

Kaschub, M., y Smith, J. (2016). *Experiencing Music Composition in Grades 3-5*. Oxford University Press. pp. 166

This book targets those music teachers who want to introduce compositions in their classroom. It is a practical guidebook which includes new and innovative lesson plans for students from 8 to 12 years old that approach composition techniques in a natural and accessible way.

The two authors are proven experts in the field. Michele Kaschub works as Professor of Music and Coordinator of Music in Education at the University of Southern Maine, School of Music in the United States. She teaches courses in music education philosophy, research and curriculum and has presented several books, articles, conferences and workshops. Ten years ago she launched “Composing Together”, an advanced study program that focuses on preparing teachers to lead composition in PreK-12 schools in the United States.

Janice Smith is currently professor at the Aaron Copland School of Music and has worked previously as a general music specialist for 30 years in public schools in Maine. As a professor she teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in General Music, Foundations of Music Education, and Music Methods for Elementary Teachers. Her research is focused on the compositional structure imposed by teachers and its impact on children’s compositions. She also studies the effect of scaffolding on the compositional process and the revision of the children’s work.

Before writing this book both authors have written two other volumes dealing with similar subjects. The first one, *Minds on Music: Composition for Creative and Critical Thinking* (Rowman y Littlefield), in 2009, focuses on the theory and gives guidelines for teachers who want to develop composition in the curriculum. The second book, *Composing Our Future: Preparing Music Educators to Teach Composition* (Oxford 2013) is addressed to educators who want to teach composition at schools. It talks about the necessary groundwork that has to be done and the means to implement it. Therefore, *Experiencing Music Composition in Grades 3-5* is not an isolated guide, but a continuation of two other books that deal with the stages prior to teaching a lesson.

*Experiencing Music Composition* focuses on how to help students to create original compositions. The approach goes step by step, it starts with teacher facilitated collaborative work, with partnered and small group activities and finishes up with projects that are planned and executed with complete autonomy by the student. It explores a broad spectrum of compositional styles and genres: music for movies, videogames, commercial jingles; works for chorus and instrumental ensembles; pieces with electronic media, to accompany art installations, etc.

The book consists of two parts: *Introduction to Experiencing Music Composition* and *Facilitating the Work of Young Composers*. The first part indicates the qualities a professional that undertakes the task should have and the musical abilities that are

expected from the students of Grades 3, 4 and 5. Teachers should have “a willingness to explore and consider a broad range of musical possibilities, some practice at asking critical questions of young composers about their work, and a strong belief that music will emerge from what may appear to be a busy, messy, and sometimes rather loud sound environment” (p. xii). In the second section of part one, Kaschub and Smith give a detailed list of the typical characteristics of the composers in Grades 3 to 5 and the qualities that their work should have.

The second part of the book, *Facilitating the Work of Young Composers*, is divided into four sections: Compositional Capacities, Using *Sketchpages*, Creating Positive Compositional Experiences and Teacher Guides y Student *Sketchpages*. The first section focuses on the three compositional capacities a student should develop: what she refers to as “feelingful intention” along with musical expressivity and artistic craftsmanship. Each one of them plays a fundamental role in the way they experience music. Both musical expressivity and artistic craftsmanship are qualities we usually read about in books and articles about composition, but the *feelingful intention* is something new. Kaschub defines it as the ability to consider the emotional impact of musical sounds. Children will be more interested in composing if they relate it to a familiar feeling, as opposed to the focus of putting into use different types of music notation. The three compositional capacities are related to each other; to express an emotion or situation, children will need to use the techniques and tools designed for that purpose. This is precisely where the *sketchpages* come into action.

Section 2 deals with the *sketchpages*. They are worksheets that help you through the process of composition: jotting down ideas, connecting the three compositional capacities and reaching the final product. There is one *Sketchpage* for every lesson in the volume and this section explains how to use them in a meaningful way in the classroom.

The next section is about *Creating Positive Compositional Experiences*. The approach of the book is based on discovery learning, constructivism and the works of Jerome Bruner, Jean Piaget and John Dewey. The key idea is to pose challenges that students can solve on their own with the help of previous experiences. This way they will engage willingly in the learning process and they will achieve success in their compositions. The way in which teachers approach tasks with the students is vital in order to obtain positive results and motivation.

The last section includes the 15 guides with their corresponding *sketchpages*. Projects are organised considering five different compositional genres: song-writing & choral music, composition & visual media, instrumental music, electronic music & digital media and music theatre. Each lesson plan is created taking into account the interests of the students so that they can relate composition with stories, characters and everyday events. It gives a meticulous description of how the lesson should be developed and adds suggestions and ideas of how each project should be undertaken.

*Experiencing Music Composition in Grades 3-5* has been written based on the K-12, the standard curriculum of the United States. Both in Spain and in the United States, the average time dedicated to music is one hour per week. Although it is a different curriculum, the guides can be used in Spain quite efficiently and productively and without alterations. The only problem is that the teacher will have to create their own *sketchpages*.

When talking about composition in music education, there is an emphasis on creativity and the use of music tools, but nothing is said about the essential part that

*feelingful intention* has on learning. Composition has to be linked with the interests of children to be meaningful, and if not, it will turn into a boring, unproductive and meaningless activity. This book does start with the interests of children and provides the necessary tools to create the piece of art. Each lesson plan takes the previous knowledge into account and adds a new difficulty.

In my opinion there is a definite need for this kind of work. Most students finish school without having written or performed an original composition and there are few possibilities of doing this later on in life. Perhaps since teachers themselves probably did not experience composing as students, they do not notice the absence of its creative development in the classroom or understand how it may be useful, not only for the experience itself, but also for music and artistic discovery and appreciation. In my experience as a music teacher in those grades, we tend to develop more to other parts of the curriculum. When we deal with composition we don't expect our students to write down the piece or analyse it in depth. Normally we give them two or three parameters, a theme and some time to prepare it, with the final outcome being performed at the end of the lesson. All in all, *Experiencing Music Composition in Grades 3-5* is the perfect guide for those teachers who seek to introduce composition in the classrooms in a meaningful and fun way, developing multiple dimensions of feeling and artistic expression and appreciation.

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