
CHAPTER ELEVEN

FAMILY AS A BASIS FOR VIRTUE BASED LEARNING: THE MUSICAL CHILD

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Abstract

Children develop musically right from birth, they develop and learn this attitude naturally through interactions with their environment, their brothers and sisters, playmates, nannies, and most importantly from the parents especially, the mother. For a child to live responsibly, the family which is the first school of virtues and primary educators and teachers of a child plays a very vital role. However, parenting is to help shape the character of children in a family. This paper discussed the role of the family in the children's musical development looking at the family as the basis for virtue-based learning in the development of a child. The concept of musical child, family role, virtue and children's musical learning were the major discourse in this paper.

Keywords: Family, Virtue-based learning, Musical child, and Development of a child

Introduction

Physical development of a child starts at conception and continues after birth. At age one, a child does not know much, but learning takes place in him/her within his/her environment. Importantly, children understand their world through their senses, from birth to about two years (i.e. the sensor motor stage). They naturally imitate objects and also make use of their memory and thought, they recognize objects as well. At this time, home becomes their school with the exception of children whose parents are workers and do not have anyone to take care of the babies at home. This is then when children are taken to Day-Care. Slavin (1997) describes Day-Care programs as somewhere that “exist primarily to provide child-care services for working parents. They range from a babysitting arrangement in which one adult takes care of several children to organized preschool programs that differ little from nursery schools” (81).

From two years to about seven-years (pre-operational stage) children gradually develop the use of language and ability to think in symbolic form. They live at home and go to school. Slavin (1997) explains that “During the preoperational stage, however, their thoughts are still prelogical, tied to physical actions and the way things appear to them” (73). And most children remain in this stage of cognitive development until about seven or eight years of age. The major functions of the family at this time are to take care of the children as they grow up. In fact, “childbearing is important, if not the most important precondition for the existence of any society. It is the responsibility of the institution of the family to produce children in order to maintain the continuity of society” (Ezewu, 1990:41). Children grow up among their family members before they step into school. The family house is, therefore, in fact, the first school of every child. Children's learning starts from the family home and as such parents see to the day to day learning of their children especially mothers who most at

times devote time in making sure that these children are brought up properly at home. To this, Ezewu (1990) points out that “in many traditional societies mothers are fully devoted to the bringing up of their children and they understand the children's language and reflexes” (41). There are mothers who abandon their babies/children and left the family for no good reasons of theirs and left the children in the hands and care of others who also abandon these children without taking proper care of them. These children eventually fight the family and the entire society. The family which is the oldest institution in human existence is supposed to be the foundation of a child's education. It, therefore, means that the family moulds the life of a child and positions the child in the society, the family decides what the child will be in the society through wrong or right education given to that child. Most at times, the family dictates the course or subject a child should study in school. A course in music is one of the courses family interferes with. When a child decides to study, the family begins to underrate abuse and misdirect the subject/course music, forgetting that a child had already taken his/her musical foundation while growing up, and even at conception.

Hence, the reason for this topic “Family as a basis for virtue-based learning: The musical child”. This study is to discuss the family as number one teacher/educator of a child before formal education, the examination of the early childhood musical education and encouragement of children's musical creativity.

Early Childhood Musical Learning Environment

Children in their sensori motor and preoperational stages learn by playing, by being inquisitive in their environment, learning new things and learning through their own discovery. A child's environment is where he/she dwells/stays, in this context it is the family where the child lives with other members of the family. This environment may be favourable or unfavourable to the child. It all depends on how a child is treated, but it is important to say that children come to this world with love and trust. They trust everything they come across in their environment. That is why they easily learn good or bad habit through imitation without questioning its value. Children's growth and developments are being shaped by their impression about things around them. Repetition is part of a child's upbringing, whatever a child learns is repeated without stress. At an early age, a child loves to move and imitate, learning through doing something along with someone else or after seeing it done (Baldwin, 1989:15). When a mother or any member of the family sings, the child tends to repeat that same song and continue to sing it over and over again. It is therefore important to say that imitation is part and parcel of children's growth.

Away from that, children respond to music and sound even before birth. Quoted by De Kock in Onyiuke (2009) a foetus is able to hear intense sounds, for within the womb it is immersed in a liquid and behaves physically like a solid. Sound waves, therefore, travel easily through this liquid medium and into the foetus body (3). To prove this assertion, De Kock in Onyiuke (2009) describes the musical development of a child in the first six months of infancy as:

The infant can clearly distinguish, at an early age, between sounds according to pitch and timbre. Tones of an interval of a fifth can be distinguished in the fifth or fourth

month. At the same age, too in the presence of a continuous acoustic stimulus created by instrumental playing, the infant will lie quietly for up to half an hour. In the second half of the first year, therefore, the child is able to analyze more accurately his sound world, displayed by an increase in pleasure or hearing vocal and instrumental music (p. 4)

Onyiuke (2009) has expressed this in the saying that "the first "cry" of the newborn baby has been regarded as not only the generator of the spoken but also the generator of musicality" (4). It, therefore, means that the musical world of a child starts in infancy and develops as the child grows. Unfortunately, this musical growth is being distorted by the environmental disorder. However, the importance of how the environment is stimulating musical interest cannot be overlooked for the child's sensitivity to environmental influences and especially to the quality of music instruction he receives (Onyiuke, 2005; Gordon, 1991). The ability of learning music is not only inherited but also the product of the environment where a child lives. That is living in a family and learning the family traits, for children to learn music as they learn how to speak in different languages through observations and imitation. Imitation as a part of the music teaching method can effectively be used in music teaching and learning which is exploited by Suzuki, a music educator in the teaching of the violin to children of three years.

Music is natural in the lives of children; they develop musically as they grow up. As a child, when he cries and the mother carries him, a lullaby is being sung for him to be calm; the child quickly responds immediately and stops the cry. Rudolf Steiner in Baldwin (1989) describes musical nature thus: "it is a fact that the individual is born into the world with the desire to bring his own body into a musical rhythm, into a musical relationship with the world, and this inner musical capacity is most active in children in their third and fourth years" (212). That is why a child responds quickly as soon as he/she hears the sound of music. "One of the simplest and best musical things you can do with your child is to sing. This can begin prenatally and continues through lullabies and special songs that you make up for your baby" (Baldwin 1989:212).

As children grow and develop musically, they begin to sing songs they hear others sing and dance with their peer groups. At the age of five and six (the school-age), they learn to listen to their teachers who apply music into different subjects such as learning numbers and counting through the rote method, making use of gestures and movements to match the words of their songs. At this stage, children can now move from informal music training to formal training in music. Green (2002) says that informal music practices may be both conscious and unconscious... learning through interaction with others such as peers, family...(16)". It is believed that children are naturally musical but it has been observed that spontaneous music-making of the young children tends to disappear as they grow older. This is as a result of socially and culturally induced suppression or pressure from family members making or making decisions for the child (Onyiuke, 2009:5).

Family as the First Music Teacher

Singing with children is one of the joys of parenting. Plays, games, songs and dances are children's delight and they enjoy it most when it is a family affair. Babies bond well with their family through music-making. Baldwin (1989) emphasizes strongly that:

No matter what our family situation or lifestyle, we as parents are our children's first teachers. The importance of what they learn in the home and through their relationship with us cannot be underestimated... One of our primary tasks as our children's first teachers is to provide them with impressions of the world that are appropriate for them to copy (p. 16–17).

It takes a tremendous amount of energy to mother a baby and young child as a first teacher. Babies are nourished by the family musical life. Baldwin (1989) lists three things that can really help to replenish a nursing mother's energy as “sleep, artistic activity and meditation. The artistic activity involves the same vital or creative forces that your baby is using, but it replenishes rather than depletes them. Playing a musical instrument, drawing, sculpting, painting, all can help mothers to have more energy” (118). As the child grows, he learns and associates more with other members of the family and also starts getting used to their pattern of life. A family may have particular songs they sing, the child may begin to master these songs and would be moved to make some movement (dance) or clap hands as he/she sings. We should not forget the musical nature of children. According to Eke (1983) “Children are born amoral. They learn about good and bad conduct from their cultural environment and parents are the primary agents...” (152). A musical family is always a happy family. Ludwig Van Beethoven, a great German composer and pianist, one of the most recognized and influential musicians of his period and the greatest composers of all time displayed his musical talent at an early age and was taught by his own father Johann Van Beethoven. Another prolific and influential composer of the classical era was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Mozart showed the prodigious ability of music from his earliest childhood, he started composing music at the age of five. His own father was his only teacher. These two among other music composers had their musical foundation from home and their families. Sherly Crow who had nine Grammy awards comes from a musical family, her mother taught piano and her father played the trumpet, she also studied music at the University of Missouri.

It means that every parent there literate or illiterate, musical or unmusical is always the first teacher a child has. The family's aim for the children is to expose the kids to an excellent development in the society that will make them useful to society and the child himself. It, therefore, means that children need to be developed in the family before their association with society. This shows that literacy learning begins at birth and in the home and develops gradually over time. A child's first experience helps in shaping his career in future. If his first experience is telling him stories and things through music, he grows up loving music and applying it in everyday life. According to Baldwin (1989) “Parents naturally want to give their children the best start in life and do everything they can to assure their intellectual development” (255). And teachers are making effort to see to the intellectual development of children but the fact remains that family plays a very direct role in children's educational

upbringing especially in music, teachers are very important but it all starts with parents and the entire family to mould a child's character.

Inculcating the Right Musical Virtue in Children

What is the right virtue in human life? These are good moral characters or behaviour found in humans such as loyalty, truthfulness, acceptance, gratitude, patience, self-discipline, mindfulness, courage, honesty, humility and so many others. In music, you find or notice a musical virtue as being skilful in musical performance just as seen in the lives of Mozart and Paganini the virtuoso violinist.

Parents are in the position to inculcate these right virtues to children. For this, they need to encourage their children to achieve these virtues by being patient enough to watch, listen and help the children in achieving success in their talents, making their dreams to come through, accepting whatever be their talents and helping them to develop such talents and not to discourage these children, applying truthfulness, prayerfulness and discovering their areas of interest.

A child who shows interest in musical knowledge should be encouraged in truthfulness and not call this child names, labelling him/her and totally rejecting such child. A musical lesson could be arranged for this child, watch and see that he does not deviate from good moral in learning music. Parents should be conscious of what the child learns to inform of music. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart as a child showed prodigious ability in keyboard and violin but his family allowed him to be engaged in musical performances in Salzburg court and other places of performance. If the family had not encouraged him, he would have not written/composed more than 600 works of his. He grew up in a musical family that supported him all along, otherwise, no one would have heard about Mozart today. His family inculcated the right musical virtue to him and made him stand tall amid all children of his age and above. Musical virtues need to be cultivated to become more prevalent in one's life; with this, a person's life course is redirected towards greater fulfilment. Virtues take perseverance to achieve its goals, it also takes courage to accomplish its objectives. In order to achieve musical virtues, one must be disciplined trusting one's self ability to be creative and render service to other people by changing people's lives, creating stronger nations. These will help in living a better fulfilled life. Life of a virtuoso musician/musicologist is a life of commitment, determination, purposefulness, service, unity and wonders.

The musical virtues in children manifest when parents speak the language of virtues, setting virtues-based boundaries, recognizing teachable moments. This brings out the best in the children and helping parents to become mentors. The greatest gift we can give our children is the authentic self-esteem that comes from developing their virtues because the world needs people who are willing to take personal responsibility (<https://virtuesproject.com/family.htm>). What parents can do for their children is to pass basic virtues on them by purposefully teaching the children qualities of character that are universally valued. "Helping young people to form their character is an exciting endeavour that God has entrusted first of all to parents. It requires delicacy and strength, patience and

joy, and is not lacking in challenges”

(<https://scepterphishers.org/products>). Importantly, parents are not to be lazy about their children's attitude especially towards others and for the general good of the nation.

Ways to Encourage a Musical Child

- Parents should sing together with their child to support early musical literacy in children.
- Singing with your baby always matters a lot.
- Tell your child stories that have a musical background.
- Talk to your child about numbers (1,2,3) through music.
- Teach them about their culture.

Conclusion:

A family is a place where we give and receive love, care, relax, share our problems and also enjoy ourselves as we grow to maturity. Family environment plays major roles in every child's development and upbringing that is why the family affects a child negatively or positively depending on the orientation given. Music can be part of family culture, it is, therefore, very important to create a very conducive environment for a musical child in order to develop him musically for his own good and the good of the society in general. It is also important to know according to Rudolf in Baldwin (1989) “the inner musical capacity is most active in children in their third and fourth year” (212), and as they grow up they either deviate from music or remain in it. Note as well that “Young children are naturally musical” (Rudolf in Baldwin 1989: 219). Being active in music, therefore, depends on the musical virtues imparted into a child by parents while growing. It is necessary that parents should pay enough attention to the musical development of their children.

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