacher perceptions of the composition mentoring process should inspire us to imagine the possibilities of curriculum development in the area of composition training for future teachers and composition activities for students of all ages and musical ability.

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