Fostering Composer Voice in Tertiary Teaching of Contemporary Music Composition

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Abstract

The aspiring composer's development is commonly described using the metaphor of finding one's own composer voice. A central goal for teaching composition in higher music education is to guide students toward finding such a voice—toward personal expression and creativity. In order to shed light on the teaching strategies associated with this goal, we analyzed composition teachers' views on their students' typical problems and how they deal with them. We conducted semistructured interviews with higher education composition teachers in Germany and Sweden. By means of thematic analysis, we identified two recurring problem situations. First, students might be insecure about what they want to achieve musically. To address this issue, teachers reported engaging students in self-reflection regarding their aesthetic preferences or specific compositional decisions. Second, students' work might not seem original enough. Teachers reported addressing this problem by providing new perspectives on students' music, for example, by prompting students to engage with their materials, acquire new experiences, or consider different musical parameters. Despite an ideal of creative freedom, the teachers thus retain authority over the aesthetic learning process by requiring adherence to a second ideal—that of originality. The findings could strengthen pedagogical practitioners' efforts to foster the creativity of young composers.

Keywords

composers, individual supervision, musical creativity, music composition, one-to-one teaching

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Introduction

Most higher education programs in the arts involve fostering students' technical skills as well as promoting their individual artistic creativity. This is exemplified by a model of teaching musical composition derived from the composition-pedagogical literature by Lupton and Bruce (2010). The first two of the four themes in their model, "learning from the masters" and "mastery of techniques," deal with technical knowledge and skills, whereas the last two, "exploring ideas" and "developing voice," deal with personal expression and creativity. According to Lupton and Bruce, the last theme—developing voice—is the least developed in terms of suggesting specific teaching strategies. They assumed that learning composition based on the previous themes will eventually lead to finding one's own voice and that when this is about to happen, "the role of the teacher recedes, with the emphasis on giving the student freedom to find their own creative impetus resulting in a personal style and individual expression" (Lupton & Bruce, 2010, p. 276). In our present study, we addressed the role of higher education composition teachers in fostering their students' individual expression and creativity. Rather than merely stepping aside, which specific teaching strategies do these teachers use to support their students in "finding their own voices"?

The Pedagogical Separation of Technical Craft and Personal Creativity

The emphasis on personal expression and creativity in teaching composition is related to what the sociologist Reckwitz (2012) called the "creativity dispositive" of our contemporary society—a general expectation to produce novelty. As Reckwitz explained, such an expectation structure is the result of a broad historical shift in which aesthetic views have spread from the arts to other societal areas. Yet expectations regarding individual creativity also remain in flux within the artistic domains themselves. For our present purposes, it is relevant to note how Western discourse concerning the nature of compositional work consists of several sedimented layers of ideals, including those of steady craftsmanship (à la J. S. Bach), romantic notions of an original genius (on the model of Beethoven), and conceptions about the composer as a researcher (e.g., Stockhausen, Xenakis). Arguably, such disparate ideals have not simply superseded one another but, rather, have left their traces in contemporary views, as seen, for instance, in Lupton and Bruce's (2010) model. The common pedagogical metaphor of a composer voice that should be found or developed (e.g., Beck, 2001; Collens & Creech, 2016; Devaney, 2022; Lupton & Bruce, 2010; Mateos-Moreno, 2011; Reese, 2003; Young & Roens, 2022) might be understood as a convenient shorthand for referring to this rich tapestry of cultural ideals and expectations while avoiding outmoded notions such as that of a so-called creative genius.

It would, of course, be possible to suggest more specific ways to understand the voice metaphor, as in Stauffer's (2003) distinction between young composers' identity and their voice. In Stauffer's view, identity is a matter of the consistent, unique musical gestures and structures that allow informed listeners to associate a work with its composer. The composer's voice, instead, has to do with the unique aspects of

expression and meaning embodied in the compositions (Stauffer, 2003). The obvious question would be whether and how such a distinction is tenable in a pedagogical context. For example, it may not be possible to address compositional expression and meaning independently of addressing the technical aspects of creating musical structures. Lupton and Bruce's (2010) model, in which "developing voice...includes the previous three themes" (p. 276), suggests a dependence of personal expression and creativity on the technical craft of composition.

The pedagogical literature on musical composition has been dominated by views of composition as a technical craft. Following the rationalizations of compositional pedagogy in the Age of Enlightenment (see Lester, 1992), innumerable composers and theorists have codified their ideas concerning the mastery of musical structure in manuals of harmony, counterpoint, musical form, meter, and instrumentation. In this tradition, composing appears as the artistically sensitive application of common principles—in a word, as a craft. Twentieth-century pedagogies of compositional craft include such prominent examples as Hindemith's (1937) derivation of composition from principles regarding intervallic relationships and Schoenberg's (1967) analytical approach to organizing the formal units of a composition. These are powerful and important traditions that continue to inspire the education of composers. A recent composition textbook by Belkin (2018) still worked progressively through musical forms up until the sonata form, as in Schoenberg's treatise, on the principle that "musical composition is best seen as a craft, whose principles can be explained and learned" (p. xv).

Craft-based conceptions of composition pedagogy that emphasize rules or principles are not necessarily antithetical to fostering the students' individual creativity and expression. For example, the approach of the influential composition teacher Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979) was firmly anchored in a craft-based conception that included a strong focus on musicianship skills and traditional theoretical subjects such as harmony and counterpoint (see Monsaingeon, 1980). Yet when it came to supervising her students' own creative work in composition, Boulanger emphasized their will, trying to understand who the students were and getting them to express what they wanted (Monsaingeon, 1980). One composition student described studying with Boulanger as involving a cyclical process of composing–critiquing–revising, a "systematic exhausting of all the possibilities within a given musical context" (Ward-Steinman, 2011, p. 14). Teaching students not to be too easily satisfied with their work, Boulanger "would say, 'Here it is not *You*,' and she would be right" (Ward-Steinman, 2011, p. 16).

A central issue is how to address both technical skills and personal creativity in higher education composition pedagogy. In the course of the 20th century, the erosion of a common tonal language seems to have led to an increasing pedagogical separation between the technical craft and the free creative work of the composer. In East Germany, for example, composers first learned their technical craft at conservatoires (*Musikhochschulen*) but could then continue their studies by attending individual master classes with a member of the *Akademie der Künste* with the goal at this stage being the "forming of the Personality" rather than the transmission of the craft (Trebesius, 2012, p. 231).

Based on a review of composer-teachers' views, Mateos-Moreno (2011) supported the stance that the teaching of contemporary composition in recent decades has moved away from music-theoretically driven, rule-based approaches, stating "*music theory* relates to composer's traditional training exercises, while *composing* relates to something else that may emerge through one-to-one tuition" (p. 414). In the author's view, contemporary composition has thus shifted from the traditional mastery of a fine art to an obsession with "finding one's own voice" (Mateos-Moreno, 2011, p. 415). In Mateos-Moreno's own empirical study, all six of the British composer-teachers that were interviewed agreed on the importance of fostering individuality in composition students. Indeed, it also appeared that the teachers were less interested in pursuing the avant-garde or the new as such and more deeply invested in fostering the individual and the personal in their students (Mateos-Moreno, 2011).

The gradual separation between technical skills and personal expression and creativity has left its mark on contemporary study programs, which often involve separate courses focusing on each of these aspects. Composition courses that focus on individual creative work typically involve long-term individual supervision, thus following the master-apprentice tradition in instrumental teaching (e.g., Burwell, 2016; Creech & Gaunt, 2012; Daniel & Parkes, 2017; Schön, 1987) in which the master teacher "steers the development of the [student's] entire personality" (Manturzewska, 1990, p. 134). This stresses the need to clarify specific teaching strategies associated with these courses. Accordingly, we inquired into composition teachers' ideas on how to promote students' personal expression and creativity in these long-term, individual supervision courses.

Pedagogical Approaches on Fostering Personal Expression and Creativity

Some composition teachers may feel that "the creative aspect of composing cannot be taught" (Beck, 2001, p. 55). This is certainly true at least in the trivial sense that highly detailed instructions by the teacher would be incompatible with calling the result the student's individual creative expression. According to Lupton and Bruce (2010), "allowing creativity to emerge" thus requires a "'hands-off' approach" in which "the teacher's intention is not to impose their own views or be prescriptive" (p. 276). But of course, this also depends on the students' prior skills and independence. In Reese's (2003) composition-pedagogical work with children, "help[ing] students find their voice" was contrasted with "teach[ing] and tell[ing]" (p. 213). The author suggested a continuum of possible teacher responses from the least directive to the most directive. The teacher's task, in Reese's view, was to observe and find the right approach along such a continuum based on the needs of each student in a given situation. On a tertiary level, the need for directiveness might often be smaller. For instance, a Swedish study of higher education composition students' creative processes revealed that students were given a great deal of freedom to develop their own highly personalized scaffolding ideas and structures to guide their own work (Hagerman, 2016).

There might also be psychological reasons for teachers' reluctance to intervene in their students' creative processes. The unique, personal aspects that a teacher might

want to encourage in a student might also be the most difficult to criticize. In a study of the artistic processes of contemporary composers, Zembylas and Niederauer (2018) found that their professional composer participants were generally open to feedback from performers on their works during rehearsals but tended to be critical of receiving feedback from other composers, sometimes explicitly rejecting such feedback. Such attitudes may also be reflected in the ways in which composers teach composition to others. In a study of composers' beliefs and pedagogical work with children, Weber (2021) found a "taboo of interference" in how composers tended to limit their feedback to technical aspects, avoid using more active guidance strategies, and keep their aesthetic judgments of children's compositions to themselves. These examples suggest that guiding the most personal side of creative work can be experienced as intrusive, counteracting the teacher's efforts to support the student's self-confidence.

In a recent music composition textbook, noting the ideal of "discovering [one's] artistic voice," Young and Roens (2022) suggested that "the creator often feels strongly about the notes on the page" and that student-teacher discussions thus "require a certain amount of sensitivity and diplomacy" (pp. 89–90). Indeed, the delicacy of dealing with the most personal aspects of musical expression is not unique to music composition. It has been suggested that the one-to-one teaching relationship in higher music education may generally share similarities with a psychotherapeutic relationship. This involves a "focus on the development of the student's/client's capacities including their own unique authentic voice" (Collens & Creech, 2016, p. 152).

In contrast to these rather passive approaches, Burnard and Younker (2002) suggested some more active measures. In order to foster students' individual expression and creativity, composition teachers should try to develop an understanding of students' creative processes, engage students in self-reflection about their developments, and design assignments to meet students' individual needs. In interviews with heads of composition at British music conservatoires, Devaney (2022) identified three central pedagogical goals shared by participants. First, teachers aimed to encourage independence in their composition students. Thus, they discredited the traditional teacher-led, master-apprentice model of teaching in favor of more dialogic, collaborative problem-solving approaches. Second, the teachers aimed to help their students develop their unique compositional voices rather than closely copying the musical styles of other composers—an approach that was seen as requiring some risk-taking. Third, by providing positive feedback, teachers wanted to build students' confidence in their own work.

In summary, the motivation for the present study was based on two considerations. First, because composition teachers apparently intend to grant students creative freedom and exercise caution in their criticism of students' personal works, they need to decide when to intervene with more active guidance. Second, because there appear to be several kinds of active measures, such as engaging students in risk-taking or self-reflection, teachers need to decide how to intervene in a given situation. To investigate these issues, we reinterpreted our preliminary research question (How do higher education composition teachers support students in finding their own voices?) in terms of a more specific one: When and how do teachers deem it appropriate to intervene with

more active guidance? We approached this question through semistructured interviews with eight teachers of composition from six higher education institutions in Germany and Sweden. We analyzed which recurring student problems teachers reported, how they related these problems to personal creativity, and how they reported addressing them in their teaching. The findings provided us with a better understanding of individualized composition teaching that sensibly addresses students' individual work while maintaining their creative freedom.

Method

Participants

As participants, we wanted to involve professional teachers of musical composition who teach at the bachelor level. To this end, we first informally surveyed the program requirements of undergraduate composition programs in music colleges in Germany and Sweden. It turned out that the majority of composition programs included a cycle of main composition courses that lasted for the entire duration of the study program and focused mainly on one-to-one supervision of the students' own artistic work. We selected three such composition programs in Germany and three in Sweden that had a fairly similar structure of long-term individual supervision at the bachelor level.

After inquiring from the colleges which teachers were responsible for these courses, we contacted these teachers by e-mail asking them to participate. In both countries, our initial inquiries at one college suggested two composition teachers; in these cases, we decided to contact both of the teachers. All of the teachers agreed to participate, so the resulting sample consisted of eight teachers from six different music colleges. Seven of the teachers were male, and one was female. The teachers were all professors or lecturers of composition in their respective departments. At the point of the interview (in summer/autumn 2019), participants were between 52 and 65 years old and had between 10 and 32 years of teaching experience with an average of 20 years. Because a preliminary analysis did not reveal any systematic differences between Germany and Sweden, we did not consider the nationalities of the participants in the further analysis. In the following sections, we refer to the teachers by the abbreviations T1 through T8.

Interviews

The data were collected through individual, semistructured interviews. Using an interview guide that we first developed in German and then translated into Swedish, the first author conducted the German interviews in German, and the second author conducted the Swedish interviews in Swedish. In order to avoid teachers merely reporting culturally shaped opinions about composition teaching in general, we asked open-ended questions about students and activities in the lessons. Most importantly, we asked teachers about students' typical problems and how they dealt with them. We hoped this format would encourage answers related to situations that required teacher

intervention. In addition, we asked about typical lessons, changes in activities over the course of the program, students' typical developments, and the teachers' personal relationships to students (find the full interview guide in the Appendix). In order to capture the expert teachers' individual approaches to teaching composition, we used these questions as initial prompts, allowing the teachers to digress to aspects that they considered important. We also asked unstructured follow-up questions in order to encourage participants to provide concrete examples of their teaching.

Prior to the interviews, the teachers were informed that their statements would be reported anonymously and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All teachers provided informed consent. The interviews lasted between 53 and 77 minutes and were audio-recorded. Seven interviews were conducted in person at the respective institution, and the interview with T4 was conducted by telephone due to the long distance between the interviewer and the participant. Procedures in this study were in accordance with American Psychological Association's (2017) *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* and the data privacy regulations of the respective country.

Analysis

The analyses were mainly conducted by the first author, an early career scientist with background in educational psychology and cognitive sciences. Each analysis step was discussed in-depth with the second author, a professor of music education with a PhD in musicology. The first author speaks German and English fluently and understands some Swedish. The second author is capable of all three languages.

We transcribed the interviews verbatim. To familiarize ourselves with the content, we each read the transcripts of the interviews conducted by the other author. As a first step in the analysis, we created a spreadsheet in which the answers to the interview questions and other recurring topics that we considered potentially relevant (e.g., teachers' goals, the role of group lessons, students' writing tools) were listed separately for each participant. Each cell in the spreadsheet contained both a quote in the respective language (German or Swedish) concerning this topic and a brief summary of the content of that quote in English. The purpose of the spreadsheet was not to cover the whole material but, rather, to reduce complexity and get an overview of the most important and potentially interesting aspects. It enabled us to check the occurrence of specific topics of interest whenever relevant to the further analytical process.

In a second step, we conducted a focused thematic analysis (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). To this end, we read all interview transcripts and coded them for problems in students' compositional processes that were reported by the participants. In the first round of coding, a set of reported problems was identified, and a second round of coding was used to find those problems that participants deemed relevant for students' individual expression and creativity. We found two such problems and decided to choose them as our themes. In the third step of the analysis, individual interventions by which teachers reported to address these problem situations were identified and categorized. This involved a third round of coding the transcripts for the interventions

that were reported in the context of the themes. Throughout the coding process, we paid attention to current ideas on fostering personal creativity in composition teaching, such as engaging students in self-reflection, fostering students' self-confidence, and granting students creative freedom. Besides this theory-driven approach, we were also open to the occurrence of new ideas.

Findings

In the interviews, all eight teachers emphasized the importance of students finding their "individual, personal expression" (T7); "own creativity" (T5); or "inner voice" (T3) during their studies. Although the notion of "finding one's voice" did not appear in our interview questions, many of our participants used this specific term to describe the central goal of their composition programs (T2, T3, T4, T8). As T4 stated: "If we want to generalize somehow, . . . the focus on finding one's own voice . . . is really the most important thing." According to T8, the "enormous journey" that students make during their studies is "not primarily about compositional technique or virtuosity, but it has to do with [finding] a personal voice." Teachers also mentioned other goals, such as fostering students' professionalization (T3, T4), integrating them into the music scene (T7), improving their efficiency in composing (T4), or engaging them in a social and political contextualization of their music (T8). In our interpretation, however, none of these goals were as ubiquitous as the goal of fostering students' personal expression and creativity.

   In accordance with these ideals, the teachers placed the students and their music at the center of their teaching. T2 noted that "the kind of teaching or conversation or work we do is very, very much oriented to the individual that is sitting in front of me." In the words of T1, it "would actually be my job to help them do what they want. That would probably be the most important thing." As a consequence of the focus on students and their ideas, teachers reported to restrict their own influence. As T1 stated: "Of course, I also have a certain attitude, and I would be lying if I said I didn't have it. But I don't want to enforce it." Similarly, in the course of being a composition teacher, T8 mentioned to have learned

> to hold back . . . very concrete ideas that I myself have about how something could be, in order to give the student as much room as possible to come to a conclusion. . . . It's important that it's not my music but it's their music, and . . . somehow they have to go through that purgatory—get through it themselves.

   However, some statements showed that there were also limits in the intention to help students with what they want to do: "It's not always about the student's interests. . . . I will also challenge them" (T6). T1 reported the case of a student who wanted to use large logical structures in his works but just was not very talented in applying them. T1 recommended this student to go a different way, which he did and completed his bachelor's degree successfully. "And then he switched back again after the lessons, after his studies. And the results are . . . regrettable." T1 continued that there "was

actually a difference between what I thought was in his talent…and what he wanted but couldn't actually do technically."

As a further consequence of this focus on the students, teachers cannot rely on a standardized curriculum, as implied by T6: "I don't have any textbooks, I don't have any literature.…The only thing we work with here is what [students] bring to class." Therefore, our participants stated that they have to adapt their teaching to the students' various influences and approaches. T6, for example, mentioned having to adapt to some students' preferences for neoromantic tonality or extramusical narratives: "I myself have another relation to music, but I have to relate to their way of thinking about music. It is very important for a pedagogue: Otherwise, we cannot meet at all." Similarly, T1 reported being open to students' rap and metal influences and trying to help them find bridges between these genres and their own written compositions.

Some participants considered this individuality of the teaching to be a recent development. T7 recalled that when their composition program began in the 1980s, students were asked to write pastiches: "One had to write in Beethoven style, and a string quartet in sonata form." The teacher continued, however, that those exercises "felt a bit obsolete, and now we have a more open attitude" (T7). As a student, T1 had been required to "orchestrate the six little piano pieces in [Schoenberg's] Opus 19. Everybody had to do that.…[As a teacher] I don't do that.…[Exercises] are always tailored to the person."

Although these findings are consistent with the notions of individualized teaching (e.g., Burnard & Younker, 2002) and granting students creative freedom (e.g., Hagerman, 2016; Lupton & Bruce, 2010), they raise a question: Which problems require the teachers to intervene, and how? Our participants reported numerous student problems, such as competition among students (T4), refusal to learn something new (T5), failures in time management (T8), mental health issues (T3), and difficulties with inner hearing (T1) or with the verbal communication of musical ideas (T2). More technical compositional problems included using extended instrumental techniques (T1), creating convincing transitions between sections (T6), and overloading pieces with content (T6). Besides all this, there were two problems that were both most commonly mentioned and most often associated with the development of personal, individual creativity. First, the teachers reported that students might not know what they want. Second, the students were not always found to live up to the teachers' expectations of originality. In the following sections, we describe the teachers' views concerning these problems and their pedagogical strategies for dealing with them.

Self-Reflection as a Means to Help Students Find Out What They Want

The idea that students do not know what they want was prevalent among respondents. For instance, "The common [issue among students] is the search for what one actually wants to tell musically" (T1). Regarding students' intentions, T6 stated that "the students don't know that either themselves. They only know that there is something that they don't have that it is possible to find." Likewise, T2 noted, "It is not like everyone

always knows right away what they want, or what the piece wants and so on, and what's good or how to get ahead. You have to find that out together."

Although the notion of not knowing what one wants sometimes remained rather vague, at other times, it was explicitly linked to students' feelings of insecurity concerning the music that they composed: Some students "don't trust any note they write down" (T1). Sensing such insecurity made the teachers cautious in their criticism of students' work:

> Most often I try not to over-criticize what they have done; rather, I try to see the possibilities for either changing something or for getting ahead. This is because in my experience, if I harshly criticize their first attempts, they can get completely stuck. (T5)

Similarly, T3 claimed, "I wait for a very long time before I intervene. I say: 'Yes, keep it up'... because I can destroy so much [by intervening too early]." T7 described how the time in the composition course was divided between group sessions and individual supervision but that the students' own pieces were only addressed in the latter "as students can sometimes be sensitive to being criticized in front of others." Similarly, T3 implied that students' own music was something intimate and therefore only discussed in individual supervision.

In addition to insecurity, not knowing what one wants might result from students' lack of awareness of how they are shaped by their cultural and educational backgrounds:

> Does one actually swim along the current with what one has been taught..., or does one strive for something different?... Not everyone is well-behaved and does what they are told. Many people are anarchic in a beautiful way and don't even know it. That is, they don't really know yet what they are protesting against, what they want to get out of to make their own voice sing. And it indeed is a part of teaching composition to show them that. (T2)

Moreover, one teacher reported that students who come from backgrounds with restricted access to music might be overwhelmed by the new input in the study program. As a consequence, students might "want too much" (T1), that is, what they want might lack focus.

In general, students not knowing what they want was described as a critical situation requiring teachers' intervention. Such intervention almost always seemed to take the form of engaging students in self-reflection. For instance, asking students about certain details of their music "teases out their self-articulation, and through the act of having them talk about themselves, their own intentions and aims, you strengthen [the intentions], presenting these to the composer as in a mirror" (T4). The teacher may simply begin by asking the students "to describe their aesthetic ideas" (T5) or ideals. According to T8, "It is always the student who gets to begin and describe... what kind of desires and ideas there are, or whatever—dreams, sources of inspiration." The teacher's role, then, may be to ask questions or make suggestions about how the student's "idea could be opened up to span even more things" (T8). Students' aesthetic

goals could also be discussed in the context of standardized exercises. In T7's teaching, students always write short clarinet and choir pieces in the first semester, but apart from the instrumentation, they "may themselves create . . . their stylistic and aesthetic platform they can stand on, and then we take this as a topic for discussion."

However, our participants reported that these personal topics—aims, desires, dreams—require a kind of trust and personal connection that could not be reached with all students. Using an English quote from a Paul Newman movie, T3 stated that "some men you just can't reach." Likewise, T4 reported that "sometimes [the trust between teacher and student] does not develop, that also happens. . . . And from my side, . . . you respect what the student comes up with and wants to come up with. Some people are incredibly reserved." According to T4, this forces the teaching to be constrained to a technical level.

Besides encouraging the students to build on their aesthetic ideals, the teacher might also seek to stimulate growth and change in such general conceptions. For instance, one might prompt students to engage productively with their aversions and thereby reflect on their potentially unrecognized aesthetic restrictions:

> I think I once helped a composer a great deal by asking her "What is the thing you would least like to do in your piece? What do you hate the most in a string quartet?" Then she said, "Okay, what I hate the most is scratching the strings with the bow." So I said, "All right, you seem to have an intimate relationship with such scratching. Try writing a movement [in a work] that consists only of scratching." And she loved it. So I think this massively broadened her perspective. That's such a simple example. But it worked. . . .

> We have an "aesthetic police" within us. And the aesthetic police, like every police force, has different departments. There is the normal one . . . but there is also the secret police. First of all, [this secret police] doesn't reveal itself, and secondly, it doesn't say what its rules are. And to detect the aesthetic secret police is a lot of work, but it exists in us, we all have it. And [to detect the aesthetic secret police] is a beautiful thing, because then I realize what I am not allowed to do, what's forbidden for me, or why I always do this. And then, when you realize that, you don't always have to obey the police. (T2)

The teacher can thus help to liberate the students in their compositional work by challenging them to reflect on otherwise unrecognized norms. However, most of our participants seemed to prefer linking self-reflection to the compositional writing itself. For T6, teaching takes place primarily through discussion but always in relation to the "practical work" of composition: "Without the practical work, it is impossible for me to discuss, and we are stuck." This is because "the character of the subject [i.e., composition] is that you don't learn anything if you don't write: It is in the writing that knowledge is manifested and, so to speak, deepened." Indeed, "knowledge comes into being in the writing itself" (T6).

Our participants implied that the most common way to engage students in self-reflection is to discuss their work in progress with a written score at hand. T7 reported asking students about their ideas, intentions, and messages in a particular composition and about how they expect or intend the piece to be perceived. T5 stressed the

importance of challenging young composers to "learn how to communicate their music in words" and questioning students about their writing: "What do you mean by this? How should I play it?" (T5). Likewise, T6 felt it was important for students to be aware of their compositional decisions: "Knowledge is developed just simply by having solved [problems]…and recognizing different choices and decisions that one makes." With more advanced students, T6 reported to "problematize their strategies" with respect to particular compositional decisions. Approaching composition as problem-solving, the teacher might also suggest working on and reflecting on alternative solutions: "Try to make three different variants of this short passage. They should represent different strategies of solving [the problem]. Then, we compare the different strategies" (T6). Similarly, fruitful discussions might also be based on students' unsuccessful attempts: "I always try to get them to bring their failed sketches.…It's a very effective way for me to help them. To sort of clarify [what they] want to do" (T6).

In the context of a 3-year composition program, self-reflection may also take on a formative role when it occurs after the students have already finished particular compositions and had them performed. T7 described how each student concert is followed by a session in which the pieces are listened to repeatedly and the teacher asks the students "what they themselves think about their pieces—advantages, disadvantages, what are the strengths and weaknesses.…And this feels very creative" (T7).

Importantly, the quest of finding out what one wants was not described as something that is eventually completed. Rather, it was described as an ongoing task:

> And now, after graduation, you're not supposed to think that you are a composer already, because composition education is not just like…"Okay, now you have got your degree and now you can do this." That's not the case. For us [composers], unfortunately, it's also life-long learning. That means we have to learn how to go on. And that means we also have to doubt throughout our lives. And we have to ask ourselves again and again: "Am I on the right path? Do I really want this? Is this the right thing?" (T2)

Continuous development was described as an inherent requirement of being an artist. As T5 put it, "To develop artistically is really not to stand still, [it is] to dare to change what one previously has thought out.…If you think that you are perfect, it will rarely be good music." Thus, supporting students' "creative self-dependence is…the main objective" (T4). This is achieved not by criticizing students but by providing them with "tools of thinking":

> Criticism is often not the right thing to do. Actually, it's more about giving suggestions so that…students themselves get the tools of thinking that enable them to work independently. Actually, [knowing these tools] is also the goal for the time after graduation. Because I can criticize very well and say "You have to do that, that's right and that's wrong," but if I don't give [the students] the tools of thinking to work with later, then the moment I'm gone, everything is gone. (T2)

In conclusion, a commonly recognized problem situation was that students might not know what they want. Students might be insecure about their music, unaware of

their cultural background and aesthetic position, or unfocused in their intentions. Teachers reported reacting to such problems by engaging students in self-reflection concerning their aesthetic preferences and norms or by asking questions concerning their specific musical pieces. Indeed, aesthetic self-reflection was often described as being intertwined with compositional work: It could be based on written scores, and it could form the basis for further compositional activities. The teachers hoped that an internalization of a self-reflective attitude would help equip students with the tools for continuous artistic development.

Providing New Perspectives as a Means to Foster Students' Originality

Our participants described the finding of one's voice to be associated with achieving originality. T3 claimed that "one first has to know the inner voice, separate it from what is just somehow attached to it, all the routines, clichés and imitations, . . . and this is the case for everybody." Some statements allow us to conceptualize this vague notion of originality in greater detail. First of all, lack of originality might involve copying the teacher: "The worst thing, I usually think, is if the students start making music that you make yourself. . . . I don't want them to copy me, I want them to find themselves in some way based on what they're doing" (T6). Likewise, T5 stated to be "not the kind of person who thinks that my music is the only right one and that they just have to imitate me or something. That would be terrible, I think."

Second, the lack of originality might, of course, appear as an excessive allegiance to some culturally available compositional models. Students may sometimes be "restricted in what they want to do—out of convenience or some kind of fanaticism about a given composer" (T7), or they may be fixated on certain musical forms, such as the sonata form (T5). Therefore, as T3 suggested, "If a student comes and I see that this composer is very much influenced by Stravinsky or by Ligeti or whatever . . . you have to shake them a bit, not physically, but so that they open up."

In our analysis, such situations were seen as another critical reason for teacher intervention. Due to their experience, teachers believed that they were able to recognize if the students' works were "sufficiently made their own" or whether they were "simply taken off the shelf" (T3). In the latter case, it seems that the teachers often simply wanted to get students to attend to their own music more closely. According to our participants, achieving originality requires paying attention and listening to details rather than relying uncritically on previous stylistic models:

> I can give an example of a student who is very nimble. This person writes unbelievable amounts, very fast, getting it out of [himself/herself]. . . . [She/he] is very, very creative, but in a way that just then did not work so well in the concerts. After the first year, I thought . . . that this person confronts me with a new problem: How would I get this person to understand that [she/he] has to take it easy with [her/his] creativity a bit—that is, start to listen. . . . We had a discussion after the first year where I said: "No, you cannot use all these Classical and Baroque styles. . . . The following semester, you are going to write a solo piece, and you are going to listen to each and every note." (T5)

Listening, in this sense, can also mean recognizing the potential in one's material and allowing oneself more patience in developing it. According to T6, students should learn to let "the box grow, instead of just adding new boxes" (T6). In the same vein, T7 spoke warmly about expanding on those composed moments that felt most personal, recalling a suggestion from the Danish composer Per Nørgård:

> [He said to me:] "I will give you a good piece of advice. Try sometimes to write something from the heart—three, four bars, not more—and then build the whole piece from this as a point of departure, as a basis." And [Nørgård] meant that this is an exercise in discipline and in holding back. . . . Oftentimes the students have so much there: It is dynamics and it is several voices speaking to each other's mouths, and there is no stylistic direction, but it is just thick and very much. And that is when I tend to use this simplification idea, [saying]: "This is just too much. You have to find . . . a place where you set the wedge and make room for what you have there. You will get a 10-minute piece from it." . . . For many students, this clears the way for new thinking. But it has to be repeated many times. (T7)

Teachers reported another way to encourage students to focus on their work and add a personal touch, namely, asking them to engage in the composition process in a more embodied manner. Instead of always writing their scores on a notation program, T8 sometimes encourages them to write with pen and paper, believing that this contributes to the quality of the writing: "It is simply the calligraphic, the movement itself [that makes a difference]. It is a kind of embodied knowledge that one activates by actually using the body for something else than just pushing a button." Likewise, T6 reported asking students to write by hand because they are "very controlled by the possibilities of the notation programs" and "need to be opened up."

When teachers perceived a lack of originality in their students, another typical approach appeared to be to simply provide them with new experiences, thereby "showing them what else one could want in this context" (T1). As T4 put it, "For someone who has no experience, you have to make that experience possible somehow."

> When a person writes very, very tonally, very simple minimalism, then perhaps I think this person should challenge [himself or herself], pursue other styles, and dare to try out other things. I do not want to control them, but I want them to challenge themselves. (T5)

Asking students to listen to other composers was described as a central way of providing students with new experiences: "Your assignment is to [listen to a chosen composer] and to present something based on your listening: In what ways could elements from that music be interesting for you to be inspired by?" (T8). Likewise, T2 noted that a broad knowledge of compositional traditions helps to avoid an intuitive, and thus often imitative, approach to composing. But even extramusical experiences might be helpful. As implied by T3, these experiences might be found in art, theater, dance, literature, or discussing political issues. Indeed, T2 recalled once "send[ing] one student to a botanical garden . . . and that helped her."

The teacher's challenge, then, is to be able to "soften [the students'] view on their own music, but also to offer perspectives, . . . trying to set their philosophical brain into

motion" (T5). The teacher needs to "constantly offer a kind of push ahead—or a world of ideas about how they could develop their piece" (T5). The examples that T5 gave of this were tangible suggestions for shifting the focus to other musical parameters in particular problem situations. For instance, if the student is fixated on thinking about harmony, the teacher might suggest hearing the piece in terms of timbre, focusing on instrumentation, setting the music to a different rhythm, changing the tempo of the music, or drawing a form schema for it. This way, "One is constantly trying to give input instead of getting stuck with the problem" (T5).

The strategy of shifting focus between musical parameters was indeed common in teachers' statements. For instance, T6 suggested that the student might get stuck because of "not using the rhythmic parameter at all," and the teacher might help by simply pointing that out. Similarly, T7 "talks a lot about musical parameters" to the students, for example, asking them to locate "a harmonic climax [in their piece]—not a dynamic or a registral one, but just harmonic tension." Subsequently, the teacher might ask students to address the musical form in their pieces one parameter at a time, drawing several form sketches on transparent slides—one for "dynamic form," "another for rhythm, and a third for something else"—and placing them on top of each other (T7).

Of course, the teacher might also choose to feed the student's imagination by teaching the technical aspects of composition. However, according to T6, the teacher should only suggest specific composition methods based on an observed need in the student's current writing. Likewise, T2 noted that students make a qualitative leap if they realize that "applying a technique does not yet lead to great results,…but there may be another [technique to be found] or maybe I need to develop one." Thus, the use of specific compositional methods or techniques may itself be subject to the originality requirement. Other teachers were even more critical of the reliance on established compositional methods in the individual supervision. T5 stated that "we do not educate music theorists; we educate composers, and that is about finding one's own creativity" (T5). At T8's institution, compositional techniques such as the 12-tone method are covered in the students' other courses in music theory but rarely addressed by the teacher in composition supervision. This is "because the students are so individual in their purely technical compositional methods and also kaleidoscopic in the sense that [their work] rarely represents [any compositional method] in pure form." Instead of such methods, T8 therefore chooses to talk more about "strategies"—asking, for instance, "Will you begin by sketching a graph of the form?" or "Are you going to begin by concretizing a possible moment somewhere in this progression, in this work,…as a kind of pilot study?"

In summary, the teachers deemed it necessary to intervene when students were felt to copy other composers or to be fixated on certain styles or techniques. The teachers' reported interventions in such situations could be grouped into three categories. First, the teacher might ask students to listen more carefully and be more patient with their materials or to find more embodied ways of engaging with their work. Second, the teacher might generally guide the students to new musical and extramusical experiences, letting the students themselves make the connections between such experiences and their current writing. Third, with regard to students' particular compositional

problems or needs, the teacher might suggest new perspectives on the work in terms of particular musical parameters, strategies, or even (with caution) specific compositional methods. In the end, however, overcoming established ways of composing also might carry the risk of failure. Accordingly, T4 claimed that "insecurity is an inherent part of our job." Thus, teachers "have to allow [their students] to make mistakes and to try something and realize that it wasn't good. That is also a possible result" (T3).

Discussion

Higher education programs in composition strive to foster not only students' technical skills but also their individual creativity. Composition students are expected to develop a personal style, and this development is commonly circumscribed with the metaphor of "finding one's own composer voice." To support this development, teachers may choose to step aside, giving the students the freedom to find their own creative impetus (Lupton & Bruce, 2010). However, such a passive approach might seem at odds with the expectation that teachers actively shape their teaching. In the present study, we thus sought to investigate composition teachers' ideas on active strategies for fostering their students' personal, individual creativity. To approach this topic, we chose to inquire into specific situations in which the teachers deemed it appropriate to intervene in their students' work.

In semistructured interviews, we asked eight higher education composition teachers about their students and about the activities in the lessons. In addition, we asked questions on students' typical problems and how they were handled. In our analysis, we focused mainly on reported problem situations, leaving out other positive influences of the teacher, such as functioning as a professional role model or integrating students into networks of music professionals.

In the teachers' statements, we identified two recurring student problems in which teachers reported to actively intervene. First, the teachers suggested that their students do not always know what they want, which makes it difficult to individually support students' creative processes. To address this problem, teachers reported engaging students in self-reflection (e.g., Burnard & Younker, 2002), thus in effect, furthering students' skills in compositional metacognition (see Pohjannoro, 2016). Some of our participants reported asking students directly about their general aesthetic ideals or approached such ideals by confronting the students with their possible aversions. For other teachers, it seemed more important to engage students in reflecting on specific aspects of their work in progress—failures, intentions, or alternative compositional solutions. Interestingly, formal compositional techniques (e.g., counterpoint, 12-tone method, etc.) were not mentioned by our participants in this context. In this respect, our participants' approach differed substantially from that of Nadia Boulanger, who seems to have stressed the mastery of formal compositional techniques as a necessary step in the development of one's artistic vision (see Monsaingeon, 1980). Based on our interview material, it appears that our participants allowed their students to decide on their own artistic goals more independently of imposed theoretical frameworks.

Indeed, the second problem that was repeatedly described by the teachers was that their students were sometimes too dependent on existing compositional models or

musical styles and thus did not meet the teacher's expectations of originality. Such expectations appeared more pronounced than might be common in music instrument teaching in higher education, where the dominant master-apprentice tradition "tends to rely [on] demonstration and imitation" (Daniel & Parkes, 2017). In participants' statements, we identified three different ways of dealing with the perceived lack of originality: The teacher could (a) challenge the students to listen patiently to and engage with their materials, (b) provide the students with new experiences to enrich their work, or (c) suggest other musical parameters or perspectives to be taken into account. The first of these approaches suggests that originality may require the development of a sharpened view of one's material and its potential for something new. At the same time, originality, as conceptualized by the teachers, may not only be related to psychological creativity in the sense of experiencing one's own actions as something new and interesting. Rather, originality here appears to be related to historical creativity (see Boden, 1990) and has to be judged from the outside perspective of a more experienced mentor. Given their knowledge of the domain, master teachers in our study believe (probably with good reason) that they can reliably judge originality when they hear (or see) it.

Some may think that "the creative aspect of composing cannot be taught" (Beck, 2001, p. 55), but such a view is not supported by our participants' reports. Even though we did not observe the actual teaching situations, the interviews did not suggest a strict "hands-off" approach (Lupton & Bruce, 2010), at least in the sense that instruction would only be provided when students start to procrastinate or experience writer's blocks. On the contrary, the teachers repeatedly reported intervening in the students' processes even when the students were fluently writing. For instance, teachers intervened by challenging the students to listen more carefully to their materials or by problematizing their strategies. As in Devaney's (2022) study, the teachers appeared to favor a collaborative problem-solving approach in order to encourage independence in their composition students. In this sense, nothing in our material suggests a "taboo of interference" (Weber, 2021) in bachelor's programs in composition but, instead, a constant engagement with addressing the personal side of the students' creative work.

Despite the curricular separation between technical teaching and the supervision of individual creative work, the teachers in our study did not seem to separate creative work from the hands-on craft of writing notes on a page. The teachers' reports on how they deal with problems of originality suggest that the musical materials and musical parameters may often be at the center of the individual supervision. Thus, our findings do not support Stauffer's (2003) separation between the notions of composers' identity (as identifiable gestures and structures) and their voice (as expression and meaning). In our study, it appears that questions of musical expressivity and meaning were closely intertwined with discussions regarding particular musical materials, gestures, and structures. Moreover, despite the institutional separation of composition courses from courses on music theory and music history, our participants could hardly be criticized as educational progressivists advocating learning merely through the students' own exploratory activity and turning their backs to knowledge of "classical" traditions (see Egan, 2002). Helping students connect their work with previous musical

traditions was a frequent topic in the interviews, even if our focus on teacher interventions led us to highlight situations in which the traditions needed to be shaken off.

Given the emphasis on judging the originality of students' compositional work, the teachers appear to retain some degree of authority over the students' compositional decisions. Ultimately, students may not be completely free to decide on the music they write. If their music is not original enough, the teacher may intervene and guide them toward more original solutions. This finding highlights an interesting conflict between different statements of the teachers. On the one hand, the teachers claimed that they sought to help students to realize their own goals. On the other hand, it seemed unacceptable to the teachers that the students wanted something that was not original enough. It appears that teaching composition involves two potentially conflicting ideals—those of creative freedom and originality. Why, then, did our participants not explicitly mention any such conflict? In our interpretation, this is simply because both originality and creative freedom are understood as ideals to be attained by the mature composer. The main task of the teacher is seen as guiding the student toward maturity in a process in which the right to creative freedom is gradually redeemed by demonstrating appropriate originality. In any particular situation in the supervision process, the master teacher holds an eye on the originality of the student's work and, as Reese (2003) suggested, may accordingly choose an appropriate teaching approach along a continuum between more and less directive ones.

Through our participants' views, we have seen how mentoring Western art music composition avoids both reliance on imitative principles and systematic regulation by prior theoretical schemes. Originality is encouraged, but not by requiring the students to build on a shared framework of compositional theory or specific stylistic norms. In our view, this implies that the criterion of originality has become somewhat detached from any shared, linear notions of musical progress. In Reckwitz's (2012) terminology, one might suggest that the new appears not so much as an improvement over earlier products but simply "as a stimulus" (p. 44), which is "denormativized" (p. 46) in the sense of being detached from views of sequential progress.

Although such a model has its clear precedents in 20th-century arts, Reckwitz (2012) suggested that it has become a predicament of all Western culture, which demands "the new as a stimulus" (p. 44). Our study demonstrates how the same logic continues to be in action in higher education composition pedagogy. In demanding originality from their students, composition teachers subject their students' work to some criterion of historical creativity, in the sense of making new contributions to the artistic domain in question. At the same time, they avoid making overarching claims about the shape of the historical process that emerges from such contributions. Such a general view resonates with Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) sociological analysis of creativity, where creativity equates to making contributions to a domain in a way that is subsequently recognized by a field of experts. As the vanguard of this much larger field or as gatekeepers to the art music world, the teachers appear to partake in the emerging recognition process in each supervision session. Prior to witnessing new acts of creativity, however, they seem unwilling to use their knowledge of the domain to offer regulative principles to guide the direction of creativity.

Although our study provides only a limited perspective on composition teachers' actions, we believe that our systematic and theory-driven analyses can help practitioners improve their teaching. Our work reveals three basic kinds of teacher activities: (a) gathering information about students and their work, (b) using this information to identify students' strengths and weaknesses, and (c) deriving activities that address these strengths and weaknesses. This classification may help composition teachers to reflect on their individual approaches in these three areas, discuss them with colleagues, or identify further teaching strategies beyond those we have described in this work.

Before concluding, we want to point out some limitations of the present study. In our analysis, we had to decide what counts as a prevalent theme, what to exclude, and how to interpret the statements. We necessarily did so on the basis of our prior understanding of the issues. Moreover, our data consisted of teachers' statements, which might conceivably have been biased by social desirability and their individual attitudes. We had no insights into teachers' actual behavior in class, the effects of their strategies on student learning, or students' views regarding the pedagogical approaches taken. Thus, our findings should be seen as neither completely objective nor normative. We do not want to imply that the described strategies are the only ones or the "right" ones to foster composition students' personal creativity.

Future studies may address these limitations in a number of ways. First, our study could be replicated in order to check if the findings are similar in another sample of teachers and with analyses being performed by researchers with another background. It would be especially interesting to address one-to-one teaching that intends to support individual creativity in other domains, such as visual or performing arts. Developing and employing a questionnaire on the teaching strategies that we described would allow for the investigation of their generalizability and the breadth of their application. Moreover, future studies could involve observations of higher education composition classes, followed by stimulated recall interviews with the participants. This would allow some more objective insights into the interactive dynamics of fostering creativity and the ways in which compositional thought might be externalized onto the score at hand (see Pohjannoro, 2022).

In summary, how may professional composer-teachers in higher music education foster their students' composer voices? Based on the reports by our eight participants, it appears that teachers may decide on interventions in their students' work after a process of information gathering and evaluation. More specifically, teachers reported putting students' written scores at the center of the pedagogical interaction. In doing so, they were able to address specific compositional materials, structures, and possibilities as well as more abstract issues, such as students' cultural influences, aesthetic preferences, and artistic ideas. Our findings suggest that the teachers then engage in implicit evaluation. If students appear to be unclear about their artistic goals, teachers might decide to support their self-reflection. If students' musical visions appear to lack originality, teachers might decide to help students to gain new perspectives on their own music, its connections to culture, and potential ways of developing it further. We hope that this account of reported teaching approaches can advance composition teachers' self-understanding of their practice and inspire possible other ways of fostering young composers' voices.

Appendix

Interview Guide (Translated From German to English for This Article)

1. Lessons
   - Can you start by explaining how you approach your lessons in general? How do you proceed through a typical lesson? What specific exercises do you use?
   - How do your lessons change over the course of a student's study program? What is the difference between the lessons at the beginning of the program and the lessons at the end of the program?
2. Individual differences of students
   - Students are already active as composers before their studies. Would you say that they have already developed their own methods and ways of working during this time before their studies? What do these individual methods look like? How do you deal with them?
3. Problems in the compositional process
   - What are typical problems in the compositional process?
   - Can you remember a specific case in which a student had difficulties with composing? How did you go about helping the person?
4. Development of compositional activities
   - Students develop over the course of their studies. They improve technically and write better compositions. We are particularly interested in the development of the compositional approach. Would you say that there are typical developments that students go through here? What do these developments look like, and when do they typically take place?
   - How do you try to influence these developments through your teaching?
5. Long-term supervision and personal relation
   - You supervise the students throughout their study program. In your opinion, what are the advantages of this long-term support?
   - When you supervise a student over such a long period of time, a personal relationship develops. How does this relationship influence the teaching?

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