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Music in Family Dynamics and Relationships: A Case Study

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Abstract

The role of parents is central in children's musical lives throughout childhood, yet it serves distinctive functions in different developmental stages. During early childhood, literature documents parents' and children's spontaneous musical interactions in daily life as a means for creating and sustaining bonding and mutuality. As children begin compulsory schooling and become involved in formal music instructions, research tends to highlight the influence and contribution of parents in children's music learning process. In this case study, I present the musical life of one family with a toddler and a school-age child as a qualitative case study and document the full range of their musical experiences—spontaneous musical interactions and music learning activities—in which they are engaged on a daily basis. Through the portrait of a family highly immersed in music, I intend to depict the complex web of family members' reciprocal influences and provide insights into their distinct but interconnected emotional worlds. Data analysis indicates that music is an enriching presence in family life, a source of emotional closeness that served to balance tensions and frustrations and develop relationships of mutual responsiveness. Whether dancing together at home, making up songs at dinner time, attending a Broadway show or practicing piano, music enabled family members to spend meaningful time

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together, attuned and drawn to each other by their shared musicality. Implications for music education research and practice are provided.

Keywords: musical parenting, spontaneous musical interactions, family musical relationships, case study

Introduction

The role of parents is central in children's musical lives throughout childhood, as documented by a large body of literature depicting family musical life from different perspectives and around the world. A thorough analysis of this literature, and especially that related to family musical dynamics and the influence of music on parent-child interactions, seems to reveal two main lines of research. One such line of inquiry is early childhood research examining how music—particularly the extemporaneous exchange of singing sounds and dancing gestures—serves to create and sustain affective bonding in families (e.g., Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2008; Dissanayake, 2000; Malloch and Trevarthen, 2002; 2009; Papousek, 1996; Sole, 2016; Trevarthen, 2011). Another line of inquiry is a large body of literature addressing the role of families in children's musical education, as it pertains to the school setting (e.g.: Brand, 1986; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005) and extra musical activities related to the formal acquisition of musical skills and the mastery of a musical instrument (e.g. Creech, 2009; Creech & Hallam, 2003, 2011; Davidson & Borthwick, 2002; Davidson & Pitts, 2001; Koops, Kuebel & Smith, 2017; McPherson, Davidson & Faulkner, 2012; McPherson & Davidson, 2006), and therefore involves school-age children.

The first line of inquiry reflects a developmental perspective where music is viewed as a means for socialization and emotional growth (Ilari, 2017), and parents and children described as both equal agents in the construction of their relationships. Music is naturally woven into family's daily routines, such as diaper change (Addessi, 2009), journeys in the car (Koops, 2014) or pre-sleep transitions (Sole, 2016). It shapes family rituals (Barrett, 2009), serves as a means for communication (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), and creates a sense of belonging to a shared family culture (Gratier & Apter-Danon, 2009; Ilari, 2009). For Dissanayake (2000), parents and

children's spontaneous musical interactions are the ultimate expression of mutuality as they reflect their shared need to be emotionally meaningful for one another. A pedagogical lens seems to rather characterize the second above-mentioned line of research, which highlights the influence and contribution of parents in children's music learning process, as children enter the compulsory school-age period and become more engaged in formal learning. Asserting the centrality of parents in children's learning, this research called us to recognize that children's musical development is closely connected to their family, and specifically to their home environment (Ilari & Young, 2016), to the parents' values, beliefs, and ability to let their children access a variety of musical opportunities.

In this article, I present the musical life of one family with a toddler and a school-age child as a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998). I document the full range of musical experiences—spontaneous musical interactions and music learning activities—in which the family members are engaged on a daily basis and seek to explore how music can become a source of bonding and mutuality, shaping members' relationships, interpersonal dynamics, and self-perceived role. Through the portrait of a family highly immersed in music, I intend to depict the complex web of family members' reciprocal influences and provide insights into their distinct and yet interconnected emotional worlds. Such investigation might deepen our understanding of the richness that music may bring in the life of families and suggest pathways for engaging them more meaningfully in our music education settings.

The Case Study

The Foley family included parents Sylvia (37 years old) and Gregory (36 years old), who held administrative positions in musical theater, and two boys, Ben and Gabe, 7- and 3-year-old, respectively, at the time of the study. Gregory had worked as a professional actor for a few years

before marrying, while Sylvia's involvement with musical theater had always been exclusively administrative. Residents of a borough of New York City, they were part of a multiple case study that documented current musical experiences and musical memories of ten families with children in middle childhood (Cali, 2015). The Foley family represented a household where music was central to daily life in many ways: it surrounded the parents' jobs; it was valued and chosen as an important means to an educational end; and it was cherished as a significant aspect of the family life, providing opportunities for spontaneous music making and for meaningful sharing. It was illuminating to see how in a family where music was so central, but not pursued as a professional artistic career, all the musical activities and experiences shared within the family context influenced members' interactions and relationships. This family was chosen as an exemplary case to achieve as full an understanding as possible of the role of music in family dynamics and relationships (Merriam, 1998).

Methodology

Data collection took place over a 5-month period and comprised two 4-to-5-hours long home visits. During the first one, I conducted individual semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were audio recorded. I also asked family members to document their musical experiences over a period of seven weeks, three times per week. Each member filled out individual journals formatted in a booklet, in which they were asked to write their musical experiences (Figures 1, 2, 3). The younger child did not independently fill out a journal, but added some drawings to his mother's journal.

During the second home visit, I conducted a collective "show and tell" interview, in which members were asked to present and describe personal artifacts related to music such as songs, pictures, musical instruments, concerts programs, or videos. Artifact gathering shed light

on the emotional meanings of family musical life; it exemplified stories recounted during the first interview, illuminating contexts and functions of their most recent experiences. Family members were also asked to individually and collectively comment on the journals they had previously filled out, for validation in the form of member checks (Kvale, 2007).

The coding process of interviews transcripts, journals, and musical artifacts comprised first dividing the reported episodes into two groups (spontaneous musical interactions and music learning activities), as established in my research purpose, and then developing codes about the setting, the subjects' ways of thinking about music in relation to each other, and the perspective held by the subjects about music (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I subsequently identified emerging themes regarding family members' self-understanding and awareness of each other's feelings and thoughts. Interpretation was also informed by a linguistic analysis of oral and written texts of each participant (such as recurring linguistic forms, metaphors, personal or impersonal pronouns) and by considerations of the contexts in which each data source was collected (Bruner, 1987; Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2018). Consistencies and differences in members' account of the same musical episodes were also examined. To enhance accuracy of interpretation, I also used peer debriefing, and asked colleagues to examine the data collected and some of my analysis, in order to find insights that may have been overlooked (Creswell, 2019). Excerpts from the interviews and journals in Figures 1-3 exemplify the process of coding and the grouping in one of the themes.

Aware that entering the private life of a family could be perceived as intrusive (Graue and Walsh, 1998), I was sensitive to the fact that family is a particularly intimate space requiring permission beyond the formality of the collected consent form in conformity with IRB approval. As researcher, I was especially aware of discomfort that comes from talking to an outsider about

private aspects of their lives, and I strove to respect the unique contribution of each member as individually expressed.

Findings and Discussion

Family Musical Interactions and Activities

Music seemed to be pervasive in the Foleys' daily life, working seamlessly into their emotional state as well as the children's musical development. Singing and dancing accompanied their daily routines and they inspire moments of spontaneous musical creativity everywhere they went. Below, the dynamics underlying such interactions are described.

Singing: A father- son activity. Singing occurred throughout the day: at bedtime, travelling on short or long car rides and sometimes at the table, during dinner. Throughout the data collection period, Sylvia began realizing how often her family, specifically her children, sang on a daily basis. During the second visit, she revealed that journaling made her increasingly aware of the ubiquity of singing in their family life, especially recognizing that her 7-year-old son Ben, "sings all the time, which is very similar to Gregory, and I had forgotten how much he does it." She proceeded to explain that even some of their family friends had noticed that Gregory, like Ben, is always singing. Gregory also displayed awareness that his intense attraction to singing was shared with his older son. He recognized that for Ben singing served as a musical form of storytelling that framed his daily experiences; there always seemed to be a good reason to make up songs, whether to express pleasure for the vegetables that he ate at dinnertime, or to provide a soundtrack for when his brother threw a temper tantrum. Recognizing himself in Ben's overflowing need to sing, Gregory often struggled to find a balance between understanding this tendency and educating his child in proper manners and social behavior. Gregory observed,

Sometimes Ben says, "Ah! I can't control it!" and I remember feeling that way when I was a kid, I was just sitting here and all I'll do is I'll sing; that's how it is! I know that is

what he feels but he's got to be mindful of the situation and what is going on around him, when it's appropriate and when it's not. And we don't really bug him about singing, he just sings whenever he wants outside of the table and when [it] is not disruptive to something bigger going on, like his brother getting in trouble. You do not sing about being in trouble! (*Individual interview - first visit*)

Despite Gregory's frustration with Ben, their shared yearning for singing seems to have connected them emotionally (see Figures 1, 2, 3). They expressed such musical bonding through different modalities, while Sylvia appeared to observe this with awe. This was particularly evident in a journal entry, where Sylvia, Ben and Gregory recounted the same episode—watching the soccer game on TV and singing the national anthem. However, each of them described it slightly differently. Gregory observed that he felt, “excited and patriotic” because the soccer game gave him an opportunity to show his child some of the traditions with which he grew up. Data analysis indicated that Ben sought moments of meaningful sharing through singing with his father. In his journal he often used expressions such as, “I like singing with my dad” or, “I would like to sing more with my dad,” and in fact his father was mentioned in all the entries related to singing at home.

Conversely, looking at father and son from outside the dyad, Sylvia recognized their musical talent and proudly noted their shared musicality. She recounted,

Gregory had Ben stand with him, place his hand over his heart and sing the national anthem. So sweet, Gregory has a beautiful voice and when he sings with Ben he melts my heart. (*Journal entry 2 - Week 1*)

WEEK 1 - Entry No. 1	
Date: 6/22	
HOW did you feel?	Silly, patriotic
DESCRIBE & COMMENT	<p>excited about the world cup like to show the some of the traditions I grew up with</p> <p>Gregory singing with Ben</p>

Figure 1. Gregory's journal entry 1, excerpt

WEEK - Entry No. -	
Date: -	
HOW did you feel?	In love
DESCRIBE & COMMENT	<p>Gregory had Ben stand with him, place his hand over his heart and sing the national anthem. So sweet. Gregory has a beautiful voice and when he sings with Ben it melts my heart. I also love America, and I love seeing a dad teach his son the words to our national anthem.</p>

Figure 2. Sylvia's journal entry 2, excerpt

WEEK 1 - Entry No. 2	
Date: _____	
HOW did you feel?	I felt really good with my Dad and my self.
DESCRIBE & COMMENT	I like singing 1 with my Dad more often. I felt more good watching the soccer game. I would like 3 to sing more with my Dad.

Figure 3. Ben's journal entry 2, excerpt

Ben and Gabe's familiarity with singing seemed to stem from their parents introducing them to musical theater more frequently than any other musical genre. Recently, however, Ben's repertoire was expanding, as a result of new friendships with school peers who listened to pop songs and contemporary music. During the summer, Ben also attended a musical theater camp where he learned many Broadway songs, and he was repeatedly selected for leading roles. Ben spoke extensively about this experience during my second visit and shared four videos featuring him singing. While Gabe was still primarily drawn to children's tunes and cartoon songs, he seemed to be influenced by his older brother's musical experiences. During my second visit, I noticed that Gabe continued singing every song that Ben had mentioned and shared with me, even when our conversation had moved on. Ben appeared to serve as a musical resource for Gabe, whose musical responses were often triggered by his brother's stimuli.

Dancing as a family. Dance parties represented a building block of the Foleys' life. In all the interviews, dance parties were described as spontaneous moments of moving freely to the music whenever they, “feel inspired as a family,” as Gregory once noted. Engaging with music together was reported as a means for this family to cope with the intensity of their work and school life, as well as to understand each other and connect emotionally. Usually Sylvia initiated these moments when she sensed that “everything gets a little too hectic” and they all needed to “get all their wiggles out.” She furthermore illustrates:

Dance parties? [They] often [happen] before bath time. I consider from 4pm to 6pm the witching hour and that's when the kids melt down because they are tired, and they had a long day and they are hungry; so whenever I find myself just yelling at them too much, we just put on music and dance and then just do that for 10-15 minutes and then everything is ... okay, it's like a reset switch. So then we can just do something else.
(*Individual interview - first visit*)

These moments seemed to occur even when they were outside. This was evident in one of Sylvia's journal entries:

Ben, Gabe and I were walking to Ben's piano lesson. We walked on the sidewalk in a place of our neighborhood where people set up chairs and play music most summer evenings. Lots of people were playing their radios, but one guy was cleaning out his car and was blasting Spanish/Latino music. At first I was annoyed that he was playing the music so loudly, but when Ben and Gabe broke out into spontaneous dancing, I couldn't help but smile. They danced down the block and other folks smiled at the boys too. The boys are always a good reminder to find the joy in life. (*Journal entry 15- Week 5*)

In this, as in other circumstances, dancing influenced family members' moods and attitude.

Sylvia reported that dancing served to release negative feelings and influenced their perception of experiences and situations.

From Ben's perspective, dance parties were opportunities to watch and cherish Gabe's unfettered clumsy movements along with the music—a scene that unanimously brought laughter to the whole family. Recently, Ben had developed new musical interests, choosing to take on learning challenges like tap dancing. Sylvia reported how Ben defined tap dancing as,

“drumming for your feet,” and was continuously, “trying to tap a rhythm song out with his feet.”
(*Journal entry 11 – Week 4*)

Playing the piano. Although supportive of spontaneous family music making, Sylvia also believed in the formalized experience of music instruction as a means to cognitive and cultural growth for her children. Therefore, as soon as Ben reached what Sylvia defined as, “the right age,” she started taking him to piano lessons, firmly convinced of the invaluable richness that playing an instrument can bring into a person’s life. Piano did not seem to be Ben’s favorite musical activity, but he trusted his mother and her parental choice and practiced the piano daily.

Since the keyboard was located in the living room, Sylvia and Gregory had developed strategies to constantly monitor Ben’s practice sessions, especially when they were not able to sit next to him and directly help him. Fully aware of their son’s reluctance to practice piano, they continuously negotiated with him, attempting to obtain a more consistent practice commitment. Sylvia was more involved than Gregory in this learning process: she took Ben to piano lessons and strove to consistently attend to his practice time. Yet, this involvement came with some frustration since, in her words, “He has taken lessons for a year and already a year of piano is further than I know. So I can’t necessarily (*pause*)... if he’s not playing correctly I don’t know how to help him” (*Individual Interview – first visit*). She believed that to be more effective, she should study music herself, and was frustrated that she lacked the time to do this. In the first interview, she connected this frustration to a negative childhood experience with piano that led her feeling inadequate.

Ben seemed to trust what she wanted for him. He accepted that his mother knew what was best for him and he took piano lessons contrary to his personal preference. He expressed his reluctance by saying,

I love playing drums...drums are fun...and the piano is... I... don't...I want a drum lesson, but to unleash drums from my spirit, you have to go through piano until 18. My mom said that I need to go through piano until I'm maybe 16 or 18. (*Individual interview – first visit*)

This definitive decision to focus on piano seemed to be rooted in Sylvia's childhood experience.

She corroborated,

I played piano for a year and I begged my mom to quit, because my peers were so much more advanced while I was doing scales, and I was like, "Oh, this is embarrassing to me." And so she let me quit after a year and I regret that because I wish I could have started earlier, because...well, especially how much my life has to do with musical theater and editing books, just knowing music better would be helpful in a lot of different ways, and that's the reason why I want Ben to stick to it. (*Individual interview – first visit*)

Family Dynamics and Musical Roles

While the Foleys all seemed to share a common interest and love for music, data analysis revealed distinctive and unique musical roles that each family member held, as described below. The individual perceptions of their family musical roles coincided with their descriptions of each other.

The musical talent: Gregory. Gregory was the performer of the family. He started performing in high school as a musical theater actor and continued professionally until he and Sylvia settled down and started raising their own family. During the data collection period, he was pursuing Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in Marketing. He explained that the lifestyle of a Broadway performer required being always on tour, away from one's family: "It was fine for my twenties, but it was not what I wanted to do for my entire life," he said.

Raised in a highly musical family, Gregory learned to play several instruments, sang in a choir, followed the marching band of his father—a high school music teacher and band director—through parades and competitions, and attended arts and music summer camps. However, playing instruments and sight-reading never held his interest. Rather, from a young

age he developed a passion for musical theater, and found himself involved in shows through school and the community. Singing seemed to come naturally to Gregory. His interviews and journal were full of references to singing. During the interviews, he talked about some current and past songs and performed them informally; he imitated Ben's made-up songs and recalled the singing rhymes of his childhood—those that his father used to improvise as a musical storytelling of their day for him and his brother at bedtime—complete with lyrics. The awareness of Gregory's fine musical talent seemed to be strong in Sylvia and Ben, who consistently referenced his beautiful voice, musical competence, and natural aptitude (Figure 2). Comparing her relationship to music to Gregory's, she stated: "Gregory is musical to me because he can listen to people sing and know the notes that they are singing and speak about it fluently. I know what I like to hear, and I know what I don't like to hear and that's about it for me" (*Individual interview – first visit*).

The synchronizer of family musical experiences: Sylvia. Sylvia appeared to perceive herself as the least musical member of her family: she did not play any instrument, and she described herself as lacking both intonation and the sophistication of musical taste. When asked if she considered herself a musical person, she replied in a low tone of voice, but with intensity, "I don't! I'm around way too many musicians to consider myself musical."

Despite this low confidence in her musical abilities, Sylvia presented as the main force behind the family's daily involvement with music, in both spontaneous and formal contexts. She referred to the use of dancing to help the children through daily moments of irritability: "When everything gets a little too hectic, we stop and have a dance party and get all our wiggles out" (*Individual interview – first visit*). Sylvia used singing and playing recorded music, especially in the car, as a strategy to keep the children engaged and emotionally in sync with her and Gregory.

Throughout the interviews and in many journal entries, Sylvia spoke about learning piano as an essential component of her children's education. She regretted prematurely interrupting her piano studies as a child and emphasized that she is strongly motivated to ensure Ben kept learning piano. She observed,

My decision to quit piano as a child is the reason I make Ben stick to it, because it is a huge regret. I read studies where if a child studies music they are also better at math, and I have also struggled with math. Now [I wonder] if I hadn't stopped doing it, if math would have [been] easier for me in college and high school. I'm hoping that I can offer that opportunity and see if it influences them. I don't want them to become piano players, but I'd love them to have an appreciation for it, and I'd love for them to be able to translate to the rest of their studies (*Individual interview – first visit*).

Sylvia's motivation and determination to provide educational opportunities to her children seemed to drive their learning processes.

The intensifier of family vitality: Ben. For Ben, music seemed to function as a way to express and release his mental and physical energy—an embodiment of his inherent vitality. He recognized that his favorite activities were all connected to moving and exercising and that he was constantly seeking opportunities to make his body active. “Except for videogames and some cartoons,” he noted that all he does, “ends up into exercising.” And while talking together during my first visit, he continuously expressed his thoughts through bodily gestures and facial expressions. His notion of music appeared to be connected to movement, as expressed in this instance:

Music is fun, you get to unleash your talent of music, you get to unleash piano, you get to unleash anything that you are really good at... combined into music... Music is everywhere ... I mean like sounds ... sounds like we are talking right now. Music is everywhere ... if I move this chair, this is music, and if you do this [*he moves a box, making some sounds*], this is music. Everywhere is music. I mean...because anything that moves is music, because it makes a sound and sounds are music (*Individual interview – first visit*).

The connection between music and movement drew him naturally towards musical

experiences in which he could release his physical energy, such as playing the drums or tap dancing, and his mental energy, as with singing. This focus on movement was demonstrated by his choice of artifacts—four videos of him singing and dancing improvised and learned songs—and particularly evident in the language used to describe his feelings in the journal entries related to singing. The most frequently recurring words include terms such as “feeling really good,” “energetic,” “awesome,” “exciting,” or expressions such as “I had lots of energy.” His vitality seemed often to be overflowing, forcing his parents to develop strategies to contain or channel it.

Gregory described family mealtime:

Whenever you are trying to eat or have a conversation, trying to learn about people’s day... Ben loves to talk and you know, getting him to stay quiet while we are sharing time with everybody and giving mommy an opportunity to share her peak and pit, it’s challenging when someone else is singing *I love broccoli...broccoli, broccoli (singing in a rock style voice)*; try to steal focus and try to get back attention over to him. It’s a family meal! (*Individual interview – first visit*)

The musical explorer: Gabe. During my two visits to the Foleys' home, Gabe never engaged in direct conversations with me or with his family members. Rather, he seemed to prefer playing on his own with toys or an iPad, or running around the living room. In two of the three visits, he fell asleep in his parents’ arms during our conversations. Gabe turned three during the data collection, which was also the period when Sylvia and Gregory started transitioning him into new routines, including sleeping in his own bed. Musically, Sylvia refers to Gabe as the, “singing-off-key” family member, implicitly underlining the differences between him and his older brother. In her journal, she explained, “Gabe is often over-shadowed by his bigger talkative brother” (*Week 2 – Journal entry 6*). She continues, “I adore hearing him sing—he’s off key (like his mom) but very enthusiastic.” Her words meant to suggest her belief that she and her son were musically less gifted than Ben and Gregory. She explained:

Gregory was pushing Gabe in the shopping cart [at the grocery store], and was one aisle over from where Ben and I were. I was talking to Ben when I heard Gabe start singing at the top of his voice with gusto, “Down by the bay.” Gregory and I joke that Gabe sings like a drunk person: off-key, no melody and a little too loud. It was adorable hearing him sing the song with seriousness and commitment (*Week 6 – Journal entry 17*).

Despite the presence of his more extroverted brother, Gabe’s musical presence still permeated the Foleys’ life, as he exhibited a sense of genuine wonder and joyful spontaneity. Gabe was highly receptive to the ever-present musical content in his home, especially the musicality of Gregory and Ben. For instance, during the second visit, while his father was talking about loading a video of Ben on the computer, Gabe began improvising a song based on the word “loading” on the pitch of SMLSM, echoing and expanding the music-making at home.

Discussion: Bi-Directionality and Mutuality in the Foley Family

According to social relational theory (Sameroff, 1975, 1994, 2009), the Foley family exemplifies the mutual emotional influence between parents and children and demonstrates how the meaning given to their musical exchanges affected the way they responded to each other. Music was ingrained in the Foleys’ life; it was largely present on a daily basis in different forms, providing the rhythm of their interactions and shaping their relationships through mutual contributions (Bell, 1968; Collins & Madsen, 2003; Kuczynski, 2003). Music seemed to create a dynamic matrix through which family members experienced—are receptive and vulnerable to—each other. Whether dancing, singing, listening to music, playing piano or taking part in musical theater events, their musical interactions and behaviors, their emotions and thoughts were reciprocally and causally interconnected (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2009; Kuczynski, Parkin & Pitman, 2014). Their shared passion for musical theater brought emotional intensity to the family interactions with music. Such intensity was experienced in terms of vitality, or a sense of “being

alive" (Stern, 2010) that drove their shared musical activities, and caused them to be highly receptive to each other's emotions, states of mind, thinking processes, and musical preferences.

The Foley's musical interactions and behaviors were shaped by an effort to be constantly attuned to each other, which presented as similar to the intersubjectivity observable in mother's-and-infant's early exchanges (Dissanayake, 2000; Trevarthen & Aitkin, 2001). Ben accepted the experience of piano lessons because he perceived the significance of piano in his mother's life, in an effort to keep himself attuned to Sylvia's musical interests and aspirations. By putting his desire to learn drumming on hold, Ben appeared to prioritize the emotional communion with his mother over his natural musical disposition. In doing so, he demonstrated her influence over him and the degree to which he actively strove to adjust to her intentions and emotions. Gabe tended to constantly be attuned to the musical people that surrounded him, by imitating and mirroring their musical expressions (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009), especially those of his older brother. Meanwhile, Sylvia's awareness of the significance of music in her family's life was often awakened by the musical vitality of her children, which affected her mindset and mood. Sylvia listened deeply to her children's needs, and often used music to actively help them through emotional daily transitions. Such interdependence often prompted a shift in her musical attitudes, emotions, or state of mind, in order to match her children's. While transmitting his love for singing to his sons, Gregory was also receptive to their responses to his singing attitude, which became the context for passing on his musical interests as well as a family musical spirit (Custodero, 2009).

Employing Custodero's definition of mutuality (2005b), I posited that Sylvia and Gregory strongly recognized themselves in the musical actions and expressions of their children. Such mutual mirroring (Dissanayake, 2000) stemmed from moments of collaborative musical

interactions, and was deepened by reflective observations of their children's relationship with music.

For Gregory, recognizing himself in his son's continuous and uncontrollable need to sing deepened this awareness. Ben's singing was so constant that it almost constituted a soundtrack of his daily happenings. Consequently, it may sometimes have occurred in inappropriate moments: when his brother threw a temper tantrum, or during dinner, interrupting family conversations. Gregory understood that when Ben said, "Ah! I can't control it!" he fundamentally found it difficult to stop singing. He remembered feeling the same way, but he did not seem to realize that he still sang all the time, as reported by his wife and friends. As a consequence, Ben and Gregory's engagement with singing was a source of mutuality that drew them closer and generated a sense of mutual mirroring (Dissanayake, 2000). However, singing might also have generated moments of tension that occurred when Ben's musical exuberance raised the intensity of their emotions so high that Gregory felt the necessity to exert his parental authority and reprimanded him. Sylvia also recognized herself in her younger son Gabe and especially in his less exuberant way, compared to Ben, to express his musicality. Her belief that Gabe appeared to be less gifted than his brother seemed to be more a projection of her insecurity regarding her own musical abilities than an unbiased evaluation of Gabe's musical skill. She seemed in this way to long for the same emotional communion that she recognized Ben and Gregory both had.

The activities related to music learning were valued in the Foleys' musical life. Although Sylvia seemed to hold a vital role in this process (McPherson & Davidson, 2002), both parents continuously strove to create a learning partnership with their older son Ben, monitoring his piano practice from a distance, and providing active support and encouragement when his motivation decreased (Creech, 2009a; Creech & Hallam, 2011; Davidson, Howe, Moore &

Sloboda, 1996; McPherson, 2009). In spite of the centrality of formal music education, the spontaneous moments of responsive musical interactions were reported as the most joyful, fun, and bonding, for they served to regulate emotions and release stress (Gingras, 2012). Resembling rhythmic turn taking, melodic vocalizations and bodily gestures of mother's-infant's exchanges, these shared moments exemplified how, through music, parents and children continued to communicate emotionally with one another beyond infancy; the time spent together nourishes a musicality that sustained and enhanced their relationships in meaningful ways (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2002, 2009).

The emotional significance of these spontaneous interactions also became a source of mutual trust when the music learning was stressful and frustrating for Ben, since they fostered a sense of vitality and a positive disposition towards music. These interactions nurtured an affective bonding that went beyond the learning partnership during piano practice (Creech, 2009a, 2009b, Creech & Hallam, 2011). The family's emotional closeness deepened their experience of togetherness, of "being with" one another (Custodero, 2005a), and transformed Ben's experience of learning piano into a shared family activity.

Conclusions

Through the story of the Foleys, I portrayed how music becomes an enriching presence in family life, a source of emotional closeness that served to balance tensions and frustrations and develop relationships based on mutual responsiveness. Whether dancing together at home, making up songs at dinner time, attending a Broadway show or practicing piano, music enabled family members to spend meaningful time together, attuned and drawn to each other by their shared musicality. This calls music education researchers and teachers to acknowledge that music provides affordances for relationship-building and to recognize the extent to which music

continues to enhance family socialization, communication and well-being throughout childhood. It also reaffirms the vital role that family plays in children's development and is at the core of an advocacy for a student-centered approach to teaching music, where students' voices and contributions are valued and the sharing of individual interests and dispositions, as a reflection of the students' family culture, is encouraged. Cultivating connections with students' families might not only provide insights into salient aspects of the home musical environment, but also become a means for understanding which music learning experiences cross the boundaries of the classroom and influence students' lives in meaningful ways. Consideration should also be given to developing pedagogical strategies that allow the creation of spaces where children and parents may share musical experiences together throughout the school year: open lessons, shared concerts or inviting parents to be volunteers in children's musical events. These moments may become opportunities to spend meaningful time together, re-enforcing children's learning, and promoting a conjoined musical engagement.

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