Learning a music instrument in early childhood: What can we learn from professional musicians' childhood memories?

Wyverne Smith
Murray School of Education, Charles Sturt University

PROFESSIONAL EARLY CHILDHOOD educators are often asked for advice about whether or when a young child should learn to play a music instrument. Many educators who do not have a background in music education may not be confident in providing such advice. A range of overseas research has supported learning a music instrument in the early childhood years, noting the importance of parental support. This research project investigated the effects, especially emotional, on children's lives of adding instrumental music lessons to their general education, using the strategy of surveying professional musicians about their childhood experiences. Of the 46 professionals surveyed, all but two reported that the addition of music lessons to their general education had improved their enjoyment of childhood. Implications for early childhood professionals and teacher educators are also considered.

Background

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION is often the site for conflicting views on the importance of early learning. On the one hand, there are suggestions that children need to start learning specialised skills early in order to attain mastery status in later years. On the other hand, there are recommendations that young children not be introduced to formal instruction in the early years, as so much of their learning is play-based (Elkind, 1982). As a teacher of piano to young children, my own experience reflects positively on the active involvement of young children in learning to play an instrument. However, it is also the case that both parents and children have noted that this experience can produce stress. To consider the potential stress involved and to reflect on the role of family and teachers, this study investigated the experiences of people who had successfully learned to play a music instrument during their early childhood years.

In the past 10 years, there has been a considerable amount of research related to children's learning to play a music instrument. Previous research has investigated areas such as the benefits of learning a music instrument (Rauscher et al., 1997; Schellenberg, 2004), the age of starting to play a music instrument (Jorgensen, 2001), and the involvement of parents in the process (Creech & Hallam, 2003; Davidson, Howe, & Sloboda, 1995; McPherson & Davidson, 2002). Also researched were the reasons parents enrolled their children in music lessons (Yun Dai & Schader, 2001) and the connection between practice and success (McPherson, 2001; McPherson & Renwick, 2001). However, little has been written on the impact of learning a music instrument on early childhood (defined as birth-eight years) experiences.

This project sought data from professional musicians about their childhood experiences of learning an instrument, particularly relating to parental involvement, and their perceptions about whether or not practising an instrument hindered their enjoyment of childhood. In the telling of their stories, other details of their music life were discussed, such as the age they began lessons, the instruments they played, the reasons for the choice of instrument and teacher, and the number of family members who played instruments. In addition, the musicians were asked about their memories of their early years at school and the role their teachers had in their music learning.

Benefits of learning to play an instrument

There is an abundance of information about the positive benefits of music lessons for children. For example, in
their study known as the Mozart effect (Rauscher, Shaw & Ky, 1993, cited in Rauscher, 2003), the researchers claimed that music had a positive effect on the brain. Schellenberg (2004, p. 320) also concluded that 'music listening and music lessons can lead to short-term and long-term cognitive benefits'. The strongest benefits were reported to come from music instruction rather than listening to music (Rauscher & Hinton, 2008).

Teachers and researchers make strong claims for the benefits of learning a music instrument. One Suzuki violin teacher and teacher trainer at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, US noted that in her experience:

> most children who study music deeply eventually become more confident, more sensitive individuals and they are usually better listeners. Often, they are leaders in other areas, and they almost universally do well in other subjects at school (Costa-Giomi, Price, Rauscher, Schmidt, Shackford & Simms, 1999, p. 31).

Stewart (2007, p. 1) cautioned that music students often come from privileged homes where parents are ‘actively involved in their children's education’. Stewart (2007) notes that music tuition has value outside of music itself but reminded us that ‘music’s intrinsic values are second to none. We teach a language that begins where all other languages end. Music has the ability to express every nuanced emotion of the human experience’ (p. 4).

Costa-Giomi et al. (1999, p. 32) conclude that ‘It’s clear that music study at any age can increase the quality of life, and those who teach it are handing present and future generations a gift whose value is only beginning to be understood.’

A range of research and experiences suggests that it is appropriate for children to begin music lessons at an early age. It is well-known that many famous composers/musicians began lessons as young children, Mozart and Mendelssohn to name two. Jorgensen (2001) concluded from his research on a group of Norwegian conservatorium students that those who had obtained the highest grades had started learning the instrument earliest. Consequently his advice to parents was ‘if you have ambitions for a professional career for your child ... start as early as possible ... If you simply want your child to have a rich life and desire to take care of and nurture their expressive potential, they will also benefit by an early start’ (p. 238).

Jorgensen also suggested that it takes up to 10 years to develop expertise (Jorgensen, 2001, p. 235). Adolescents have difficulty coping with extra-curricular learning because of the many stresses in their lives (Sprenger, 2005), so an early start helps develop considerable competence before adolescence.

McPherson and Davidson state that, in relation to private instrumental tuition, ‘within reason, the adage “earlier the better” is probably appropriate as a general guide to when children should start learning an instrument’ (McPherson & Davidson, 2006, p. 331). They describe (pp. 346-347) age-related learning principles that include learning to play by rote as distinct from learning to read the music; rich, varied experiences within the lesson; inventing their own notation; and learning to play songs they can already sing.

The Suzuki Method promotes learning by rote and the delay of music literacy, but creativity is not regarded as important at an early age ‘when there is nothing with which to be creative’ (Beegle, 1999, p. 74). Suzuki teachers believe that children need to learn some music skills in order to be creative. Other methods use a ‘pre-reading’ step which promotes music literacy in the early years. Bastien, an American piano teacher and publisher, wrote that ‘the student who has been exposed to a period of pre-reading ... will be more likely to comprehend the complexities of the staff when it is presented’ (Bestien, 1977, p. 155). This method uses large music notes that go up and down on the page according to the melody but are not placed on lines and spaces. Children are also encouraged from the beginning to create their own songs. Many current tutorial books now use the Bastien pre-reading method. Most children’s tutorial books begin by using songs that children can already sing. The Kodály (Forrai, 1988) music method teaches music literacy and creativity through singing and games from a very early age.

Some instruments are more suitable for young children because of the size of the instrument and the technique required. Jorgensen (2001) indicates that piano, violin and recorder seem to be the most popular instruments for young children to learn. Their choices could be related to the child or parents’ perception of how easy the instruments are to play (McPherson & Davidson, 2002). Descant recorders are small, cheap and easily acquired. Violins are made in fractional sizes, as small as one-sixteenth of the full size. McPherson and Davidson (2006) also suggest that children have a view of themselves being successful on a particular instrument. Pianos are a well-known instrument, and the electronic keyboard popularised by modern singers is a less expensive and easily obtained option.

While studying the learning styles of pre-school violin students, Calissendorff (2006, p. 86) reported that the children said ‘playing had to be fun ... If it is easy, you don’t get tired’. Rife, Schnek, Lauby, and Lapidus (2001, p. 5) also found in their study of 568 young music students that they had to ‘have a good time at music lessons’. Calissendorff (2006, p. 93) has also indicated that the children needed to ‘like’ their teacher and to receive encouragement from their parents'. So, learning an instrument while still very young is widely promoted, but must be done in ways that are suitable for children.
The roles of family and early childhood teachers

Family

There is evidence that the success of young children's music lessons depends on parental involvement (Creech & Hallam, 2003). While the amount of practice is important, 'the amount of time spent by parents in supervising home practice is even a better predictor of successful achievement in the initial stages of development' (Brokaw, 1982, cited in Creech & Hallam, 2003, p. 32). In addition, Sloboda (1991) and Sozniak (1985, cited in Creech & Hallam, 2003, p. 32) state that the support and encouragement of parents who lacked formal knowledge was also acknowledged as helpful. Furthermore, Davidson, Howe and Sloboda (1995, cited in Creech & Hallam, 2003, p. 32) wrote that 'without the positive involvement of parents in the process, the highest levels of achievement are likely to remain unattainable'.

However, there are several other factors to consider concerning family involvement that may determine success. The first is a mutual understanding between teacher and parent of the role that each plays in the instruction and supervision of music tuition with the young student. Second, parental contribution should complement the teacher's encouragement and guidance. Parents need to understand the teacher's instructions as well as allowing their child some independence (Pitt & Davidson, 2000). Other factors include the parents' confidence in their role and their child's ability to learn an instrument, the parents' persistence and resilience, and agreement between the two parents about goals (Creech & Hallam, 2003). When Yun Dai and Schader (2001) explored the reasons parents supported their child's music training, they reported that the main reason given by the majority of parents (especially professional parents) was the belief that music lessons benefited their child personally, rather than because they believed the children should develop musical talent.

Music teachers

While parents have the added responsibility of selecting a suitable music teacher, the most important contribution instrumental teachers can make is to provide enjoyable lessons for children. Children who like their teacher and the music they are given to learn are more likely to continue music lessons (Rife et al., 2001).

A knowledge of how children learn is also important in an instrumental teacher, and this is not always the case when a performing musician decides to teach. According to McPherson (2005, p. 30), the chosen teacher needs to have 'an understanding of what is going on in children's minds when they perform'. The teacher needs to encourage reflection by 'asking students to explain how they are doing a task' (p. 31).

Music concepts, like any other concepts, can be difficult to grasp. Teachers need to listen to children in order to understand their thinking strategies and, if necessary, be able to guide them to clearer understanding. McPherson (2005, pp. 31-32) reported that in his three-year longitudinal study of 7-9 year-olds learning a music instrument, the children who progressed effortlessly were those 'who applied musically appropriate mental practice strategies early in their learning'. Barry and Hallam (2002, cited in McPherson, 2005, p. 28) stated 'beginners are not always aware of where they are going wrong'. They need help to connect what they hear to what their fingers are doing, to isolate the problem and fix it.

McPherson (2005, p. 28) suggested that teachers need to help children to develop an 'armoury of task-appropriate strategies' that may be used during parent-supervised music practice. The strategies suggested fell into two categories: 'organisational', that included keeping a practice diary and practising difficult parts before enjoyment, and 'improvement'—practising with persistence to improve and knowing how to correct their own mistakes (McPherson, 2005, p. 19).

Early childhood teachers.

Early childhood teachers have three roles in encouraging children to play a music instrument. First, they need to be able to advise parents of suitable extra-curricular lessons, of which music is only one of the many available. Olson and Hyson (2005, p. 67) stated 'we should do a better job communicating our role as reliable, credible sources of information and support'.

Second, teachers in early childhood settings need to provide a holistic music environment and a developmentally appropriate music program for children. Wright (1991, pp. 141-142) put these instruments in a context of exploration and enjoyment for a 'child-centred approach' and suggested that children explore sound in a variety of ways, including:

1. Manipulating objects
2. Imitating sounds, discriminating between sounds
3. Classifying sounds
4. Sequencing sounds
5. Improvising with instruments
Encouragement of musical creativity is the third role of early childhood teachers. 'If children's efforts are encouraged, they may continue to create their own music beyond the age when they usually become self-conscious and stop doing so' (MENC Adviser, 2006, p. 66). Kenney (2007, p. 31) stressed the importance of children being permitted to explore sound and to compose, with their efforts recorded by adults. Kenney supported the MENC Adviser's call for the urgency of giving children opportunities for creativity when she said, 'Maybe the reason Western culture thinks that only a few gifted people can become composers is that we lose most of our composers before they turn eight' (p. 31). Barrett (2006) has also researched widely in the area of music creativity in early childhood, exploring ways that children compose and record their composition with invented notation. Uptis (2000, p.16) suggested that just as language is learned by immersion in a rich language environment, so too is music. She adds that this rich music environment 'would include adult musicians who could model and encourage playfulness with music'.

Research by Artan and Balat (2003) reported that, when children aged between four and six years were asked 'What is music?,' they replied, 'Playing a music instrument.' Since it could be presumed that the most common musical activity for young children at home, in the car and at school would be listening to CDs or singing, this response is surprising. Furthermore, they cited Bjorkvold's argument that 'musical instruments are fundamental for children: if they cannot find the real musical instrument, they create their own' (Bjorkvold, 1992, cited in Artan & Balat, 2003, p. 360).

Early childhood teachers may be well-placed to provide all the creative opportunities already discussed. These opportunities and others may provide the foundations for sound music education experiences and motivate children to develop more advanced skills. However, according to Andress (n.d., cited in Ponick, 1999, p. 32), teacher education courses need to 'empower these teachers and care-providers to present quality music experiences to their charges.'

Encouragement of musical creativity is the third role of early childhood teachers. 'If children's efforts are encouraged, they may continue to create their own music beyond the age when they usually become self-conscious and stop doing so' (MENC Adviser, 2006, p. 66). Kenney (2007, p. 31) stressed the importance of children being permitted to explore sound and to compose, with their efforts recorded by adults. Kenney supported the MENC Adviser's call for the urgency of giving children opportunities for creativity when she said, 'Maybe the reason Western culture thinks that only a few gifted people can become composers is that we lose most of our composers before they turn eight' (p. 31). Barrett (2006) has also researched widely in the area of music creativity in early childhood, exploring ways that children compose and record their composition with invented notation. Uptis (2000, p.16) suggested that just as language is learned by immersion in a rich language environment, so too is music. She adds that this rich music environment 'would include adult musicians who could model and encourage playfulness with music'.

Research by Artan and Balat (2003) reported that, when children aged between four and six years were asked 'What is music?,' they replied, 'Playing a music instrument.' Since it could be presumed that the most common musical activity for young children at home, in the car and at school would be listening to CDs or singing, this response is surprising. Furthermore, they cited Bjorkvold's argument that 'musical instruments are fundamental for children: if they cannot find the real musical instrument, they create their own' (Bjorkvold, 1992, cited in Artan & Balat, 2003, p. 360).

Early childhood teachers may be well-placed to provide all the creative opportunities already discussed. These opportunities and others may provide the foundations for sound music education experiences and motivate children to develop more advanced skills. However, according to Andress (n.d., cited in Ponick, 1999, p. 32), teacher education courses need to 'empower these teachers and care-providers to present quality music experiences to their charges.'

It is acknowledged that there are two sides to the story of music in peoples' lives—the stories of those who reached a confident stage in their music skills and the stories of those who gave up prematurely. Finding those who were 'lost' would be an interesting and worthwhile second step to more enlightenment about the place of instrumental music in children's lives. However, this project is the first step, seeking knowledge through the experiences of competent musicians.

**Method**

### Selection of participants

This research project used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, studying a non-random sample. There were 46 participants in all. Thirty-nine of them were members of an international orchestra, based in Malaysia. This orchestra provided convenient access to musicians from a variety of nationalities—with 13 nationalities represented in the group. Four participants were from an Australian symphony orchestra, and three were teachers from a music conservatorium in regional New South Wales.

Written questionnaires, designed by the author, were based on aspects of early learning such as reasons for choice of instrument and teacher, attitudes to lessons and practice, and parental support. The questionnaires were trialed with an Australian member of the Malaysian orchestra and that member's colleagues (Japanese, French/Canadian and Hungarian) for relevance and understanding by people whose first language was not English. The questionnaires were then distributed to more than 120 musicians, of whom 46 (24 males and 22 females) responded. In addition, five of these 46 were interviewed in person. The survey questions relied on the memories of participants. 'Memory work' has been questioned as being unreliable as a research methodology (Ceci & Loftus, 1994, p. 362). However, Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault and Benton (1992, p. 37) see its worth as enabling people to reflect and analyse their personal history. Norquay (1990) sees the importance of memory work in education because examining the memories can help to make changes in the way we support children's learning.

Many of the questions were 'tick the box' style or numbering, but space was also given for participants to add more if they wished. Calculations were made from the short answers to examine the commonalities and differences. As the participants were extremely busy, it was essential that the task was not onerous but that the opportunity was given for those who wished to elaborate. Informal interviews were held with each of the five volunteers from the Malaysian group at a coffee shop in close proximity to the orchestra's concert hall, and took between 20 and 30 minutes. The author designed the questions and conducted the interviews, individually addressing each participant's survey answers. Each participant talked enthusiastically about their childhood experiences.

With the decline in the number of orchestras in Australia and overseas and the intense competition for positions in the remaining orchestras, it is likely that only the more talented, persistent and confident musicians gain full-time orchestral positions (Bennett, 2006). It was hoped that the stories of these musicians might give some
insight into the early music experiences for children. The survey data focused on their memories of music and instrumental lessons in early childhood, including details of when they began lessons, the part their parents and teachers played in the music education and their feelings about practice.

**Results**

Thirty-three of the 46 musicians who responded began studying music when they were under nine years of age (Table 1). The average starting age was seven years four months, with the youngest being two years old. It is interesting to note that four of the youngest starters were Japanese who were taught by the Suzuki method and that six of the 11 under-five-years starters were taught by family members—five by their mother and one by an aunt. These family members were also professional music teachers. Twenty (43 per cent) participants started playing music before the age of seven. This is consistent with Jorgensen’s (2001) findings that successful musicians had started formal music lessons when they were young.

Of the 72 per cent (33) of participants who began instrumental lessons under the age of nine, only two now play their first instrument as career musicians. Their career instrument was more often the second or third they had studied. Piano and violin were the most popular first instruments. Nine musicians changed instruments twice before finding the one that suited them. One participant found success on his fourth instrument. He wrote that the clarinet ‘was going nowhere for me. As soon as I tried the trombone, everything worked well’.

Twenty musicians began on their first instrument because of availability, whereas they chose their next instrument because they ‘liked the sound’ or because of hero worship of a teacher or soloist. The cliché ‘the instrument chose me’ was used by more than one participant in surveys and interviews in an attempt to explain the unexplainable. The idea that certain instruments go with certain temperaments, suggested by Ben-Tovim and Boyd (1985), also seemed to be borne out in the stories of some participants. One participant changed from trumpet to tuba. He said that he liked the supportive role of the tuba rather than the trumpet, which he described as ‘everything out there ... always courageous’. Another wrote that ‘the school added timpani/percussion to the instrument menu at just the right time’. He had not excelled at either of the two instruments he had tried but the timpani suited his personality. One conclusion to be drawn from this is that it is important to consider a change of instrument if children retain their interest in music but seem to be not progressing with a particular instrument.

Schools played a valuable part in some participants’ lives. Thirteen mentioned school instrumental programs as the starting point for their lessons. Three of these were from Queensland primary schools, which are well-known for their extensive instrumental music program (Department of Education, Training and the Arts, 2008). The others were from eight different countries (Japan, the Netherlands, Ecuador, Romania, United Kingdom, Sweden, Canada and Hungary). In Australia, The
All participants who began lessons early had parents who were closely involved in the lessons and practice (Table 3). Almost half of the participants (48 per cent), reported that it was their parent(s) who initiated music lessons and chose their first instrument. Some participants were taught initially by a parent, and only one reported an unhappy relationship. Very few said their parents were not involved at all, except to pay for and drive them to lessons. Although two said their parents’ input was negative, they now, as adults, say they are grateful.

To an early childhood professional, initiating music lessons for children and the consequent organisation of daily practice might sound limiting of children’s choices. However, parents usually make considered serious choices for their young children. For example, parents choose to have their children taught to swim. If possible, they also select a kindergarten that has similar values or religion to their own. Parents also help their children with other routines such as cleaning teeth and even a bedtime story, both regarded as positive habits for children. Music lessons and practice can be just another decision, based on whether it is considered they will benefit a particular child.

Most (41) of the musicians wrote or spoke about the music they remember hearing as children (Table 2). Six of the participants grew up in church communities, of which one wrote ‘the kids and grown-ups were singing all the time’. A large number of participants (89 per cent) reported the sound of recorded music (CDs, radio and tapes) in the home. One musician said, ‘Classic FM radio was on all the time. I got to know standard classical repertoire without knowing I was absorbing it’. Many had direct experiences of live classical music, including attending concerts or listening to parents and/or sibling(s) playing a music instrument. Only nine per cent (four) wrote they had no relatives who played instruments. The implication from this finding is that it is beneficial to immerse children in a rich music environment from an early age.

Several participants had memories (Table 2) of preschool teachers who were musically very creative and inspiring, but only nine attended specific pre-school music classes such as Kodály, Orff or Yamaha. Three of the nine grew up in Hungary, where the Kodály system originated. One Japanese musician completed a Yamaha class. Three attended Kodály classes in Australia, the United States and Japan. One Australian attended Yamaha classes. Preschool music classes are promoted in Australia today, but at the time the musicians were ‘pre-schoolers’ these classes may not have existed in their country of residence. These classes have always been expensive in Australia and therefore limited to those who can afford them.

While some researchers (Creech & Hallam, 2003) have looked closely at the ways parents have been involved in their children’s learning, this research project focused on the participants’ feelings about learning to play a music instrument in early childhood.

Although many participants reported that at times, and especially in the very early years (under eight), they did not like to practise, most did not think this discipline had affected their childhood in a negative way. Some of the comments were:

Male (30-40 years): Practising was a burden of sorts. But I’d have to say that, once I found a tutor that I loved, that gave me all the inspiration and motivation I needed.

Male (40-50 years): I would describe my childhood in highly positive terms.
Male (20-30 years): I think my childhood was pretty happy. I didn't particularly enjoy practising, but it didn't make me miserable.

Female (20-30 years): I would describe my childhood as happy. I loved my violin teacher.

Female (20-30 years): I had a very happy childhood surrounded by music.

Female (30-40 years): When I was a kid I just loved playing the violin. It was fun.

Half of the participants were 'told to practise' by parents, with one participant writing 'at times "told" was far too mild a word'. Sixty-nine per cent of participants (32) actually liked to practise, although many used provisos such as 'sometimes' and 'on a particular instrument but not another'. An important aim of this research was to explore the emotional effects of being made to practise. In two cases, the relationship with a parent seemed to be put at risk. The first, where the parent supervising was also the teacher, was described by the participant: 'practice was unbearable ... my sister and I were quite fed up'. Because her parent was also the teacher, her daily practice was always a lesson. Nevertheless, during the interview, this participant said she now feels she owes her mother a lot because playing in the orchestra is a real joy. The second felt trapped into practice. ‘My father said, "If you really want, you can stop,' but I knew that if I did I would make him sad. I loved him so much that I couldn't give up ... My parents should have discussed it with me.'

However, most participants (44) reported positive benefits. Some stated that music benefits the brain, echoing the conclusions of Rauscher (Costa-Giomi et al., 1999; Rauscher, 2003). Others talked about the improved quality of their life, as claimed by Shockford (n.d., cited in Costa-Giomi et al., 1999) who said, 'It adds richness to your soul'.

Most (44) also reported that they liked their teacher. For some, their exceptional teachers provided the motivation to continue learning the instrument. Comments included: 'He was funny and the lesson was fun ... it helped me to love music'; 'Fantastic teacher! We are still in touch'; 'The sweetest lady, an excellent teacher with gentle guidance and positive reinforcement.' Four reported that they had teachers they disliked, and as a result their parents soon found a new teacher. One participant did not like her teacher, who was the only teacher of that instrument in the town. She said her mother had asked her to try for a year, and that if she was still not happy she could give up. This participant said she was glad her mother had made her keep going because later, when another teacher was found, her instrument became her love and career.

The five participants who were also personally interviewed were asked whether they thought instrumental music lessons should be offered to all children, or only to those who seem talented. (Many of these musicians are parents themselves as well as being music instrument teachers.) The answers were a very definite: 'All children can learn and enjoy making music.' All said parents should understand that for the first couple of years it is hard work, and that children need help and encouragement to keep up their practice. They noted that, on their own, most children do not have the maturity to be self-motivated and self-directed.

The two participants (surveyed and interviewed) who had an 'unhappy' experience with learning to play an instrument in childhood said they would have their own children taught, but they would be careful about their children's wellbeing. In particular, there would be family communication about the process.

The average age for participants in the questionnaire for deciding that music would be their career was 18, with only two stating that from early years it was 'assumed'. This suggests that for the most part the parents' and/or child's purpose in beginning music lessons was something other than a career.

Summary

The majority of these professional musicians began their music lessons as young children, and their parents were closely involved with that learning process. They had memorable, close relationships with their music teachers. Although the musicians had spent considerable time practising their instrument during early childhood, often with a parent supervising, most described their childhood in positive terms. They added that the opportunities afforded them as they progressed, to interact with other young musicians in ensembles such as school bands, youth orchestras and music camps, gave them extra enjoyment. The two participants who had negative recollections about some aspect of their childhood regretted the lack of honest, open family communication about the music learning process. No participant felt that their hard work had not been fruitful; rather that, regardless of career, music had enriched their life.

Further research

In this research, only 'successful' musicians have been surveyed. How can we know about the people whose childhood experiences of the discipline of music study were so negative that they gave up or, as Austin, Renwick and McPherson (2006, p. 222) suggest, about the people who gave up because of their fixed belief that they do not have music ability? There is a need to research those who commenced learning a music instrument but gave up. Researching their memories of their experiences with instrumental music lessons might provide more insight...
into the wisdom of when and how to add instrumental music lessons to children's education.

Implications

For parents
1. Immerse your child in a rich music environment at home.
2. Begin instrumental music instruction early.
3. Choose a teacher that young children like and one who makes music fun.
4. Ensure that a developmentally appropriate method of instrumental instruction is being used.
5. Show interest in the child's progress and provide encouragement and enthusiasm.
6. If possible, join in the child's music practice in a supportive manner.

For early childhood teachers
Based on research by Artan and Balat (2003), Kenney (2007), Upitas (2000) and Wright (1991), it would seem that early childhood teachers need to:
1. Provide a music-rich environment (a variety of music instruments) that will inspire music play.
2. Give children opportunities to sing and dance creatively.
3. Seek authentic current information about the suitability of other lessons offered to young children.
4. Display music symbols and pictures of instruments in the learning environment.
5. Encourage children to use symbols to record their compositions.
7. Make music 'fun'.
8. Play an instrument yourself or invite a parent, grandparent or orchestral member to share their talent.
9. Take children to appropriate concerts or invite the concert to the centre.

Implications for early childhood teacher education
Teachers who understand the language of music are well-placed to sow the seeds of music literacy in children. During pre-service teacher education, students need to have opportunities to hear a range of music and explore a variety of instruments. Creative and exploratory experiences in their courses will open them to the many enriching music experiences children can have. Without themselves gaining a basic level of music literacy, as well as the experiences outlined above, new teachers will find it hard to lay the foundations for children's music development. Teachers without music literacy can provide children with basic music experiences which can be enjoyable and worthwhile, but, as the National Review of Music Education (2005) stated, 'many Australian students miss out on an effective music education because of the lack of quality of provision; lack of quality of provision; and the poor status of music in many schools.'

References