From the idea to the final result: the process of pupils' musical creation

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Abstract Composition is one of the musical activities most widely investigated in scholarly literature and its analysis is based on the studies of the creative process. There is little awareness about the music composition process and the creative experience of single pupils, since the creations of children are different to the creations of adults. In the article the results of the research that sets out to reveal the peculiarities of the creative process of pupils' compositions are presented. Twenty inventories of the creative process of upper grade pupils' compositions and fifteen inventories of lower grade pupils were analysed. The study results revealed that creation of pupils' compositions can be defined as the process consisting of four stages: generation of an idea, research, testing and improvement of the first variant of the composition, presentation of the results of creation. Not all stages of the composition are equally important for lower and upper grade pupils. Different musical and life experiences influence both pupils' creative processes and the quality of composition.

Keywords composing, composition, creative process, upper and lower grade students.

Introduction

Music composition is the sphere of musical activity most closely related to creativity (Perkins, 1981; Weisberg, 1986; Balkin, 1990; Hickey & Webster, 2001; Webster, 2002; Hickey, 2003; Barrett, 2003; Girdzijauskienė, 2004; Running, 2008; Guderian, 2012; Hopkins, 2015). The importance of the creative process is recognized in the works of all authors who have investigated creativity (Girdzijauskienė & Penkauskienė, 2014). Therefore, it is not surprising that studies of the creative process carried out by pedagogues, psychologists, and philosophers (Wallas, 1926; Guilford, 1950; Torrance, 1966; Clark, 1986; Sawyer, 2006) have had a significant influence on the research of music composition.

In the literature, conceptual models of the process of music creation are most often presented, where specific stages of the creative process are identified. Wallas's (1926) model of creative process consisting of four stages (preparation, incubation, illumination, verification) is recognized as suitable for musical creation, however, it is also argued that this model is based more on theoretical considerations than on empirical research. Wallas' works have encouraged the creation of other models of creative process, including composition. For example, Sloboda (1985) presents the model of the process of music creation, covering four stages: creation of the holistic image of the composition, generation of the main idea of the composition, its development, presentation of the complete composition. Moor (2003) presents the creative model consisting of six stages: detection of an interesting problem, foreseeing an overall image of the composition, preparation of the first 'draft', its assessment and improvement, identification of positive and negative aspects of the final product, presentation of the results of creation. Hickey (2003) compares the process of creative thinking with the process of problem detection and highlights its following stages: flexible use of the means of musical expression, exploration, identification of the elements of the problem and selection of the most important ones.

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By analysing in detail what happens during one or another creative process, Hickey (2003) claims that preparation for musical creation starts with the questions what I want to create, what instruments I intend to use, what style the composition is going to be. Wiggins (2003) has showed that before creating instrumental music pupils have to decide what instruments will be used and who will be playing them, what role one or another instrument will have in general architecture of the composition, what style/genre/form the composition will be, what its texture will be like. If it is going to be vocal music, a decision has to be made what text to choose. Later pupils experiment with music sounds, test various ways of creation, use familiar strategies of creation or invent new ones, generate and evaluate musical ideas, plan creative process, develop rhythmic and melodic motives, combine separate parts of the composition into a whole (Espeland, 2003). The repetition of musical motives and fragments of a musical work is not just a mechanical aim to memorize what has been created. At the same time it is the way to complement or to try out other variants of solutions. The whole composition is being constructed from fragments.

The authors who have investigated the process of creation of compositions also discuss what influences creation of compositions, what problems are encountered when teaching pupils to create music. According to Wiggins (2003), the level of pupils' musical culture, their experience in music, and cultural context influence the quality of pupils' compositions and creative process. Other internal and external factors influencing creation of compositions are also identified: traditions of teaching/learning in a classroom, methods and strategies applied by the teacher, the way of task presentation, teacher's expectations (Espeland, 2003); pupils' skills in playing an instrument, experience in music listening in school and out-of-school contexts (Staufer, 2002, Barrett, 2003); experience in music performance and creative activity (Elliott, 1995; Morin, 2002; Menard, 2015); the vocabulary of tonic and rhythmic derivatives that a child possesses (Gordon, 1993); excellence at school (Byrne, MacDonald, & Carlton, 2003); values cherished by teachers, examples of creativity (Clark, 1986).

Limitations of time and place for creative activities, complexity of assessment of creative works (Kennedy, 2002), lack of knowledge in music, insufficient culture of music performance in a classroom, physical environment of the classroom unfavourable to group and/or individual work (Menard, 2015); inadequate level of freedom for creation, too specific requirements to creation, limited teachers' experience in music creation; pupils' opposition when they are invited to improve, to correct their creation (Webster, 2003) pose challenges to teachers. According to Webster (2003), if a teacher presents strict instructions, then a pupil only follows them and does not make his/her own creative decisions. It is also likely that many teachers have not attended lessons of composition. Therefore, a pedagogue's suggestions how to develop or improve a composition are not based on personal practice. The teacher without experience in creative activity can only present a limited number of suggestions and advice. Lack of knowledge about pupils' creative process can demotivate pupils who create and at the same time can limit the development of pupils' creativity. Summarizing the analysis of the research on the process of music creation, we can state that music composition is the sphere, which has been quite widely studied. However, some theoretical and practical aspects of composition have not been sufficiently analysed. Given that various kinds of creation are possible (individual, in pairs, in groups), there is a lack of attention to the disclosure of differences and similarities from the aspect of the creative process. As Running (2008) claims, there is little awareness about the music composition process and the creative experience of single pupils, since the creation of children is different from the creation of adults (Barrett, 2003). During the research, problematic issues were raised: how do pupils create musical compositions? What questions and problems do

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they encounter? What decisions do they make while creating? What is characteristic to the process of music creation of upper and lower grades pupils?

The object of the research – the process of creation of pupils' music compositions.

The aim of this study – referring to the inventories of the creative process presented by upper and lower grade pupils to characterise the process of creation of music compositions.

Methodology of the research

The access of qualitative research has been applied to collect the data. Qualitative research allows for the understanding of how pupils perceive and construct social reality, how the meanings created by pupils influence their behaviour. In qualitative research the data expressed in oral form, statements, categories are analysed and subjectively evaluated (Creswell, 1998; Silverman, 2001). Twenty inventories of the creative process of compositions of upper grade pupils and fifteen inventories of lower grade pupils were analysed.

Upper grade pupils presented their description of creative process while creating compositions for a Lithuanian contest of pupils' music creation. The age of the pupils was from 15 to 18. There were 8 boys and 12 girls among contestants. Among 20 created pieces of music, 12 compositions of instrumental music, 5 songs and 3 examples of computer music were presented. The data was collected using *the method of free thematic essays.* The subjects were suggested to write an essay on the topic 'The Process of Creation of a Composition: from an Idea to the Final Result' (at least 300 words). The topic was formulated so that the content of the composition could reveal experiences of pupils' creative process; detect the elements of the creative process. Particularly the method of free thematic essay made it possible for pupils openly to express their experiences, difficulties encountered, value-related attitudes, and thoughts, notwithstanding content or form.

Lower grade pupils from two Lithuanian schools participated in the school project "I can create" and after it presented the ways how compositions were created. All pupils were the same age – 9 years old. There were 8 boys and 7 girls among them. The pupils of this age group presented 10 compositions of instrumental music and 5 songs. Similarly to upper grade pupils, the youngest participants of the research were also asked to describe the process of creation of the composition. The essay 'How I create music' was written during music lesson. The teacher explained the purpose of this task, gave some advice how to describe the process of creation in a more detailed way.

Qualitative analysis of the data was carried out having collected empirical information in the form of a text. Content analysis was used*,* which allowed obtaining information, understanding meanings, and the peculiarities of the subjects' life and worldview (Schwandt, 1997; Silverman, 2001). While categorizing and coding the essay texts of the subjects, *memos* (in accordance with the marked comments) helped to clarify the coded categories, and to substantiate the final analysis and interpretation of the data (Schwandt, 1997). Following the principles of ethical research, the authors of the quotes presented in the part of the analysis of the research results are coded in numbers from 1 to 20 (upper grade pupils) and 21-35 (lower grade pupils). Comparison of the process of creation of two age groups revealed both common patterns and differences of the process of creation of upper grade and primary pupils.

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Results of the research

When analysing pupils' essays, attention was drawn to the fact that the process of composing starts from generation of an idea. It was described in the essays of almost all pupils. The stage of the search for a creative idea also is discussed in great detail in the works of authors analysing the process of creation of compositions. The analysis of pupils' creative works has shown that ideas are generated at very different moments; creation is inspired by various external and internal stimuli (Table 1).

Table 1 *External and Internal Stimuli of Creation of the Composition*

Upper grade pupils	Lower grade pupils
- Geopolitical situation; - Travel impressions; - Listening to the music of other composers or performers; - School task; - Coincidence; - Encouragement of the teacher; - Wish to express oneself.	- Encouragement of the teacher; - Nature impressions; - Fairy tales.

Comparing the descriptions of the first stage of creation, it appears that upper grade pupils were influenced by the widest range of stimuli. Both internal (a wish to express oneself, travel impressions, listening to the music of other composers) and external (school task, encouragement of the teacher) stimuli were important for pupils of this age. In some cases two or three types of stimuli were named. For example, in the statement below listening to the music of other performers and a wish to express oneself were equally important to young musicians.

'The idea to create this song was born when I was listening to the groups whose creation is significant as it tells about societal and social problems. My composition is very unstable, impulsive, and rhythmic. It really corresponds with my personality I think that compositions tell a lot about the composer, show his/her personality', 16.

All lower grade pupils have named only one reason to start composing. In most cases it was encouragement of the teacher. The statement of one nine-year-old participant could serve as an example.

'I have never tried creating before, but the teacher explained that it is not hard. She also said that I would certainly succeed in creating a composition. She said- 'just try'. So I tried, and I think I did it quite well', 25.

Both the idea of creating a composition and the titles of compositions by lower grade pupils are related whether to natural phenomena, or created following the motives from well-known fairy tales. The participants who have chosen the theme of natural phenomena have given their compositions very figurative titles, for example, 'Rain Dance, 'Snowflake Waltz, 'Travels of the Clouds, 'Mushroom War'. All music compositions have the element of program music.

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While analysing the essays of pupils, the second stage of composing emerged. All pupils described the process of how they searched for the ways of implementation of the idea. The research, testing of the first variant of the composition was especially widely described by upper grade pupils. As can be seen from the data in the chart, pupils discuss what instruments could be chosen, who will perform music, what will be form, style, melody, rhythm, genre, harmony of the composition. For songwriters the questions of choice of the text and its concord with music arise. Primary school children were not very detailed in descriptions but also presented some information about the search of ways of composing according to the initial idea. The content analysis of the essays enabled to discern some directions of concern of the composing ways (Table 2).

Table 2 *Choices under Discussion by Pupils when Creating Compositions during the Research Stage*

Upper grade pupils	Lower grade pupils
- Instruments; - Form of the composition; - Music style; - Performers; - Genre; - Melody; - Rhythm; - Harmony; - Coherence between music and text.	- Mood; - Instruments; - The beginning and the end of the composition.

The most pertinent issue for almost all upper grade pupils-composers is what instruments could render their idea the best. Both the choice of instruments as well as of performers is associated with the idea of the composition, impression on the listeners, and character of the composition. The most detailed description and comprehensive concerns were detected while describing the process of choosing instruments (*'We chose trombone because wind instruments seemed mysterious to me... Particularly trombone gives softness, lightness, and calmness to the composition',* 12), the form and harmony of the composition (*'I paid the greatest attention to harmony between individual parts of the composition. For me it was very important to create an interesting, dramaturgically effective composition',* 20), the music style (*'I wanted to create a composition of modern music. I was always interested in contemporary art, starting from impressionism and ending in vanguard. I am fascinated by originality, interesting consonances, diversity of music of these styles'*, 7).

Almost all lower grade pupils took into consideration the mood of the composition (*'I wanted my music to be playful, radiant, light. Similar to summer rain, 26*). Mood for this age students is closely connected with chosen instruments, the title of the composition (*'Mushroom war takes place in the forest, this is why I chose wooden percussion instruments. Claves, sound boxes, shakers render the atmosphere of the woods, 31*). It is quite typical for pupils to start the composition from general idea and to think how it could be shown through musical sounds. The concern about the beginning of the composition plays the greatest role in realisation of the idea (*'The beginning had to be mysterious, telling about the start of the*

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travel of clouds. First, clouds are thinking where to travel. Therefore, the beginning is calm, perhaps even gloomy", 34).

It has been observed that creative process itself differs in each case. Almost all lower grade pupils created the composition from the beginning to the end in the first attempt. For upper grade pupils it took longer to create the composition. Some of them firstly wrote the main part of the composition, later the introduction and the end: *'Everything was going very slowly. It took me almost five months to finish the composition. I created the beginning and the end after I had thematic material'*, 3. Others, having written down the composition, paid a lot of attention to its improvement: *'Having put everything together, I listen to my composition for many times, then I hear its pluses and minuses that I can improve'*, 6. There were cases when the idea of the composition was put aside for some time and later work on it was resumed: *'The melody of the prelude came to my head 2 years ago. Then its harmony was primitive. I did not develop the composition, but I started creating a new one. Some months ago I unexpectedly found the melody in the draft and I thought I should continue working on it'*, 3. There were also cases when the primary idea was developed consistently, at the same time supplementing it and completing the composition.

While creating, pupils encounter various problems. Lower grade pupils doubt about their abilities to create (*'I do not know if I am a composer yet, I have never created before and now I doubt if I am capable of it', 24*), the quality of the composition (*'I was worried very much if my teacher would love the composition. My mum said that it was interesting. I think that I did quite well', 28*). Only some of them expressed uncertainty about the use of musical elements. In general, lower grade pupils were satisfied with the offer to create music. Their creative process, judging from the essays presented, was fluent and joyful.

The creative process of upper grade pupils is accompanied by numerous doubts and uncertainties, such as completeness of the composition form, abundance of ideas and difficulties while selecting the most important one, lack of knowledge and musical competence. Independent work of the creators, search for information, a wish to close the gaps of musical competence is also valuable:
'I had to consult serious books on music, encyclopaedias. I also had to see and communicate with my music teacher more often; to remember already known music genres and to find out about new ones. I found out a lot of new things and I understood that there was still much more to learn', 5.

Experience in music is necessary for creation. From pupils' remarks it becomes clear that knowledge, including music style and genre that are used for creation, works of composers, music theory, potential of an instrument are important to the idea as well as to its realization. Not only understanding of technical potential of an instrument is related to the knowledge of the instrument, but also the level of complexity of the composition, as well as writing down the part in a sheet music.

Analysing the data, it was surprising how much attention both age group pupils devote to social context. Even in the beginning of the creative process a tendency to create something original, effective reveals: *'I wished my composition could touch the heart of other people, would let them feel what I felt'*, 2. The opinion of other people (parents, peers, teachers) is also important during creative process. When the composition is developed, improved, comments and suggestions are taken into account. Sometimes even criticism gives an important impetus to create and/or improve the compositions: *'I wrote the composition when*

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I was angry with those who criticized my work, who wanted to cause negative feelings. I proved to myself that I can create', 19. However, recognition of others has the greatest effect not only on creative motivation, but also on intensity of the creative process and its quality: *'When in some events I saw that people liked my works, I decided to continue my music career'*, 6. In all cases opinion and evaluation of others are important to pupils.

Conclusions and discussion
Analysis of the inventories of pupils' creative process suggest that creation of compositions can be defined as the process consisting of several phases where some stages clearly stand out. Both age group pupils start from the generation of the idea; then they research how to implement it through musical sounds, test the first variant of the composition, and present the results of creation. Having compared the stages of the creative process of upper und lower grade pupils, only one difference was found. Unlike primary pupils, upper grade pupils pay a lot of attention to the improvement of the composition. Lower grade pupils do not give due consideration to this. Division of creative process into such stages is consistent with works of other authors (Sloboda, 1985; Weisberg, 1986; Balkin, 1990; Moor, 2003; Hickey, 2003; Wiggins, 2003; Burnard, 2012), who tried to identify the parts of the process of creation of compositions.

Analysing in greater detail the process of the composing of lower grade and upper grade pupils, some other differences were found. Upper grade pupils are characteristic of a greater number and more diverse stimuli to create music. They identify many and varied internal and external stimuli to create a composition, from geopolitical situation to the wish to express oneself. Extensive experience in music and life influences creative motives as well as variety and quality of compositions (Staufer, 2002; Morin, 2002; Menard, 2015). Meanwhile primary pupils specify only one reason for raising an idea, most often – the teacher's encouragement. Compositions of this age pupils have a specific name, and they could serve as an example of program music. Most often nature impressions and fairy tales become the stimuli for creation.

Exploring the ways of realization of a musical idea, upper grade pupils discuss a wide spectrum of means of musical expression. Instruments, form of the composition, music style, performers, genre, melody, rhythm, harmony, coherence between music and text (for song writers) are in the focus of their attention. Often those means are referred to as interrelated: the instrument played determines the choice of the melody; the choice of harmony is subject to the form of the composition. Meanwhile lower grade pupils while looking for the ways of realization of a musical idea specify a much lower number of possibilities: they discuss what could be the mood of the composition, what instruments could perform it, what could be the beginning and the end of the composition. This is natural because children of that age have less experience in music performance and creative activity (Elliott, 1995; Morin, 2002; Menard, 2015), the vocabulary of tonic and rhythmic derivatives that a child possesses (Gordon, 1993) is limited.

The research has showed that lower grade pupils usually create compositions from the first attempt and are unwilling to improve or adjust them. Meanwhile upper grade pupils create using different methods. Only some participants of the research indicated that the composition was created immediately. In the mean time others created extremely differently: they used the idea of the composition that was once unfinished, created and then changed the idea of the composition several times, systematically improved the composition.

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Comparing the inventories of the creative process of both age group pupils it appears that depending on pupils' experience in music and in creation, on genre of creation, on the personality of the creator, the scope of creative process, time devoted to an individual moment of creation, the quantity of problems arising, the character of necessary help vary. As Burnard (2012) claims, there is no one musical creativity, but there are many of them, we can say the same about the process of creation of compositions.

The results of the research reveal the general pattern of creative process, simultaneously directing towards further research to find answers to the questions how the process of creation differs when pupils create music of a particular genre (vocal and instrumental, rock and country, vanguard and pop), when they create individually or in a group.
In the light of the results of the research advice on how to encourage pupils to create compositions, how to help them in their creation could be formulated. When teaching composition it is appropriate to encourage all age pupils to create in those spheres where they have accumulated the greatest musical experience; to create for other performers or together with other pupils (this will provide them with more confidence); to accept challenges, not to limit themselves with simple compositions. It is of major importance that teachers helped pupils to overcome shyness, lack of trust in their creative power.

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