

# “Ins and outs” of Music on The lap: an introduction.

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Music on the lap (MoL): a child centred early childhood music education approach in The Netherlands. To guide the children in their musical learning, musicians and pedagogues are trained by the MoL foundation to become early childhood music specialists

Background knowledge and didactical skills provide an early childhood music teacher with a solid base to make appropriate decisions in working with young children and music. A MoL teacher should also be creative and flexible. To support the musical learning of young children, teachers have at their disposal a large range of musical activities from which they can choose. These activities are the centre of the MoL approach.

Music: parents and children always love it! It looks “easy”, “cute” and everybody has fun. But music education for the under-fours needs professionalism, musicality, knowledge, flexibility, structure, .....

## Introduction

Music on the Lap (MoL) is the name for preschool music lessons for children in the age of 4 months to 4 years, an age range as is generally defined for the preschool age range in the Netherlands. The aim is to let children acquire and develop the basic skills of music by means of a programme strongly underpinned by evaluation of practice with theory emanating from practice. (Gestel van, M., M. Albers, M. van Maurik, A. Van der Bomen, R. Rikhof & H. Veerman, 2010)

Certified MoL teachers provide music lessons for children accompanied by a parent, carer, or grandparent. These lessons are given on a weekly basis on the same location. Courses are held not only at music schools but also in community centres. Music lessons are also given in larger groups at playgrounds and day care centres in the presence of professional carers.

Music on the lap works with different age groups in her courses. Although depending on the group composition which boundaries can be determined by the individual teacher, regularly the baby group has an age range of 4 months to 12 months, the “dreumes groep” (this is a specific Dutch word for this age group) 13 to 24 months and the toddler group 25 to 48 months. The songs used in these groups are specifically written and selected for them in order to make a close connection to the musical and general developmental levels of the group.

A regular MoL course consists of 6 to 12 lessons. These lessons are built on singing and musical activities. An activity is a song accompanied by a motor action and often using either a musical instrument suitable for young children, or a toy. (Albers & Rikhof, 1998)

A regular MoL lesson generally takes 30 or 45 minutes. In this time 8 to 12 songs will be presented. Each song/activity will take an average of about 3 to 4 minutes. The remaining time is generally used for distributing objects and putting objects back into boxes, responses from the children about what they experienced and the response of the parents and teacher on this, or the longer continuation of an activity due to the children's responses to it. A MoL course generally has 6 to 10 participating children accompanied by one of their parents.

### **History**

It was found during professional practice in general education and general music education (1980 - 1988) that children were less and less able to sing well and march on the beat. (Albers, Gestel, Hopster & Maurik, 1990)

The idea arose to stimulate innate musical possibilities before the children would enter elementary school. Already in 1981 the Dutch Annie Langelaar – who stood at the cradle of general music education for children in the Netherlands – created the Foundation for Toddlers and Music (Stichting Peuters en Muziek). The aims were to investigate how musical influence in the first years of life could be of importance for future general development. A second aim was to stimulate research in the field of early childhood music education, and to expand the gained knowledge.

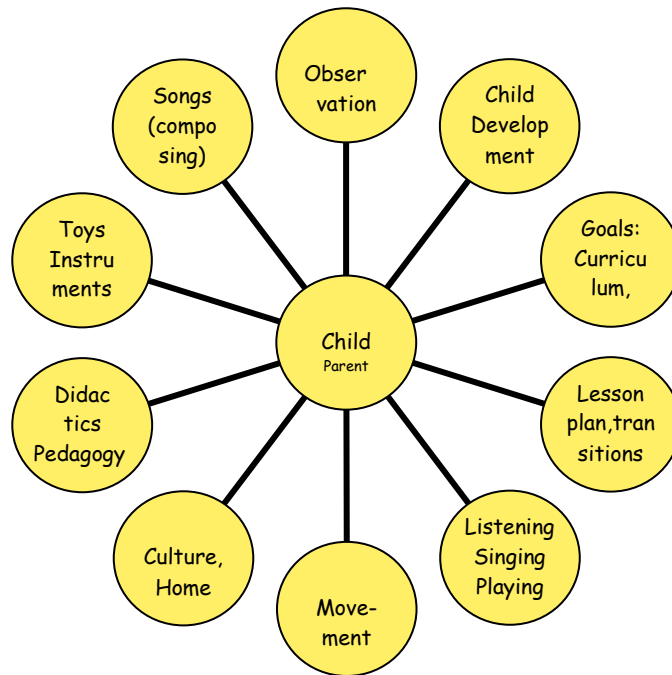
Annie Langelaar wrote the following: “Every child is born with a large number of very different talents, amongst which music. These talents need to be given the change to develop otherwise they will shrivel” (Langelaar, 1977, p. 14).

The quest is therefore to develop these inherent capabilities according to the children’s own level of possibilities and to offer activities and songs that can be used in the home situation to continue the musical learning process. Activities that can be easily transferred to the home situation (like brushing your teeth) are part of the lessons.

The structure of the musical learning process is based on a group process more or less derived from the family structure. Parents (grandparents or carers) are an important part of the MoL-lesson. The musical interaction between parent and child is stimulated as well as the taking part in a group process. The teacher should function as a mediator of musical information and should guide the learning processes of individual children in the group as well as the learning processes of the group.

### **Teacher training**

Students (musicians and pedagogues) become MoL specialists during a one and a half year teacher training. The training consists of 18 days of 6 hours. The total number of study hours is 550.



The songs and musical activities offered to the children need to be tailored to their possibilities and capabilities. The offering of music wrapped in an attractive activity and constructed in accordance with the developmental level of the children motivates them to join in. Knowledge about the general development of young children and connecting with their personal capabilities is therefore important. Consequently MoL does not only take musical development into consideration but also the sensory, emotional, motor, social, language and cognitive development.

### Lesson plan

All MoL lessons are prepared by means of a lesson plan in which the activities are described as well as the necessary (musical) objects and musical and general developmental aims to focus on. Directions as they are articulated by the teacher-training course are not binding, but serve as good guidelines for the didactical choices MoL teachers can make. Within this construction, teachers formulate the specific starting points and decide for different aims for the course and the lessons. During the preparation of the lessons they decide for different developmental or learning aims for each activity. For example: different motor actions; focusing on different aspects of the developmental areas and different choices of toys and musical equipment.

Because of the importance of repetition, each lesson normally only offers two new activities. Multiple repetitions of the songs during a lesson and over a course provide the children the opportunity to step in to an activity when they want to.

To offer different movement possibilities a lesson alternates between activities that are performed on the floor and activities that are performed in the space of the classroom. A regular lesson should contain different kinds of activities in order to focus on the different parts of the developmental areas and contextual aims. Through frequent repetition during

the lesson and course parents and children have ample possibilities to learn the songs and activities and it becomes easier to use singing and music making in the daily routine. Through constant evaluation during and after a lesson, MoL teachers adapt their way of working in a course to the musical behaviour and musical needs of the children. Therefore observation and evaluation, understanding what is happening, are among the most important skills a MoL-teacher should have.

### **The competences of the Music on the lap teacher.**

A MoL teacher should have the following competences:

- Musical competence: the MoL teacher should be able to use her musical professionalism to guide children in their musical development by creating a challenging musical learning environment. Traditional music and songs should constitute an important part of the MoL programme to promote the transfer of culture.
- Interpersonal competence: the MoL teacher has an open and respectful attitude and is able to create a safe and secure climate within the group through amongst others stimulating interactive communication with children and parents.
- Pedagogical competence: the MoL teacher is able to create a well-structured musical learning environment.
- Organising competence: the MoL teacher is able to create and conduct an inspiring and functional musical learning environment for children and parents.
- Competence continuing personal professional development: the early childhood music teacher is able to evaluate her functioning as a teacher and has an investigative attitude towards her continuous professional development.

### **Final word**

As early childhood music teachers we all have our aims and ideals about working with young children and music. Nowadays music is often linked to “useful” things as language development or social skills to justify singing and music making.

But offering children the opportunity to develop their innate musical potential as well as transferring the songs and music of the culture is equally important. By promoting the integration of music in the daily routine, all young children can be offered the opportunity to have access to music according to their age group, interests and possibilities. Children are born with a broad musical potential and they have the right to develop that potential.

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