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A Comparison of Mexican Children's Music Compositions and Contextual Songs

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Abstract
The purpose of this research was to make observations and comparisons between original music composed by Mexican children, and traditional Mexican songs. Data were obtained through notated music compositions created by the children, and through videotaped interviews during which the children performed their compositions, talked about both their compositions and songs representative of their cultural context, and performed the songs. Subjects were 10 randomly selected fourth-grade children enrolled at the Julian Hinojosa School in Puebla, Mexico. Prior to composing, the children explored the instruments to be used, and the musical elements of pitch, duration, tempo, dynamics, and timbre. Results indicate that cultural context plays a role in influencing original music compositions of Mexican children.

Introduction

This research explores children's original music composition through the lens of cultural context. Since the development in the United States of the National Standards for Music Education in 1994, there has been much interest in student music composition. One of the nine music content standards states that students should be composing music (MENC, 1994), and this has posed a challenge for many educators unfamiliar with the teaching of music composition. This research study of cultural context as it influences student music composition will provide a new layer of understanding about the teaching of music composition. This increased understanding should facilitate more effective teaching and learning in this important area of music education.

According to Upitis (1992), music provides a way of interpreting and understanding our world. Elliott defines context as "the total of ideas, associations, and circumstances that surround, shape, frame, and influence something and our understanding of that something" (1995, p. 40). Campbell (2004) writes that even the youngest children can compose music, and that informal musical experiences within family and social environments enhance musical understandings. This research contributes a new dimension, cultural context, to research in the area of student music composition.

Marsh (1995) researched children in an Australian inner-city school playground to examine their compositional processes as they related to text, movement, and context. She found that children work in several compositional modes simultaneously, and that they progress through a cycle of experimenting in which new ideas are invented and introduced, and then either "retained, reworked or discarded" (p. 6). Marsh also reported that the compositional processes of children are influenced by "collaborative interaction" among group members, and that "children's varying levels of understanding or skill may be accommodated and extended by this process of musical joint construction" (p. 7).

Levi (1991), Kratus (1989), Ashby (1995), and Perconti (1996) state that children progress through stages of music composition development. Levi (1991) investigated 6 second-grade children over a period of seven weeks, during which they composed music using Orff xylophones, and also composed using written language. The children were asked to "improvise

with the goal of creating a piece that could be played for the teacher" (p. 63). In subsequent sessions, they were given the option of starting new pieces, or revising earlier ones. Levi describes a five-phase process that consists of exploring, focusing, rehearsing, composing, and editing. Kratus (1989) found that children use different strategies for composing music depending on their age, with seven-year-old children composing primarily through exploration. As children become older, he found that they compose through development and repetition, and noted that the 9- and 11-year-old children change processes as they compose—starting with exploration, progressing to development, and ending with repetition. Ashby (1995) examined the processes of 8-year-old (n=15), and 10-year-old (n=15) children as they composed music during a 10-minute session, and reported that children of these ages are able to replicate compositions that they have created. Similar to Kratus, Ashby writes that children "tend to change from one process to another while composing" (p. 18), with the 8-year-old children using approximately the same amount of time exploring, developing, and repeating musical ideas, while the 10-year-old children used substantially less time exploring and developing, and more time repeating musical ideas. Also similar to Kratus, Ashby reported that during the composition process, the children generally moved from exploring, to developing, to repeating musical ideas. Perconti (1996) studied children in first through fourth grade as they composed in general music classes over a 2-year period. Like Kratus, Perconti observed that children engage in a four-step process. First, they create music assimilating "what they know about music and the composition task" (p. 126). Second, they notate their ideas; third, they practice and edit the ideas; and fourth, they perform their composition for others.

Kratus (1985) studied the use of melodic and rhythmic motives as 5-, 7-, 9-, 11-, and 13-year-old children composed using keyboard instruments. Analyzing compositions for use of "melodic motivic repetition, same direction melodic motivic development, different direction melodic motivic development, rhythmic motivic repetition, and rhythmic motivic development" (p. 3), Kratus found repetition of melodic motives to be very common in compositions of children from each age group. He also found that development of melodic motives in both the same direction and different direction increased substantially in the compositions of children as their ages increased from age 5 to 11, that rhythmic motive repetition was not commonly displayed in the compositions of the younger children, and that rhythmic motive development was only found in one composition, created by a 13-year-old.

Wilson and Wales (1995) also investigated rhythmic and melodic characteristics of 7- and 9-year-old children's music compositions. Wilson and Wales "compared the complexity of compositions with the ages of the subjects in the study" (p. 96), and reported that the compositions were "divided into three melodic and rhythmic developmental stages that varied according to melodic contour, tonality, rhythmic grouping and meter, [and that] the older children created more compositions at higher stages of complexity" (p. 94).

Reinhardt (1990) examined the creative musical products of 37 fifth-grade children to determine if tonal structure would change as a result of repeated composition experiences. Studying the range of pitches used; the establishment of a tonal center; the use of different tonal centers with repeated composition sessions; the development of tonal patterns consisting of transposed, inverted, and extended musical motives, and the degree to which the children were

able to replicate their creative musical products, Reinhardt concluded that tonal structure does not change as a result of repeated composition experiences, and found that children are "better able to replicate their compositions with additional opportunities for composition" (p. 211).

Kratus (2001) studied the effects of different sets of melodic materials on composition products and processes of fourth-grade children with Orff xylophones equipped either with five or ten pitches of the pentatonic scale, or five or ten pitches of the harmonic minor scale. Kratus found that the ten-pitch sets yielded more exploration, longer songs, and songs less easily replicated than the five-pitch sets; and the pentatonic sets yielded songs that were less likely to end on the starting pitch than the harmonic minor sets. The different sets of melodic material had no effect on the children's compositional processes.

Aug and Walker (1999) studied 38 Korean seventh-graders to examine the effects of composing using traditional staff notation with non-traditional graphic notation on the students' music composition strategies and creativity. They found that the non-traditional graphic notations resulted in more musically creative compositions. Aug and Walker speculated that the non-traditional graphic notation provided a more "open-ended task" that may have been less inhibiting to the students as they composed (p. 5). They also found that "composing music with graphic notations can facilitate students to use more diverse compositional strategies" (p. 6).

Barrett (1999) examined the compositional strategies of 24 kindergarten children, and found that when "the element of text is introduced through the use of lyrics (canonic or original), young children's notational focus is primarily concerned with lyric content with little or no reference to musical dimensions" (p. 14). She concludes that imposing text "masks children's capacity to represent their musical understanding" (p. 6).

While research has been conducted regarding the processes and products of children's music compositions, little research exists that examines the influence of cultural context on children's original music composition processes or products. Therefore, the intent of the present study was to make observations and comparisons between original music composed by Mexican children, and music that is representative of their cultural context. More specifically, the research sought to determine the similarities between Mexican children's original music compositions, songs that that they sing from earlier in their childhood, songs that they like to sing currently, and traditional Mexican folk music.

Method

Subjects were ten fourth-grade children enrolled at the Julian Hinojosa School in Puebla, Mexico, a residential elementary school for economically disadvantaged children. The children live and study at the school during the week, and return to their families' homes on weekends. Children at this school are provided with no formal music education. Participating children were randomly selected from all fourth-grade children at the school (n = 68). The researcher functioned as facilitator of the music experimentation and composition activity. Data were obtained through notated music compositions created by the children, and through videotaped

interviews during which the children performed and discussed their music compositions and songs representing their cultural context The data were gathered in June 2004 during three 90-minute sessions.

Prior to composing, the children experimented with the instruments to be used, and the musical elements of pitch, duration, tempo, dynamics, and timbre. Instruments were soprano glockenspiel, alto glockenspiel, alto metallophone, soprano xylophone, alto xylophone, hand drum, tambourine, shaker, guiro, maracas, claves, and African drums. Each of the barred instruments was equipped with 13 pitched bars, arranged diatonically from a lower C to a higher A, with no chromatic alterations. The children were shown the instruments and how to play them, and given the opportunity to experiment with each instrument. They then experimented with playing loudly or softly, fast or slow, using short or long durations; and on the mallet percussion instruments, high or low pitches; and with melodic characteristics of stepping up or down, leaping up or down, or staying on the same pitch. Next, they experimented with performing sounds on the instruments that were becoming louder and softer, faster and slower, shorter and longer; and on the mallet percussion, higher and lower.

The children worked in groups of twos, and were told that they were to compose their own original music using the instrument of their choice. They were told that if they chose a xylophone, metallophone, or glockenspiel, that they could use that instrument by itself, or add one of the non-pitched instruments. After the instruments were chosen, the children started working on their music compositions.

The compositions were recorded on paper by the children using non-traditional notation. It was suggested that they use pictures, symbols, letters, words, numbers, colors, and/or anything they wanted to document their musical ideas, and to record it in a way that they would remember it on the next day. They were given blank white paper, and packets of colored pencils. The children were told that they could move anywhere in the room to work, and that the researcher would come around to answer questions. At the end of the session, the items were collected, and the children were told that the researcher would return the following day so that they could continue their composing, and that they would be working with the same partners, and using the same instruments.

At the second session, the children were told that they would be finishing their music compositions, and that on the following day they would be playing this music for the researcher. The children were reminded of the instructions from the previous day. When there were fifteen minutes left to work, the children were told that they should finish composing and recording their music. They were reminded that they should record it in a way that would help them to remember it on the following day. They were told that if they wanted to give their composition a name, they should write it at the top of the paper; and that if they wanted to make a place that would state what each of their symbols means, that they could do so. They were also told that when finished composing, they should practice performing their composition. At the end of the session, the items were collected, and the children were told that the researcher would return on the following day, and that they would come to the room one group at a time to play their finished music compositions, that the researcher would be asking them questions.

On the third day, the children came to the room one group at a time where they were greeted, given their papers and instruments, and asked to practice playing their finished music composition. When they had practiced for a few minutes, they were invited to the area where the video camera was set up, and asked to perform their composition, to describe and sing songs that they heard in their homes when they were younger, and to describe and sing songs that they like to sing currently (referred to in this study as "contextual songs"). At the end of the interview, the items were collected, and the children were thanked for their hard work, and praised for their music compositions.

The videotaped interviews were transcribed, and translated from Spanish to English. The music compositions and contextual songs were transcribed from sound into standard musical notation. Data also included the papers collected from the children at the conclusion of the third session. Pseudonyms for the children participants are used in the reporting of this research.

Choices made in the design of this research were based on findings of related research. The decision to have the children work in pairs was influenced by Marsh (1995); to have exploration experiences included in the design, by Ashby (1995), Kratus (1989), and Levi (1991); to have each of the barred instruments equipped with 13 pitched bars and arranged diatonically from a lower C to a higher A by Kratus (2001), and to use non-traditional notation, by Aug and Walter (1999).

Results

Sergio and Angel

Sergio chose to play the alto xylophone, and Angel, the large African drum. The xylophone played what appeared to be random single pitches with the drum mirroring the rhythms of the xylophone. A transcription of this original composition appears in Figure 1. On one of two papers the boys used to document their composition, Sergio and Angel had written the words (translated) "outside, inside, outside, inside, outside, inside," and also "title" and "the cd player." On the other paper, were the upper case letters, AGDECBAFDAD with the GD, and the B underlined. The words (translated) "title" and "the cd player" were again written on the paper. The boys did not appear to look at either paper as they performed their original composition, and neither paper seemed to be connected to what the boys performed.

When asked to describe and sing a song that the children remembered listening to earlier in their childhood, Angel stated the names of musicians, "Raul Cona, Chaya, Los Temerarios, Los Magnates, Miguel Jose, Pedro Infante, Los Buqui, Los Teles." The boys chanted pitches that had no distinguishable melody, but seemed to rise and fall with alternating higher and lower pitches. The rhythm was comprised of mainly quarter- and eighth-notes, with some dotted-eighth- and sixteenth-notes, and eighth-, quarter-, and half-rests. Each phrase ended with a single quarter-note.

In describing and singing a song that they like to sing now, Angel stated the first line of a song (translated), "You are like a butterfly." This is a popular song, performed by the Mexican group, Mana. The boys went on to chant the words of this song, entitled Mariposa Traicionera. The melody of Mariposa Traicionera, as performed on Mana's 2002 CD, Revolucion De Amor, is in the key of A-flat Major, and is mainly comprised of stepwise motion and thirds; and there are several sequences in the verse section. Rhythmically, it is in duple meter; and is mainly comprised of quarter- and eighth-notes, with a few sixteenth- and dotted-quarter-notes. There is quite a bit of syncopation, and phrases generally end with a longer note value followed by an eighth-note. There is a rhythmic accompaniment of steady eighth-notes played mainly on a drum set, with occasional auxiliary percussion, including maracas and claves. On both this song, and the song from earlier in their childhood, the boys followed along on the xylophone and drum, playing what seemed to be random pitches that mirrored the rhythm of the words of the songs.

There were similarities between Sergio and Angel's original composition and their contextual songs. With the exception of one eighth rest, the composition was comprised entirely of quarter- and eighth-notes. The songs were also comprised mainly of quarter- and eighth-notes, although the songs included syncopations and other note values. Melodically, the composition seemed to be in a Major key, included the IV and I6 arpeggiated chords, and cadenced using sol-do. Similarly, Mariposa Traicionera is in a Major key, includes the IV and I6 arpeggiated chords, and cadences to the tonic.

Antonio and Andres

Antonio chose to play the alto metallophone, and Andres, the small African drum. A transcription of this original composition appears in Figure 2. As the boys played, they did not appear to be looking at the paper they used to document their composition, and what they had written on the paper did not appear to have any connection to what they performed. The paper contained the words (translated):

> "Dogs, My dog's chains were taken off. Where are my dogs? Au, Au [not translated]." This may be a reference to the pop song, "Who Let the Dogs Out," by Bahamian artists, Baha Men."

When asked to describe and sing a song that they remembered listening to earlier in their childhood, Andres stated the name of a performer, Angel; and Antonio stated (reading from the original composition paper) a variation of the above words (translated):

"My dog's chains were taken off, Where are my dogs? Au, my dogs are howling."

In describing and singing a song that they like to sing now, the boys didn't offer a description, but Antonio sang the words:

> "They, a little more, dogs . . . they . . . it must be the dogs. It must be them. A little more, dogs."

A transcription of this contextual song appears in Figure 3. The only similarity between Antonio and Andres's original composition and the contextual songs seemed to be the repeating pitches on each scale step of the composition; and the prominent repeating pitches in the melody of the song they sang, and the prominent repeating pitches in the melody of the chorus section of the Baha Men's version of "Who let the Dogs Out."

Juan and Rodrigo

Rodrigo chose to play the soprano xylophone, and Juan, the maracas. For their original composition, Juan sang words (translated) to what appears to be a preexisting text, possibly a song or poem; and sometimes Rodrigo joined in:

> "Pedro and Pablo were brothers, inseparable friends.
> They were all alone, after their parents died.
> Pedro, the oldest, told himself, Pablo would never lack for anything
> Pedro went north, his girlfriend told him, over and over, I entrust him to you. . ."

A transcription of this original composition appears in Figure 4. Most of the time, Rodrigo wasn't looking at the xylophone as he played. On the paper documenting their composition, the boys had written two other sets of words, the first was a text about ducks and chickens, possibly original; and the second, a text about a barkeeper, probably preexisting. The researcher was unable to establish a link between either written sets of words and/or the sung words, and any preexisting texts. The boys did not appear to be looking at the paper as they performed their composition.

When asked to describe and sing a song that the children remembered listening to earlier in their childhood, Juan and Rodrigo did not offer a description, but sang using the following words (translated):

> "The [inaudible word] is now closed, and the black door is nailed shut.
> Your parents are jealous, and afraid because I love you."

In describing and singing a song that they like to sing now, the boys again did not offer a description, but Rodrigo sang the following words:

> "The sky [inaudible word], the horses were whinnying, the trees were swaying, the wind was blowing, the houses were being destroyed, in a bad storm."

A transcription of these contextual songs appears in Figure 5. As with the original composition, the researcher was unable to establish a link between either sets of written words, and any preexisting texts or songs.

There were melodic and rhythmic similarities between Juan and Rodrigo's original composition and their contextual songs. Melodically, both the composition and songs consisted mainly of stepwise motion, with some repeated notes, and with a few intervals of thirds, fourths and fifths, usually occurring after rests; although one of the contextual songs also included some intervals of a sixth. Rhythmically, the composition consisted mainly of quarter- and eighth-notes, and some quarter- and eighth-rests, with some sixteenth-notes and notes of shorter duration; and both contextual songs mainly included those same note values, although the first song did not include any sixteenth-notes or notes of shorter duration, and the second song also included dotted notes, and half notes and rests, and did not include notes of shorter value than sixteenth-notes. The Maracas and xylophone kept mostly a steady beat throughout both the composition and the songs. Also, both the composition and songs started with a short instrumental introduction, before the vocal part began.

Miguel and Raul

Miguel chose to play the soprano glockenspiel and Raul the small African drum. On the paper documenting their composition, the boys had written the words to the popular song Mariposa Traicionera (which translated means "You are like a butterfly"), performed by the Mexican group, Mana on their 2002 CD, Revolucion De Amor. This is the same song that Sergio and Angel identified in their interview as a song they like to sing now. As performed by Mana, this song is mainly comprised of stepwise motion and thirds; and there are several sequences in the verse section. Rhythmically, it is in duple meter; and is mainly comprised of quarter- and eighth-notes, with a few sixteenth-notes, and dotted-quarter-notes. There is quite a bit of syncopation, and phrases generally end with a longer note value followed by an eighth-note. There is a rhythmic accompaniment of steady-eighth notes played mainly on a drum set, with occasional hand percussion, including maracas and claves. The version that Miguel and Raul sang consisted of a melody that was mainly chanted with pitches that somewhat reflected Mana's version; and with rhythms that accurately reflected Mana's version. Similar to Mana's version, phrases ended with an eighth-note preceded by a quarter- or dotted-quarter-note; and there were many syncopated rhythms. As Raul sang he also played the drum, and dissimilar to Mana's version, Raul played the same rhythms that he sang, not a steady eighth-note pattern. The glockenspiel mirrored the rhythm of the singing, but not exactly; and the melody seemed to go up and down the instrument at random, although it returned to A, the highest pitch on the instrument, on almost every ascending passage. At the low end of the instrument, sometimes Miguel played the lowest pitch, C, but more often played a D or an E. The glockenspiel seemed to cadence on an E at several points in the piece. The boys referred to the paper with the Mana lyrics early in their performance, but then moved it out of sight, putting it behind them.

When asked to describe and sing a song that the boys remembered listening to earlier in their childhood, Miguel and Raul named the television and cartoon characters, Cri Cri, Pinochio, Chapulin, Pokemon, Popeye, and Camino Alvarado. They sang words (translated):

> "Something calls in me the victory that pertains to the fire you have in your heart."

The notes they sang were quarter- and eighth-notes in syncopated rhythms. The melody started on a low A, and went back and forth in thirds two times, and then went up and down a four-note scale, resting on a C. This repeated three times, although sometimes there was additional melodic material in between. Raul played an accompaniment on the drum, using the rhythm of the singing. Miguel played random pitches on the glockenspiel, also mirroring the rhythm of the singing.

In describing and singing a song that the boys like to sing now, Miguel and Raul did not offer a description, but performed a song made up of quarter- and eighth-notes with rests in between. It was hard to distinguish a melody, or clear rhythm patterns, but the boys chanted the song with pitches that somewhat went up and down. Raul played an accompaniment on the drum, mostly consisting of unsteady eighth-notes and rests when there were rests in the singing. Miguel played random pitches and rhythms on the glockenspiel.

It is difficult to compare what was performed as an original composition by Miguel and Raul's to contextual songs, because the boys performed a preexisting song as their original composition. The three songs were similar in that there were many syncopated rhythms in at least two of the three songs. (It was difficult to identify rhythmic patterns in the third song.) In the first two songs, Miguel played the rhythm of the singing on the drum, but in the third song, seemed to play more of a continuous eighth-note pattern on the drum, with rests when the singing rested. There did not seem to be melodic similarities among the songs.

Maria and Ana

Maria chose to play the alto glockenspiel, and Ana the tambourine. As they practiced and performed their original composition, the girls positioned the glockenspiel on top of the tambourine, and both girls played on the glockenspiel, each using one mallet. Maria and Ana had written on the paper documenting their composition words of a text, entitled "Hormigris." The text was probably preexisting, although this researcher was unable to locate any similar preexisting text, or anything referring to the word "hormigris," which is not included in Spanish dictionaries. The girls softly chanted the text, and played pitches that appeared to go along with the rhythm of the text, using one pitch to each syllable. A transcription of this original composition appears in Figure 6. Appearing on the paper the girls used to document their composition were two items that were crossed out. One was the letters: C D E F G A B C D E F G A, a statement of all of the bars on the glockenspiel, in order from low to high. The other was the letters C E G B D E A, followed directly below by D E A C E G. Underneath the letters was a series of wavy lines and dots, which may have signified duration. There did not appear to be any connection between the crossed out writing, and what the girls performed for their original composition. The girls did not look at the papers documenting their composition as they performed. Additionally, early in the composition process, the girls had marked certain keys of the glockenspiel with little pieces of masking tape. They removed the tape before the final day of composing, and did not use any tape as they performed during their interview. Of all of the original compositions, excluding the scale-wise triplet- and quarter-note composition performed

by Antonio and Andres, this is the one that seemed to be most easily and readily duplicated, at least rhythmically, and in melodic contour. The girls played this piece again and again, and each time it sounded very similar to the other times.

When asked to describe and sing a song that the girls remembered listening to earlier in their childhood, Ana stated (translated): Whatever they would sing on the radio and on television, nothing else. She then sang using the following text (translated):

> "I love you and you love me, we are a happy family
> With a big hug, I give you my affection."

This appears to be the text of a prominent song, I Love You, from an American children's television show, Barney. Although Ana did not sing entirely accurately, she seemed to sing the pitches and rhythms of I Love You. Rhythmically, the note values of I Love You are mainly quarter-notes, with some eighth- and half-notes. The melody of this song consists of repeated descending and ascending minor thirds, followed by descending, and then ascending scale-wise passages, which include some repeated notes, as well as a descending interval of a fifth, and later a descending fourth. The song is divided into two 4-measure phrases, with the melody starting on a sol-mi-sol pattern, and ending on do. This researcher noted that Ana did not sing all of the correct pitches of I Love You, but generally had the correct melodic motion. Since none of the children in this study had received formal music instruction prior to the research, it is probably that Ana is not aware of how to use her head voice, and therefore sang very low, in the key of F Major, starting on middle C. It appeared that when the melody was to go lower, and Ana couldn't sing any lower, she stayed on the same pitch.

In describing and singing a song that they like to sing now, the girls did not offer a description, but sang a song with much rhythmic variety, including dotted-quarter and eighth- note patterns, quarter-note triplets, and dotted-eighth and sixteenth note patterns. A transcription of this contextual song appears in Figure 7. The girls accompanied their singing of both contextual songs on the glockenspiel playing the rhythms to the songs, and the general melodic contour of the songs.

There were melodic and rhythmic similarities between Maria and Ana's original composition and their contextual songs. In both the composition and the two contextual songs, the intervals used melodically were mainly stepwise with repeated notes, and including some thirds, fourths and fifths. Rhythmically, the composition and I Love You were similar in that they consisted of mainly quarter- and eighth-notes, and quarter-rests. The composition also included three half-rests; and I Love You did not include half-rests, but did include an eighth-rest, two half-notes, a whole-note, and a whole-rest. The second contextual song included all of the rhythms performed in the composition, but also included dotted-eighth and sixteenth-note combinations, quarter-note triplets, and half-notes. Additionally, the original composition and both contextual songs were organized into four-measure phrases, although the second contextual song also included some five-measure phrases.

Combining information gained from the comparison of each pair of children's original composition and the contextual songs reveals some commonalities. Rhythmically, most of the children's original compositions were comprised mainly of quarter- and eighth-notes, with some quarter- and eighth-rests; and the contextual songs were comprised of mainly the same note values, with some syncopations, and a few other note and rest values. Melodically, the original compositions consisted of mainly stepwise motion with some repeated notes, and some intervals of thirds, fourths, and fifths; and the contextual songs were comprised mainly of those same intervals, with a few other intervals also included. The tonality in the original compositions and in the contextual songs, when identifiable, was Major. When cadences were present in the original compositions and in the contextual songs, most often the resolution was to the tonic. When phrases were discernable, the most common phrase length in the original compositions, and in the contextual songs was four-measure phrases. Most of the original compositions and contextual songs included repeated rhythmic and melodic patterns. Additionally, two of the original compositions included the use of sequences; and one of the contextual songs, referred to twice, once as a composition and once as a song that the children want to sing now, Mariposa Traicionera, includes sequences.

Discussion

The use of repeated patterns in the children's compositions is consistent with the Kratus (1985) finding that repetition of melodic motives is very common in compositions of children 5- to 11-years old, and that rhythmic motive repetition was not commonly displayed in the compositions of the younger children in his study. Similar to the results of the Kratus (2001) study comparing the composition products and processes of fourth-grade children using instruments equipped with 5 or 10 pitches, the children in the present study, using instruments equipped with 13 pitches, created music using mainly exploration and with only moderate levels of replication. The children's vast use of text in their documenting and performing their original compositions in the present study is consistent with the Barrett (1999) finding that text becomes the primary focus of kindergarten children's notating of music compositions.

Similar to Ashby (1995), Kratus (1989), Levi (1991) and Perconti (1996), the children in the present study seemed to progress through stages as they created their original compositions. The stages that this researcher observed are most similar to those described by Kratus and Perconti. The children explored various ideas, decided which ideas to use, rehearsed the ideas, and then performed their composition. The children in the current study were nine-, ten-, and eleven-years old; and except for one group that consisted of a 10- and an 11-year old, each group consisted of a 9- and a 10-year-old child. The children in the present study appeared to compose primarily through exploration, a strategy associated by Kratus with 7-year-old children, and less through development and repetition, a strategy associated by Kratus with 9- and 11-year-old children. This researcher feels that the lack of formal music instruction, may have delayed the children's progress through the stages. Ashby reported that 8- and 10-year-old children are able to replicate compositions that they have created, but in the present study, it appeared that only two of the five compositions were capable of reasonable replication. Again, this may be due to the children's lack of prior formal music instruction. Perconti states that children "assimilate

what they know about music and the composition task" (p. 126). In the present study, it seems that the similarities between the original compositions and the contextual songs indicate that the songs the children remember listening to earlier in their childhood and that they want to sing now have influenced the original music they composed.

Conclusions and Implications for Music Education

There are similarities between the original music compositions of the ten Mexican children researched in this study and the music that is representative of their cultural context. Similarities between the original compositions and songs that they sang from earlier in their childhood, and songs that they like to sing currently include note values used, types of melodic motion, use of rhythmic and melodic repetition, tonality, cadencing to the tonic, and phrase length.

Prior to examining the original compositions of the children in the study, this researcher examined characteristics of hundreds of traditional Mexican songs, including those present in the books Folk Songs of Mexico, Cantos de Mexico, Educacion Musical en el Primer Ano de Primara, and Educacion musical en las primarias. Characteristics that this researcher identified in the traditional Mexican songs include 4-measure phrases, Major keys, dominant-tonic cadences, step-wise melodic motion, use of arpeggiated chords, repeated notes, and duple or triple meters. The original compositions of the children in this study also exhibit each of these characteristics (see figures). The conclusions of the present study demonstrate some of the ways that cultural context influences children's compositions, including choice of note values, melodic motion, rhythmic and melodic repetition, tonality, cadences, and phrase length in their original music compositions.

The implication for music education appears to be that exposing children to a broad range of musics to experience will provide children with the tools to compose original music that is broader than their immediate cultural context. A variety of music from the children's own culture and from other cultures will enhance the musical palette available for the children to use in their composing.

Figure 1

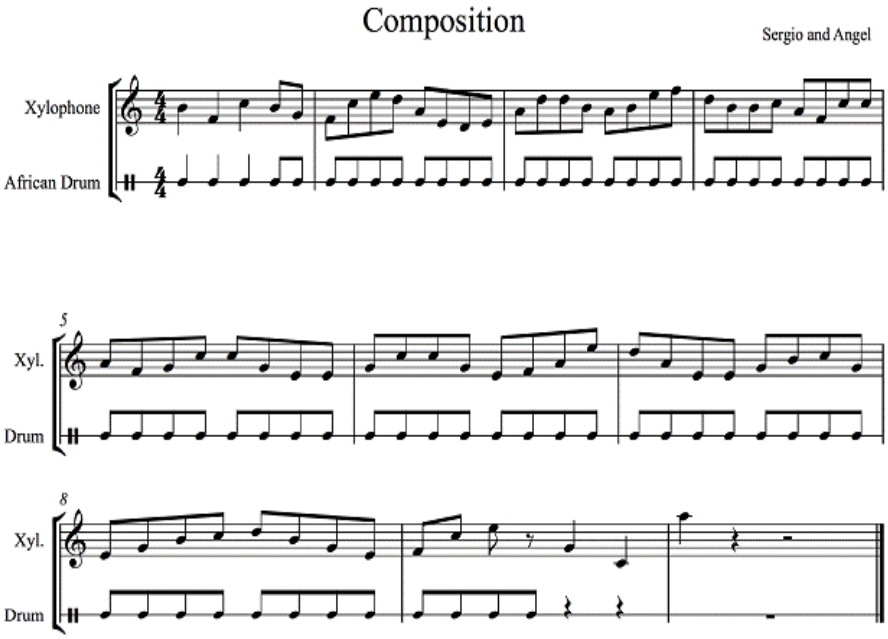


Figure 2

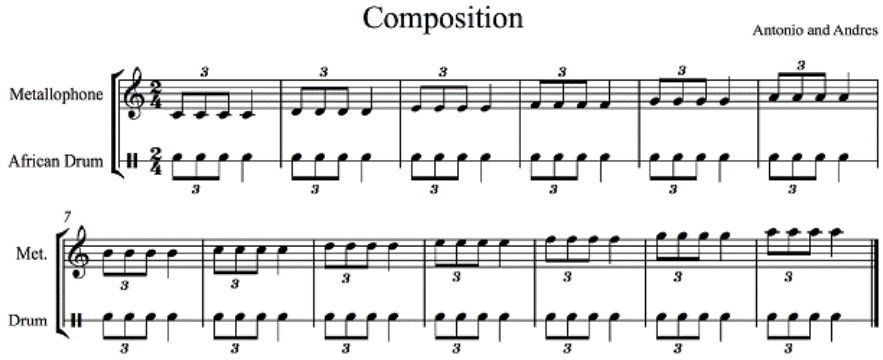


Figure 3

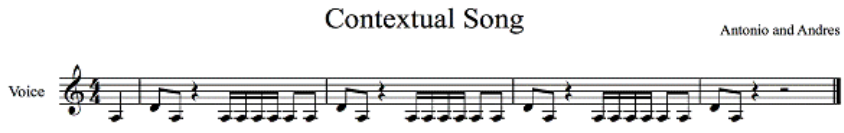


Figure 4

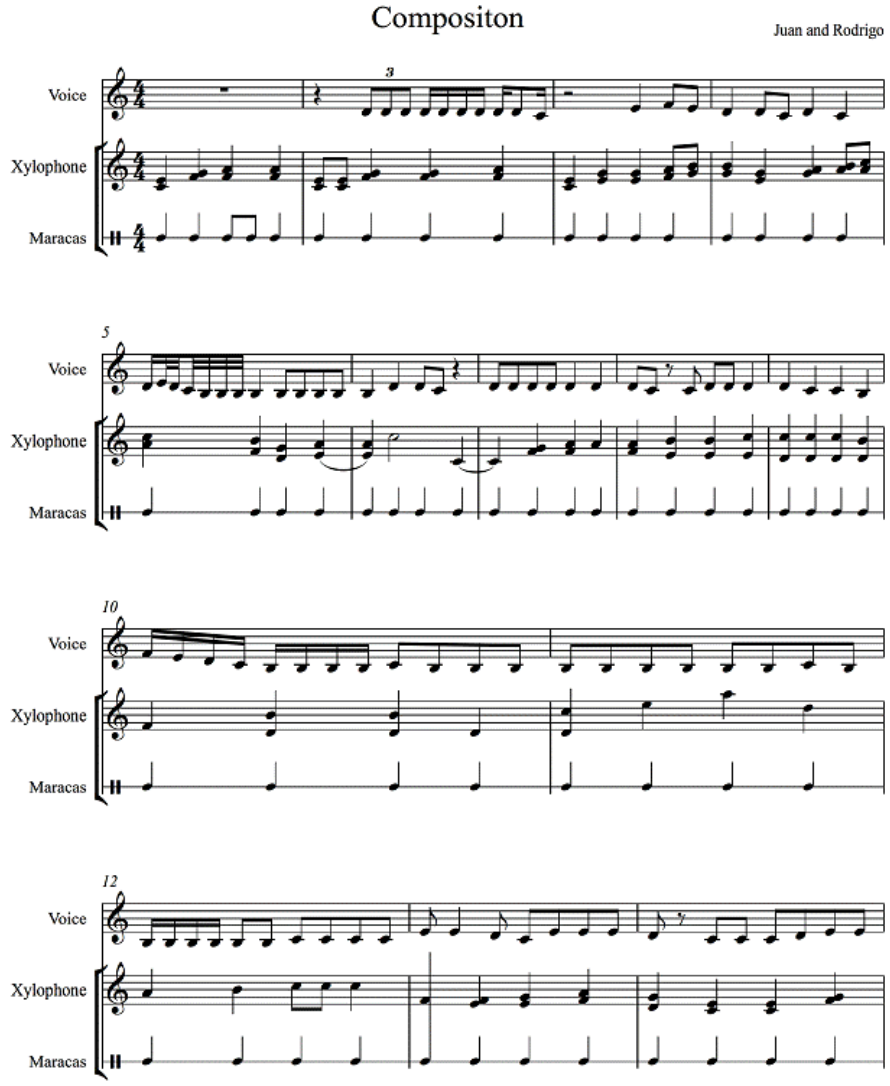

Compositon
Juan and Rodrigo
Voice
Xylophone
Maracas
3
5
10
12

Figure 5

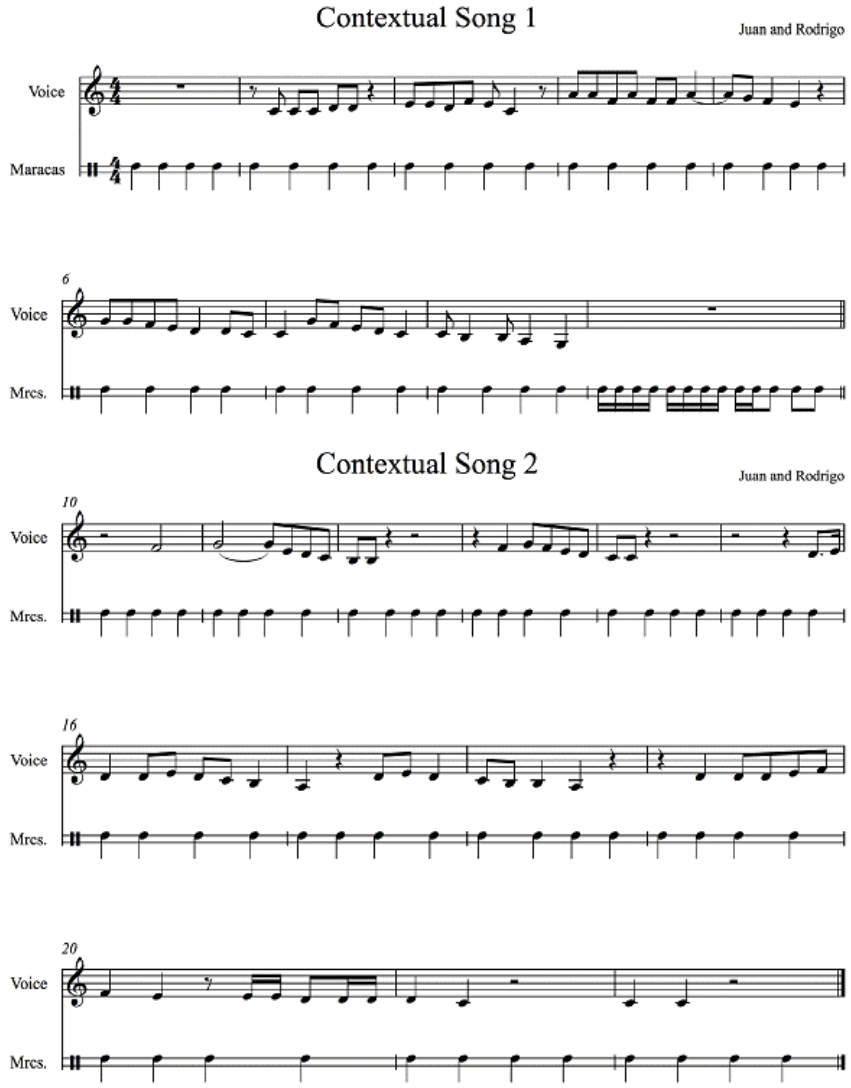

Contextual Song 1
Juan and Rodrigo
Voice
Maracas
6
Voice
Mrcs.
Contextual Song 2
Juan and Rodrigo
10
Voice
Mrcs.
16
Voice
Mrcs.
20
Voice
Mrcs.

Figure 6

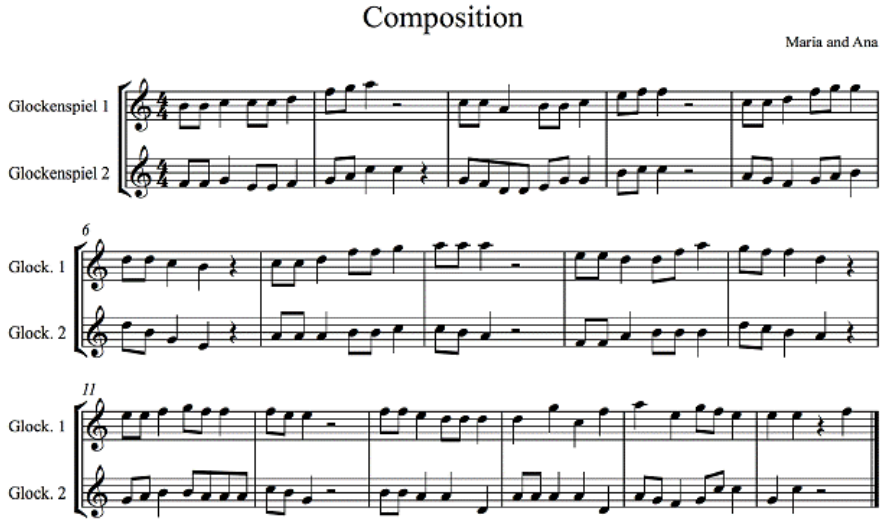
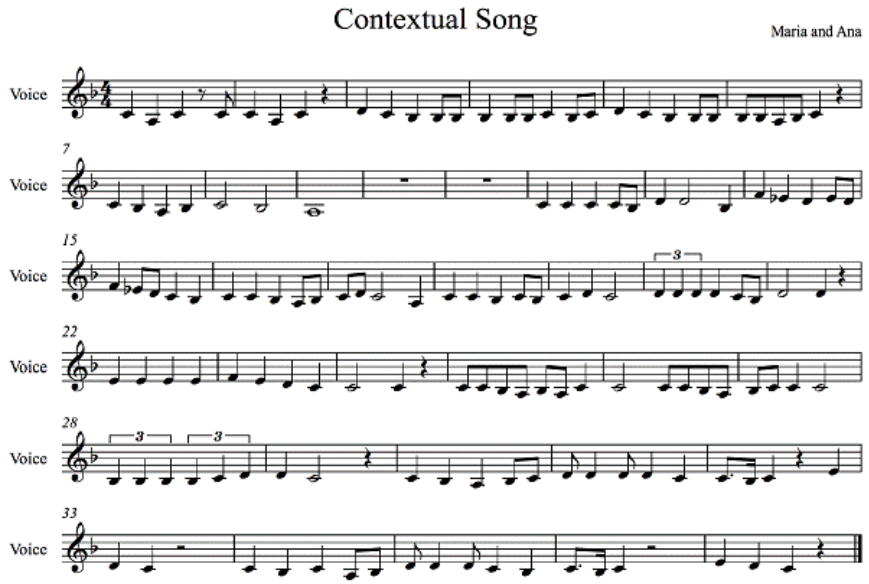


Figure 7



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