



Making the Gift of Music Work for Your Child: How to Avoid Your Child's "Dropping Out" from Music Studies

By Rufina Gorin, MA, NCMT

"The artist is nothing without the gift, but the gift is nothing without work."

-Emile Zola (1840-1902)

I would like to discuss the topic of "dropping out" from music instruction. Dropping out mostly seems to happen as a consequence of the lack of maintaining required daily practice, which is a vital ingredient of instrumental learning. Why should this not be a reason for "dropping out?"

Very often parents feel forced to make this decision because "the child does not practice enough," "the child is not enjoying the lessons," or just simply because "the child does not want to do it anymore." This reasoning is usually followed by the statement "when he/she is older, we will come back to continue music lessons." I have heard this too many times.... And since I have not been asked for an advice, at that point I diplomatically reply, "I understand."

To be honest, considering my experience of more than 40 years in music education, I know that it is rare for the kids who drop out of music study to ever come back. And although I say that "I understand" at some level, I do not understand some adults who are passing on the responsibility of making an important decision onto shoulders of youngsters, decisions which will influence their children's character and future. Children need guidance and parenting, and adults in their wisdom should make the decisions concerning their kids. Sometimes it is wise to ask a teacher or a music educator for a professional opinion, just as we ask a doctor or a lawyer or accountant for an advice in the area of their expertise.

It is wise to be tuned into your child's interests, capabilities and talents; it is wise to have various discussions with your child in this regard as to understand your child better; it is wise to be able to influence your child, and to make a right decision together.

Any study requires focus, discipline, and consistent practice, and if a child does not possess these qualities and is not willing to develop them on their own, the result should not be to "drop a study," but to *help* them develop it. These are qualities that will lead to success, not just in music but in many other realms of life.

My point is this: If at the early age we are allowing the child to drop out because of required work, what kind of unconscious message are we sending to this child? What might be the implications of that decision? Discussing with your child from time to time various aspects of learning, talking about your learning experience, or bringing up cases of celebrated individuals, are a chance to share with child your thoughts and knowledge, and at the same time to help them understand that the feeling they may have of wanting to avoid the discipline of practice or give it up is not an exception; it is a common fact, so they will not feel inadequate or incapable.



A very good example is Albert Einstein, a Nobel Laureate and the most famous scientist. Einstein was one of the greatest minds in world history. He is known as a brilliant physicist who contributed to the scientific world more than any other person. His theories on relativity paved the way for how science currently views time, space, energy, and gravity. In his early years, Einstein's mother was disturbed by how long it took him to learn how to talk. His elementary school teachers thought that he was a foolish dreamer, and one teacher had even asked him to drop out of his class. Young Albert hated sports as a child, they made him dizzy and tired, but he made up for his dislike of sports with his love for music. I am bringing up this example as proof that even the most brilliant people need understanding, support and perseverance. There may be good reasons for dropping out, but it is not an action to be taken lightly. Before deciding to drop out, I urge you to reflect deeply on the causes and consequences of that decision. I encourage any parent with a child that is contemplating dropping out to give me a call before that final decision is made. Perhaps together we can make a difference.