

Cooperative vs. Competitive Learning

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From the moment our toddlers start kicking a ball, we eagerly enroll them in soccer classes. Sports offer teamwork, physical activity, and coordination, but they can quickly become highly competitive, sometimes catching parents off guard. While competitive learning environments contribute to early childhood development, fostering creative and cooperative experiences is equally important for nurturing our children's sense of self. The arts, particularly music, provide a platform where children are recognized for their creativity rather than their achievements.

Unlike other forms of art that often emphasize solo creativity, music fosters a cooperative experience, especially in early childhood. Music classes encourage children to create together and often involve parent participation, cultivating an environment where cooperation and creativity flourish. As children grow older, many activities shift to drop-off formats where performance is evaluated and compared. However, during their formative years, it's essential to seek out classes that involve parents and facilitate educational and creative experiences together. This approach lays the groundwork for a lifelong appreciation of music, the arts, and collaboration.



The Vital Role of Music

Music, often hailed as a universal language, permeates every aspect of human life. Whether at the gym, in the car, or during celebrations and mourning, music adds depth and emotion to experiences. Despite its ubiquity and significance across cultures, music is often relegated to the realm of "extra curricular" activities in America. This is a stark contrast to many cultures where music remains an active and engaged part of daily life, fostering community and connection.


In America, music's role has become more passive, with fewer participatory experiences, particularly among children. This lack of early exposure and engagement can lead to diminished interest, confidence, and ability in music-making later in life. However, it's never too late or too early to begin! There's a clear correlation between our interest in music-making and the exposure and experience we've had. Moreover, the feedback we receive from others significantly influences our willingness to engage with music. If we've been discouraged or labeled as "tone deaf," our inclination to pursue music may diminish.



Cooperative vs. Competitive Learning in Music

Cooperative learning fosters peer learning, which can be particularly effective as children might understand and relate to their peers' explanations and demonstrations better than those from adults. It increases motivation and engagement, making learning more enjoyable and less intimidating, thus motivating children to participate and engage in music activities. Through cooperative music activities, children learn to be empathetic, understand different perspectives, and cooperate towards a common goal.

The Role of Competitive Learning



Competitive learning, on the other hand, involves structured activities where children compete against each other to achieve individual goals. While competition can drive motivation and excellence, its role in early childhood music education should be carefully considered. Competitive learning can inspire children to strive for higher standards and personal bests, and learning to cope with winning and losing can teach resilience, discipline, and the value of hard work. However, competition can also create pressure and stress, which might hinder some children's enjoyment and learning process. Excessive focus on individual achievement can undermine the collaborative spirit and reduce opportunities for cooperative learning. It may also disadvantage children who are less confident or have different learning paces, leading to feelings of inadequacy.

Creating a Balanced Learning Environment

While competitive learning has its place, cooperative learning aligns more closely with the developmental needs of young children, particularly in the context of music education. The collaborative nature of music – from playing in bands to singing in choirs – inherently supports cooperative learning environments. These settings not only enhance musical skills but also foster critical social and emotional development. As parents, choosing music classes that prioritize cooperative learning can create enriching and supportive environments that cultivate a lifelong love for music and learning in young children. Introducing competitive elements gradually and sparingly to motivate personal excellence ensures a balanced and comprehensive educational experience.

Music education offers a powerful tool for early childhood development, fostering cognitive, emotional, and social growth. By prioritizing cooperative learning in music education, parents can help their children develop essential life skills such as teamwork, empathy, and communication, laying the groundwork for a lifelong appreciation of music, the arts, and collaboration.

How to Support Early Childhood Development Through Music

Try these with your child and watch them blossom



- 1 Morning Musical Ritual:** Incorporate a simple, fun song into your morning routine that involves both you and your child. Sing a "good morning" song or a playlist of favorite tunes to start the day. **Benefit:** This sets a positive tone for the day and helps establish a consistent musical routine. It emphasizes cooperation as you sing together, reinforcing the idea that music is a shared experience.
- 2 Interactive Storytime with Music:** Enhance storytime by integrating music. Use instruments to create sound effects for the story or sing parts of the narrative. Choose books that include songs or rhythmic text. **Benefit:** This makes reading more engaging and interactive, and it shows children how music and storytelling can go hand in hand, promoting creativity and cooperative learning.
- 3 DIY Family Band:** Make simple musical instruments together using household items, such as shakers from rice-filled containers or drums from pots and pans. Have a "family band" session where everyone plays their instruments and makes music. **Benefit:** Crafting instruments and making music encourages creativity and collaboration. It helps children see the fun in making music and highlights the cooperative aspect of musical activities.
- 4 Participatory Music Classes:** Enroll in parent-child music classes that emphasize cooperative music-making. Look for programs that encourage both parent and child participation. **Benefit:** These classes provide a structured environment for cooperative learning, allowing parents and children to bond over shared musical activities. They help build a child's confidence and social skills in a supportive, non-competitive setting.

By incorporating these hacks into your daily life, you can create a rich musical environment that supports your child's early development, encourages cooperation and creativity, and lays the foundation for a lifelong appreciation of music.

About In Harmony Music

In Harmony Music is a forward-thinking early childhood music education company designed for the needs of today's families. We believe music is essential for children, families, schools and communities who need real-life support for development beginning from infancy. We recognize that music, movement, play, and meaningful group experiences build neuroplasticity in the brain, and serve as foundational elements for the overall well-being of children and adults. Our classes are a canvas for communal creative expression, creating an environment to explore and embrace the transformative power of music!

About the Author



Justine Chadly, an early childhood music educator since 2003, is the owner of In Harmony Music where she offers her curriculum based on a contemporary combination of early childhood music learning methods. She has been a guest speaker for local universities and conferences nationwide. She holds a BA in music from UC Davis with an emphasis in vocal performance and an MA in Music Education with an emphasis in early childhood and special education from San Francisco State University. She completed the certification course from the Smithsonian Folkways in World Music Pedagogy. Justine has composed for a worldwide music education curriculum and has led workshops and video tutorials for music educators around the world.

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