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**WHY SHOULD IT BE EXACTLY ME?****Students estimating their own success in entrance examination of music teacher training programme****Abstract**

In this paper we will describe the conceptions of Oulu University music teacher education try-outs (from year 1993) about their own skills and succeeding in the entrance examination (n=121). The research was carried out as a paper questionnaire in the occasion of information. The research focuses in the questions: 1) "Why should exactly I be selected to study in the music teacher education program?" 2) If you don't come in the education programme, consider why it happened?" 3) What is your own estimation about your success in different parts of the entrance examination?"

Only a small part (18) of the candidates (121) could come in the education program. The candidates speculated in their answers their own succeeding and possible reasons for not coming in the programme. In the selection there were several tests concentrating in personal musician skills, capacities as music teacher and personality aspects. The try outs mentioned lack of skills, being nervous and others being more able as reasons for not coming in the music teacher education programme.

**Keywords:** Music education, music teaching, entrance examination, student selection, developing the entrance examination, try out's conceptions

## **WHY SHOULD IT BE EXACTLY ME?**

### **Students estimating their own success in entrance examination of music teacher training programme**

#### **1 Background of the student selections**

Entrance examinations are in central role when we are contemplating the university incomers. With the entrance examination the organizers of the education are trying to find the best possible students for their training programmes. The entrance examinations are thought to 1) prognosticate the success in actuality of the studies, 2) to measure the motivation towards the studies, 3) to predict the locus orientation and the commitment and fortune in the actual work in future. The entrance examinations are effected together by conscious, unconscious and totally unknown quantities. The education is successfully fulfilled when it gives good preparedness to make good in the future work (see Laitinen 1989, 7)

At the Oulu University the Music Education -training programme (leading to the music teacher's examination) was started in year 1993. The programme produces music teachers (Master of Arts) in about five years of studies. They are able to work in the elementary schools, high schools and in other specialist assignments in field of music education (Valintaopas 1993). The first entrance examinations were held in spring 1993 with an organisation including 45 specialists doing the evaluation of the candidates. The main criterions of the entrance were decided by a committee of entrance and the criterions are still based on these mainlines.

In the entrance examination the candidates were (and also today are) tested in fields of 1) aptitude for being a music teacher (a teaching session and personal interview), 2) practical musicianship (free accompaniment) 3) playing different instruments and 4) solfège. The emphasis of the examinations has been almost the same during the years up till today. In the year 1993 it was as follows: the main instrument and the second instrument playing 15 % of value, free accompaniment 20 % (practical musicianship); solfège 10 %. These were measured in the first part of the examination. In the other part of the examination the emphasis was: teaching session 30 %, personal interview 15 %, practical musicianship 10 %.

Though the entrance examinations have changed a little since the year 1993, are the basic ideas and focuses still quite the same in 2005 (Juvonen & Ruismäki 2005). The education programme in University of Oulu has been built to respond the demands of actual music teaching at schools of today as well as possible. In the beginning of the education (10 years ago) many of the candidates applying to education had been working as music teachers on different levels and were wishing to complete their studies to be a qualified music teacher. Nowadays the two-section entrance examinations at the University of Oulu seem to select quite effectively the core which will finally enter the university to be educated as music teachers of researchers. (Peltola 2003.)

#### **2 Theoretic frame**

It is most important to research the concepts of students to be able to understand their way of thinking and worldview. That way we might be able to make good use of it in their studies and change their conceptions when it seems necessary. It also helps to develop the entrance examinations and widely thinking the whole music teaching and learning in future (Espeland 1994, 83-93). A conception is in this frame defined as a picture of a phenomenon which has been formed through experiences and thinking. When we use the terminology of Marton (1991) we are talking about the second level viewpoint which means that we are observing peoples conceptions of different phenomenon.

Another point of view which we are using in this research is the attribution theory (Weiner 1986). Our question is: what are the reasons the candidates use in explaining their own successful or unsuccessful experience in entrance examination?

Asmus (1986a; 1986b) discovered in his researches that the students explain their success and failure in studies with their own inner capabilities and with the amount of trying. The same researcher says (Asmus 1989, 171-182) that the best predictors in success of music studies are the achievements at school and the success in academic field connected to hardworking practice and musical talents. One point of view in this theoretic frame comes from the candidate's notes about good and efficient music teacher at school.

In a wide-ranging American research (Kvet & Watkins 1993, 70-80) 306 classroom teacher students were asked (among other things) about the facts effecting their successful music teaching at school. The question aroused four factors. The first one was describing the ability to understand diverse children and adjusting teaching with their dissimilarities. The second factor concentrated in musical abilities and talents together with the positive attitudes to music. The third factor described different personality outlines. The fourth factor focused in external matters like the backup from administration and society. In many researches it has been shown that musical achievements are connected to 1) musical talent and musical aptitude 2) academic achievements, 3) intelligence, 4) musical experiences, and 5) motivation, when we are trying to predict success in it (Asmus & Harrison & Serpe 1994, 131-144; Caimi 1981, 183- 198). Some researchers have concluded into more detailed classification in explaining the success in music studies. (Edwards 1986, 3-8). On the other hand some scholars have resulted in two factor solution: cognitive and affective matters are the things that explain the efficiency of teaching and learning.

Brand (1985, 13-16) noticed that an effective teacher illustrates musicianship and capability to control the classroom. An efficient teacher is able to proportion the aims of a lesson to the interests of the pupils. In addition he can time his teaching right; he is energetic and enthusiastic about his work; he uses direct eye contact and gesture language and also varies his voice in speech. McCoy (1985, 9-12) also focuses in the way that as efficient teacher substantiates the thoughts of his pupils while giving feedback about the achievements and also teaches musical skills in addition of the performance skills. Saunders and Worthington (1990, 26-29) presented that a music teacher must show ability to plan lessons correctly and he must be able to optimize the activities in the lesson for the learning. He also must communicate with the pupils and keep a good and positive classroom spirit up all the time. Madsen and Geringer (1989, 87-94) point out that the intensity of the teacher is a universal character of an effective teacher.

Though American research often focuses in the profitability-thinking (affectivity, impressiveness) it is still possible to notice the characters of a good teacher in them. These characters can easily be connected to many of the conceptions which the students show in their personal answers to many of the questions asked in this research.

### 3 The execution of the research

This research was fulfilled with a questionnaire during the information meeting in the entrance examinations of University of Oulu. The questionnaire was carried through before the examination and the answers were not marked by name. Originally there were 183 candidates for the education and in the first round of the entrance examination there were selected 121 candidates. To the second level there were selected 67 candidates. In this research all the 121 candidates answered the questionnaire. Finally there were 18 candidates accepted for the music teacher education in the year 1993. The amount of students has varied between 17 and 25 since.

The answers were analyzed by classifying and compressing the meaning structures and implications to higher abstraction level both graphically and using the T-test and correlations. The conceptions of the candidates are not categorized or put into some order of superiority; they are only marked by their frequency. (See: Syrjälä & Ahonen & Syrjänen & Saari 1994, 114-115; Marto 1981; Uljens 1989, 37).

Naturally the answers of the questionnaire show the thoughts of the candidates at the very moment. They show personal conceptions from the candidate's own world of experiences. The experiences of being a stand in teacher, the earlier instrument studies, the experiences of working with children and also musical values and attitudes are shown in the answers. From the background factors only gender was asked to guarantee the anonymity of the answerers. It was pointed out for the candidates that this questionnaire and the thoughts the answerers wrote in it have no connection or influence to the entrance examination.

The research questions were:

- 1) Why should exactly I be chosen in the music teacher education programme?
- 2) If you will not be chosen, what do you think is the reason in it?
- 3) How do you estimate your success in different areas of the entrance examination?

The aim of this research was to find out the conscious conceptions of the candidates about being selected or not being selected for the education programme (See: Tulamo 1993, 53). This is a matter of being conscious oneself, one's own possibilities and being able to express one's own thoughts and being able to proportion oneself with the other candidates. To the open questions (q1 and q2) which were asked there was a possibility to give three essential answers. There were altogether around 300 expressions to each question.

Furthermore the candidates estimated (q3) their possibilities in different areas of the entrance examinations with a scale from 1 to 7. The questionnaire was knowingly made short and it concentrated into the essential because the idea was to get the answers in the information situation. The reliability and exactitude of the research was made better by using two different classifiers. The categorizing of the open questions was mainly same in the classification though there were differences in the amounts of the expressions. The answers are represented using the categories rising from the data collected. In the results we concentrate in the categories which were most popular.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Why should they choose exactly me in the education programme?

The candidates justified becoming chosen (See table 1.) with their personal characters and with different qualities for the music teacher's work. Broadly speaking personal qualities and characters (including teacher-type and vocation for becoming music teacher) were the most common statements. Many of the candidates perceive music comprehensively and internally (See: Weiner 1986). Many of the candidates mention music as a way of living (21 statements) (Compare: Fox 1993, 32). In this connection many candidates mention personal qualities like interest, enthusiasm and personal motivation. Motivation has been noticed as a salient point in many American attribution researches (Harrison & Asmus & Serpe 1994, 132). Also the richness of ideas and the ability to creativity were underlined in the answers. Many statements were made to point out also broadmindedness, self-possessedness, inventiveness and energeticness (compare Rentfrow & Gosling 2003). Many of these statements would likely correlate with the statement "I am exactly a teacher type person". Many candidates connect the mentioned characteristics to what they think is a mythic picture and conception of a "good teacher". It is interesting that the candidates use very seldom their own personality or personal characteristics to explain the failure. Instead, when they give reasons for being chosen they use very often their own personality and characteristics.

*"Preparedness for being a music teacher"* – classification includes also a couple of statements like "good improvisation abilities" or "good musicianship" which some of the candidates mentioned in their answers. As a summary it can be said that the candidates do not state being chosen with their good abilities in instrument playing or other musical abilities but they do state it with their many-sidedness and standing for general teacher type.

One very popular statement is the "ability to get well along with the children and youngsters and with different people" (39 statements). This could also be classified among both personal characters or representing a teacher type personality.

*"Representing a teacher type"* made a category of its own. It includes, of course, also other characteristic qualities like ways of working or being extroverted. The conception of being "*teacher type*" represents the candidate's school orientation which, at least in 1970's was quite weak among the school music teachers (Laitinen 1989, 23). Certainly the teachers who studied in the separated music teacher's education in 1980's did start working in elementary schools and in gymnasiums near their education district (Ruismäki 1991, 97). Though "*teacher type*" way of thinking is seen in many of the answers there are a couple of answers in which a teacher is seen rather as an adviser than as an old-fashioned teacher.

There were 32 candidates who stated the "*willingness to improve own abilities in field of music*" as a reason to be chosen into the education programme. The ideal starting point to the music teacher education would, of course, be that a student has a desire to teach music to pupils, but not yet sufficient skills to do it. Becoming conscious of this contradiction may rise a real motivation to deepen the studies and broaden them.

*“The vocation for becoming a music teacher”* got 30 statements from the candidates. When the younger candidates (who do not yet have experience of the teaching in classroom) mention vocation they probably mean a strong interest in the first hand towards the music, teaching and more widely towards the whole music education. Then it includes more self-fulfilment and at the same time serving other people. These characteristics have often been connected into a teacher’s work (See: Simola 1995, 233-273).

Sixteen candidates mention *“former working experience”* as a reason to be chosen.

They talk about experience of the music teacher’s work which probably has brought them good, positive, challenging and inner satisfaction bringing feelings as many researchers have shown before (Harris 1991, 66-69; Ruismäki 1991, 279). Profit responsibility or requirements for the efficiency did not show in the answers at least in 1993 data. Still, there were many statements and comments about being a good teacher which also include an efficient teacher.

All these mentioned categories describe the many-sided qualities which the candidates used to justify being chosen for the programme. Many of the statements could be classified also otherwise as they describe the same phenomenon from different points of view. For example the statement *“I represent a good teacher type”* does not exactly point out any special personal characteristics but it does not exclude any of the candidate’s self-esteemed personal qualities. This is partly a matter of candidates being able to make exact descriptive and literal statements. In the data collected the alternation between different personal expressions was wide.

#### **4.2 Why would I possibly not be chosen for the programme?**

The candidates show more clearly the reasons for not being chosen to the programme than those why they should be chosen. The four most popular classifications for not being chosen were 1) lack of sufficient abilities and preparedness, 2) being nervous in the entrance examinations, 3) high level of other candidates, 4) failure in some part of the entrance examination (See: table 2).

The most common reason for not being chosen was the lack of sufficient abilities and preparedness. The possibility of failure was most often placed in the test of free accompaniment (practical musicianship) (26 statements). This is probably because the free accompaniment is pointed out strongly in the percentage (See page 1) and not many of the candidates had had earlier any kind of teaching in this special area of instrument playing (See: Ruismäki 1992, 376-385). The lack of instrument playing skills in general level was mentioned 14 times as a reason not to be chosen. Both classic piano playing and solfège had clearly their own classification. Quite often the classic piano playing was the most difficult subject especially among those who had piano as a second instrument. The free accompaniment was often mentioned as the first reason; piano playing and solfège were in varying places.

Uneducated voice, poor singing skills or poor speaking voice were mentioned in 14 statements. Especially male candidates mentioned poor skills in singing more often than female candidates. Other reasons for not being chosen were too little practise and too short time to prepare for the entrance examination. Especially female candidate thought that they had lack of skills in playing pop-rock music and in band playing. The result is the same as Ruismäki (1991, 224-226) found earlier. The problem of the pop-rock teaching has been discussed in the curriculum level already from the 1960’s (Mark

1994, 76-83). Three candidates had doubts about their own musical abilities and talents, two candidates were unsure about their classic music background.

The teaching session was mentioned almost twenty times as a reason for not being chosen. It was connected to small experience of teaching, being unfamiliar with this kind of situations and poor ability to handle big groups of pupils. A couple of candidates thought that they were too tranquil and that would cause them failure. Some candidates had doubts of being believable and plausible or not being able to praise one self. Outward circumstances and possibilities for the studying are different between the candidates. Two candidates mentioned that in their hometown there was not any possibility to study music or instrument playing. The lack of motivation and doubts about the right career selecting or doubts about being able to survive in the studies were quite rare among the candidates. The answers to the first question also show the same.

Being nervous in the entrance examination was clearly one category (45 statements). It was often mentioned as the second or third reason for failure. The most of the statements simply were "I am nervous in the entrance examination" without any kind of specifying explanations. One of the candidates wrote that she is always nervous in instrument playing tests which leads in playing wrong keys and that is why she always gets lousy points from the jury. Some of the candidates pointed their nervousness to singing or instrument playing situations; some mentioned the test jury and the situation of testing itself as a source of nervousness. Also Harra (2004) notices in his research ("Musician's negative stress experiences and possibilities of controlling them") that the stress of the students at the Art upper secondary school is mainly caused by stage fright. The entrance examinations is a remarkable situation for the candidates, it may change the whole life into new paths if he or she succeeds well. In this point of view the ability of performance and the stage fright is naturally present at the entrance examination sections. It may be, that the standard of the performance makes the emotional atmosphere oppressive (Compare Anttila 2000; Numminen 2005, 83-85). The entrance examination situation may in many ways be compared to that of music competitions in the life of a young adult. As Hirvonen notices in her doctoral thesis (2003) the students who participated in this study have begun their competing at high school age. The present study reveals competitions to be very essential but also conflicting events in the lives of the students. Some students even regard competitions as the most important events from the point of view of orientating to professional studies. On the other hand, competitions and preparing for them during the studies may have been felt to be phases of extreme stress and to cause feelings of insufficiency.

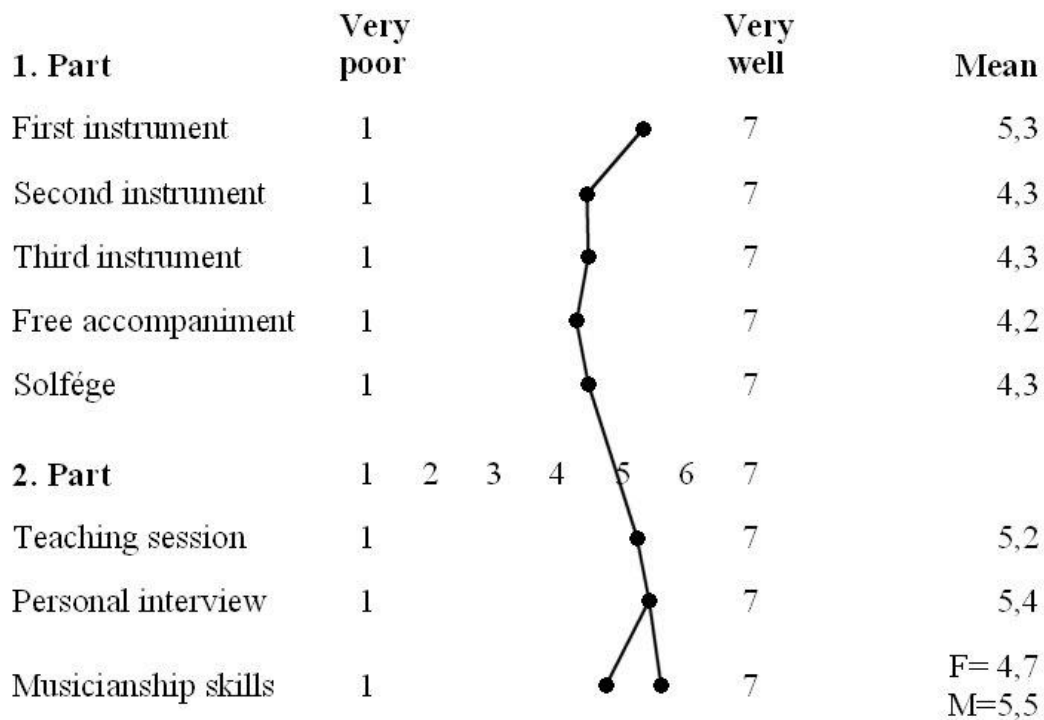
Many candidates compared their own achievements to the other candidates and noticed that the others were better (44 statements). The amount of the candidates willing to start the music teacher studies was a surprise to the testing personnel as well as to the candidates themselves. Very common statement was that there were too many good candidates and that's why "*Not even all good candidates can fit the program*" Although the candidates are many times pointed out the importance of their personal way and speed of learning and developing they still suffer a lot from the internecine comparison in the entrance examinations.

The failure in the entrance examination or in some part of it was mentioned 13 times as a reason for not being chosen. In some answers candidates speculated for example about their possible failure in the free accompaniment test. Failing in entrance examination and on the other hand speculating about the lack of some skills form together a larger category of the answers which tells about same things. Failure in some part of the tests describes more candidate's speculating emotional conception about surviving in the test than the earlier formed conception about personal skills and abilities and possible lacks in them.

Nine candidates brought up their age and the reasons which raise therefrom. The explanation was often that because the candidate is so young she has not had enough time to get the sufficient skills and abilities in many-sided instrument playing. No one mentioned reasons caused by too high age. Still, there was one fear connecting candidates of differing ages: they all thought that maybe just their age is not the right age to get in the programme. This can be construed as normal tremousness connected to any kind of entrance examinations.

### 4.3 Candidates self-esteem about success in the entrance examination

Figure 1 show nicely the general idea of the answers (n=121). In the examination there were 79 female (65 %) and 42 male (35 %) candidates. In the first part of the examination the candidates estimated their skills in first instrument playing to be best. The second instrument, free accompaniment (common musicianship) and solfège skills situated in the middle of the estimating scale. The mean values were quite similar to normal distribution. The candidates estimated their skills a little better in the teaching session. In the practical musicianship tests they thought their own skills to be good (n=121, mean 5,0).



**Figure 1. Candidate's self-esteem in success in different parts of the entrance examination.**

There were not statically significant differences between female and male candidates in the mean values except in one part: The practical musicianship skills were estimated to be better among the male candidates (The statistic risk in meaningfulness situated in 1 percent level) The male candidate's mean was 5,5 and the female candidate's mean was 4,7.



Correlation analyzes showed the strongest connections between personal interview and teaching session ( . 625) and teaching session and practical musicianship skills ( .455). The candidates who estimated themselves to be successful in teaching session also estimated to succeed in personal interview. These parts of the entrance examination focus in the candidate's didactic preparedness and aptitude for the music teacher branch. Especially in the first part of the examination the level of the candidates was quite heterogeneous.

## 5 Discussion

The entrance examination of the year 1993 seemed to have fulfilled its essential ideas. Only a few small correctives were made for the coming years. Still, after ten years the basic idea of the examination remains the same. The ongoing research work has shown the examinations to be modern and selective in the right way. This research showed clearly the amount of tense and nervousness which the candidates experience in examination situations. It is interesting to speculate about the nervousness disturbs the achievement of those who got almost the best points in the examination. Does the nervousness drop out candidates who cannot make their normal level achievement? What does the excessive nervousness in entrance examination prefigure? Are the evaluators able to see through the nervousness to find out the best candidates? How could the entrance examinations be carried out the way that the candidates could do their optimal achievement in the situation?

We also can state a question about the personality of the becoming teacher: is the type of teacher who forms pressure and nervousness – even a little bit neurotic – better than the type of a teacher who is always self-confident and self assured in his achievements? The nervous type must exert oneself in almost every situation. Distressed and nervous teacher may sometimes process knowledge only superficially instead of deeper understanding and analyzing. Also, it is possible that an uncertain teacher uses more time in planning the lessons than the other teacher type, because he does not only count on own personality or virtuosity with the musical instruments in the classroom.

The lack of different skills and abilities was a predictable cause of failure in entrance examination. It would be most important to increase the amount of free accompaniment teaching in the music school piano and other instruments teaching. One of the candidates states that it is not fair that the candidates are required the skills of a qualified music teacher already in the entrance examinations. This is why we may rightfully ask: would it be fair to add points to younger candidates or otherwise raise the amount of young applicants.

The work of a music teacher is rapidly changing together with the changes in society, musical life and music education. The research of the education compared with the needs in working field becomes therefore more and more important (See Elliot 1995; Regelski 1996). For example free accompaniment was not trained in music teacher education in 1950's, pop music was not taught in 1960's or music technology in 1970's. In music teacher education today these subjects are in an important role, although the latest researches show that there are still some deficiencies in the studies (Juvonen & Anttila 2003). If we would have exact knowledge about the things connected to music teacher's working conditions, it would be easier to make decisions about changing the entrance examinations and the focuses in them somehow. After all the speculation about entrance

examinations takes quite lot of time to be clear. Institutions like school and teacher education are still slowly changing and they are administered quite heavily which causes many difficulties in the changing process. It would also be interesting to research these candidates now: they have qualified themselves as music teachers in about year 1998-1999, so now they have been working for 6-7 years.

The fact that entrance examinations in the Oulu University still are built on the model which is described here shows clearly the durability of the ideas. In other universities education music teachers in Finland (University of Jyväskylä and Sibelius Academy) there are some differences in the entrance examinations, and these differences are discussed in another presentation in the conference Problems in music education in University of Daugavpils (Juvonen & Ruismäki 2005).

What is most important is that the future music teachers would have sufficient abilities and skills to educate young schoolchildren to enjoy music and have it as enrichment in their entire lives. Music should not be something obligatory and dull. It should be happy and energetic achievement which would be done together in a good, safe and positive atmosphere. Every pupil should be able to develop in his own way and speed without pushing and pulling. This states great demands to music teacher education which already is suffering from downward resources while the needs in the field are growing rapidly. The use of music technology is one of the new solutions which may open new gates to music teachers. The great interest in computers may in some part help future music teachers to find common field of interest with the children.

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Table 1. **Why should just I be chosen for the education programme?**

(F=female, M=male)

	1 <sup>st</sup> reason		2 <sup>nd</sup> reason		3 <sup>rd</sup> reason		All together	
	F	M	F	M	F	M		
<b>Personal characteristics.....</b>							<b>83</b>	
- Music is a way of life	5	2	4	2	7	1	21	
- Interest, enthusiasm, motivation		12		3	1	4	20	
- Rich in ideas, creative	1	3	5	4	3	2	18	
- Broadminded, self-possessed	4		2	1	3		10	
- Frisky, energetic, inventive	4				1		5	
- Dynamic and go ahead –type			1		2		3	
- Able to regenerate	1				1		2	
- Other reasons					2	2	4	
<b>Ability to be a music teacher.....</b>							<b>74</b>	
- Sufficient skills and abilities	8	5	6	3	9	2	33	
- Broad knowledge of music education	4	6	7	2	1	3	23	
- Broad experience	2	3	1	3	1	1	11	
- Skilful in many instruments	1		1	1	1		4	
- Good in other ways				2	1		3	
	1 <sup>st</sup> reason		2 <sup>nd</sup> reason		3 <sup>rd</sup> reason		All together	
	F	M	F	M	F	M		
<b>I get on well with children and different people</b>	10	2	10	6	8	3	<b>39</b>	
<b>I am a teacher type</b>	6	3	10	4	9	4	<b>36</b>	
<b>Vocation or mission</b>	13	3	4	4	5	1	<b>30</b>	
<b>Willingness to improve in music</b>		9		6	4	9	4	<b>32</b>

