Musical Development

Costa-Giomi, Eugenia. University of Texas at Austin. Infant Preferential Attention to Music and Speech

Infants attend to the multitude of sounds of their environment selectively. Human vocalizations associated with speech seem to be among the most privileged sounds of infants’ environment. Almost from birth, infants’ prefer to attend to such sounds over many others (Vouloumanos et al., 2010). However, there’s evidence suggesting that singing is as effective as speech in attracting and sustaining infants’ attention (Corbeil, Trehub & Peretz, 2013; Costa-Giomi & Ilari, in press). The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of visual, auditory, and audiovisual cues on infants’ preferential attention to singing and speech and to determine whether it is the combination of music and language portrayed by song or the music itself that affects such type of attention. An infant-controlled preferential procedure was used to determine infant attention to two different stimuli presented 16 times in an alternating fashion. In Experiment 1, infants (n=12) were presented with audiovisual (AV speech/song) stimuli depicting a woman singing or reciting a folk song in English. In Experiment 2 (n=12), they watched the same videos presented with no sound (i.e., visual only speech/song) to determine the effects of the movements of the speaker/singer on infants’ preferential attention to the AV stimuli. In Experiment 3 (n=24), infants heard sung and spoken renditions of the same song in English or French (i.e., auditory only speech/song). In Experiment 4, infants (n = 12) were exposed to the instrumental and vocal version of a children’s song (i.e., auditory only instrumental/vocal music). Infants’ cumulative attention to the two stimuli were calculated and compared through paired t tests. The results showed that mode of presentation affects infants’ preferential attention to singing and speech. The findings of the present study reconcile the seemingly contradictory results of previous research on infants’ differential attention to music and speech by identifying mode of presentation – audiovisual or auditory – as a critical variable affecting infants’ sustained attention to singing and spoken language. Previous studies have shown a music bias (Nakata & Trehub, 2004) or no preferential attention to singing and speech in infants 8-11-month olds (Corbeil et al, 2013; Costa-Giomi & Ilari, in press). In the present study, infants’ showed no preferential attention to singing or speech in the visual-only and the audio-only conditions, but a singing bias when presented with audiovisual stimuli. The combination of music, speech, and visual cues makes watching a singer a seemingly irresistible stimulus for infants. This is true even when the singer sings in a style that is not infant-directed. Parents and caregivers from all over the world have used singing to redirect and sustain infants’ attention for centuries. The results of the study provide further evidence of the value of this universal practice in infants’ lives which increases infant attention not only to music but also to language.

Culp, Mara. Pennsylvania State University, State College. A Comparison of Techniques Used by Speech-Language Pathologists and Music Educators

Techniques for improving individual speech sounds (phonemes) concurrently with speech continuity (speech fluency) have been explored in the field of music education. Though literature in the field of speech-language pathology indicates that techniques can be employed to improve speech sounds without regard for speech fluency. Many of these techniques used by speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to improve speech sounds are akin to techniques used in general music and/or choral settings. Yet, SLPs and music educators may not recognize the ways in which their techniques are similar. The primary purpose of this study was to examine possible connections between the techniques used by SLPs to improve speech sounds and techniques used by music educators to improve musical skills for K-5
students with no additional impairments. This study also sought to compare and contrast the views of SLPs and music educators. Speech-language pathologists’ views on incorporating musical techniques to improve speech-language skills were collected, as were the views of music educators on incorporating speech-language techniques to improve musical skills. The types of language impairments that are encountered most frequently by school-based SLPs are Speech Sound Disorders (SSDs) (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2012). In 2012, 93% of school-based SLPs encountered students with SSDs, which accounted for the highest mean total of all students receiving speech-language assistance nationwide (ASHA, 2012). Most students receiving assistance, however, do not have severely impaired speech-language skills. Only 24% of all students receiving services were reported as severely impaired (ASHA, 2012). In elementary settings, severely impaired students represented only 19% of those receiving services (ASHA, 2012). Given the prevalence of SSDs and that most treated cases are not severe, it is likely that many students with diagnosed SSDs are in elementary music classrooms. To discover connections between the techniques used by SLPs and music educators the researcher conducted two surveys: one of SLPs and one of music educators. The questionnaire for the first survey was designed by the researcher to discover techniques SLPs regularly use, as well as their opinions about using music to improve speech sounds. The second questionnaire was designed by the researcher to discover techniques music educators regularly use, as well as their opinions about using speech-language techniques to improve musical skills. The music educators’ questionnaire was based on the content from the SLPs’ questionnaire, but was reworded to remove unnecessary jargon, reflect the credentialing and demographic information of music educators and opinion-based questions were altered to reflect a speech-language emphasis. To identify SLP participants, Intermediate Units (IUs) in PA forwarded a link to the online questionnaire to their SLPs. Intermediate Units provide specialized services to assigned school districts and can employ SLPs. Responses from SLPs (n=44) from 14 IUs (48% of total IUs in PA) were used. Data were analyzed to yield a description of current practices and opinions. The results indicated that aural, oral and direct speech production intervention strategy categories were the most highly used among the response group. While musical techniques were employed the least, musical techniques utilizing rhythmic activity were the most likely to be incorporated and the most highly suggested by SLPs, rather than tonal activities. Overall, SLPs had positive attitudes about incorporating musical techniques. Speech-language pathologists with Master’s Degrees in speech-language pathology, 1-3 years of experience and American Speech-Language-Hearing (ASHA)-certification were the most likely to incorporate music in sessions. In the in-progress, second phase of this study, Music Districts (MDs) will provide a link to the online questionnaire to music educators who hold an active PMEA membership. Twelve Music Districts (MDs) in Pennsylvania overseen by the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) organizes musical events and services for IUs within each region. Responses from a representative sample of elementary music educators from MDs in PA will be used. Data will be analyzed to yield a description of current practices and opinions. The comparison between the results of the two surveys will be completed at the beginning of April 2014. The results of this study can help music educators understand how their current practices can encourage positive speech sound development without compromising music learning. Results can also help SLPs understand how their current practices are related to those used by music educators.


Glenn, Sabrina. University of Arizona, Tucson. Mother-Child Interactions in an Early Childhood Play-Based Music Class: A Case Study
The concept of play is universal to the human race. All children—regardless of country or culture—engage in play. Modern theories of play attempt to explain the role of play in child development. Freud’s (1961) psychodynamic theory asserts that “play can have a cathartic effect, allowing children to rid themselves of negative feelings associated with traumatic events” (p. 8). Psychologists such as Piaget (1962), Sutton-Smith (1967), Bruner (1972), Singer (1973), and Vygotsky (1976) all produced cognitive theories of play, focusing on various aspects such as cognitive development, adaptation, fantasy, creativity, and flexibility. Though engaging in play is key in encouraging child development, parents’ interactions with their children are also of considerable importance to healthy development. “In early childhood, positive interactional skills such as parental responsiveness, warmth and sensitivity combined with an absence of angry, irritable parental affect are key factors associated with developmental outcomes” (Nicholson, et. al 2008). Additionally, several reports from the childhood development literature indicate that there is a moderate correlation between a child’s rate of development and their mother’s level of responsiveness (Kim et al., 2004). Nicholson et al. (2008) observed 358 parents and children enrolled in “Sing & Grow,” an early childhood music program designed to promote positive parent-child interactions for young parents, parents of children with disabilities, and parents of low socioeconomic status. The researchers found that the program “enhance[d] children’s behavioral, social and communication skills and promote[d] positive parenting” (p. 234). Berger and Cooper (2003) observed 18 children participating in a ten-week program called “Musical Play”. Analysis of data revealed three themes: unfinished play, extinguishing play, and enhancing play. Berger and Cooper (2003) concluded that adults must be flexible with their guidance and encourage children to continue their involvement in a chosen play activity, rather than offering criticism and suggestions that may extinguish play.

Sing & Grow (Nicholson et al., 2008) and Musical Play (Berger & Cooper, 2003) encouraged parents to play with their children in a healthy and positive manner. Though some researchers have revealed the positive impact of parental involvement in a child’s musical play environment, little extant research exists exploring the nature of parent-child interactions in early childhood music classes. With the intent of adding to the scholarly literature, the purpose of this study was to explore parent-child interactions in an early childhood play-based music class. Guiding research questions are: (a) How do interactions change over the course of the ten-week music class? (b) How do the parent and child interact with one another? (c) How are the interactions initiated?, and (d) How does the parent describe their interactions?

The setting for this study was an early childhood music class for parents and children called “Musical Play” at a large university in the southwestern United States. The “Musical Play” program consists of 10 weekly sessions that last approximately 45 minutes each. The 45-minute period was divided into 4 sections: opening free-play, guided group activities, middle free play, and a closing group activity. I focused on “Sarah,” and her 2.5 year old son, “Dylan.” I purposefully chose Sarah and Dylan as my participants due to their familiarity with the musical play program; her three older children had all participated. Sarah’s background as an elementary music teacher also allowed her to provide a greater insight and depth of knowledge (Stake, 1995) as to why she interacted with Dylan in specific ways.

My role during the musical play sessions for this study was as a non-participant observer. I attended nine of the ten 45-minute sessions and recorded field notes using my computer. Due to Sarah’s absence at one musical play session, only eight weeks of field notes were used for analysis. I also interviewed Sarah three times during the course of the ten weeks, during weeks 3, 7, and 10 using email per Sarah’s request. Data collection and analysis is still in progress. Data is being coded and analyzed for themes. Initial analysis suggests that parent-initiated interactions diminished slightly over the course of the 10 weeks. Additionally, Sarah initiated interactions with Dylan to reinforce the material, redirect his
attention, or to provide him with comfort. Trustworthiness measures to ensure the credibility of the data will include peer review and data triangulation (Creswell, 2013).


Musical interactions between parents and their infants and toddlers are common both inside and outside the home ( Custodero, 2006; Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2003; Fox, 2000; Howe, Davidson, Moore, & Sloboda, 1995). However, the scope, frequency and nature of these experiences can vary greatly between families (Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2003), and are often shaped by each parent’s unique musical background and attitude towards music (Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2003; Duke, Flowers, Wolfe, 1997). Early childhood music education classes often encourage musical interactions between parents and their young children through structured activities within class time, and also by providing audio recordings intended for use at home. Investigating ways in which parents use these recordings to enhance musical experiences with their children can have far reaching implications for the music educators working with this population. The present study examined home listening practices of families enrolled in such a class.

A survey was given to all families participating in a university sponsored community early childhood music education program. The survey asked parents to provide information about their family’s musical background, listening habits outside of class, and interactions with their child while listening to music at home. The children enrolled in the class ranged in age from 10 months to 4 years and had been enrolled in the program between 1 and 3 academic years. All families enrolled in the class received a CD with audio recordings of the action songs and rhymes used in the weekly class curriculum along with twelve lullabies not directly used in the curriculum. Seventeen surveys were administered, and there was a 100% response rate. 58.8% of parents reported listing to the recording of class material on a weekly basis, 11.8% of parents reported listening on a daily basis, 11.8% reported listening on a monthly basis, and 11.8% reported never listing to the recording. 23.5% of parents noted on the survey that their listening frequency had decreased since they first acquired the recording.

Weekly listening times varied greatly among families, and parents indicated a variety of listening practices. Some reported they habitually listened to the recording from beginning to end before returning to the beginning to listen again, while others described playing their child’s favorite songs or those songs that elicited the most responses from their child. Some parents indicated they selected the songs most often sung in class to provide a sense of familiarity for their children, while others indicated that they selected those that were not being used in class to provide variety throughout the week.

When asked to report on their own behaviors and their child’s behaviors while listening, parents described both music and non-music related activities. Music related activities included singing, clapping, and dancing, while students’ non-music related activities included riding in the car or nursing, and parents’ non-music related activities included reading or driving. While 76.5% of adults reported engaging in music related activities while listening with their children, only 58.8% of parents reported that their children engaged in such activities themselves.

When asked about the time of day parents listen to the audio recording with their children, 29.4% of parents indicated that they listened while driving. Most parents who reported listening while driving indicated that their children did not engage in music related activities while listening, but only 25% of parents who listened at alternative times reported that their children did not engage in music related
activities. Further research is needed to know if these infants and toddlers are less likely to engage in music related activities while in the car, or if parents who are driving are less likely to observe music related activities exhibited by their child.

Insight into the listening practices of students enrolled in music classes can provide valuable information to the teachers who encourage home listening as part of a weekly practice routine. Teachers who suggest utilizing musical play during home listening with these young children may be able to influence parent-student interactions and alter the expectations and attitudes of the parent (Creech & Hallam, 2009; Creech & Hallam, 2010). Future research could explore how teachers can best help parents and their children engage in stimulating musical play in the home environment.


Music educators have long been concerned with the future music making of their students. If those students are children, will they continue playing as adults? Are they being provided with the necessary skills to enable a lifetime of musical activity? This study was conducted to examine the possible correlation three musical skills—music reading, ear playing, and improvisation—might have with “the carryover of musical activity into adult life” (Lawrence & Dachinger, 1967), and to address the following questions: 1. What methods did adults who still play their instrument or sing use to make music as children; improvisation, ear playing, or reading music? 2. Do the genres played by respondents during childhood and adulthood reflect their improvisation practices during both stages?

Adults (n=585) who had learned a musical instrument as children completed a questionnaire. Participants were recruited through social media and networking, word-of-mouth, and local advertising including flyers on public boards. Elements of snowball sampling were also used, in which respondents identified further potential participants (Oliver, 2006). The questionnaire was posted on an online data-collection website. No particular population was targeted, as the purpose of the study was not to determine who improvises; rather what happens when they do.

Those who improvised as children were most likely to continue playing their instrument. Based on adjusted chi-square values, 75% of those who improvised, 69% of those who played by ear, and 55% of respondents who read music as children continued playing as adults. The relationship between the variables was found to be significant; $\chi^2 (df = 2, N = 585) = 21, p < 0.000$. Also of interest was an investigation of those respondents who now improvise as adults but who did not improvise as children. Of the 424 respondents who did not improvise as children, 56% (n=239) still play their instrument. Of those 239, 35% (n=83) now improvise. Further, of the 189 respondents who claim to improvise as adults, those 83 improvising adults who did not improvise as children comprised 44%. Overall, 27.5% (n=161) out of the 585 respondents improvised as children, while 46% (n=189) of the 412 respondents who still play as adults improvise.

Data concerning the musical genres played by respondents both during childhood and adulthood were also gathered. Respondents reportedly play rock, hip hop/R&B, jazz, and folk - genres which typically do not rely exclusively on notation - more often as adults than they did as children. They also play church music more frequently as adults, with classical and pop music experiences decreasing from childhood to adulthood.
The data gathered in this research indicate that creative improvisation and the genres that typically include improvisation are an important feature in many person’s musical lives, particularly as adults. The results indicating that a significantly greater number of children who improvise continue playing as adults than their non-improvising counterparts support this as well, suggesting that children who have developed skills beyond music reading have more opportunity and flexibility to express themselves musically as adults.

References:


Kelly, Steven. Florida State University, Tallahassee. Juchniewicz, Jay. East Carolina University, Greenville, NC. An Investigation of Solo and Small-Ensemble Experiences on the Influence of Musical Development of Undergraduate College Music Majors

Research regarding the musical development of instrumentalists has determined these abilities and skills are often cultivated through the number of individual and group performance opportunities provided by middle and high school instrumental directors. While it appears that both students and directors alike place a great deal of importance on large ensemble performances, a growing number of investigations have revealed that solo and small-ensemble participation not only increases self-esteem and motivation to continue with music, but is also directly related to improved musical achievement scores and skills. Additionally, researchers have concluded that instrumental students’ decisions to choose a career path in music is heavily influenced by the various types of musical performance activities they are exposed to, and more specifically, indicate that solo and small-ensemble music performance experiences play an important factor in this decision to pursue music as a career.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the extent that solo and small-ensemble experiences influence the musical development and abilities of undergraduate college music majors.

Answers to the following questions were sought: (1) Does participation in solo and small-ensembles influence a student’s decision to become a college music major? (2) Is there a difference in influences of solo and small-ensemble participation on musical development between college music majors? (3) Does the amount of participation and type of solo and small-ensemble activities at the middle and high school levels influence musical development? (4) What musical abilities do college music majors attribute to developing the most through participating in solo and small-ensembles? College/university band and orchestra students (N = 266) from three different universities participated in this study.

The participating universities were selected due to their (a) different geographic representations, (b) comprehensive music curriculum that included both wind band and orchestral ensembles, and (c) willingness to participate in the study. The participants completed a three-part survey. Part One consisted of six items where participants indicated their (a) primary performance area, (b) curricular focus, (c) at what level(s) they participated in solo and small-ensembles, (d) the extent they participated in solo and small-ensembles at both the middle and high school levels, and (e) the type of activity they performed. In Part Two, using a seven-point Likert-type scale with 1 = least influential to 7 = most
influential, participants indicated the extent they felt that participating in solo and small-ensembles (a) improved their performance abilities, (b) influenced their decision to become a music major, and (c) improved their musical knowledge. Finally, Part Three included a list of seventeen musical skills and abilities from which participants selected the top three items they believed improved the most due to participating in individual solo and small-ensemble activities.

Two hundred sixty-six students completed the survey with 133 wind/percussion students and 133 string students. Most students were music education majors (n = 123). Ninety-seven percent (n = 189) participated in solo and small-ensemble activities in both the middle school and high school. In middle school 75% (n = 143) of the students participated in solo and small-ensemble activities 1-2 times each year, while in high school nearly the same number of students (n = 140) participated in solo and small-ensemble activities three or more times each year. During both middle school and high school, most students participated in both solo and small-ensembles rather than a single activity. Findings showed that students believed participating in solo and small-ensemble experiences strongly influenced the improvement of their performing abilities (M = 5.81), their decisions to become music majors (M = 4.91), and improved their musical knowledge (M = 5.69). ANOVA procedures found no significant differences between wind/percussion students and string students regarding the influence of solo and small-ensemble experiences and their performing abilities, decisions to become music majors, and the improvement on their musical knowledge. When asked to select the top three items they believed that participating in solo and small-ensemble help them develop the most, intonation (n = 76), improved self-confidence (n = 50), and musicality (n = 42) were most frequently selected.

The researchers concluded that solo and small-ensemble experiences were important to the development of a variety of musical skills and decisions for college music majors. This conclusion supports previous research regarding the contributions of solo and small-ensembles toward individual musical achievement and career development. Consequently, middle and high school instrumental music educators should stress participation in solo and small-ensemble experiences to further strengthen individual and ensemble skills.

Kistler, Stephanie. University of Delaware, Newark. Social Media as Educative Tool for Parents toward Musical Development in Early Childhood

Social media plays an integral role in people’s everyday lives. More than one billion people use social media worldwide (Sengupta & Bilton, 2012). A recent study indicates that parents of young children, especially mothers, spend more time on Facebook after giving birth than other social media (Bartholomew, Schoppe-Sullivan, Glassman, Kamp Dush, and Sullivan, 2012). While many parents know how to use social media, most parents do not know about how their children develop musically or how to foster a musical home environment (Cooper & Cardany, 2012; DeGrätzer, 1997). Researchers indicate that parents are interested in learning about their children’s musical development and obtaining online resources (Cooper & Cardany, 2012). Moreover, parent education has been shown to have a positive impact on parent-child relationships and increases musical activity at home (DeGrätzer, 1997). Given these results, a natural course of action would be to study the role of social media for parent education in early childhood music.

Parents’ observations of their children’s musical development have been noted by researchers as a valuable and often absent voice in early childhood education (Valerio, Reynolds, Morgan, & McNair, 2012). As an early childhood music specialist, I examined the perspectives of participants, while acting as
both teacher and researcher. I explored a) the use of social media as a tool to educate parents about musical development; and b) parents’ descriptions of musical interactions with their children as a result of participation in the research. Through a private Facebook group, I sought to reach parents (N=35) through their preferred means of communication over an eight week period.

After two weeks of recruitment on Facebook and distribution of flyers to local preschools, forty-three persons gave consent to participate in the research and completed a pre-study survey relating to their music-making at home with their children. All parents who gave consent were invited to a private Facebook group for the eight-week study, with thirty-five choosing to participate. On a weekly basis, I posted lessons pertaining to musical development and applications for musical engagement at home. I encouraged participants to respond to my prompts and other group members’ posts. Throughout the weeks, I asked questions and responded to group member comments, seeking to probe further into the insights and learning of participants. Upon completion of the study, all participants will give feedback about participation in the group through an exit survey.

Using the lens of symbolic interactionism, I interpreted the meaning participants found through dialogue with each other and me (Blumer, 1969). During the eight week period, I collected data, while simultaneously analyzing participants’ responses, which informed the prompts and weekly lessons I posted (Stake, 2010). In conference with an early childhood music expert, I analyzed data cross-participants in order to develop a sense of emergent patterns and themes throughout the group (Patton, 2002). Data sources are pre and post surveys, all posts within the Facebook group, the researcher’s journal, and a record of all in-person and private conversations with participants about the study. Trustworthiness was ensured by triangulation of all data sources (Patton, 2002). Results and findings are in progress, but will be completed by the date of presentation. Social media has promise to be used as an educative tool in early childhood music. This research has the potential to provide insight into parent education and how they interact musically with their young children.

References:


In an attempt to strengthen the concept of music for all people, it is important to continue the study of music in the lives of children. Music in the elementary school classroom is important for supplementing music experiences at home as it may broaden a child’s music exposure (Demorest & Schultz, 2004). Early exposure to a variety of music and music activities may foster a child’s desire to pursue further music experiences in secondary schools and as an adult. While researchers have expressed the need for educating parents in the benefits of music for children at home, there are also implications for music educators studying the pedagogical aspects of musical parenting and the cultural relationships between home and school (Custadero, 2006) in the interest of music participation for all children. Participation and recruiting for secondary school music programs is a widely discussed topic in music education literature (Abeles, 2004; Barak, 1981; Doerkson, 2002; Gillespie, 1989). Research supports the notion that familiarity is a strong factor in choosing a vocation (Barak, 1981) and is specific to stimulating interest in music activity through a wide variety of music experiences (Doerkson, 2002; Gillespie, 1989). Abeles (2004) examined the effect of musical partnerships among students in grades 2-4 and professional orchestral musicians on instrumental music interest. Abeles found increased participation in middle school orchestra programs as a result of partnership programs, suggesting that students who have the opportunity to develop images of themselves as performing musicians are more likely to choose a school music vocation. Results of these and similar studies may lead to important discoveries in the area of childhood music experiences and their influence on future school music endeavors.

The purpose of the current study was to investigate childhood music experiences that influenced further music participation in school music programs. Specifically, this study investigated 1) locations of the earliest-remembered music experiences, 2) sources of music instruction or training during childhood, 3) the extent to which certain people (family, teachers, etc.) influenced the decision of the participant to pursue further music activities in secondary school, and 4) specific remembrances of the decision to join music ensembles in secondary school. Participants in the current study were undergraduate music education majors (N = 56), representing a variety of primary instrument and large ensemble areas. A questionnaire was developed using a template similar to previous research concerning first remembrances of music (Edenfield, 1989; Madsen & Duke, 1999; Madsen & Kelly, 2002).

Part One of the questionnaire asked participants to select one item from a list of possible people and places that were the source of their first music experiences and influences. Part Two used a seven-point Likert scale to measure responses regarding the extent to which others influenced their decision to pursue music in secondary school. Part Three contained a free-response section asking participants to describe an event that most influenced their decision to pursue music activities in secondary school.

Consistent with previous research, participants were able to remember the location of their first remembered musical experience and the source of their first instruction in music during childhood. Responses indicating the location where the first musical experience occurred were evenly divided
between “Home” and “School,” which is likely a result of wide ranging musical activity at the childhood homes of the subjects. When asked the extent to which different individuals influenced the decision to continue music activities in secondary school, the highest rated influence was “Parent” despite the fact that the first music instruction often occurred at school. The next highest ratings of musical influence were “Elementary Music Teacher” followed closely by “Secondary Music Teacher.” These results are encouraging considering previous research on partnerships between elementary music instruction and performing musicians (Abeles, 2004). Results of the current study may indicate that participants had the opportunity to develop an image of themselves as a musician through transitional activities designed by elementary and secondary school music teachers. Family members had the greatest musical influence in the current study, particularly those who were musicians or had previous musical experiences themselves. Of the comments that referred to school music influence, most described a specific music experience in elementary school rather than the music teacher. Perhaps the combination of musical experience and personal encouragement from music teachers would have a confounding effect on a students desire to pursue further music activities. Specific music remembrances and circumstances were described in a free-response section of the questionnaire and implications are discussed in this study.

Merkow, Carla. Seattle Symphony, Seattle, WA. Parents' Beliefs and Practices Regarding Commercial Baby Music

Commercial production of music for infants today reflects the existence of a separate and distinct genre of “baby music” that is identifiable to parent consumers (Gillen & Young, 2007; Illari, 2005). The prevalence of so-called “baby music” raises a number of questions relevant to music educators, including how parents conceptualize the purpose, value and use of music products designed especially for very young children. To address these questions, parents of 11- to 13-month-old infants completed a questionnaire regarding their beliefs and practices with music produced especially for babies. These conversations were guided by a short list of questions including parents’ musical preferences, the use of music at home, and observations of infant responses to music.

Procedure: Parents completed a questionnaire in conjunction with an infant behavioral measure in which parents and infants (n=33) listened to two versions of a classical music selection—one with synthesized timbres produced especially for babies and the other recorded with the original, acoustic instrumentation of the same piece (Merkow & Costa-Giomi, 2013). The parent interviews elicited information about 1) parents’ perceptions of the “baby music,” especially the examples played during the study, 2) parents’ use of recorded music since pregnancy and at home with their infants, and 3) parent and infant experience with commercial baby music toys.

Selected findings: Based on the listening experience, parents were asked which version of music they preferred. The majority of responses was either neutral (no preference, 33%), or favored the acoustic version (39%); only one parent preferred the synthesized “baby music” version. We found that parents commonly identified the “baby music” based on the perceived audience (infants) and its relative simplicity compared to music with acoustic timbres. In terms of music listening practices at home, parents gave examples of music they played for their babies, which included the categories of both “baby/ kid’s music” (e.g., Baby Einstein, Rockabye Baby!, nursery rhymes) and “adult music” (e.g., rock, pop, classical music). We heard from several participants that their own music listening habits have changed in relation to their pregnancy, the birth of the baby, and their observations of the child’s behavior. In general, participants reported using recorded music to regulate the baby’s moods, whether for entertainment, stimulation or calming purposes. All of the parents reported owning baby toys with electronic music functions, ranging from digital keyboards to stuffed animals that play music and
musical crib attachments. However, opinions of the music toys were mixed; while some of the parents in this study provided positive descriptions of the toys’ functions and their babies’ responses, others expressed reservations about the toys.

The diversity of music resources available to parents today, including those specifically produced for babies, reflects the ever-evolving landscape of music in infancy and early childhood. As music educators, we benefit from further understanding the forms and functions of music assumes in the earliest years of development. The results of this questionnaire study add to previous work in this area (e.g. Ilari, 2005, Young, Street & Davies, 2006), provide insight into current musical parenting practices, and highlight areas worthy of further research.