

Learning the piano: a study of attitudes to parental involvement

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Numerous studies in general education have concluded that parental involvement improves student achievement. Research in music education indicates that parental involvement is beneficial to progress on a musical instrument. However, few music teachers are known to actively encourage it. This paper reports on a detailed qualitative survey that examines teachers', pupils' and parents' attitudes to parental involvement, the extent and nature of that involvement, and pupils' resultant enjoyment and achievement.

The survey found that, while pupils and parents alike welcome parental involvement, some teachers encourage this collaboration and some do not. Teachers who (a) have pedagogical qualifications, (b) have followed specialist courses, and (c) are experienced, prove more likely to encourage parental involvement.

Introduction

Parental involvement in general education

Encouragement for teachers to involve parents can be traced back to the Plowden Report (1967: 1.48):

It has long been recognised that education is concerned with the whole man [sic]; henceforth it must be concerned with the whole family.

The report emphasises that much depends on teachers' attitudes to the involvement of parents. More recently, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (1997: 111) stated:

Parental involvement in the education of their children cannot in today's world be viewed as an optional extra for professional teachers and effective schools. It is clear that parents want to be positively and productively involved in the life and work of their children in school and that positive parental attitudes to education are an important influence on children's educational development and subsequent life chances. Teachers therefore have a professional obligation to create and nurture structures that will support and develop positive parental involvement and participation in the life and work of schools.

During the last few years, studies have been undertaken into the links between parental involvement and children's achievement, and these have concluded that the evidence that

parental involvement improves student achievement is beyond dispute (e.g. Ballantine, 1999, cited in Hornby, 2000). A Gallup Poll (1993) concluded that

teachers intuitively know that children are far more likely to do well in classes if parents play an active role in their children's education.

In the United States, almost all teachers in a study by Ramirez (1999) reported that parental involvement is important for a good high school and increases student achievement. However, many of the teachers surveyed believed it was not their responsibility to involve families.

Parental involvement in instrumental learning

Compelling evidence that musical achievement is linked to high levels of parental involvement is provided in studies by, for example, Brokaw (1983), Kelly and Sutton-Smith (1987), Ericsson, Krampe and Tesch-Romer (1993) and Davidson, Howe, Moore and Sloboda (1996). Davidson and her colleagues found that once children start learning an instrument, parental involvement is critical as to whether the child persists or gives up. They report that all children selected for entry to a specialist music school had parents who took an active participatory role in music lessons and daily practice. The most successful children had parents who were involved in lessons, spoke to the teacher at the end of the lesson, took notes and supervised practice, often for up to 15 years.

Overall, the most musically able children had the highest levels of parental support. (Davidson *et al.*, 1996: 399)

They found that the highest achieving children received the most support from their parents up to the age of 11. Thereafter, parental support diminished while the children were increasingly driven by intrinsic motives to practise regularly by themselves. While supervised practice can be helpful for some individuals, it can be detrimental as students become more mature and seek greater independence (Barry, 1992, cited in Barry & Hallam, 2002).

Practising is a skill in itself. Supervised practice can create optimal conditions for deliberate practice and resulting skill acquisition. Home instruction and supervised practice may lead to faster optimisation of time spent practising (Lehmann, 1997). Successful learning seems to be a group effort involving the child, parents, teachers, other family or family friends (Sosniak, 1987). Studies also show that

parent involvement . . . is a better predictor of student achievement than other factors such as musical aptitude test results or parents' musical literacy. (Creech, 2001: 72)

Typically, parents of highly musically successful children have broad interests in music rather than performance expertise – and parental involvement in music increases over the child's learning period, that is, parents follow rather than lead their child's growing sense of musicianship (Davidson *et al.*, 1996). Parents of talented children were found to be active, hard-working people who avoid waste of time and excessive leisure, as well as being strict and demanding (Lehmann, 1997). They quietly persevere to help their child complete their work (Howe & Sloboda, 1991).

Children's motivation and enjoyment

Children's motivation and enjoyment are affected by many factors, including the repertoire they study, their view of ability and effort, their teachers, and their parents. Creech's (2001) study demonstrates that

a major challenge for parents of violin students is to provide high levels of support in the initial stages of learning, and then to be able to maintain a supportive yet challenging environment within which the child may discover intrinsic motivation, and to replace imposed routine with allowing the child to take responsibility for the decision to continue playing the violin. (Creech, 2001: 73)

High levels of support and challenge have a positive effect on teenagers in all talent areas (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, cited in Creech & Hallam, 2003). Children in all age groups, including secondary school students, welcome parental support (Crozier, 1999). However, it seems to be important that parental involvement is based on negotiation and is optional rather than obligatory. According to O'Neill (2001) it helps young people if they believe their parents are supportive of their involvement in musical activities.

Research questions

Although there is extensive published evidence to demonstrate the value of parental involvement, my experience as a Regional Organiser for the European Piano Teachers' Association has led me to believe that few instrumental teachers actively encourage and involve the parents of their pupils. I therefore decided to explore this topic by undertaking a systematic survey of attitudes to parental involvement among teachers, pupils and the parents of pupils. My research questions were:

1. What are instrumental teachers' attitudes to parental involvement in children's music lessons and practices?
2. What do those teachers who promote parental involvement actually encourage parents to do?
3. How do parents support their children musically?
4. Does increased parental involvement raise pupil enjoyment and achievement?

Study method

I devised interview schedules and conducted interviews with 10 piano teachers, two pupils of each teacher (20 pupils), and one parent of each pupil (20 parents). Interviews were judged to be a good method to explore these research questions since they provide an opportunity to obtain qualitative and quantitative replies and because they allow open-ended responses including coverage of issues which may not have been entirely foreseen when drawing up the interview schedule. Teachers were asked about their teaching background, their pupils, the involvement of parents in lessons, their encouragement of parents in practices, and their pupils' motivation for and enjoyment of playing the piano. Parents were asked about their child's musical environment, parental communication with the teacher and attendance at piano lessons, parental assistance with practice, and their

assessment of their child's motivation for playing the piano. Pupils were asked about their musical environment, parental attendance at their piano lessons, parental assistance with practice, and their enjoyment of playing the piano. The grade of their current pieces was noted. While this was primarily a qualitative study, I classified responses in order to make comparisons across the replies from the interviewees.

The 10 teachers interviewed for this study were all members of the European Piano Teachers' Association, members of which must either hold an appropriate music degree or diploma or be recommended for membership by another professional musician. Eight were female and two male.

In order to control for the variable of pupil age, and to simplify the selection process required of teachers, I decided initially to concentrate on pupils aged 10 who were taught privately. Each teacher was asked to offer two pupils for interview. The first five teachers were asked to provide two pupils aged 10. However, each of the second batch of five teachers was asked to provide one pupil aged 10 and one aged 14. There were two reasons for this change. First, the two 10 year old pupils and parents of any one teacher gave similar responses regarding parental involvement. Second, many 10 year olds are still very enthusiastic about learning an instrument. The Young People and Music Participation Project (O'Neill, 2001) indicates that fewer than 35% of those children who play instruments in Year 6 (age 10–11) are still playing by the end of Year 7 (age 11–12). I thought it would be interesting, therefore, to study some older pupils who had persevered beyond this critical point. 12 girls and 8 boys were interviewed.

One parent of each of the 20 pupils was also interviewed. This was invariably the parent who was more involved in the child's music-making. In all cases but one this was the mother.

Results and discussion

Communication between teacher and parent

Teachers report frequent communication with pupils' parents: all but one teacher (90%) say they make contact weekly, most weeks or quite a lot (see Figure 1). But one teacher reports she communicates 'never, unless there is a real problem'.

Most teachers appreciate regular communication with parents about practising, progress, goals, problems and arrangements. One teaches both in schools and at home, and an aspect of teaching at home that she particularly likes is that she is able to develop 'a much better relationship with pupils' parents'. Another feels 'the more interest and commitment in the shared endeavour, the better'. But two teachers believe children must take responsibility for their own practice and that interaction with parents is not necessary. One feels it is best if she 'can get a child very motivated in the lesson because then the child can go home and play'. The other will answer parents' questions about what is to be practised but wants 'pupils to develop their own motivation to practise'.

Comparing the replies from teachers and parents, it is evident that teachers consider themselves more communicative than parents view them.

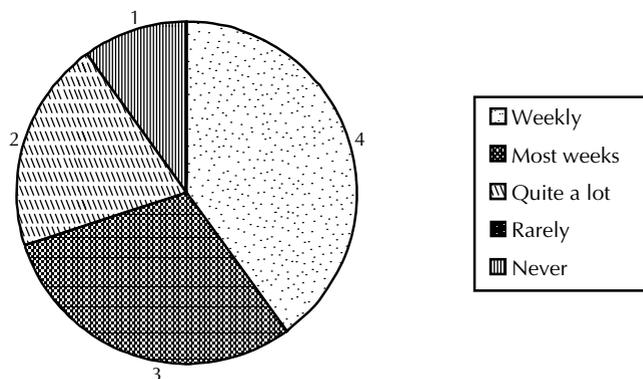


Fig. 1 Teachers' reports of communication with parents

Parental attendance at lessons

Five teachers (50%) report that many parents (generally of younger pupils) attend lessons weekly, whereas the other five teachers report that parents rarely or never attend lessons (see Figure 2). However, the parents of the two teachers who say that over 50% of parents attend lessons are involved in very different ways. In one case, the parents sit at the other end of the room and read; in the other, the parents are expected to listen to the lesson and are given specific tasks to practise at home with their children.

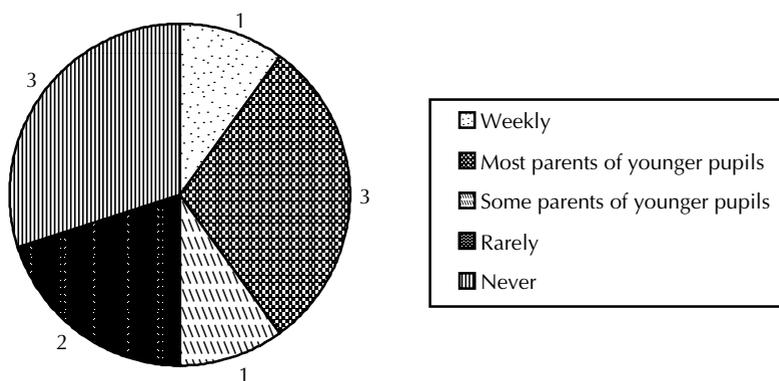


Fig. 2 Teachers' reports of parental attendance at lessons

As Figure 3 shows, six parents (30%) say they attend lessons weekly or fortnightly, while 10 parents (50%) say they almost never attend. Six parents do not attend lessons because they do not want to intrude on what they consider to be a private activity between teacher and pupil. A further three feel they have no legitimate reason to attend lessons. Others say it would be impractical to attend (5), or that their child would prefer them not to be there (2). The most common reason for attending lessons, cited by six respondents,

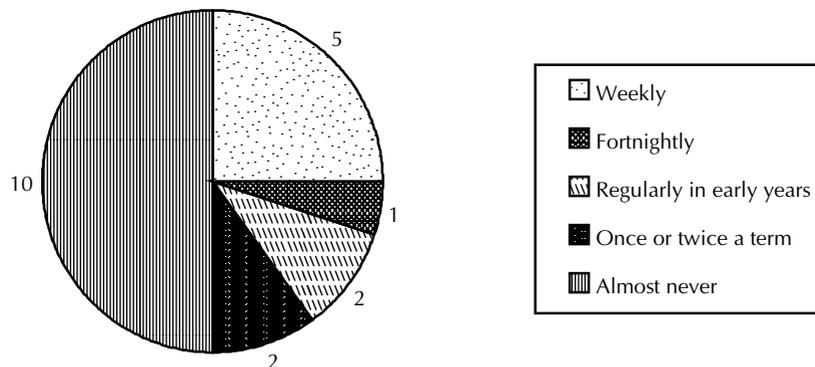


Fig. 3 Parents' reports of parental attendance at lessons

is convenience. Other parents attend for their own interest and enjoyment, or want to be involved in order to help their children.

Some parents cannot see the point in attending lessons, assuming the only reasons for attending would be a discipline problem or a lack of trust in the child, but with no awareness that the parent could help the child. On the other hand one parent, who has had only a year of piano lessons herself, attends her son's piano lessons because she is interested, and learned the guitar prior to her son starting so that she could help him. Despite having had only basic musical training herself, this parent is confident she can assist her son.

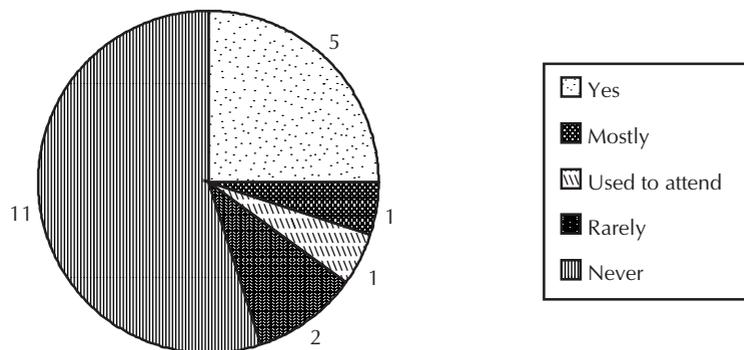


Fig. 4 Children's reports of parental attendance at lessons

As shown in Figure 4, six of the interviewed children (30%) say their parents attend lessons. 11 (55%) say their parents never attend: many of these children say they would not like a parent to attend lessons. One said: 'I would get a little nervous'; and her mother said: 'I think it would make my daughter nervous if I were there.' A second child said: 'I don't like other people to hear mistakes'; and her mother said: 'I assume she gets on better without me being present – she can be more relaxed.' Two other children said

respectively: 'I would get a bit embarrassed in front of them' and 'I would be under more pressure to play properly'. Parents seem to be sensitive to their children's feelings, but also these children are very conscious of themselves and the situation. However, of the six children who say that their parents attend all or most of the time, four have no strong views either way, and two feel very positive about attendance: 'I don't feel so lonely, and she knows what I am doing' and 'It is quite nice if I play a piece particularly well to show my dad that I CAN play it and that I HAVE been practising'. One boy, whose mother rarely attends lessons, would like her to be there 'because she can tell me things afterwards that I have missed in the lesson'.

Teacher encouragement of parental attendance at lessons

Four teachers (40%) encourage or are happy for parents to attend lessons, three (30%) do not mention attendance, and three (30%) discourage parents or would prefer them not to attend lessons (see Figure 5). Teachers in the sample vary between those who positively encourage attendance of all parents, through those who encourage attendance of parents of younger pupils but feel it is inappropriate for those of older pupils, to those who positively discourage attendance apart from the very first lesson.

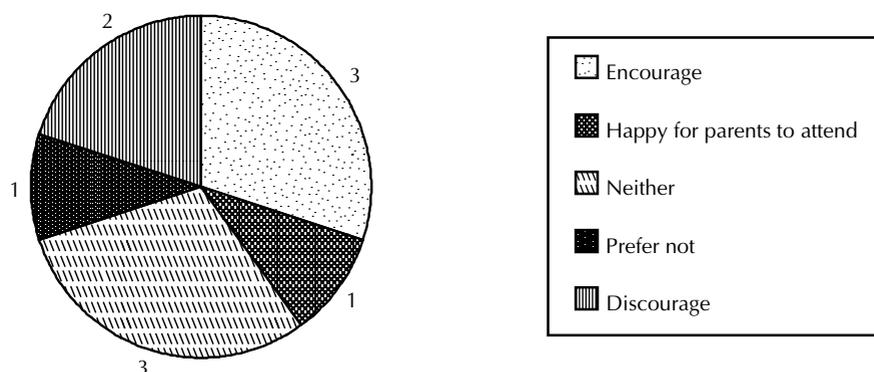


Fig. 5 Teachers' reports of their encouragement of parental attendance at lessons

Many teachers are not specific about what those parents who attend should do during lessons, and parents decide to sit and read, or listen to the lesson. Other parents are invited to follow the lesson with a view to helping with practice (3), and some take notes (2). One teacher invites parents, especially those of younger pupils and of those preparing for an examination, into the end of a lesson to explain what she has written in the notebook. Two teachers engage parents in approval, drawing attention to notable achievements.

Ten parents (50%) in my sample say they are neither encouraged nor discouraged from attending lessons (see Figure 6). Often the subject has never been mentioned. Five parents (25%) feel they are encouraged to attend. All parents report that they are not encouraged to do anything in particular during the lesson.

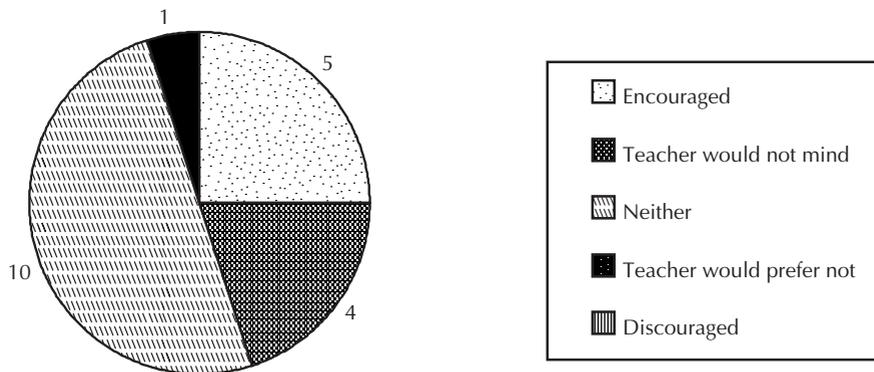


Fig. 6 Parents' reports of teacher encouragement of parental attendance at lessons

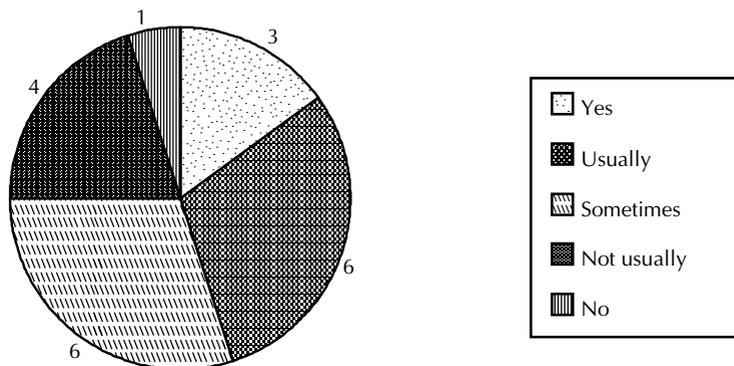


Fig. 7 Parents' reports of parental attendance at practice

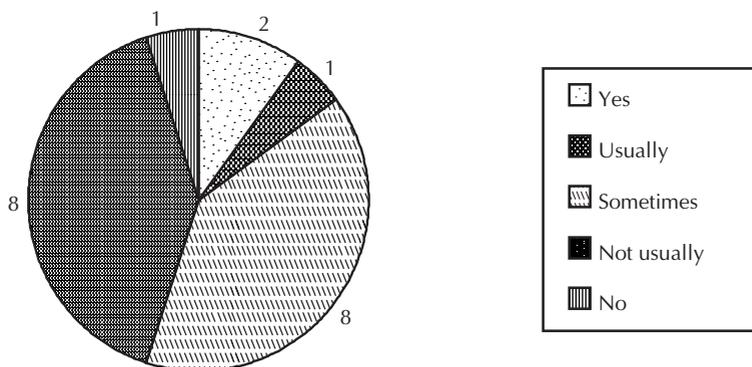


Fig. 8 Children's reports of parental attendance at practice

Parental assistance at practice

Almost half the parents claim to attend their children’s practices, but only a sixth of children report they do so (see Figures 7 and 8). It seems probable that parents like to feel involved, they wish to show an interest, they like to listen to their child practising, and yet they do not wish to intrude on the child’s private world and space, so they keep a discreet distance. They may have wished to give the impression in the interview that they show genuine interest, while their children may have tried to give the impression they are very independent.

The most common reason given for attending practice is to provide encouragement (6 parents) and assistance (5). Other reasons are that parents enjoy listening (2), wish to ensure that practice takes place (2), or ‘will occasionally be called in to listen to something in particular’. One father plays duets with his daughter which have been written for them by her teacher.

Teachers in the sample are not sure how many parents assist at home. Some think no help is given by any of their parents, while one teacher thinks half her parents help. Mostly it seems to be parents of younger children and beginners who are involved. It does not necessarily depend on parental expertise at the piano – one teacher reports that parents will help beginners ‘whether or not they themselves can play’, while another reports that ‘involvement may depend on how musical the parents themselves are’. There is, in fact, almost no correlation between parents’ reports of their involvement and the parents’ own musical abilities.

Teachers often do not seem to know in what way parents assist. Only one teacher says she explains to the parent how to work together with the child at home, while another tells parents ‘this is what we are trying to do’ and lets parents ‘work out for themselves’ how to practise at home. The other teachers think that parents encourage practice to take place, help if the child asks, read the notebook, listen to the child, act as an appreciative audience, or engage in ensemble playing with their children.

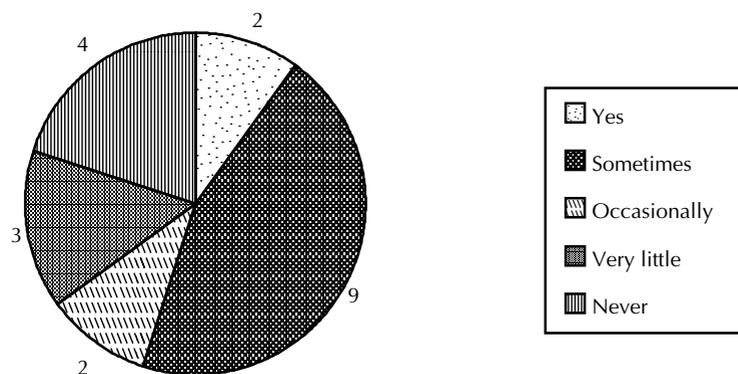


Fig. 9 Parents’ reports of frequency of parental assistance with practice

The question on supervision of practice drew some interesting responses from parents. Two parents (10%) report that they do help their child with practice, and four (20%) say they never help; the remaining 14 (70%) offer a little help (see Figure 9). Ten parents (50%) say

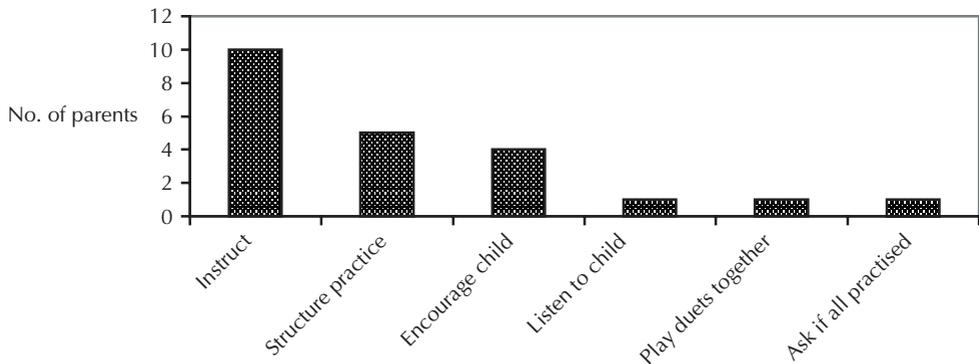


Fig. 10 Parents' reports of how they assist their children with practice

that when they do help, they instruct their child in some way (see Figure 10). For instance, one mother, who is a primary school teacher but does not play the piano herself and only learned the guitar for a term when she was at primary school, 'will structure the practice by saying "Play this bar, now play this bar, now join them together" – things I would do in school for my children, trying to break it all down. Or I will just sit in the same room so my daughter is not in isolation, and encourage her by saying how nice it sounds.' Another parent learned the piano for a year in her teens. She sits with her son once or twice a week while he practises: 'If something is not very comfortable, I will tell him "maybe that bar should be improved". I rely on my senses to help. For instance, "it sounds too choppy – can you make it smoother?"' One mother feels she 'can't help musically but will try and help by calming her down if she is having trouble with a piece'. So here are three parents with very little musical training themselves, relying on their senses, their natural skills, or on other training to help their children with their music.

Some parents can see no value in attending practices. They are unaware that help could be given. Many parents seem to underestimate their potential ability to help with music practice.

The overall level of parental involvement in my sample is less than that of Howe and Sloboda (1991) with their sample of high achieving students at a specialist music school. However, the overall achievement of the pupils in my sample is somewhat lower than that of students at a specialist music school. According to Howe and Sloboda, before admission to the music school only three out of 42 students' parents were not involved in practice sessions. A quarter of the parents 'regularly commented on the child's playing' during practice, and a further third of parents 'provided active moment-by-moment supervision when the child was practising' (1991: 57). It is possible that parents who feel their children are enjoying their instrument and are progressing well are more willing and more likely to attend lessons and to offer help with practice than parents of children who are not enjoying playing and not progressing (Davidson & Borthwick, 2002). Or alternatively, children who receive parental help may be more likely to play well and to wish to progress to a specialist music school.

Figure 11 shows that six children (30%) report getting help with practice at least once a week, while nine children (45%) say they get none. Those children who receive help report a range of involvement from ‘the last five minutes of each practice’, or ‘about two practices a week’, to the more constant ‘mother is in the room most of the time’. Four children who say they now receive no assistance say they received some help in the past.

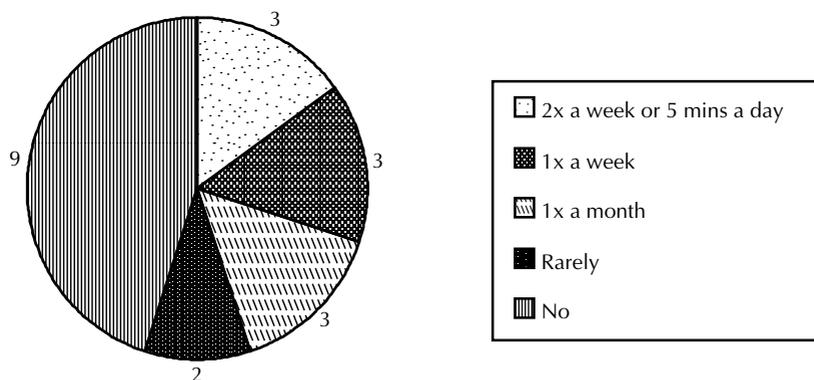


Fig. 11 Children's reports of frequency of parental assistance with practice

Eleven children (55% of the sample) say their parents can usefully help by instructing: correcting mistakes, helping learn notes or with counting, testing scales or aural (see Figure 12). Children appreciate the assistance: ‘Mum helps me work out the notes’; ‘She helps me realise when something is wrong, then I can correct it’; ‘Father can show me my mistakes and how to repeat the passage over and over again; he knows some of the tricks of the trade’. One child feels ‘Mum can help even though she doesn't play the piano’. Parental ability at the piano seems not to be an issue with the children, and the survey showed no correlation between parental musical ability and the amount of supervision children report receiving.

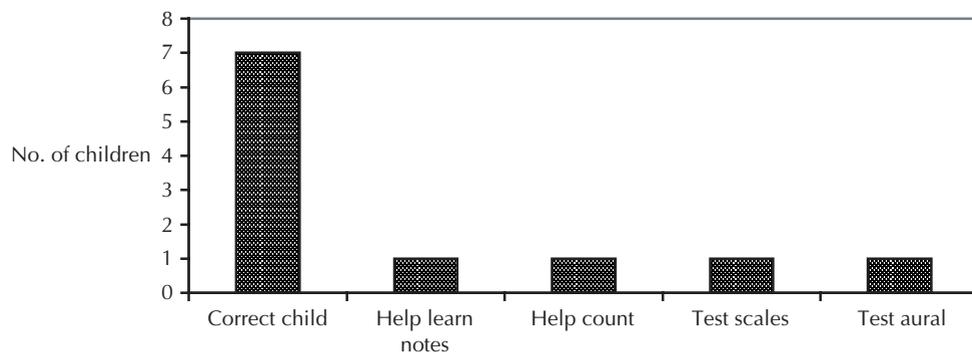


Fig. 12 Children's reports of how parents help with practice

As with parental attendance at lessons, no one who receives help with practice dislikes it. All who get help like it, for instance ‘because she can help me improve my pieces’. Those who do not receive help say they ‘would rather she didn’t’ or ‘prefer to be more independent in order to concentrate more’. So children are happy in the situation that is familiar to them.

Teacher encouragement of parental assistance with practice

Two teachers (20%) encourage parental assistance with practice, two generally encourage it, two encourage it in the early stages, two neither encourage nor discourage it, and two positively discourage it (see Figure 13).

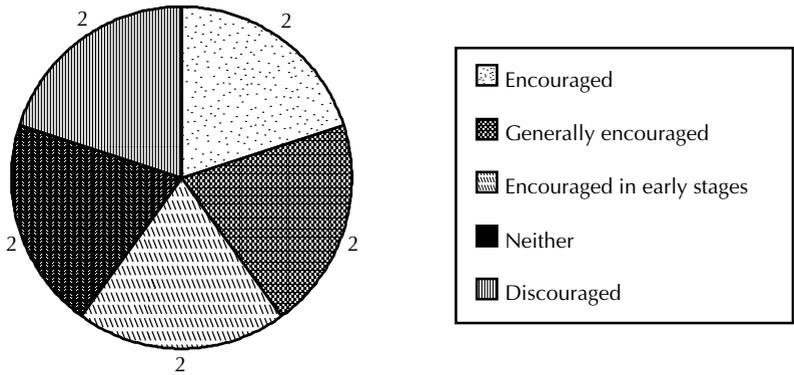


Fig. 13 Teachers’ reports of their encouragement of parental assistance with practice

Six parents (30%) think they are encouraged to assist with practice, three (15%) have never discussed the matter with the teacher, two (10%) think they are not really encouraged to help, while nine (45%) are sure they are not encouraged to help (see Figure 14). Five parents report they are encouraged to ensure practice gets done, another three are encouraged to help. All other parents say the teacher is not specific.

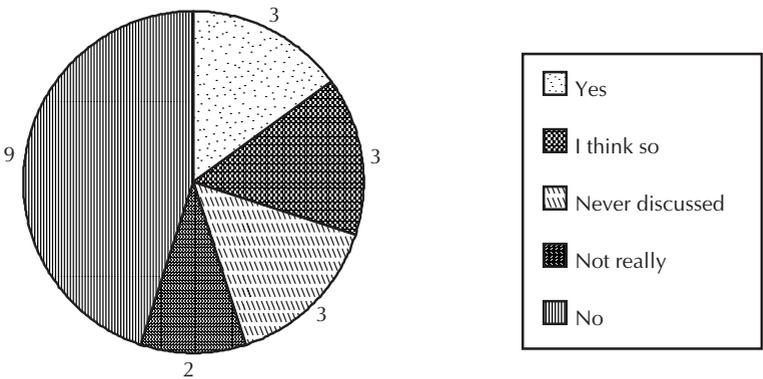


Fig. 14 Parents’ reports of teacher encouragement of parental assistance with practice

However, one parent is unaware that her child's teacher does not wish her to attend lessons, nor to have anything to do with practice – not even urge the child to do it. The mother likes to overhear the lesson so she knows what to remind her daughter to practise, especially before a performance. But this teacher says: 'if parents tell the child to practise, it becomes like every other area of life instead of something the child sees as very much their own thing', and she strongly discourages parents from getting involved in practices.

There is further conflict between teachers' and parents' perceptions of the parent's role in practice. One parent, whose teacher discourages parental involvement in practice, says: 'I listen to the CD of his exam pieces so I know how they should sound, and listen to his performance, and try to help him make it sound the same. . . . Oh, no, my son doesn't listen to the CD. . . . No, the teacher doesn't know about this, but I find it useful.' So here is a parent who does not herself play the piano, wishing to help her son, given no guidance from the teacher, surreptitiously doing what she can to help. Similarly, one mother 'was thrilled' to play alongside her son in the early stages, 'but the teacher didn't know we were playing along together'. Likewise, another mother herself started piano lessons (with another teacher) when her son started, and learns his pieces so she can help him. She likes to sit in on lessons and do what she can at practices. The teacher does not seem to be aware of this arrangement.

Children's musical experiences

Piano pupils were asked 15 questions, the replies to five of which were taken as indicators of musical enjoyment:

1. Do you enjoy practising?
2. Do you play music not set by your teacher?
3. Do you play for pleasure?
4. Do you get a sense of satisfaction from playing the piano?
5. Do you enjoy listening to music?

The total of the five scores gave an overall level of enjoyment for each pupil.

One parent of each child was asked 28 questions, the answers to six of which were taken as indicators of the musical environment of the child:

1. Did either parent have a musical upbringing?
2. Did the mother sing to the child as a baby?
3. Does either parent now play an instrument or sing, and is this overheard by the child?
4. Do other children in the family play musical instruments?
5. Do the parents listen to music at home or in the car, and is this overheard by their child?
6. Do they take their child to live performances?

The total of the six scores gave an overall level of musical environment for each child.

Having obtained for each pupil overall levels of enjoyment and of musical environment, I calculated rank correlation co-efficients. These showed some correlation between teacher encouragement of parental involvement and actual parental involvement (0.64 for all children in sample, 0.94 for 14 year olds), but no correlation between parental involvement and pupil enjoyment. There is a slight negative correlation (-0.39) between

pupil enjoyment and achievement at the age of 10, though a positive correlation (0.61) by the age of 14. Achievement appears to be of little importance to 10 year olds, who can enjoy playing the piano whether or not they are achieving highly, or who may achieve highly but not gain pleasure from their music-making. On the other hand, teenagers enjoy achieving, or those who achieve well also enjoy their piano playing. I found no correlation between parental involvement and pupil achievement in my sample.

Research questions examined

What are instrumental teachers' attitudes to parental involvement in children's music lessons and practices?

Teachers in my sample were divided equally in their views on parental involvement (see Figures 5 and 13).

Teachers who discourage parental involvement put forward many convincing arguments for not involving the parent in lessons. They report that parents tend to interfere during lessons, that parental attendance inhibits the development of an independent pupil-teacher relationship, and that parental attendance makes it difficult for children to take responsibility for their own practice. Conversely, other teachers give good reasons for encouraging parental attendance at lessons. They report that practice is more efficient when supervised but that young pupils cannot adequately communicate to the parent what is to be practised, so they like to explain it to the parent. They believe it is beneficial for parents to see in the lesson their children's achievements, challenges, problems and goals.

Some teachers discourage parental involvement with practice and give good reasons. They wish children to be independent in their practice, they consider parental interference or over-involvement may be discouraging, and they feel confusion can arise if parents are involved. But other teachers recognise that the discipline of parental involvement can improve the effectiveness of the practice, and emphasise the enjoyment of making music together. Parental assistance is considered particularly helpful by these teachers in the early stages, with younger pupils, and for examination preparation.

Although evidence from many researchers indicates that parental involvement is beneficial, even crucial, for high achievement on a musical instrument, some teachers in my sample prefer to work on a one-to-one basis with the pupil, with minimum contact with the parent. Even when the parent wishes to be involved, these teachers do their best to exclude the parent. None attempts to show the parent how to assist positively, even though parental involvement is welcomed by those children who have experienced it.

It is evident from my research that parents are more able to act as an intermediary between the teacher and the child than teachers realise. Some parents assist without the teacher knowing about it, and it is not necessary for parents to be musically trained to help their children. For all these reasons, even though I was not able to show that parental involvement led to greater achievement, there are good grounds for believing it is of benefit to pupils and should be encouraged.

The crux of the matter seems to be training parents to help in a positive, non-critical way. To be successfully involved, it is essential that parents have confidence in their own

potential to contribute. Therefore, it is necessary for instrumental teachers to build parents' confidence in their ability to make a difference to their children's development.

Willingness to involve parents seems to be affected by teachers' training and experience. Teachers in my sample who have initially received training in teaching skills, have followed specialist courses, have been teaching for the longest and have the most pupils are the most likely to encourage parental involvement. In contrast, those who have received no initial teacher training, have not followed specialist courses and have less teaching experience discourage or do not discuss parental involvement. Teachers' attitudes to parental involvement may be moulded by what they learn on teaching courses. Therefore, if children do better with more parental involvement, for children to receive the best possible instrumental tuition my study indicates that they need to be taught by experienced people trained in pedagogy as well as in music.

What do those teachers who promote parental involvement actually encourage parents to do?

In my sample, the teachers' promotion of parental involvement is very varied. At the end of lessons, some teachers discuss the lesson. Some teachers invite parents to follow the lesson with a view to helping with practice, or they draw the parent's attention to good achievements. Other teachers are not specific about what parents should do, and the parents sit at the other end of the room, and either read or listen to the lesson.

Only one of the teachers in my sample instructs the parents of her younger pupils how to supervise their children's practice on a moment-by-moment basis. Other teachers ask parents to encourage practice to take place, help if the child asks, read the notebook, act as an appreciative audience, and engage in ensemble playing with the child. Again, often teachers are not specific about what they wish parents to do.

How do parents support their children musically?

Parental support varies from family to family. Some parental involvement occurs without the teacher being aware of it. Where there is very little communication between teacher and parent, there can be differences between the teacher's and the parent's perception of the parent's role in practice.

Involvement at lessons amongst my respondents varies between never attending, reading a book during the lesson and not talking to the teacher at all, not attending but discussing the lesson with the teacher when collecting the child, and listening to the lesson and discussing it with the teacher at the end. None of the 20 interviewed parents reports being encouraged to do anything in particular during the lesson.

Although teachers often speak to parents at the end of the lesson, no parents report taking notes to help with practice at home. Parents say they may encourage practice to take place, ensure everything gets practised, instruct their child, engage in ensemble playing, listen when asked, or encourage their child.

Several parents say they would like to make music with their child but consider they are not good enough. However, there is much evidence here to show that many musically

untrained parents are willing and able to assist their children with practice. There is almost no correlation between parents' musical ability and their reports on supervision of practice.

Some parents see no value in attending practices. They have no conception that help could be given. They seem to underestimate their ability to help with music practice. If teachers were to guide parents and build their confidence, both teachers and parents might discover that parents are able to contribute a great deal.

Does increased parental involvement raise pupil enjoyment and achievement?

Results from my sample do not support evidence from Sloboda and his colleagues that more parental involvement increases pupil achievement. There is some correlation in my sample between teacher encouragement of parental involvement and actual parental involvement, but none between parental involvement and pupil enjoyment or achievement.

One reason for the lack of correlation between parental involvement and pupil achievement may be the widely varied nature of the pupils in such a small sample. Another problem is that of accurately assessing a child's achievement at the piano. There is evidence that teachers offered their most capable pupils for interview. Capable, intrinsically motivated pupils will often do well whatever the teaching. It is the average and less good pupils who need careful nurturing. Also, potentially, a highly skilled teacher who does not encourage parental involvement could get better pupil results than a less skilled teacher who encourages parental involvement. My sample is very small, and cannot take account of individual teachers' or pupils' innate abilities. There are many variables which contribute to a child's progress on a musical instrument.

Conclusion

My review of the literature shows overwhelming support for the notion of involving parents in general education and, additionally, in instrumental learning. My survey findings show that some teachers discourage parental involvement, but give good reasons for doing so. Other teachers encourage it, although few of them demonstrate awareness of the many ways in which parents can support their children. Those most likely to encourage parental involvement are experienced teachers who have received initial pedagogical training and then followed specialist music courses. While some parents are unaware of the value of their potential input, others assist their children without the teacher's knowledge; and, crucially, children who receive help welcome it.

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