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Dr. Bo Wah LEUNG

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The Role of East Asian Mothers in Their Children's Musical Lives

Ebru Tuncer Boon
Performing Arts Department
Yeni Yuzyil University, Istanbul
Turkey

ebru.boon@yeniyuzyil.edu.tr

Abstract

This qualitative study is undertaken to understand East Asian mothers' roles in their children's musical lives, and is a continuation of fieldwork done at the Petit String Orchestra and Junior Youth Orchestra located at the University of Florida. Field observations provoked the researcher to consider the following: "Why are eighty percent of the orchestra players Asian children?" "Was it a coincidence or culturally constructed?" "Why do mostly Asian mothers occupy the chairs behind the orchestra every Sunday?" Data was collected using interviews and subsequently analyzed with the narrative method. The selection of participants in this study was based on a criterion sampling. All of the participants were Chinese and Korean mothers whose children (between the ages of 7 and 9) attend the Florida String Project. Narrative inquiry offers different ways of understanding individual, social, cultural, and historical factors that influence how identities are constructed and/or understood by others. The purpose of this narrative study was to understand and explain the roles of mothers in their children's musical lives, and to consider these roles in the framework of culturally responsive music education. This study differs from the positivist approach by giving voice to the mothers, and allowing them to discuss their roles in their children's musical lives. This study documents the practice of meaning making as it pertains to the youth orchestra environment.

Key Words: culture, string education, Asian role models, narrative analysis

Background of the Study

In the fall of 2005, I worked at the University of Florida String Project. I was teaching at the Petit Strings and Junior Youth Orchestra. The orchestra met every Sunday between 3:00 and 5:15. In the Petit String Orchestra, there were ten students: eight of them were Asian, one was African American, and one was white. The ages of the children were between 7 and 9. The parents always sat behind the orchestra, waiting eagerly to hear the first tunes from their children. During the rehearsals, I tried sometimes to focus on the parents' reactions to the overall experience. I tried to search for some specifics. For instance, Jane's mother, Sally, seemed to be very engaged in the experience. Sometimes she walked away from her chair, went behind Jane's chair, and listened closely to how she was playing.

After the rehearsal, I caught them in the hallway and talked to Jane first, and then to her mother. I congratulated Jane for her first time playing in the orchestra. She said she really enjoyed being there. I asked her when, where, and why she began studying violin. Her mother said Jane studied violin for 3 months in Korea and two months in Gainesville. Jane said she chose to play the violin because she wanted her parents to be proud of her. Her mother also told me that when she watched Jane or her son John playing in a concert, she always felt very proud.

Jane said that her brother influenced her because he also plays violin. She was taking a private lesson once a week, and she practiced every day. When I asked her if she had any problem with practicing, she said, "my mom always asks me to practice." Jane asked me to leave because she wanted to play with the other kids, and I said yes. Then I walked away and struggled with some questions that I wanted to investigate further: (1) Why are there many Asian students playing in the orchestra? (2) What is the role of mothers in their children's musical lives? (3) How do mothers perceive and describe their relationships with their children as it is influenced over time by strings practice and performance?

Literature Review

For the last three decades, Asian children and youth have been known as a good “minority model” in classrooms. Scholars have explained the educational success among Asian American students with the role of their culture and how their culture shaped parenting behaviors and practices. Asian-American unique home environments and educational activities pass on the cultural traditional values from parents to children and at the same time help children to excel and to be resilient (Peng & Wright, 1994). In most research and academic discourse, these children are described as hardworking and competitive students who excel in math, science, and arts (Lee, 1996; Kao & Thompson, 1995). This phenomenon was often cited as the “Asian effect” (Kao, 1995). Sun (2011) states that although a large body of research on human intelligence has concluded that the observed racial differences in children’s IQ scores are due to “environmental factors,” the role of genetic factors in explaining such differences has never been completely ruled out.

Advocates of a parental resource model attribute the educational success among Asian American students to their advantages in various parental resources. It remains to be investigated whether such advantages in family resources are also responsible for the potential cognitive (and/or artistic and musical) advantages among Asian American children (Sun, 2011). Schneider and Lee (1996) stress that Asian American students have different home environments than their Western counterparts. Their parents are more supportive of learning and provide them with greater learning opportunities, assistance, and pressure for learning. Lin (2008) writes in an article published in *Philadelphia Inquirer* (cited in Huang, 2011) that fifty million children in China study the violin and that “Chinese parents urge their children to excel at instrumental music with the same ferocity that American parents push theirs to perform well in soccer or Little League” (p. 162). Most research recognized the importance of parental involvement and guidance in the development of their children musical (or other

academic) behavior (Moore, Burland & Davidson, 2003; McPherson & Davidson, 2002; McPherson, 2009). When children have supportive, caring and capable parents, building and developing musical skills are not difficult.

McPherson (2009) points out that “in many areas of learning, including music, there has been much discussion on the tendency of Asian descendent children to outperform their American Caucasian peers. To examine this relationship, a number of studies have focused on the similarities and differences between the practices of Asian and American parents” (p. 103). For instance, as stated by Lee (1996) Asian parents “teach and motivate their children to work hard in school in order to uphold the family honor, and most Asian children work hard to please their parents and to avoid the shame and guilt associated with failure” (p. 53). Zhang and Carrasquillo (1995) also assert that Asian students (especially Chinese students) work very hard to meet their parents’ demands and expectations for doing well academically. According to Schneider and Lee’s (1990) study, East Asian parents are more willing than other ethnic groups to sacrifice for their children’s education. They often work long hours to save money to send their children to college.

Research has also demonstrated that academic achievement of students in East-Asia attributed to Confucianism (Hue, 2008; Huang, 2011). According to Confucianism, every individual inherits “natural tendencies” from birth. “This gave them the potential to become complete persons if they put effort into achieving this” (Hue, 2008, p. 307). Hue writes,

In Confucianism, education was intended not only to acquire knowledge, but to help students explore their instinctive potentials and transform their natural tendencies through various helping strategies, which were depicted as ‘the way.’ It was assumed that ‘the natural tendencies’ of students could be improved and transformed through ‘education.’ (p. 307)

Huang (2011) writes that music education has been valued in East Asia as a way of harmonizing human beings into well-ordered Confucian Society. In Huang's article, Confucius is quoted as saying:

Music produces pleasure which human nature cannot be without. That pleasure must arise from the modulation of the sounds, and have its embodiment in the movements of the body—such is the rule of humanity. These modulations and movements are the changes required by nature, and they are found complete in music. (p. 167)

As Lee (1996) cited from Suzuki (1977), there are several cultural and historical explanations for Asian American educational success. According to Suzuki, “early Asian American immigrants, excluded from labor unions and forced into self-employment, pushed their children toward education in the hopes that they would have better lives” (ibid., p. 54). Bourdieu argues that, beyond economic factors, “cultural habits and [...] dispositions inherited from the family are fundamentally important to school success” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 14). Bourdieu (1977) points out that parents can make cultural investments by teaching their children the right kinds of cultural values and norms that the current school system (and dominant culture) favors and rewards. Throughout my interview experience, I observed one particular feature among my participants (Asian mothers): they often linked playing an instrument and studying music with the activities of high and privileged social classes. In their view, building cultural capital is a tool for access for further academic improvement (for example, networking and access to good universities with the help of art scholarships) and social mobility. According to Huang (2011), Western classical music is still perceived as a tool for personal or business advancement for many ambitious Chinese.

Individuals can be mapped in various fields in social life (Bourdieu, 1986). These fields are the places where they perform various actions consciously or unconsciously. In social life, their resources dictate their locations and impact how and what kinds of cultural capital they acquire. Bourdieu (1986) suggests that these resources take the form of wealth, privilege, and cultural and social capital. He also believes that the dominant groups control

these resources (Bourdieu, 1986; Harker, 1984; Johnson, 1993). Johnson (1993) comments on Bourdieu's important notion of "cultural capital" as "a form of knowledge, an internalized code or cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artifacts" (p. 7). If knowledge is power and cultural/social capital as form of knowledge is controlled by the dominant group, then children who are socialized within the dominant cultural values and norms at school and/or in the family will most likely be more successful than children who are not socialized within this culture; this should force us to consider knowledge as power in cultural production.

The purpose of this study was to understand and explain the role of mothers as it relates to their children's musical experiences—as a way of measuring the potential for socially and culturally responsive music education. In this research, socially and culturally responsive teaching refers to reflective and critical practices that aim to build connections and dialogues among the subject to be taught, and the historical, cultural and social realities and identities of the learners and teachers. Valuable teaching in any field is dependent on bringing the larger cultural, social and historical contexts into discussion. As Pollock (2008) stated, "good educators (like good anthropologists) never rest satisfied with broad-stroke descriptions of how groups learn or feel or act toward schools or in schools. Instead, they seek to learn about specific practices and experiences that specific children and adults actually come to share, and they consider those experiences' consequences for children's school achievement" (p. 378).

Without falling into the "minority model" stereotype—because most low achievement Asian students are invisible and wait to be addressed—I tried to understand this phenomenon from a local perspective so that I could translate and connect it to a more global educational reality with the help of alternative research findings. East-Asian families and children might

have to be understood in specific and unique social and cultural contexts. For instance, in an article by Li (2003), we read the counternarratives of the Liu family. The research provides us an insight into the daily struggles faced by this minority Asian-Canadian family and their children's difficulties with schooling, which are seldom known to educators and policy makers. Li's (2003) research offers a critical understanding of the lives of underachieving minority children, especially those who are overlooked because of public stereotypes. Zhang and Carrasquillo (1995) demonstrate that some Asian-American students are still "facing adjustment problems of discrimination against Asian-American groups, as well as in economic situations" (p. 2).

After reviewing the literature on academic achievement and the music making experiences of Asian American children, I wanted to focus on this specific research question: What is the role of East Asian mothers in their children's musical lives?

Theoretical Orientation

While various theories guide research in music education, this study was guided by the theoretical perspective offered by social constructionism, according to which "[I]ndividuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment they live in" (Kim, 2001, para. 11). Social constructionism is based on constructionist epistemology. As Crotty (1998) points out, there is a tendency to use the terms "constructivism" and "constructionism" as synonyms; however, he continues, "it would appear useful to reserve the term 'constructivism' for epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on 'the meaning making activity of the individual mind' and to use 'constructionism' where the focus includes 'the collective generation (and transmission) of meaning'" (p.58). "Constructivism and social constructionism look at human knowledge or rationality as a byproduct of the *socius*...in both cases, the relationship precedes the individual" (Gergen & Wortham, 2001).

Social constructionism views the role of culture and context “in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding” (Kim, 2001). In other words, knowledge is produced in the social context and individuals actively and creatively produce and construct meaning and reality through interactions with each other.

According to social constructionism, the interaction is the unit of analysis, and individuals blend their roles, realities and meanings to create new roles, realities and meanings. They construct reality socially, and the process is fluid, changing, ongoing and dynamic. Gergen and Wortham (2001) state that all meaningful propositions about the real and the good have their origins in relationships. They also quote from Wittgenstein (1953): “There is no private language (a moment prior to relationship in which the individual formulates meaning); rather, language (and other actions) gain their intelligibility in their social use, as they are coordinated with the actions of others. Individuals in isolation do not thereby cease to be intelligible; however, this is to trace the intelligibility of their private actions to a preceding immersion in relationship” (p. 119). This study is framed by social constructionism because it involves learning through discourse and conversation, and takes into account the changeability of subjects’ attitudes and perceptions in the course of those conversations.

Research Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were four Asian mothers who lived in northern Florida. The participants were selected through criterion sampling and their willingness to participate. Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Patton, 2001). All of them were East Asian mothers whose children attended the Florida String Project. Two of the participants were originally from China (Mary and Susan),

and two were from Korea (Amy and Sally). For ethical concerns, I did not use participants' real names in the text.

All of the mothers were fairly well educated, and their husbands all worked in the fields of engineering or medicine. Mary and Susan were in their early forties and Amy and Sally were in their mid-thirties. Mary studied nursing and had two children; her son was 9 and her daughter was 13. Her son was learning the violin since he was 7. Her daughter was four and a half years old when she began studying the piano. When she turned 9, she started taking violin lessons. Susan was an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher at an elementary school. After taking care of her children for nine years, she decided to go back to work. She also had two children, a son and a daughter. Her daughter began studying the violin when she was 7. She is 15 now. Her son, who is 9, has been studying the cello for two years. The Korean mothers, as opposed to their Chinese counterparts had less experience in their children's musical lives simply because their children were younger. Amy and Sally were in their early thirties. Amy studied social work and had a son who was 8, who was studying the violin for one and half years. Sally who studied banking had two sons. Both of her sons were learning the violin for a year.

Data Collection

The data were gathered through interviews, all of which were conducted in the winter and spring of 2006. The researcher explained the purposes of this study to each participant in oral and written forms. Individual interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Each of the open-ended interviews for individual participants lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. The interview guide contained 15 questions. The questions addressed and helped to uncover the details of Asian children's musical lives, and how their mothers perceived and described their relationships with their children as it was influenced over time by string practice and

performance; the questions provided the groundwork for an analysis of the role of their mothers in children's music making experiences.

The starting point for the social constructionist interview did not begin with individual subjectivity but rather was centered on cultural relationships as they actively and constantly create language and understanding (Gubrium & Koro-Ljungberg, 2005). In a research case, even though the researcher and the participants come to the interview with their own culturally and socially created meanings, these meanings are not fixed and unchangeable; rather, they are active and changing. Because interaction is the main activity throughout the interview, this social context of the interview shapes the ways the researchers and participants make meaning and use language within the interview. For this particular research, the researcher was aware of this transformational and reflective aspect of the interviews. Even though I understood the obstacles of speaking in a second language, throughout the interviews I had some difficulties interpreting and understanding some of the participants' expressions. They often prefer to express their ideas using a third person or with circular reasoning patterns. After transcribing the interviews, to clarify the participants' responses I consulted an American professor who had experience in teaching English to East-Asian college students.

Narrative Structure as Theoretical Framework

For both the researcher and reader of narrative research, it is an exciting journey to enter into another's story. The knowledge a person gains about another person or a phenomenon is developed into further narratives when conveyed to others. When stories are told to others continuously, they become a form of social interaction. In this research, I explored (1) Asian mothers' strong interest and role in their children's musical lives, and (2) how they perceive and describe their relationships with their children as it is influenced over time by instrument practice and performance. I wanted to hear their stories based on their experiences. Their

stories will be represented and extended into further narratives when conveyed to others, and will be reproduced in various musical and social interactions.

Narrative approaches offer different ways of conceptualizing cultural/institutional and individual perspectives for developmental research, and address the challenge of integrating culture, person and change. Narrative approaches also help researchers understand complex and diverse life systems in the educating of young people and advance the possibilities of understanding individual development within sociohistorical context (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004).

Muller (1999) defines four dimensions of narrative, based on how the structure of narratives creates meaning: (1) Narratives are based on assumption that people like storytelling. They organize their significant experiences in terms of stories, and the telling of stories is a way for people to make meaning of events in their lives, (2) Narratives have structural properties of time and plot, and plot links events together, (3) Narrative has power to shape human conduct as well as to reflect an individual's life experience, (4) Narrative has contextual focus. Narratives do not arise by themselves; they are nested within a cultural context (pp. 221-238).

One general and common approach exists for studying narrative structures, and it is based on the linguistic features of the text. Labov (1972) describes the overall structure of the "fully-formed" narrative as following: (1) abstract is a summary of the story offered at the beginning; (2) orientation provides information by identifying time, place, persons and their activity or situation; (3) complication action is the sequence of events that changes the planned direction; (4) evaluation is the significance and meaning of the action; (5) result or resolution is about the outcome of events and describes what happened at the end; and (6) coda returns the speaker to the present moment (Labov, 1972). I analyzed each narrative based on Labov's approach to narrative structure. Before analyzing each of the narratives, I

did thematic analyses to decide which stories I would focus on and analyze. The stories were based on the research question: What is the role of Asian mothers in their children's musical lives?

Results

“Mothers’ Role as Decision Makers: The Early Bird Catches the Worm?”

Before presenting the data and citing examples from the participants, I would like to share some commonalities that I found among the participants' responses. Each of the mothers had very little musical experience. They made clear that they had limited musical opportunities in the past. If given greater opportunities, they would have studied music more seriously. For instance, Susan tried to play the guitar and sang in the school choir. Amy played the piano. Sally sang in the choir.

All of the mothers believed that children should be exposed to various experiences, like music, at an early age. For instance, Susan explained, “they are too young to make that decision.” Mary said, “when they were young, I want them to try everything because there is not much academic burden on them... This is why I want them to study music, soccer or gymnastics...” Amy also added, “but they are little bit older, like 7 or 8, we want them to stick with one thing such as playing one instrument and maybe doing one sport.” Sally said, “my first child was a girl. I always thought that a girl should learn music. I have a friend playing in an orchestra. He said the best time for a child to start music education is 4.” Mary said that “most Asian parents spend a lot of money, energy and time to push our children because we feel that our children should compete with other Asian children. We expect a lot from our children. Later children don't have passion. When they become a teenager, they want to be themselves. They stop and they hate it. We want them to be the top scientists or get into the best universities.”

Amy also struggled with the pressures of raising a musical-oriented child as stay-at-home-mom. She said, “I pushed my first child. I didn’t have so much experience then. She studied the piano and the violin. She won a piano competition in Canada. I worked too much. I helped her practicing, counting...After coming to America I adopted myself to American culture more. Americans want to have fun. I got this. We, most Asian parents, ‘you have to do it’ even the children suffer...I read Suzuki’s book about value of music and violin. My daughter began to study violin. Her teacher has a gentle approach. She plays in the Youth Orchestra now.” Susan said, “I don’t push them too hard but I do it consistently. Some Asian mothers are not only very strict in music education they are also very strict in academics and homework. In our culture, life is very competitive. I understand that a lot of parents have to be good. They have to be good in order to get into the good universities or good jobs. That happens a lot especially people from mainland China. They have to be really good in order to come to the US.”

“Mothers’ Role as Future Builders: Music as Social and Cultural Capital”

All of the mothers emphasized the connections between good education and prestige, and support educational environments that they believed produces better human beings. Susan was aware of her socio-economic status and she wanted to use this power to build a better education for her children. She knew some friends and they helped her contact some violin teachers. First, she took her kids and observed others’ private lessons, and tried to understand if children liked the experience or not. Susan also took her children to her friend who played the violin and made them listen to violin music. Amy said, “Because my husband is a professor and I’m educated, if you have this kind of status, you can give it to your children...We lived in Canada. When we were students there, we lived in the apartments for married students. So, in the whole building everybody had a piano. Most of us had kids. Every Korean and Chinese family in the building, even with little money, took private lessons

for our kids. The superintendent was surprised. She thought it was a strange thing...but we look at music differently.”

Mary believed that since ancient times Chinese culture especially has valued education (music education) because “music education makes people noble people.” She thought in the feudal system people were selected to get jobs based on their skills and educational background. If you’re good at calligraphy, poetry, chess or music you have good education and better chance to get a job. She said, “there is a Chinese saying. It means education is the most important thing...now it is the same in our generation.” Susan also believed that historically “in China, education is limited to rich people. If you don’t have good education, you are less valued.”

Susan had a very clear rationale as to why she never let her children give up studying music. Even though she stated that music was not a promising career in her country, Susan saw various benefits of playing an instrument. These benefits were mostly extra-musical. For example, Susan explained that playing an instrument helps her children to build habits of practice, discipline, stability, good eye and hand coordination, and memory. Furthermore, her children, Susan felt proud of themselves and confident because they had a unique talent. She thought her children had learned how to focus and this helped them to be successful in other academic areas.

Mary said, “I see that most children are high achievers. They have opportunities. They started studying music at a very early age. But Asian culture in general not many parents really support their kids to do music to become a musician. Because in China becoming a professional musician is not an advantage. Unless you want to do a teaching at a university...But I think studying music will give them a rich life in the future. They will be more sensitive and kind. They will have a unique personality.” Sally thinks, “Kids who play instruments, they meet with a lot of friends. They make a good circle. I know kids playing

violin or piano, they do things together. These things never make bad people. Kids playing music are always best kids, at the universities or anywhere.”

“Mothers’ Role as Home Teachers: Committed, Supporting and Providing”

Mary described her role as a committed and supportive mother. She had been involved in her children’s music education since 1997. She said “being talented is not enough. You have to work hard. If you play an instrument perfectly you have to improve yourself. I wanted my children perfect at their instruments. I worked with them. I sat besides them, I went to the lessons with them. I helped them with their assignments like theory or sight-reading. My daughter plays piano and violin. My son plays violin. I was pushy with my daughter. My son is more difficult to help now. Sometimes he doesn’t want to practice. I want him to follow everything what his teacher says like dynamic details, good posture, counting the beats. He refuses to use the metronome. I sit besides him. He doesn’t like it because I cannot stop myself and I say ‘This is wrong. That’s wrong...’”

Mary also stated that she monitored her children practice everyday. She said, “my second child Derek refuses me to remind him the practice time. He is more independent. He has more character. Sometimes he says, ‘No, mom. I don’t want you to sit beside me.’ My husband and I argue sometime. He doesn’t want me to open Derek’s case and rosin the bow. He says, ‘you do this too much. He will think, he works for you to please you. Let him practice for himself.’”

Amy, after having a child, chose to stay at home. Because she played piano in the past and valued music a lot she wanted her children to experience music too. She had friends with children studying music. She observed some lessons and decided to do the same thing for her daughter. She participated her daughter’s piano lessons. After the lessons she monitored her practices and helped her when she had difficulties. She says “music education should be about

spreading the seeds. You may spread many seeds but two of them might grow up. I want my children to learn good things, valuable things...”

Susan describes her role as a committed mother to her children, a supporter of education, and a provider. She stated, “I want to provide my children an opportunity to play an instrument.” Susan’s desire was to do it consistently and in a very disciplined way. She said, “In our culture, we are very disciplined because we were brought up that way. So, if we have to do something, we have to make sure doing it consistently not just for a year or two.” She was aware of the difficulty of dealing with very young children and, because of that, Susan strived for them to be consistent and disciplined at a very young age. Her evaluation was that if her children learn the violin consistently, they would become successful, and if they become successful, they would start to enjoy doing it. Susan described her other role as to remind her children when to practice and the objectives of practice. Although she reminded her children when and how to practice their instruments, Susan emphasized that she was not responsible for their learning, and children should feel that responsibility for themselves.

For Susan, becoming a home teacher of her children was not easy. Susan attended each private lesson for three years, and learned the basics of violin playing. When her daughter began to take private violin lessons at the age of 7, the teacher required Susan to stay throughout the lesson. During the lessons, Susan learned how to hold the bow and violin, and to play simple pieces. She also took notes related to particular songs so that she could mentor her daughter when she practiced at home. Susan stated that participating in her daughter’s lessons was very helpful for her, especially because it allowed her to empathize with the child. She said that playing violin was “really painful [...] It hurts your fingers and your neck.” Susan stated that she could do home teaching up to a certain point, but after a while the pieces and techniques became very complicated and she was not able to help her daughter. Over the

years her role switched from becoming a home teacher to a critical listener and audience for her children's performances.

The most common difficulty that Susan encountered in her role was to set up regular practice time, especially during the first two years. Susan states that even though her children had excuses not to practice, she made them practice every day for at least 20 minutes. Susan stated, "If you want to learn something, you have to practice in a right way and everyday." When it was difficult for her to keep the schedule straight, she sat down and discussed the rules with her children. Sometimes they had to negotiate the rules of practicing.

Discussion and Conclusion

Asian mothers' parenting goals and practices in their children's musical lives are shaped by their values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations that were constructed in their culture. In this study, all of these mothers are strongly committed to their children's musical lives. Even though none of them had any professional musical training, they showed great enthusiasm for their children to get experience in music. Mary, Susan, and Sally chose to stay at home and raise their children. They became home teachers. As an interesting phenomenon, although they don't have any professional musical training, they became musicians of a type (enough to mentor the kids at home) with their children.

All of the mothers are certainly aware of musical training and the challenges that go into practicing an instrument. As McPherson (2009) cited from West, Noden & Edge (1998) mothers especially play a critical role in children's academic achievement. According to McPherson (2009), mothers' parenting practices, such as being present at music lessons, attending orchestra rehearsals or helping with practice, have been shown to have a direct influence on children's educational (musical) achievement outcomes. In the current study, mothers conveyed similar parenting behaviors and practices in their children's musical development.

Willing to create social-musical networks also seems like an initial motivating factor for dynamic participation of the mothers in their children's musical lives. Their musical/social networks connect children and their families to each other and to the society. Mothers have friends who either play an instrument or have children taking private lessons. As McPherson (2009) explained, with certain types of parenting practices, parents realize the socialization goals they hold for their children, such as being successful at music, playing in an orchestra or enjoying musical participation. It is not surprising that all of the mothers have a strong desire for their children to be successful, and not necessarily only in music. They believe that through learning the violin, piano, or cello, their children will always have better lives than children who don't experience music in that way. A good, rewarding life is associated with being around "successful," "smart," and "good mannered" people.

Playing an instrument serves as a kind of cultural capital that can widen their children's opportunities. For instance, in the future the children can attend the best universities because of their artistic talents. They strongly sense the power of arts in society. For instance, Mary said that her neighbors' children take private lessons, and if her children wouldn't do so she would feel "lowered." For Mary, especially, being interested in the arts and playing an instrument implies belonging to higher social classes.

Mothers' socio-economic conditions, and how they perceive them, seem to be an important factor in that experience. They emphasize that, especially in Chinese society, very few people can afford private lessons. They are aware that they are capable of giving such opportunities to their children in the United States, and they do not hesitate to do so. In the case of the Chinese mothers, there is an emphasis on relationship music education and class issues. For them, music education is as a sign of success, intelligence, and belonging to higher classes. Mothers provide their children artistic opportunities so that they can enter a better life and achieve social mobility.

Interestingly, even though they strongly believe that their children gain benefits through studying music, they do not show a great desire for them to choose music as a professional career. It is a “commonly held view that music is a subject that has high intrinsic value but low attainment and utility value” or “in other words music is not important or useful as other academic school subjects in terms of future preparation for life and a career” (McPherson, 2009, p. 96). Mary’s justification is that her children are not talented enough, and she does not push her children enough. Susan implies that music is not a promising career, especially in their culture. As a researcher, my first reaction to their strong interest in music when their children are very young is that they want to give as many opportunities as possible to them so that they can gain countless benefits from them (responsibility, discipline, consistency, focus, self-confidence, and pride). They also imply that children are more controllable when they are young. It is not a coincidence that Mary and Susan were more pushy and disciplined with their first children than their second children, providing great evidence of how their attitudes and experiences changed over the years.

Researchers argued that Asian American immigrants bring from their home cultures many pro-education cultural values and beliefs which strongly emphasize hard work, self-improvement through continuous effort, parental obligation to monitor and help with learning, and educational achievement for the sake of the family. For instance, the concept of parental commitment to improving and promoting children’s education is highly consistent with cultural themes embedded in and implied by the doctrine of Confucius, which still remains influential in East Asian cultures (Sun, 2011). As has been demonstrated earlier, Asian mothers take a rigorous approach to skill acquisition, which involves vigorous parental reinforcement of a regular practice schedule. Huang (2011) writes, “the art of self-cultivation through the application of self-discipline is valued and practiced in many Asian families” (p. 171).

According to McPherson (2009), there is a large body of literature on parental influences on children's learning of academic subjects, but very few studies on music education. This study raises important questions and opens new avenues for the research community in the field of music education. It is important for music educators learn how to examine the social and cultural histories of our students that influence their identity and musical development. In every narrative, the narrator gives a message to the listener that reveals why the story is being told in the first place. Instead of taking the "minority model" idea for granted in our classrooms, we need to understand the more complex processes of development of Asian children.

The analysis of the interviews illuminates how these families approach studying music and playing an instrument. Their approaches show us their way of meaning making and understanding the value and importance of music education in a particular cultural point of view. These children face with two different cultures: the culture they acquire at home and the culture they acquire at school (or in a music classroom). Music teachers need to be sensitive to their students' cultural backgrounds, which may be different than those of dominant society. This study provides critical observations for music teachers who work with East Asian children.

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About the Author

Ebru Tuncer Boon (PhD) was born and raised in Istanbul, Turkey. In 2001, after receiving a scholarship from the Turkish Ministry of Education, she began her graduate studies at Ohio University in Athens. Boon completed her master's degree in music in 2003, and then moved to Gainesville to begin her doctoral studies in music education at the University of Florida. In 2004 and 2006, she received the Recognition of Achievement in Graduate Studies given by the Turkish Ministry of Education. Boon is currently Assistant Professor of Music at the Yeni Yuzyil University Performing Arts Department. In addition to her music education duties, Boon directs the university's Social Science Institute. Her research interests include critical pedagogy, philosophy and sociology in music education, qualitative research in music education, movement in culture, and body music and body percussion. As a practitioner, she also teaches violin and viola to children.

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