

Authors' Notes: The Neuroscience of Teaching Good Behavior Through Musikgarten

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Please Teach my Child Patience!

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"Just a minute! Hold on a second! Wait your turn! Not yet!"

Parents hear themselves saying these words over and over to their child throughout the day...

...sometimes in a conversational tone of voice

...sometimes chanted quietly as they try to calm an angry child chomping at the bit for his turn

...sometimes yelled in exasperation, having already explained repeatedly, "I am not quite ready."

Why is it so important to learn to wait?

- For reasons of safety, such as waiting before crossing a street
- For social reasons, such as waiting to take your turn
- For emotional well-being, such as developing patience when dealing with others

According to neuroscience educator, Dr. Dee J. Coulter,
"Waiting is a skill that is amazingly powerful!"

Dr. Coulter goes on to say:

The ability to wait is what researchers call the ability to delay gratification. They say that it is the single most important requirement for developing impulse control, for resisting addictive behavior, for handling the confusion of new learning, and for setting goals and working toward meeting them.

We all know that a person learns best when s/he is comfortable. And yet, when we utter the above phrases, it is usually because the children need a reminder - they are pushing ahead of someone else, they are rushing toward the street, or they may be repeating the same question over and over with increased urgency each time. These would hardly be described as comfortable situations! Musikgarten class is the ideal comfortable place to work on this vital life-skill.

So how can we effectively teach children to wait and then allow them time to practice this new-found skill?

As stated above, Dr. Coulter is a neuroscience educator - not a musician. But she recognizes the importance of music because of the benefits it affords the mind. She is particularly drawn to Musikgarten because of the rich heritage of the repertoire and because of the teaching model afforded to Musikgarten teachers in their training workshops.

In talking about Family Music for Babies and Toddlers Dr. Coulter says:

Even with the youngest infant in Family Music for Babies, the songs and movement activities embed small wait times. A song may end with a "wheee" accompanied by a dipping motion that the child learns to anticipate with delight. Even creating a tiny moment of suspense before beginning a favorite song makes waiting fun.

Creating an environment and setting up situations where waiting is fun is crucial if we want the children to embrace this essential skill. We do this in our Toddler Class with activities such as *Jack in the Box*, where the children joyfully wait for "Jack" to jump up with the ringing of the cymbal, or when they anticipate hearing their name in the weekly "hello" song or songs like *Green Green*. And as with all skills, children need opportunities to practice this, if we expect them to gain mastery. Learning to **enjoy** waiting is just the first step. And waiting with anticipation for your mom or dad to roll you back on their legs and then gather you into a hug on *Humpty Dumpty* is a far cry from next year's challenge to wait your turn to join the parade in *Walk Along John* when you hear your name being sung - and still later when functioning as part of a musical ensemble.

As your child progresses through the Musikgarten curricula, moving into a *Cycle of Seasons* class when they complete the toddler program, s/he will be treated to many wonderful songs and musical games that have cues built right into them. In Dr. Coulter's words, "*Signals to speed up, to slow down, and to stop - the hardest of all once the child is already in motion - are embedded right in the song repertoire. And since Cycle of Seasons corresponds to the age when learning motor control is so important, children naturally love the songs and the corresponding activities!*"

How will mastering this skill affect my child as s/he grows up?

- Learning to wait is what will give children the patience to persevere with a school assignment until it has been completed.
- It will help the young working adult see a project through to completion.
- It will help both the child and adult develop persistence when confronted with a particularly difficult task.

Observing young children as they gain control of their bodies is truly wondrous! But so often, in an attempt to allow our children to experience everything, we tend to move them from one activity to another without giving them the opportunity to refine newly-acquired skills and experience mastery.

- Being able to walk is a wonderful development, but it requires being able to stop on cue!
- Being an independent worker is an admirable trait, but sometimes richer results are achieved through working with others.

For opportunities to develop these skills and traits nothing equals what will be introduced in *A Cycle of Seasons*, the next step of the Musikgarten sequence for 3- and 4-year olds. Because children naturally love moving to music, playing instruments, and singing games, they joyfully engage in these activities which play a vital role in preparing children for life! Developing a vocabulary of movements through each of these delightful activities, your children will not only gain control of their bodies, but of their behavior as well!

A partial bibliography

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