CHILDREN AND MUSIC: AN EXPLORATION
OF THE IMPACT OF MUSIC ON CHILDREN’S LIVES

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Arts in Education at
Marietta College

By
Robin S. Mead, BME

Marietta College
2008

Master’s Examination Committee
Dr. William M. Bauer, Adviser

Approved by
Adviser
Department of Education
ABSTRACT

There is a great deal of research labeling all the positive effects of musical experiences on young children’s lives. Within the first few years of a child’s life musical experiences can help to develop a child’s literacy, language and math skills, social interactions, and emotional well-being. The intention of this study was to explore if there is a deficiency in early childhood music education for some children and how can music educators fill this void once these children are in school. Both students and teachers from schools in different socioeconomic settings were included in this study.
This thesis is dedicated to my son and daughter

for their inspiring musical talent

and continued love of music.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my adviser, Dr. William Bauer, for his constant dedication, patience, and assistance in helping me to pursue my Master of Arts in Education Degree.

I thank my mom and dad for all the music lessons, for encouraging my musical interests, and for singing to me when I was young.

I am grateful to my husband for his continued love, support, and tolerance throughout this endeavor.
VITA

December 4, 1954 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Born-Warren, Ohio

1977 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Bachelor of Music Education, Otterbein College

Present . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Music Teacher, Utica Elementary School, Utica, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Music Education
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>.ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>.iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>.iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>.v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>.viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>.ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Purpose</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Research Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Hypotheses</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Limitations</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Definition of Terms</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature Review</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Benefits of Music Education</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Home Environment</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Socioeconomic Status</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Teacher Preparation</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methods</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Study Design</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Subject Population</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Instruments</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Procedures</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Data Analysis</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Preliminary Expectations</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Results</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Themes</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Discussion ................................................................. 35

5.1 Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions ................................ 35

References ........................................................................ 39

Appendix ........................................................................... 41

Appendix A – Children and Music Student Survey ....................... 41

Appendix B – Children and Music Teacher Survey ....................... 44
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Student recognition of song styles</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>I listened to my own children’s CDs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>My family listened to children’s music in the car</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>I would enjoy going to a symphony orchestra concert</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There is a great deal of research supporting all the positive effects of early musical experiences on young children’s lives. Within the first few years of a child’s life musical experiences can help to develop a child’s literacy, language and math skills, social interactions, and emotional well-being. “Children welcome opportunities to think and act musically and they do so with exuberance” (Campbell, 1998). Parents, siblings, teachers, and even the media assist children in their musical journey.

Children’s musical journeys occur in stages with their first live musical experiences often being lullabies sung to them by their parents, particularly their mothers (Campbell, 1998). As a child becomes a toddler, he or she learns nursery rhymes and play songs that may gradually work their way into play with toys, outdoor activities, and interactions with other children. The next stage occurs as children enter school. Depending on a child’s background, children entering kindergarten will have a variety of musical experiences. Some children may only be familiar with music from the television or radio while others may have already started private music lessons on an instrument. At this point in time and throughout the next several years it is the music teacher’s responsibility to nurture, guide, and inspire children to become well-rounded music students.

Statement of the Problem

There are, however, children that do not have a positive musical influence in their lives prior to their formal school training. For over thirty years this researcher has been a music
educator and has had the opportunity to teach in a variety of school settings. This researcher has taught in upper class suburban schools where parents not only have had extremely high academic standards, but they also attempt to heavily involve their children in both fine arts and sports activities. In contrast to this the researcher has also experienced teaching in a low socioeconomic area in southeastern Ohio. In this particular school district the researcher discovered the students had very little involvement in music, if any, before they entered kindergarten. There were students that admitted to never watching an episode of Sesame Street, they did not remember their mother singing to them, and they did not know simple nursery rhymes, musical games, and folk songs. Since these students had little background in music, their inclination to further their study of music was extremely minimal. They were very closed-minded to learning about the wide range of musical genres and their participation in musical organizations such as band and choir was limited.

There are many research articles on the positive influences of music in a child’s life, but there is little evidence indicating the negative effects from a lack of exposure to music. Music and the arts are important in educating a well-rounded child. In an article by David Pankratz he comments, “To achieve an equitable distribution of aesthetic wealth, it is essential that a society’s members have ample opportunities to experience objects of high aesthetic value, whatever their geographic location or social stratum” (1987). If parents are not introducing their children to the aesthetic value of music then it should be the intent of music educators to give children the advantage of a musical education.
Purpose

The intent of this study is to explore whether there is a deficiency in the early childhood music education of lower socioeconomic children compared to upper socioeconomic children and how can music educators fill this void once these children are in school.

Research Questions

This study used both qualitative and quantitative forms of research. The researcher surveyed a sampling of students from schools in lower socioeconomic areas and compared their responses to students from upper socioeconomic schools in Ohio. The subjects were asked about their pre-school music experiences, their music listening preferences, and their future intentions for musical involvement. The researcher expected the students in the lower socioeconomic areas to have less motivation to appreciate and be involved in music than students in the suburban schools. In addition to surveying students, the researcher asked a sampling of music teachers open-ended questions of how prepared their students are when they reach kindergarten, if they see resistance to musical diversity and involvement, and how music educators can fill in the gaps for students that do not start school with a meaningful musical background.

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis: there is no difference in musical knowledge, understanding, and involvement of lower socioeconomic students compared to upper socioeconomic students.

Alternative Hypothesis: there is a difference in musical knowledge, understanding, and involvement of lower socioeconomic students compared to upper socioeconomic students.
Limitations

This research is limited by the sampling of students and teachers that were included in the research. The students were selected from two schools in lower socioeconomic locations and two schools in upper socioeconomic locations. The teachers were chosen for their teaching experience and the socioeconomic status of the school in which they teach. Both teachers and students needed to reflect on their past experiences to complete the surveys. The students and teachers chosen for this study may not be representative of students and teachers across the nation.
Definition of Terms

Dyslexia - "A disorder in children who, despite conventional classroom experience, fail to attain the language skills of reading, writing and spelling, commensurate with their intellectual abilities." (World Federation of Neurology 1968)

Genre – a category of musical composition marked by a distinctive style, form, or content.

Phoneme-segmentation – children break a word into its separate sounds, saying each sound as they tap out or count it; then they write and read the sounds (ed.gov.).

Socioeconomic – of, pertaining to, or signifying the combination of interaction of social and economic factors.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers agree early childhood music education has benefits far beyond just the enjoyment of the music itself. “Music is seen as contributing to the total development of the child, including intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and aesthetic” (Temmerman, 2000). The more musical activities a child is exposed to, the more advantages that child will acquire. “Music and movement, its rich combination of rhythm, melody, lyric, motion, and group interaction touches the many dimensions of child development, in other words, the whole child” (Palmer, 2001).

Benefits of Music Education

Literacy is of vital importance to all children. Researchers have made strong arguments in how music can contribute to literacy skills. Wiggins reported that “a music-integrated literacy environment nurtures auditory and visual discrimination, eye-motor coordination, visual sequential memory, language reception, vocabulary development, phonological and phonemic awareness, and fluency” (2007). Music’s rhythmic patterns, phonetic word usage, and aural perceptions facilitate the development of a child’s reading ability. The left to right reading direction in both music and reading explains how one can complement the other. Zimmerman (2006) designed a descriptive research study exploring whether or not there is a relationship between music lessons begun as a child and language proficiency of adults. “The implications of this type of research are that providing some kind of music lessons at an early age can contribute to a
child’s success in reading that will have lasting benefits” (Zimmerman, 2006). In Gromko’s (2005) study, she revealed that “kindergarten children who received four months of music instruction showed significantly greater gains in development of their phoneme-segmentation fluency when compared with children who did not receive music instruction.”

As an example of how diverse research is becoming in reporting the effects of music on children, recently there has been research performed to find the effects of music training on dyslexic children. “Several current theories on the underlying cause of dyslexia are converging on the idea that it is neurological timing problems, or temporal processing problems which cause difficulties with auditory skills and motor skills, and thus lead to language and literacy difficulties” (Overy, 2000). Music can assist these temporal processing problems through carefully planned lessons including structured rhythmic games, singing, and activities using percussion instruments and movement. Overy (2000) concluded that the development of timing skills through music training may be an effective remediation tool for the improvement of dyslexic children’s language and literacy skills.

Math and music also have a correlation that has significant value in increasing a child’s intellectual growth. Music is organized sound that is structured in similar ways to math. It is logical that one would influence the other. In Geoghegan and Mitchelmore’s (1996) research, they found indications that there was a difference in mathematical achievement of a group of children who were involved in a music program and listened to music at home compared to a group of children who had not been involved in a music program and had a limited musical background. Students of the arts continue to outperform their non-arts peers on the SAT, according to reports by the College Entrance Examination Board. In 2005, SAT takers with
coursework/experience in music performance scored 56 points higher on the verbal portion of the test and 39 points higher on the math portion than students with no coursework or experience in the arts (MENC, 2005).

Home Environment

The home surroundings should be a child’s first exposure to musical experiences. “The home environment can create a setting where music is valued, be supportive in the child’s musical endeavors, and provide a source of motivation for the child” (Brand, 1985). Only exceptional children could reach their full musical potential without a supportive and involved musical home (Brand, 1985). “For children, music is a natural inclination, and it often appears to be as essential to their well-being as it is for them to be warm, fed, and well-rested” (Campbell, 1998). In research by Geoghegan and Mitchelmore (1996), they reinforced the thought that children should have their own music to listen to and that parents that provide this music for their children are giving their children added motivation and confidence. Clearly it is the parent’s or caregiver’s responsibility to first introduce children to the joys of music.

Recent research in music education indicates a growing interest in the family as an influential context (Custodero, 2006). Custodero, Britto, and Brooks-Gunn (2003) found indications that child age, parent sex, education level, employment status, race/ethnicity, and income were related to the frequency with which parents sing and play music to their children. In this same study on the musical lives of American parents and their children the researchers found that 60% of parents were singing/playing music with their children daily and 32% were doing so weekly (Custodero, Britto, Brooks-Gunn, 2003).
Socioeconomic Status

Research does suggest that a child’s socioeconomic status (SES) may have a great deal to do with their musical preferences and their future participation in musical activities. Bergonzi and Smith (1996) found that the higher one’s SES, the more one participates in arts activities. However Bergonzi and Smith also found that education in the arts does have a strong impact on arts’ consumption regardless of personal background and SES (1996). In a study performed in the Columbus Public Schools, Fitzpatrick (2006) looked for a correlation between instrumental music participation, SES, and Ohio state proficiency test performance. The researcher found that on the proficiency tests the lower-SES instrumental students lagged behind their higher-SES instrumental counterparts; however the lower-SES instrumental students did perform significantly better on the tests than the non-instrumental students of like SES (Fitzpatrick, 2006). Hargreaves and North (2007) reported correlations between socioeconomic levels of their participants, their musical preferences and other leisure activities such as reading newspapers, books, or magazines, going to concerts, listening to the radio, and watching television.

Teacher Preparation

Because of the numerous circumstances influencing each child’s musical journey, teacher preparation is an essential component in early childhood music education. “Music educators at all levels and in all contexts--studio teachers, community music educators, church musicians, K-12 music educators, and community college and university music and education faculty--need to become aware of the relationship between children’s early musical development and their development later in life” (Scott-Kassner, 1999). Traditionally music teachers have been trained to teach children K-12, but now new programs are being developed to train music majors, as well as early childhood education majors, how to best instruct children in music
during their preschool years (Fox, 2000). Educators need to learn how to choose musical activities that encourage active involvement, relate to the interests of the children, engage the whole child, have repetitive easy-to-learn phrases and the songs need to emphasize rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration (Palmer, 2001). These increased resources and preparations need to be obtainable for teachers to learn how to help children comprehend that music is a natural part of their daily lives. If educators can integrate music into their programs in an engaging way, they will instill a love of music that will have lasting positive effects on the children.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Study Design

An exploration of early childhood music education preparedness in two socioeconomic settings was performed by using a QUAN/QUAL mixed method design. Students were surveyed using a Likert question design combined with a listening CD to determine their exposure to different genres of music and their interest in continuing to study music. The music teachers of these students, as well as a sampling of other music teachers, were asked open-ended questions pertaining to the central phenomenon of their thoughts on SES and the musical preparation of children. Questions were related to the musical knowledge of their students as they enter kindergarten, if they have seen a difference in the students’ musical experience regarding their SES, and steps they take in encouraging all students to participate in music.

Subject Population

Random samplings of fifth grade students from four different elementary schools were surveyed in this research project. Students were from two lower socioeconomic schools in Ohio, one in north central Ohio and the other in southeastern Ohio, and two upper socioeconomic schools in central Ohio. The music teachers of these schools, as well as others, were the purposeful sampling participants in the qualitative section of this study.

Instruments

This study was carried out by administering a researcher designed Likert style survey. The survey included questions to the students in the following areas: their recollection of musical
Children and Music

experiences prior to kindergarten, parental initiation of singing activities, media musical 
exposure, musical preferences, and future musical interest. The listening CD included excerpts 
from many different genres of music. Using a Likert scale the students responded to their 
knowledge of the songs and their likeliness to listen or perform that style of music. Music 
teachers were electronically interviewed and asked open-ended questions by the researcher 
concerning their observations of their students’ preparedness when they reach elementary school. 

Procedures

Data was collected from the Ohio Department of Education regarding the percentage of 
economically disadvantaged students to be used in this study. The music teachers of the schools 
to be used in the study were the first to be contacted. After the teachers and schools were 
determined the following procedure was followed:

1. Researcher gained permission from the Institutional Review Board at Marietta 
   College to determine acceptance of this thesis proposal.
2. A letter explaining the research and introducing the researcher was sent to the 
   principals of the schools being asked to participate. The letter asked for confirmation 
   of permission to engage in this study by either letter or e-mail. Assurance of privacy 
   was stressed in the letter. No teacher or school names are declared in the study.
3. An explanation letter, the researcher created Likert style survey, and the listening 
   CD’s was sent to the music teachers, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to 
   return the surveys.
4. The researcher e-mailed the participating teachers the electronic questionnaires for 
   their qualitative responses.
5. Two weeks after the mailing, the researcher e-mailed the teachers to assure receipt of
the surveys and that the surveys would be returned in a timely manner.

Data Analysis

The researcher tabulated and reviewed the student responses to each question and
determined percentages by the categorized results. The qualitative data from the teachers was
coded and analyzed then placed into themes.

Preliminary Expectations

The researcher expected to find that there is a difference in the early childhood music
education of lower socioeconomic children compared to that of upper socioeconomic children.
Possible themes expected to appear in the qualitative results were:

1. Teachers see a difference in musical knowledge and preparedness of children from
   lower socioeconomic groups compared to higher socioeconomic groups.
2. Teacher preparation to deal with the children’s differences is important.
3. Early exposure to music is important in the long-term study of music.
4. Teacher approach is vital in teaching children to enjoy music.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of the surveys were collected via mail or the researcher personally picking them up from the schools. The results were tabulated from 236 fifth grade students. By coincidence, 118 (50%) were from two lower socioeconomic schools and 118 (50%) were from two upper socioeconomic schools, in four different school districts in Ohio. The four schools’ socioeconomic status was determined from the Ohio Department of Education’s 2006-2007 Annual School Building Report Card Files. The socioeconomic ranges of the schools were as follows:

- School A – 71.7% of students economically disadvantaged
- School B – 57.3% of students economically disadvantaged
- School C – 4.4% of students economically disadvantaged
- School D – NC (fewer than ten students in the economically disadvantaged category)

The student survey was designed on a five point Likert scale with the divisions being never, rarely, sometimes, regularly, and often (Appendix A). In the data analysis an ascending scale was used for coding the survey data with never coded as one and often coded as five. The survey consisted of ten questions relating to the students’ pre-school musical experiences and ten questions concerning their present musical preferences and if they plan to be a part of a musical organization in high school. The last section of the survey consisted of ten listening selections where the students indicated their knowledge of and reaction to each song.
The first question on the survey asked if the students had their own children’s music CDs when they were young. Interestingly, 63 students (53%) of the lower socioeconomic students never had their own music compared to only 10 students (8%) of the upper socioeconomic students that said they never had their own music.

![Figure 1](image-url)

**Figure 1**

- **Never**: Lower SES: 63, Upper SES: 10
- **Rarely**: Lower SES: 15, Upper SES: 23
- **Sometimes**: Lower SES: 26, Upper SES: 37
- **Regularly**: Lower SES: 5, Upper SES: 30
- **Often**: Lower SES: 9, Upper SES: 18

Children and Music Survey
Students were asked if they watched VH1 and MTV while in their pre-kindergarten years. In School A (lower SES) 33% of the students responded that they regularly or often watched the music video shows in comparison to only 6% of School D (upper SES) students viewing those particular television stations. In these same two schools 45%, of the students in School A listened to their parents’ music when they were young compared to only 14% of School D’s students saying they listened to their parents’ music. Of the students surveyed, 86% marked that they now watch VH1 or MTV.

There was no significant difference in the responses to questions about watching “Sesame Street” or “Barney”, children’s music videos, and student’s enjoyment of dancing. Of the students surveyed, 36% of the lower socioeconomic students said they sometimes, regularly, or often were encouraged to play children’s singing games whereas 72% of the upper socioeconomic students recalled being encouraged to play children’s singing games.
There was a notable disparity among the lower and upper socioeconomic students when it came to answering the question about listening to children’s music in the car.
Students were asked if they enjoy listening to or performing rap and hip/hop, classic rock-n-roll, classical, jazz and blues, and country music. Of the students surveyed, 72% of the respondents said they sometimes, regularly, or often prefer rap and hip/hop music. There was much lower interest in the other styles of music. The largest difference in responses to the students’ present musical preferences was in regards to jazz and blues styles of music. In Schools A and B (lower SES) only 17% of the students enjoy listening to or performing jazz and blues, but 49% of the students from schools C and D (upper SES) were interested in performing or listening to jazz or blues. In Schools C and D 58% of the students said they probably will participate in band, choir or orchestra in high school, but only 32% of Schools A and B responded they would participate.
An interesting difference in responses was noted in the amount of students that thought they would enjoy going to a symphony orchestra concert. There were 70 students surveyed in School A, 48 in School B, 72 in School C, and 46 in School D. Although there was not a huge number of students willingly wanting to go to a symphony orchestra concert, the results were significant, especially with the amount of students in School A never wanting to attend a symphony orchestra concert.
The listening section of the survey resulted in some differences between the socioeconomic levels of the students and their familiarity with the different genres of music presented on the CD (Table 1). Surprisingly, the least difference was in the recognition of the rap song. There was little contrast in the responses in wanting to listen to or perform the different styles of music.

**Table 1**

*Students that regularly or often have heard this music*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Styles of Music</th>
<th>Lower Socioeconomic Schools</th>
<th>Upper Socioeconomic Schools</th>
<th>Difference In Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Song Lullaby</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Concert Band Music</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Soundtrack</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blues Guitar</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Happy Song</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic Piano</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classic Rock-N-Roll</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swing/Jazz</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rap</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Qualitative Teacher Survey

The qualitative survey (Appendix B) of the research was given to twelve elementary music teachers with extensive experience. The schools represented by these teachers are in lower, middle and upper class socioeconomic levels and four teachers represented each division. The majority of these teachers (83.3%) see their kindergarten students twice a week and all but one have taught in more than one school district.

The teachers were asked if their kindergarten students are familiar with a variety of children’s songs and games, how important preschool musical preparation is, does socioeconomic level make a difference in this preparation, and does musical style and quality of musical knowledge make a difference in later years.

Themes

Qualitatively, several themes became apparent from the answers on the teachers’ surveys. Teachers’ comments are presented below for each theme. Direct quotations are noted by quotation marks.

The Importance of Preschool

Children who have preschool experience are the most knowledgeable about children’s songs, nursery rhymes, and singing games. Three upper SES teachers felt their students were very prepared for kindergarten because nearly all of their students attend preschool and some have even begun private lessons on a musical instrument. One upper SES teacher was surprised that her students did not know “Ten Little Indians”, but they did know the words to “Hannah Montana” and “Spongebob Squarepants.” Two teachers from lower SES schools said their students are not musically prepared when they come to kindergarten because very few students
attend preschool, and the other six teachers said they could tell a difference between the students with no preschool education and those that did attend preschool.

*Early Exposure to Music*

Early exposure experiences with music are vital to developing a child’s musical appreciation.

- Early exposure to music “gives kids such a head start on musicality and life-long love of music, both as a performer and a consumer of music. INVALUABLE!”
- “Absolutely important! They learn to develop an appreciation for it (music) outside of our classroom walls. It teaches them that it is not only important because it is a ‘class’ but because it is a part of their lives.”
- “Singing and keeping a steady beat helps develop listening skills and language syntax.”
- “Exposure, exposure, exposure! It’s a known fact that music stimulates a part of the brain that nothing else does.”
- “Let them hear and sing many musical things – early exposure can make a difference.”
- “Exposure not only benefits the child musically but also in areas of reading, math, and in coordination.”

*Musical Styles and Genres*

If children are acquainted with a variety of styles and genres of music they will become more diverse in their musical preferences in their later years.

- “I’m pretty certain that students who hear classical music at home are at least more open to listening to it later. Those who grow up with rap – well...!”
• “By exposing my daughter to symphonic music and concerts before the age of 5, she has become a discriminating listener. She enjoys listening and dancing to a variety of music.”

• In regards to listening “Garbage in – garbage out!”

• “I think that the more genres of music a preschool child is exposed to, the better the chance of greater music appreciation and wide range appreciation as they mature.”

• “My own children were exposed to all kinds of music when they were young; now you can find classical, jazz, blues, classic rock, alternative, musical soundtracks, Christian and country music on their iPods.”

Musical Preparedness and Socioeconomics

Most of the teachers (91.7%) felt there is a significant difference in children’s musical preparedness and their socioeconomic levels. Several of the teachers have taught in both economically disadvantaged schools and wealthier school districts. Parental support and involvement appeared as extremely important in a child’s musical growth.

• “In other schools I’ve taught the less advantaged child, there is an enormous difference in preparedness compared to where I teach now.”

• “I have taught at this building (economically disadvantaged) for 19 of 20 years. The one year I was on the other side of town I saw an amazing difference in the ability of students and I feel this was based on what they were given prior to their school years.”

• “If a parent invests time and actively participates in his/her child’s education then children will embrace and pursue.”
• “I believe family values have an impact on a child’s education as well. Not just in music, but in all aspects of a child’s education.”

The music teacher respondents were split 50/50 in their opinions as to whether a child’s musical knowledge as a preschooler affects the student’s participation in musical activities such as band, choir or orchestra.

*How can music teacher’s help?*

Once again exposure and involvement appeared as the themes to filling in the gaps for the students that enter kindergarten with little musical knowledge. As music teachers we should all be equipped to introduce children to the musical world in a fun, amusing way.

• “I start the school year with this question, ‘Where did you hear music this summer?’ We go from that question to ‘What would our world be like without music?’ Great discussions get started with these two questions.”

• Encourage students to be involved in music at school and outside of school such as church choirs.

• As educators, students should see us involved with musical activities outside of school like church choirs and community bands.

• “A wide variety of listening experiences would be an added bonus for promoting a musically diverse culture.”

• “Work on the fundamentals as early as you can. Have students keep a steady beat to classical or world music in class. Teach folk songs and rhymes as early as possible.”

• Offer preschool music classes for children and their parents.
• “Express to the administrators how vital an early childhood music program benefits students in the long run.”

• “I think we just do our job and teach our curriculum and we will fill in the gaps.”

• “From day one in the music classroom we need to offer a variety of good listening selections.”
A solid music education can create positive influences on children’s lives that will last a lifetime. Coordination, self-esteem, higher level thinking skills, communication, as well as just plain enjoyment are all things that music can promote. The more diverse children are in their knowledge and exposure to music, the more appreciation of music they will have as they grow older in addition to being a more eclectic adult.

The researcher’s concern and reason for conducting this research was from witnessing students in the classroom who instantaneously recognized heavy metal or rap and hip/hop songs, however, these same students were not familiar with simple children’s songs such as “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” or “Brother John.” Even though the research did show some differences in musical knowledge among students from lower and upper socioeconomic levels and the majority of the teachers see a difference, the researcher does not feel the significance level of the statistical evidence from this research is enough to reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. In accepting the null hypothesis, which was stated as there is no difference in musical knowledge, understanding, and involvement of lower socioeconomic students compared to upper socioeconomic students, the researcher would advise more in-depth study on this subject of musical preparation and socioeconomic levels.

Implications, Limitations, and Suggestions

In both the student and the teacher surveys, the researcher noticed substantiation that very few of our students today are as cultured and accepting of all types of music as music educators
would like them to be. One teacher has students from both socioeconomic extremes and feels both groups are lacking when it comes to their musical skills and knowledge. By surveying the students in different socioeconomic settings, it gave the researcher insight into the musical views of the students. According to the survey, very few students seem interested in learning to listen to or perform music outside of their current preferences and/or comfort levels. This is where both parents and music educators need to use the resources available to expose children to a multitude of musical experiences. Here are some suggestions for these musical experiences.

- Parents should purchase, or obtain from a public library, children’s CDs and DVDs to introduce children to the songs that they will learn to repeat with ease. Children need their own music and choices should be made from a variety of genres.

- Take children to the symphony concerts at the zoo.

- Most symphony orchestras perform a children’s concert series, both parents and teachers should encourage attendance at these activities.

- Seek out live performances; they are usually very motivating to a child. These could include plays, dance performances, ice skating shows, and musical concerts such as “Sesame Street Live”.

- Make sure music is a part of the kindergarten curriculum.

- Take children to see musicals such as “Music Man” or “The Sound of Music”. If money is an issue, borrow the DVD from the library.

- Music educators should choose musical activities that are fun, educational, and rewarding in their long-term music education. As one teacher commented, “if we just teach our curriculum, we’ll be doing our job.”
This research only began to explore the differences among socioeconomic levels and children’s exposure to music. Further research is necessary to give a more definitive view of the situation. The small sample size of the twelve teachers and only 256 students could have influenced the reliability and validity of this research. Given the limitations of this study the researcher feels the findings are simply suggestive. This study should be expanded to a wider data base of both students and teachers. Perhaps also surveying parents would give a clearer picture as to where the students are coming from. Does the parent’s attitude towards music reflect the student’s attitude? There are other questions that would be interesting to add to this study.

- The question was asked if the parents encourage musical involvement. An interesting comparison would be to ask if parents encourage involvement in sports activities.
- Does gender play a role in musical preferences and involvement?
- How many students participate in church activities? Church is where many children first learn to sing.
- Have you ever attended a music concert with your parents? If so, what genre of music was the concert?

This study confirmed many of the researcher’s suspicions about the lack of musical experiences in lower socioeconomic students, however, other discoveries were made and other questions could be asked. It is disappointing to see that many students, regardless of their SES, are indifferent about widening their knowledge of music. What influences this attitude? Answers could be the media or perhaps their parents. Nevertheless, music educators need to be aware that students come from many different backgrounds and the music classroom is capable
of bringing together the various cultures of our lives. The most important thing is for music educators to help each student reach their full musical potential.
REFERENCES


Retrieved on October 7, 2007 from http://journals.ohiolink.edu/ejc/

APPENDIX

SURVEYS

Appendix A

Children and Music Student Survey Questionnaire

Using the following 1 – 5 scale, please indicate by circling the most correct response, how frequently you were exposed to the activities below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>regularly</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first 10 questions are related to your pre-kindergarten experiences.

1 2 3 4 5 1. I listened to my own children’s CD’s or tapes?
1 2 3 4 5 2. My mother, father, or caretaker sang lullabies to me when I was young.
1 2 3 4 5 3. I was encouraged to sing children’s songs.
1 2 3 4 5 4. I was encouraged to play children’s singing games.
1 2 3 4 5 5. My family listened to children’s music in the car.
1 2 3 4 5 6. I watched “Sesame Street” and/or “Barney” as a child.
1 2 3 4 5 7. I listened to my parent’s music when I was young.
1 2 3 4 5 8. As a preschooler I watched VH1 and MTV.
1 2 3 4 5 9. I enjoyed watching Disney movies and other children’s musical videos.
1 2 3 4 5 10. I enjoyed dancing to music.
The next 10 questions are related to your present and future musical preferences.

1 2 3 4 5  11. I enjoy listening to or performing rap and hip/hop music.
1 2 3 4 5  12. I enjoy listening to or performing classic rock-n-roll music.
1 2 3 4 5  13. I enjoy listening to or performing classical music.
1 2 3 4 5  14. I enjoy listening to or performing jazz and blues music.
1 2 3 4 5  15. I enjoy listening to or performing country music.
1 2 3 4 5  16. I enjoy watching DVD’s of musicals such as “The Sound of Music”, “Music Man”, “Grease”, or “West Side Story.”
1 2 3 4 5  17. I enjoy watching VH1 or MTV.
1 2 3 4 5  18. I would enjoy going to a symphony orchestra concert.
1 2 3 4 5  19. I plan to participate in band or choir in high school.
1 2 3 4 5  20. My family presently encourages me to be involved in musical activities.
Using the following 1 – 5 scale, please indicated your knowledge and reaction to the following musical examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>never</td>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>regularly</td>
<td>often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

22. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. Someone sang this song to me when I was young.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

23. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

24. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

25. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

26. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I sang this song when I was young.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

27. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

28. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

29. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.

30. a. I have heard this piece of music.
   b. I would enjoy listening to this style of music.
   c. I would enjoy learning how to perform this music.
Appendix B

Children and Music: Teacher Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions as accurately as possible.

1. In general my school would be considered:
   a. Upper middle class
   b. Middle class
   c. Economically disadvantaged

2. My teaching experience is:
   a. 1 - 5 years
   b. 5 - 15 years
   c. 15 - 30 years

3. How many schools have you taught in?
   a. 1
   b. 2-4
   c. Over 4

4. How frequently do you see your kindergarten and/or first grade students?
   a. Once every two weeks
   b. Once a week
   c. Twice a week

5. When your kindergarten or first grade students enter school are they familiar with a variety of children’s songs and games?

6. What do you feel is of primary importance to musically preparing children before kindergarten and do you feel this early exposure to music is important in the long-term study of music?

7. Is there a difference in musical preparedness according to the student’s socioeconomic status?

8. Does the quality of musical knowledge as a preschooler affect the student’s participation in musical activities (such as band, choir or orchestra) when they are in jr. high and high school?

9. Does the style of music children are exposed to in their preschool years influence their music preferences in their later years?

10. How can we as music educators fill in the gaps of those students that do not start school with an acceptable musical background?