



Introduction to Composing

What is composing?

Composing is a creative process, which involves exploring, selecting, organising and using sounds to make music.

In the Primary School Curriculum 1999, the Composing strand seeks to develop the child's creativity and uniqueness, first and foremost by providing an avenue for self-expression. 'The importance of developing the child's own creativity through music making, is central to the Composing strand' (Teacher Guidelines p9). Composing is 'concerned essentially, with developing the children's creativity within the framework of their thinking in music'. (Teacher Guidelines p110). It provides an avenue for the development of a 'spirit of discovery' (Teacher Guidelines p9), As children explore, select, organise and use their sounds to make music, they are involved in risk-taking, problem-solving and inquiry.

Linkage within the Music Curriculum

Composing is closely linked with other strands of the Music Curriculum. Children draw on their experiences in the other strands when composing and the process of composing offers a means by which children develop the skills and experiences from the other strands and strand units. The Teacher Guidelines offers some comment on this. When composing, children explore and create sounds (Listening and Responding-Exploring Sounds). They experiment with rhythm and pitch (Performing-Literacy) as they develop their compositions. As they present the compositions to an audience, they gain an understanding of performing activities. Through the process of composing, they are given opportunities to recognise the purpose of recording and notating music: to store sound patterns for future revision or retrieval and to enable others to read and interpret what has been previously composed. As they present the compositions to an audience, they gain an understanding of performing activities.

Finally, as they listen and respond to each other's compositions, they are engaging in what is, in many ways, the ideal listening response (Listening and Responding to Music) as the actions of listening and responding are rooted in a meaningful and relevant context.

Strands and Strand Units:

The Composing strand consists of two strand units:

- Improvising and Creating
- Talking about and Recording Compositions

Let's take a deeper look at each strand unit and how they may be developed in the classroom:

Improvising and Creating:

Opportunities for children to **improvise**, through sound, are central to Composing. The process begins with children **exploring**, playing and experimenting with sounds. Such exploration, experimentation and inquiry are pre-requisites for composing and central to the evolution of the composition. Children explore vocal, body, environmental and instrumental sounds and as well as melody and rhythm patterns/sequences. Inherent in this is the development of an awareness of the musical elements (pulse, pitch, timbre, texture, structure, style, dynamics, duration and tempo).

Through this free exploration, children build up a bank of sounds and sound experiences for composing.

Drawing on their sound experiences, the child begins to **select and organise** sounds from the range of sound sources available. At this stage, the child is involved in 'listening and in deciding what source best suits the purpose and best captures the essence of what he/she wants to communicate or portray' (Teacher Guidelines p.7). Decision making skills and problem solving skills are central at this stage, as are the skills of working co-operatively as a group. Selections are made and children use the sounds in creating and performing their compositions.

Children may explore and create sounds for a range of purposes, including accompanying a story, poem or song or composing on a particular theme.

(See PPDS website article: [Using Story as a Stimulus for Composing](#))

Talking about and Recording Compositions

'Talking about and reflecting on what has been done in the composing class is an important aspect of the composing process' (Teacher Guidelines p120).

Children are given opportunities to evaluate the composing process and the composition product. They are encouraged to describe their compositions and the compositions of others, to recognise the elements that worked well and to identify changes that could be made. Composing is seen as a process whereby different drafts are created and improved on over a period of time.

The teacher leads the process with questions or prompts.

(See PPDS website article: [Talking About Compositions](#))

In order to replay compositions, children come to the realisation of the need to record their compositions in some way. 'Notation—either standard or invented—is not an essential component of composing, but it can help the process of thinking and planning if children write down or record their musical ideas' (Teacher Guidelines p120).

Notation is initially invented by the children ([See PPDS website-samples of scores](#)) and may be described as pictorial or graphic notation. As children become to standard notation, they may use this to record aspects of their compositions.

Children are given opportunities to record their compositions electronically also, using different media.