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Article:

Pitts, S.E. (2014) Exploring musical expectations: Understanding the impact of a year-long primary school music project in the context of school, home and prior learning. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 36 (2). 129 - 146. ISSN: 1321-103X

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1321103X14556576>

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Exploring musical expectations: Understanding the impact of a year-long primary school music project in the context of school, home and prior learning

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Abstract

This article reports on a year-long project carried out in three UK primary schools, which aimed to understand the expectations and experiences of children participating in a series of workshops delivered by the chamber music organisation, Music in the Round. Through drawings, discussions, questionnaires and observations, the children's developing musical identities and skills were explored, alongside the teachers' and parents' understandings of what the children gained from the workshops. The project raises questions about the evaluation and impact of musical interventions of this kind, and about the ways in which children acquire musical self-efficacy from encounters in school and home.

Keywords

children's drawings, musical confidence, musical identity, music workshops, primary school music

Introduction: Understanding Children's Musical Worlds

Children's responses to the musical opportunities they encounter in the classroom are deeply affected by the interconnectedness of their musical worlds in and out of school. The attitudes of adults around them to the potential of music, and its relevance to young lives, shape children's emerging sense of musical identity. This gives teachers and parents a strong responsibility to present clear routes into musical engagement if children's development in this area is to flourish. Studies of parent-child musical interactions (Custodero, Britto, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003) and of young children's articulations of their musical preferences and experiences (Campbell, 2002, 2010) have shown how musical self-belief and ambition is nurtured or limited by informal encounters with music, as well as by the deliberate interventions of schools and families. Custodero's (2006) interviews with parents about their own musical lives and those of their children illustrate how musical habits and values are passed from one generation to the next, so demonstrating the effect that music in the home has on children's preparedness to engage with music in school (Pitts, 2012). Following the

pedagogical principles of moving from the known to the unknown in acquiring skills and knowledge, Harwood and Marsh (2012) go so far as to suggest that “familiarity with the rich world of children’s musical experience outside school is requisite teacher knowledge when planning formal instruction” (p. 322), while recognising that the plurality of musical repertoires, practices and attitudes encountered outside school mean that it is “not always possible to predict what is musically more or less familiar” (Lum & Marsh, 2012, p. 382). The receptiveness to musical learning that children will ideally bring to school is in sharp contrast with the widespread lack of confidence for teaching music found amongst primary school teachers (Hennessy, 2000; Kokotsaki, 2012). A long-running debate (Mills, 1991) over whether music should be taught by generalist or specialist teachers has never been satisfactorily resolved, with the result that musical provision remains patchy and dependent on the enthusiasm of individual teachers and headteachers (Ofsted, 2012). Primary school music is recognised as having huge potential for developing young children’s creativity, engagement in the arts, and any number of extra-musical skills (Ellison & Creech, 2010), and yet it has had consistently low status in the curriculum (Stunell, 2006) and in teacher training (Hallam et al., 2009). Evidence from a large-scale study of 2000 elementary school teachers in the United States suggests that “generalist teachers tend to treat music as a marginalized afterthought that serves to entertain, create group cohesion, or teach non-musical skills such as motor skills or following directions” (Wiggins & Wiggins, 2008, p. 24). Meanwhile, in England, a recent government pointed to similarly low expectations of music in the curriculum: “Sadly, the laudable wish for musical learning to be relevant, accessible and enjoyable too often ends in a curriculum that is unchallenging, demotivating and sometimes dreary” (Ofsted, 2013, p. 12).

It is in this confused context that many arts organisations have begun delivering learning and participation programmes to schools, often fulfilling a funding requirement to reach new and diverse audiences (Arts Council England, 2013) while also articulating the value of educational work in the arts for young people, their families, and the artists’ creative practice (Lord, Sharp, Lee, Cooper, & Grayson, 2012). The *arts-education interface* (Harland et al., 2005) has brought new opportunities to connect children’s musical experience with the wider professional arts world, but also new challenges in supporting continuity of provision in schools, rather than generating a reliance on one-off workshops or short-term projects. Research into learning and participation programmes has tended to focus either on evaluation (Woolf, 2004) or the demonstration of benefits ranging well beyond arts-related skills and knowledge to include improvements to generic learning outcomes (Imms, Jeanneret, &

Stevens-Ballenger, 2011), encompassing problem-solving and communication skills, school attendance and attainment, and behaviour and wellbeing (Harland et al., 2005, p. 20). Both approaches set very high demands for demonstrating the impact of arts interventions, with the risk that documenting the enjoyment and engagement experienced by the participating children can be lost under the pressure to prove the economic and social value of the arts in schools.

The project reported in this paper, which came about through a partnership between the University of Sheffield, UK, and Music in the Round (MitR), a chamber music organisation based in Sheffield, attempts to navigate and connect these many facets of children's musical worlds: the musical learning children bring from home, their encounters with music in school, and their experiences of a series of workshops and performances within one primary school year. The focus is not on evaluation or measurable outcomes, but rather on the development of the children's musical identities, ambitions and engagement over one year of their learning. Through exploring the musical expectations and understandings of teachers, parents and children, this research aims to broaden the debate over what music means to young people and how their musical futures can best be supported.

Research Context and Methods

A year-long study in three Sheffield primary schools took place during 2012–13, in which twelve 'Music Box' workshops were delivered to Year 2 classes (ages 6–7) in each school by Polly Ives, an experienced musician and workshop leader, and the musicians of Ensemble 360, who are the resident chamber music ensemble with Music in the Round (www.musicintheround.co.uk). This organisation has an award-winning track record in their learning and participation activities for schools and families, and so evaluation of the workshops was not the primary concern of the research; instead, this project aimed to investigate deeper questions of how the workshops intersected with children's musical ambitions and expectations, and were in turn affected by the contexts in which they took place.

Since its establishment with a Youth Music grant in 2003, the Music Box programme has developed to offer workshops linked to schools and family concerts, which feature newly commissioned works based on children's story books: in December 2012 the focus was on *Sir Scallywag and the Golden Underpants* by Giles Andreae, with music by Paul Rissmann, MitR's Children's Composer in Residence. The workshops themselves, delivered in three blocks of four weekly 45 minute sessions, included a range of songs, musical games,

improvisation activities and interactions with a visiting musician from Ensemble 360. Children from the three participating schools also took part in an end of year Showcase concert, featuring the songs and activities they had learnt throughout the year, and a jointly improvised performance of music for the popular children's book, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen. An interim Showcase also took place in each school in March 2013, either as an open lesson for parents or a whole school assembly for pupils.

The workshop sessions were all observed by the research team, with detailed notes made at the time and subsequently coded using an observational framework designed to show the elements of musical and social development that occurred during the session (Nutbrown & Jones, 2006). This ORIM framework, devised during a comparable project with early years arts practitioners in nearby Doncaster, was adopted after consultation with its author, Cathy Nutbrown, at the start of the project. The framework works on the principle that artists and settings can provide "opportunities, recognition, interaction and modelling" (ORIM), which arise through "materials and experiences, imagination, skills and 'talk about the arts'" (Nutbrown & Jones, 2006, p. 10). Coding within this framework helped us to track the change in focus, engagement and skills across the year, and so to provide evidence for the teachers' and parents' intuitive observations about how children had gained in confidence or other skills. Additional information was gathered from children, parents and teachers through a variety of methods, designed to offer children multiple opportunities and modes for responding throughout the year, and to gather the perspectives of parents and teachers on how the workshops affected the children over time:

- Questionnaires to children in November 2012, to explore their levels of musical confidence and interest through selecting/ranking musical activities, drawing a musician and responding to questions about music in their lives [*141 responses/3 schools*]
- Questionnaires to parents in February 2013, to explore their children's level of interest in Music Box, the parents' musical ambitions for their children, and their views of Music Box [*27 responses/2 schools*]
- Interviews and end of year questionnaires with teachers, supplemented by action research carried out by teachers at one school, to explore the impact of Music Box on the children in their classes [*3 schools*]
- Focus group discussions with children in June-July 2013, to explore their memories of Music Box over the year, their other experiences of music in school and home, and their musical hopes for the future [*3 schools*]

- Questionnaires to children in July 2013, to revisit their levels of musical confidence and interest through the same selecting/ranking task, drawing ‘someone they know who is a musician’ and responding to questions about their ambitions for music in the future *[163 responses/3 schools]*

Through this wide-ranging collection of data, the study was able to explore the impact of Music Box workshops on the children, their families and their teachers, and to set this understanding in the context of the children’s other musical experiences and expectations.

The Participating Schools

The three schools, which have been given pseudonyms in line with University of Sheffield ethical policies, presented different contexts for the Music Box workshops, outlined here with reference to their most recent Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) reports and other information from the schools’ websites:

- Mappin Infant School had an outstanding Ofsted report in 2011, which noted that “many children enter school with above-expected knowledge and skills”. The school provides a high level of music and other extra-curricular activities on site, including instrumental tuition, and has a specialist music coordinator. Parents and carers are supportive of the school: 75% returned Ofsted’s questionnaire at the last inspection, and expressed a high level of satisfaction.
- Jessop Primary School is a larger than average primary school which had a good Ofsted report in 2011, which noted children’s “pleasure and enjoyment” of learning at the school. There is a specialist music teacher who provides regular lessons for each class, and a programme of extra-curricular activities that include music and instrumental tuition. Parents and carers expressed strong support for the school at the last inspection.
- Firth Community Primary School had a good Ofsted report in 2012, with inspectors noting “much improved achievement” since the previous inspection. It is a much larger than average primary school, in which about 75% of pupils do not have English as their home language and a higher than average number have special educational needs and/or are entitled to free school meals due to low parental income. Parental involvement is relatively low, though the school makes strong efforts through reading initiatives and other activities to involve parents in their children’s learning. The school has previously participated in MitR education projects, but musical provision is otherwise fairly limited.

Data collected across the three schools and using the full range of research methods will be reported in the discussion that follows, with participant codes to indicate the school and the mode of data collection; e.g. Mappin pupil focus group (M-PFG), Jessop teacher interview (J-TI), Jessop parent questionnaire (J-PAQ), Firth pupil questionnaire in November (F-PQN), Firth pupil questionnaire in July (F-PQJ).

Results and Discussion

Drawing a musician: Exploring children's musical experience and references

The children were asked to draw a picture of a musician in November 2012, a few weeks into their first block of Music Box workshops, and these drawings were coded and analysed to reveal trends of musical references across the three schools. Using drawings to elicit children's views is a recognised tool in arts education research (cf. Reason, 2010), as well as in the assessment of cognitive and emotional development (Cox, 1992): the Goodenough 'draw a man' test was established in the 1920s as a non-verbal intelligence test (Jolly, 2010) and is still widely used in research and practice, though its validity as a reliable measure of intelligence has been criticised in some studies (Willcock, Imuta, & Hayne, 2011). The interpretation of the children's drawings in this study needed to take account of these broader developmental trends: some children were clearly limited in their ability to add the detail that would indicate their understanding of the 'musician' concept, drawing neutral figures without additional musical references. Conversely, while the smiles and colourful clothes featuring in many of the drawings seemed likely to represent Polly's animated workshop leading style, other studies have found a high proportion of smiling faces in neutral figures intended for an adult audience (Burkitt, Watling, & Murray, 2011, p. 469), as well as confirming that the basic emotions of happiness and sadness are amongst the easiest for children to both depict and recognise in their drawings (Brechet, Baldy, & Picard, 2009, p. 593). There are clearly dangers in over-interpreting children's drawings without further contextual evidence, and in the analysis that follows here the focus groups and workshop observations help to provide a more nuanced interpretation of the children's drawings.

At Mappin, the musical references in the children's drawings were mainly to orchestral instruments, and a smiling, colourfully dressed female also featured prominently (see Figure 1); in the July 2013 questionnaires, when they were asked to name the musician they were drawing, Polly's identity was made even clearer.

[Insert Figure 1: Mappin November drawing showing a colourfully dressed female with open mouth and musical notation]

[Insert Figure 2: Mappin July drawing showing a boy playing the piano, labelled 'Me!']

The Mappin children's drawings also featured notation, often quite detailed and accurate, showing how they were bringing their existing musical experience to the task. Discussions with the teacher and in the focus groups confirmed that a high proportion of these children had access to instruments at home, or were pursuing lessons in school time, with the result that the Music Box workshops were set in the context of already rich musical experiences for many at Mappin. Figure 2 is a self-portrait of a boy playing the piano, with the explanatory note "I'm good at the keyboard because I have lessons once a week" (M-PQJ). One girl recalled previous contact with Polly, and showed a strong identification with the organisation: "I've gone to as many as I can go to since I met [Polly] in the museum, and I did a Music in the Round session; I've been doing it, I've been going to Music in the Round sessions with her" (M-PFG). The children were aware of other musical provision in school, and in the focus groups spontaneously sang songs not only from Music Box but also from their school choir and assemblies.

The Jessop children included instruments in all but one of their drawings: guitar and drums featured prominently, with violin/cello and piano close behind (see Figure 3). There were music stands and notation evident too, and in addition to the colourful female musician (see Figure 4), the school's music teacher was also depicted in the drawings and referred to in the focus groups.

[Insert Figure 3: Jessop November drawing showing both classical and popular instruments]

[Insert Figure 4: Jessop July drawing showing Polly surrounded by notation and a range of instruments]

Fewer children were learning instruments at Jessop than at Mappin, but children in the focus group discussions made reference to weekly music lessons where "we learn about different types of music", to "singing songs in assembly, but not these ones", and to listening to the Sir Scallywag CD in the classroom; "before we go home Mrs [A] lets us listen to it sometimes [...] and we sing it all together" (J-PFG). Referring to musical life at home, several children

described singing with the family or listening to CDs, or having informal access to instruments: “At my nanny and grandad’s, in their bedroom there’s a toy box with a little flute, and I used to play it and I still play the flute” (J-PFG). There were mentions of parents or older siblings playing instruments too, though one girl’s description of her mother’s oboe playing was less than complimentary: “My mum played the crazy, um, oboe flute kind of thingy. She put, um, this big, um, kind of paintbrush down the hole and then she started trying to blow on it and it made a weird little squeaking noise” (J-PFG). This impression of musically rich but unstructured home life was confirmed by the parents’ questionnaires, where 15 out of the 16 responses described the children singing around the house, with a high number also listening to their own choice of music (14/16) or listening to music with the family (13/16). None of the parents reported that their children were learning instruments formally, apart from one mother who was teaching her child the piano; however, 12 out of the 16 parents expressed a wish that their child would learn an instrument in the future, suggesting that the school culture or policies encourage a later start than was evident at Mappin.

The Firth children’s drawings also featured instruments prominently, with drums, guitar and keyboard, often in combination, showing a stronger influence of popular music than in the other two schools (see Figure 5). The drawings of people were less recognisable, though there were some clearly labelled conductors, often wearing formal dress; no notation was in evidence, in contrast with the ‘music books’, notes and clefs seen elsewhere.

[Insert Figure 5: Firth November drawing showing singing with a microphone]

[Insert Figure 6: Firth July drawing labelled ‘Polly playing the piano’, though the instrument shown with beaters is likely to be a xylophone]

Firth children were more likely to refer to wanting to play instruments, rather than having experience of this: their questionnaire predictions for the future included wanting to play “more” or “bigger” instruments (F-PQJ), while one suggested that “teaching little kids how to do it” was her musical ambition, though immediately qualified this with a concern that “somebody who was about six and a half might be silly when you’re teaching them, and won’t listen, and then they won’t know what to do” (F-PFG). The Firth children were the only ones to be concerned about the musical activities being “silly” or “babyish”, and a few also regretted missing outdoor play time when the day was rearranged to accommodate the

workshops (F-PFG). Music in school was very strongly identified with Polly and the Music Box workshops, though there were a few references to singing in assembly, and one mention of “a man [who] came with a guitar, a long, long time ago” (F-PFG).

Across the three schools, the July questionnaire task of drawing “someone you know who is a musician” showed the strong influence of Polly and the Ensemble 360 musicians (see Figure 6); this was strongest at Firth, where the children perhaps had fewer other role models, marking a striking shift from the focus there on popular music in the first questionnaire. Family and other children in the class were also evident, and at Mappin and Jessop a sizeable minority drew themselves (see Table 1).

Table 1. Depictions of musicians in July 2013 questionnaire

| Mappin | Jessop | Firth |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Relative/friend (39%) | Polly/E360 (46%) | Polly/E360 (75%) |
| Polly/E360 (20%) | Relative/friend (13%) | Teacher (10%) |
| Self (15%) | Self (13%) | Relative/friend (0.02%) |
| Teacher (2%) | Pop musician (6%) | Self (0%) |
| | Teacher (0.02%) | |
| | Mozart (0.02%) | |

The questionnaires revealed the ways in which the children were making connections between their existing musical worlds and the new experiences being offered to them. There was evidence that the children were open to acquiring new skills and broadening their musical experience, though their sense of how this might be continued into the future was variable. At Mappin and Jessop, where peers and older children were learning instruments, there was a clear route to developing musical skill, but at Firth this was less clearly defined, and the sense of associating music with a passing phase in their learning seemed more apparent: “I’ll remember Polly’s things . . . what I did with her when I was a child, when I grow up” (F-PFG). The next section turns to a closer analysis of how the children viewed themselves as developing musicians, with a consideration of their levels of confidence in relation to specific activities.

Children’s expressions of musical confidence and concern

In the November 2012 questionnaire, the children were asked to indicate (by drawing a star, triangle or circle around listed items) which of a range of musical activities they expected to be good at, to need more help with, or to be their favourite: these included ‘making up music’, ‘learning new songs’, ‘being a conductor’ and ‘listening to instruments’. Similar questions were asked in the July 2013 questionnaire, with items added to encompass the additional activities of Music Box, including ‘playing or singing a solo’, ‘performing to an audience’ and ‘talking about music’.

At the start of the year the children expressed most confidence about the aspects of music that they were likely to have encountered before: learning new songs, clapping rhythms, singing songs and listening. They expected to need help with some of the creative aspects of music, including playing instruments, being a conductor and making up music. Responses for the three schools are shown in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2. Confidence ratings in November 2012 questionnaire: ‘Things you will be good at’

| Nov 2012 Things you will be good at (Circles) | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|-----------|
| Firth (42 responses) | | Jessop (60 responses) | | Mappin (39 responses) | |
| Sing songs together | 90% | Clap rhythms | 80% | Listen to instruments | 82% |
| Listen to instruments | 86% | Learn new songs | 70% | Clap rhythms | 79% |
| Clap rhythms | 74% | Sing songs together | 70% | Play instruments | 79% |
| Learn new songs | 67% | Listen to instruments | 68% | Sing songs together | 74% |
| Play instruments | 67% | Move and dance | 47% | Move and dance | 72% |
| Move and dance | 67% | Play instruments | 43% | Learn new songs | 67% |
| Making up music | 38% | Making up music | 32% | Be a conductor | 54% |
| Be a conductor | 38% | Be a conductor | 20% | Making up music | 44% |
| Average rating | 66% | | 54 | | 69 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| | | | % | | % |
| Range of data | 52 | | 60 | | 38 |

Table 3. Confidence ratings in November 2012 questionnaire; ‘Things you will need help with’

| Nov 2012 Things you will need help with (Triangles) | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Firth (42 responses) | | Jessop (60 responses) | | Mappin (39 responses) | |
| Making up music | 57% | Be a conductor | 62% | Be a conductor | 44% |
| Be a conductor | 50% | Making up music | 35% | Learn new songs | 31% |
| Learn new songs | 31% | Play instruments | 33% | Making up music | 28% |
| Play instruments | 31% | Learn new songs | 18% | Move and dance | 28% |
| Move and dance | 24% | Sing songs together | 18% | Play instruments | 21% |
| Clap rhythms | 19% | Learn new songs | 18% | Clap rhythms | 15% |
| Listen to instruments | 17% | Listen to instruments | 17% | Sing songs together | 10% |
| Sing songs together | 12% | Move and dance | 13% | Listen to instruments | 8% |
| Average rating | 30% | | 27% | | 23% |
| Range of data | 45 | | 49 | | 36 |

The figures in Tables 2 and 3 show that the musical activities likely to be most familiar to the children received top confidence ratings across all schools, while conducting and composing, likely to be the newest activities, or the terms that were least well understood by the children, received the lowest scores overall. The Firth children had some of the highest ratings, but Mappin had the highest average and narrowest range: there was only one activity (making up music) that less than half the Mappin children thought they would be good at. This is consistent with previous research on children’s self-efficacy in music learning (Ritchie & Williamon, 2011), where instrumental tuition—most prevalent at Mappin—was a predictor of higher musical confidence (p. 156); however, the same study noted that “if students have a positive sense of well-being, then this may impact their self-efficacy for learning” (p. 157), suggesting that the general encouragement of creativity and music-making across all three schools would also have an effect on the children’s readiness for musical learning. This is confirmed through the ratings on ‘need for help’, which were much lower across the three schools, showing that musical confidence was greater than musical anxiety for most of the participating children.

On assessing the children’s confidence using similar measures in July 2013, some unexpected findings emerged: in contradiction to the children’s evident enthusiasm and the teachers’ observations about their musical and social development across the year, the ratings for ‘good at’ and ‘could do better at’ activities showed an apparent decline (see Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Confidence ratings in July 2013 questionnaire: ‘Things you were good at’

| July 2013 Things you were good at (Circles) | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Firth (56 responses) | | Jessop (59 responses) | | Mappin (37 responses) | |
| Listen to instruments | 64% | Listen to instruments | 61% | Play instruments | 57% |
| Clap rhythms | 61% | Learn new songs | 53% | Sing songs together | 51% |
| Play instruments | 61% | Sing songs together | 51% | Learn new songs | 49% |
| Learn new songs | 59% | Playing or singing solo | 51% | Clap rhythms | 49% |
| Sing songs together | 57% | Clap rhythms | 47% | Listen to instruments | 43% |
| Making up music | 55% | Move and dance | 47% | Making up music | 41% |
| Be a conductor | 48% | Be a conductor | 46% | Performing to audience | 38% |
| Move and dance | 45% | Play instruments | 42% | Move and dance | 35% |
| Talking about music | 41% | Making up music | 41% | Playing or singing solo | 24% |
| Playing or singing solo | 38% | Talking about music | 32% | Be a conductor | 16% |
| Performing to audience | 32% | Performing to audience | 31% | Making up music | 16% |
| Average rating | 51% | | 46% | | 38% |
| Range of data | 32 | | 30 | | 41 |

Table 5. Confidence ratings in July 2013 questionnaire: ‘Things you could do better at’

| July 2013 Things you could do better at (Triangles) | | | | | |
|--|------------|------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Firth (56 responses) | | Jessop (59 responses) | | Mappin (37 responses) | |
| Talking about music | 43% | Making up music | 29% | Talking about music | 49% |
| Playing or singing solo | 39% | Talking about music | 27% | Playing or singing solo | 43% |
| Be a conductor | 36% | Playing or singing solo | 25% | Be a conductor | 41% |
| Performing to audience | 36% | Move and dance | 22% | Move and dance | 27% |
| Making up music | 34% | Be a conductor | 20% | Clap rhythms | 22% |
| Sing songs together | 25% | Performing to audience | 20% | Performing to audience | 22% |
| Clap rhythms | 18% | Clap rhythms | 19% | Learn new songs | 19% |
| Listen to instruments | 18% | Play instruments | 17% | Making up music | 19% |
| Play instruments | 18% | Sing songs together | 12% | Sing songs together | 14% |
| Move and dance | 18% | Learn new songs | 10% | Listen to instruments | 11% |
| Learn new songs | 16% | Listen to instruments | 10% | Play instruments | 11% |
| Average rating | 27% | | 19% | | 25% |
| Range of data | 27 | | 19 | | 38 |

While an unequivocal increase in confidence would undoubtedly have been a more satisfying data set, there are several qualitative explanations for the change in ratings that help to make these figures more consistent with the observed and spoken responses of the children. One explanation lies in the children’s interpretation of whether ‘needing help’ with an activity is an indicator of poor performance or willingness to learn; likewise ‘things you could do better

at' (a change in terminology that in retrospect should have been avoided) could be an expression of aspiration rather than defeat. It is plausible that the children's increased exposure to musical activities had made them more realistic and informed in their evaluations, such that their definitions of what it means to be 'good at' an activity had changed over the year. In their focus group discussions, the children showed an awareness of the effort needed to master musical skills, with one young pianist reporting that "it took me a year to get up to the grade of *Yankee Doodle* already" (M-PFG) and others defining musicians as people who are really good at an instrument, know a lot of songs, and practise a lot in order to "learn all the fingers, just in case you don't know them, and you don't get mixed up" (M-PFG). It is notable that the rank ordering of activities has changed too: familiar activities were still high, but 'making up music' and 'being a conductor' had moved up the list, except at Mappin, where the large group had had fewer turns at the solo improvisation and conducting activities.

Alongside the measures of confidence, children were asked about their favourite activity: while these also tended to be linked to familiarity at the start of the year, there was a wider spread of children's reported favourite activity by July, suggesting that their musical horizons had been broadened by the range of activities covered in the workshops and associated performances (see Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6. Favourite activity ratings in November 2012 questionnaire

| Nov 2012 The activity that you think will be your favourite (Stars) | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Firth | | Jessop | | Mappin | |
| Be a conductor | 29% | Move and dance | 33% | Play instruments | 36% |
| Learn new songs | 26% | Making up music | 22% | Sing songs together | 26% |
| Play instruments | 21% | Play instruments | 18% | Move and dance | 13% |
| Move and dance | 21% | Learn new songs | 12% | Making up music | 10% |
| Making up music | 9% | Clap rhythms | 12% | Be a conductor | 10% |
| Clap rhythms | 7% | Be a conductor | 8% | Learn new songs | 5% |
| Sing songs together | 4% | Listen to instruments | 5% | Clap rhythms | 3% |
| Listen to instruments | 2% | Sing songs together | 3% | Listen to instruments | 3% |
| % total | 119% | | 113% | | 106% |

Table 7. Favourite activity ratings in July 2013 questionnaire

| July 2013 The activity that was your favourite (Stars) | | | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Firth | | Jessop | | Mappin | |
| Learn new songs | 18% | Play instruments | 32% | Listen to instruments | 19% |
| Move and dance | 16% | Sing songs together | 30% | Play instruments | 19% |
| Sing songs together | 14% | Learn new songs | 20% | Making up music | 14% |
| Clap rhythms | 13% | Making up music | 15% | Perform to audience | 14% |
| Play instruments | 13% | Perform to audience | 15% | Learn new songs | 11% |
| Perform to audience | 13% | Listen to instruments | 14% | Sing songs together | 11% |
| Listen to instruments | 9% | Talking about music | 14% | Move and dance | 6% |
| Making up music | 7% | Clap rhythms | 12% | Talking about music | 6% |
| Be a conductor | 7% | Move and dance | 8% | Playing or singing solo | 6% |
| Talking about music | 7% | Playing or singing solo | 8% | Clap rhythms | 3% |
| Playing or singing solo | 7% | Be a conductor | 7% | Be a conductor | 3% |
| % total | 124% | | 161% | | 112% |

In both questionnaires, the inclusion of favourites totalling more than 100% indicates the difficulties of choosing one: in July, these totals are higher, and the spread of responses across the activities is wider, showing that the variety of the workshops had appealed across the groups. Performing to an audience is well represented, even though children expressed that they could have done this better: this provides further evidence than needing help or aspiring to improve an activity could be a positive indicator of self-efficacy and motivation. Another perspective on the children's development through the year came from the teacher interviews and questionnaires, where attitudes to the workshops were overwhelmingly appreciative, with teachers stating that Music Box had improved the children's learning and increased their own confidence to teach music. At Firth school, the teachers carried out an independent action research project, which emphasised the effects of music learning on children's emotional literacy and imagination, with clear benefits for both social interaction and attainment in literacy. The teachers at Firth also reported how children with special needs had joined in and gained confidence during the sessions, including those with limited

English language skills, who had enjoyed singing songs in a variety of languages (F-TQ). At Jessop, the teachers emphasised the creativity, concentration and enjoyment that the children had brought to the sessions, and attributed much of this to Polly's "buckets of charisma!" (J-TI).

The Mappin teacher felt that her children's existing level of musical knowledge had been enhanced by contact with professional musicians, with the children making connections between, for instance, their violin lessons and the visiting string players. The teacher also noticed an improvement in behaviour and concentration across the three blocks, as children became more confident that they would get a turn: similar change was noted in the observations at Firth, where the children's self-discipline with instruments and tasks was noted during the observations of later sessions. Each school context presented a different set of pupil needs, and the workshops had connected with these through the provision of broadly similar activities which accommodated the children's and teachers' levels of musical confidence and engagement.

Impact profiles: Teachers' nominations of individual pupils

The teachers in each school were asked to identify a few children who had particularly benefited from the Music Box sessions, and pseudonymous profiles of some of these follow here to help illustrate in more detail the reported effects of the workshops.

At Firth School, both teachers chose children whose challenging behaviour or speech and language difficulties had shown improvements over the course of the year, including a child with "with no English . . . who came to life during sessions and enjoyed learning and singing along to songs", and another who "was withdrawn, wouldn't talk [but] during the sessions and since he is more animated, willing to join in group discussions, more animated" (F-TQ). Adoha was an elective mute, whose teacher observed that "in the sessions although she didn't speak, I observed her joining in with instruments, singing, engaging. Parents mentioned she talked about the music. She talks in/out of class to more adults" (F-TQ). Her questionnaire displayed a high level of confidence and enthusiasm at the start of the year, anticipating needing help only with 'making up music' and predicting that 'learning new songs' would be her favourite activity (F-PQN). By July, her favourite activity was 'singing songs together', perhaps an indication that she had achieved the new repertoire that she was hoping for at the start of the year. In line with the general trend, she nominated more activities as needing help: six, in fact, still including 'making up music', now alongside 'learning new songs; being a conductor; moving and dancing together; talking about music; and playing or singing

solo'. If it seems overly optimistic to suggest that Adoha had become more aware of her potential in these areas, rather than only her limitations, her comments reinforced this interpretation: next year, she stated that she "wants to sing more songs", in secondary school "to go over the music" and when she grows up "to be a musician". In the focus group, Adoha also demonstrated her eagerness to learn more, struggling to choose a favourite instrument because she liked all of them, and stating that on Music Box days she felt excited, "cause we might do more new stuff that we haven't done" (F-PFG). It seems that Adoha had discovered and enjoyed the effort involved in acquiring musical skill; surely a valuable lesson in raising musical aspirations and providing a route into continued engagement.

The other Firth teacher nominated David, a child with autism who in the first session ran away from the circle to sit under a table with his hands over his ears. Our observation notes show how over the first term he became increasingly involved in the sessions, joining the circle and quietly playing a drum in the second week, and gradually becoming fully involved in the sessions, until by the whole school Showcase assembly in March he was volunteering to sing solos, with an excited workshop leader noting that she had to "stop myself asking him to do *everything!*" David's questionnaire responses in November showed an expectation that playing instruments would be his favourite activity, and were almost equally divided into activities he expected to be good at (learning new songs, listening to instruments and singing songs together) and those where he might need help (clapping rhythms, making up music, being a conductor, moving and dancing), the latter notably more interactive and so likely to cause greater difficulties for an autistic child. In his July responses, he left items blank rather than stating a need for help, and nominated 'making up music' as his favourite activity and 'being a conductor' as the only one in which he could do better. He stated that he wants to 'learn more songs' in primary school and 'learn to play instruments' in secondary school, while as an adult he anticipated that he would 'listen to music', a modest ambition but one that fits with his early reports of hearing music in the car and on the television and radio at home (F-PQN).

One of the Jessop teachers also focused on concentration and confidence in assessing the impact of the workshops, nominating three children who had "become much more confident in front of other children", or who had gained focus both in the sessions and in other subjects (J-TQ). Of these three, it is evident from the initial questionnaires that Sarah's academic attainment is below average for her class: her description of music in school read "No ferst day we hav singnge esemblee" [On Thursday we have singing assembly] (J-PQN), showing an awareness of musical opportunities in school, but clear difficulties with language. She

predicted that she would need help in only two musical activities, ‘listening to instruments’ and ‘moving and dancing’, and that ‘making up music’ would be her favourite activity, suggesting that she was open to new musical experiences. By the end of the year, the striking feature was not so much her two nominated favourites, ‘making up music’ and ‘talking about music’, but her illustration of a musician, which was a pencil drawing of a girl with long hair, with a violin next to her: this was clearly labelled “me”, with the additional explanation “It is [Sarah]” (J-PQJ). The teacher’s description of her being “totally engrossed in each session” (J-TQ) fits with this apparent expression of musical identity, and although Sarah expressed no further thoughts about her musical future, she had clearly made an engagement with music that had not been there previously.

The other teacher at Jessop focused much more on the children’s musical responses to the sessions, noting the enjoyment of creativity and its benefits for the wider curriculum, and describing one child as a “very creative girl whose favourite part of [the school year] has been Music Box” (J-TQ). Another nominated child for this teacher was John, whom she described as “kind of shy/reticent about music/singing/performing—thought it was all a bit beneath him! LOVES it now—started playing piano and learning himself” (J-TQ). John’s own responses at the start of the year were confident, anticipating that ‘making up music’ would be his favourite activity, and expecting to need help only with ‘being a conductor’ (J-PQN). His first drawing of a musician also displayed an existing interest in the piano, as he drew a person in a hat and multicoloured clothes alongside a labelled ‘piano’, ‘music book’ and stand. John also mentioned the specialist music teacher’s lessons and the weekly singing assembly, and described hearing music at home in his room, in the car and at the park (J-PQN). By July, his drawing of a musician was a smiling woman with hands raised labelled ‘Polly’ and his ambitions for the future expressed a clear progression from being able to “play a song on my piano” in primary school, “be in a band” in secondary school, and finally to “be world famoz [famous]” (J-PQJ).

In the focus groups, John’s interest in the piano showed a connection with his teacher’s description of him as “very mathematical” (J-TQ), as he described his favourite instruments: “Oh, bassoon. Because it was big, and, I dunno, just had lots of things to press and you could see the little things going up and down and up and down. And do you know the, um, piano? I think that’s got the most things to press” (J-PFG). He also hinted at a supportive musical home, where his brother played the tuba, and his mother was responsive to opportunities at school: he described how when he took home the participation pack provided for the Sir Scallywag concert, “the first day we got the CD and the booklet, er, at bath time my mum just

read them out” (J-PFG). John remembered some of the first activities of the Music Box sessions, and showed an openness to new opportunities, saying that “I just want to play all of [the instruments] I don’t mind what.” He mentioned several times that “I can read music”, and when another child confided that “I’ve got a recorder but I only know one letter and that’s ‘A’”, John interrupted with, “I know, it goes ‘C, D, E, F, G, A, B.” His confidence and enthusiasm was a complete contrast with his teacher’s description of it being “beneath him” at the start of the term: whether she had misinterpreted his interest, or it really had changed substantially in a few months, John’s musical identity was much more foregrounded in school by the end of the year, and his peers and teacher were acknowledging him as someone for whom music was important. Whether his musical career plan will fulfil his expectations of “being rich” (J-PFG) remains to be seen, but John was clearly aware of and excited by future possibilities in music.

Finally, at Mappin school, the teacher focused more on musical development in her observations of impact, noting generally that “the children have thoroughly enjoyed the project and I have seen an improvement in their musical knowledge, listening and appraising skills, and their handling of the instruments” (M-TQ). One child who illustrated this development was Lola, who her teacher identified as “already playing violin at school; has been able to apply and extend her musical knowledge meeting the musicians” (M-TQ). Lola’s first questionnaire responses showed an enjoyment in acquiring new skills, as she nominated ‘playing instruments’ as the activity that would be her favourite but in which she would also need help (M-PQN). Her drawing of a musician at this stage was a smiling man (with huge ears and hands) holding a conductor’s baton, and she made reference to her playing her violin at school and home, and to hearing music in her friend’s car. By July, her musician picture was a detailed drawing of a face with glasses and hair in bunches, labelled, “It’s me and [I] play the violin” (M-PQJ). In the large group at Mappin, it would have been easy for Lola’s existing musical knowledge to go unnoticed, but her description of how the cello sounded was picked up by the workshop leader: after her answer, “It sounded cross, like there were sharp notes, long ones, short ones,” Polly praised Lola’s response and invited her to come and have a closer look at the cello. Lola’s final questionnaire did not include any expression of her musical ambitions, but her favourite activity had changed to ‘playing or singing solo’, suggesting that the opportunities she had gained through the workshops had indeed increased her musical confidence in the ways her teacher had noticed.

These profiles help to illustrate the individual impact of the Music Box sessions, for raising children’s musical aspirations, and improving their confidence and concentration within and

beyond the workshops. They show too how the various sources of data help to build up a picture of how the workshops were integrated with the children's existing musical knowledge, in some cases bringing this more clearly to the teachers' attention.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings presented here show how experiences of the Music Box workshops over one primary school year have been intertwined with the children's prior musical encounters in school and home and their developing sense of themselves as musicians. Children's confidence and preferences for familiar activities were highest at the start of the year, with their exposure to new experiences serving to broaden their preferences and openness to new experiences, and to increase their understanding of how musical skill is acquired through effort and practice. Their definitions of 'who is a musician' were broadened by the workshops, shifting in the clearest examples from popular musicians to Polly and E360, and sometimes including themselves, friends and family. The children had learnt that becoming a musician is open to everyone, countering the popular myth of musical 'genius' that is accessible only to a few (Sloboda, Davidson, & Howe, 1994); their teachers too had gained confidence in teaching music and had seen its benefits for their pupils' emotional, social and creative development.

Some of the difficulties of engaging young children in music were evident even in these successful workshops: the Firth children's concerns about "babyish" songs showed how the fun of musical participation can become too readily associated with play, and therefore set aside as children grow up. The ambitions for future involvement in music were in some cases—including among the parents—rather vaguely formed, and in others unrealistically ambitious and in danger of floundering. Both these concerns demonstrate the need for clear routes into continued, age-appropriate musical learning, and the potential benefits of peer modelling by older children, as demonstrated effectively in boys' singing by Hall (2005). Likewise, while the teachers reported increased confidence, they also expressed a need for ongoing support in their music teaching, now being addressed through a continuing professional development programme offered by MitR. The combination of enthusiasm and uncertainty that runs through the responses from teachers, parents and pupils illustrates a need for continuity of musical support that is beyond the resources of most arts organisations and beyond the expertise of many primary school teachers.

The three schools presented diverse contexts for the Music Box workshops, and so raised interesting questions about how musical interventions of this kind are affected by and

received within the existing school culture. At Mappin, the provision of instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities was already strong and some children were very confident in their expression of their musical skills: this provided a good foundation for the workshop learning, but also meant that the children tended to be more critical of the sessions, comparing them to other activities or to their ideals of music learning. The voluntary musical opportunities in the school also meant that there was a wide range of abilities and experiences in the group, and a danger that the needs of both the highly skilled and the inexperienced young musicians would not be adequately met. While this relatively affluent school might have been assumed to be the easiest setting for the workshops, it brought its own challenges, and illustrated the inequalities of musical access that can emerge even in the early years of schooling. The Jessop policy of providing whole class music lessons for infant pupils, and offering instrumental lessons in later years, appeared to have some advantages in this respect: the children were receptive to the Music Box workshops, and they and their parents often had a sense that acquiring musical skill was still a future possibility for anyone who expressed an interest. Finally, at Firth, the most obviously disadvantaged school, the pupils' and teachers' appreciation of the workshops was striking, as was the response of the whole school and staff when the pupils performed in an assembly. Musical ambition appeared not to have been expected or prioritised in the school's culture prior to the workshops, but was warmly welcomed and its benefits clearly appreciated by the teachers.

The diversity of these three schools is a small illustration of the range of musical provision experienced by children of this age, and the challenges facing workshop leaders as they attempt to connect with the existing musical cultures that they enter for short periods of time. It becomes easy to see how children assume the sometimes limited musical identities of their surroundings, whether that is as a non-instrumentalist in a high achieving school, or a child assuming that their only future access to music is as a listener, like their parents: evidence of potential disengagement in music could be seen in the children's responses, just as much as their receptiveness to new opportunities and possibilities. While there is growing research evidence for the difficulties of maintaining musical participation at the transition to secondary school (e.g. Marshall & Hargreaves, 2007), this study suggests that musical identity and self-efficacy are in flux much earlier in children's learning, and need to be supported at this formative stage if children are to recognise and pursue routes into future musical engagement. Finally, this study explored the challenges of understanding young children's musical experience and development, using a range of methods and perspectives to gain insight on their experiences of the workshops and their other musical references. The project resisted an

'outcomes model' of evaluation (McNeil, Reeder, & Rich, 2012), which would have aimed to demonstrate the effects of the workshops on children's literacy, school attendance or other non-musical development. Nonetheless, these effects were reported by parents and teachers, showing that the value of musical activity for children's general development is widely understood. A greater focus here on children's experiential learning revealed how the workshops were assimilated into the children's musical understandings and general development: the attempts to measure their confidence levels at the start and end of the year, for example, showed how the raising of musical aspirations could result in a decrease in self-assessed competence, with these quantitative measures needing to be understood alongside the children's commentary and the observations of their behaviour in the workshops. The children's drawings were revealing of their changing notions of what it means to be a musician, and future studies could explore these in more detail through individual or group discussions, or use videos of the workshops themselves as a prompt to conversation with the pupils, parents or teachers (cf. Rowe, 2009). Above all, the findings demonstrate the complexity and richness of children's musical worlds, showing the diversity of perspectives that they bring to workshops of this kind, and the many layers of musical engagement evident within the small community of a primary school classroom.

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