A Case Study on Parent Participation in Their Child’s Musical Development

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The purpose of this research was to study one family’s role in their child’s musical development. My research questions include (a) Why does this family choose to participate in early childhood music classes with their child?; (b) How do the parents engage in their child’s musicking during early childhood music classes?; and (c) What musical responses do the parents recognize in their child’s musicking during early childhood music classes?.

To explore the research questions, a qualitative ethnographic case study design was used. Participants were one family (mother, father, and 18 month old son) enrolled in an early childhood music program in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States taught by the teacher-researcher. Data were video recordings of the classes, an interview conducted with the parent participants, and teacher-researcher journals. Video data was coded using Scribe 4.2 (Duke & Stammen, 2011). The interview was transcribed verbatim, and all written data was content analyzed. Intercoder reliability had 99% agreement, and a member check ensured reliability of the transcription.

Findings indicated that the parents chose to participate in early childhood music class for reasons beyond supporting their child’s musical development. Initial enrollment stemmed from perceiving their son as musical and wanting to participate in a family activity. Both parents engaged in musicking with their child through tonal, rhythmic, and movement interactions. Musical engagement and attempted musical engagement with their child occurred most frequently in the form of movement interactions. The parents described several musical behaviors their child demonstrated during classes; however, they lacked confidence in their vocabulary to describe their son’s musical behaviors.

**Applications for Teaching:**

Due to the case study design of this research, conclusions from this study cannot be generalized. However, the findings may have implications for further investigation in the field of early childhood music education and research. Having a greater understanding of early childhood musical development and terminology, as well as an increased comfort with musicking may impact parental participation in their child’s musical development.

To improve parent education on early childhood musical development, teachers may consider:

* Verbally reinforcing key vocabulary and ideas used in early childhood music
* Communicating concepts through a newsletter or social media, in which musical ideas are reinforced and suggestions are offered for ways to interact musically outside of class
* Holding individual family progress report meetings to explain each child’s stage in their musical development and answer questions parents may have
* Encouraging parents to create and improvise their own songs and chants during early childhood music classes
* Facilitating parent-child interaction during class, allowing parents to engage musically with their child in a safe and supportive environment

**Suggestions for Future Research:**

* Replication of study with different demographic of participants
* Longitudinal study of one family’s participation in an early childhood music program
* Large-population survey of parent participation in early childhood music classes
* Comparison of at home musicking versus musicking during class