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An Exploratory Study of the Relationships Between Teachers' Beliefs About Musical Ability, Assessment, and the Purpose of Elementary General Music

ABSTRACT

Existing research suggests that teacher beliefs are powerful factors in teachers' thoughts and actions. The research also suggests that connections may exist between elementary general music teachers' beliefs about musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music. Therefore, the purpose of this survey study was to examine relationships among and between elementary general music teachers' beliefs of musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music. Elementary general music teachers in Michigan (N = 156) completed an online survey consisting of Likert-type items pertaining to beliefs about musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music. Analysis revealed a number of correlations among and between these beliefs. Implications include the need for further research on music educators' beliefs and their connection to teaching practice as well as the need for educators to reflect on their own beliefs.

Keywords

assessment, elementary general music, musicality, talent, teacher beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Beliefs are powerful influences in the lives of teachers, functioning as filters through which they experience and interpret the world, frames for situations they face, and guides for their intentions and actions (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Pajares, 1992). Because of this inextricable link between beliefs and actions, the study of teachers' beliefs has been an important topic in the field of education (Ernest, 1989; Fives & Buehl, 2008, 2012; Pajares, 1992; Thompson, 2007; Vartuli, 2005). Beliefs about

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teaching, learning, and subject matter—both explicit and implicit—have an inevitable impact on what teachers do in the classroom and thus on the learning experiences of their students (Ernest, 1989; Thompson, 2007; Vartuli, 2005).

Musical Ability

One powerful subset of teacher beliefs centers on students' abilities to learn, particularly during the early school years because these "are an important formative period when children's beliefs about their intellectual abilities are based on academic expectations and ability evaluations conveyed by their teachers" (Vartuli, 2005, p. 77). Thus, teacher beliefs about musical ability can be powerful factors in shaping student success in music education.¹ One prevalent belief is the idea of musical talent as an innate and selective trait—one that is genetically transmitted and held by only a minority of the population (Howe et al., 1998). Existing research suggests many music teachers believe musical ability requires innate talent, to which they may attribute a student's musical success or failure (Biasutti, 2010; Brändström, 1999; Clelland, 2006; Evans et al., 2000; Hewitt, 2006; Jaap & Patrick, 2015; Legette, 2002, 2012; Shouldice, 2009; Thompson, 2000). In a mixed methods study (Shouldice, 2009), I found that many music teachers agreed with the statement "To be good at music, a person needs to have a talent for music." One expressed the belief that "to be truly musical I think is a gift" (p. 148), while another stated, "Some people *can't* be ... 'a musician' because they might not have that talent" (p. 133). Conversely, my ethnographic case study (Shouldice, 2019) of an elementary general music teacher who believes all human beings have musical potential revealed this belief to be connected to the safe, supportive, and empowering classroom environment she created and her persistence in helping all students succeed musically.

Assessment

In addition to beliefs about musical ability, music teachers may differ in their beliefs about aspects of classroom practice, such as assessment. Previous researchers have found varying beliefs about the purpose and importance of assessment among elementary general music teachers (Abell, 1993; Hepworth-Osiowy, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Peppers, 2010; Salvador, 2011, 2019; Talley, 2005). For example, studies by Hepworth-Osiowy (2004), Barkley (2006), and Peppers (2010) each showed that a minority of elementary music teachers did not believe assessment was important or valuable. Furthermore, some elementary music teachers believed assessment can have negative effects, such as dampening student creativity (Niebur, 1997; Peppers, 2010) or causing students to feel threatened or worried about being assessed (Patterson, 2006; Shih, 1997). Others believe assessment may interfere with students' love and/or enjoyment of music (Delaney, 2011; Hepworth-Osiowy, 2004; Patterson, 2006; Talley, 2005). Another perceived negative effect of assessment is that it can hurt students' musical self-esteem and/or self-efficacy (Farmer, 2004; Niebur, 1997; Peppers, 2010;

Salvador, 2011). For example, one of Farmer's (2004) respondents considered authentic singing assessments to be "potentially harmful" (p. 70) because "assessment could discourage a child" (p. 73).

Findings of the aforementioned studies suggest there may be connections between beliefs about assessment and other beliefs. Beneath the belief that assessment may hurt students' musical self-esteem or self-efficacy is another implicit belief: that only a minority of students will have the special, innate talent necessary to develop musical ability. For example, 16% of teachers in Talley's (2005) study said they assess in order to "identify and challenge gifted students" (p. 60), while one of Niebur's (1997) participants worried that assessment might cause a child who "was not musically talented" to feel that he or she "can't do music" (pp. 219-220). These statements seem to imply a view that assessment is essentially a judgment of students' musical abilities. In contrast, two of Salvador's (2011) three participants' assessment practices were driven by the belief that they were teaching "measurable musical skills" that "all students were capable of learning" (p. 273). One felt conveying the beliefs that "anyone can learn to sing" and "anyone can be musical" to students would help them come to "know that everyone can achieve the things that I am teaching" (p. 228).

The Purpose of Elementary General Music

In addition to connections between beliefs about assessment and beliefs about musical ability, another possible connection revealed by existing research is between beliefs about assessment and beliefs about the purpose of the elementary general music program. Salvador (2011) speculated that "disagreement regarding the nature and purpose of elementary general music" may be "the root of differences in instructional style and thus the practice of assessment" (p. 274). For example, one of Salvador's participants believed "that all her students could progress musically and that the purpose of music class was for all students to learn music" (p. 226). Those beliefs formed the underlying basis for and driving force behind her assessment practices, specifically that her "practice of assessment and differentiated instruction stemmed directly from her philosophical beliefs regarding universal musicality" (p. 230). Conversely, it appears that many teachers believe that most students will grow up to be "consumers" of music, and therefore the purpose of the elementary music program should be to help them acquire appreciation and love of music (Carter, 1986; Abell, 1993; Rasor, 1988; Shih, 1997). I observed connections between my case study (Shouldice, 2019) participant's beliefs that everyone has musical potential, that assessment "is vital in order to ensure that each student is developing musical skills" (p. 201), and that the purpose of her elementary music program is to equip students for lifelong independent musical engagement.

The Purpose of the Current Study

Findings of the aforementioned research suggest that connections may exist between elementary music teachers' beliefs about musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music. However, there is currently no research specifically examining connections between these beliefs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine relationships among and between elementary general music teachers' beliefs pertaining to musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music. Specific research questions were as follows:

1. What relationships exist among teachers' beliefs about musical ability?
2. What relationships exist among teachers' beliefs about assessment?
3. What relationships exist among teachers' beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music?
4. What relationships exist between teachers' beliefs about musical ability, beliefs about assessment, and beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music?

METHOD

Survey Instrument

In order to examine relationships among and between teachers' beliefs about musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music, I designed a survey to quantitatively measure these beliefs. I adapted or took survey items pertaining to beliefs about musical ability directly from a previous survey instrument (Shouldice, 2009). These eight items featured statements about musical ability to which respondents indicated their level of agreement (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree). Creation of the survey items pertaining to beliefs about assessment was informed by findings of a number of previous studies on assessment practices in elementary general music that revealed possible beliefs warranting further investigation (Barkley, 2006; Farmer, 2004; Hepworth-Osiowy, 2004; Niebur, 1997; Peppers, 2010; Talley, 2005). Beliefs about assessment were measured using four statements, in response to which respondents indicated their level of agreement. Respondents then read a list of six possible assessment criteria and rated how important it was for elementary music students to be assessed on each (1 = most important/top priority, 2 = very important but not top priority, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = somewhat important but not essential, 5 = not important). Finally, beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music were measured using items adapted from my previous survey instrument (Shouldice, 2009). Respondents read a list of 12 statements (each beginning "The primary purpose of elementary general music is...") and rated each statement on a five-point scale (1 = most important/top priority, 2 = very important but not top priority, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = somewhat important but not essential, 5 = not important). A list of all survey items can be found in Table 1, and the survey instrument is provided in Appendix A.

Table 1*Means and Standard Deviations for All Survey Items*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Every child can develop musical skills.	1.49	.657
Anyone can learn music.	1.51	.606
Anyone can be good at music.	2.18	.854
A lack of talent makes it difficult for a person to acquire musical skills.	3.50	.869
Talent is a powerful factor in determining a student's musical success.	3.25	1.053
Talent is necessary to develop musical skills.	3.77	.826
Some children have more musical talent than others.	1.90	.693
Some children just naturally have a mind for music and other children don't.	2.91	1.086
Assessment is not appropriate for elementary general music.	4.05	.959
Assessment in elementary general music hurts students' musical self-esteem.	3.89	.940
Assessment in elementary general music interferes with students' love of music.	3.86	.950
Assessment is important in elementary general music.	1.97	.946
Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their participation.	1.92	1.084
Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their behavior in class.	2.26	1.082
Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their effort.	2.02	1.172
Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their musical skills.	1.97	1.164
Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their knowledge about music.	2.36	1.089
Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their creativity.	2.53	1.139
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to help all students develop knowledge about music.	1.66	.914
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to help all students develop musical skills.	1.59	.938
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to provide a means of self-expression.	1.62	.902
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to promote creativity.	1.73	.928
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to help all students develop an appreciation for music.	1.50	.933
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to instill a love of music within students.	1.46	.939
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to help students to become knowledgeable consumers of music.	2.05	1.056
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to prepare students for a lifetime of enjoyment in music.	1.34	.864
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to help students understand their own culture and the culture of others.	1.97	.929
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to enhance ability in other subject areas.	2.97	1.204
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to prepare interested/talented students for a career in music.	2.92	1.131
The primary purpose of elementary general music is to prepare students for musical participation in middle school.	2.39	1.069

I piloted the survey with several individuals who had experience in both research design and elementary music teaching. These individuals provided feedback on clarity, and I adjusted the survey accordingly.

Participants

After piloting the survey and revising the instrument, I used the SurveyMonkey website to distribute the survey and collect responses. In order to target elementary general music teachers in the state of Michigan, I solicited contact information for members of various state organizations for music teachers, including the Michigan Music Educators Association (MMEA), the Detroit Orff-Schulwerk Association, the Michigan Gordon Institute for Music Learning, and the Southeast Michigan Kodaly Educators. In order to broaden the sample, I also searched the websites of various school districts in Michigan to obtain additional email addresses of potential participants.

A total of 205 people responded to the survey invitation. However, responses from 16 individuals were mostly incomplete. In addition, 33 respondents indicated that they did not currently teach elementary general music. This left a remaining sample of 156 elementary general music teachers who completed the survey.

Analysis

I calculated means and standard deviations for all survey items, which can be found in Table 1. Because the variables were ordinal and not all normally distributed, I calculated Spearman rank correlations using SPSS in order to ascertain the relationships among and between the three types of beliefs.

RESULTS

Relationships Among Beliefs About Musical Ability

Analysis of responses to the items pertaining to musical ability revealed moderate positive correlations among the three beliefs statements “Anyone can learn music,” “Anyone can be good at music,” and “Every child can develop musical skills,” as shown in Table 2. Weak to moderate positive correlations also existed among responses to most of the other five ability statements. In addition, weak to moderate negative correlations existed between responses to the first group of statements and responses to the second group, suggesting that elementary music teachers may tend to believe musical ability is either universal (“all humans are musical”) or innate and selective (“only some have talent”).

Relationships Among Beliefs About Assessment

Analysis of responses to the first four items pertaining to assessment showed a similar dichotomy between pro-assessment and anti-assessment beliefs. As shown in Table 3, responses to the statements “Assessment is not appropriate for elementary

general music,” “Assessment in elementary general music hurts students’ musical self-esteem,” and “Assessment in elementary general music interferes with students’ love of music” were all moderately to strongly positively correlated with one another. Furthermore, there were moderate to strong negative correlations between responses to these three items and responses to the statement “Assessment is important in elementary general music.”

Analysis of the six items pertaining to assessment criteria revealed moderate to strong positive correlations between beliefs that students should be assessed on participation, behavior, and effort, as shown in Table 3. There were weak to moderate positive correlations between beliefs that students should be assessed on musical skills, knowledge, and creativity. Across these two clusters of beliefs, there were several weak negative correlations.

In comparing pro/anti-assessment beliefs and beliefs about assessment criteria, the strongest correlations were related to teachers’ beliefs about the assessment of musical skills. There was a moderate positive correlation between the belief that students should be assessed on musical skills and the belief that assessment is important (see Table 3). However, there were weak to moderate negative correlations between the belief that students should be assessed on skills and the beliefs that assessment is not appropriate, hurts students’ musical self-esteem, and interferes with students’ love of music. In addition, there were weak positive correlations between the belief that students should be assessed on participation and the beliefs that assessment is not appropriate and hurts students’ musical self-esteem.

Relationships Among Beliefs About the Purpose of Elementary General Music

Analysis of responses pertaining to the purpose of elementary general music revealed that most of these belief statements were correlated with one another, as shown in Table 4. Weak to moderate positive correlations existed between beliefs that the purpose of elementary general music is to develop musical skills, to provide a means for self-expression, to promote creativity, to develop music appreciation, to instill a love of music, to help students become knowledgeable consumers, to prepare students for a lifetime of musical enjoyment, and to understand culture. There was less correlation between these beliefs and the beliefs that the purpose of elementary general music is to prepare students for music in middle school, to enhance other subject areas, and to prepare students for a career in music. The latter three statements, however, were all weakly to moderately positively correlated with one another.

Relationships Between Beliefs About Musical Ability and Beliefs About Assessment

Comparing beliefs about musical ability and beliefs about assessment revealed few significant correlations (see Table 5). The belief that assessment is important was weakly positively correlated with the belief that anyone can be good at music and that

every child can develop musical skills. The belief that assessment hurts students' musical self-esteem was weakly positively correlated with the beliefs that some children have more musical talent than others and that talent is a powerful factor in determining a student's success, and it was negatively correlated with the beliefs that anyone can be good at music and that every child can develop musical skills. There was a weak positive correlation between the belief that assessment is not appropriate in elementary general music and the belief that some children have more musical talent than others. There was also a weak negative correlation between the former and the beliefs that every child can develop musical skills and that anyone can learn music. In addition, although the other correlations were not significant, it is worth noting that the direction of the relationships was mostly positive between anti-assessment beliefs and talent beliefs and negative between anti-assessment beliefs and universal musicality beliefs, while the reverse was true for the pro-assessment belief.

Relationships Between Beliefs About Musical Ability and Beliefs About the Purpose of Elementary General Music

Analysis of the relationships between beliefs about ability and beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music also revealed few significant correlations (see Table 6). The most notable were weak positive correlations between the belief that the purpose of elementary general music is to develop musical skills and the beliefs that anyone can learn music and that every child can develop musical skills.

Relationships Between Beliefs About Assessment and Beliefs About the Purpose of Elementary General Music

Comparison of pro/anti-assessment beliefs and beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music revealed a number of weak correlations (see Table 7). Those who believe assessment is important were more likely to believe students should be assessed on skills ($r_s = .298^{**}$) while those who believe assessment is not appropriate were more likely to believe students should not be assessed on skills ($r_s = -.273^{**}$). In addition, it is worth noting that the direction of the relationship between anti-assessment beliefs and purpose was the reverse of the relationship between pro-assessment belief and purpose for all twelve purpose statements.

Finally, there were a number of moderate correlations between assessment criteria beliefs and purpose beliefs, as shown in Table 7. The strongest of these was a positive correlation ($r_s = .515^{**}$) between the belief that the purpose of elementary general music is to develop musical skills and the belief that students should be assessed on skills. Moderate positive correlations also existed between the belief that the purpose of elementary general music is to promote creativity and the belief that students should be assessed on creativity ($r_s = .464^{**}$), between the belief that the purpose of elementary general music is to develop musical appreciation and the belief that students should be assessed on participation ($r_s = .385^{**}$) and effort ($r_s = .347^{**}$), and between the belief

that the purpose of elementary general music is to develop musical knowledge and the belief that students should be assessed on knowledge ($r_s = .356^{**}$).

Table 2
Correlations Among Beliefs About Musical Ability

	Anyone can learn music.	Anyone can be good at music.	A lack of talent makes it difficult for a person to acquire musical skills.	Talent is a powerful factor in determining a student's musical success.	Talent is necessary to develop musical skills.	Some children have more musical talent than others.	Some children just naturally have a mind for music and other children don't.
Every child can develop musical skills.	.556**	.365**	-.134	-.212**	-.221*	-.252**	-.253**
Anyone can learn music.		.488**	-.128	-.291**	-.224**	-.158*	-.201*
Anyone can be good at music.			-.207**	-.231**	-.345**	-.255**	-.149
A lack of talent makes it difficult for a person to acquire musical skills.				.400**	.212**	.266**	.112
Talent is a powerful factor in determining a student's musical success.					.250**	.398**	.270**
Talent is necessary to develop musical skills.						.202*	.173*
Some children have more musical talent than others.							.213**

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 3
Correlations Among Beliefs About Assessment and Assessment Criteria

	Assessment ... hurts students' musical self-esteem.	Assessment ... interferes with students' love of music.	Assessment is important ...	Participation	Behavior	Effort	Skills	Knowledge	Creativity
Assessment is not appropriate ...	.717**	.602**	-.747**	.258*	.140	-.203*	-.447**	-.102	-.139
Assessment ... hurts students' musical self-esteem.		.749**	-.671**	.192*	.106	.126	-.361**	-.126	-.198*
Assessment ... interferes with students' love of music.			-.585**	.141	.087	.084	-.267**	-.054	-.224**
Assessment is important...				-.254**	-.132	-.154	.426**	.146	.261**
Participation					.525**	.713**	-.200*	.055	-.180*
Behavior						.533**	-.090	-.045	-.181*
Effort							-.200*	.016	-.117
Skills								.457**	.381**
Knowledge									.260**

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 4
Correlations Among Beliefs About the Purpose of Elementary General Music

	Skills	Self-ex- pression	Creat- ivity	Apprecia- tion	Love	Knowl. Consu- mer	Lifetime Enjoy- ment	Culture	Other Sub- jects	Career	Prepare for middle school
Know- ledge	.368**	.168*	.172*	.462**	.328**	.361**	.369**	.277**	.122	.228**	.328**
Skills		.223**	.235**	.243**	.240**	.221**	.284**	.183*	-.194*	.097	.337**
Self-ex- pression			.537**	.328**	.423**	.312**	.359**	.407**	.061	.092	.036
Creativity				.235**	.311**	.455**	.301**	.245**	.051	.135	.008
Apprecia- tion					.479**	.265**	.413**	.356**	.199*	.078	.238**
Love of Music						.376**	.560**	.395**	.104	.202*	.197*
Know. Consumer							.347**	.279**	.124	.285**	.192*
Lifetime of Enjoy- ment								.416**	.138	.102	.080
Culture									.302**	.240**	.268**
Other Subjects										.236**	.366**
Career											.429**

** $p < .01$

* $p < .05$

Table 5
Correlations Between Beliefs About Musical Ability and Beliefs About Assessment/Criteria

	Every child can develop musical skills.	Anyone can learn music.	Anyone can be good at music.	Some children just naturally have a mind for music...	Talent is necessary to develop musical skills.	Some children have more musical talent...	Talent is a powerful factor in ... success.	A lack of talent makes it difficult ...
Assessment is not appropriate...	-.202*	-.158*	-.143	.105	.087	.209**	.106	.126
Assessment ... hurts students' musical self-esteem.	-.163*	-.116	-.202*	.033	.100	.227**	.185*	.092
Assessment ... interferes with students' love of music.	-.097	-.120	-.170*	-.006	-.024	.100	.124	.114
Assessment is important ...	.189*	.116	.194*	-.019	-.105	-.190*	-.092	.036
Participation	-.198*	-.118	-.130	.082	-.049	.098	.029	-.020
Behavior	-.122	-.140	-.049	.093	-.100	.076	.064	.069
Effort	-.129	.013	.003	.135	-.065	.159*	-.022	.001
Skills	.094	.139	.066	.102	.016	-.118	.101	.071
Knowledge	-.010	.074	.102	.166*	.065	-.012	.053	.114
Creativity	.098	.191**	.208*	.052	.021	-.065	-.064	.060

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$

DISCUSSION

The current study revealed a number of connections between elementary music teachers' beliefs about musical ability, assessment, and the purpose of elementary general music, as suggested by previous research. The number of significant correlations and the direction of correlations among responses pertaining to musical ability suggest teachers tend to have opposing views regarding musical ability: those who believe anyone can learn music, be good at music, and develop musical skills versus those who believe in the power of talent and that some children are more naturally talented than others. The former aligns with a belief in universal human musicality, while the latter aligns with a belief in innate and selective musical talent. This dichotomy among teachers' beliefs about musical ability reflects findings of previous research. Brändström (1999) discovered teachers were split between absolutist and relativistic views of musicality, and Jaap and Patrick (2015) found a dichotomy between reductionist and emergentist views of musical ability. Furthermore, I (Shouldice, 2019) determined that a belief in universal musicality (i.e., relativist/emergentist views) may align with certain classroom practices. More research is needed to observe the ways in which differing conceptions of musical ability relate to teachers' actions in the classroom and interactions with students.

In addition to the dichotomy between universal musicality beliefs and talent beliefs, results of this study revealed a dichotomy between pro-assessment and anti-assessment beliefs. Additionally, there was a dichotomy between teachers who believe students should be assessed on participation, behavior, and/or effort and teachers who believe students should be assessed on musical skills and/or knowledge, suggesting split views on whether assessment should reflect process goals or outcome goals. Furthermore, teachers with anti-assessment beliefs tended to believe students should be assessed on participation and not skills, while teachers with pro-assessment beliefs tended to believe students should be assessed on skills and not participation. It is worth investigating whether teachers' beliefs about assessment may be related to the degree to which they have been adequately trained in assessing students' musical development, as it is possible that teachers who are opposed to assessing musical skills and knowledge in elementary students may lack the expertise to do so.

Although there were only weak correlations between ability beliefs and assessment beliefs, the direction of these correlations warrants further investigation. Specifically, anti-assessment beliefs tended to align more with the belief in innate and selective talent rather than universal musicality while pro-assessment beliefs tended to align more with the belief in universal musicality rather than innate talent. This supports previous research suggesting connections between beliefs about assessment and beliefs about talent (Niebur, 1997; Salvador, 2011; Talley, 2005). It may be that opposition to assessment in elementary general music is rooted in a belief that some students lack the requisite "talent" to become skilled at music, while teachers who believe in universal

musicality may see all students “as being reachable, teachable, and worthy of the attention and effort it takes to help them learn” (Vartuli, 2005, p. 77).

Teachers’ beliefs about assessment were also related to their beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music. Specifically, beliefs that students should be assessed on knowledge, skills, creativity, and participation correlated respectively with beliefs that the purpose of elementary general music is to develop musical knowledge, to develop musical skills, to promote creativity, and to develop musical appreciation. This suggests teachers tend to believe students should be assessed on the outcomes that align with what they believe the larger goal of elementary general music to be. This supports Salvador’s (2019) supposition that beliefs about assessment may be connected to beliefs about purpose and suggests it is critical for both pre-service and in-service teachers to reflect on their own philosophical beliefs about music education.

It should be noted that the current study had several limitations. One was that it involved respondents from only one state (Michigan). Further research is needed to examine beliefs among music educators in other geographical areas. Also, many of the respondents belonged to organizations that promote the development of musical ability as a key goal of music education. Further study including teachers outside of these groups may reveal different beliefs. Another limitation was that respondents were not asked to rank statements regarding the purpose of elementary general music. Therefore, many teachers rated a number of purpose statements as their top priority, which might be why there were few meaningful findings regarding beliefs about the purpose of elementary general music. Had respondents been required to rank the purpose statements, there may have been a greater range of beliefs expressed regarding each purpose statement and clearer differences when comparing purpose beliefs to ability and assessment beliefs.

Another limitation of the study was a failure to provide an operational definition of the term “talent” as an innate and selective trait that is genetically transmitted and held by only a minority of the population. Optional open-ended comments from several respondents indicated they were unsure whether to interpret this term inherent or learned ability. For example, one pointed out, “It is difficult to answer these questions without defining talent and what it means to be ‘good’ at music.” Another respondent commented,

Talent can be defined in many ways so I struggled with some of these answers. I believe people refer to talent as inherent musical ability. I believe many more people could develop what is thought of as ‘talent,’ but are never given the chance.

Similarly, Scripp et al. (2013) encourage clarification on whether the term talent is used to refer to a natural, innate ability or learned expertise. Music educators should reflect on the implications of varying uses of the term “talent” as well as the ramifications of these beliefs in the classroom.

An additional limitation of this study is the fact that beliefs were self-reported. While many beliefs are overt and conscious, other beliefs may be implicit and unarticulated, guiding teachers' actions in ways they may not even be aware (Ernest, 1989; Vartuli, 2005). According to Pajares (1992), "beliefs cannot be directly observed or measured but must be inferred from what people say, intend, and do" (p. 314). Therefore, more research involving naturalistic observations of teachers working with students are needed to infer beliefs from teaching practice. An example of one such study is my ethnographic case study (Shouldice, 2019), which involved extensive classroom observation, teacher interviews, and teacher journaling to reveal connections between the participant's beliefs and practice.

Finally, it is critical that music educators reflect on and examine their own beliefs in order to increase awareness of how they may be positively or negatively affecting students' experiences. According to Vartuli (2005), "teachers' pedagogy and self-efficacy beliefs are powerful predictors of child outcomes, classroom climate and management, and teacher career satisfaction" (p. 84). In a controversial study, Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), randomly selected a subset of students from each class in one elementary school and told their teachers those students had been identified "as showing unusual potential for intellectual growth" (p. vii). At the end of the school year, those children showed significantly greater academic gains than the other students, suggesting that teachers' beliefs about their potential became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Not only is it possible that music educators' beliefs about students' musical potential shape their students' experiences and outcomes but that these beliefs also underlie teachers' assessment practices and beliefs about the purpose of their music programs.

Therefore, it is imperative that music teacher educators encourage examination of beliefs among pre-service teachers and that in-service music teachers be provided with opportunities to continue reflecting on their own beliefs in order to make the implicit explicit and thus reveal possible discrepancies between beliefs and practice. This might include questions such as the following:

- What does it mean to be musical?
- Where does musical ability come from?
- Who is capable of developing musical knowledge and skills?
- What is necessary in order for a person to be "good" at music?
- What is the purpose of music education?
- What is the purpose of assessment?

In reflecting on such questions and engaging in dialogue with others, music educators can make their beliefs explicit, possibly reconsider them, and continue to shape their teaching practice.

ENDNOTE

¹ For the purposes of this study, musical ability is conceptualized primarily as one's ability to sing or play an instrument with accurate pitch and rhythm.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Teaching Status

***1. Do you currently teach elementary general music?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

Assessment

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

2. Assessment is not appropriate for elementary general music.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

3. Assessment in elementary general music hurts students' musical self-esteem.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

4. Assessment is important in elementary general music.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

5. Assessment in elementary general music interferes with students' love of music.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

Please use the following criteria in responding to the statements below.

1= This is most important and therefore one of my top priorities for assessment.

2= This is very important but not one of my top priorities for assessment.

3= This is somewhat important to assess.

4= This is somewhat important but not essential to assess.

5= This is not important to assess.

6. Students in elementary general music should be assessed on their:

	1	2	3	4	5
knowledge about music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
effort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
behavior in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
musical skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
participation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
creativity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

7. If you would like to make any additional comments on this topic and/or your responses, you may do so in the box below.

Purpose of Elementary General Music

Please use the following criteria in responding to the statements below.

1= This is most important and therefore one of my top priorities.

2= This is very important but not one of my top priorities.

3= This is somewhat important.

4= This is somewhat important but not essential.

5= This is not important.

8. The primary purpose of elementary general music is:

	1	2	3	4	5
to help students understand their own culture and the culture of others.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to help all students develop musical skills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to instill a love of music within students.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to enhance ability in other subject areas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to help students to become knowledgeable consumers of music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to prepare interested/talented students for a career in music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to help all students develop knowledge about music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to help all students develop an appreciation for music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to promote creativity.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to prepare students for musical participation in middle school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to prepare students for a lifetime of enjoyment in music.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
to provide a means of self-expression.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify)

9. If you would like to make any additional comments on this topic and/or your responses, you may do so in the box below.

Closing Questions

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements:

10. Some children just naturally have a mind for music, and other children don't.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

11. Every child can develop musical skills.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

12. Some children have more musical talent than others.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

13. Talent is necessary to develop musical skills.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

14. Anyone can learn music.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

15. Anyone can be good at music.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

16. Talent is a powerful factor in determining a student's musical success.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

17. A lack of talent makes it difficult for a person to acquire musical skills.

☐ Strongly Agree ☐ Agree ☐ Neutral ☐ Disagree ☐ Strongly Disagree

18. If you would like to make any additional comments on this topic and/or your responses, you may do so in the box below.

About the Author

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