

The role of the **parents in CML**

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Thesis of habilitation



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Introduction

In my thesis I'm approaching the topic of the parents' role in CML, since they have a crucial role in the musical development of their children and especially in the CML method, where children often start at a very young age and are therefore still very dependent on their parents.

First of all we need to have a look at the different reasons why a parent could choose music, and more concretely CML, as a path of education for his child. This is very important to make clear in order to understand the big efforts that a parent makes to offer his child this musical path and to accompany him through it.

Secondly we are going to explain the basic psychological needs of children, since only understanding these, the parents are going to be able to support them and to foster them correctly. Having these into account we are going to have a look into the parental influences on their children's development, distinguishing between parenting practices and parenting styles and constructive and destructive communication, applying all this to CML.

After this we are going to discuss the role of the parents at the lessons as well as at home, how are they supposed to behave and what is expected of them in order to support their child optimally. Finally we are exposing different kind of motivations, motivation theories and some rewarding systems in order to increase and improve the practice at home.

Why music?

Before having a look into the role of the parents in the musical development of their children we should have a look in the possible reasons why parents would decide to get their children enrolled in a music-program. There certainly are many reasons for music to be considered a fantastic discipline to foster different aspects of children's development and why a parent would choose music as a path to educate his children. Here are some of the skills that can be improved through a good music education:

- **Fine motor skills and coordination:** through different choreographies, through rhythm activities and through the playing of different percussion instruments fine motor skills as well as coordination skills are considerably developed, especially the ear-hand coordination, the ear-eye coordination and the eye-hand coordination.
- **Memory recall:** every week children are exposed to new tunes, lyrics and choreographies, which are of course learned by ear. Through listening and repetition they very soon learn them by heart, which supports the development of their memory recall.
- **Language development:** most of the songs learnt at the music lessons have a lyrics, some of them even quite complicated ones. This is a great tool for the kids to learn new vocabulary and to integrate it on a daily basis. It is also very helpful as a complement for speech therapy, since singing in a group can help to correct pronunciation or linguistic weaknesses.¹

¹ Brandt, A. K. (2012). *Music and Early Language Acquisition*. Frontiers. Visited on the 14.09.2022, in

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2012.00327/full>

- **Neural activity growth:** the neuroscience has proved music to have very positive effects on our brain activity, since it is one of the very less activities that are able to stimulate both hemispheres of the brain. Through brain scans they could see that musicians' brains have bigger, better connected and more sensitive brains; that musicians have superior working memory, auditory skills and mental flexibility. It was also observed that their brains are more symmetrical and that areas of the brain responsible for motor control, auditory processing and spatial coordination larger. Also, they usually have a larger corpus callosum, which is the band of nerve fibres that transfers information between the two hemispheres of the brain.²

- **Discipline and time management:** Kids in music programs will learn that not everything they do will be perfect on the first try, but that as they practice and put in effort, they'll see themselves improve. This is a great way to shape discipline, a very important and useful skill for life. This automatically leads to a good management of time, since a scheduling of the time is of high importance to achieve all goals.

- **Resilience, Frustration tolerance, patience:** very often when learning a new song or later a new piece on the instrument children are faced with technical difficulties. Feelings like frustration or anger come up very often, but they learn to control these feelings and to cope patiently and with a greater frustration tolerance with these problems, since they have learned that with time, patience and discipline they are going to be able to achieve anything. This is a very good skill for music, but of course also for life in general. Through an early music education children learn to cope with these feelings at a very young age.

² Alban, D. P. C. (2021, 18.07). *How Music Affects the Brain*. Be Brain Fit. Visited on the 16.09.2022,

<https://bebrainfit.com/music-brain/>

- **Focus and concentration:** nowadays we are used to multitask and make several things at the same time. But whenever we're engaged in a creative process, such as music-making, we're present in the moment and we put all our senses on it.
- **Self-confidence and self-esteem:** as said before when learning music you realise that there is nothing you cannot achieve if you work hard for it. This certainty gives a lot of strength and self-confidence in one owns capacity. Also the fact of creating something beautiful and performing the results of hard work on the stage is something that children are usually very proud of.
- **Way of expression:** very often music is able to express that what words can not. Especially little children often do not find the words to express what they are feeling and in this case music can be a 'gate' for their emotions and playing them allows their emotions to come through. This is a very effective way to learn about and explore feelings and then practice how to express and manage them. In fact, given the emotionally charged nature of music it's an incredibly effective way for everyone, not just children to express themselves and cope with challenging life circumstances.
- **Stress relief:** Music can be a great escape mechanism through which we can escape from our fears or concerns and just concentrate on ourselves and our emotions, which can be very stress relieving. Also making music stimulates the production of dopamine, a hormone that makes us feel good.
- **Teamwork and friendships:** attending to a music course can be a great opportunity to get into a new social frame of parents and children that have similar interests. Making music together can strengthen ties very intensively and reinforces teamwork skills, since kids can realize first-hand that working with a group and doing their part makes the best music.

Most of the parents are aware of some of these wonderful effects of learning music. Nevertheless, many of them think that just bringing their children to the music lessons will make the "magic" happen, without any further own commitment. But for a successful musical

development little children need their parents, and not just to pay the fees of the program or to drive them back and forth. They need their time, their support, their interest, their active implication. And this is what CML is about. CML supports the Suzuki triangle structure where child, parent and teacher play a crucial role in the musical education.

Psychological needs of children

Of course little children are not aware of the many qualities that learning music has on them. That is just the knowledge of their parents and it is also the decision of them, and not of the child itself, to get enrolled in a music program. But what does make an activity attractive in a long term to a child? Which general needs do they have to cover? In order to understand this we are going to have a look into the four general basic psychological needs of children, which are mainly to feel³:

- **Competent and autonomous:** in the early years the most important feedback children get comes normally from their parents, so that they can have an enormous influence on the self-concept of their children. In order to let their children feel competent and autonomous they should trust in their capacities and transmit them a feeling of self-confidence.
- **Related:** an intrinsic motivation is much more likely to happen if the child is related to their parents by a strong and loving bond, surrounded by a warm, caring and non-threatening environment.⁴
- **Purposeful:** lastly children need to find a purpose in the activity they are enrolled in and find it meaningful and valuable.

³ A.J. Elliot & C.S. Dweck, Handbook of competence and motivation (p. 259). New York: Guilford.

⁴ Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (2000). The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. Psychological Inquiry, 11, p. 231

If parents do take into account these four basic psychological necessities and try to support them it will be much more likely that their children have a general positive approach towards music.

CML is a method that supports all of these four necessities: the participation of the parent during the lessons and the practice time together at home is quality time that they spend together, which strengthens the bond parent-child considerably. Furthermore, the well-thought-out sequence of activities and songs allow the children to develop their skills step by step and successfully achieve the goals, which gives them a great feeling of being competent. Also, the constant revision of the older pieces increases even more this feeling and allow them to become with every time more and more autonomous.

Parental influences on children's achievements

In educational literature parenting is often separated in two different dimensions: parenting practices and parenting style. Parenting practices are specific behaviours that parents adopt to realize the socialization goals they hold for their child and these have been proven in many studies to have a direct influence on children's educational achievement outcomes.⁵

On the other hand, the parental style is the way parents communicate with their children and the emotional climate between them. The level of parental cognition and affect influence very strongly how attitudes and values are going to be transmitted to the children and to what extent parents are going to be able to create the necessary type of emotional climate that is required for an effective music learning.

In music, parental styles and practices help satisfy children's most basic psychological needs, which are, as we already explained, "to feel competent, to feel that they have some control over the choices to be made during the learning process, to feel a strong bond between their

⁵ Spera, C. (2005). A review of the relationship among parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement. *Educational Psychology Review*, 17(2), 128.

parents and their teachers within a non-threatening learning environment and to enjoy the success that comes from engaging meaningfully as a result of personally rewarding experiences”.⁶

Every parent has certain beliefs, values, expectations and aspirations when it comes to the education of their children. Some parents prefer fostering sports, others fostering music, others theatre, fine arts, handicraft... Choosing to get enrolled in a CML course is not the decision of the child, but it's absolutely a parenting practice based on the parent's wish to foster and to support his child's musical development.

In a CML frame the way parents accompany the whole process, the way to communicate with their children and the way to practice with them is the parental style. If they make use of a constructive or a destructive communication, if they practice with their children in a loving and patiently way or in a severe and a hectic way, if they give their children space and time or put them under pressure, if they believe in the capacities of their children or not... These are some of the factors that form the parental style in a family and it has a great influence in the self-esteem and the personal development of a child. CML promotes spending quality time with your child and also with other children and parents. It is an opportunity to grow musically and personally together and to exchange experiences with other families. It fosters, summing up, a very healthy and well-balanced parental style.

Parental role at the lessons and at home

As we explained already, especially at young ages the parental style and the parental beliefs influence the personality and the behaviour of their children very strongly. Usually children are a mirror of their parents: “it is unthinkable to go on with tenacity and faith when the child receives signals that are different, indifferent, or downright hostile on the part of people who make up a part of his life and in whom he has faith. Furthermore, we realize this is true also

⁶ McPherson, G.E., & Davidson, J.W. (2002). Musical practice: Mother and child interactions during the first year of learning an instrument. *Music Education Research*, 4(1), 141–143

in simple day to day activities. Washing one's hands before lunch, or brushing the teeth after, if required by only one of the surrounding adults will be justification for the child to take advantage at his pleasure. The established time for going to bed, whether or not to watch a television program, the execution of homework, of daily duties will all become terrible battles which, all too often, the child wins if the educators are not consistent"⁷. Through this quote of Elena Enrico, the founder of CML, we can understand very well that the most important task of the parents is to firmly believe in their decisions and that they act accordingly with these ones.

What does this mean in the CML context? That both parents have to be absolutely convinced of the method and of the capacity of their child to success in it. It also means that one of the parents has to always be present in the lessons and have an active participation in them. This is not always easy, since many parents perceive music-making as something very intimate and feel very awkward sharing it in public. But how can we expect our children to take part in the activities if we don't? How can we expect that our children find the activities inspiring and fun if we don't want to take part in them or just do them reluctantly? That's why it is very important to not only participate in all activities, but also to do it enthusiastically.

It is of course also very important for the parent to take care of an appropriate behaviour of his child during the lessons, so that the child does not disturb or interfere in the learning process of the other participants. Making sure to provide his child with all necessary materials and taking notes of the homework for the following week are also important parental tasks at the lessons.

At home the parent has the role of a coach. They have to make sure to find a daily and regular time for the study of music in the child's schedule and to revise together with his child all homework-songs and activities. Many parents think at the beginning that the daily practice

⁷ Enrico, E. (2013). *Suonare come parlare per far crescere i propri figli con la musica*. Didattica Attiva. Pages 8-9.

at home will never be a problem, since music is a “fun” thing to do, which their child will always be happy to do. But truth is that this path is not always easy and fun and that most of the children often prefer doing other activities that do not require any effort. As Elena Enrico said: “The discipline of learning to play a musical instrument, as with any discipline, is not always easy and fun. Each day requires taking a small step. They must increase the constancy and concentration in proportion to the difficulty and to the acquisition of new capabilities. In the beginning it can be like a game which increases in difficulty. at times it is like a bitter medicine and at other times like a more painful therapybut the results are exciting and gratifying. The child will conquer, little by little, a world of new knowledge, new relationships and experiences. He will be more sure of himself, more orderly, coordinated, have a better memory, more sensitivity and more friends.”⁸

Motivation and rewarding systems

Along the history several models of motivation have been proposed, like for example Maslow’s theory of hierarchical needs, Hertzberg’s two factors theory, McClelland’s theory of needs or Vrooms theory of expectance. ⁹

On basis of these motivation models there have been developed four different types of motivation¹⁰:

⁸ Enrico, E. (2013). *Suonare come parlare per far crescere i propri figli con la musica*. Didattica Attiva. Page 7.

⁹ Badubi, R. M. (2021, 3. August). *Theories of Motivation and Their Application in Organizations*. Research

leap. Visited on the 16.09.2022, <https://researchleap.com/theories-motivation-application-organizations-risk-analysis/>

¹⁰ Triola, V. (2021, 2 enero). *The Four Forms of Motivation: Extrinsic, Identified, Intrinsic & Introjected*.

Vincent Triola. <https://vincenttriola.com/blogs/ten-years-of-academic-writing/the-four-forms-of-motivation-are-extrinsic-identified-intrinsic-introjected>

- **Intrinsic motivation:** internal motivation believed to occur as a result of actions aligning with values or with pleasure for performing a task
- **Extrinsic motivation:** Extrinsic motivation is an external influence that impels people to act or behave in a specific way such as accomplishing a task or job but can also be a personal goal. External influences include rewards, promotions, prizes, etc.
- **Identified motivation:** external source, feeling or desiring accomplishment for a task
- **Introjected motivation:** internalized motivation in order to gain appreciation from individuals of importance such as parents or bosses

It would be ideal if the CML students would all have an intrinsic motivation, since this kind of motivation is the healthiest and the ever lasting one. But unfortunately there are many children, especially at this young age, that need also external sources of motivation. For example the introjected motivation is a very common one at this age, since every child seeks the appreciation of his parents.

Furthermore, there is a motivation theory that we can apply to facilitate parents the daily practice at home with their children: the "reinforcement theory of motivation", from one of the most famous psychologists and philosophers of the last century and one of the fathers of behaviourism: Burrhus Frederik Skinner.

The reinforcement theory of motivation holds that we are able to conditionate a person's behaviour using positive or negative stimuli: a person is much more likely to repeat an action if she/he has got a positive reinforcement for it and is much more likely not to repeat an action if she/he has got punished for it. Because in CML the children are very young and our goal is to make them want to repeat an action, I would encourage the parents to use a positive reinforcement (only if the intrinsic one is not enough).

There are two kinds of rewards: the tangible rewards (materialistic) and the intangible ones (non-materialistic). In order to avoid the children to create a relation between practicing

music and a tangible rewarding I would recommend using intangible ones, like choosing once a week a meal, choosing once a week a movie, going to some place together, etcetera.

Conclusion

In this thesis we show how CML is a path of education through music, a very complete program that not only provides children with a very high quality of music knowledge, but also covers all basic necessities of children and teach them very meaningful and important skills for life.

At this very early age parents are the biggest and most important reference and role model of their children, so that their behaviour, beliefs and actions have a crucial influence in them. We show therefore how parents not only are the only ones responsible for choosing this path, but also into what extent they can influence their children's education and their motivation status, spending with them quality time, giving them their attention and making them feeling important. Being part of the lessons, happily taking part in them and fulfilling the role of a coach at home are a must at this age in order to have a successful and gratifying musical education.

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