

How to Get the Family Involved, and Their Effects on a Student's Musical Success

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April 11, 2017

## **Abstract**

It's important to get the whole family involved in a child's early musical life. As music educators, this is an easy topic to discuss and agree upon, but why? Most music educators have grown up with some sort of influence throughout their life, and that something sparked a flame that lead into a career. That said, what happens to all those students who never find that inspiration from any musical subject? If students can be inspired in the general music classroom in a way that encourages their families to get involved, it could lead to a life long story of musical fulfillment in their lives. This would serve as a music advocacy tactic for many more reasons than just (though not undermining the importance of) building a program. The success of a music program in a public school is largely dependant on the support you can get from a community. In any school event, the community largely consists of those close to the students, such as family. The trick is to getting the family engaged, and the process of which you go through to achieve this, and it all begins with the place of music in the early childhood, and the natural process of music that lead to bridging this gap. Many times in following discussion "the parents" are addressed, however, this term is in every way interchangeable and related with the family of the student as well.

## **Music at the Roots**

Music is a very important part of education at all levels, and it's important that communities and parents alike understand the true value of music in common-place education. Many times the saying "you don't know what you have until you've lost it" rings true with music, but even just as commonly comes the same effect with the discovery of music. A well-renowned learning theorist writes about his experiences as a child in a nearly music deprived world. In his speech "*Music Child Abuse*" he tells about how he grew to love music and became more involved in it as he grew older and learned more about it, despite his parents lack of early musical input. The manners of nature vs. nurture are very prevalent in music, and just like any skill music can be affected by both. Any skill or ability can be apart of someone's nature, but Gordon proves that the true success of anything requires nurturing as well (Gordon, 1987). A child brought about in a musical family will be more likely to keep the music in their life, in comparison a deprived child to suddenly pick it up. While this is not true in all cases, it is without a doubt the status of the adversary: "parents and the home may be the most important determinants in the development of interests and attitudes of in the life of a child" (Sandvoss, 1969). Through dozens of research studies and time-proven influence, "parental influence has been identified as an important external factor affecting student motivation and persistence" (Sichivitsa, 2007). The family dynamic greatly impacts all attributes of a child's musical direction, and interests (Gordon, 1987). Getting the family involved with the child and providing the encouragement at home is crucial to the child's success and equally to the program in which they are involved (Brand 1986). It's the job of a director to be the biggest advocate for their

program and each of their students, so it's important to learn how to build both up at the same time, starting with the student, because the student always comes first.

### **Family- Friendly Concerts**

Providing a family with a something they'll enjoy (aside from simply being able to experience their child doing what they love), can be very beneficial. It's important that the family and students be able to recognize their progress and the value in that they are doing, in order to give it their support (Kenney, 2013). In many ways a director has to "win" their support, by proving their worth in ways that appeal to their intended audience. While maintaining an educational and valuable environment, directors and educators can find ways to cater to their audience in conjunction with achieving musical and life skills goals with their program and ensembles. Keeping the family involved in every step of the process is important. A "Family Concert Series" is a way of allowing parents and other faculty, to see the progress of the ensemble and their child as they work along. "The Family Concerts require a minimum of extra work for conductors" (Kenney ,2013). These concerts can range in format from an "open rehearsal type of setting" to a regularly scheduled type of informal performance, and maybe even both.

Probably one of the most obvious ways to achieve this is to reach the families through the music you present to them. While tunes such as *Irish Tune from County Derry* or *Homeward Bound* are standards in education field, they may not be all that appealing to the intended audience, the parents. While not disregarding the need for the classics, including elements such as movement for a younger demographic, narration, and inclusion of technology in Family

Concerts provide a secondary channel for both education and entertainment. Music has a natural way of connecting humanity, especially within a family; “many examples of music being used within the family to ‘connect’ or ‘disconnect’ with parents and siblings” (Nutall, Tinson, 2008) are apparent in today’s society, according to a new study . Discovering the types of popular music in an area and using those in a program or lesson within the classroom, will in many ways increase the interest of students and their families. Every element of a concert (of any kind) can reach out to the parents, the music you program, the manner they are performed in, and the program for the concert itself are all valuable helping hands that can reach out to the parents with the music.

### **Using Natural Benefits of Music in the Toolbag**

There are numerous benefits of music to any child, or person are countless and all too often overlooked among music educators and directors, and especially parents. Including facts about the benefits of music in your program, or periodical program newsletters, will be encouraging to the parents and students who may be second-guessing their placement in the program. It’s important to advocate for music both within the students currently in and out of the music classroom. Along with this would come the co-curricular advantages of music.

Mathematics and music are closely related, if parents knew that a better understanding with music could also help their child who struggles with math in that subject, they would be more likely to support their students involvement, rather than using music as a “privilege” in their extra-curricular activities (Catterall, Chapleau, Iwanaga, 1999). A long term study of the relationship of music a student’s academic career proves that involvement in music helps a

student stay engaged in all academics. Knowing that the student's home life is another heavy-weighting factor (Catterall, Chapleau, Iwanaga, (1999), crossing the line of musical involvement to the home is of utmost importance a student's musical journey in a program.

While music classes aren't typically thought of as "core courses" to many district, they do hold the same amount of importance. This point is made to prove that homework, though not common in music classes, can be helpful for many of the same reasons as it is in other classes. Bridging the gap of creating music strictly at school (practice time not included) is not a difficult trek. Creating music is simple and easy, and without a doubt a natural instinct to humanity. "The best musical learning is achieved when the home and school work in concert so that the unique opportunities and special resources of home and school operate simultaneously and co-operatively to positively influence the musical growth of children", as said by a long term music education researcher (Brand, 1985). Providing students with ways to create music at home, will intrigue the parents while provoking creativity to be reflected in school.

One of the most common, and highly disputed methods of teaching music is the Suzuki method. Used in teaching nearly all aspects of music, it would be easy for the parents to get involved with their young children, "parental involvement is a major component of Suzuki programs, the success of which has been acclaimed widely" (Zdzinski, 1991). Having the parents involve themselves with the learning process of music will encourage them to see the to see their students progress as they have become a critical part of their musical development, regardless of their own musical knowledge. The more that children seem to find success within themselves, the more likely they will be to continue in their endeavours (Mcpherson, 2008). As parents work

with their children, and see their success it is much easier to encourage something a parent has already addressed and instilled within a child.

## **Conclusion**

Getting the families involved with a student's musical trek and the program by which they are involved is a very attainable goal for any music program. This should in no way understate the importance of a student's family's interaction and relationship with the program. It's important that an educator, and director use all of their resources to ensure the health and success of their program and their student's musical journey. Music holds a very important part in every person's life, and it takes support from families to ensure musical success. A strong music program is only successful because of the foundation of inspiration it has within its students and their families.

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