1.

Teachers tend to devote very little class time to composition. (Orman, 2002; Schmidt, Baker, Hayes, & Kwan, 2006)

2.

Composition may not be a priority for many teachers. (Kirkland, 1996; Peddell, 2005; Strand, 2006)

3.

PURPOSE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To investigate teachers’ beliefs about compositional experiences in the elementary music classroom.

1) How do elementary general music teachers define composition?
2) Why do some elementary general music teachers believe that engaging students in compositional experiences is valuable?
3) What factors, either positive or negative, motivate elementary general music teachers to engage (or not engage) their students in compositional experiences?
4) What relationships exist between teachers’ beliefs about the importance of composition, the extent to which they currently include composition in the classroom, and their interest in incorporating composition into future classes?

4.

SURVEY TOOL

• Online only
• Researcher-developed
• Combination of forced-choice and open-ended responses
• Please describe the characteristics of music composition. (e.g., What is composition? What does it entail?)
• How important is it for elementary general music students to engage in composition?
• Why do you feel composition is or isn’t important for elementary music students?
• On average, how frequently do you incorporate composition activities in your Kindergarten classes? In your Grade 1 classes? Grade 2 classes? Grade 3 classes? Grade 4 classes? Grade 5 classes?
• What influences your decision to NOT incorporate composition in elementary general music? (OR what influences you to not incorporate composition more frequently?)
• How interested are you in incorporating composition into future elementary general music classes?

SURVEY SAMPLE
• Solicited from membership in state music education organizations and district websites
• 245 respondents (26% response rate)
• 22 were not eligible; 47 were incomplete.
• Remaining sample = 176

DEFINITIONS OF COMPOSITION

DEFINITIONS
IMPORTANCE/USE/VALUE
IMPEDIMENTS
DEFINITIONS OF COMPOSITION

CREATING
• “The creating of original music.”
• “Creation of musical thought.”
• “Creative process.”

EXPRESSION/COMMUNICATION
• “Intentionally ordering sounds in a way to convey ideas and/or feelings.”
• “Creating using a palette of sounds and silence, in order to Express your self.”

REPLICATION
• “Is when you create something and are able to re-create/play/sing it again and again.”
• “Can be replicated, either from written record or memorized recall.”

ROLE/PRESENCE OF NOTATION?
• “Is the written form of communication from one musician to another.”
• “Is the process of notating musical ideas.”
• “Should be written in some form.”
• “Whether it is composed by ear, or written.”
• “For some, this may entail writing notes down onto a staff. . . For others, composition may be strictly aural.”
• “One does not need to know notation in order to compose.”

COMPLEXITY?
• “Is the process of coming up with a unique musical idea and building upon that idea to create a whole musical piece.”
• “Is the process of writing a complete piece of music. It involves rhythm, melody, chords, tempo, dynamics, and occasionally lyrics.”
• “Can be as simple as creating an interesting rhythm or melody or as complex as creating a piece for several singers or instruments.”
• “Is the process of creating something new musically, whether it be a simple ostinato pattern, or a lengthy complex piece.”

IMPORTANCE/USE/VALUE OF COMPOSITION
**IMPORTANCE OF COMPOSITION**

“How important is it for elementary general music students to engage in composition?”

- Very, 40%
- Somewhat, 18%
- A little, 5%
- Not at all, 1%

**USE OF COMPOSITION**

“Do you currently incorporate composition into your elementary music classes?”

- Yes, 84%
- No, 16%

Moderate positive correlation ($r = .379$, $p < .01$) between participants’ beliefs about the importance of composition in elementary general music and whether they currently incorporate composition.

**IMPORTANCE/USE OF COMPOSITION**

“Do you currently incorporate composition into your elementary music classes?”

- Yes, 84%
- No, 16%

**USE OF COMPOSITION**

- Kindergarten (n = 121): 41.0%
- Grade 1 (n = 125): 60.0%
- Grade 2 (n = 117): 78.6%
- Grade 3 (n = 107): 88.8%
- Grade 4 (n = 103): 90.3%
- Grade 5 (n = 88): 89.8%
Moderate positive correlations ($r = .379-.487$) between participants’ beliefs about the importance of composition and frequency incorporating composition for each grade level except grade 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Never (%)</th>
<th>Once per year (%)</th>
<th>2–3 times per year (%)</th>
<th>Once per month (%)</th>
<th>Once per week (%)</th>
<th>Almost every class (%)</th>
<th>Unsure (%)</th>
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<td>3.3</td>
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</table>

Strong positive correlation ($r = .780$, $p < .01$) between beliefs about the importance of composition in level of interest in incorporating composition into future classes.
**VALUE OF COMPOSITION**

- Understanding
- Ownership
- Creativity
- Self-expression

**UNDERSTANDING**

- Developing knowledge
  - "In order for students to fully understand music they listen to, they must understand how it is put together."
- Application/synthesis
  - "When students are given the opportunity to compose, they apply that knowledge and learn how to really use it."
- Assessment
  - "Allows [the] teacher a window into their students’ musical minds and a way to see what musical knowledge their students have mastered and internalized."

**OWNERSHIP**

- "Teaches kids that they can also be music inventors, that they don’t always have to perform what someone else has already done."
- "Students need to be aware that they have the power to create music."
- "Kids usually love it because they get to [make] ‘their own’ music."

**CREATIVITY**

- "Every other subject regurgitates facts and applies formulas. Music [composition] is one of the few areas where we can create."
- "I think there are many students whose creativity is boundless and it would be a shame to hold them back because our own agenda dictates that they sing, dance, and perform."
VALUE OF COMPOSITION

SELF-EXPRESSION

- “[Is] a practice in learning to communicate through music.”
- “Gives students a chance to ‘directly’ express who they are with sound, something that is extremely valuable, something that is often times missing in school music programs.”

IMPEDIMENTS TO COMPOSITION

TIME
- Contact Time
  - “Budget cuts to the music program in which some classes have been reduced to once a week.”
  - “If I had more time with my students I would like to incorporate composition more.”

- Time Required
  - “Composition is time consuming.”
  - “It tends to take up more class time than I feel is appropriate.”

LOGISTICS
- Class Size
  - “There is only one of me and there are 25 students who need my help.”

- Lack of Resources
  - “If I had more instruments ... that my students could use to make a composition, it would be easier for the entire class to participate in a composition assignment.”
  - “I travel to 3 schools, do not have my own room, teach ala cart [sic].”
IMPLICATIONS

- Teachers’ conceptions of composition likely influence whether, when, and/or how they teach it.
- Teachers who don’t believe composition is important are less likely to teach it.
- Broadening teachers’ conceptions of composition may help alleviate perceived impediments.