

# MUSICAL IDENTITIES AT SCHOOL: AGE AND EXPERIENCE AS DETERMINANTS OF MUSICAL IDENTITY

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## Background

Previous research suggests that musical identities are strongly affected by the contexts in which children experience music-making and opportunities to participate. Situations with more overt music-making opportunities result in more positive musical identities amongst those children involved in the musical activities, but also lead to more negative musical identities amongst children not involved. The current research forms part of a larger project into music in and out of school, commissioned and funded by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority in England.

## Aims

The study aims to illustrate the changing nature of children's musical identities and to highlight how this can be affected by personal, school, and wider social factors. It will explore the potential gap between the children themselves and the musicians they describe, and investigate the factors that children believe are necessary in order to become a musician.

## Method

134 children between 8 and 14 years participated in semi-structured focus groups. Three different groups were constructed based on their interest in active music-making: children currently having formal instrumental training ("training"), those who would like to ("aspiring") and those who would not ("non-aspiring"). Participants were asked about the value of music, asked to imagine "a musician" and describe that person in detail, and probed for underlying causes and influential factors in becoming a musician.

## Results

Children nominated a wide range of different kinds of "musicians", from classical composers such as Beethoven through celebrity pop musicians to their own music teachers. The influence of television, in particular Pop Idol (a recent UK series), was particularly strong. Many children expressed negative beliefs about their own capacities as musicians and felt either talent, hard work, or luck was responsible for the success of the musicians they nominated. Analysis is still under way and full implications will be presented at the conference.