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**MUSICAL CULTURE OF A FAMILY AS A BASIS  
FOR THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDHOOD**

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**Abstract**

The topic under study is very important in the theory and practice of working with pre-school children. The paper summarizes the theoretical material on the topic under study and gives the results of the experiment. The material of the paper may be interesting for readers with children under the age of 3. To detect the level of general music awareness, the authors used a technique “Musical Program for Friends” by L.V. Shkolyar. The level of parents’ (aged 20–35) musical development was detected by means of an interview. The analysis of the survey has shown that 11% of parents have a low level of musical development, 60% – an intermediate level and 29% – a high level. These results enable to continue the topic under study in further elaborations. The paper analyses the content of the notion “learning environment”. It deals with the concept of childhood as an inherently valuable period in person’s life. It also defines the components of musical culture. The authors tried to show parents’ influence on infants’ education by means of arranging various musical activities: listening to music, singing folk songs, playing children’s musical instruments, music-making in a family circle. The material of the paper is intended for teachers, parents and all people interested in the development of musical culture in family.

**Keywords**

Learning environment – Childhood – Family – Musical activities

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## Introduction

Modern scientific pedagogical literature and official documents often contain the notion “learning environment”. This collocation entered pedagogical literature in 1990s<sup>1</sup>. The idea of learning environment became especially popular at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to a need for new ways to address a whole range of organizational and management issues. Besides, this term was introduced into the content of the Federal State Educational Standard of a new generation.

## Research background

Recently, the notion of learning environment is an actively discussed category of pedagogy both among scientists (S.K. Boldyreva, M.Ya. Vilenskiy and E.V. Meshcheryakova, V.I. Ginetsinskiy, V.I. Panov, V.I. Slobodchikov, I.G. Shendrik, etc.) and practical pedagogues. The analysis of the content of this notion in scientific research shows that authors have different views of this pedagogical category. The interpretation of this term is quite broad: from a territorial category to one of the levels of a social environment (together with economic, political and cultural environment) to the synonym of the terms “educational environment” and “system of education”. Besides, the notion of learning environment is considered through the interaction between a child and an adult<sup>2</sup>.

The Russian pedagogy mostly views learning environment as a place, a point and a process of a contact between an individual and environment, when the functions of generation, transmission and assimilation of knowledge are performed. Most pedagogical studies define learning environment as a constituent of environment focused on education, training and development of a personality during the interaction between an individual and an environment.

The structure of the notion “musical culture” is quite diverse. It consists of many components with meaningful content varying in the degree of importance. The objective is to find the components to reflect the most significant aspects of musical culture and the dynamics of its development. The components should be generalized. They should express meaningfully the most essential things in musical culture. They should be general components in relation to the specific ones (i.e., special knowledge), and define the strategy of working towards the development of musical culture and identification of the level of its development. The research into the comprehension of the structure enables to reveal several components in musical culture: 1) musical experience (a level of general knowledge of music, musical preferences, musical horizons, interest in music, motivation for resorting to music, skills of music-making); 2) musical competence (on the one hand, certain amount of knowledge and skills; on the other hand, spiritual comprehension of musical art and development of special qualities of its perception); 3) creativity expressed in the ability to reproduce, interpret and feel music.

Nowadays, many parents assume that musical potentials develop on their own accord. They believe that everything they should do is not interfere and give freedom to their

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<sup>1</sup> I. D. Frumin & B. D. Elkonin, “Learning environment as a space of development”. *Voprosy Psikhologii*, num 1, (1993): 24-30.

<sup>2</sup> O. B. Shirokikh, *Childhood as a value and values of childhood in a changing world. Innovative activity in pre-school education. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Applied Research Conference (Yaroslavl-Moscow, 2016).*

children. However, psychologists argue that if we do not develop our potentials, they will fade. We often hear from parents that in early childhood, their children liked music very much, were emotional in responding to it, sang and danced. However, when they grew older, it all disappeared without a trace. This is not true, since nothing disappears without a trace in nature. As a rule, potentials should be developed in some activities. They become abilities only in joint activities with adults, in communication with them.

The level of musical culture development is indicative of the degree of child's acquisition with music. Home musical environment, which develops and educates a child, has a great influence on him.

Each family has its own level of musical culture. Thus, some families like both folk and classic music. They often listen to it, attend concerts and musical performances, and make home concerts. Some of the adults even play musical instruments. Parents understand that music gives much joy and spiritual satisfaction to their children. Therefore, they try to develop the abilities of their children as well as their own abilities. In such families, children and parents live in the favorable atmosphere of music. They get diverse valuable impressions that enable them to develop their musical abilities. In other families, parents pay little attention to the musical education of their children, since they do not see any practical use in it. They treat music as an entertainment. In such families, they usually listen to modern "light" music, since parents are indifferent to "serious" music.

## Methods

To determine the level of development of musical culture in a family, a pedagogical study was conducted. During the interview, we asked parents (aged 20-35) to answer the following questions and discovered the situation in each family: 1. Do you listen to music with children? 2. Do you share impressions of the music you have listened to? 3. Do you sing with children? 4. Do you have any children's musical instruments at home? 5. Do you play any musical instrument? 6. Do you like classic music? 7. What is required for your child to achieve a certain level of musical culture? <sup>3</sup>.

## Results

The survey of parents with these questions and the results of the technique "Musical Program for Friends" by L.V. Shkolyar showed that from 9 to 11 % of parents gave positive answers. This is indicative of a low musical level of parents. Besides, parents are ignorant of the influence of music on the development of a child's musical culture and general development.

Moreover, we found that families have different expectations. Some parents rely on kindergarten and school in the development of musical abilities and culture. Others are going to reveal the child's creative potential by participation in performances during fests, competitions and festivals for self-actualization of both parents and children. Some parents just expect entertainment for a child, a kind of game and a useful task.

Most parents ignore the role of music in a family. We can also assume that joint perception of music, listening to music, music-making, and the discussion of its advantages

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<sup>3</sup> L. V. Shkolyar; V. A. Shkolyar, & E. D. Kritskaya, Musical education at school. Tutorial for the students of Musical Faculty of pedagogical universities and colleges (Moscow: Akademiya, 2001).

enable to reduce conflicts between adults and children and to understand each other. Besides, they develop respect for the opinions of each other.

A famous researcher of folklore G.M. Naumenko wrote: “A socially isolated child suffers a retardation of intellectual development. He/she acquires the skills and language of a person who educates him/her and communicates with him/her. The sound information absorbed in infancy will be the basic poetic and musical language in future conscious speech- and music-making. It becomes clear why children who were brought up with lullabies and entertained with humorous sayings, fairy tales and nursery rhymes are the most creative children with developed musical thinking, as shown by many evidence...”<sup>4</sup>.

It is acknowledged all over the world that the best conditions for development and education of infants, including musical development, are created in a family. Most children under the age of 3 do not attend pre-school establishments. Therefore, the parents who take the responsibilities of a teacher should understand that this period is especially important for a child’s further development. At this age, the bases are laid that enable to develop musical abilities in children, to acquaint them with music and to develop a positive attitude to it.

Considering the concept of childhood, we may state that L.S. Vygotsky’s cultural and historical theory of the establishment of child’s psyche, further developed by D.B. Elkonin, offers the most general philosophic context for penetration into this phenomenon, compared to any other pedagogical concept of childhood from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

L.S. Vygotsky and D.B. Elkonin assume that childhood is a special social phenomenon given to a person to master the cultural (human) ways to satisfy the needs in the life activity. The needs are based on inherent biological (natural) forms of psyche (unconditioned reflexes, instincts, and organic needs). They become enriched by social and spiritual constituents and enable to function in both natural and cultural environment. D.B. Elkonin assumes that childhood emerges when a child cannot be immediately involved into the system of social reproduction, since he/she cannot master the sophisticated instruments of labor. It is the more complicated sociocultural context and more sophisticated instruments of labor, requiring special training and a higher level of intelligence, that prolong the period of Childhood<sup>5</sup>.

Considering childhood from the perspective of its modern interpretations (Sh.A. Amonashvili, M.S. Kagan, I.S. Kon, M.V. Osorina, V.I. Slobodchikov, D.I. Feldstein, etc.), we can highlight the general features of this life period: Childhood exists in the adults’ representations of children as adults at the beginning of their life (childhood exists only in adults’ representations); Childhood is comprehended as an integral phenomenon (childhood is not a multitude of children); Childhood has inherent value (its mental and spiritual world cannot be reduced to a form of an underdeveloped adult psyche; children experience spiritual freedom, true perception and feeling of the world); active forces in child’s nature that strive for self-development; a special subculture in modern Childhood created by adults and children especially for children; continuation of childhood in the life of every adult<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> G. M. Naumenko, Folk musical art (Moscow, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> E. V. Pushkova, Education and development of pre-school children in the context of modern concepts of childhood. Retrieved 18.04.2016 from: <http://nsportal.ru/detskiy-sad/raznoe/2012/04/14/filosofiya-detstva>

<sup>6</sup> M. S. Kagan, Music in the world of art (St. Petersburg, 1996).

Sh. A., Amonashvili, Thoughts about humanistic pedagogics (Moscow, 1995) .

Despite social and cultural changes, modern pre-school and junior school children, just like their parents used to, love their mothers, birthdays, New Year's Day, sweets, ice-cream and visiting friends. They are still afraid of darkness, spiders and snakes. They are afraid of being left alone (being lost), of loud sounds and height. The biological nature of a human remained almost unchanged; a child did not change either. This biological nature determines the basic values of Childhood that are still associated with a significant and loving adult (mother), family, secure existence, games, child subculture, strive for adulthood and clear value orientations and rules of a game<sup>7</sup>.

However, there are new aspects in modern childhood, which are associated with changes in a social and cultural situation. In a climate of globalization, information society, child's legal security, return (sometimes excessive) to naturalness and freedom in education, children often have to make an independent choice. They should be ready for powerful information flow that does not come from thoroughly selected books or teacher's explanations. Book culture is substituted for the culture of TV, tablets, telephones, and other gadgets. They create the fantasy ruled by non-terrestrial laws of physics, and this fantasy resembles reality. Childhood was always distinguished by fabulous and fantastic thinking; this wonderful world in action, colors, sounds and sometimes even odors is so suitable for child's age and absorbing that sometimes a child does not want to return to reality. New heroes appear on multimedia screens. These are not teachers or writers, scholars or doctors, astronauts or farmers, but show business stars, successful criminals and mysterious monsters from other planets. Therefore, in addition to the well-known fears, modern children are afraid of aliens, monsters, and angry birds. They are afraid of them and... love them. Growing from pre-school and junior school age, children risk to be dragged into social networks. At first, adults are relieved to slip this new toy to them, but then they began to drag them out of the virtual reality.

Today, a whole industry works, a serious business earns millions on the specific features of children's psychology, children's images in the advertisement of goods, child shows and computer games. Adults (teachers and parents) should understand clearly that they can lose the real Childhood of children in the depths of a computer world. However, it does not mean that we should decelerate social development and return to the patriarchal past. Gadgets are useful, making the perception of complex phenomena easier and creating new technological reality for the humanity. It means that the advanced parents should know the psychology and manifestations of a child nature. Now, we should bear in mind that children became more information-oriented. However, they are still children and they need a reasonable adult who would become an assistant and a non-indifferent companion in their experiences of the brightest part of human life – childhood<sup>8</sup>.

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V. I. Slobodchikov, Learning environment: achieving goals of education in the cultural space. New values of education: cultural models of schools, Issue 7 (Moscow, 1997) y D. I. Feldstein, Social development in the space and time of childhood (Moscow: Moscow Psychological and Social Institute, Flint, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> O. B. Shirokikh, Childhood as a value and values of childhood in a changing world. Innovative activity in pre-school education. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Applied Research Conference (Yaroslavl-Moscow, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> O. B. Shirokikh, Childhood as a value and values of childhood in a changing world. Innovative activity in pre-school education. Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> International Applied Research Conference (Yaroslavl-Moscow, 2016).

## Discussion

The world of childhood is complicated. This is the world of communication between a child and other people, the world of social relationships. How does a child perceive other people and oneself? How does he/she perceive good and evil? How does his/her personality appear and develop? When and how does he/she become independent? This is the world of objects, the world of cognition. Why are wizards and fairies expelled from the real world? How should we distinguish between the objective, external world and our own subjective internal world? How should we resolve the eternal human challenges: the problems of truth and existence? What signs should we use to distinguish between fantasy and reality?

However, there are things that remain unchanged in a rapidly changing world. Among them is the recognition of childhood as the crucial phenomenon in the life of human community.

Today, many specialists are likely to think that childhood is a special world that affects the world of adults. It is at this period that the basic features of each person are laid and the features of the future are largely developed, since every individual is an essential part of the present and the past<sup>9</sup>.

The individuality of every person is established in childhood, and environment influences this process greatly.

Family is the first learning environment that surrounds a child and influences him/her. It affects a child by everything: lifestyle, each pronounced word, expressed thought, or intonation. The attitude to the environment (examples, deeds, actions, hobbies) has even greater impact.

The biographies of many musicians confirm that family has a positive influence on the development of child's interest in music and his/her creative abilities. M.I. Glinka, A.S. Dargomyzhsky, P.I. Tchaikovsky, D.D. Shostakovich and others associate their first impressions with music. They note that home musical evenings, full of love and respect to art, stimulated their interest in music and developed devotion to it.

Mother's lullabies, nursery rhymes, counting rhymes, and tongue-twisters arouse children's interest and bring them joy. They create a good mood, remove the feelings of fear, disturbance, and anxiety and, therefore, provide emotional and mental well-being. Reproducing sounds, adjusting one's voice to the mother's, a child develops the ability of an auditory control. A child should learn to correctly intonate a melody before he/she learns the song lyrics. Unfortunately, it should be noted that in many families a modern young mother's singing is replaced by multimedia. All issues associated with the research of a human being always relate to culture. Culture comes to the foreground in the analysis of a human world and reality, in the analysis of people's social life, in a person's specific being and self-awareness. It is under these conditions and in this sphere that a person can disclose all potentials.

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<sup>9</sup> V. Zenkovskiy, *Psychology of childhood* (Yekaterinburg, 1995).

Culture is a “specific human way of being” (M.S. Kagan). It determines the direction and content of people’s activities, their attitude to themselves and the world around<sup>10</sup>. Culture is a unique phenomenon, because it is a space of realization of the person’s potentials, a sphere of free self-expression<sup>11</sup>.

Music affects the general development of a child: it develops his/her emotional sphere, creates a sensibility to beauty in art and life, and provokes immediate emotions that determine the child’s actions. Besides, it develops the child’s intellect. Therefore, music is an indispensable means of education in a family.

The Federal State Educational Standard for Pre-School Education emphasizes the priority of child’s education in a family and need for enhancing the parents’ pedagogical culture in the sphere of child’s up-bringing and education<sup>12</sup>.

Besides, up-bringing is an essential part of a modern educational system. The last revision of The Law “On Education” of the Russian Federation (2015) defines up-bringing as an “activity aimed at developing a personality, creating conditions for a learner’s personal identification and socialization based on social, cultural, spiritual and moral values as well as rules and norms of behavior adopted in the society in the interests of a person, family, society and state”<sup>13</sup>.

Long-term reforms in the Russian society had a significant impact on the destinies of the Russian people. They influenced the development of the personality of young people, who enter a new life as well as their tastes, views, and wishes including the development of musical culture. It is difficult to convince modern children to be serious about folk and classic music, since it is used by modern market for commercial purposes and in advertising videos, and sounds distorted in mobile phones. Children and adults who listen to intoxicating rap or stunning metal in their earphones perceive the world of music through battering and annoying sounds, and, thereby, expose themselves to the danger of nervous disorders. A healthy person can “consume” this music (rock and pop music) for some time. However, if he or she intends to do it constantly and without intervals, there is a risk of mental or physical harm.

Musical culture as a part of general spiritual culture of a person develops in a family since childhood. Child’s acquaintance with folk songs, games and circle dances is one of the factors that influence the establishment of culture<sup>14</sup>. Children’s tastes are only emerging in childhood. Therefore, a child should listen to folk songs, sing them and play and dance to this kind of music. He/she should learn its melodic intonations and rhythmic peculiarities in order to make them close and dear.

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<sup>10</sup> A. G. Gogoberidze & V. A. Dergunskaya, Theory and methods of musical education of pre-school children. A tutorial for university students (Moscow: Akademiya, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> M. Clayton; T. Herbert & R. Middleton, (Eds.), The Cultural Study of Music (a critical introduction) (New York & London: Rutledge, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Federal State Educational Standard for Pre-School Education (Moscow: Centre for Pedagogical Education, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> Federal Law “On the Education in the Russian Federation” No 273-Φ3. Retrieved 18.04.2016 from: <http://base.garant.ru/70291362/>

<sup>14</sup> A. A. Belik, Culture Studies. Anthropological theories of cultures (Moscow: Russian State Humanitarian University, 1999).

H. Neuhaus, a pedagogue and a pianist, assumes that “good parents are more important than good pedagogues”<sup>15</sup>; in other words, the best pedagogues will be powerless if parents are indifferent to music. It is father or mother that should “infect” the child with love to music, show interest in his/her musical activities and arrange these activities correctly<sup>16</sup>. When children grow up and become parents, they will be able to create a warm atmosphere of love to arts and creativity in their own families and to continue the home musical traditions.

In our opinion, parents can create musical and learning environment of childhood, i.e., accustom children to listening to music, singing, and dancing; give them elementary lessons of playing musical instruments: a chromatic metallophone, a xylophone, a harp, a horn, a recorder flute, a kuray (a Bashkir reed pipe), not to speak of a piano, an accordion, a guitar, a synthesizer, etc. Many parents used to study at children’s music schools and received elementary musical education. However, they lost the interest in playing musical instruments over time. To some extent, we see here the mistakes of music school teachers, who failed to teach children to love musical art. Remember when people read books aloud, sang songs, made music, and played intellectual games in a family circle. A person accustomed to such kind of recreation knew quite well what to do in his or her free time<sup>17</sup>.

To avoid a consumer attitude to art and one-sided development of musical preferences, a family should be active in cultivating the children’s interest in artistically valuable music. This objective, which is rather new and difficult for modern parents, requires a certain pedagogical training and, possibly, musical retraining of them. As noted by A.S. Makarenko, parents should learn many things themselves to teach children and educate them properly.

Music develops child’s intelligence as well. Apart from varied kinds of cognitive information, conversation about music includes description of emotional and imagery content. The children’s vocabulary is enriched by the expressions for feelings rendered by music. The ability to represent and reproduce the height of sounds in a melody implies intellectual operations: comparison, analysis, juxtaposition, and memorization, which affects musical and general development of a child.

The basic pedagogical methods (visual, verbal and practical) can also be applied for musical education in a family. The successful application of these methods depends on the general and musical level of the adults, their pedagogical knowledge, abilities, patience and desire to stimulate the children’s interest. When teaching music to a child, the parents pursue various goals and solve various tasks. The main tasks are:

- to enrich the child’s spiritual world by musical impressions, to provoke interest in the traditions of one’s native peoples;
- to develop musical and creative abilities through various musical activities (perceiving, performing, or composing music);

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<sup>15</sup> E. R. Azeeva, “Together, we are united family: from ensemble performance to family music-making”, *Uchitel Muzyki*, num 1 (2010): 32-50.

<sup>16</sup> Sh. A. Amonashvili, *Thoughts about humanistic pedagogics* (Moscow, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> N. A. Vagina, “Functions of music in the development of infants”. *Iskusstvo i Obrazovanie*, num 3, (2012): 79–90 y T. I. Gornaya & R. Kh. Gimaev, “Muzitsirovaniye – odna iz form semeinogo dosuga”, *Iskusstvo i Obrazovanie*, num 8 Vol: 296 (2009)

- to contribute to the general education of children by means of music<sup>18</sup>.

Pre-school children have little experience of the human feelings' representation in real life. Music, which transmits the whole range of feelings and their shades, can enlarge such representation. Apart from the moral aspect, musical education is very important for the development of aesthetic feelings in children: when a child becomes familiar with the musical heritage, he/she learns the etalons of beauty and masters a valuable cultural experience of generations<sup>19</sup>.

In a family, music can be used both in the form of classes with children and in more free forms – an entertainment, a “musical hour”, and independent music-making. It can also be a background for another activity. An adult plays an active role in the activities with children. Making home video and audio collections, using the Internet, radio and TV programs ('Kultura' TV channel), arranging home musical entertainment evenings, etc. – all this creates family musical interests<sup>20</sup>. Besides, music can be used for morning exercises. In this case, light dancing and rhythmic melodies should be chosen.

Participation of parents and children in a joint creative process, revival and development of music-making traditions, shared interest in creativity always gives an impetus to the development of all family members, as well as many other possibilities.

Life is a continuous process of creativity, which requires self-improvement of a person. Knowledge, abilities and skills are obligatory for performing a creative act. However, the essence of creativity is not the formal accumulation of knowledge and skills. It is rather using them as a means to discover new ways, regularities and modes of action, which lead to the results unknown before.

A creative person is distinguished by broad interests, high emotional sensitivity, and a desire to follow one's own path without violating the ethical norms<sup>21</sup>.

Pre-school age is especially important for further mastering of musical culture. If the musical and aesthetic consciousness is developed through musical activity, it will affect the person's further development and general spiritual establishment. While promoting the best examples of classical, folk and modern music and developing the traditions of home music-making, it is necessary to unite the subjects of a learning environment in developing the musical culture of adults and children.

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<sup>20</sup> T. I. Gornaya & R. Kh. Gimaev, “Muzitsirovaniye – odna iz form semeinogo dosuga”, *Iskusstvo i Obrazovanie*, num 8, Vol: 296 (2009)

<sup>21</sup> L. S. Vygotsky, *Psychology of art* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1986).



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