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Not Musical? Identity Perceptions of Generalist Primary School Teachers in Relation to Classroom Music Teaching in England

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In my years working as a music specialist in English primary schools I encountered confident, experienced, professional teachers who expressed anxiety about teaching music in the National Curriculum. A number of generalist teachers seemed to believe that they were not competent to teach music to their classes, since they perceived themselves as "non-musicians" or "not musical." Because of this, they said, they lacked confidence in music. As one teacher said,

> *The fact that I can't demonstrate good practice or how to go about improving things, you know, which I can do in all other subjects, but it's the one where that all falls down, and I'm not able to help them.*

Anxiety about music led to fears of an inability to control music lessons:

> *With music you have to get it right . . . It's the lack of control.*

Yet these same teachers felt able to teach other subjects where they did not perceive themselves to have strong, subject-specific identities.

> *In any other subject it's fine you know, it's just …I mean in any other subject if something went wrong I would say "That hasn't worked. We're going to pack away and we're going to do something else."*

Music appeared to present a particular problem. Informal interview and observation studies in a range of primary schools suggested that this problem was indeed widespread, a picture supported by wider research (Holden & Button 2006; Osborn et al. 2000; Wragg 1994). However, while teachers appear to regard confidence as an essential attribute to bring to successful teaching, they seem to have difficulty in expressing a specific definition.

In order to probe teachers' discomfort more thoroughly, and to make a more rigorous investigation of the reasons for their anxiety about music, I carried out case study research. Four generalist teachers, all of whom were confident professionals of around ten years' experience, participated. All four saw music as a weak area in their otherwise strong professional identity.

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The tradition of generalist teaching in English primary classrooms sees teachers working in a complex context, acting in a number of roles and presenting a range of identities. Data from the case studies showed the participating teachers to have strong and positive perceptions of many aspects of their teacher identities. In music, though, these strong teacher identities stood in stark contrast to the weakness of their perceived musical identities. The teachers saw their perceived lack of ability to teach music as a failure to match up to their image of what a good generalist primary teacher should be.

In practical terms, the research suggested that generalist teachers are frequently tempted to opt out of music. Teachers hold dear the generalist vision of holistic teaching within their classroom. Yet, if pressures mount in the high-stakes, externally assessed subjects of numeracy and literacy, music is often the first subject to be abandoned. Furthermore, if a specialist teacher is available, teachers willingly send their classes to learn music in isolation from the rest of the curriculum. Both of these actions seem likely to intensify teachers' feelings of failure, to weaken their musical self-esteem and their self-perceptions of musical identity.

It appeared that the participating teachers' low confidence levels in music involved feelings about control and agency. It has been argued that a need to be in control of the outcomes of actions is a fundamental human need (Bandura 1995). These teachers' perceptions of their musical identity included poor control beliefs with regard to music. The resultant expectations of failure perhaps explained the low self-efficacy beliefs which emerged from the research data.

Whilst lack of confidence in music presented a challenge, the research suggested that it was a challenge that teachers would be delighted to overcome. As one teacher said, with notable intensity,

> *I'd love to feel confident about it, because they really enjoy doing it. They love coming over to the music room, it's a special place. Oh yes! I'd just love to not have that fear really.*

Although findings suggested that teachers would like more knowledge, skills and understanding of music, it appears that they believed that, in contrast to other subjects, they could not easily access these.

To set the context for this discussion of English primary teachers' identity perceptions, this article begins with some description of the English primary school and its teachers, the English National Curriculum and how teachers are trained. A discussion of the issue of

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confidence is followed by a brief description of a research project which probed teachers' perceptions. The article considers two emergent aspects of these, first looking at teachers' initial perceptions of their musical identities and their roles in the music classroom, then discussing teachers' self-efficacy and control beliefs. In conclusion there is an outline of some difficulties faced by teachers as they work to strengthen their musical identities, and pointers are given to some possible ways forward.

THE ENGLISH PRIMARY SCHOOL AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FOR ENGLAND

English Primary Schools and Classrooms

Primary schools in England work with children from ages 5 to 11, after which they transfer to secondary education. The National Curriculum, which must be adhered to by all schools, begins at Year 1 with children who will be 6 during that school year. Younger children follow the Early Years Foundation Stage, which "sets standards for the development, learning and care of children from birth to five" (DCSF 2009a). Many primary schools have associated Nursery provision for 3- to 5-year-olds.

In English primary education there is a long tradition of generalist teaching. Class teachers are expected to be with their class all day, teaching a wide range of subjects (Alexander 1992; DES et. al. 1967; DES & Inspectorate of Schools 1978). Despite the encouragement of the generalist system in the highly influential Plowden Report (DES et al. 1967), music has long been taught as a discrete subject in many schools, either by a member of staff who had a little expertise or by a visiting 'music specialist' (Cox 2002; DES & Inspectorate of Schools 1978; Mills 1989; Rainbow 1996). Class teachers have traditionally possessed considerable autonomy (Grace 1987; Lawton 1980). There was no nationally-set curriculum, and teachers often had freedom to adapt the school-set curriculum to fit in with their strengths and weaknesses. If they wished, they could include any aspects of music that they were comfortable to teach (Campbell 1985; DES et al. 1967; Rainbow 1989).

The National Curriculum

Practice in the classrooms of English primary schools underwent major changes as a result of the Education Reform Act of 1988 (Great Britain Parliament 1988). For the first time in England, a uniform curriculum for all schools was established by parliamentary statute. The

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Act provided that every maintained school should have a common curriculum and music was specified among its foundation subjects. Music had never been specified in this way before. It was introduced in full by 1996.

The primary National Curriculum has undergone revision since its inception (Stunell 2006). The version being used at the time of the described research, and still in use at the time of this writing, is the third (DfEE & QCA 1999). Following a government-requested review of the primary curriculum in 2008 (DCSF 2009b), a new primary National Curriculum is proposed from September 2011. This curriculum will be organised in six Areas of Learning, rather than by individual subjects (DCSF 2010). Music will be part of Understanding the Arts. Whilst basing the curriculum on these broader learning areas will allow teachers more freedom to organise their pupils' learning and encourage more cross-curricular working, there is no suggestion that there will be any change to the generalist teaching principle in primary schools. Music will still be a specified subject within the Understanding the Arts area, with defined content.[1]

Initial Teacher Education for Primary Teachers

Working within the National Curriculum, English primary teachers have to confront and cope with subject gaps in their professional competences. If alternative provision is not made in their school, they are statutorily required to teach all subjects of the National Curriculum. The professional standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) include the requirement for teachers to have "have a secure knowledge and understanding of their subjects/curriculum areas and related pedagogy to enable them to teach effectively across the age and ability range for which they are trained" (TDA 2007).

Teacher education, leading to QTS, can be undertaken at institutions of higher education or within a school (TDA 2010). Historically, music has been a component in the preparation of teachers (Mills 1989). The early 1990s saw good provision for music in some ITE institutions (Tidsall 2004), but this changed as the decade proceeded. There was evidence of a decline in music and other arts provision within training programmes (NACCCE 1999; Rogers 1998). The 40 training providers in England providing courses in music in 2001 (Ofsted 2001) fell to 14 by 2005, with 2% of primary training places offering some specialist musical education (DfES & DCMS 2005).

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Even where music training has been available, a positive experience for students has not been universal. Brewer (2003) found that 59% of the teachers in her study of 41 teachers, and 66% of those who did not take music as a specialist option, found their training to be "poor" or "totally inadequate," a situation she describes as "a substantial level of inappropriate and inadequate preparation" (88). Anecdotal evidence in 2009 suggests that students' experience of music in primary education courses is still very patchy.[2]

Hennessy (1999) has said that the actual experience of making music is the most certain way to develop musical skills and achieve understanding, but limited time militates against such experience. All teaching students are required to spend periods on school-based teaching practice.[3] However, it is possible for them not to experience curricular music during these periods, and it appears that only 30–40% teach music during their school practice (Rogers 1998, 35). Some students may not even observe music being taught, since schools may timetable music in half term blocks against other subjects.[4]

English primary teachers, then, may enter the profession with little knowledge or skill in music teaching. At the same time, teachers take professional pride in being able to teach the whole curriculum and may suffer stress when they are not able to do so (Alexander 1995; McCulloch 1997). Informal discussions with primary teachers have suggested that they care deeply about the children in their classes and want them to enjoy access to the whole curriculum. They appear to be concerned about curricular areas where they feel incompetent or lacking in knowledge or skills. For a notable proportion of teachers, music seems to be such a subject area.[5]

THE ISSUE OF CONFIDENCE

Many primary teachers currently in service experienced limited musical education in their own schooldays. Teachers born before 1982 may well have attended primary schools where music was not timetabled. Some, of course, will have been at schools where music was established, and some will have received private instrumental music tuition, although many of those would not have continued to play after their teenage years (ABRSM 1997). It is perhaps not surprising that, given the patchy nature of music provision in ITE, lack of confidence to teach music is such a prevalent concern.

2005 saw the publication of the first report on the Music Manifesto, the British

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government's 2004 initiative to support music for children and young people in England (DfES & DCMS 2004, 2005). This initiative covered a wider range of musical engagement than that of curricular music in primary schools, but the report included figures confirming an expressed lack of confidence amongst generalist teachers, openly stating that "music is the subject that newly qualified primary teachers say they are least confident to teach" (DfES & DCMS 2005, 50). The government-appointed Music Champion charged with implementing the Manifesto, Marc Jaffrey, commented that a situation in which music was seen as "fearful" for teachers was one of significance (Jaffrey 2005). It can be argued that teachers who are "fearful" of music in school are likely to perceive themselves as having weak musical identities in this context.

This perceived problem with music has been ongoing since the early days of the National Curriculum, when teachers' feelings of competence to teach music fell even from a low starting base (Wragg 1994). Low self-perceived competence may be assumed to instill a lack of confidence to teach well and to support weak self-identity perceptions. Music was not the only 'new' subject with which generalist teachers were faced in 1988; but in other subjects where teachers had been found to have low self-perceptions of ability, the situation changed markedly during the following years. Carré and Carter (1993) showed, for example, that between 1989 and 1991 science moved from being eighth out of ten in a list of teachers' subjects of self-perceived low competence to being third out of ten. Music was ninth in 1989 and still ninth in 1991. The situation has improved in music since then, but lack of confidence is still widespread. Holden and Button (2006) found that 74% of their sample of 71 teachers were "very confident" or "reasonably confident," although 21% were still "not confident" (30). This still represents a large number of primary teachers.

While suggesting that there is no agreed definition of the term, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) has developed a working definition of confidence for learners. Teachers with low confidence in music may be seen as learners to which this definition might apply:

> Confidence is a belief in one's own abilities to do something in a specific situation. This belief includes feeling accepted and on equal terms with others in the same situation. (NIACE 2004, 2)

Teachers who are "professionally confident" have good self-belief in relation to both their effectiveness and their "authority to make important decisions about the conduct of their

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work" (Helsby 1999, 173). They display strong teacher identities. For generalist teachers, though, each subject context may be distinct, and there is a range of subject-specific identities that need to be positive for a perceived ability to control the teaching situation. In the context of music, teachers who regard themselves as 'musical' are likely to be more confident than those who see themselves as 'non-musicians'.

A RESEARCH PROJECT TO INVESTIGATE TEACHERS' IDENTITY PERCEPTIONS
IN THE MUSIC CLASSROOM

My research, then, began from a real-world enquiry into why it might be that teachers of some experience, who regarded themselves as skilled and confident teachers and appeared to have strong self-perceived teacher identities, should so often have little confidence in their abilities to teach music. It asked three questions, each of which impinged on self-perceptions of musical identity.

(i)   How do English primary teachers perceive their position in relation to NC music?

(ii)   What do they mean by the word 'confident' in relation to music?

(iii)   What do they believe they need in order to be confident in music?

Case study was the primary methodology used for this research. Stenhouse (1985, cited in Bassey 1999) describes educational case studies as being about "enriching educational action by understanding it," a description that echoed the underlying reason for this study. Since the research hoped to discover answers of some depth, it required a methodology in which researcher and respondents could move past the superficial. Deeper probing of the nature of confidence was likely to stray into the world of feelings and possibly into quite personal areas of teachers' lives. There was a need to reach a level of thinking and understanding where teachers could describe the interrelationships among their actions and beliefs. A methodology which allowed time for a good rapport to develop between researcher and respondents was indicated, so that a strong level of trust could be built during the fieldwork.

The four teachers were all in their early thirties and all professed to be more concerned about their music teaching than their teaching of other subjects. They all stated that they believed that being involved in the research would help them with their music teaching. They

came from a variety of geographical areas, including a London borough, a southern shire county and a north-western urban area. They were working with a range of age-groups from year 1 (age 5/6) to year 6 (age 10/11).

 "If you want to know how people understand their world and their life", says Kvale (1996), "why not ask them?" I carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with each teacher over a period of a year. This was supplemented by time spent in the teachers' classrooms during the school day and in a range of subject lessons including music. These periods included many brief, informal exchanges of questions and answers.

Information also came from many sources within the social context of the school and classroom. The children in the schools, other staff, school documents and policies, notices and displays, school events, unexpected incidents and other factors all added to the data. Video-recordings of the music lessons were made, to provide a way for the teachers to share a review of the lessons during the interviews.

After the first visit to the teachers in their schools, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire about themselves. This initial approach seemed to be a non-threatening way for teachers to supply information from which the series of interview conversations could start. It also encouraged the participants to start to reflect on their own musical experiences both in and outside school. The questionnaires provided some factual information about teachers' length of service, education and training, but also gave some idea of their views about the purposes and content of music education. These thoughts did indeed prove to make good starting-points for the interviews. The first session with each teacher included discussion of how they conceived a "musical person" and what they understood by musicality. These conversations quickly moved onto the teachers' perceptions of their own musical identities.

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UNDERSTANDINGS OF MUSICALITY AND TEACHERS' INITIAL PERCEPTIONS

OF THEIR MUSICAL IDENTITIES

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Self-identified 'musicians', usually understood to be those with performing skills, often seem to differ from self-defined 'non-musicians' in their definitions of musicality. There is a common perception that to be musical is to be able to play an instrument or sing well (Hallam 2002; Welch 2001). For musicians, though, although they may be able to perform, the notion of musicality is about more than practical skill with the voice or a musical instrument. Practising musicians would agree that to perform musically requires more than technical

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ability. For them, musicality is about sensitivity to musical sound, and the ability to make a response to musical events. Such an understanding defines everybody as musical (Glover and Ward 1993; Welch 2002). Under this broader understanding, levels of musical skill may vary, but do not in themselves demonstrate the innate level of musicality. Technical instrumental skill is not necessarily accompanied by musical sensitivity; on the other hand, intensely musical people may not have developed performance skills.

The teachers in this research study all had a view as to whether they were musical and how far they saw themselves as musicians, and were keen to talk about the place of music in their lives outside school. Bridget, the only one of the four who had had more than a general musical education, clearly saw herself as musical. She declared herself to be "passionate" about music, and had high levels of music skill and knowledge. Although she made no statements directly assessing her own musicality or identifying herself as a musician, she talked with ease about music and her involvement in it. She talked about the musicality of children in her class, confident in her own understanding of what this might mean, and showing that, for her, musicality was not about performing skill.

> *R's very musical, she's got a very musical ear. She was completely absorbed . . . she doesn't do it in a showy-offy way, but she does in a completely intuitive way.*
> *You know I've got quite a lot of musical ones in here and it gives them an avenue to explore their musicality and it gives the other ones something to explore and it gives them a voice in music.*

Bridget had a high level of subject confidence, and a strong musical self-identity. Interestingly this seemed to be what gave her a lack of confidence in the music classroom. She was afraid that she would not be able to optimize the benefits of music for her pupils. So her anxiety seemed to be related more to her teacher identity than her musical identity.

> *It does take a lot, you do need to think, it does need careful thinking about how you're going to structure a music session. It really does need a lot of time and effort. It's not something you can just, if you're not really sure what you're doing you can't just muddle through a session, you have to kind of know what your aim is and what you're actually going to do.*

Anna, too, was passionate about the place of music in life, referring frequently to how important it was to her.

> *I don't play the piano particularly well, but I listen to music. As soon as I get in the car to go home, the radio goes on. Or we actually now have a car with a CD player. Which is so useful! So a CD goes on. At home quite often we will not have the television on, but we'll have a CD on.*

She expressed difficulty in understanding people for whom music was unimportant.

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> *I don't understand how you can get people who say "I'm not fussed about music." I just don't quite understand that.*

Anna had considerable music knowledge, used musical vocabulary easily, was willing to sing with her class, and even had some performing skill on the piano. In contrast to Bridget, though, Anna initially had a weak self-perception of her musical identity.

> *No. I wouldn't say that I was a musician. I'm not musical . . . if that was the scale, if this was the top end, you know, being able to play an instrument and being a musician, and this is the bottom end, I would say that I'm somewhere kind of, not right in the middle, somewhere just below middle, kind of 30% along the line.*

Also in contrast to Bridget, Anna was unsure that she could recognise musicality in others.

> *I would be able to say, I think, that some of them are able to discuss what they can hear, and that some are able to compose . . . oh, I don't know, that's really difficult!*

Interestingly, she regarded the description 'musical' as applying differently to children and adults,

> *. . . me as an adult, I don't consider myself being musical. But, as a teacher, there isn't one child in my class that I would say is non-musical.*

Kate had had some damaging experiences of music during her own school life. At the same time, she had enjoyed music outside school when the opportunity arose.

> *There was music at home all the time. Yes, and we would all sing along to it when we were at home . . . and whatever and belt it out, but . . . I wouldn't like to hear it in the car when we were going along!*

As an adult, Kate was engaged with music at home as a listener. She also sang and danced with her daughter, and took her to mother-and-child music activities. Despite this, she expressed minimal confidence in her own musical identity. When asked what she regarded as the marks of a 'musical' person, she talked of knowledge and understanding rather than any innate ability. She did not regard herself as having this to any degree and saw herself existing in a different world from 'musicians', who would be "put up there on a platform!"

Kate regarded music as having a central importance in life. She regretted her lack of ease with music and evidently saw this as a great loss. She was clear that she did not want the children she taught to feel as uneasy with music as she did.

> *Well, I know I've always felt ...felt guilty when I haven't taught music lessons, you know like if I've dropped it for whatever reason. Because I don't want the children to feel the same way that I feel.*

Like Anna, Kate seemed to apply different criteria for musicality to adults and to children. In assessing children's musicality she would look for enthusiasm and involvement rather than knowledge, but was uncertain about these criteria being "right."

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Sally did not regard herself as a musician, although she had some skills and was not afraid to use them in school. She was realistic about how far she could go and where she needed the support of someone with more expertise, but she was willing to try to teach music as a subject within the curriculum. She too was unable to agree that her childhood level of skill on piano and recorder or her reasonable but unrecognised singing ability qualified her to be "musical." For Sally, a musical adult must be able to play an instrument or to be a confident singer. In her case, similar criteria applied to children, though innate abilities, such as rhythmic responses, also qualified.

> *I can tell who can pick up a rhythm. I know those who play brass and the guitar, and you can see that they've got a bit more of a flair for it, and I could also point out those that can sing well.*

Initially, then, the four teachers represented a range of self-perceived musical identities. For two of them these identities transferred between school and their outside lives. Bridget's belief that she was musical was constant across her life. Sally, too, was consistent in her perception of herself as not having much musical skill, and her refusal to define herself as musical. Anna displayed some confusion in her perceptions. She believed that a child could be musical without performing skill whereas an adult could not and, despite evident confidence listening to, enjoying and sharing music both outside and inside school, her fairly strong outside musical identity did not transfer inside school. Kate's damaging experiences with music during her own school life perhaps made it understandable that she would not see herself as having a positive musical identity in a school context. Like Anna, she was willing to see children as musical without performing skills, but her fear of "getting it wrong" in practical musical skill meant that she could not see herself as musical inside school. In Kate's case, her very low musical identity inside school seemed to have transferred to her self-perceptions outside school.

TEACHERS' ROLES IN THE CLASSROOM: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Classroom Context

Primary teachers work in a complex context. Context has been defined as "that which surrounds" (Cole 1996, 133). It may be helpful, in understanding the teacher's identities and roles within it, to look more closely at the characteristics and relationships of this setting. Bresler (1998), reflecting the work of Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979), describes the teacher's

"commitments and expertise" within the classroom as the "micro context" of action (2). She argues that the "meso context" within which the micro context lies is the institutional level of the school, with its particular structures and aims. Outside these she defines a "macro" level at which cultural and social values constrain individuals' action.

The music classroom can be conceived as being a context of shifting shape, formed by the ever-evolving group of societal discourses which form these contextual levels. Cultural and social values, and policies and structures at the "macro," "meso" and "micro" levels all impact upon teachers as they work with curricular music. Within this context they develop beliefs about their ability to be 'good' teachers. This complexity of constraints and expectations also provides information and understandings from which teachers develop their own identity perceptions.

Teachers' Roles and Identities

The teacher, too, has a complex nature. Burr (2002) argues that individuals assume ideas and beliefs that are current in the society in which they live. These social representations, as Burr (2002) also points out, are not static. Individuals constantly question their position within the shifting context, and re-define their own positions and identities within it.

Wetherell and Maybin (1996) suggest that the need to construct the self in ways that make sense of the personal context of action leads to the existence of a "variety of selves" (222). In each of their settings, they argue, people have different relationships and develop a particular contextual self. Harré and Gillett (1994) argue that to have a sense of personal identity in the complexity of the social world means having a sense of place within various locations and social settings. So teachers might be expected to have different views of their musical identities in different parts of their lives. Thus, Anna may see herself as having a strong musical identity relative to her own classroom, but be unwilling to extend this into the wider school context.

"In any society people occupy status positions in numerous aspects of their social structure" (Linton 1945, cited by Burr 2002, 59). Each of these positions can be termed a role within that aspect. Roles are seen to be under constant social negotiation and are transient, since people adopt new ways of behaving as their contexts and contextual relationships shift (Burr 2002). Although the development of a range of roles within a classroom may be potentially enabling for teachers, helping them to act appropriately in different situations,

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performance within them may not always be straightforward. Goffman (1961, cited in Oatley & Jenkins 1996, 31) argued that people learn to give different kinds of performances, acting within the rules of particular roles. In general, Oatley and Jenkins suggest, the more fully engaged people are in their role performances, the happier they will be. However, negative emotions may also be engendered if people are enacting a role without full engagement. This may be what is occurring when teachers are anxious in the music teaching setting.

Three particular teacher roles were identified in the described research as being central for the teacher in a primary music classroom: teacher, individual person, and musician. For classroom teachers the central role may be said to be that of *teacher*. In the school context, teachers identify themselves first as teachers, bringing a range of professional skills and abilities into the classroom. At the same time, every teacher has a range of other identities outside school and possibly non-teacher identities within school. These identities may not be seen by teachers as part of their personas as 'teacher'. They are perhaps more correctly identified as belonging to the teacher as an *individual* within society. Following Welch's claim that "We are all musical; we just need the opportunity" (Welch 2001, 25), it is suggested that every teacher also has a *musical* identity. Although individual teachers may claim that they are not musical, or not musicians, it can be argued that everyone has a position on a continuum between non-musician (one who has no musical sensitivity, arguably a rare person [Shuter-Dyson 1999]) and highly-developed musician (one who has well-practised and significantly developed sensitivity to and understanding of music, possibly, though not necessarily, including performing skill). While their self-perceptions may differ from external perceptions, teachers, like all others with normal brain function and sensory ability (Marin & Perry 1999), have a place within this range of definitions.

TEACHERS' SELF-PERCEIVED ROLE IDENTITIES

Identifying Voices Within the Data

The research data were initially analysed by a coding system which identified whether teachers appeared to be describing positions, experiences and ideas from within their roles as teachers, as individual persons, or as musicians. For example, speaking as a teacher, Sally says,

> *I don't actually mind teaching it [music], as in I don't dread my music lessons, though I don't find it very easy.*

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Referring to her own understanding of pulse in music, that is, speaking from her standpoint as a musician, she said,

> *I don't know, I'd just make it up! I'd either use three or four . . . I'd just say, "Right I'll count in three." Not because I'd listened to it and thought you'd need to count in three.*

Speaking of her activities outside school as an individual person, she said,

> *I listen to the radio, and bits and bobs, but I'm not somebody who's always got a CD on or anything like that.*

Many passages were coded under more than one of these codes, since teachers often spoke from more than one role position at the same time. In another example from Sally's interviews, she described how she felt as an individual, her musical understanding and how she was working to improve her teaching skill.

> *Things like that are hard because I'm not confident, and even though I've read what it means it still doesn't mean very much to me, mainly because I don't understand it. That's where it's the understanding—I mean I don't particularly like teaching singing, because I know that I don't sing in tune. And more and more this year, I have tried to sing along with them. I mean I love singing. I don't have a problem, you know. We can go to singing practice and I'll sing away. I'm quite happy doing that as long as everybody else is singing.*

All four teachers presented each of the three voices, identifiable sometimes as representing discrete role positions and sometimes in combinations of roles.

Teachers' Voices

All four teachers in the case study regarded themselves as good professional generalist teachers who wanted to be able to teach the whole curriculum.

> *. . . I don't think it's good enough just to say "I can't do maths. I mean I'm not brilliant at maths. I'm not particularly keen, but I can't say "Oh I'm not going to teach maths, it's clearly not my strong point ." . . And I think you can't duck out of anything.* (Bridget)

The teachers all suggested that they were not equally strong in all curricular areas, and displayed a reflective stance about their work.

> *I suppose as the time has gone on I've become more confident with teaching it [music]. I still don't think that I've got any great music whatever. . . But, you know, I feel the same in a way about ICT, and again there are lots of things that frighten me stupid about ICT. But the children have got to learn it. And I've got to learn it.* (Anna)

They all acknowledged that music is a place of particular difficulty for many generalist teachers within their professional role.

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> *I don't think really you should be able to duck out of music, and I know it's a difficult one. I know most of my colleagues, a lot of them don't do as much music as they should do.* (Bridget)

While all four teachers could be seen as "striving after perfection," they also felt that they were under a good deal of pressure. Anna, considering the fact that some of her colleagues taught music only rarely, described how teachers opt out of non-core areas, and surmised that her life might be easier if she did the same thing.

> *I think that perhaps those people that wouldn't do that, who wouldn't do drama, possibly wouldn't even do dance. It's always having to prove yourself and prove what the children have done to parents, to inspectors, to the county . . . and I think perhaps in a way, if I just did what I'm supposed to do, you know just sort of do my literacy and my numeracy . . . and forgot everything else, perhaps life wouldn't be quite so stressful.* (Anna)

Within the curricular constraints, each of the teachers described situations where they had thought creatively about how to provide optimum learning experiences for their pupils in music, using their confidence in their teacher identity even where their musical identity was weak. Kate, for example, looked for ways in which she could challenge and extend the pupils' musical thinking in a composition activity. After using an activity from her Scheme of Work based on groups of three sounds, with a geometric pyramid as a starting-point (the class topic was Ancient Egypt), Kate suggested that this could be extended to consider sound patterns based on squares as well as triangles. This kept Kate within the bounds of her own area of musical competence and security, but supported the needs of some musically gifted children to create more complex music.

> *I suppose as well, and actually for them, if we had more time, for them to go back and see how they could amend it to do the squares and the triangles would actually be quite good.* (Kate)

These four teachers apparently regarded the making of mistakes as part of their own learning process, and were confident enough in their class management to stop when an activity was not working well.

> *I felt a bit miffed when my 'Poverty Knock' [a song] hadn't worked. Because I was a bit stuck then, which is why I said we'd come back to it next time. Because "This isn't working because we're not quite fitting it in." But it didn't actually bother me, and it didn't bother the children"* (Sally)

Whilst there were differences in school context and individual philosophy, the commonalities among the four teachers when speaking in their teacher identity were striking. The observed behaviour of all four reflected the perceptions which they expressed in words.

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Musicians' Voices

The musician voice was defined as the voice used when teachers were seeing themselves, not as teachers of music, but as personal perceivers of music. In this voice they showed less commonality than in the teacher voice.

> The teachers' perceptions of their musicality have been discussed above. All four also discussed the nature of music and what they saw as its constituent elements. All concurred in the view that music is a powerful innate human characteristic.

> *I do want them to start thinking about how they can express things in music, using instruments for themselves or stuff like that . . . because it's something that they innately know.* (Bridget)

> *I really struggle with people that are indifferent to music. I mean that's fine, but you know, there are certain pieces of music that I listen to, and they either make my stomach flip, or they make me go goosebumpy, or they make me want to cry. They make me well up. I mean that is quite dramatic, but . . . I don't understand. . . (Anna) It's for everybody isn't it? You know, we've got children in there who are statemented, but look at them!* (Kate)

Sally acknowledged that she had never considered music's nature, but saw it as an essential part of a whole curriculum.

> *I haven't ever thought about it! I've always just presumed that you would—you know, it's just like PE, isn't it? You wouldn't not have—I suppose if it wasn't in you'd wonder why it wasn't in . . . to be honest I've never, ever thought about it. About why we do it.* (Sally)

> Bridget and Anna both enjoyed a wide range of musical genres, and were confident enough in their musical identity to enjoy these with their pupils.

> *I am classically based but I also used Zimbabwean mbira playing . . . I think it's nice for them to listen . . . to classical music, but I don't think it's any more or less valid than any other."* (Bridget)

> *My husband and I sat one Sunday afternoon and . . . "What about the Flying Pickets?" "How about this?" and in fact I meant to bring in the Flying Pickets because that's quite nice because it's a capella. You know it's like there's no other instruments and I just thought it would be interesting to see what they make of that.* (Anna)

Kate, however, with her weaker conviction about her own musical judgements, was diffident about expressing her own musical preferences, appearing to feel that they might not be substantial enough:

> *Hmm . . . but I quite like . . . um . . . motown and . . . I couldn't use that in school!* (Kate)

Stunell, G. (2010). Not musical? Identity perceptions of generalist primary school teachers in relation to classroom music teaching in England. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 9/2: 79–107. http://act.maydaygroup.org/articles/Stunell9_2.pdf

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Whilst the participants' self-perceived teacher identities were in accord with their observed behaviour in the classroom, this was less true of their musical identities. Bridget was the only one of the four whose actions and words when teaching were entirely consistent with her musical self-descriptions. Sally, although not as consistent in her behaviour as Bridget, nonetheless behaved in ways consistent with her description, except in singing. She confidently led a range of musical activities, drawing on the strengths of her positive teacher identity, and stopped at positions where she felt her musical limits had been reached. After each observed lesson she asked for constructive suggestions as to where she could go next, and was bold in challenging herself in the music context. However, despite recorded evidence to the contrary she remained convinced that she was not able to sing "in tune."

Anna displayed behaviour that suggested considerable musical confidence. Even in performance (both singing and playing classroom instruments) she appeared confident and showed more than elementary skill. It might be expected that these abilities would place her within her own definition of a musical adult, but she seemed to believe that only advanced skills would raise her into that category. Her easy use of musical terminology when talking to her class, and her confidence in producing ideas for musical activities which would, in her words "move the children along a bit" in music, might suggest musical confidence to the observer. Her own view of her musical capability strengthened during the research period; evidently some individual support had encouraged her in music, and she had begun to question her musical identity perceptions.

Kate's musical self-perception was expressed at the outset in extreme terms and she used words such as "useless" and "hopeless." Despite these expressions, she showed herself in practise to be musically sensitive and to have a feel for both rhythm and pitch. She remained adamant, though, that she was not musical at all. It is to be hoped that Kate's case was unusual. She was so dedicated to being a complete professional generalist that she was brave in facing her considerable fears regarding music. However, her early experiences of music, at home and at school, had been diametrically opposed, and her understandings of musical identity appeared to have been not just socially and culturally mediated, but significantly distorted.

Individual Voices

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The four participants had had varying early experiences of music. These had coloured their perceptions of what music is about. Bridget viewed music as inclusive. A primary school which fostered music had been formative of her view.

> But in my primary school most children chose, to play one, so that's why we had an orchestra. I mean it wasn't the kind of thing you really had to do, it was just something you could decide if you put your name down for an instrument and it became available you were in, you know you played it and you joined in. (Bridget)

In contrast, the genesis of Kate's perspective on her music education was particularly stark, and she had learned early to see music as exclusive.

> I tried for the choir. Oh ye-e-es! Every year at juniors! And the insult was that the lady that did this, you know, the trials for it, she was my class teacher, and even when she knew I was in top juniors she said "Oh, try again next year"! And it was like you know, as though that would soften the blow! (Kate)

Anna's experience of music in her education was that it was both enjoyable and inclusive. She had attended a secondary school where all students had studied music through an imaginative curriculum up to the age of 16. She regarded as fortuitous the fact that she had elected to take drama as a main subject at college and had therefore had more musical input than students in other subjects. This reinforced her view that music was not just for 'experts'. Anna's musical confidence had been nurtured at each stage of her education and, although she did not regard herself as musical, she did believe that she had a right to enjoy music and to share her enjoyment with her pupils. Sally, in contrast, appeared to have gone through school with the expectation that music was just "one of the things you did in school". Music had apparently not featured in her areas of particular interest, but she had not been left with a negative perspective. This left her in a position where, though her musical identity was weak, she could allow herself to develop.

For all four teachers there was some consistency in the relationships between their individual experiences of music and their perspectives on music teaching. Their individual biographies seemed to map onto their perceptions of their musical identities.

SELF-EFFICACY AND CONTROL BELIEFS

The linked issues of confidence, roles in the music classroom, and self-perceived musical identity, appear to involve feelings about control and agency. Considering a picture of individuals living within continuously developing narratives of life that are integral parts of their particular social and cultural milieus, it seems likely that the exercise of some control

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over actions may be important to feelings of confidence. Such control, it can be argued, may provide the feeling of certainty about the outcome of actions which is implicated in the notion of confidence cited above (NIACE 2004). Bandura (1995) believes this need for control to be a fundamental human characteristic, exercised so that people are ". . . better able to realise desired futures and to forestall undesired ones" (1). The teachers in this study were all concerned that their practice with regard to music teaching in their classrooms was less skilled and less effective than their teaching of other subjects; they felt themselves less in control in the music classroom than in other professional contexts. Schwarzer (1992) claims that human functioning is more effective when there is a personal sense of control. For teachers, perceptions of effectiveness may result from a sense of control of the learning process within their classrooms (Evers, Brouwers & Tomic 2002). In particular, strong subject-specific identities may be related to a sense of control when handling subject-specific content and resources.

The study participants appeared to want to be able to predict outcomes in music and to be able to carry out planned actions, as they could in other subjects. Positive personal control beliefs seem crucial to successful action, since they are prerequisites for both the planning and execution of actions (Flammer 1995). Flammer has shown that control beliefs are domain-specific; control beliefs seem to be implicated in confidence. This finding supports the study participants' identification of music as presenting specific problems of confidence which their strong teacher identities could not solve.

Personal Self-Efficacy and Self-Esteem

Perceptions of self-efficacy have been shown to influence not only the instigation and sustaining of action, but also the selection of particular actions and the ways emotional consequences are dealt with (Pervin et al. 2005). Self-efficacy has been defined as ". . . the exercise of human agency through people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired effects by their actions" (Bandura 1997, vii). These beliefs influence thought, feeling, motivation and action. Strong control beliefs are a significant part of strong self-efficacy perceptions and would seem to be a necessity for the development of feelings of confidence.

Bandura's (1997) definition of perceived self-efficacy is centred on people's beliefs about their capabilities. It suggests that a lack of skills or capabilities, as perceived by the research participants in music, may decrease belief levels and thus diminish self-efficacy.

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Self-efficacy beliefs require an internalised view of the self for their formation (Fontaine 1998). Fontaine suggests that self-concept is based on individual perceptions of past experiences which appear salient at the current time, a suggestion well illustrated by Kate's acute fears in music.

All the teachers in the study cited the fact that music is one of the first subjects to be abandoned when pressures rose.

> *I can be guilty of "Ah, this week I don't know, do I really want to do music? You know, I really need to get the science done, or I really need to get . . . " But I do that with drama as well.* (Anna)

> *. . . even though I'm really into music and we do a lot of music in the classroom I suppose it is one of those things that does get squeezed out quite a lot, when you're really busy and you've got x number of things to do, music will often get squeezed out of the curriculum.* (Bridget)

Low self-efficacy beliefs, exacerbated by the fear of failure, may explain some teachers' avoidance of music in such situations. Such avoidance, may, in turn, lower self-efficacy further by denying the possibility of success. Indeed, Pervin et al. (2005) claim that self-perceived inefficacy can cancel out even strong motivations and render action ineffective or even non-existent despite possibly very desirable outcomes.

When people feel that they cannot act adequately in response to their environmental demands, Fontaine (1998) suggests, they can become preoccupied with their personal abilities. Such self-evaluation can give rise to potentially negative emotional reactions (Pervin et al. 2005) and give rise to negative self-identity perceptions. The notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy, which may be disabling, is supported by a considerable body of research (Burr 2002; Merton 1948; Rosenthal & Jacobson 1968). McKay and Fanning (1992) point out that "judging and rejecting yourself causes enormous pain" (1), suggesting that behaviours may be chosen because they avoid aggravation of such pain. This argument may be another explanation for some teachers' avoidance of music teaching.

Self-esteem has been said to be the evaluative process involved in the creation of self-concept (Adler & Stewart 2004). Rosenberg's definition of self-esteem is that it is a "favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the self" (Rosenberg 1965, cited in Adler & Stewart 2004). Positive self-evaluation in a domain of activity will provide good self-esteem, a strong self-concept and high self-efficacy beliefs. In contrast, negative or distorted self-evaluations will lead to low self-esteem and low self-efficacy. It seems probable that, for teachers with low confidence in music, self-evaluation in that domain, whether accurate or

not, has given rise to weak identity perceptions and attendant low self-efficacy beliefs. Lawrence (1999) supports this argument when he defines self-esteem, ". . .theoretically as a person's evaluation of the discrepancy between their self-image and their ideal self . . . in practice . . . as confidence in personality and confidence in abilities" (4). For the teachers in this study both aspects of Lawrence's definition may be significant.

<div align="center">TEACHERS DEVELOPING STRONGER MUSICAL IDENTITIES: DIFFICULTIES</div>

All the teachers in the study expected to develop their skills for teaching music within the school by acquiring knowledge and musical skills and by extending their teaching strategies. For Kate and Sally, opportunities for external Continuing Professional Development in music were remote, since their Local Authority no longer funded central music CPD except for newly qualified teachers. External CPD was available to Anna, but at the time of the fieldwork she was not expecting to use it, since her school's concentration was heavily on the core subjects of literacy and numeracy at the time. Bridget was able to access a high level of internal music support within her school, but for Anna there was no real music expertise within the school. Kate and Sally, like Bridget, could expect a successful outcome if they embarked on a programme of self-development within their schools, since they, too, worked in schools with in-school music expertise.

Membership of a group or community of practice is one way in which individuals can access support and learn within work situations (Lave and Wenger 1991). The participating teachers identified themselves as members of various groups connected to their work as teachers. They also identified groups from which they felt alienated. There were other groups where they felt some right to membership but did not feel themselves to be full members. Sadly, only Bridget could recognise herself as belonging, even as a peripheral participant, in the group of primary school music practitioners. Both Sally and Kate felt not only remote from but alienated from this group. The fact that they were required to teach music did not, apparently, suggest that they had any right to be part of this group. Although Sally had some confidence in teaching music she regarded herself as a non-musician and had no confidence that she could access musical development or knowledge for herself or that she could claim legitimate access. Kate saw musicians and the world of music as something which had deliberately excluded her in the past and from which she had been positively alienated. The fact that she believed this to be unjust did not change her feelings about the situation,

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although in cognitive terms she could see that she might be included one day. She claimed that she "felt like a fraud" when she pretended to be able to practise music; from that emotional position she did not feel she had any right of access.

These positions are significant since teachers who feel outsiders in a subject area are unable to become even legitimate peripheral participants without the mediation of members of the relevant group of practice. With support, Anna might have had a sufficiently strong musical identity to demand membership in such a group in music. It seems likely that neither Kate nor Sally would have felt themselves to be in a position to take such action. If teachers do not feel themselves to have access to music-oriented groups they face major obstacles in possibilities for development. Furthermore, unless an active group member is available in a school, negotiation of access is often difficult. Anna had no such person in her school, so even the comparatively easy transition she needed to make to perceive herself as a group member was apparently unavailable. Kate and Sally each had potential mediators within their schools but for them the step even to peripheral participation status was a major challenge.

Hope for the future

As the interviews proceeded, Kate began to see that knowledge about music could be structured so that she could access it. An embryonic musical self-efficacy belief, nurtured by the researcher, allowed her to see herself as a teacher of music in some very small measure and she began to be more pro-active in organising children's music experiences, using her pedagogic skills with music materials and accepting (as she was able to do in other subjects) that complete 'success' in achieving the objective of the lesson was not essential to children's progress within the field. Under the shelter of the research activity, she tentatively began to use in school the music skills which she used with her daughter at home. Although she was frustrated that she did not have musical language in which to explain things to her class, she began to negotiate with them to produce a musical result. Gradually she began to introduce her own variations on a suggested activity from the scheme of work, an action which not only allowed her to feel more secure, since she had mediated the activity to fit within her own perceived area of control, but allowed her to feel a sense of achievement for herself both as a teacher and as a musician.

> *You know the one where they chant it and they do it on the rhythms, the rhythms on the instruments and things. And, because they've been doing food and things I, we were able to talk about that first, and then I could say to them "Right, I want this*

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> *group to try and think of healthy foods for their chant" and kind of just changed it a little bit, but because I felt like I'd done my own little way, it made me feel so much better!* (Kate)

Kate's story over this short period is particularly illuminating to considerations of how generalist teachers can be enabled in music teaching. At the beginning, her self-perceived musical identity was almost non-existent, and her musical self-esteem very poor, at least in part because of her early life experiences in music. Although her teaching self-efficacy was possibly the highest of the four teachers in the study, she seemed quite unable to use her pedagogic skill in the music context. However, support in the development of a minimal level of musical self-efficacy seemed to allow her to attempt to use her pedagogic skills in the music setting and to begin to acknowledge the possibility of a musical identity.

Sally's and Anna's cases support an idea that the nurturing of musical identity and personal musical efficacy is centrally important. Both professed low levels of perceived musical efficacy but admitted to some abilities in music teaching. Even these low levels of efficacy, though, had enabled them to use their pedagogic skill to achieve music teaching of an acceptable standard.

These stories, while clearly of only four individuals, suggest that at least a minimal level of positive musical self-efficacy may be required before teachers can be expected to attempt music teaching. Once this minimal level is reached, though, it may be possible to reinforce belief in self-efficacy as a music teacher quite quickly to a level where general teaching self-efficacy beliefs may be transferred to the music setting. Teachers can then explore music teaching within a familiar pedagogic framework, developing musical aspects of their teaching self-efficacy and strengthening their musical identities and musical self-efficacy beliefs.

The teachers in this case study felt enabled to some extent by participation in the research. It would seem that working with an empathetic specialist had raised their musical control and self-efficacy beliefs. The experience appeared to have improved their self-perceived musical identities by legitimising them as musicians. The specialist input which I provided as part of the fieldwork (which did not amount to many hours for each teacher) seemed to have raised their confidence levels in music.

Whether it is possible to provide this kind of support through initial training in English

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institutions seems questionable in the current economic and political climate. However, if understanding specialists can be deployed coherently and imaginatively, a good deal of progress might be made in strengthening primary teachers' musical self-identities.

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Notes

[1] At the time of writing, the proposals are that when studying music children should: learn about and appraise a range of music of different genres and from different cultures including classical, folk and popular traditions; learn to sing songs (including chants and rounds) and use instruments to perform melodies and accompaniments by ear and from notation; create and compose music by choosing, ordering, combining and controlling sounds and recognising how musical elements (pitch, duration, tempo, timbre, texture and silence) can be used; work with a range of musicians and watch, listen to and participate in live performances.

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[2] Informal evidence from conversations with students currently in ITE suggests that, unless a student opts to take it as a specified specialist subject, little time is allocated for music.

[3] 18 weeks for postgraduate programmes, 24 weeks for two and three year undergraduate programmes and 32 weeks for four year undergraduate programmes. www.tda.gov.uk

[4] During research data collection, I found schools where art or RE were 'paired' with music.

[5] Evidence from teachers in informal group discussions at Hill Road, Woodvale and Orchard Schools during March, 2000. All 16 teachers expressed discomfort in at least one curricular area. For 9 teachers music was such an area.

About The Author

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Gillian has worked as a teacher of music in the secondary sector and in Early Years as well as in primary schools and private practice. She has practised for some years as a primary music specialist, working in a variety of ways within primary schools and with primary teachers.