

## *The role of parents in children's musical development*

Psychology of Music

*Psychology of Music*

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Society for Education, Music  
and Psychology Research

vol 37(1): 91–110 [0305-7356

(200901) 37:1; 91–110]

10.1177/0305735607086049

<http://pom.sagepub.com>

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**ABSTRACT** A framework for studying parent–child interactions is proposed, based on evidence that parents play a pivotal role in their children's musical development. It is suggested that the goals and aspirations that parents hold impact on the styles and practices they adopt during interactions with their children. Importantly, the model proposes a feedback loop in which child and socio-contextual characteristics interact with parenting goals, styles and practices to help shape children's musical competence and achievement, their sense of musical identity and accomplishment, and their continuing desire to participate, exert effort, overcome obstacles and succeed musically.

**KEYWORDS:** *home environment, musical development, music motivation, parent–child interactions, parental practices, parental style*

### *Introduction*

During the past 30 years, some of the most important advances in understanding children's psychological functioning and achievement have come from research that focuses on the socialization processes that occur in the home, with results showing a consistently positive effect of parental influences on student achievement, attitudes, behaviour and learning (Asmus, 2006; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). As with other areas of children's development, the home environment is crucial in early musical development (Asmus, 1985, 1986; Brand, 1986). Beginning at a young age, children develop resilient attitudes, beliefs and expectations about their potential to learn music that have been instilled in them through interactions with their parents (McPherson & Davidson, 2002, 2006). Parents are critical to a child's ongoing success in all areas of their education and this is particularly true in music, a subject that involves particularly high demands (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002).

Only a handful of studies have examined the role of parents in children's musical development. This stands in contrast to a growing body of literature available in educational and developmental psychology that details how parents influence their children's achievement. Recently, Creech and Hallam (2003) have discussed the dynamic relationship between the parent, teacher and pupil, to document interactions that can influence outcomes for all three groups in instrumental tuition. The model they propose examines these interactions from the perspective of a systems

approach, in that it provides a framework for understanding certain types of human behaviour and communication between teachers, parents and students that work together in the context of instrumental music lessons. The model proposed here, however, draws the lens in much closer to explain the psychological principles that underpin specific types of parent–child interactions within the home environment. I consider this view particularly important for helping to frame the types of parent–child interactions and ‘emotional climates’ that occur separately from, or in conjunction with, formal and informal music learning. The major purpose of this article, therefore, is to synthesize evidence from educational and developmental psychology with what is known in music, in order to propose a model that can be used to frame the critical types of parent–child interactions that have an impact on music learning.

### *Children’s psychological needs*

Very recent research in developmental psychology has focused on competence (Elliot & Dweck, 2005) and motivation to succeed (Eccles, Wigfield, & Schiefele, 1998). As shown by Pomerantz et al. (2005), these theoretical positions are important because they highlight the social contextual forces present in the parent–child interactions that influence children’s learning. A key principle embedded in these explanations is that parents enable their children to positively approach achievement through an innate need to feel:

- *Competent*: The more children perceive themselves as competent, the more they are likely to engage in learning tasks, utilize the skills and strategies they possess, persist when they confront difficulties and achieve success (Austin, Renwick, & McPherson, 2006). In their early years, the most important feedback children use to form conceptions of their own competence comes from parents (Wigfield et al., 1997).
- *Autonomous*: Children have a basic need to feel autonomous; that is, to make independent choices. Parents who support their children’s development of autonomy are more likely to have children who are self-regulated, display greater competence and achieve at a higher level, possess fewer learning difficulties, and take more overall responsibility for their own learning (Grolnick, Gurland, Jacob, & DeCoursey, 2002).
- *Related*: Children need to feel connected to their parents by a strong loving bond (Pomerantz et al., 2005). High levels of intrinsic motivation for music are more likely to occur when parents and teachers support children in warm, caring and non-threatening environments (McPherson & Davidson, 2006). In contrast, lower levels of intrinsic motivation can become apparent when adults ignore children’s work on interesting activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
- *Purposeful*: Success and enjoyment are outcomes of learning when children feel that the activity in which they are engaged is meaningful and valuable, and that it relates to their own personal goals. A sense of purpose helps to prevent boredom and enhances opportunities to experience success (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Children are likely to approach activities with which they are engaged more positively when the above psychological needs are satisfied (Pomerantz et al., 2005). When these occur, children are better placed to draw on the regulatory resources that will enable them to form positive judgments about whether or not they wish to achieve

and why, hold more positive personal beliefs about their capacity to achieve (as reflected in higher feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy for mastering difficult activities) and draw on more effective learning strategies that help them persist with their learning as they strive to achieve the goals that they personally view as important (Pomerantz et al., 2005).

#### PARENTAL INFLUENCES ON CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT

Parents (and perhaps mothers more so than fathers) play a critical role in the processes outlined above (West, Noden, & Edge, 1998). In educational literature, parenting has often been defined according to two separate dimensions: *parenting style* and *parenting practices*. Parenting style is defined as the 'constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviours are expressed' (Darling & Steinberg, 1993, p. 488), while parenting practice relates to the specific behaviours used to socialize children.

Studying the relationship between specific parenting practices and educational outcomes appears to be logical. Parenting practices are specific behaviours (e.g., being present at music lessons, helping with practice, attending concerts) that parents adopt to realize the socialization goals they hold for their child (e.g., being successful at music, enjoying musical participation). In much of the initial research literature, both in education (e.g., studies of how parents help their child with homework) and in music (e.g., studies of how parents help their child with musical practice; see Brokaw, 1983; Doan, 1973; McPherson & Davidson, 2002), these parental practices have been shown to have a direct influence on children's educational achievement outcomes (Spera, 2005, 2006), as depicted in Figure 1.

Unfortunately, explanations that are restricted to these two dimensions have serious limitations because the relationship between parenting practices and achievement is mediated by many other factors. For example, two siblings may exhibit different levels of achievement even though their parents use similar practices to help both children with their musical development. As shown below, attempts to study a direct link between specific parenting practices and educational outcomes without acknowledging other influential aspects of the home environment are therefore simplistic. The home environment is complex, so studying *parental practices* alone does not help us to discriminate with sufficient accuracy between the various complex, dynamic relationships that operate within families.

My reconceptualized model (see Figure 2) depicts how the goals parents hold for their child's musical education (and more generally) lead to the types of styles and practices they adopt when interacting with their child. The interactive feedback loops within the model also show how parental goals, styles and practices are mediated by child characteristics and other sociocultural factors, which in turn

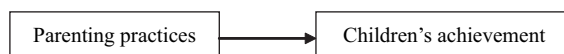


FIGURE 1 *Parenting practices and children's achievement.*

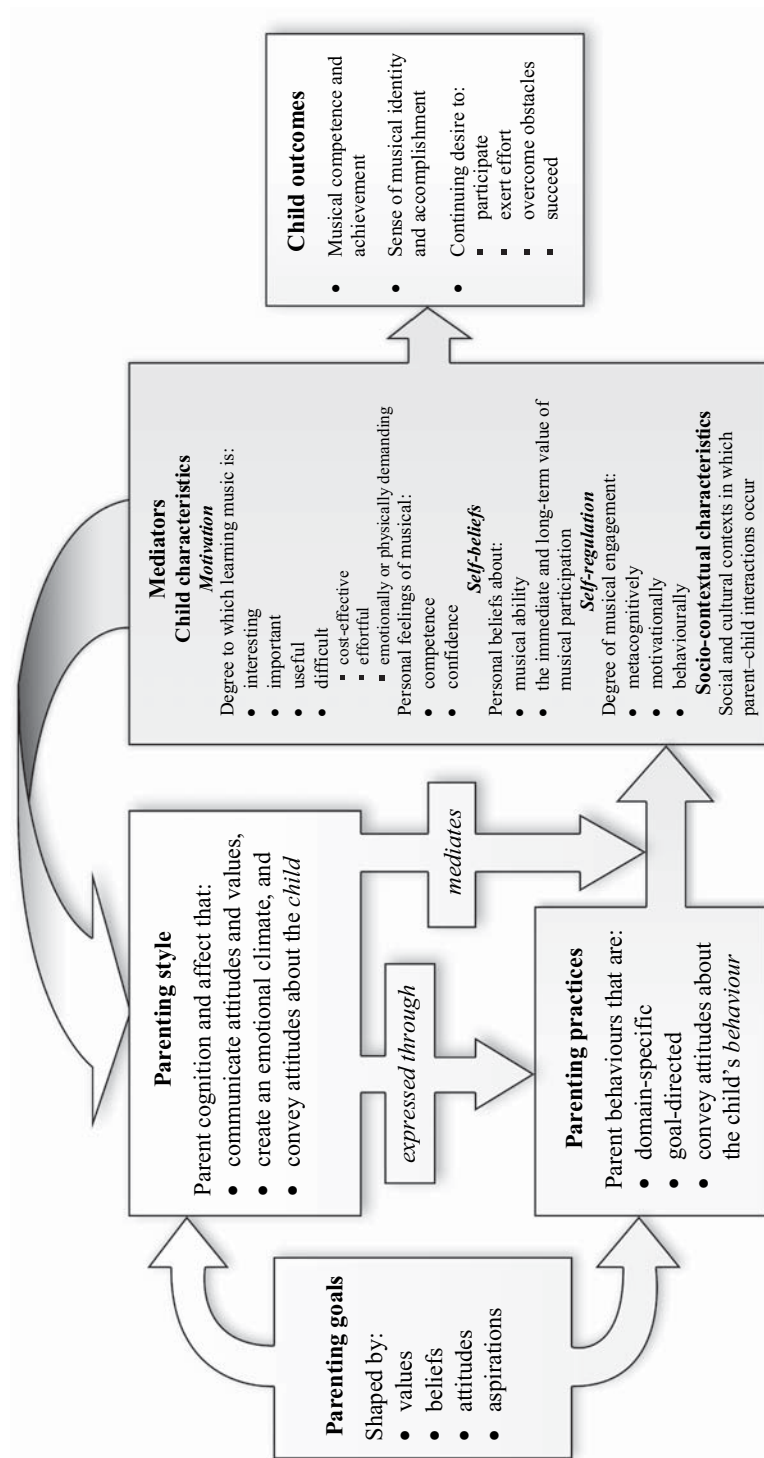


FIGURE 2 Parent-child interactions in children's musical learning.

support and help frame a number of child outcomes, the most important of which are competence and achievement, a sense of musical identity and accomplishment, and the continuing desire to participate, exert effort, overcome obstacles and succeed. These processes, based on recent psychological evidence, are depicted in Figure 2 and explained in more detail in the following sections.

### *Parental orientations*

#### PARENTAL GOALS

Parents have basic ideas about how they want to raise their children and specific views about what they want them to achieve. Parenting involves socializing children by raising them to be able to participate in society (Spera, 2006). The values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations held by parents shape the specific goals they hold for their children (Spera, 2006; Wentzel, 1998). For example, parents might aspire for their children high academic achievement, sporting ability, good manners, a strong work ethic, good interpersonal relations, and so on. Parental socialization *goals* influence *parental styles*, that is, the 'emotional climate' in which parental attitudes and values can be expressed to the child. These goals also influence *parental practices*, as evidenced in the specific actions and messages parents convey to their children about their behaviour (Spera, 2006).

In music, parental styles and practices help satisfy children's most basic psychological needs, which are 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 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 musical experiences (McPherson & Davidson, 2006).

#### PARENTAL STYLES

Parental cognition and affect influence how attitudes and values are conveyed to children and the degree to which parents are able to create the type of emotional climate that is conducive to effective music learning.

#### *Parental cognition*

Like the behaviours that parents exhibit when interacting with their child, the beliefs they hold are vital. We have known since the 1950s that parental expectations and aspirations are closely connected with children's level of self-esteem, motivation, and achievement. More recent evidence shows that children's perceptions of competence are shaped more strongly by parents than by teachers (see survey, Pomerantz et al., 2005). Put more directly, the more accurately a parent views his or her child's competence, the better that child will perform (Miller, Manhal, & Mee, 1991).

In the achievement motivation literature, evidence has emerged demonstrating that parents socialize their children in ways that are consistent with their perceptions of how well they feel they are doing academically (e.g., Eccles, 1983; Halle, Kurtz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2001). As Pomerantz and Dong (2006) explain, 'Inherent in this portrayal is the idea that parents view competence as relatively fixed, so that they use their perceptions to guide

children toward the niches for which they believe children are suited' (p. 951). As an extension to this view, Pomerantz and Dong have shown that mothers who hold a fixed view of competence possess attitudes about their child's learning that actually foreshadow their child's achievement and create a self-fulfilling prophecy. In contrast, mothers who viewed competence as malleable did not predict their child's achievement. When explaining these findings, Pomerantz and Dong suggest that the main factor concerns the degree to which parents believe competence to be something that cannot be easily changed. The more fixed parents view their child's competence, the more self-fulfilling is their perception.

This finding has particular relevance given the widely held but inaccurate view that musicians are born rather than made and that musical ability is therefore the result of a special innate gift or natural talent that a child either does or does not possess (Davis, 1994; Gagné, Blanchard, & Bégin, 2001; McPherson, 2006a; Lehmann, Sloboda, & Woody, 2007; Winner, 1996). This misconception became evident in a study I conducted to examine mother-child interactions during the first year of musical learning (see McPherson & Davidson, 2002). Interviews with mothers before their children started learning showed that some held a fixed view that their child might not have sufficient ability to cope with the demands of music. Consequently, very soon after learning commenced, many of the mothers of unsuccessful learners withdrew their support for practice, based on their assessment that the child was not coping emotionally, that if he or she was really interested then practice would be completed anyway, or because they were unwilling themselves to invest in the time and effort needed to regulate their child's daily practice schedule. Unfortunately, the fixed perceptions of children's musical competence held by some mothers partly explained why some of the unsuccessful learners came to feel that they did not have the necessary ability to cope with the demands of learning music. McPherson and Davidson (2002) concluded therefore that some of the mothers had actually given up on their child as a potential musician much sooner than the child had come to feel the same way.

This attitude can be seen in other ways. For example, a commonly held view is that music is a subject that has high intrinsic value but low attainment and utility value (McPherson, 2006a). As an example, parents may provide their children with a music education based on their belief that their child will enjoy and find music interesting during their time at school while at the same time holding the view that music is not as important or useful as other 'academic' school subjects in terms of future preparation for life and a career. Consequently, how parents regard music (as compared to other learning opportunities) has far-reaching consequences for children's musical education and on the interactions depicted in Figure 2 (McPherson, 2006a; see also McPherson, 2000).

#### *Parental affect*

Related to parental perceptions of competence are the feelings that parents have for their child. Parents breed feelings of relatedness and closeness within the family environment, which are vital for their children to develop a sense of autonomy and purposefulness. Close parent-child bonding also results in other positive benefits for children, such as being more mastery-oriented, a willingness to utilize more sophisticated



cognitive skills and higher achievement (Pomerantz et al., 2005). It is self-evident therefore that parental affect plays a key role in children's music learning.

#### PARENTAL PRACTICES

Parents employ specific behaviours and strategies to help socialize their children. These behaviours most often occur in the context of a specific domain and are interventions in or reactions to children's behaviour that convey information about how the parent feels about what the child is doing or has done (Pomerantz et al., 2005). Research shows that parental behaviour is particularly effective if it involves structuring. However, to be most effective it should be autonomy-supportive rather than controlling and should help focus the child on processes to be employed in learning. Parents' ability to focus their child on effort (e.g., 'You're working hard, and I can hear how quickly you're improving') rather than fixed ability perceptions ('You don't seem to be very good at that. What's wrong?') are crucial (Pomerantz et al., 2005).

Other forms of parental involvement such as providing resources (e.g., purchasing a music stand or new instrument), acting interested in what the child is learning (e.g., 'Can you play that new piece for me?') and being more generally interested in the child's life all facilitate learning and involvement. Parental involvement also occurs when a parent participates in supportive activities (such as joining the school's music committee), sits with the child when practising an instrument, or more generally talks about musical learning (e.g., 'How did you go in your music lesson today? Did you learn anything new?'). Parents extend their support through taking their child to concerts, purchasing additional resources to enhance learning (e.g., CD and recordings), expressing excitement over their child's successes (such as when a beginner has mastered a new piece) and keeping abreast of what is going on in lessons. Indeed, parental behaviours of these types are critical for children's ongoing musical success (see McPherson & Davidson, 2006).

Parental behaviour of the type described above help children develop skills that then lead to feelings of competence. They also reinforce for the child that the parent is interested in what he or she is doing; and, if the activity is also valued, they develop a sense of relatedness that fosters a closeness between parent and child that acts as a buffer during periods when the child experiences difficulties or obstacles that hinder progress (see Pomerantz et al., 2005 for academic achievement; McPherson & Davidson, 2006 for music learning). In summary, when parents foster a sense of competence, their child will feel more competent and more in control of his or her learning (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994).

When parents work proactively to provide information, guidelines and feedback, they enhance their child's feelings of competence and help *structure* their child's learning environment in ways that facilitate and enhance the acquisition of skills (Pomerantz et al., 2005). Parents can also help to *scaffold* learning by subtle variations of the amount of information they provide within the range of their child's current capabilities by tailoring their interactions depending on how the child is progressing (Pomerantz et al., 2005). If the child is doing well, assistance can be decreased. However, if the child is struggling, he or she will need extra assistance.

Importantly, also, some parents will react to external reports of poor progress only when they are made aware that there is a problem or perceive that their child is

having difficulties (Pomerantz & Eaton, 2001). In my longitudinal study with beginning music students (McPherson & Davidson, 2002, 2006), I found that parents who were willing to invest time and effort to support their child's musical learning were often unsure how to help their child cope with difficulties and deal with the frustrations that arose during the early stages of learning. In conversations with mothers of children who ceased playing, many spoke about the frustrations they experienced when trying to encourage their child to practise or attend lessons. As a consequence, once they felt that their child was not keeping up or lacked ability, some of these mothers would steer their child to another activity that they believed would be more rewarding and less stressful.

Better music learners are more likely to be self-regulated and know how to work autonomously (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002). Parents play an important part in developing these skills. For example, parents who are more autonomy-supportive rather than controlling tend to have children who are more likely to explore their own environment, monitor and control their own learning, and be more active in the way that they solve problems and cope with difficulties (Pomerantz et al., 2005). Children are far less likely to succeed and cope with their musical learning when their parents exert pressure through orders, commands, instructions and restrictions. The main benefit of autonomy-supportive parenting is that this support encourages children to take initiative in order to develop stronger feelings of competence as they start to solve challenges by themselves (Grolnick, Gurland, DeCoursey, & Jacob, 2002; Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998).

Additional conceptions extend this view by proposing that an ideal parental style for developing a child's sense of competence is *authoritative*, that is, one in which the parent displays high involvement in the child's learning, high structuring of the environment in which the learning takes place and high autonomy-support. In contrast, *authoritarian* parental involvement characterized by low involvement, high structure and high control is far less likely to breed feelings of competence (Pomerantz et al., 2005; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994).

As shown by Pomerantz et al. (2005), when parents respond to their children's accomplishments by acknowledging their hard work, reacting to their frustrations by focusing them on the learning goals, reminding them that working hard is more important than achieving high grades and helping them develop strategies that will serve them well in their learning, they are displaying a *process* orientation that fosters feelings of competence in the child. In contrast, parents who employ a *person* orientation focus more on praising the child's ability, which in turn expresses to them that they will be personally disappointed if they do not continue to achieve at a high level. The danger of adopting a *person* orientation is that children might start to feel that their parents are pushing them with little regard to the process employed and that they therefore have little control over their own ability.

#### MEDIATORS

Parental influences are not a one-way process, so conceptions proposing that parents socialize their children in a unidirectional manner are deficient. There are many instances that could be cited, for example, where a child's initial interest in music acts as a catalyst for his or her parents to become supportive and interested to the



extent that they will devote enormous amounts of time and resources to help their child learn music (Howe & Sloboda, 1991; Sosniak, 1985, 1987). Children's characteristics as well as social-contextual forces appear therefore to be the prime moderators of parental cognition, affect and behaviour (Pomerantz et al., 2005).

#### *Child characteristics*

As shown previously, parents play a critical role in shaping how children come to feel competent, autonomous, related and purposeful. To understand this dynamic process further, however, it is important to investigate how and in what situations parents are receptive to their children's beliefs and expectations. As shown by McPherson (2000), even beginning musicians as young as seven or eight are able to quickly form an impression of how competent they are at coping with their new instrument. In this study, the children could differentiate between their interest in learning a musical instrument, the importance to them of being good at music, whether they believed their learning would be useful to their short- and long-term goals and the cost of participation in terms of the effort needed to continue improving.

The degree to which the parents influenced the children's expectations and valuing of their future music lessons as reported by McPherson (2000) is unknown. However, the impression gained from the extensive interviews with the mothers and the children throughout the first three years of learning are in accord with psychological research (e.g., Pomerantz et al., 2005), which suggests that parents who adopt controlling practices will be far less successful than parents who use autonomy-support practices in helping children who view themselves as incompetent. Controlling practices fail children because they reinforce perceptions that the child is not coping and has less ability than others.

Parents also have a major role in helping children who are experiencing difficulties to cope when irritable (Pomerantz et al., 2005), especially when they are able to put their own frustrations aside in order to focus their child on the enjoyable aspects of learning. It is especially important, therefore, for parents to be willing to put up with the uncomfortable squawks and noises that typify children's early attempts to master a range of basic instrumental skills and to maintain a positive attitude during periods when they themselves are frustrated or angry with their child's attitude or approach to music learning. Such practices are generally more successful for promoting motivation, persistence and ongoing musical involvement, especially during times when music learning is demanding and stressful for a child (McPherson & Davidson, 2006).

#### *Motivation*

Many facets underpin children's personal beliefs for learning music. The level of children's commitment to music is partially shaped by parental influences, the expectations children hold for becoming competent and the value children place on their engagement during the process of learning. In music, six dimensions have been identified that help to explain the types of expectations children hold for their musical learning and the degree to which they value their musical participation (McPherson & Davidson, 2006):

- *Interest* – the personal satisfaction gained from learning music.
- *Importance* – the degree to which learning music fits with personal goals about what one hopes to be good at.
- *Usefulness* – whether learning music is constructive and functional for what the child wishes to do now and in the future.
- *Difficulty* – whether the learning process creates obstacles or is perceived as being more difficult than other activities.
- *Competence* – for which participating in music becomes an activity in which the child would like to succeed.
- *Confidence* – the empowerment felt for developing the skills necessary to master challenges associated with learning music (e.g., whether the learning process is fraught with pressures and anxieties that diminish confidence and a sense of self-worth).

Every time children choose to devote effort to music, they are making decisions in the context of a complex social reality in which they have many choices, each of which has immediate and long-term consequences (Eccles, 2005). Very often, their choices are made from a number of viable options. In the context of the home environment, choosing to go off and practise an instrument might be just as viable as finishing off a school assignment or choosing to go out and play with friends. Faced with these types of decisions, students will very often choose the option that they value most unless their decision has been shaped by their parents. Thus, in order to understand why a child chooses some options over others we must discern the child's hierarchy of subjective task values, not the absolute value the child places on each of them, in addition to the parent's role in this decision-making process (Eccles, 2005).

Children's performance on specific tasks is influenced heavily by the degree to which they expect their engagement to be interesting, important, useful and difficult, their valuing of the activity, and their feelings of competence and confidence (Warton, 2001; Wigfield et al., 1997). As described previously, these attributes are established even before children arrive at their first music lessons as a result of interactions with their parents, who shape their expectations and valuing of music as well as their educational attainment (McPherson & Davidson, 2006; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000).

### *Self-beliefs*

In the psychological literature on motivation, studies concerned with self-beliefs are so prevalent that they dominate the field (Graham & Weiner, 1996). Among the most important are the types of judgments people make about their capacity to organize and execute actions to attain chosen goals (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Self-efficacy judgments of this type are defined in terms of what a person thinks he or she can do and have consistently been shown to be powerful predictors of student achievement across a number of domains (Bandura, 1997). In music, self-efficacy is an effective predictor of children's capacity to perform music in stressful situations (McCormick & McPherson, 2003; McPherson & McCormick, 2006), and therefore crucial in an area as difficult and taxing as learning music, where 'insidious self-doubts can easily overrule the best of skills' (Bandura, 1997, p. 35; McPherson & Davidson, 2006).

The seminal figure in self-efficacy research is Albert Bandura (1977, 1997), whose contribution has helped shape thinking for the past three decades. In a recent

publication, Bandura (2006) outlines how self-efficacy beliefs influence children's lives and aspirations. Importantly, within his conception, Bandura has been able to write extensively from the perspective of children's ability to make choices as they actively reflect, regulate and organize their own learning. The collective efficacy within a family, according to Bandura (2006):

is not simply the sum of the members' beliefs in their individual efficacies. Rather, it is a shared belief in their family's capability to work together to manage and improvise their lives. It is an emergent group belief because it incorporates the interactive dynamics of the family system operating collectively. The collective whole can be greater or lesser than the efficacy parts depending on whether the family transactions are mutually supportive and enabling or wrangling and debilitating. (p. 9)

Within the above conception, children acquire information from their parents that shape their own beliefs and sense of competence. Indeed, Creech (2001) has shown that parental efficacy is essential in sustaining children's musical interest, particularly in the early stages of learning. Her study provides evidence that parents who possess a strong sense of self-efficacy for their child's musical learning, construct a role for themselves within the learning process such that they are more likely to attend lessons, keep in contact with the teacher, help to instill discipline and focus in practice sessions, and support their child emotionally during difficult or taxing periods.

The above findings imply that parents should aim to provide an environment that offers some degree of challenge within a loving, supportive atmosphere where high but realistic aspirations are encouraged. Within this environment, children should also be exposed to positive role models, supported through mastery experiences and taught to deal with difficulties and obstacles in a constructive manner (Schunk & Meece, 2006). These effects are reciprocal, because parents often respond positively when their child displays curiosity and a willingness to engage in new activities, especially those experiences that parents themselves value and wish to encourage. Successful parents therefore promote positive competence perceptions and modify their expectations and demands in line with their child's needs, abilities and dispositions (Eccles et al., 1998; Schunk & Meece, 2006).

Another important factor is socioeconomic status in that families with less income or less experience with music may be less able or willing to devote financial resources to their child's musical education (e.g., continuing to pay for lessons or to purchase an instrument) unless they feel that the child is succeeding and has the potential to make the most of these resources.

In schools, the situation for music is even more pronounced. Very recent evidence (McPherson, 2006b) using the expectancy-value motivation framework to study children's beliefs about a range of school subjects shows that children report that their parents expect them to do less work in music compared to other school subjects, view music as a less important school subject and do not expect them to work as hard in music as other academic subjects. It seems self-evident that parents rely heavily on tangible indicators such as school grades or actual performance when forming perceptions about their child's learning. However, parental perceptions are also shaped by cultural stereotypes in that parents hold expectations for their children's long-term success that may differ from the children's immediate interests (Schunk & Meece,

2006). By conveying their expectations directly through verbal feedback and indirectly through support and encouragement, parents convey information that subsequently affects their children's expectations and self-efficacy (Schunk & Meece, 2006).

### *Self-regulation*

Children need help from others particularly in situations where they are unable or unwilling to set goals and anticipate the consequences of their actions (Zimmerman & Cleary, 2006). Accordingly, parents can play a particularly important role in children's musical education by influencing the degree to which children become metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning. The basis of self-regulated learning theory is that socializing processes, such as vicarious or direct reinforcement by others or modelled or guided help from more knowledgeable others, act to reinforce appropriate behaviours that over time allow children to monitor and control their own learning (McPherson & Zimmerman, 2002).

Children's earliest experiences are regulated by their parents, who enforce rules of behaviour for everyday tasks that provide the context for the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes that will eventually enable them to cope with more formal aspects of learning after they start school (Corno, 1995; Goodnow & Warton, 1992; Warton, 1997; Warton & Goodnow, 1991). The socializing role does not end when formal schooling commences because parents very often continue to enforce behaviours that convey messages about their expectations and valuing of certain activities over others. This type of parental feedback provides the context for children to acquire an awareness of their own functioning in terms of the self-regulatory resources they require to guide their own learning (Corno, 1995; Goodnow & Warton, 1992; Warton, 1997; Warton & Goodnow, 1991)

Studies of child prodigies show that most had parents who systematically supervised their practice (Lehmann, 1997; Sosniak, 1985, 1987). They also became accustomed to performing in front of their family and friends before giving their first recital. Their parents' and teachers' interest in their development helped them to gradually build the confidence, motivation and persistence that would eventually distinguish them as performers (Sosniak, 1987). In these ways, the encouragement and support the parents provided were important as the prodigies developed the personal discipline necessary to persist with the many hours of practice needed to develop their skills to an elite level. The parents not only applauded and rewarded their child's initial attempts to perform in front of others, but they also supported and encouraged their children's efforts when interest flagged or skills stalled (Sosniak, 1990). Less than successful efforts were seen as a challenge to be overcome rather than as a debilitating failure (Sosniak, 1990).

One might assume that the family background of prodigies is entirely different from the normal population. However, studies with other populations of students (Davidson, Sloboda, & Howe, 1995–96; Sloboda & Davidson, 1996) shows that, in broad terms, high-achieving student musicians tend to have parents who actively supported their child's practice, especially during the initial stages of instruction. For example, parents would either sit in on lessons and/or actively seek regular feedback from their child's teacher. These parents also supported their child's practice by verbal reminders to practise, encouragement, moral support and, in some cases, direct

supervision. Their involvement was most evident in the early stages of development when the children's ability to self-regulate their own learning was least evident. As the children's developing self-motivation started to increase and they became increasingly autonomous, the parents, many of whom did not have a musical background themselves, started to withdraw their direct involvement as they continued to maintain a high level of moral support for their children's increasing involvement with music. In contrast, low-achieving student musicians tended to receive little parental support during their early years, but during their teenage years, parental pressure to motivate practice and attend lessons increased markedly. The researchers viewed this as a last effort by the parents to keep their child learning (Davidson, Moore, Howe & Sloboda, 1996; see also, Davidson & Burland, 2006; Davidson et al., 1995–96; Davidson, Howe, & Sloboda, 1997; Sloboda & Davidson, 1996).

Zdzinski (1994, 1996) also reports on a study in which parental involvement was significantly related to the students' performance level and their affective and cognitive musical outcomes. These effects were more evident at the elementary level than for junior and senior high school students. This complements work by O'Neill (1997) who studied six- to ten-year-old instrumentalists. She reports a significant relationship between the parents' involvement in lessons and children's progress. More able students tended to have parents who would seek information from the teacher about progress and how they might assist the child.

According to O'Neill (1997), high-achieving students are not necessarily innately talented or 'clever'. Rather, they work harder and with more self-regulation than their less accomplished peers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As the previous survey has demonstrated, however, parental involvement helps to facilitate the self-regulatory processes needed for children to eventually take charge of their own learning.

#### SOCIOCULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

Obviously, parent-child interactions occur within a social-cultural context so the processes mentioned above need defining in ways that capture these salient dimensions (Pomerantz et al., 2005). In many different 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. More recently, this body of research has been expanded to examine how the same practices used by parents vary across cultures, based on conceptions that children of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds view themselves and their relationships with their parents in distinct ways. For example, Pomerantz et al. (2005) speculate that Asian children tend to be more likely to take on their parents' goals and subsequently be more influenced by their parents' views because they do not always regard their parents' opinions in the same way as European American children. Whereas European American children might view their parents' practice to make a decision without consulting them as controlling or interfering, Asian children may not because this action is congruent with their decision to take on their parents' goals autonomously. As an example, Iyengar and Lepper (1999) found that European American elementary children were more interested in their work if they had been part of the process of choosing it for themselves. In contrast, Asian American children

often preferred tasks that they were told that their mother chose for them. To follow up on the results of this study, Bao and Lam (2008) studied a group of Chinese children and found that they often experienced fulfilment of their need for relatedness in situations where they had internalized the demands of significant others to whom they felt a strong socio-emotional attachment. Even though these children did not always make choices themselves, they nonetheless experienced autonomy because they consented fully to, concurred with, or identified with their parent's wishes.

In music, some evidence exists that individual and situational interest can work in combination to enhance motivation. For example, Renwick and McPherson (2002) report on a case study with a 12-year-old female clarinettist who was observed practising repertoire she had chosen herself with a highly elevated level of attention, persistence and strategy use in comparison with repertoire assigned by her teacher.

Moreover, decisions on when and for how long to practise (or even what instrument to learn and how to become involved in music learning) are often negotiated within the home environment. For this reason, social-cultural factors are an essential component of any understanding of the types of processes that lead to children's musical outcomes. These factors deserve more research attention across many areas of education, and particularly music.

### *Conclusions*

The creation of models to represent relationships and to test research assumptions is at the core of scientific inquiry (Edwards, 1992). Models are a concise means of representing relationships and ideas. They help focus research effort and provide a framework upon which researchers may identify, explore and eventually confirm important relationships among a wide range of human behaviours. Models therefore play an important role in the development of theories.

Because the model provided here is selective rather than exhaustive, many additional parental and child variables probably also exist. Nonetheless, in this article, I have chosen to describe the relationships that I feel hold the greatest potential for understanding the complex issues surrounding parent-child interactions and parental influences on children's musical learning.

Within the proposed view, there are a number of issues that will need to be resolved. Importantly, progress will depend on developing techniques that can reliably distinguish between the different types of parent-child interactions that occur within homes and that result in different kinds of 'emotional climates' across time. Researchers in our field would do well to keep an eye out for new methodologies that are emerging to study family dynamics in other areas of psychology.

To improve our understanding of the principles embedded in the proposed framework it will be important to clarify more precisely how mothers in comparison with fathers support their child's musical education, and whether there are any fundamental differences between how mothers versus fathers support a daughter as compared to a son's musical education. Evidence in education suggests that during adolescence, daughters receive more parental involvement than sons, perhaps because they are more obedient and cooperative (Carter & Wojtkiewicz, 2000). In sociology, however, much debate centres on the validity of the Trivers and Willard (1973) hypothesis that



proposes that throughout evolutionary history, low-ranking parents have tended to invest more in their daughters than their sons while high-ranking parents have tended to invest more in their sons than their daughters (Freese & Powell, 1999). Clearly, within the proposed framework, the role of mothers as compared to fathers, parental socioeconomic status, level of education (including musical education), number of children in the family and the cultural norms parents follow deserve more attention from music psychologists and music educators. Given that the model is based on evidence in educational and developmental psychology, it will be especially important for researchers to design studies that attempt to gather data on each component of the model within both specific (e.g., learning repertoire for a concert) and general (e.g., informal versus formal) musical contexts.

Research is also needed to more clearly understand the decisions parents make to support their children and how they come to believe that their involvement will make a difference. The home environment involves many types of pressures, such as economic problems and stressful life events, in which parenting may suffer (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In the McPherson longitudinal study (McPherson, 2005; McPherson & Davidson, 2006), seven of the nine learners whose parents separated at some point in the study (drawn from a sample of 157 beginners) ceased instruction very soon or immediately after one of the parents left the home. Of the two learners who did continue, both relied on extraordinary amounts of encouragement and emotional support from the remaining parent to sustain their involvement.

In conclusion, almost all the literature on parental influences on children's learning has focused on academic subjects, with very few studies on music learning. For this reason, my review has summarized this literature in a way that would be valid for music learning by drawing on the main trends and concepts that appear to be relevant and interspersing ideas and findings from music-related research. In so doing, I hope to have alerted readers to the complexity of the subject and to the benefits that could be derived for children's learning based on a more thorough understanding of the critical role that parents play in children's musical education.

My training and experience as a teacher inculcated within me a feeling that the most important influence on a child's development is the teacher. However, in recent years, I have come to realize how limited this view is as I began to understand more fully how the emotional climate within families profoundly influences children's musical education. Obviously, many contextual aspects affect children's musical development, but there is no reason to doubt, given the extensive research now available, just how important parents are to their children's musical development.

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