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The MaPS project: mapping teacher conceptions of musical development

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Chapter 8

The MaPS Project: Mapping Teacher Conceptions of Musical Development

Mary Stakelum and David Baker

Background

Following the introduction of a national curriculum to England in the 1980s, the teaching of music became statutory in contemporary English primary schools,[1] with an expectation that each school should provide all its pupils with opportunities to engage in composing, listening, reviewing, evaluating and performing. Within this national framework, there is scope for each school to decide how to organize its curriculum on a local level. In a recent review of the provision of music education in England (Department for Education (2011a), it was acknowledged that there is a shared aspiration among all those working in England's school system to provide a high quality music education which challenges all pupils:

> … we want to make it possible for every child to have the opportunity to progress through a Music Education system that enables them to achieve their full musical potential. (p. 7)

A degree of complexity surrounds the provision of music education, with input from music services, peripatetic teachers and classroom teachers. While this multi-layered approach has strengths in terms of the division of labour;

> … no one teacher, performer, school, organisation, group or body has all of the requisite skills to deliver every part of a rounded Music Education to every child. (p. 5)

This has led to reports of lack of cohesion in accountability across routes of progression and a pressing need to find a collaborative approach to provision. Such concerns resulted in a National Plan for Music Education, (Department for Education (2011b) in which the Department proposed a mechanism for shared understanding, identifying musical potential and assessing musical progress in children and young people. The National Plan sets out the parameters for a way

[1] Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2) in the national curriculum for England relate to the educational levels expected at 5–7 and 7–11 year olds respectively.

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ahead in music education, one which will involve the reorganization of music providers into hubs, each working with clusters of schools 'to determine what high quality music education looks like in a local context, and who will be responsible for the delivery of each aspect' (p. 17). A needs analysis will be the starting point for this initiative and will serve as a means by which schools can hold hubs to account for the services they arrange: at the same time, hubs will be able to challenge and support schools to improve their music curriculum. The implications for teachers in schools are far-reaching, not least because they will be charged with identifying and assessing the needs of their pupils on the one hand and in evaluating the extent to which these needs are being met by providers on the other.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some teachers still draw from a legacy of aptitude testing such as that in Bentley's (1966) measures of musical ability (also Seashore et al., 1960; Wing, 1961; Gordon, 1965). Dominated by forced-choice responses and the identification of norms of musical behaviour, tests of this type are now found to be narrow in their focus on perception of musical pitch, rhythm and other such structural elements (Hallam, 2001). In the absence of a national curriculum, however, they offered a way for teachers to structure music education – by working backwards it was possible for teachers to work out a syllabus or 'teach to the test'. Today, within the framework of a national curriculum, assessment is increasingly predicated on the notion of personalized learning; in the case of music, this necessitates the development of a model of assessment that is portable enough to be applied across a variety of socio-cultural settings and flexible enough to capture the nature and extent of children's development as musicians at an idiosyncratic or local level (see Stakelum, 2010). For these reasons, it could be argued that there is no longer a need for teachers to draw on the legacy of formal tests of musical ability. On the other hand, there may be residual traces of aptitude testing in schools and these will influence the manner in which children are appraised, taught and selected for additional musical participation (such as choirs or weekly instrumental lessons in primary school). Such is the lack of clarity surrounding practice that has prompted us to examine some of the issues arising from changes to the music education landscape and, in doing so, to explore the beliefs of primary teachers who are called upon to assess potential and progress in pupils' musical learning.

Music and Primary Teachers: Conceptions, Beliefs and Attitudes

In mapping teachers' conceptions, beliefs and attitudes that are conducive to educational inclusion are brought into play, as well as those militating against it. Figure 8.1 illustrates a potential interplay of concepts. It is not intended to be an exhaustive diagram; the figure merely acts as a starting point for our consideration. For example, if musicality is deemed to be a universal human trait, everyone has aptitude and can benefit under suitable conditions. Motivation (Maslow, 1954; Dweck, 1999; Schmidt, 2005; Ng and Hartwig, 2011) and the significance of

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family background (Sosniak, 1985; Howe and Sloboda, 1991; Davidson, Sloboda and Howe, 1995/1996; Zdzinski, 1996; Sichivitsa, 2007) have been variously documented in the literature on music education as influential in the development of musical ability. Clarke, Dibben and Pitts (2010) underscore the importance of social circumstances for musical development:

> Comparisons of children's emergent musical skills with those of the general adult population show how dependent musical development is upon opportunity and teaching, if latent levels of competence are to retain their potential and flourish into adult life. The vast majority of children have the ability to sing, to recall and reproduce melodies, and to assimilate the music they hear into spontaneous tunes of their own – yet most adults would be much more reticent about doing the same in the presence of other people … . (p. 131)

Seeing musicality as a species-defining trait means that everyone is primed to develop musical capacities with some effort; parallels with language acquisition might be drawn – an inclusive vision. Sloboda, Davidson and Howe (1994) have questioned a folk psychology of talent which assumes that innate skills cause some to be more talented; they contend that unassailable evidence of inherited differences simply does not exist (see also Sloboda, 2005). The importance of

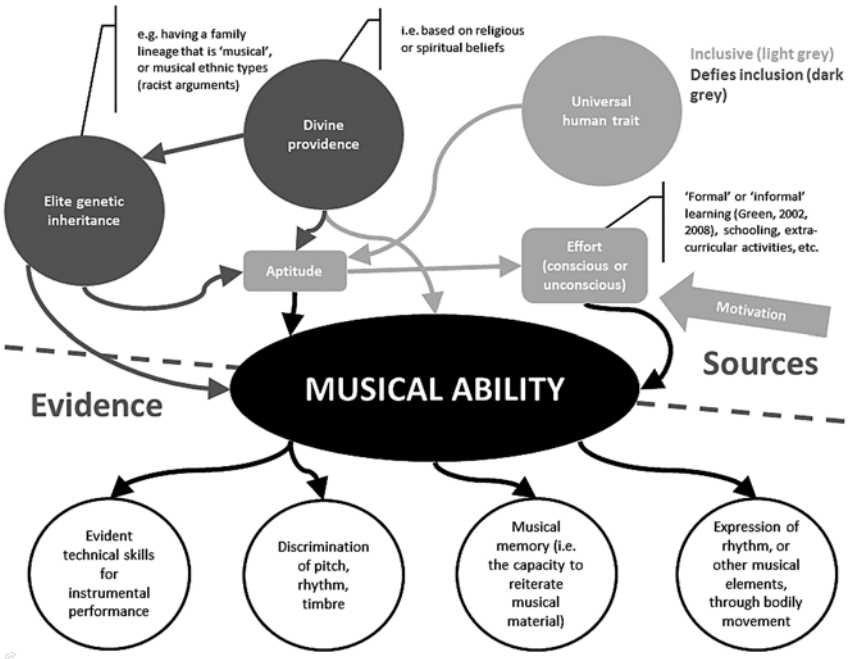

Figure 8.1 Possible notions of musical ability

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perception testing has clearly declined with a shift towards a vision of music education that is fully inclusive and this is evidenced in recent research focussing on a richer, multifaceted understanding of musical ability (McPherson, 1995/6; Cope, 1998; Hallam, 1998a). For example, Hallam (1998b) has linked musical capacities to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1999, 2000, 2006, 2007). Hargreaves and North (1999) have explored willingness to accept musical styles or 'open-earedness' (also see Hargreaves, North and Tarrant, 2006).

Primary Educators as 'Musicians' and 'Non-musicians'

The Plowden Report (CACE, 1967) suggested that poor quality primary music teaching resulted from '… neglect of systematic musical instruction in … colleges of education, and the consequent musical illiteracy of the great majority of teachers' (p. 251). In the late eighties, Her Majesty's Inspector (HMI) Janet Mills (1989) also observed a confidence problem in primary educators. She noted that many attempted to opt out of involvement in music pedagogy.

In some schools, classroom music is taught by an individual held to have elite and 'appropriate' skills in music – a 'specialist'. Some schools acquire visiting musicians from Local Education Authority (LEA) services. These teachers provide classroom lessons or Wider Opportunities projects. The latter are whole-class instrumental projects which were funded through a government initiative aimed at 'increasing participation and raising standards of pupil achievement in music by funding opportunities for Key Stage 2 (KS2) pupils to learn a musical instrument and/or to receive specialist vocal tuition' (DCSF, 2007, p. 31). Hennessy (1998) notes that, within the primary education sector:

> 'Music specialist' implies a teacher with traditional expertise who may be expected to teach music to all or most of the children. This kind of post has become increasingly rare in state education for a combination of reasons both economic and philosophical. What is not rare is the 'fall-out' from this title which continues to lead teachers to believe that music can only be the province of specialist teachers. Music is seen as a special specialism: as a subject that teachers can, quite openly and without shame, admit to not teaching. (p. 9)

The necessity for primary music to be taught by a 'specialist' with traditional expertise, conceivably meaning someone with a background as an instrumental performer, is inherently troubling. Likewise, the connotation that primary music can only be taught by the 'musically literate', someone fluent in standard Western notation, is rather problematic. The economic reality is that, in many primary schools today, music needs to be taught by staff members without such experience and knowledge.

Nonetheless, does teaching primary music, unlike other curricular areas, really require a unique background in the subject? Plummeridge (1991) has taken the viewpoint that:

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> All music teaching calls for subtle and refined musical judgement … it is wrong to assume that because generalists (in primary schools) can teach most curriculum subjects they can automatically teach music if they have guides and support materials. They may be able to 'cope' and *contribute* to children's musical education in this way … but if music is to be a truly meaningful and dynamic part of children's education then the foundations of musical understanding must be firmly laid in the early years of schooling. (pp. 70–1)

However, Glover and Ward (1998) refute Plummeridge's thinking. They argue that:

> … the specialist is not the person to be able to do this with every child in the primary school, any more than the language coordinator can know about every child's reading and writing. Implicit in Plummeridge's argument is the assumption that only specialists have access to musical understanding … [On the contrary] almost all adults exercise musical understanding to a considerable degree, though not necessarily as instrumental performers. (p. 172)

Perceived self-competence in music teaching may well influence the manner in which musical ability is framed by teachers. Without an evidence base to support this, we can only speculate on what primary teachers today believe about musical ability, or on what its chief manifestations are. Evidence of musical ability might be considered by some to lie in the technical skills of instrumental performance and/or musical memory, as demonstrated on an instrument or through the voice. Similarly, it might be evidenced by the capacity to discriminate elements such as rhythm, pitch or timbre, or to express music through bodily movement. Added to this is the way in which formative experiences and music preparation are likely to have an impact on the attitudes and beliefs held by primary teachers about music and their capacity to teach it. These beliefs are likely to be shaped by teachers' own experiences of music and music education. They shape their perceptions of themselves as 'musical' and have a further impact on teachers' success in identifying musical potential and effecting change in pupils' musical ability.

Against this background, we set out to explore some of the notions held by primary teachers around the phenomenon of musical ability in themselves and in children in primary school. Our interest lay in gaining increased understanding of the attributes they associated with musical ability, how they came to develop this understanding and how it informed their views on assessing potential in pupils. To this end, a number of research questions were formulated:

(1) Do primary teachers believe musical ability to be innate?
(2a) What attributes do they associate with musical ability?
(2b) Do they believe that musical ability can be developed?
(2c) Do teachers consider a musical aptitude test helpful in selecting children for particular musical activities within the primary school?

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The project was entitled MaPS (Musical ability in the Primary School). It was an exploratory one, designed to uncover themes that would serve as a platform on which to build an evidence base and to prepare the way for further investigation.

Method

Participants

The participants were generalists, required to teach music in schools in Southern England. Every 'partner' school (n = 318) of the Institute of Education, University of Reading was invited to participate. These schools were connected to the University through its Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes. The fieldwork and analysis took place between September 2011 and February 2012. Because the themes were potentially emotive for participants (e.g. curricular competence and inclusivity), the anonymity of a mail survey seemed more appropriate than interviews. Questionnaires with detailed covering letters were forwarded by post with a stamped, addressed envelope for return. Participants were asked not to collaborate when completing the document or to share their answers with others. In total, 79 (25 per cent) survey questionnaires were returned.[2] Of these, 89.9 per cent (71 respondents) were female.

We used a questionnaire comprising musical ability statements with five-point rating scales (1 = 'Strongly disagree', 3 = 'Neither disagree nor agree', 5 = 'Strongly agree'), closed 'Yes/No' items and open questions to collect qualitative elaborations and clarifications on the numerical data. Quantitative data were understood in terms of arithmetic means, standard deviations (denoted by SD) and percentages. Participants were selected on the basis that they were teachers in primary schools within the catchment area of the University. Using email addresses, initial contact with each school was made through a letter of invitation sent to the head teacher, whereby permission was sought for teachers in the school to take part in the study.

Table 8.1 shows the teaching experience of the respondents categorized according to number of years of experience.

Table 8.1 Years of teaching experience

Category	Years of teaching experience	Percentage of respondents	No.
1	10 years or less	53.2	42
2	11–20 years	26.6	21
3	21–30 years	13.9	11
4	31 years or more	6.3	5

[2] Please note that the percentages in this chapter have been rounded to one decimal place. There may be a nominal amount of 'rounding error' as a result.

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In terms of specific musical experience, 53.2 per cent (42 respondents) had undergone at least a year of formal instrumental instruction in the past or indeed were currently learning to play a musical instrument. However, only 39.2 per cent (31 respondents) could read a commonly-used system of music notation (such as staff notation or guitar tab). The role of music co-ordinator within the primary school was held by 13.9 per cent (11 respondents). 21.5 per cent (n = 17) reported that they had a qualification that equipped them for teaching music and 6.3 per cent (n = 5) stated that they were attending professional development sessions in music. Of the total number of responses, 40 per cent had no previous musical experience and expertise. Results are presented in Table 8.2.

Table 8.2 Musical experience and expertise

Music experience and expertise	Percentage of respondents	No.
I had lessons in playing an instrument or singing for one or more years prior to teacher training	53.2	42
I can read a widely-used system of musical notation (such as Western staff notation or guitar tab)	39.2	31
I am the music co-ordinator at a primary school	13.9	11
I have a qualification that equipped me well for teaching music in primary schools	21.5	17
I regularly attend professional development specifically in music education	6.3	5
None of these	40.5	32

The themes included in the questionnaire were established through a literature review, the researchers' experience and extensive discussion with primary teachers. Both researchers had regular contact with 'professional experts' and 'cultural insiders' and this was particularly helpful when designing the questionnaire; consulting both groups circumvented the trap of bias towards the former (Converse and Presser, 1986). These procedures also contributed to the construct validity of the instrument (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). For us, there were three themes of interest. In the first of these – nature or nurture – our focus was on exploring the extent to which teachers believed that musical ability was innate. For this reason, we included statements such as:

> Everyone has aptitude for music.
> Musical ability is related to a person's genes.
> A person's environment and experiences are responsible for his or her musical ability.
> Musically able people are most likely to have parents who participate/participated in music.
> Children start primary school with different musical abilities, which affect their musical potential.

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Secondly, there were statements which focused on attributes of the musically able:

> People with musical ability are more creative.
> Musically able children can reiterate short melodies or rhythmic statements that are played to them.
> Musically able people can discriminate pitch.
> Musical ability is evidenced when people can hear and identify different timbres.
> Musically able people are rhythmical and can express this through their bodies.
> Children with musical ability will interact spontaneously with music by moving to it or by singing.
> Musically able children, with less effort than others, play instruments or sing well.

A further set of statements was formulated and grouped around teaching, selection and the musically able. Here too we included positive examples such as:

> A musical aptitude test would be helpful in selecting children for activities (for example choir or instrumental lessons).
> A person can be taught to be rhythmical.
> Everyone can discriminate pitch, rhythm and can benefit from music lessons.

We recognize that there is some overlap here and that some statements, such as the statement 'a person can be taught to be rhythmical' could qualify for inclusion in the set of nature-nurture statements above.

In all, there were 17 statements. The teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt each matched their own beliefs, using the scale. Additionally, respondents were invited to offer written clarifications and elaborations on their numerical responses. We adopted this approach so as not to '… leave [these survey] respondents with the impression that their personal opinions or experiences … [had] to fit into a straightjacket of prescribed answers' (Gillham, 2007, p. 34); quantitative research has been criticized for being 'reductionist' (Jones, 2011) and 'atomistic' (Aldridge and Levine, 2001). With rating scales alone, it would also have been impossible to know if respondents wished to introduce related issues (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Furthermore, this was an opportunity for respondents to comment upon ambiguity or on items that needed clarification; fortunately, there were no remarks along those lines.

In order to avoid 'response sets' (Black, 1999), whereby a person completing a set of scales 'hangs' on one side for mere speed of completion, the polarity of some statements was deliberately reversed (such as, for example, 'Some people cannot discriminate …' became 'Some people can discriminate …'). These were turned back at the data-inputting stage. Gillham (2007) has warned that attitude questions are the most difficult to answer so there is often a limited use of scales towards the positive side. It was deemed important to encourage full consideration of each item.

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In addition, there was a section related to teachers' perceptions of themselves and their colleagues as 'musical' (Qs18, 19, 20 and 21) and here there was an opportunity to expand on the answers they provided. Demographic questions were positioned last and this was done so as to lessen the likelihood of reactivity to, for instance, age or length or professional experience (Haslam and McGarty, 2003). It was of interest here to find out how long they had worked in schools (Q22), the extent to which they felt qualified to teach music in school (Q23) and what was their prior training in music (Qs24 and 25). In the final section, we asked for information about the Key Stage with which they worked (Qs26 and 27), if they had a designated post in music co-ordination across the school (Q28) and whether or not they attended professional development in music (Q29). In the final question, they were asked to state their gender.

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS from both the closed and rating-scale items and the transcribed qualitative material was stored and coded with NVivo9 software. The quantitative data from each rating-scale item were compiled as an arithmetic mean and standard deviation; the latter gave an indication of the dispersion of the raw scores. Simple frequencies and percentages were calculated for items relating to nature-nurture, music experience and attributes of musical ability. In the ensuing passages, scores 1 and 2 ('Strongly disagree' and 'Disagree') have been combined to form one score, as have those for 4 and 5 ('Agree' and 'Strongly agree'). A third category has been formed for 3 ('Neither agree nor disagree'). The qualitative data permitted data-type triangulation.

Findings

Research Question 1. Do Primary Teachers Believe Musical Ability to be Innate?

The responses to questionnaire items relating to nature-nurture are presented in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3 Nature-nurture in beliefs about musical ability

Statement	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	N
Musical ability is related to a person's genes	22 (27.8%)	34 (43%)	23 (29.1%)	79
A person's environment and experiences are responsible for his or her musical ability	8 (10.1%)	24 (30.4%)	47 (59.5%)	79
Everyone has aptitude for music	33 (41.8%)	19 (24.1%)	27 (34.2%)	79
Musically able people are most likely to have parents who participate/participated in music	17 (21.8%)	18 (23.1%)	43 (55.1%)	78
Children start primary school with different musical abilities, which affect their musical potential	20 (25.3%)	15 (19.0%)	44 (55.7%)	79
Everyone can express themselves well through music	24 (30.4%)	17 (21.5%)	38 (48.1%)	79

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This was supported by qualitative data: some teachers were keen to emphasize the importance of family background in their own musicality.

> Music has been a part of my life since I was a very young child.
> I inherited the passion for music from my parents who from a very young age were involved in music.
> My mum used to and still sings in church choir. My dad used to play guitar, make music and used to sing in a small group.
> The whole family was musical and we were all involved in the choir and mostly our family gatherings were fun and musical.

Research Question 2a. What Attributes do Teachers Associate with Musical Ability?

Results for the statements relating to the attributes associated with musical ability are presented in Table 8.4.

Table 8.4 Attributes associated with musical ability

Statement	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Total
People with musical ability are more creative	8 (10.1%)	17 (21.5%)	54 (68.4%)	79
Musically able children can reiterate short melodies or rhythmic statements that are played to them	41 (51.9%)	31 (39.2%)	7 (8.9%)	79
Musically able people can discriminate pitch	57 (73.1%)	14 (17.9%)	7 (9%)	78
Musical ability is evidenced when people can hear and identify different timbres	40 (51.3%)	29 (37.2%)	9 (11.5%)	78
Musically able people are rhythmical and can express this through their bodies	59 (74.7%)	15 (19.0%)	5 (6.3%)	79
Children with musical ability will interact spontaneously with music by moving to it or by singing	58 (73.4%)	13 (16.5%)	8 (10.1%)	79
Musically able children, with less effort than others, play instruments or sing well	45 (57.0%)	21 (26.6%)	13 (16.5%)	79

There was general agreement that musical ability is evidenced: when children learn to play instruments with seemingly less effort than others; when they spontaneously interact with music, by moving to it or by singing; or when they express rhythmic understanding through bodily movement. Furthermore, for these teachers, musical ability was related to the capacity to hear different timbres, to discriminate pitch and to reiterate melodic or rhythmic material by ear. The teachers supported these views with written statements about their perceptions of themselves as musical:

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> [I am musical because] I've always involved myself in musical activities throughout my life.
> [I am musical because] I have performed independently and in a group on a range of instruments and singing.
> [I am musical because] I find it easy to identify pitch and rhythm and initiate these on a range of new instruments.

or not:

> [I am unmusical because] I've only dabbled with instruments. I can't read music, play an instrument.
> [I am unmusical because] I like singing and enjoy music but I don't have any real aptitude.

Likewise, they identified others as musical exclusively because of their ability to play musical instruments:

> They can read music and play an instrument well.
> They can play instruments to a high level.
> [A colleague] plays piano confidently and recorder.
> Their ability to play instruments, read music …
> They can play musical instruments/have learned to play musical instruments.

Those who agreed that people with musical ability were more creative than those without it were heavily outnumbered by those who disagreed or were unsure.

Research Question 2b. Do they Believe that Musical Ability can be Developed?

Responses to statements relating to teachers' beliefs concerning whether or not musical ability can be developed show that there was support for the idea that teaching can bring about a change in levels of musical ability. Results are presented in Table 8.5.

Table 8.5 Teacher beliefs on whether musical ability can be developed

Statement	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Total
A person can be taught to be rhythmical	42 (53.2%)	25 (31.6%)	12 (15.2%)	79
Everyone can discriminate pitch, rhythm and timbre and can benefit from music lessons	47 (59.5%)	16 (20.3%)	16 (20.3%)	79

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Research Question 2c. Would a Musical Aptitude Test be Helpful in Selecting Children for Particular Musical Activities within the Primary School?

The statement concerning musical aptitude testing produced the responses presented in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6 Would a musical aptitude test be helpful in identifying potential?

Statement	Agree	Don't know	Disagree	Total
A musical aptitude test would be helpful in selecting children for particular activities within the primary school (e.g. choir or instrumental lessons)	15 (19%)	22 (27.8%)	42 (53.2%)	79

Although the statement that a musical aptitude test would be helpful in selecting children for activities attracted some resistance, with a mean of 2.44, albeit with well-dispersed scores (SD 1.174), there was overall agreement that music lessons would benefit everyone in developing their musical ability (mean = 3.57, SD = 1.216). Overall, the most likely response biases were hefty weightings towards those who considered themselves musical or held positions as music co-ordinators within the school. These subgroups amounted to 62.5 and 13.9 per cent respectively. Because of the emergence of this response bias, we undertook a further layer of analysis. Scores returned for Qs23, 24, 25, 28 and 29 were used to identify three levels of musical experience, with scores of 4 or more indicating 'High experience', and those between 1 and 3 denoting a low level. A third category was formed from the respondents who reported no experience. From this, we undertook cross-tabulations of previous experience/expertise against responses to the various statements. In reporting the results, we have chosen to focus on those relating to universality (Table 8.7), nature (Table 8.8) and nurture (Table 8.9).

Table 8.7 Cross-tabulation of musical experience and expertise to beliefs about universality in musical ability

Statement	Level of experience			
Everyone has aptitude for music	None	Low	High	Total
Agree	15.6% (5)	50% (15)	41.2% (7)	79
Don't know	25% (8)	20% (6)	29.4% (5)	
Disagree	59.4% (19)	30% (9)	29.4% (5)	

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Table 8.8 Cross-tabulation of musical experience and expertise to beliefs about nature in musical ability

Statement	Level of experience			
Musical ability is related to a person's genes	None	Low	High	Total
Agree	40.6% (13)	20% (6)	23.5% (4)	79
Don't know	37.5% (12)	40% (12)	58.8% (10)	
Disagree	21.9% (7)	40% (12)	17.6% (3)	

Table 8.9 Cross-tabulation of musical experience and expertise to beliefs about nurture in musical ability

Statement	Level of experience			
A person's environment and experiences are responsible for his or her musical ability	None	Low	High	Total
Agree	56.3% (18)	53.3% (16)	76.5% (13)	79
Don't know	34.4% (11)	30% (9)	23.5% (4)	
Disagree	9.4% (3)	16.7% (5)	0% (0)	

There is a wide disparity in responses to the statement that 'Everyone has aptitude for music', particularly between those with no experience and those whose experience was high. The former were most inclined to disagree with the statement whereas those with high levels of experience agreed. This difference can be seen in the statement that 'Musical ability is related to a person's genes' also. Those with no experience tended to agree more than either of the other groupings. There was a considerable level of uncertainty around this statement, too, with 58.8 per cent of the highly experienced respondents reporting 'Don't know'. Regarding responses to the statement that environment and experiences have a part to play in musical ability, the weighting for all groups was towards agreement, although it was considerably more so for those with high levels of experience (76.5 per cent) than for those with low levels (53.3 per cent) or none (56.3 per cent). At the other end of the scale, no respondent in the experienced group disagreed with this statement.

In addition to the statements above, a cross-tabulation of experience/expertise and belief about the worth of a musical aptitude test for picking up on potential generated a mixed result. Of the total number of respondents, 22 appeared to be uncertain and most of these were those in the 'No experience' category. Most of the respondents tended to disagree with the statement, but there is a greater level of disagreement among respondents with low levels of experience than in the other categories.

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Table 8.10 Cross-tabulation of musical experience and expertise to attitude to musical aptitude tests

Statement	Level of experience and expertise			
A musical aptitude test would be helpful in selecting children for particular activities within the primary school (such as choir or instrumental lesson)	**None**	**Low**	**High**	**Total**
Agree	15.6% (5)	20% (6)	23.5% (4)	79
Don't know	40.6% (13)	16.7% (5)	23.5% (4)	
Disagree	43.8% (14)	63.3% (19)	52.9% (9)	

There was agreement as well with the statement that 'Children start primary school with different musical abilities, which then affect their musical potential'; there was a higher positive response from those with no experience (62.5 per cent) than for those in the other categories (Low: 50 per cent; High: 53 per cent).

Discussion

In general, a degree of uncertainty surrounded the responses to our first research question regarding primary teachers' belief that musical ability is innate. This may be explained by the fact that teachers have not been canvassed on such matters before and so were unable or unwilling to commit themselves to expressing a view. It may also reveal allegiance to a notion that music is a talent and, as such, defies inclusion. On closer examination, however, we can see a clear distinction between the beliefs held by those with some experience and those with none (see Table 8.7) where the responses to the statement for those with low and high levels of musical experience combine to show an overwhelming level of support for belief in the universality of musical ability. This lends weight to the view that those who are musically knowledgeable tend to be more confident that music is teachable than those without musical experience. The highest level of disagreement with the statement 'everyone has aptitude for music' was recorded from those with no musical experience. A similar tendency can be found in responses related to the genetic factor (Table 8.8). Those with no musical experience were most inclined to agree with the statement that musical ability is related to a person's genes while those with most musical experience were least confident in expressing a view. In responses to the statement about a person's environment and experiences being responsible for their musical ability (see Table 8.9), those with high levels of musical experience were much more confident than the other two groupings that musical ability could be nurtured.

This raises some serious issues about the perception of music as teachable and might explain why the policy of using visiting specialist teachers has met with little resistance in primary schools, at least in England, in spite of the fact that

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music is included as a statutory subject in the primary school curriculum. Further investigation would help to clarify the extent to which notions of innateness are confined to a particular tradition (for example, Western classical music), resistant to change over time and experience and also whether or not this view is held by others who play a role in the development of children. This might include visiting specialist teachers, head teachers, parents and carers.

In some cases, there were signs of beliefs relating to inherited ability or ability due to other factors beyond one's control. Most common among these was an agreement that family background and environment had a bearing on a person's musical ability. Interestingly, in the qualitative statements provided by the respondents, a distinction can be drawn between those activities that occurred informally and those that were on a more formal footing. Take, for example, the reference to singing. Where this was cited as an activity, it denoted an activity outside the formal setting of the school and in social situations, like church choirs and family gatherings. In contrast, when giving reasons to support their descriptions of themselves or their colleagues as 'musical', teachers almost exclusively mentioned formal instrumental tuition. Clearly, we would not want to extrapolate too much from this, but it does raise a rather interesting point about conceptions of innateness and universality in musicality. Moreover, it raises an interesting point about the extent to which engagement in music activities is perceived to have different weightings, at least in the opinions of the teachers in our survey. Further research is needed on the source of these opinions and the preconceptions underpinning them. Certainly, it is necessary to consider the experiences teachers have had of engagement in musical activities and the manner in which that engagement took place. It would be possible to learn why educators with 'informal' formative experiences make comments that place a premium on enjoyment, whereas those on a more formal footing do not. Narrative or life history methods might be particularly valuable in exploring matters such as these.

The focus in the second research question was on finding out what attributes these primary teachers associated with musical ability. Results show that, regardless of the degree to which they engaged in music, respondents shared a tendency to connect the notion of musical ability with specific 'indicators' such as instrumental performance skills and the ability to hear structural elements in music. We recognize that the statements provided were predicated on a model of musical ability originating in an historical and institutional orientation that is itself culturally specific. Added to this, there is an absence of any reference to hard work or effort in the qualitative statements. In the main, the responses to this question tended to correspond with degrees of experience. They add weight to the claim that those with experience of music were likely to have seen, at first hand, the positive impact it had on their own musical ability. As a consequence, these practitioners were convinced that they could bring about changes in the musical ability of others. By contrast, those without this experience had no such evidence on which to draw and, for them, musical ability in themselves and others seemed to remain a mystery.

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This observation on experience does not necessarily hold true in all cases, however. Take for example the responses to the statement on the usefulness of musical aptitude tests (see Table 8.10). We might expect the highest scores to come from those with most experience and yet, curiously, the highest level of disagreement (63.3 per cent) was reserved for those in the low experience category. Without further insights we can only speculate on the causes for the lack of enthusiasm for testing reported by this group. It may be that they have had negative experiences of these tests in their own formative experiences, leading them away from engaging with music in later years. Whatever the reason, we would wish to examine this in greater detail; interviews would allow us to gain access to teachers' perspectives, with the prospect of providing an explanation for the dispersal of results in the 'Low experience' category. Interviews too would present us with a means of finding evidence of a causal relationship between these negative formative experiences and reported lack of experience and expertise in music as an adult.

Conclusion

The research presented here was exploratory in nature and limited in several respects. For one thing, the response rate was small and the findings cannot, therefore, be considered to be representative of primary teachers in general. It is likely, too, that a survey like this with its focus on music will attract those already interested in the subject. We do not know if the responses of a wider pool of teachers, or those at different stages of their careers, would change the results considerably. Nor can we draw conclusions about gender: the sample we used was heavily biased towards females. In terms of terminology, we have difficulty with assumptions underlying labels used to describe the activities that take place in primary classrooms. For example, where the label 'musician' is used to denote an instrumental performer, it tends to create a distinction between two types of primary school teachers, namely those who have skills as an instrumental performer and those who do not. It should be borne in mind that it is not normally a requirement for primary teachers entering the profession to be instrumental performers; indeed it is perfectly possible for primary teachers to be effective music educators without such qualification. Just as we would want to challenge the negative connotations attached to the primary teacher who is not an instrumental performer, we would caution against acceptance of the descriptor 'non-specialist' as it is ascribed to generalist primary teachers. If we take the term 'generalist teacher' to be the norm for those who, in the course of their professional practice, teach music to pupils in the classroom context, it would seem more appropriate to apply the descriptor 'non-generalist' to those who differ from this norm. By shifting the emphasis thus, we would advocate a move away from the presentation of the professional practice of the classroom teacher as somehow deficient. Our future research will necessitate finding a way to probe beneath this initial layer of communication with primary teachers, interrogating these responses further, moving beyond the terminology used here, and confronting the assumptions

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which have remained uncontested for too long. It is still too early to form an opinion of the impact of the 36 recommendations proposed in the Henley report (Department for Education, 2011a). What we can say, though, is that the proposal to introduce a collaborative approach to the provision of quality and excellence in music education offers opportunities for all those involved in primary school to work in new ways. As this exploratory study has shown, there is still a degree of uncertainty among primary teachers around the extent to which children's potential for music can be recognized and developed. We can use this uncertainty as a starting point and, by taking on board the attitudes of primary teachers, build a platform on which to work together toward finding new understandings of the origins and development of their perceptions of music education.

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