



Introducing a mentor into a children's composition project: Reflections on a process

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a case study where a professional musician was assigned to a primary school as mentor in a project where 14 primary-aged children, with their teacher's direction, were involved in the composition of a piece of music that would act as prologue to the school's major production. The researchers were interested in aspects of the composition project that appeared to develop student's compositional skills and motivation and how the mentor might exercise his role in the composition project alongside the teacher, who was the school's music specialist. A range of data was analyzed: classroom observations, emails, questionnaires, and one-on-one and focus-group interviews. Findings suggested that the involvement of the mentor was well received by the pupils and that the mentor and teacher complemented one another in their enactment of both pedagogical and compositional roles. Students enjoyed a high sense of success in the production of their composition. Student learning were highly variable and a range of activities and processes was identified by students as contributing to their learning.

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1. Introduction

This article is based on a sequence of five, two-hour teaching/learning sessions, undertaken by the first author (Millie) with 14 Year 6 (10 to 11-year-old) students from a West Auckland primary school and involving Brent Grapes, a full-time musician with the Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra (APO), who had been appointed to the school as mentor under the orchestra's Partnership with Schools scheme. In the New Zealand context, the school is atypical in having had a specialist music programme for the last couple of decades. Millie had worked at the school for nine years as a music specialist during which time she had developed a comprehensive music programme for all students, that draws on Orff Schulwerk principles and practices. A feature of the Orff Schulwerk approach is its emphasis on improvisational processes. Improvisation is integrated into the music programme at Henderson Valley from the beginning and the composition project was seen as a natural extension of this. Henderson Valley is one of few schools with a well-developed, environmental education programme which was recognized in 2010 by its being awarded 'Green/Gold' award by the EnviroSchools Foundation.¹

This research project was prompted by the apparent absence of composition as a component in the New Zealand primary school music programme, even in schools where there is a designated music specialist. This situation appears to appertain in a number of settings besides New Zealand, despite advocacy for the importance of composition that goes back some decades (Barrett, 1998; Dogani, 2004; Mills, 2005; Paynter, 2000). This project provided an opportunity to engage

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¹ See <http://www.enviroschools.org.nz/>.

participating students in compositional work that built upon the students' previous experiences playing barred instruments and improvising in a range of modes. It also offered a chance for more sustained compositional work than took place in the authors' 2009 project, *Sounds of Waitakere* (Locke & Locke, 2011). That project left insufficient time for students to reflect, revise and refine their compositions (something that Paynter, 2000, argues, does not occur often enough in relation to student composition at any level). In addition, while students in that project were highly motivated to have their compositions recorded, they were not offered the opportunity for public performance. Neither was the involvement of a professional musician available to them.

2. The artist as partner in an educational context

The idea of artists being involved as co-workers with teachers for the purpose of enhancing the arts educational experiences of young people is not new. Reflecting on the British situation, Burnard and Swann (2010) report an increase in partnerships between schools and artists or arts-based organizations. Reflecting on the Pathfinder project in North-East England, which involved two local authority music services, the Greater Manchester Music Action Zone (GMJAZ) and an orchestra (Hallé), Stephens (2008), writes glowingly of the way risk-taking can be fostered in students and the development of confidence through "working hard together with the guidance of experienced musicians [who] helped them better to understand their relative strengths and weaknesses" (pp. 24–25). Having a musician work alongside the classroom teacher is seen unreservedly as a bonus.

Other researchers and commentators are more circumspect. Both Ledgard (2006) and Upitis (2006), writing out of British and North American contexts respectively, draw attention to inauspicious contextual factors which have the potential to impact negatively on artist–teacher partnerships. The former draws attention to current curriculum approaches that are outcomes driven and which therefore tend towards the "production" of instrumentalist or technicist teachers, who may be indisposed to view teaching as an art and may not be open to working in an artistic way with an assigned musician, for example. Upitis (2006) notes that: "Even in schools with strong arts programmes, the political pressures to raise standardised test scores and the lack of on-going training serve to weaken teachers' efforts to teach the arts, particularly when arts specialists are no longer present to foster the arts curriculum" (p. 55). Although the latter certainly resonates with the current situation in New Zealand, where National Standards for literacy and numeracy have been introduced despite considerable opposition, and where the regular provision of in-service professional development in the Arts (and Sciences and other subject areas) has been curtailed by school support services that have been government funded, Henderson Valley School's long-term commitment to a music programme has enabled the development of a high-quality teaching space, in which teaching may be viewed as an art and where experimentation and innovation has been encouraged.

Ledgard's (2006) study of teacher–artist partnerships, based on three research projects associated with the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT), found that "success comes when the teacher/artist partnership is based on mutual understanding of the distinct and equally valuable contribution of both teacher and artist to the partnership" (p. 178). The findings argued for "the importance of both artist and teacher participating in creative endeavour, taking risks and daring to experiment together" (p. 178), but cautioned that the teacher/artist combination only worked when there was a basis of trust, friendliness and mutual respect (p. 179).

Upitis (2006) analyzed participant reflections from four North American arts partnerships, which differed widely in terms of structure, curriculum orientation and the extent to which attempts were made to integrate the arts with other curriculum areas. She found that both groups agreed on the importance of an arts-rich education "the importance of physical involvement in the arts" (p. 60). Both groups also identified issues with time-tabling and finding appropriate spaces. As a group, teachers felt challenged by the sense that artists misunderstood how classrooms work, by a lack of administrative support and difficulties around sustainability. Artists found working in a classroom environment a challenge and did not always regard teachers highly, though they also gained an increased appreciation of what teachers were up against. A number felt that the relationship was detrimental to their own artistic agendas and felt "compromised by curriculum expectations" (p. 63).

In reviewing the literature on teacher–artist partnerships, Burnard and Swann (2010) report a lack of focus on how students have experienced these partnerships and the "pedagogic practices" students find to be enhancing of their learning in such arrangements (p. 71). They refer to evidence of the "catalytic impact that artists can have on pupil learning" (p. 72), mentioning such factors as: (1) "the development of creative spaces that foster creativity in ways that lead to change", (2) broadening the "zone" of learning by the use of authentic contexts for learning and creating, (3) the positive effects of artists positioning themselves in a non-hierarchical relationship with students, and (4) the value of "the facilitative stance adopted by artists in engaging students in the processes of creative learning" (p. 72).

Basing their research in a mixed comprehensive, performing arts-oriented community college in South-East England, the researchers investigated over a period of 18 months how students perceived "learning, and themselves as learners, when working with artist" (Burnard & Swann, 2010, p. 72). Over this time, a Composers' Workshop Project led by artists ran 20 workshops involving one composer and three musicians with young student composers ranging in age from 12 to 18. The artists worked collaboratively with the students on a range of projects, which culminated in a public performance.

A number of themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data.

1. *Learning relations*: Students were inspired by the nature of the relationship. Artists were viewed as "guides" or "experts" who worked *alongside* students collaboratively on a shared journey characterized by a high degree of trust and in way

- that appeared to mirror authentic music-making in real-world settings. “Through a scaffolded process of performing and composing together with the artists the students were encouraged to think of themselves and their peers as real composers” (p. 76), with pupil ownership of the material produced and a high degree of control of the learning process.
2. *The emotional dimension*: Students suggested that “artists drew them into an emotional engagement with their learning” the deeply personal nature of which “was a significant factor in developing students’ self and identity as composers” (p. 79). They felt free to draw on their own feelings and ideas in their compositions, even though some expressed feelings of anxiety, discomfort and disorientation.
 3. *Contexts for learning*: “Removing the structure of the school environment and allowing the students to play in, and compose for, out-of-school sites enhanced their participating and engagement with the creative process and gave authenticity to their experience of learning” (p. 78). As we shall see, some of these themes resonated with the much younger students involved in the project we are reporting on.

3. Context and nature of the project

14 Year 6 students who had achieved an elementary level of proficiency in recorder playing (including basic musical literacy skills) and who played in the Year 6 school marimba group were invited to collaboratively compose and perform pieces to be incorporated in the 2010 major school production, *Mokoroa: Guardian of the Valley*. In this production, the four senior classes in the school would be working with their teachers to devise eight linked episodes, which would collectively tell the story of the Waitakere Ranges² over time and how they were “saved” to become the significant natural, cultural and recreational resource they are today.

Central to this project was a compositional brief which offered participating students constrained possibilities for their musical creativity. The brief required students to compose a prologue to the show, which would establish a mood and accompany a choreographed enactment of the Maori creation myth – the separation of the sky god, Rangi, from his beloved earth, Papatuanuku, through the concerted efforts of their offspring. In the first instance students were directed to work in groups of 3 or 4 on barred instruments or recorders for melodic improvisation in the Dorian mode. They were asked to work towards settling as a group on some melodic ideas (fragments or more extended ideas) that could be shared with the larger group. Simple tonic or bordun accompaniments could be provided by members of the group, if they so wished.

A number of specific learning outcomes (SLOs) guided the teaching and learning process student participants were involved in:

1. Students are able to work as a collaborative ensemble to create music through improvisation; composition and performance;
2. Students can use narrative as a stimulus for musical composition;
3. Students can improvise compose and perform a melody and accompaniment in the Dorian mode, which works to express the purpose, mood or style of a particular piece of music;
4. Students can collaborate to use a range of ideas to create a coherent piece of music suitable for the beginning of the school show;
5. Students are able and willing to develop criteria of evaluation and to use these to reflect on, revise and refine their compositions.

The Auckland Philharmonic Orchestra (APO) set up its partnership scheme in order to facilitate the ability of schools to access the orchestra’s education programme and to build connections with schools in a range of ways. According to Lee Martelli, the APO Education Manager, a mentor’s role as a professional musician is to help support the music teacher in the delivery of a music programme in schools (personal email, March 11, 2011). This is a wide brief; one aspect of the project that is described here was to explore the potential of the relationship between a primary school, music specialist (Millie) and the mentor. The mentor assigned to Henderson Valley School was Brent Grapes, the APO’s principal trumpet player. Brent, an Australian, had graduated from the Julliard School in New York and, having previously worked in a Manhattan school on a composition project, had a real interest in working with Millie on the composition project described here.

4. Research design

At the commencement of the project, we set ourselves the following research questions:

1. What learning activities or experiences appear to contribute to the ability of selected Year 6 students to produce music to fulfil a compositional brief?
2. What learning activities or experiences appear to contribute to the motivation and enjoyment of selected Year 6 students in producing music to fulfil a compositional brief?

² A range of coastal hills to the west of Auckland with a rich bicultural and multicultural history and a high conservation value.

Table 1
Data collection summary.

Type of data	Person responsible
Reflective journal entries and other reflective material (including exchanges)	Classroom teacher (Millie) and mentor (Brent)
Classroom observations	University researcher (Terry)
Draft and final compositional material	Classroom teacher (Millie)
Post-study student questionnaire	Classroom teacher (Millie)/University researcher (Terry)
Post-study interview with mentor	University researcher (Terry)
Post-study focus group interview with selected students	University researcher (Terry)

3. What specific compositional skills are developed by selected Year 6 students in the course of their engagement in a learning process designed to enable them to fulfil a compositional brief?
4. What role might a professional orchestral musician as mentor play in facilitating the engagement of selected Year 6 students in a compositional process?
5. How might a classroom music teacher and a professional orchestral musician as mentor complement each other in terms of their respective roles in facilitating the achievement of project SLOs?

As Yin (1989) points out, case study research can be (a) exploratory (description and analysis leading to the development of hypotheses), (b) descriptive (providing narrative accounts and rich vignettes of practice) and (c) explanatory (offering causal explanations of the impact of various interventions). We view this small project as primarily descriptive and exploratory, and set in a wider action research framework. In action research terms, it might be thought of as the second phase of a recursive cycle which commenced with our “Sounds of Waitakere” project in 2009, which worked with children of a similar age, who worked collaboratively in groups to develop a non-conventional sound palette (using the recorder and untuned percussion (conventional and found sounds), devise a notation, and compose a small layered piece reflective of their sound-based readings of paintings made by well-known painters interpreting Waitakere landscapes (see Locke & Locke, 2011).

We concur with the following definition of action research:

Action research is a form of *collective* self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. . . The approach is only action research when it is *collaborative*, though it is important to realise that the action research of the group is achieved through the *critically examined action* of individual group members (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 5).

This project was collaborative in respect of the ways in which the researchers brought complementary expertise to the enterprise. In welcoming the mentor, Brent Grapes into the team as participant, the circle of expertise was widened and the working relationship enriched. The students themselves were invited into a collaborative relationship with Millie and Brent, each of whom made their musical and pedagogical expertise available to these novice composers.

Viewed as a phase in an action research cycle, stable factors in this case study included: the collaborative relationship, the setting, the participants and the research questions. The dynamic factors included the character of the intervention (i.e. the teaching/learning process itself), which was constantly evaluated and modified and, to some extent, the nature of the data to be collected (for instance, correspondence between Millie and Brent proved to be a rich source of data).

Year 6 students were invited to participate on the basis of their musical ability and enthusiasm for composition, and because they were members of classes who were involved in developing the major production, *Mokoroa: Guardian of the Valley*. Arriving at this purposive sample involved consultation with the school’s Year 5/6 teachers to ensure their agreement. Consent was obtained from the principal and Board of Trustees, participating students and their parents. The number is being confined to fifteen for two reasons: (1) the practical issue of needing to work intensively with students on compositions, and (2) so as not to drain the “talent pool” for the show itself. The APO trumpeter, Brent Grapes might be thought of as a “convenience sample of one”. He had already been assigned to Henderson Valley Primary School under the APOPS scheme (see above). Like other participants, he was provided with an information letter and asked for his consent

The students, teacher and APO mentor met over a series of five 2-h sessions, during which Millie and Brent worked collaboratively to:

- provide initial experiences, which introduced the musical material upon which the composition would be based;
- provoke and stimulate compositional thought in the students;
- establish a process for the sharing of ideas;
- evaluate each session and establish a subsequent direction as a way of shaping ideas to form the final product.

The mentor’s role was to work collaboratively with the music teacher to refine, flesh out and modify “in process” the activities designed to enable students to achieve the outcomes listed above.

Table 1 sets out the kind of data collected and the person responsible for its collection.

As can be seen, the mentor was asked to participate in the reflective process and to participate in an interview once the production has been staged. Students engaged in a compositional process which produced a range of data, completed

a questionnaire once the production has been completed and, in some cases, participated in a focus group interview. Data analysis was done by the authors at the completion of the project.

5. Findings

5.1. The process

The first author as “observer-as-participant” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 310) took field notes of what happened over one of the two-hour composing sessions. There was no observation schedule, and the field notes were later checked and modified by the first author, for whom the draft served as a kind of stimulated recall prompt. The session observed was the second of five. The mentor, Brent, had already attended one session.

In analyzing the field notes, we identified the distinct roles that participants took on various times in the session. In coding verbal utterances, for example, we were focusing on their *force* (Locke, 2004, p. 47). For instance, when Brent says to a group of students: “Would you mind playing it for me?” he is using the form of a question. However, the force of the question is a request or instruction. In terms of our coding, he is orienting students to a task he is wanting them to perform, but in a polite and respectful way.

This session began with Millie inviting students to give voice to their understanding of what the project was about and what had been done thus far. She gave her own overview, invited Brent to talk about his background, and then read the Maori creation myth, while holding up an illustrated picture book she was reading from. Then Brent introduced a listening and analysis activity based around Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” (the melody of which all student were familiar with) in which the student were asked to consider the role repetition and contrast played in the piece and, as well, to consider the way in which melody and/or rhythm drive the piece. Students then worked in four groups, building on compositional work that had been done in the first class. The first group worked with alto instruments, the second with soprano, the third with metallophones and the fourth with recorders. Millie and Brent worked successively with each group.³ In the final part of the session, the groups were brought together in the music room, and each played through their latest efforts and received feedback.

Our field notes analysis revealed five roles we describe as *pedagogic* (i.e. related to the teaching process) and five roles we term *compositional* (i.e. related to the composition process). The former comprised:

1. *Activity or task designer*: This role involves the design of a learning task.
2. *Task initiator*: This role involves actively orienting or introducing learners to a task that will move a project forward.
3. *Expert*: In this role, knowledge or expertise is shared with other participants.
4. *Feedback giver*: In this role, one or more participants are offered feedback on some aspect of their behavior or performance.
5. *Discussion facilitator*: This role involves the active encouragement of participants to engage in discussion or negotiation.

The latter comprised:

1. *Explorer and improviser*: This role involved participants in experimenting with the crafting of sound in a purposeful but open way.
2. *Demonstrator*: This role involved participants in the performance of an idea as encapsulated in a stretch of composition.
3. *Synthesiser*: This role involved the active bringing together of two or more compositional ideas or threads to form a more complex whole.
4. *Improver*: This role involved participants in making suggestions for the improvement of a composition.
5. *Assigner*: This role involved the allocation of participants to specific instruments or sound-making roles.

We use the tables below (Tables 2 and 3) to provide an overview of *who* assumed *what* roles (using examples) and how often. We do not claim that our analysis has been exhaustive, but we would argue that the pattern that emerges is *indicative* of the activity that occurred in this session and others.

A number of points can be made here. Firstly, Millie and Brent share the activity design tasks. Millie takes responsibility for the overall activity design – this being informed by her knowledge of the students’ previous experience and the availability of particular resources in the classroom (instruments). Brent contributes a listening and analysis activity, which draws upon his training in Western art music and introduces the formal musical concepts of rhythm-driven or melody-driven composition to the students. Secondly, as we might expect, Millie and Brent are the main activity initiators. However, because students have been given a voice at the start of the session, Sarah has taken the opportunity of assuming this role. Thirdly, teacher, mentor and students all take on the role of “expert” at different times, in a way which suggests a leveling out of “hierarchy”. Fourthly, the mentor Brent plays a major role in offering feedback to students, though it is also clear that students are being encouraged to assume this role also. Finally, the field notes show only one clear example of overt discussion facilitation, with Brent assuming this role.

³ Groups 2 and 3 worked outside the classroom and were not “observed” for field note purposes.

Table 2
Pedagogic roles.

Pedagogic role	Millie	Brent	Students
Activity designer	1 Directs students towards improvisation in the Dorian mode on barred instruments or recorder.	1. Designs a listening activity based on Beethoven's "Ode to Joy".	
Task initiator	1. Provides an overview of the project and the parameters for the composition to be produced. 2. "We are going to reread the story, remember that this is going to inspire our composition." 3. "While we're waiting shall we stop playing and listen now." 4. "I would like to see the group experimenting and avoiding the wood altogether. I could get some other metal instruments if you needed them."	1. "Today, I want you to take the melody, the long singing line, and I want you to see how you can improve it so that we can tell the story in music term." 1. "To begin with, I'm going to play a little melody." 2. "For this exercise can we break into three groups." 3. "Which group would like to go next?" 4. "Next group." 5. "Would the recorder group like to play their work?"	1. Sarah: "We've been listening to the story and we're going to do a production based on that and we're writing the music for the production, but we are writing music that's telling a story."
Expert	1. "we say it was by Beethoven, but it was actually by Schiller." 2. "The way he used accent."	1. Brent displays expert knowledge in his description of the way Beethoven scores "Ode to Joy". 2. "Anacrusis is the word" 3. "We call that retrograde"	1. Riley: "Because we're doing a story on a taniwha, we are using instruments to tell the story, base, alto and soprano." 2. Robert: "We've been using the Dorian mode basically the D scale with any sharps or flats." Sarah: "Is anybody going to Andrew Rieu?"
Feedback giver	1. Compliments certain students on the ability to listen to others. 2. "I want to say some things about how you worked together."	1. "So last week we heard some really fantastic melodies." 2. "A special feature of Madeleine's melody where the beat comes on the second note." 3. "It reminds me of the very beginning of the story when they talk about the dark space." 4. Brent tells David he would like to record his counter-melody. 5. "What I really liked is the way you played a melody and then played it backwards."	1. Student: "It is different in a weird way." 2. A student suggests that David has used a counter-melody. 3. "I like those tunes."
Discussion facilitator		1. "I talked about something that the oboe did. Did anyone notice anything that David did?"	

Since the project is about students composing, it is non-surprising that students play key roles here. They certainly do, as explorers and demonstrators, though teacher and mentor both, at times, engage in improvisation as they enter into or intervene in the group-based composition process. Significantly, however, it is teacher and mentor that assume the role of synthesiser, for reasons we will discuss later. Roles of improver and assigner are shared. Students clearly feel free to suggest improvements. As class teacher (and the person with an overview of instrument availability), Millie does more assigning than Brent. However, the students also take the opportunity to assign themselves as part of the exploration process.

Email correspondence between Millie and Brent provides further commentary on the process. The third session was managed by Millie on her own. In an email to Brent (July 23) she expresses amazement that despite a vacation break the students remember their own and others' melodies. She describes the session:

Today I have taken the bull by the horns and settled on the ensemble. The kids helped choose instruments, bearing in mind the individual melodies that have been created. I asked the composers to take the lead with their parts and the others to improvise accompaniments. We "strung" the various parts together and the kids had lots of ideas for layering – solos before the whole group plays – building texture through adding metals or woods, sops, altos, etc. The basses experimented with different accompaniments and were keen to try any new ideas suggested by others in the group

Table 3
Compositional roles.

Compositional role	Millie	Brent	Students
Explorer/improviser (11)	1. In intervening in Madeleine's group, introduces an ostinato pattern.	1. "Would you mind if I conduct some people it?"	1. For a good part of the session, students are exploring and improvising as they devise melodies in groups, e.g. Madeleine and Clara discuss the possibility of a B section for their melody. 2. At Millie's instruction, one of the groups experiments with metal instruments only.
Demonstrator (10)	1. Introduces Group 1 to an ostinato on the marimba.		1. Madeleine teaches her melody to others in her group. 2. Group 1 (Madeleine and others) play through their new versions. 3. Group 2 (Sarah and others) play their new work. 4. Group 3 play their recorder work.
Synthesiser (12)	1. Intervenes in Madeleine's group as a means of integrating various disparate ideas into something coherent. 2. Intervenes in respect of sequencing and layering when the recorder group does its play-through.	1. Brent (referring to having notated their initial melodies): "My goal was to combine them as best I could so that we could use everyone's work when we performed the piece." 2. "I'd like to record Madeleine's group." (The act of recording produces focus and coherence.)	
Improver (8)	1. Suggests that the second group avoids wooden instruments.		Student: "Because we have a number of players we can introduce counter-melodies and interjections."
Assigner (13)	1. Checks with students who can play what instruments, particularly Maori instruments. 2. Assigns David to an alto xylophone at one point. 3. Places to metallophones together and assigns players. 4. Assigns David to a metallophone in during the group play-through of latest work.	1. Suggests that Natalie moves to the alto.	1. David tells Brent that he is off the ukulele and on to the alto. 2. Clara moves to the bass marimba of her own accord. Riley: "I think that next time I could try a barred instrument because I find it really hard to play the recorder."

She notes that their "ears have accustomed" to the Dorian mode which they are enjoying. "One of the students discovered she could 'transpose' another recorder piece we play into the Dorian and she likes the sound very much." It is clear that the role of "assigner" continues to be shared, but with Millie having final say. The use of the pronoun "we" indicates that Millie views the construction of the piece as a collaborative venture, with the children making suggestions around such things as layering. A clear development here is a division among the students between "composers" (in the next email, Millie refers to "lead" composers) and those who improvise accompaniments.

Millie, however, maintains her role as overall "synthesizer". Her of July 24 to Brent has a Sibelius file attached where she has put down "three of the melodic ideas from the students strung together", without layering, indicating an intention to add the recorder part the following Monday. She notes that "the kids and I decided on the following ensemble" (and lists the instruments), again showing how the "assigner" role is shared. The following sentence shows her both managing the process of synthesis and ensuring that students' suggestions are honoured. "I am having the whole piece 'sit' over a drone bass, with a varied rhythmic structure, maybe adding in some ostinati that the kids suggest. She talks about her intention to meet with her "lead" composers the following Monday to "see if they want to change anything in the melodic lines, add the counter melodies and accompaniments that the kids have come up with. She asks Brent if he would "focus on drawing out some understanding of the notion of form" the next time he comes, positioning him clearly as the expert in this regard.

In a July 27 email, Millie reports to Brent on her meetings with her "lead" composers playing them back their melodies in Sibelius form.

I wanted their feedback on their melodies, as I had transcribed them, and the way they were fitting together. They were absolutely fascinated by the Sibelius facility and were spellbound as, under their direction, I corrected some of

the mistakes I had made with their melodies. Natalie was very keen to have her and Robert's part included, which I had overlooked. We have decided to open [the piece] with this.

What followed in the meeting was further experimentation with accompaniments and section links. "I gave them options for accomps and ideas also came from the kids. I let the lead composer for each section have the final say." Again, Millie is balancing her role as process manager (synthesizer) with the desire to maximize student choice and initiative in the process of experimentation and creation.

5.2. *The mentor's experience*

Before the project began, Brent⁴ imagined that he would fulfil a "creative assistant" role with students, "offering insights to the students in how to develop their own musical ideas" and also engage in exposition, providing lessons on what he viewed as "the core areas of 'successful' composition. In his first visit, he used classical examples to illustrate the contrast between melody-driven compositions and rhythm-driven compositions. After his first visit, however, he felt his role became more active guide or "creative advisor", since he saw the students as having too much freedom and as being unsure how to proceed. Overall, he felt that he and Millie had "great success in getting most of the students to embrace the compositional process". He saw all students as investing in the project and as wanting to have "artistic input on the direction of the composition". He saw some students as having particular strengths in the development of melody, while others were more confident in sharing ideas "on how the overall compositions should be structured and performed. In his view, not all students were motivated to engage in the same aspect of the compositional focus, with some having an interest in melody, and others more interested in structure.

It is clear that he saw himself as wanting to ensure that his input as expert did not disempower the students:

I felt that my role as a "creative advisor" enabled the students to best express what direction they felt the work should take. At the same time, I tried to express to the students why what they had suggested would or would not work, and cite examples from history to help the students validate their role in the compositional process.

As mentioned previously, Brent was prepared to design and initiate tasks for the students. He saw Millie's decision to have the students work in Dorian mode as critical to the success of the project:

Firstly, it set the harmonic basis for the melodies the students composed, allowing us to more easily combine the individual melodic ideas and create an accompaniment in the later stages. Secondly, by giving this "boundary", several of the students who were struggling to come up with a melody when asked to do so with no restrictions, were now easily able to develop their ideas. Finally, it allowed the class to work from an area of experience. Millie had already worked with the class on this mode and as such the students felt a certain familiarity and thus ease in using this mode.

Looking back, however, Brent would have liked more time to engage students in preliminary activities to establish and develop more thoroughly a compositional skill base. He also saw the project as tightly constrained by time, and would have liked to have developed activities on different styles of accompaniment and to have given students more choices in this regard.

The mentor saw the project as successful in developing the core compositional skills of melody, rhythm and modal harmony. While "certain students became quite adept at creating balanced musical lines", Brent felt that all students appeared to become more aware of harmony and "the way that certain notes could change the mood of the music in relation the story they were trying to convey." He also commented on the discovery of certain compositional techniques through the process of experimentation.

I recall one young girl performing her melody to me that featured a simple melody in the first phrase, and then repeated using larger rhythmic values. This student was delighted when I told her that what she had done was called "augmentation", and was a device commonly used by Mozart and Haydn, amongst others. This occurred numerous times, with students using augmentation, diminution, inversion and even a primitive version of a retrograde tone row (in a simple modal fashion).

There were two areas of skill development Brent would like to see focused on were the project repeated. He noted that some students felt constrained by the Dorian mode and, while seeing this constraint as productive, would have liked to see how students managed the exploration of different harmonic structures in their compositions. He would also have liked a smaller group, where students would be able to make their own decisions without compromising for the sake of a larger group.

In terms of the mentor–teacher relationship, Brent originally saw himself as supplementing the specialist music teacher/s knowledge by bringing the perspective of a performing musician to bear. In the first session, he saw himself as reinforcing elements already taught by Millie (melody/rhythm). As the project developed, however, he saw himself as "an individual with whom the teacher could discuss the larger scale development of the project" and, in the classroom setting, as an "assistant

⁴ See Appendix A for interview questions.

Table 4
Rating scale data.

Statement	0	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoyed success as a composer by engaging in this project.			1	3	5	5
I feel motivated to compose music as a result of being involved in this project			3	4	3	4
I enjoyed composing as part of a group			1	1	5	7
I learned some new things about rhythm while I was composing			1	3	4	5
I learned some new things about melody while I was composing			1	5	5	3
I liked composing melody in the Dorian mode				4	7	3
The story “Rangi and Papa” helped give me ideas for the composition	1	1	3	2		7
I think our piece of music “In the beginning” really suits the opening of the show			1	4	4	5

to the teacher” in “seeing the project to fruition”, who assisted students “in assembling their ideas in a way that they could be best utilized in the overall composition”. It is clear that he saw himself as according Millie the final say, describing himself as wanting to enable her “to make her own decisions about the way the project would develop, by offering my thoughts and opinions from personal experience.” His main regret was the absence of regular debriefing sessions to discuss classroom developments and plan future learning, something made difficult by his own orchestra schedule.

5.3. The students' experience

At the completion of the project, students were given a questionnaire (see [Appendix B](#)) to complete. In addition, 7 volunteers took part in a focus-group interview.

The rating-scale results for the students were as follows ([Table 4](#)):

A number of trends can be noted. If we view columns 4 and 5 as representing strong agreement, then it is clear that 12 out of 14 students really enjoyed composing as part of a group. A large majority (10/14), rated their enjoyment of success in composition highly and particularly liked composing in the Dorian mode. (The latter item was also the one with no “dissenters”.) In general, also, a goodly majority thought that the finished piece suited the opening of the show and felt that they learned some new things about rhythm and composing. The items that were least enthusiastically endorsed related to motivation to compose and the relevance of having a myth as prompt for ideas. Re the former, we might infer that there were a few students who were “sidelined” during the composition process and who felt they did not make a major contribution to the process. Re the latter, there is an interesting and quite stark divide between a group who were very positive about the role of the myth in giving them ideas, and another group for whom the myth appeared to have little value or relevance.

5.3.1. Composition as process

Questionnaire responses showed students varying in what they thought they would get out of the project. Six indicated that they had little idea of what composition meant. Five suggested the idea that composition meant making up music. Three students saw the project as a chance to improve their music skills and knowledge. Sarah thought she might learn “how to read music instantly a bit better”, Robert referred to learning “how to compose music”, while Joshua thought he would “get better music skills out of it”. Some students conveyed a generally positive sense of anticipation, either from the prospect of meeting Brent and learning about musicians (Riley and Clara) or from a belief that the project would be fun.

As in [Burnard and Swann's \(2010\)](#) research with older students, focus-group students indicated that they experienced a range of feelings as novice composers.

Sarah: I feel like really excited sometimes and sometimes I get really pulled into the music thing and it doesn't really seem like I'm on a planet.

TL: It doesn't really feel like you're on a planet?

Sarah: Yeah, sometimes it takes a lot to get down to earth.

Sarah further commented on the use of the Dorian mode (“it sounds really nice because we don't have any sharps or flats and that can be really time consuming”). Natalie, Sarah and David also found it good to have an “exciting story” (Natalie) to base the music on.

Questionnaire analysis revealed three thematic responses to the question asking students to describe how they went about making up music. (Four misread or didn't answer this question.) Seven students alluded to a process of experimentation, using wordings such as “played around” or “fiddling”. Robert wrote: “I learnt that to compose a piece of music, you have to try out different ‘recipes’ to get the tune right.” A second theme, mentioned by three students, suggested two prongs to the compositional process, deciding on elements and arranging them in some way. Mandy, for example, wrote: “I learnt to make up tones and then piece them together.” A third theme was represented by Sarah alone, who again referred to the process of “daydream” and “floating up to another planet”.

In describing what they learnt from being involved in the project, five students named specific skills or understandings, often using music terminology. Sarah commented on learning the “play the Dorian mode and what it is”; Wendy learnt to play marimba better; Natalie also commented on the Dorian mode and learning to synthesise (“Put melodies together so it actually sounds like a story”); Robert reported that he learnt how to listen to music better and “to recognize notes better”; and David said that he “learnt how to combine melodies, counter melodies and bass to make a good sound”. A number of

these comments restate in different words a major learning about the dual demands of composing, i.e. selecting elements of various kinds and finding pleasing combinations. Mandy expressed her leaning in the statement: “Making up music. Piecing the music together.”

Eleven students offered opinions on activities that they saw as helping them develop their musical ideas. Three commented on the value of the mythical narrative, either as a prompt or as a basis of structuring the final product. Listening played a role here, as it did in Amy’s comment that it was helpful to listen “to what everyone else had to say”. Two students highlighted the value of being exposed to musical models. Clara: “We listened to different types of music to get the idea of how and why pieces of music change their timing and beat.” (In the focus group, three students commented on the value of having various contrasts in “Ode to Joy” pointed out to them by Brent.) The activity mentioned most (by four) was musical exploration. Rebecca wrote: “First me and Angela went outside with Brent and played around on the instruments and found out how we could create music using the Dorian mode.” Rebecca was one of two students who responded to this question by mentioning the value of collaboration as an activity. Finally, as a reminder perhaps of how noisy these proceedings were, Joshua identified as a helpful activity “Go to a quiet place and think by yourself.”

5.3.2. *Working with others*

When focus group students were asked to identify the feelings they experienced during the project, most commented on the value of “partners” in the compositional process. Sarah commented: “It’s good when you have a partner, ‘cos then when they play a note or when they have an idea it can sort of light a spark, and you can get other ideas from that and you can end up with a really cool piece of music.” Two students, however, shared feelings of frustration with group processes. Angela, for example, enjoyed working with a partner, but found the presence of a large number of ideas in the big group as “hard to put together” (i.e. the challenge of synthesis).

In the questionnaire responses to the collaborative aspect of the project, there were three broad themes. Four students saw working with others as a way of enriching the pool of available ideas. Two students took up Sarah’s idea of the spark, where one person’s idea triggered a complementary response in the other. (Rebecca: “By cooperating together and another person thinking of different ideas that could back you up with the melody you were working on.”) For seven students, the main advantage was the potential for synthesis, the sense of achieving a product that showcased the talents of all in a collaborative enterprise. For half of these students, then, the major advantage related to the nature of the product. Clara: “That everyone has different ideas and when we put them together and listen to each other we can make an amazing piece.”

Whereas the focus group gave the collaborative aspect of the project a good press, the questionnaire provided a number of insights on the challenges of working with 14 students on a single project. All students bar one identified challenges. Two mentioned the challenge of integrating a large variety of ideas in a single whole. One mentioned the challenge of mastering the work of others in the play-throughs. One mentioned bad group behavior (e.g. not listening). Two mentioned difficulties in reaching agreement. Three mentioned difficulties in focusing because of the levels of noise and activity. (Natalie: “If some people were playing something different, and you could hear it, it distracts you.”) Of particular interest to us as researchers were the three students who mentioned the risk of not having one’s contribution valued, because it is not used or because it has been misappropriated (Amy: “That they changed your idea to theirs, sometimes they try to make it their piece.”). In the July 2 observation, by way of example, Clara worked on a B section for the segment her group was working on, but this dropped from sight in the play-through later in the session.

Interestingly, when students were asked what they learnt to do by being involved in the project, three identified collaborative skills. For example, Amy said: “I learned to listen and contribute to other ideas to make something with all of each other.” Two students mentioned affective skills related to interactive processes: “Think outside the box and speak my mind” (Clara); “I learnt to open my heart and be honest to all the questions” (Madeleine).

5.3.3. *Students’ view of the mentor*

Only two students suggested it wasn’t a good idea to have Brent involved, but with little reason. The 12 students who thought it was a good idea offered three types of reason (echoed by participants in the focus group). The most common reason, mentioned by 9 students was Brent’s expertise and experience. These students all saw themselves as learning from him. For example, Sarah indicated that Brent had taught her what was special about the Dorian mode. Riley noted that: “We learned a little about pitch and accent and tone.” Robert said: “Yes! I learnt *how* to compose music in a way that it works with other people’s music. I learnt some terms of music and items used in the rhythm of the music.” A second reason, offered 5 times, was Brent’s contribution of ideas to the compositional process, with some students being fulsome in their claim that the final product would not have been the same without Brent. Finally, Sarah noted that Brent was “quite young, so he is also very fun and interesting”, a rationale others may well have thought, but didn’t mention.

Focus group students were asked to identify the single-best aspect of the project. Again responses were varied. Madeleine and Natalie identified the process of synthesis and integration (“putting it all together and making up a big piece”: Natalie). For David, it was the process of exploration and experimentation itself and tailoring the result to the mythical prompt. For Robert, it was having Brent and Millie on hand as sources of ideas. Sarah, Rebecca and Angela all mentioned the idea of partnership, as a source of vindication (“it backs you up on the music”), or innovation (“it helps you create more new music”), or integrative expansion (“you both have ideas and then it’s like you’re creating it and then you put the ideas together”), or improvement (“make them better”). The idea of integrative expansion had been mentioned earlier in the interview in

different words by Robert, Sarah and David. The latter expressed it thus: “When you’re working with a partner, if they come up with an idea, it’s actually very easy to piggy-back on the idea or combine it with something you’ve come up with.”

What would these students change, were they to be involved in another composition project? Nine had no suggestions. Three would have liked more time and less pressure, with Brent spending more time with the group. The latter suggestion was Clara’s, who would have liked more than one expert, perhaps a professional composer or conductor! The other suggested change related to instrumentation: Sarah would have liked another metallophone, while Natalie wanted a keyboard.

6. Discussion and conclusion

We frame this section by returning to the five research questions we set ourselves at the commencement of the project.

What specific compositional skills did these 10-year-old pupils develop in the course of the project? The rating scale responses suggest that a majority of students felt that they had learnt more about melody and rhythm. In reflecting on the process of composition, half the class referred to the importance of experimentation, of exploring options before settling on a particular outcome. In various questionnaire responses, a significant number of students described composition as involving a dual process of selection and arrangement. The focus of this process varied. With a focus on melody, the focus was on selecting and arranging notes. With a focus on orchestration, the focus was on rhythm patterns and how they might be sequenced and/or layered. With a focus on dynamics, the focus was on volume and accent, and how these might be sequenced and combined. A number of students suggested that they had become more aware of the importance of contrast as an aspect of composition. As mentioned, a number of students were quite specific in their discussion of their learning, as illustrated by David’s mention of counter melodies, a term used by Brent in his exposition on “Ode to Joy” in the second session. All, of course, learnt what the Dorian mode was. From the mentor’s perspective, the project was successful in developing core skills such as melody, rhythm and modal harmony. He also mentioned instances of students learning quite specific skills through the experimental process. However, while seeing the commitment to the Dorian mode as productive, he also saw it as limiting student learning in certain ways.

The findings suggest that a number of activities and experiences contributed to this group producing a piece of music they were all proud of and which a number of them performed in *Mokoroa: Guardian of the Valley*. The analysis of the observation data shows the extent to which students were enabled to take on a variety of compositional roles: explore/improviser, demonstrator, improver and assigner. In each of these, they willingly assumed agency. On the basis of this analysis, however, it was the teacher and mentor whose decision-making around synthesis appeared to dominate. Millie’s emails to Brent revealed a further role division, which would have had an impact on *what* students learned. This was the emergence of “lead” composers who began to take major responsibility for the melodic contour of a section of the composition, with other students taking on such roles as improvising accompaniments. The mentor also noticed that students tended to opt for different composing roles, with some focused on melody and others focused on structure. Such divisions would have had an impact on what specific students learned.

The findings also indicate a high degree of power-sharing between teacher, mentor and pupils. The process of synthesis can occur at a range of levels. At the micro level, it can refer to decisions around layering, such as decisions around the use of an ostinato or a particular tonal contrast. While Millie can be seen as having the final say on the overall shape of the final product in terms, for example, of the ordering of the various components produced by students in their groups, students learned a great deal by their being given responsibility for decision-making around synthesis at the micro-level. Of the eleven students who attempted to pinpoint what helped them in their learning, six mentioned listening of various kinds: listening to the creation narrative itself, listening to others (opinions and musical experiments), and to the musical models Brent exposed them to. Four students highlighted the process of experimentation itself as a key activity in facilitating their compositions, though most mentioned it in other data contexts. Interestingly, however, the rating scale findings suggest that five students were lukewarm or negative in their rating of the narrative as helpful in the process of composition.

Exploration and experimentation were key features of this project’s pedagogy. So was collaborative learning. Most focus group participants commented on the value of having partners in the compositional process, because it allowed one to “spark off” the contribution of the other. The collaborative aspect of the project allowed for the pooling of ideas and more opportunities for synthesis. It also posed challenges, arising from the size of the group, the potential for conflict and the risks of having one’s contribution marginalised.

What learning activities or experiences appeared to contribute to the motivation and enjoyment? There is no doubt that the composition brief operated as a powerful source of extrinsic motivation (>Collins & Amabile, 1999). Despite reservations about aspects of the collaborative process, the students were hugely proud of their product, as the rating scale data shows. To repeat Clara’s comment: “That everyone has different ideas and when we put them together and listen to each other we can make an amazing piece.” The sense of wonder here stems from a deep appreciation of the way each pupil has been able to make a contribution to the whole, and that the whole is better for its collaborative creation. As we have seen, most students enjoyed working in partnership with others. It was the item that ranked most highly in the rating scale. A large majority of students indicated that they enjoyed success as a composer during the project and a number of remarks in the findings suggest that students such as Sarah found the compositional process intrinsically motivating. Yet only seven students appear to be motivated to compose music as a result of the project. There are a number of possible reasons for the tepid response of the other seven: they may have experienced having their contribution marginalised; or they may not have been active in

the composition process to begin with; or they may have been active in a non-melodic aspect of composition and not seen this as composition.

The observation analysis showed the mentor assuming a range of pedagogical and composition roles. Brent designed activities, played a major role in initiating activities and giving feedback, engaged in exposition and facilitated talk. His major role in the compositional process was synthesiser (at a macro-level), but he was also prepared to be an improviser and assigner. On the basis of this one session, Brent's involvement was multi-faceted. As we have seen, Brent initially envisaged himself as having an "expert" role, but found himself as more actively involved in the composition process than he had anticipated ("guide" rather than "assistant"). While Brent was actively involved, he was also at pains to ensure that he did not disempower the pupils in his guiding role. Overall, the pupils viewed the involvement of the mentor as a benefit, because of the expertise and experience he offered and his contribution of ideas. In this respect, they echoed the sentiments of the older sample of students in *Burnard and Swann's (2010)* research. There was no contradiction between how they experienced his input and how he himself viewed his contribution.

None of the tensions between teachers and artists mentioned in the research review were evident in this project. Clearly, the fact that Millie was a music specialist and teacher musician and Brent's interest in pedagogy established a foundation for mutual respect. It is significant that pupils often linked Millie and Brent in their comments, suggesting that they were viewing them as a unified team. As the observation data analysis showed, both teacher and mentor tended to share both pedagogical and compositional roles almost interchangeably, even though Millie, as having a major role in producing *Mokoroa: Guardian of the Valley*, made final decisions about the final shape of the musical prologue as product. Brent himself changed the way he saw himself as complementing Millie as teacher. Rather than *supplementing* Millie's knowledge, he saw himself as *reinforcing* it. By doing so, he was acknowledging Millie's expertise and ways in which this had already established a number of skills and understandings he could draw on in working with these pupils. Within the classroom, he saw himself as having what he called an "assistant to the teacher" role, effectively fulfilling a similar role to the teacher. Beyond the classroom, he saw himself as a kind of project consultant, someone with whom Millie could engage with in acts of reflection (as evidenced by the data).

In the project we have reported on here, a group of primary-aged pupils, with help from a teacher and mentor, produced and in most cases performed a prologue to a major school production. All felt a sense of pride in the product and all learned something from the process. As the data has shown, what was learned was not uniform, either in type or learning or degree. An enterprise of this kind is always compromised and constrained, and on reflection, we can see that these constraints have both costs and benefits. The focus on the Dorian mode afforded certain skill developments and not others. Involving a mentor brought a number of benefits to the project, but also meant accepting time constraints determined by the demands of Brent's orchestra. Opting to making the compositional opportunity available to fourteen pupils, posed challenges to the facilitation of the collaborative process and there were probably casualties of this. The overall time constraint meant that there was less time for the establishment of some of the foundational compositional skills Brent alluded to, but the time constraint also meant a high degree of urgency and focus in bringing the project to completion. Finally, the brief itself imposed a set of constraints, but in having to work with these constraints, the pupils were engaging in music-making that was authentic and, as it transpired, deeply satisfying⁵.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix A. Interview questions with APO Mentor

1. At the start of this project, how would you have described the role you intended to play in relation to these pupil composers? Did you feel this role changed over the course of the composition sessions?
2. How successful do you feel you were in facilitating these young students to engage in a compositional process? What was it about your role that made for this success?
3. At the start of this project, how would you have described the role you intended to play in relation to the specialist music teacher? Did you feel this role changed over the course of the composition sessions?
4. In what ways do you see your role as complementing the role of Millie, the music specialist teacher?
5. Are the ways you might have managed your relationship with the music specialist teacher differently?
6. What task or activity did you have the students do which you felt contributed to their ability to achieve success as composers? Why do you think a particular task or activity was successful?
7. Were there tasks or activities that you would have had the students do differently if you were to do it all again? Are there activities they didn't do that they should have done? Give reasons?
8. How would you rate the motivation of these students, as they engaged in this compositional task? In your view, what factors served to motivate them.

⁵ The children's composition can be viewed on the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UD4qQiv.ON>.

9. Overall, what compositional skills did you see the students developing over the course of the learning process they engaged in?
10. Overall, were there skills the students didn't develop that you would have liked them to have developed if you were to do this task again?

Appendix B. Pupil questionnaire

1. Before you began the project, what did you think you would get out of it?
2. What did you learn to do by being involved in this project?
3. What were some activities you did that *helped you* develop your musical ideas?
4. How did you go about making up your music?
 - a. What were the good things about working with other students on a composition task?
 - b. What were the hard things about working with other students?
5. Was it a good idea to have Brent involved?
6. What difference did it make having Brent involved? What did you learn from him?
7. If you were to be involved in another composition project, what would you like to be different?

The following are a list of statements followed by a rating scale from 0 to 5. If you strongly agree with the statement circle 5; if you strongly disagree, circle 0.

I enjoyed success as a composer by engaging in this project.	0 1 2 3 4 5
I feel motivated to compose music as a result of being involved in this project.	0 1 2 3 4 5
I enjoyed composing as part of a group.	0 1 2 3 4 5
I learned some new things about rhythm while I was composing.	0 1 2 3 4 5
I learned some new things about melody while I was composing.	0 1 2 3 4 5
I liked composing melody in the Dorian mode.	0 1 2 3 4 5
The story "Rangi and Papa" helped give me ideas for the composition.	0 1 2 3 4 5
I think our piece of music "In the beginning" really suits the opening of the show.	0 1 2 3 4 5

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