

Connecting Generations in Music Education

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INTRODUCTION

Music education is an integral part of students' school experience. This study examines the relationship between students who participate in voluntary music programs and their parents' participation in, encouragement, and support of their child's music studies. The researcher is hoping to use the findings of the study to improve the music program at a public elementary school in Brooklyn.

QUESTION & RATIONALE

Question: Do students who participate in band, chorus, or recorders have parents who participate in, encourage, and support their child's musical studies? What can be done to help them persist in their music studies?

Rationale: Music programs are often overshadowed by standardized testing mandates, literacy and math curriculum models, and scheduling and budget constraints. Many times, music programs are not given the nurturing attention needed to maintain a thriving arts environment where students can practice expression and creativity. At P.S. XYZ in Brooklyn, 3rd, 4th, & 5th grade students are offered the opportunity to participate in the school band, chorus, and recorder groups. About 80 of the 300 students in grades 3, 4, and 5 choose to participate in one of these performing groups. Participating students are required to give up recess once or twice a week in order to attend rehearsals. Why do these students sacrifice recess in order to participate in musical ensembles? What can be done to motivate more students to be involved? Given the fact that music programs are overshadowed and not given much priority, the researcher would like to investigate reasons why students choose to be involved in performing groups in order to strengthen

the music program at P.S. XYZ.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates that parental perceptions and expectations become fact and children fulfill their parent's prophecies (Borthwick & Davidson, 1999). It stands to reason that this concept applies as easily to general perceptions and expectations parents place on their children, as it does to the value parents place on music studies. If parents value music and encourage their child to participate in music studies, students will likely value music themselves and persist in musical studies (Sichivitsa, 2004).

There seems to be a generational pattern within families when it comes to musical involvement and value. Concert attending adults attribute their own music involvement to home experiences provided by their parents. Parents with specific music education experiences and memories of being parented musically were much more likely to sing and play music to their child than those without those experiences (Custodero & Johnson, 2003).

Parents can support their child's music interest and studies in various ways. Elementary students feel extrinsic motivation through parent support. If parents provide significant support before age eleven, children will be more autonomous later and will continue to study music (Sichivitsa, 2004). One way a parent can actively support their child is by sitting down with the child when he/she is practicing an instrument, just as a parent sits down with a child to read a book (Borthwick & Davidson, 1999). Parents should provide a supportive environment for their child's musical studies because studies show that students with musically supportive parents feel better about musical abilities,

have higher self-concept, are more comfortable academically and socially, value music, and are motivated to study music in the future (Sichivitsa, 2004).

Students not only need support from home, but they also require some school-based supports if they are going to be motivated to continue their musical studies. Students who learn to play the recorder and have some instrumental knowledge have higher levels of intentions to play instruments in the future (Sichivitsa, 2004). Also, academic achievement is one of the main predictors for performance in beginning band. Students learn most and did their best when working with other students (Schmidt, 2005). Students need teacher approval and teachers needs to address individual needs (Sichivitsa, 2004) because students feel successful when they reach their personal goals and sense improvement and accomplishment (Schmidt, 2005). The more students perceived schools to be caring, friendly, and academically oriented, the greater was their interest in music (Marjoribanks & Mboya, 2004).

Parental and school supports will encourage student participation in musical studies. However, ultimately, the students personal interest in and value of music will decide their individual musical effort. Research indicates that value placed on music was the single, strongest, direct predictor of their motivation for future participation. Also, those parental and school supports are necessary to guide students in learning and participating in the arts because self-concept of ability influenced students' integration into class, and in turn, predicated degree of value and intention to continue. To summarize, socially and academically integrated students who have high levels of parental support will value music more (Sichivitsa, 2004).

There are many benefits to studying music. Students who persist in instrumental

music have higher self-esteem (Schmidt, 2005). One study proved significant relationships between rich in-school arts programs and the development of the creative and cognitive competencies needed for academic success. Arts are subjects in which students could take risks in their thinking and learning. Students in arts-intensive settings were also strong in their abilities to express thoughts and ideas and exercise their imagination. They were described by teachers as more willing to display their learning publicly. They were able to view a problem and work toward a solution from different vantage points and were able to sustain focus over time. High-arts youngsters were far more likely than their low-arts counterparts to think of themselves as competent in academics. These arts competencies appeared as useful in other disciplines (Bresler, 2005). Therefore, successful arts instruction may lead to success in other academic areas.

METHOD

To get a general idea of what motivates students to participate in voluntary musical programs, an audio taped group interview occurred with seven fourth and fifth grade students enrolled in band or chorus at P.S. XYZ. Parent consent forms were distributed, signed, and returned before the group interview.

Based on that interview discussion and additional research, a student survey (APPENDIX A) was designed, along with a companion parent survey (APPENDIX B). The surveys were written to measure parent and student musical experiences, parent expectations, the amount of support and exposure parents provide for their child, the value parents place on music. Time was taken from recorder, chorus, and band rehearsal sessions to enable the students to complete the student surveys. Sixteen third grade

recorder students, twenty-six fourth and fifth grade band students, and twenty-three fourth and fifth grade chorus students completed the survey. Parent surveys were distributed to recorder, parent, and band students to take home, have their parents complete, and return-to school. Therefore, a total of sixty-five student surveys and thirty-three parent surveys were collected. The parent and student survey questions were similar and contained yes/no questions, agree/disagree statements, frequency questions, and one short-answer question. While the survey was the main source of data collection, observation also provided the researcher with some important data.

DATA

In the audio recorded interview, several questions were posed to the students and then a discussion followed. Students were asked what motivates them to want to be part of a musical group such as band or chorus, especially when they were required to sacrifice recess to attend rehearsals. They were asked to comment on whether they think of themselves as being naturally musical. Finally, the researcher inquired about what role their parents play in students' musical studies.

Students responded that they are motivated to participate for various reasons. One girl stated that school is "too easy" and suggested that perhaps she involves herself in activities like band to make school more interesting. Also, they enjoy experiencing different types of music. Music can make people famous and they would like to be famous. It is fun and offers an opportunity for expression. When asked what is fun about being part of their musical group at P.S. XYZ, answers were given such as enjoyment is experienced by making sounds, being part of a group and working together, performing

solos, and having a nice teacher. Students also commented that music is fun when they do it well and experience success. Also, music is enjoyable because there are many ways to make music.

Students said they believe music is a natural part of who they are. They know this to be true because they feel confident performing. In fact, they love performing where everyone can see them. One student said she enjoys making her mom feel proud by performing. Another commented that when you hear an audience applauding for you, you have the feeling that you can do anything.

Regarding their parents' involvement in their musical studies, they reported on their families' music experiences, such as moms who used to play the clarinet or take dance lessons and dads who are into rock 'n roll. One student heard her father say that if he had a "second life" it would be as a saxophone player. Another student said his dad creates improvised melodies using random phrases as lyrics, such as singing a requests and statements as opposed to simply speaking them. The students claimed that their parents enjoy different types of music and value the importance of music.

The results of the student survey gave a varied picture of reasons for student participation in and exposure to music. Thirty-eight percent of surveyed students participate in a choir or musical group outside school. Fifty-two percent report that they take music lessons. Forty-six percent of the students and 36% of the parents said music is played at home everyday. Interestingly, 24% of the parents claim that music is never played at home, but only 6% of the students feel their parents never play music for them. Sixty-three percent of the students and 73% of the parents report that parents take their child to music concerts or shows roughly once a month. Ninety-one percent of the

students and 100% of the parents said they enjoy listening to people singing or playing music.

Several questions on the surveys addressed motivation for joining music groups. Students were asked what factors influence their decision to join band, chorus, or recorder. Eighty-five percent of the students said their love for music is a reason for enrolling. Only 12% said they joined because of parental influence. Eighty percent of the students feel they have natural musical talent, and 86% feel they are successful musicians.

Parent Surveys

Parent expectations and aspirations for their children were addressed. All of the parents who completed the surveys expect their child to go on to college, and all of the students surveyed believe that their parents want them to go on to college. Ninety-four percent of the parents said they expect their child to continue to study music in the future, while 85% of the students said they plan to continue their musical studies. Seventy-seven percent of the students said they hope that their own children will study music.

Regarding a supportive home environment, 78% of the students feel their parents support their musical studies, while all of the parents feel they support their child's musical studies. Eighty-two percent of the parents believe their child is a good musician. Ninety-one percent feel that their child shows improvement in their musical abilities. Seventy-six percent believe their child has natural music ability. Roughly half of the students and half of the parents reported that parents ask their child about band, chorus, or recorders on a weekly basis.

Several questions on the parent survey asked parents to assess the their own

musicianship. Fifty-five percent of the students believe their parents have natural music talent. Seventy percent of the parents have sung or played in a choir or musical group, and 73% have taken music lessons. Sixty-seven percent of the parents said their parents encouraged them to participate in musical activities. Seventy-six percent of the parents said their own parents were not musicians. Only 18% of the parents claim to be currently successful musicians.

The parent survey had one short answer question asking how they support their child's musical studies. Responses have been organized into three categories: providing private lessons/practicing, participation/exposure, and general support.

Six parents mentioned that they provide support by arranging private instrumental lessons. Parents also responded that they support their child by focusing on the importance of practicing. "I am the ever-ready audience at home. I also give feedback (both positive and negative) when necessary," reported one parent. Another parent stated, "I often sit with him when he practices the piano, pointing out problems and applauding." One parent explained that she plays along with her child on the piano. Another expressed a desire to establish a practice routine.

Another way parents provide support, according to the survey's short answer question, is by encouraging participation and exposing their child to musical experiences. One parent explains, "My daughter comes to my choir performances and occasionally sees her dad play gigs in restaurants." Other parents responded that they encourage their children to sing in the church choir, provide exposure to all types of music, and go to shows often. A mother states, "Her father plays the guitar with her." Another parent responds, "We surround her with individuals who are involved in music on all different

levels.”

Many parents say that they provide musical support at home in various ways. “Music is a part of our lives,” says one parent. Parents wrote that they provide words of support, play music constantly, sing songs at bedtime, make sure their child is at performances, discuss new notes, and encourage learning about music. Other comments include:

- “My daughter will perform for grandma when she comes by.”
- “I am there to listen and help when he needs it.”
- “I let him know how proud of I am of him for joining the band.”

Students commented on ways they feel their parents support them. Many of their survey short answers referred to verbal encouragement. “My parents support me by encouraging me to keep on trying, even when times are hard playing,” says one student. Another student states, “They help me with practice and encourage me too. When I’m having a problem in music and want to quit, they help me along.” Other students say that their parents tell them to do their best and try hard, give compliments, and ask about their school music experiences. A child wrote, “Whenever I make a mistake they don’t care and they think that it’s great that I study music.” Several students referred to ways their parents help them practice. Three students referred to parents providing musical support by paying for private music lessons.

ANALYSIS

The original question posed was do students who participate in band, chorus, or recorders have parents who participate in, encourage, and support their child’s musical

studies? According to the responses given in the audio taped interview and surveys, the answer is yes.

A high percentage of surveyed parents have participated in a choir or musical group or have taken music lessons, which is consistent with Sichivitsa's findings. However, an extremely small percentage of those parents consider themselves successful musicians.

A pattern seems to have emerged regarding the generational connection in music education within the surveyed parents and children regarding participation. Many parents said their own parents encouraged them to participate in musical activities as children, though they do not consider their parents musicians. Parents provide their children with opportunities to participate. Then as those children become parents themselves, their own children do not seem to know about their parents past musicianship and many parents do not continue participating in music as adults. This is consistent with research presented above, which states that parents with specific music education experiences and memories of being parented musically are more likely to provide their children with similar experiences. But why are children not recognizing their parents' past musicianship?

According to these survey results, parents seem to believe they are immensely supportive, though the children do not necessarily always feel their support. Perhaps, parental support is verbal and not backed up with confident actions such as those suggested by Borthwick & Davidson (1999) encourage parents to sit with their child when the child is practicing. This may be why students do not feel as supported as their parents think they are. Other motivating factors emerged beyond parental participation, encouragement, and support. Students discussed enjoying working with other students,

having a nice teacher, and experiencing success. This is consistent with research by Schmidt (2005) and Sichivitsa (2004) who stated that students learn most and did their best when working with other students, they need teacher approval, and will feel successful when they sense improvement and accomplishment.

IMPLICATIONS

Clearly there is a generational connection in music education. Parents who participated in music have children who participate in music. If parents value music and encourage their child to participate in music studies, students will likely value music themselves and persist in musical studies. Where do we go from here? What can be done at the school level to work with parents to get students to persist in their musical studies?

A series of music meetings could be arranged to create a forum for music-related conversations. One such meeting could be arranged to communicate the value and benefit of music studies. Parents could be exposed to Schmidt's (2005) research which demonstrates that students who persist in music have higher self-esteem, take risks in their thinking and learning, express thoughts and ideas, exercise their imagination, sustain focus over time, and consider themselves competent in academics. Essentially, successful arts instruction may lead to success in other academic areas.

A music meeting might be developed regarding recruitment for the third grade recorder program. Sichivitsa (2004) states that students who learn to play the recorder and have some instrumental knowledge have higher levels of intentions to study music in the future. Currently, recruitment information is only given to students. Perhaps if parents were contacted directly to discuss benefits of participating in the program, recorder

enrollment would increase.

Another music meeting topic could focus on how to support their young musicians at home. It would be extremely beneficial to organize an interactive rehearsal for band, chorus, and recorder students and their parents. This way, parents could witness practice and rehearsal strategies. They might then be better equipped to support their children at home. This interactive rehearsal could be especially helpful for supporting struggling young musicians, as Schmidt's (2005) research suggests that students persist in music studies when they feel successful and experience a sense of improvement.

Music meetings might also be developed to offer parents simple ways to support the student at home. Parents can expose students to various styles and genres of music, take them to shows and concerts, and sing to or play with them. Providing compliments and words of encouragement, sitting down to help the child as they practice their musical studies, discussing their music learning with them will also be helpful ways to show support. Parents should continue to practice their own musicianship, explore private music lesson options, and allow students to perform for family members.

At school, additional actions can be taken that compliment the support provided by parents at home. Music teachers can arrange music trips. These trips could be to professional performances or to other schools to visit and learn with other students of varying ages and musical abilities. Music teachers could encourage dialogue between students regarding their struggles and successes of their music learning. The teacher could inform children of the explicit benefits of persisting in their music studies. The music teacher could also provide the band, chorus, and recorder students with ample performing opportunities at PTA meetings, school assemblies, and places in the

community. Finally, the music teacher should also educate the school administrators on the value and benefits of music education, as administrative support is crucial if the music teacher is going to nurture and sustain a quality music program.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study suggests that when parents value music and encourage their children to participate in musical studies, those children will then also value music. When children value music and feel supported, they will persist in their musical studies. They then may continue this generational connection in music education with their own children. In order for this process to continue, several policy recommendations are suggested.

- Parents must be provided with information on the value and benefits of supporting and encouraging their child's music education.
- Parents must be given examples and suggestions on how to actively support their child's music education at home.
- Music teachers must stay in frequent communication with parents.
- Music teachers must provide exposure to music experiences at school.
- Administrators must be educated on the value and benefits of music education.

NEW QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH

What are the thoughts and ideas of students (and their parents) who choose not to be involved in music studies? Do they value music? How? If they do not seem to value music, why not? Do the parents of these students attempt to encourage music studies?

Schmidt's (2005) research says that academic achievement is a main predictors for performance in beginning band? Is that true? Do the most successful beginners get the best grades?

What do music programs look like in other schools in New York City? Suburbs? Other

states? How are successful music programs run/organized? What role do parents play?

Track current band, chorus, and recorder students through middle and high school to see how many persist in music studies. Investigate their motivations.

What can be done to elevate the importance of arts programs when the current climate in education is to emphasize results of standardized tests?

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APPENDIX A

Action Research Survey Students - Band**

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Do you sing or play in a choir or musical group? | Yes | No |
| 2. Do you take music lessons? | Yes | No |
| 3. Did you enroll in band because you love music? | Yes | No |
| 4. Did you enroll in band because your friends are in it? | Yes | No |
| 5. Did you enroll in band because your parents want you to? | Yes | No |

Please use the following scale for the next questions.

1 - NEVER

2 - ONCE A MONTH

3 - SEVERAL TIMES PER MONTH

4 - ONCE PER WEEK

5 - THREE TIMES PER WEEK

6 - EVERY DAY

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. How often do your parents play music for you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 7. How often do your parents sing/play to/with you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. Do your parents take you to music concerts/shows? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. How often do your parents ask about band? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Please respond with a sentence or two.

10. How do your parents support your musical studies? _____

11. My parents want me to go on to college. Agree Disagree

12. I enjoy spending time with my family.	Agree	Disagree
13. I love music very much.	Agree	Disagree
14. I enjoy listening to people singing or playing music.	Agree	Disagree
15. Music to me does not make a difference.	Agree	Disagree
16. I will continue to study music in the future.	Agree	Disagree
17. I am a successful musician.	Agree	Disagree
18. I can improve my musical abilities.	Agree	Disagree
19. I have natural music talent.	Agree	Disagree
20. My parents have natural music talent.	Agree	Disagree
21. I practice my music because I like learning new things about music.	Agree	Disagree
22. My parents support my music studies.	Agree	Disagree
23. When I grow up and have my own kids, I hope they study music.	Agree	Disagree

24. How important is music in your life?

Extremely important

Somewhat important

Not important

**** Throughout the student survey, the word “band” was changed to “recorder” for recorder surveys and “chorus” for chorus surveys. All other wordings remained consistent.**

APPENDIX B**Action Research Survey**
Parents

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Have you sung/played in a choir or musical group? | Yes | No |
| 2. Have you ever taken music lessons? | Yes | No |
| 3. Did your parents encourage you to participate in musical activities? | Yes | No |
| 4. Were your parents musicians? | Yes | No |
| 5. Do you expect your child to go on to college? | Yes | No |
| 6. Do you expect your child to continue to study music in the future? | Yes | No |

Please use the following scale for the next questions.

1 - NEVER

2 - ONCE A MONTH

3 - SEVERAL TIMES PER MONTH

4 - ONCE PER WEEK

5 - THREE TIMES PER WEEK

6 - EVERY DAY

- | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. How often do you get to play music for your child? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 8. How often do you get a chance to sing/play to your child? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 9. How often do you get to take your child to arts/music events? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 10. How often do you ask your child about chorus? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |

Please respond with a sentence or two.

11. How do you support your child's musical studies? _____

12. How important is music in your life?

Extremely important

Somewhat important

Not important

- | | | |
|--|-------|----------|
| 13. Music to me does not make a difference. | Agree | Disagree |
| 14. I love music very much. | Agree | Disagree |
| 15. My child enjoys spending time with our family. | Agree | Disagree |
| 16. I enjoy listening to people singing or playing music. | Agree | Disagree |
| 17. I am a successful musician. | Agree | Disagree |
| 18. I can improve my own musical abilities. | Agree | Disagree |
| 19. My child is a good musician. | Agree | Disagree |
| 20. My child shows improvement in their musical abilities. | Agree | Disagree |
| 21. My child has natural musical talent. | Agree | Disagree |
| 22. I support my child's musical studies. | Agree | Disagree |