



PARENTS' INFLUENCE ON THEIR CHILDREN'S EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING OF MUSIC THROUGH THE CML PROGRAM: A VIEW FROM DIFFERENT FAMILY BACKGROUNDS

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Music education research has identified a variety of parental influences on children's musical learning in early childhood. These include: family's support in class and in their personal practices, parental musical background, socioeconomic background, parental goals, values and aspirations, family interaction patterns, the relationship between parents, teachers and students, or music learning with families with low socioeconomic backgrounds.

This research studies some of these influences.

1. Musical development in early childhood

Musical development is linked to the evolutive stage in which each individual is and depends on the environment that surrounds him or her.

According to Benítez (2017) there is evidence showing that from early childhood, music education has a positive influence on the cognitive development of the child, as well as different musical components contribute to the development of psychomotor, emotional and social skills.

Several studies have confirmed that musical stimulation in preschool education contributes positively to the academic-social development of people. In fact, it is in early childhood that musical aptitude begins to develop. Neuroscience has also shown that music has an impact on the anatomical-functional organisation of the brain. Learning music or playing a musical instrument in childhood stimulates cognitive development and promotes the improvement of extra-musical skills, i.e. musical training in the developmental phase of pre-operational thinking (as Piaget calls it) has positive effects on the visual, spatial and verbal fields (Benítez, 2017).

Benítez (2017) also highlights that music, and especially musical training, generates a transfer of knowledge to cognitive functions such as auditory and visual discrimination, learning motor sequences, memory, language, logical-mathematical thinking, benefits in social behaviour and high IQ performance.

In relation to all of the above, there is a music program that specialises in this type of early childhood musical development: *Children's Music Lab*.

2. Children's Music Lab: music program for child development

Children's Music Lab program (CML) is designed as pre instrument introduction. Children's Music Lab anticipates and helps to develop of some necessary skills for the children.

It is born through the observation of the children in their approach to the music and to the instrument in Suzuki Method, in the light of scientific studies in Italy, 30 years ago.

CML has spread widely in Italy. Since 1985 many schools (Suzuki school, public schools, nurseries, primary schools, after school centres, families, traditional music schools and even Music Conservatories) have adopted this program.

Currently CML has a repertoire translated into 4 different languages, besides English and Italian.

The program is designed for children from the age of 3 or 4 and has a duration of 6 years. It is based on a weekly group lesson, for children and families. The course represents an opportunity for growth through music and offers motor and perceptive skills necessary for instrumental studies, in a playful way. In other words, this program adopts music as an educational method for the integral development of the human being.

The first year is a year of specific instrumental preparation that includes fine motor skills, coordination, discipline, learning attitude, development of the melodic, harmonic and rhythmic ear, of vocal expression, memorisation and orientation. After the first level, the course continues parallel to the instrumental education.

The child can start to play an instrument because she/he already knows the repertoire as she/he has sang and danced it in the first level of CML.

3. Parental influences in an early childhood musical learning context

Parents are the primary source of motivation and support in the early stages of their children's musical development (Davidson et al, 1996).

For Corbin (2016) the family is extremely important in the development of children, as it is possibly the socialising agent that will most influence their growth.

As stated by Vílchez (2013) in his book *Educación (Com)partida*, all pedagogical and psychological models emphasise that the role of families in the education of children plays a transcendental role. Likewise, Ruiz de Miguel (1999) already mentioned that the family establishes one of the most influential environments in the cognitive, personal, emotional and socio-affective development of the first years of a child's life and the beginning of their schooling. Burns (1990) also highlights that family influence plays a fundamental role especially in the first years of life and is subsequently maintained throughout the child's schooling.

Even Gopnik (2016) points out that researchers in behavioural genetics are trying to find out how environment and genes contribute to child development.

3.1. Musical background of the parents

Research on music education considers the musical background of parents as an influential but not essential factor in the musical learning of children, as demonstrated in the study conducted by pedagogues Benjamin S. Bloom and Lauren A. Sosniak in 1981. It was carried out on 120 people who, before the age of 35, had demonstrated the highest levels of performance in different areas: artistic (pianists, sculptors), psychomotor (swimmers, tennis players) and cognitive (mathematicians,

neurologists), and it became clear that in most cases the family had been supporting these people and had provided them with a role model when they were children.

Similarly, in the research of the American musician and pedagogue Stephen Zdzinski (2013) on the multifaceted structure of parental involvement in music education, the musical background of the parents also appears as a factor that can encourage children to take up music.

In contrast, other studies have found that it is not necessary for children to have musical parents in order for them to develop as musicians. For example, Sloboda and Howe (1991) conclude that it is possible for children who do not come from a musical background to achieve exceptional or similar levels of ability to that of parents with musical background.

Therefore parents don't need to have extensive musical training or experience for the child's musical supervision and development to be adequate (Davidson et al., 1996).

3.2. Socioeconomic background of families

British psychologist Garry Hornby and New Zealand educationalist Rayleen Lafaele (2011), in their study on barriers to parental involvement in education, highlight socioeconomic factors that may reduce parental involvement. The main factors were:

- Educational level, as parents may feel that they don't have sufficient skills and knowledge to be involved in their children's education.
- Family circumstances such as single parents or large families, who may encounter difficulties due to their caring responsibilities.
- The employment situation in the case of unemployed people, as their finances may not allow them to participate in activities; the employment situation in the case of both parents working, leaving less time to participate in education and work situations with inflexible working hours or leaving parents too tired to participate in their children's education at the end of the day (Hornby et al., 2011).

In the field of music education, the socioeconomic status of lower income families is an influential factor, as they may be unwilling to devote resources to paying for lessons, buying an instrument and other expenses such as materials, books or transport, unless they feel that the child is succeeding and has the potential to make the most of these resources (McPherson, 2009).

3.3. Family goals and aspirations

Parents' values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations shape the goals they have for their children (Spera, 2006). Parents' expectations and aspirations are related to their children's level of self-esteem, motivation and achievement. The higher a parent's expectation of their child, the higher the child's performance (McPherson, 2009).

The way in which parents view music, compared to other subjects, has consequences for their children's music education. They may provide music education based on the belief that they will enjoy music and find it interesting, but holding the view that it is not as important or useful as other academic subjects for future preparation is a drawback (McPherson, 2009).

The review of research shows that parents are the ones who establish hierarchies in learning according to their values and aspirations.

3.4. Parental support in home practice and in the lessons

A child's learning of musical discipline requires the support and interaction of adults to maintain a productive, but similar environment to game playing. Children under the age of 6 are generally not capable of studying an intellectual discipline autonomously or alone. This is why some early musical teaching methods or programs, such as CML or the Suzuki method, require the cooperation of parents in all aspects of teaching (Lehmann et al., 2007).

The highest achieving students tend to have parents who have participated in lessons and supervised practice in the early years (Sloboda et al., 1991). Lack of parental

support is a decisive factor in dropping out of music education. Similarly, parents who are too pushy or push their children too hard run the risk that they will lose their intrinsic enjoyment of music and want to drop out (Lehmann et al., 2007).

Creech (2010), having researched the interaction between family, teacher and student in music education, concludes that family involvement in music learning involves providing a lot of practical help and personal support during the early years of learning. She also mentions that the teacher's guidelines for music should be sought and followed, as well as allowing the child and the teacher the space to develop an autonomous relationship.

Blackwelder (2015) also states that nowadays, more than ever, families need to have a reason to spend time with their children, away from the computer, work and the hectic life of work. The opportunity to spend 30 minutes a day with the child as part of their education is often a joy.

Her reflections and experiences over the years show that if the family is organised, it is possible to learn properly music: makes a timetable, makes the decision that music education is not optional but an essential part of the child's development, communicates with the teacher fluently and constantly, hires a person to help with childcare and housework, takes a deep breath and thinks positively.

According to Wartberg (2018), the family is the best specialist for the proper learning of children, as they successfully teach them to speak. In order to open the door to music for the child, Wartberg considers the following guidelines to be noteworthy:

- Learning through fun. The child sees that his or her family is engaged in the musical learning process and imitates them.
- Daily practice with the child. Patience, perseverance and repetition. The child learns at his own pace, just like learning to walk and talk. Experience and repetition develop talent. That is why talent is neither innate nor inherited. Educating is about doing it over and over again, until it comes naturally, simply and easily.
- Concentration. The ability to concentrate on one point at a time is the first and most important step a child must learn. Examples abound: cutting with a

sharp knife requires full attention. The same applies to learning music or to playing an instrument. Even when several different aspects need to be improved, one should avoid trying to solve everything at once.

- There will always be difficulties and setbacks, however, it is important to be persistent when pursuing long-term goals, just as in natural growth.

Bearing in mind that children are shaped by their environment, remember that they absorb everything their parents do: how they live every day and interact with each other, the feelings that emanate from them, inappropriate mistakes and even the feeling during a marital quarrel. This learned environment will be experienced by the children themselves later on. Even if they are not aware of it, they absorb everything they see in their own families and thus form their character (Suzuki, 2020).

3.5. Music learning with families with low socioeconomic backgrounds

After having conducted several interviews on the management of pupils with families with low socio-economic resources with different experts in the Suzuki method, it is concluded that the work with this type of children is based on projects with external private funding. The initiatives in which the experts interviewed take or have taken part are financially supported by private foundations or multinational companies.

According to the specialist Gino Romero, Suzuki violin teacher at a public school in the Altona district of Hamburg (Germany), he knows that in the Suzuki method the role of families is a basic principle as with CML, but he believes that the biological family, in the context where he teaches, counts very little. He confirms that the involvement of his students' families is very low and that he is practically the family. He usually calls or sends messages to his students every day in the afternoon to remind them to play the violin. For the vast majority of Gino's students there is no involvement of the nuclear or biological family in the process of learning the violin. He plays the role of a parent. Another concept of family is configured, adapted to the social background in which he works. The traditional family is missing, but there is still a person, an institution or a group of people who support the child. This is what is important according to him.

Gómez (2022) explains that nowadays the term family has been extended to consider other types of social coexistence. The concept is no longer conceived only in terms of biological affiliation or as a historical and immutable institution. It is important to take into account the new realities of today's society and to adapt to the migratory and mobility characteristics of its members.

4. Conclusions

It is concluded that for a favourable development of the child at an early age it is important to take into account the evolutionary stages of the human being.

It is also emphasised that it is advisable to start the development of children through music at an early age and through active methods or programs such as CML.

Moreover, nowadays the term family can no longer be conceived as a closed concept, as the social and historical context in which we find ourselves is changing. Therefore, a continuous study is required for the rethinking of models and forms, structures and definitions.

Regarding the role of the family in the CML program, my opinion is that its presence is key to its success and effectiveness, as is the case with the Suzuki method. Particularly with early childhood learners, family involvement is essential for a significant development of the child; on the contrary, if this commitment is lacking, learning is difficult in this age range. It is emphasised that the main purpose of the role of families is to support the child in all areas and moments of life, and not only to be present in the lessons.

Regarding the high level of family involvement in the program CML, which may lead to criticism, it is pointed out that the lack of parental involvement is not only due to socioeconomic reasons, but rather to a lack of conviction and willingness on the part of parents to have their children learn music.

Bearing in mind that not all children have a favourable environment for adequate musical development, it becomes clear that the inclusion of pupils from low-income families can be carried out through projects financed by public or private entities, however, certain principles that characterise the CML program must be disregarded.

As a conclusion, the argument presented is that, if the characteristics necessary for the CML are to properly be implemented onto families with such young children, who happen to be faced with low socioeconomic status. To work with the family is essential, at least for successful results in the short term. Otherwise, if we want to reach the greatest number of children and carry out a work of social inclusion, the teacher must adapt to this underlying reality, making music education more accessible and universal.

5. Future prospects

The results of this review allow me to outline future paths of intervention. One of the long-term goals is to implement a music education project for social inclusion in the city of Berlin, specifically in the district of Wedding. Through music learning and with the help of the Children's Music Lab program, I would like to develop a favourable environment in which access to music education for socially excluded families is within easy reach.

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