

## Lullaby singing and its human Bildung potential

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### ABSTRACT

*On the basis of a qualitative study of 20 Norwegian lullaby-singing parents, this article explores the human Bildung potential of parents' lullaby singing to their children at bedtime. Some parents may experience a personal re-awakening when singing as they more easily can express themselves openly and rich and get in contact with emotional layers of their own childhood. Secondly, the act may afford a sort of "musical mindfulness", which is a unique as well as collective mindful and calm self-with-other-cultivation. The lullaby singing then becomes an important part of the forming and exploring of the parent-child intimate and social relationship through a musical journey that facilitates the creation and sharing of a personal family signature and convivial atmosphere. Parents' singing also fosters children's love of music and singing. The children may also experience and learn about the language of intimacy, self-regulation, sensitive timing and musical taste through their parents' singing. Furthermore, the act facilitates the child's language acquisition and the development of inner images and free associations. In addition, the lullaby act – as a cultural activity and way of thinking – may open up for a deeper world encountering and value orientation. This can be linked to a broader way of understanding the concept of Bildung as lullaby-singing touches upon human aspects of interconnectedness, spirituality and solidarity, but also a view of it as an end-in-itself. Nonetheless, parents who are blindly reproducing the tradition or being insensitive and highly goal-oriented, ruin the free space of the present intimate moment and will not fulfill the act's human potential. Keywords: Bildung, Lullaby, Musical parenting, Early childhood education.*

## Introduction

Throughout history and across cultures, singing and playing music has been an integral part of an adult and child's interrelationship. This is especially true for lullabies. Lullabies are a recognized universal and ancient song form considered to be an important part of care giving in every known culture (e.g. Opie & Opie, 1951; Trehub, Unyk & Trainor, 1993, Trehub & Trainor, 1998; Trehub, 2001; Dissanayake, 2000). Parents from all over the world sing simple, soothing songs to and with<sup>1</sup> their children (e.g. Opie & Opie, 1951). Singing lullabies may be considered to be a biologically rooted behaviour (Young, Street & Davies, 2007), belonging to the instinctive nature of motherhood and parenting (i.e. Papoušek, 1996; Dissanayake, 2000). However, the lullaby act is not remitted to a separate realm, but is naturally embedded in the parents and children's life reality and a larger cultural and collective context (Bonnár, 2014). It involves constraints and possibilities, which spring from life realities and the long history of this human practice and each generation 'continues to revise and adapt its human and biological heritage in the face of current circumstances' (Rogoff, 2003: 3). Nonetheless, today it seems as though this old ritual is threatened by parents' lack of time and musical knowledge (de Vries, 2009: 402) and is better maintained within the higher educated parts of the population (Bonnár, 2014, Custodero, Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

Lullaby singing is largely based upon an oral tradition that accommodates personal parental touches that include family history, cultural idiosyncrasies, and musical preferences, both before and after the child is born. The manner in which the song is performed shows that lullabies are also defined by the way they are sung. The songs that parents and children choose to sing have some common characteristics: they are short; they deemphasise individual virtuosity; they display constancy of rhythm/meter/groove and a repetitive structure (Bonnár, 2014). All of them are easy to master, and most of the melodies are immediately compelling, appealing and attractive (ibid.). Parents lullaby singing reflects a great diversity of songs used, though several are more popular than the others; 'So, ro', 'Trollmors voggessang', 'Kvelden lister seg på tå', 'Byssan lull', 'Bæ, Bæ lille lam', 'Kjære Gud jeg har det godt', 'Sov du vesle spire ung' are among the most popular (ibid.).

Unsurprisingly, the lyrics of these songs often have a clear message and centre on transition time and the day's end. The most dominant themes also include love, care, safety and sleep. This does reflect previous research results (e.g., O'Callaghan,

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1 Even though the children participate in different ways during their parents' singing, and strongly influence the act, I will, for reasons of space, use the terms singing 'to' throughout the article.

2008; Valentin, 2004). The songs also relate to nature and the animal world, real or magical. Animals can be anthropomorphised, and the songs demonstrate an awareness of children's natural affection for animals in other ways as well. Vivid images (lambs, horses and goats, for example) accompany personification of the songs and opportunities for individual interpretation and personal storytelling.

This article takes up the challenge of using the elusive concept of Bildung in the everyday context of lullaby singing in order to promote its importance and longevity. It explores ways in which Bildung might be appropriate as part of the description of this universal parental act. It is an attempt to come to grips with the overt and underlying Bildung potential of an act that has personal and unique, physical and spiritual, useful and "nonsense" manifestations as well as conventional and cultural features. Following the Danish professor of music education Frede V. Nielsen (1994), music represents a multispectral and deep universe of meaning including existential layers, and it tends to be more complex than language can describe. Experienced meaning is not simply a surface phenomenon; it permeates the body and psyche of participants.

In this respect psychological aspects in relation to the Bildung potentials of lullaby singing are included. An emphasis is placed on its human potential for social sensitivity and companionship, the particular lullaby quality and how parents' musicality expresses itself in their living, feeling, thinking and being at bedtime, as an important part of the forming of their social relationship with their children. I will first give a broad definition of the concept of Bildung, before exploring in detail parents' own experiences to illustrate the concept's practical life-world relevance. First the focus is held on the parents themselves and the parent-child relationship, then the focus shifts to the actual songs and the material content and lastly the lullaby Bildung potential for children will be treated. Keeping in mind that parents and their children experience the lullaby act in a rather global and holistic way, and that their focus may shift and change during the singing moment or during different periods of time, I will, for reasons of clarity and structure, treat these aspects separately. Then I will discuss and dig deeper into its implications for the parent, the child and their relationship. The concluding section weaves these different threads together and provides a summary.

## Theoretical underpinnings

In his “theory of Human Bildung”, the German educationist and philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt<sup>2</sup> emphasizes the role which social relations play in Bildung. Education alone does not suffice. More important are the *circumstances*, which accompany a person throughout his life (Humboldt, 1792). Broadly speaking, Bildung refers to a *process of socialisation* which makes it easier to understand, manage and participate in everyday cultural and social forms of interactions and ways of thinking (see Klafki, 2001). In the German sense of it – an *inwardness* (Innerlichkeit) or intuitive understanding is identified and pursued (Naumann, 2006: 27–28). Moreover, the concept includes an “inner development of the individual” (Watson, 2010: 53–54), self-cultivation and self-transformation (Humboldt, 1792) and is understood as human formation, growth, development and as an end-in-itself. How individuality and diversity can be achieved is a central objective in Humboldt’s theory of Bildung (1792, I: 141). This process may liberate one from blind obedience to superstition, tradition or any sort of belief in realities that transcend the possibilities of human experience (Bruford, 1975). In the process of “higher perfection”, Humboldt locates a balance of receptivity and self-activity (Humboldt, 1792, I: 141). Moreover, this process and development may also enable or facilitate an authentic meeting with the other (Levinas, 1993; Kierkegaard, 2002; Løvlie, 2003), and this process is even called an “intersubjective, spiritual process” (Miller-Kipp, 1992 In Reichenbach, 2014: 68).

Moreover, the concept of Bildung also encompasses an aesthetic and pedagogical dimension and process with a stronger focus on its *outcome*, and in the educational field, the focus is most of all held on academic knowledge (Reichenbach, 2014: 67). For many years, the concept has been associated with “noble” academic or classic ideals of self-cultivation, self-transformation and enlightenment. Central in this tradition is the question of what constitutes an educated or cultivated human being. The German educationist Wolfgang Klafki, as I see it, bridges the gap between the “noble” academic standards and everyday practice when he insists on quality *basic* education and regenerates the Bildung concept, which traditionally was linked with elitism and overemphasized subjectivity. Using a synthesized three-part conception of Bildung, Klafki intends to evoke material, formative as well as categorial aspects of the concept. He connects the realisation of personal development (the formal part of his tripartite definition) with social responsibility (the normative or categorial part). The key point here is to cultivate a capacity to serve both individual and social

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2 Quotations from Wilhelm von Humboldt are referenced by the volume and page of Flitner and Giel’s Edition, i.e. Humboldt 1960–81).

interests through a developed sense of “self”- and “co-determination”, a “double” or “mutual opening” towards the self and the other, which balances individuality with sensitivity to the needs of the other (Klafki, 1998) as well as an opening between the subject and the object (Klafki, 2001), in our context between the parent and the lullaby, and between the child and the lullaby. Nonetheless, from a relational point of view, the crucial point is the opening that may take place between the parent and the child when the singing becomes integrated in their being together. In his theory of categorial Bildung, Bildung is ultimately not a question of either material or formative Bildung, but both (Klafki, 1963).

Shortly, the material Bildung aspect in the context of lullabies refers to the content and substance of parents' singing, while formal Bildung aspects place an emphasis on how the child (and also the parent) may be formed towards a capacity of self-realisation and the child's processes and experiences towards greater human understanding through the singing. The song and the singing seem intrinsically woven together. Categorial aspects of the act may refer to its exemplary value and the impact the singing obtains on the child and the parent across their life span, for example “how the reality has been opened” to in this case the parent and the child (Klafki, 1963: 44). These Bildung aspects encompass what the act might provide in terms of teaching the child about social and cultural skills and behaviours, cultural belonging, family and social identity, including what it may afford for the parents themselves in terms of a musical and personal awakening.

### Methodological conditions

This article builds upon a qualitative study of 20 Norwegian parents and their lullaby singing to their preschool aged children. The study focuses on descriptions and explorations of the act of singing lullabies in a naturalistic setting. The study is local: the informant selection was selected among parents from Oslo and the surrounding areas. The majority of the participants lived within the city of Oslo (Grefsen, Torshov, Sagene, Vinderen, Frogner and Majorstuen and surrounding areas like Nesodden, Asker and Bærum). They had no formal musical education (only two of the informants had professional musical background). The empirical material consists of interviews with different families including 20 healthy, adult participants, aged 31 and above. The majority of the respondents were born in Norway and all were native speaking Norwegians. I strategically sought out cases that manifested the phenomenon intensely. I also used the accidental and snowball strategies. The sample was then adjusted according to conceptualization and the evolvement of the project.

Interviews were based on strategic choices to ensure information-rich cases and thematic diversity. Information-rich meaning in this context means a variety of unique and personally coloured narratives about the phenomenon of singing lullabies, and diversity regarding focus of interest, levels of specificity and differentiations of the act. The mothers and fathers who volunteered for this study represented a fairly culturally specific and homogeneous group: all of them were college educated, were or had been in heterosexual partnerships, and only one was an adoptive father. Single parents were included and treated on equal terms. However, several of the informants shared a great passion for music or singing in general, and they had many musical experiences from their own childhood that surely influenced upon their present situation with own children. This correlates with previous international research (i.e. Custodero, Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), which emphasizes that parents with previous musical experiences are more likely to sing to their own children. They were slightly older than the average parents in Norway (mean age = 38). The majority of the children were healthy, and of preschool age between 1 and 6. First, second and third born children were represented in the sample. However, the majority of interviews were based upon information about lullaby singing to first-born preschool aged children.

The process of collecting data from interviews and video recordings gave similarities with the long interview process. The base of this being a critical literature review, self-examination, an open, qualitative research interview outlined with a flexible semi-structured framework prior to the interview session (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The long interview procedure has been based upon a review of analytical categories in previous research literature, a review of individual and cultural categories (a detailed and systematic appreciation of my own personal experience with the topic of interest and identification of my own individual and cultural categories, discovery of individual and cultural categories of the respondents and discovery of analytical categories in connection with previous research work. For reasons of space, I will only refer to data from the interviews in this paper. The video material shows lullaby singing in action, and has an important validating value, but in the context of *Bildung*, they seem overall to confirm parents' statements and in this respect, they add little new information. Quotations from my own experiences are cited from a lullaby diary, written from 2010 until 2013, when my daughter was between the ages of 3 and 6. Parents' views differed from and correlated with my own views, and the presentation presents both these similarities and variations. Exploring the act of singing lullabies as a lived experience-phenomenon invites to a broader approach, both methodologically and theoretically. Phenomenological and hermeneutic thinking are paired, and like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived. The focus is on illuminating details and seemingly

trivial aspects within experience that may otherwise be taken for granted in our lives, with the goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding. It is critical to this process of understanding that I seek to describe, on a deep level, attitudes, thoughts and intentions behind the uses and meanings of lullabies. In order to obtain knowledge about these aspects, the focus is held on the informants' narratives, with their powerful access to authentic and spontaneous stories of human existence. The informants are sharing their life experiences in a potentially free and open manner, coloured by their own values and ideologies. My interest in themes – my fundamental research orientation – is not primarily epistemological or methodological, but within “Geisteswissenschaft” to use the original German concept. Drawing upon Dilthey, van Manen points out that what we are dealing with is ‘the human world characterized by *Geist* – mind, thoughts, consciousness, values, feelings, emotions, actions and purposes, which find their objectifications in languages, beliefs, arts and institutions’ (van Manen, 1990: 3).

## **Lullaby singing as a mediator of different intentions, influences, convictions and objectives**

Parents' personal behaviour, attitudes and value orientations colour the act in infinite ways. Some parents emphasise the didactic and educational aspect of lullaby singing more strongly than others, and they stress its pedagogical benefits; others emphasise the love of music and singing or the importance of social and cultural competences and skills. Still others focus on the importance of creating good routines and pay special attention to the regularity of their singing. Lastly, some parents focus on their singing as a social moment of sharing, confession and exploration. Very often there is a mixture of different intentions and objectives that colour parents' experiences of the ritual of bedtime singing. Normative, material and formal aspects of the lullaby act seem blended together in the parents' statements:

Every child loves to sing, and it's egocentric, from my point of view, not to systematically sing to your children. I started with ten songs – ‘Så rart å være flaggermus’ and other songs – and had the ambition to sing two hundred songs to my children, to create a sort of song bank, but it all stalled. It is so egocentric. I didn't manage to complete my project, even though I knew it was so important for them. (Father no. 8)

Music is a gift that I feel I have received, that I feel all people have received, in different ways, naturally, and with different points of departure, but I feel a sort of commitment. Yes, that's it: a commitment. I want music to be so integrated in my son's life that he will not be able to say the first time he heard a song. (Father no. 5)

Some parents feel a strong parental duty or commitment of handing over music, songs and this oral lullaby tradition to the next generation. Parent no. 8 stresses that it is important to sing "systematically" to your children, and that it is "egoistic" not to do so, because children love to sing. The father no. 5's own strong relationship with and devotion to classical music influences his choices and gives him a feeling of commitment to hand over music to his son. Parents sing songs that resonate with their own personal beliefs and taste and/or with their children's preferences and needs. In this respect, both a cultural formative as well as a parental normative aspect is present. The normative part of lullaby singing is linked to a parental commitment or a feeling of parental duty of transmitting these traditional songs to their children. The father no 5 touches upon a personal strong conviction and commitment towards music, while others describe this commitment more in relation to children's appreciation of music, social, educational upbringing, to 'being a good and responsible parent' and a 'parental task'. Some parents emphasise their love of music and singing in association with a strong interest in their cultural heritage, while others are more immersed in personal, spiritual and earthly beliefs or the children's upbringing, needs and routines. The parents in these examples are aware of the lullabies formative potentials and want to provide their children with musical encounters that both promote an appreciation of music and stimulate their musical abilities and collective, cultural awareness. The lullaby singing is also strongly linked to a parental identity. In this respect, the singing is part of children's upbringing, a process of socialisation and enculturation, as a *Bildung* aspect of learning about our cultural song heritage or simply as an important social family tradition that is passed on to the next generation.

### Lullaby singing as personal awakening– a unique parental personal style and signature

The empirical material shows a great range of assessment when it comes to parent's singing and musicality. The arrival of a newborn baby into one's life sometimes reawakens one's musicality. When raising children, in effect, parents are also very often raising themselves as well:



I started singing again, for my son, after a very long break. I think I haven't sung since the school days. I am not that into music, but I see that my son likes it, so I started to do it for that reason only. (Father no. 2)

But I have not really been singing. I cannot sing, or at least I didn't believe that I could. I never sang. 'Passively musical', you could call it. It turned out that it was only a matter of trying. I could actually sing for my children. (Father no. 4)

-I have not sung much, but I have always wanted to express myself through music. Since my children love music and singing, I now have a new opportunity.

-So there is something new taking place since you got children?

-Yes, I have always wanted to sing, but life has not given me the opportunity until now. I never took the initiative to take singing lessons. But I have always wanted to sing and play music. (Father no. 10)

I think that I haven't sung since the school years, but now I sing every other day to my son. (Father no. 2)

Parents sing for the first time, or they find their personal singing to be placed in the spotlight for the first time. Some parents revisit their musicality entirely when their child is born, and they become more confident in their singing to their children. Interestingly, parents build their own unique and personal identity despite powerful conventional 'forces' surrounding this musical material.

It is no secret that I prefer classical music, and I use small variations of Haydn and Mozart when I sing to my youngest son – instrumental variations with no text, just a simple melody. My mother also used a simple melody when she sang to me, a melody in a minor key. I chose a melody in a major key as well. It has a lot of humour in it when I make small alterations to it. Nowadays, my wife and I sing to him a fixed series of three songs that belongs to the good old lullaby repertoire. It's part of our cultural belonging. (Father no. 5)

In this example, the father wants to musically influence his son and he has a strong passion for classical music. It may appear as a sort of "one-sidedness" (Humboldt, 1792, I. 64), where the father follows his own heart and taste, but the father is also influenced by his son's presence and adapts his singing to his son's maturity level as

he sings a simple classical melody without words. In addition, he wants to sing songs with humour and joy rather than with sadness and melancholy in order to affect and influence his son in a positive way and create a good atmosphere. Receptivity and self-activity (Humboldt, 1792) seems to go hand in hand. Other parents also shape the songs as they see fit, and try to create their own personal style:

I was strongly influenced by my mother's singing. I tried to sing the way she did, softly and tenderly, but I also tried to make it my own style. I added small nuances that belonged to my particular world and that my children appreciated. (Mother no. 10)

Drawing upon Humboldt, Mother no 10 also seem to work for "a correct balance of all powers" (Humboldt 1792, I: 141), and in this particular context, these "powers" or "forces" are the tradition, her own mother's singing, her personal singing expressions and the child's preferences and appreciation. Moreover, there seems to be a "conjoining of the powers of reflection and sensation" (ibid). The mother is highly reflective and sensitive when it comes to her own singing and she really makes an effort in trying to make a good balance out of her singing. The powers in this particular context may then work for and against a harmonious family atmosphere or "harmonious Bildung" potential where "individuality and diversity" can be achieved (Humboldt, 1792, I: 141). This also relates to the particular songs used. Some parents make a highly personal selection of songs, so in this way they reflect a sort of personal cultivation and selection:

Yes, I made a selection of songs. I picked out twelve songs that I found to be meaningful and deep. They did not belong to the traditional lullaby repertoire, like 'So ro' and other cute songs. I found songs that were deeper. (Mother no. 2)

I use a mixture of creative storytelling and old traditional songs. (Father no. 4)

When parents ornament their own personal stories through lullaby singing, their identity as mothers and fathers is strengthened and expanded. They create their own signature. They come closer to their own emotions and give their children insight into their love towards them:

Introducing our rich cultural heritage to children is an important parental task, together with creating your own personal signature that gives them

insights into your love towards them. This is what is the most valuable thing about parents' singing, I believe. (Father no. 8)

Father no. 8 continues:

The voice in the voice is all that matters.

What do you mean by that?

There needs to be a personal signature in it – if not, the meaning is lost on me. I pay particular attention to what I call the 'voice in the voice'. The voice is in itself personal, but you need to go beyond the more obvious parts of it. There is much more that makes art or singing unique.

Is this related to art in general?

Yes, but also to the singing. It is of course the actual voice of the parent that matters. But I also believe that our collective cultural traditions and our rich repertoire of songs are very important for my kids. I know a family that sing hundreds of old songs by heart. It is so valuable. (Father no. 8)

In these statements, the material Bildung aspect of a "personal signature" and "the voice in the voice" intermingle with the collective and cultural "material", such as "the old song tradition" and the "rich repertoire". Together, these aspects form the important personal, cultural or musical Bildung "substance" that parents take into account while singing. Sometimes the individual "power" or "signature" is highlighted, and by others "the conventional and traditional" forces seek to be maintained. Sometimes parents are able to track or trace the origins of their own values through concrete role models, traditions, personal childhood experiences or later professional influences.

### Lullaby singing as Cultural Bildung – building tradition, identity and cultural values

Their cultural background influences their choices of songs as well. One parent has an Italian father, and he sings an Old Italian Partisan song to his children, because it is a part of his Italian identity together with his emphasis on the importance of art, good communication and the human rights that he wants to share with his children:

I am half Italian, and my mother sang 'Bella Ciao' to me when I was a boy. She sang it in Italian, even though she is Scandinavian – my father is Italian. I

grew up in an artistic environment. Both of my parents are artists, and I was born in Italy. I am not religious, but I follow the human rights and principles. Life is hectic, being divorced with three kids, but I try to give my children this cultural dimension. Art is about communication, and good communication is about being authentic. Art always generates a response. It is fantastic. I experience this marvel with music, movies and books. Art forces you to reflect upon certain things. It moves you in new directions. (Father no. 1)

One parent has a Swedish mother, and she sings a lot of Swedish songs to her children:

My mother sang the Swedish song 'Tryggare kan ingen vara' to me every night, because that is part of her national identity. She grew up in Sweden and moved to Norway when she married my father. My children also love that song, so it's part of our repertoire today too. (Mother no. 10)

The lullaby act is also closely linked to the parents' or grandparents' mother tongue. The parents in this study mostly choose to sing songs that belong to the Norwegian song repertoire, because this acquaints their children with the particular sounds of their own language and introduces a sense of cultural and national belonging.

I believe that he wants this song so much, because it starts with 'Mamma mi' [My mommy]. This was the first word he said to me, and every time I sang this song, and the words 'Mamma mi' appeared, I could see that he appreciated it. (Mother no. 3)

These examples illuminate the strong connection between the parents' cultural background, influences and identity and choice of songs. Drawing upon Humboldt, this brings in the important aspects of both diversity and individuality (Humboldt, 1792). Lullabies themselves are handed down from generation to generation, and many parents pass on their family tradition of singing. Picking up on their own influences and intentionality, the parents stress the value of a familiar lullaby, an intimate and familiar mode of singing and the connection between singing and cultural identity:

There is a cultural transmission taking place and I want to give them what meant a lot to me when I was a child, based upon my own good childhood memories. (Mother no. 8)

I try to sing like my mother. She has been a very powerful role model for me. If I can sing as softly and warmly as she did, I feel that I have succeeded. (Mother no. 10)

I want to share our rich cultural heritage with my children. There are so many beautiful songs out there, and they don't seem to learn them in school any more. I have a friend whose children can sing many songs by heart. It is really a treasure. (Father no. 8)

Parents appreciate the rich cultural and collective material that is evident in many of the songs that they sing. The lullaby ritual activates their participation in the shared practices and patterns of their culture. Lullaby singing is an intrinsic part of those areas of parent's active lives that are instinctively intelligible rather than consciously managed. Singing is part of parents' cultural background and upbringing, which explains its continuity. These background stories demonstrate the complex net of influences that contribute to parents' convictions and intentions regarding the act of lullaby singing. Some parents are highly influenced by their professional backgrounds, while others emphasise their family and cultural background, traditions and specific life situations. Positive childhood experiences have a measurable impact on the parents' positive attitudes towards music and singing in turn. Many of the parents' musical memories of childhood are rich and often positive:

'So, ro' is a song I recall from the time when I was very small. I remember my parents sang it to me, and when they started singing, I closed my eyes and just lied down and fell asleep. (Mother no. 1)

My mother sang incredibly often to me, so when I start to sing a song from the songbook, I cannot recall it in the beginning, but then it comes back to me – all kinds of songs. It feels like a part of me, and it is so natural to pass them on to my son. (Mother no. 7)

My mother shared the deep dimensions in life when singing to me. I wanted to do the same for my children. (Mother no. 2)

Parents want to perpetuate this particular family tradition and develop similar musical relationships with their own children. This intergenerational transmission is not only related to the choice of songs but also to the particular mood or atmosphere that parents associate with lullaby singing in their own childhoods. Positive memories are

a motivating force for parents, whose own parents and grandparents thus become role models in terms of their singing today. They might even model their performance (and related parenting) styles upon these figures from the past, and they might draw from that repertoire of songs as well. Parents' childhoods exert an influence in a tacit and nonverbal manner, and parents' memories are evoked while they are singing.

Parents continually inform their ongoing lives with their children, and past memories, if they have any in particular, are integrated naturally, intuitively and mostly unconsciously into their living musicality. On the other hand, parents reflect quite consciously upon their beliefs, previous experiences and values and are very conscious about not transmitting anything they consider to be dogmatic, shallow or harsh. Instead, they prefer to introduce their own personal sense of what they consider to be important and meaningful in life. The lullaby-singing act balances between past and present, and traditional and personal, inclinations and expressions of creativity:

I carry my own memories from the time when my mother sang [the song] to me. It contains a human depth. Love is passed on through generations. This makes it even more powerful. (Lullaby diary, February 2011)

I think I try to imitate my own mother without being aware of it. She sang so softly and melodically, especially in the evenings. I try to make it sound as soft as she did, and there are songs that I have a very special relationship with, because I remember that my mother sang them to me when I was a little girl. Anyway, I try to make my own personal versions. (Mother no. 10)

My mother sang an incredible number of songs to me. So when I start singing a song, it comes back to me. I recall it from my own childhood. I can start singing a song, and I thought I had forgotten it, but it comes back automatically. I have a huge repertoire. And all the songs evoke memories. I find it very interesting. This is something new and probably one of the things that makes the process of becoming a parent very powerful. You get in contact with your self, when you were a child. And it doesn't feel so long ago, either. No, it feels like a part of me that is very natural to share with my own child. (Mother no. 7)

Lullaby singing, for many parents, represents a musical reawakening from their own childhood and is part of their parental caregiving identity and style; for some, as well, it evokes impressions and aspirations around maternal identity in particular. It seems as though the ideals that parents create or consciously or unconsciously

draw upon while singing to their children are very basic and are highly personal. Many external as well as internal “forces” influence parents’ singing. However, the most important aspect in this intimate context of lullaby singing is the focus on the contact and closeness the singing creates. A social and relational Bildung potential is highly present and this important aspect of intimacy and closeness will be touched upon in a bit more detail.

### Lullaby singing as relational Bildung – creating intimacy and closeness to the self and others

According to the parents, singing seems to nurture the parent-child relationship in a deep and tacit sense as well as an overt and concrete manner. Themes of contact, relatedness, intimacy and closeness arise, as do observations about the physical and emotional aspects of the act – in all, the diversity of the parents’ interactional and parenting styles and relationships becomes evident. Many parents report and emphasize the closeness and good contact that their singing creates:

I sing every night to my daughters, and it is part of our relationship. The singing creates strong bonds between us, and it gives me a feeling of companionship. (Mother no. 10)

Sometimes, the singing becomes so personalized and integrated that children seem to internalize them and they become a natural part of parent-child relationship:

I have created my own lullaby, based upon an Italian Partisan song but with my own lyrics, and I have turned it into a lullaby. The melody is beautiful and I have integrated the names of my children into it, so it is a very personal and private song. This song has a particular place in my children’s heart. They own it and I have to sing it over and over again. My daughter says that it is her song and I am not allowed to sing it to anybody else. My second daughter says the same things when I sing it to her. (Father no. 1)

Many parents recognise the physical, psychological and social aspects of contact as foundations of the lullaby-singing act. Parents’ singing provides an interpersonal arena in which relatedness and interpersonal contact can be experienced:

When I start to sing the song ‘Kom og rekk meg hånden din’ [Come and give me your hand], her little hand stretches out towards mine.

Her little hand stretches out towards your hand?

Yes, it does, even now, when she is thirteen years old. (Mother no. 4)

I sing to the inside, a caring song. (Mother no. 2)

Both physical and emotional intimacy takes different shapes according to the child's age and preferences, as well as the specific parent-child interactive style. Parents even acknowledge an unconscious dimension to the act that lays the groundwork for a deep intimacy that is beyond language and rational thinking. Singing allows for emotional layers that are often hidden in other daily interactions:

This deep wordless dimension is difficult to explain, but I feel it quite strongly. We get in contact beyond the words' significance. Actually, the words are not the most important thing. It is more the bodily anchored dimension that counts, and the breathing connects us to a common human ground. It is so basic, naked. I can feel my own vulnerability when lying together with my child in the bed at bedtime, and we are so close. The song emphasises this closeness, because we both know it by heart and from the heart. (Lullaby diary, September 2011)

This is a moment when we feel really close, the two of us. (Mother no. 9)

The lullaby singing invites being close to each other. (Mother no. 5)

This is a moment of closeness. (Father no. 7)

I feel that we are so close, not only at that time of the day, but this is felt very strongly when we sing together. I believe that the singing creates a positive attachment, and that the children connect the singing to our relationship. (Mother no. 10)

Parents consider the act to be highly private and indicative of the closeness that exists between them and their children. Many parents, regardless of gender, highlight the closeness and the intimacy of the act. Their focus is on the *good contact* that lullaby singing creates between the parent and the child; they are more interested in this mutual engagement than in the contact between the child and the sounding music as such. In this sense, Humboldt's emphasis on *Bildung* as a process of socialisation seems relevant, but it is a more intimate and relational kind of process, which has the



character of a dyadic, private and personal everyday encounter. Intimacy and closeness relate to both the self and the other – to the parent and the child, both together and individually. It seems that for some parents, there seems to be an “overweighting of sensibility”, to use Humboldt’s words (Humboldt, 1792, I., 141), while in other cases, parents are rather rational and put emotions aside when singing. At least, this is how they describe the act. Some parents are very emotional and receptive while singing, while others are more into practical matters, and are highly sleep or goal-oriented.

Nonetheless, some parents report that they also come close to themselves in the sense that they recollect moments from the past when they were small children and needed their own parents in order to feel safe and happy. They also relate to movement and being moved, in a very basic way, because their singing is sometimes so strongly connected with their own body or past embodied childhood experiences. Keeping in mind (and body) their own childhood memories, they seem to understand their own children’s needs better and how to successfully connect with them. Likewise, the parent can also experience the feeling of being close to oneself as a human being (as “a child within” and as a parent):

I can still remember my mother singing to me. It doesn’t seem so long ago actually. I have very vivid memories of my mother singing and lulling me to sleep. I feel like a child when thinking of it. (Mother no. 7).

Parents highlight the ways in which they get in touch with their children through their singing and the child’s responses and how it strengthens their bond.

This is a moment when we feel really close, the two of us. (Mother no. 9)

The lullaby singing invites being close to each other. (Mother no. 5)

I feel that we are so close, not only at that time of the day, but this is felt very strongly when we sing together. I believe that the singing creates a positive attachment, and that the children connect the singing to our relationship. (Mother no. 10)

The temporal aspect is also important, as the singing signalizes a free time and space, where there is nothing more to be done than to being together. A nice and free moment and sharing time seems to be an important circumstance in this respect:

The focus is on our relationship – to do something nice together. (Father no. 3)

There is no more things to be done, we can just be together. (Father no. 4)

This is our time, and I need to be alone with one child at a time. My daughter or both of them actually, want to make sure that I have made this song especially for them. (Father no. 1)

The singing is very strongly connected to our relationship and the good time spent together. At that time of the day, he only wants me to take care of him. (Mother no. 7)

It feels as if we are getting even closer to each other at this time of the day, because there is nothing in between us. My daughter wants to share with me her inner thoughts before I start singing, and can even stop me from singing, because there is something she wants to share. When the singing starts, she comes closer to me in bed, and we almost feel like one and the same body (Lullaby diary, Sept. 2012).

The singing bridges separate subjects, and physical contact and dialogue between the parent and the child reinforces. This is part of the important “substance” of their singing, which the simple songs facilitate.

## **Lullaby quality Bildung – the songs, the singing and their substance**

Emotional, free and true expressions of love and safety

The recalling of their singing to their children evokes strong emotions and reflects a strong connection between parents’ immediate affections and their singing:

-Can you describe your singing to your children?

-I feel now that I am getting very emotional when thinking of it. When they were very small, it was so different. I felt that I have so much to give my children. I feel that I am missing this very intimate singing. They are getting older now. Oh, this is not working (she starts crying).

-Your singing is strongly connected with your emotions and expressing them while singing?

-Yes, I cannot sing if I don't mean it. (Mother no. 5)

Mother no. 5 emphasizes the importance of a true singing expression. This can be linked to Kierkegaard and Levinas emphasis on an "authentic meeting" (Levinas, 1993; Kierkegaard, 1993). The mother wants to be emotionally honest with her children and in this sense the mother's Bildung process is more about true emotions, self-interpretation and the creation of an authentic relationship with her children than a cultural and musical one. It is about her true face-to-face encounter with her children on with the intention of creating a personal world of her own, based upon true, positive emotions and a convivial atmosphere. In this sense, the mother's Bildung project is connected with authenticity and emotional quality. Quality is often connected with the concept of Bildung. Klafki on his part wanted to connect quality with a basic education level and not with elitism (Klafki, 1998). In the context of lullabies, the notion of quality has different connotations. Quality may be associated with honesty and authenticity as in the previous example, parental presence and daily commitment as well as musical and cultural commitment as mentioned earlier. Mother no. 8 pays particular attention to positive responses in life, and she groups lullaby singing among them.

Singing came to me in a very natural way, and I sing for my own kids for that reason, I believe. I also believe that we influence each other very strongly. What kind of responses you get from others in life is very important, for example. I don't believe that you are born in such-and-such a way – you instead become who you are. Of course, you have your own special point of departure, but there are very powerful external influences that shape you as well. Giving positive responses to my own children is part of my thinking. It is in my blood. However, I don't look at care in the sense that you need to be with your children all the time. They need to learn to be autonomous and independent. I think a lot about that; they need to learn to be independent, to become self-confident and be able to walk the line by themselves. (Mother no. 8)

Some may also refer to continuity and role modelling, and quality here is strongly connected with creating predictability, familiarity and a sense of safety:

I want to let my children know that there is something nice out there – it is a message based upon some kind of confidence, as it was for me when I

was a child. It is all about the contact and safety – to assure them that I will always be there for them. (Mother no. 5)

I want to sing to my boy in order to give him what I never got when I was a child. I want to give him a safe and calm place to be. My own parents didn't think in those terms. I felt so insecure. (Mother no. 9)

Some parents seem to start singing because they feel that they lacked something when they were children, and they want to give their own children what their parents did not. In these examples, lullaby quality is related to a sense of freedom, creativity, open-mindedness and an emotional dimension:

My parents were Jehovah's witnesses, and I believe it was a big mistake. We became so asocial. I always felt very different from my schoolmates, and there were so many constraints in my life. Don't do this and don't do that. I feel that I have lost so much of what life is all about. We are all connected to nature, and there is something bigger than ourselves out there. If you have the courage to believe in love, and believe that you do the right things, you are not afraid of challenges. It takes a lot of courage to have children and create a family. How will I be able to pay all the bills? How can I change and adapt to this new life? I am an agnostic. God is within you. I am not religious, but I am cultivating harmony in the life of my family. I want my kids to be free, and I believe that singing facilitates this flow of freedom. I want my kids to play and have fun. And I can see that they need it. Unfortunately, I cannot sing many [actual] songs, so I invent them all. But to be honest, I do this more out of duty, because I am so tired at night. But I can see that they need it, and it is fun for me too. (Father no. 10)

Lullaby quality is here mostly linked to love, joy and a sense of safety. Other parents want their children to learn about the paradoxes and “deep” dimensions of reality.

### The deep dimensions of reality

According to mother no. 2, the following song evokes certain emotions, some of them difficult. It is a song about the paradoxes and harshness of life:

'Danse mi vise' (by Einar Skjæråsen):

Vinden blæs synna, og vinden blæs norda,

lyset og skuggen er syskjen på jorda.  
Sommarn er stutt, og vintern er lang.

Danse mi vise, gråte min sang.  
[The wind is blowing south and the wind is blowing north  
The light and the shadow are siblings on earth  
The summer is short and the winter is long  
Dance my melody, weep my song]

The mother shares her experiences and thoughts about this song:

The summer is short and the winter is long [she simulates crying]. Yes, the winter is too long. And then you have the line, 'Some are poor and others are rich'. And then there is this line, which I don't like to sing, but it comes automatically out of my mouth: 'Sing about Berit and you will get Brita'. What? You tell your children that there is no hope. You never get the one you really love. Then you sit on a stone and dream that you are sitting on a lap. It is awful. And then I reflect upon it: What am I actually singing and how many times has my son listened to this? It is terrible. But I often forget and sing all the lines anyway. The lyrics are on autopilot.

-So you don't modify the text?

-I try to avoid that part of the song. It is a sad song. No hope. But sometimes I sing it anyway. I forget. It comes rather automatically. If I remember to do it, I change the words – if you sing about Berit, you get Berit. Then I laugh and my son wonders why I am laughing. (Mother no. 2)

From this extract, we can see that there is certain amount of incompatibility between the content of the lullaby text and the mother's personal convictions and values in life. However, the mother wants the songs she sings to have depth and describes a need to show her children what is important in life. The mother in this example communicates human depth, dark as well as constructive sides of human nature to her children:

It has something to do with getting in contact with these deeper layers of reality. We don't have so much of it in our world. So I want to add a glimpse of the deeper aspects of life and not only live from consumer simplicity. Children are very open-minded, so they easily accept what we give to them. I see it as

a matter of choice what one wishes to relate to. Many people seem to choose to live a superficial lifestyle. I see this in the choices I made. I wanted some depth, and I found some of the lullabies so shallow and trivial. I believe it is important to integrate depth into our lives. This potential can be revealed through lullabies. Powerful forces and images can be accessed. A kind of transformational Plutonian atmosphere is available. This is often suppressed and censored in the over joyous TV programs for children and sweet-tempered lullabies. To deny or avoid this 'deeper' dimension is dishonest to me. These sweet types of melodies become so simple, kind and harmless.

-What do you mean by a Plutonian atmosphere?

-What I mean is the dark, magnetic forces that pull us towards darkness, a kind of Strindbergian<sup>3</sup> atmosphere, where the deep and not always positive sides of human nature see the light, but it can also be constructive forces in play. I have reflected upon the choices I made, because I found the new lullabies so superficial and light weighted. I think the 'So, ro' song is beautiful and I sang it a lot, together with 'Jeg folder mine hender små' [I fold my small hands], a song about Christianity from the seventies, and 'Det var en deilig deilig dag' [It was a lovely, lovely day]. They are all positive in character. So I picked up those that are 'on the edge of death'. That's what they are. I did it deliberately, not because they were sad, but because I wanted the depth. Not only 'it is a very beautiful day and tomorrow the sun will smile again' and all such sweetness.

-So lullabies have different qualities?

-Yes, really. The song 'Danse mi vise' [Dance my song] is so sad. At times I started to cry when I sang it. I had to stop and rebalance myself, and there were also verses that I couldn't sing. They were too sad. (Mother no. 2)

This mother wants her children to experience the 'deep dimensions' in life, and her point of view influences her choices of repertoire and relationship to her own singing. Her awareness of the various affordances of the songs she sings is evident. She picks out songs 'with powerful forces and images' so that they might 'integrate depth into our lives'. As she creates an intersubjective space that makes room for an affective dialogue,

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3 Strindberg is a Swedish author that often wrote about the dark forces of the human nature.

she also reflects on her children's openness and acceptance and her responsibility to give them something substantial and real. This means that sometimes she shares human sadness and loss, and she must deal with her own feelings in relation to this. Of course, if the songs are too relentlessly negative, she modifies the text. Drawing upon Klafki, one could say that the deep dimensions of reality are opened categorially to the child, and that it is thanks to the gained "categorical knowledge and experience" of their parents' lullaby singing that the child has been opened to these dimensions (Klafki, 1963: 44). Some parents make an effort in communicating spiritual beliefs in their children's lives. Their singing is built upon the belief that this content is both enriching and comforting:

-I want to share with my children a belief and message that there is something out there. It is about my belief – not that I know for sure. These songs are a very gentle means of transmitting this belief. I think it is a non-intrusive way of sharing with them my own personal faith. I am not religious in the strict sense, as I am very seldom in church, but I feel awe and wonder when I enter one.

-So your singing also has a spiritual dimension?

-Yes, I try to share with my children a sort of gratitude towards life and a belief that there is something out there. It gave me a sense of safety when I was a child. In this sense, my singing has a spiritual side. My husband only believes in the 'Big Bang' and the universe, and he doesn't believe in God. Introducing the spiritual side of life is my little 'mission', so to speak, but I don't share this with him. It is between my children and me. (Mother no. 10)

The mother describes lullaby singing as an act that is grounded in life values and beliefs, one that can communicate a message about being in a safe place and protected by a higher power. Another parent also touches upon the spiritual dimension of her singing.

### Religious and spiritual Bildung dimension

Spirituality for me has to do with being true to one self and others. I want to share this dimension with my children, and my choice of songs illuminates this point. (Mother no. 2)

One particular song that many parents sing to their children reflects traditional Christian religious beliefs about being grateful and praying for protection. In general, the parents consider this song to be relatively innocent and not too religiously 'loaded':

Kjære Gud, jeg har det godt

Takk for alt som jeg har fått  
Du er god, du holder av meg  
Kjære Gud, gå aldri fra meg<sup>4</sup>  
Pass på liten, og på stor  
Gud bevare far og mor

[Dear God, I am fine,  
Thank you for all the good you provide  
You are good and take care of me  
Dear God, don't ever leave me  
Take care of small and big  
God take care of mother and father]

Nonetheless, from outside this song may appear to be quite religiously loaded, but many parents sing this song without thinking of its religious content. The song is part of a strong cultural tradition, a collective Christian belief and 'main stream' repertoire, and is not considered to be too religiously loaded for this reason. Other parents sing the song because it creates a sense of gratitude towards life in general.

Some parents report that they seek to avoid songs, which have religious content and or a message that is too strong:

I like the song 'Den ville sauen' [The wild sheep] and sing it to my daughter, but I skip some of the verses, because I found out that the song actually is about the lost son in the Bible, and the lyrics became too heavy for me. I stick to the innocent animal world of the first verse of the song. (Father no. 5)

Many lullabies reflect religious beliefs; some parents take this seriously, while others sing these songs out of habit or as a nod to tradition. Several parents in this study preferred to 'soften' or avoid the Christian messages in these songs, preferring to

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<sup>4</sup> A new psalm book (October 2013) has neutralized this line even further as 'Takk, at du går aldri fra meg' [Thank you for never leaving me], but this version came out too late to be incorporated into the present empirical inquiry.



remain as religiously neutral as possible and cultivate instead the ‘playful’ and ‘free’ communicative dimension of their singing.

### A playful, creative and imaginative sort of communication

Today’s lullaby repertoire, in fact, seems to be more adapted to the child’s world than to the adult world, which correlates with music as, according to Cross and Morley, ‘a means of assimilating the value of juvenile modes of cognition and exploration into the adult behavioural repertoire, while regulating its modes of expression’ (2009, p. 74). In general, there is no logic involved when it comes to which songs the children choose, even when the song in question is meant for a baby rather than a child. Some songs are particularly suited to bedtime, due to their melodic and lyrical sweetness and soothing quality (for example, ‘So, ro’ and ‘Kvelden lister seg på tå’). A new song from a regular children’s television program is also sometimes included in parents’ contemporary repertoire, namely ‘Fantorangens sovesang’. This particular song is very appealing to children – it is about an orange elephant or hybrid animal called ‘Fantorangen’ that most children know through the daily Norwegian television program of the same name. While the song’s beautiful melody appeals to parents as well, few of them know the song by heart, so the lyrics are often made up or modified, and sometimes only the refrain is performed. Most parents seem not to bother to learn new songs like this, but they feel compelled to include them for their children’s sake. On the other hand, parents unanimously approve of ‘So, ro’ as a good lullaby. The song is easy to master and features a compelling melody and positive, associative lyrics: This song appears to be addressed exclusively to a boy, but this doesn’t hinder the parents from singing them to their daughters. They only make a few changes, and then it fits.

So, ro lille mann . Nå er dagen over  
Alle barn i alle land. Ligger nå og sover  
So, ro tipp på tå . Sov min vesle pode  
Reven sover også nå . Med halen under hodet

[Be calm, my little man, Now that the day is over  
Every child in every country is sleeping now .  
So calm, tip on toe, Sleep, my little lad  
The fox is also sleeping now With his tail under his head]

Moreover, many parents and children find this little song, which comes from a 1953 theatre play for children, to be ‘cute’, ‘simple’ and ‘nice’ (see the play ‘Dyrene

i Hakkebakkeskogen' by Torbjørn Egnér). They like the melody and the lyrics, especially the image of the fox with his tail under his head. The song is meant to have a calming effect and make the child fall asleep, exactly as it happens in the fairytale to which this song refers, where a small mouse sits in a tree and sings to the fox waiting below to eat him, until he falls asleep. Parents also seem to communicate in a playful manner with their children:

I sang a very simple song – not even a song, just a melody. And when my son knew it very well, I started to alter it. He started to laugh, and I got back on the right track, and this continued for some months. It was fun to see how he enjoyed this playful way of singing. (Father no. 5)

Sometimes I deliberately sing the wrong words, and we all start laughing. Then we create even more nonsense together. I have not been afraid of laughing and joking at bedtime. My daughters always calm down anyway. It is nice to laugh together when singing these last songs. (Mother no. 5)

Some of the songs parents choose evoke beautiful images and inner harmonious landscapes, and they present poetic inspiration. Others present a hard reality – Federico Garcia Lorca, for one, emphasises the often sad and tragic content of many Spanish lullabies (Garcia Lorca, 1928/2008). Sad and tragic songs also exist in the traditional Norwegian repertoire of lullabies, in addition to more playful ones. There are, however, reasons to believe that parents have a highly selective approach towards religious, sad and tragic songs. Parents attach significance to the content of the songs, which the children might grasp. In addition, the child's imaginative world is a pleasant place to be, for both the parent and the child, and that might be reason enough to sing silly songs. Today's lullaby repertoire, in fact, seems to be more adapted to the child's world than to the adult world, which correlates with music as, according to Cross and Morley, 'a means of assimilating the value of juvenile modes of cognition and exploration into the adult behavioural repertoire, while regulating its modes of expression' (2009: 74).

However, some parents do question how meaningful it is to sing a song, every day, about a fox that puts his tail under his head when he goes to sleep.<sup>5</sup> Yet there are good reasons. The fox that will soon fall asleep resonates with the bedtime setting and the childlike world, and children tend to love domestic as well as wild animals, as well as nature in general. Parents report that lyrics like this also promote a feeling of wonder and gratitude towards life in general. In order to catch the child's attention in the first

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<sup>5</sup> This image refers to the prototypical happy lullaby 'So, ro'.

place, many songs that parents use are childish and 'child friendly'. In general, the songs are positive and contribute to the creation of a warm and positive atmosphere. Shortly, the lyrics tend to display the following characteristics:

- the parental expression of love and affection;
- human wisdom
- a nonsensical, imaginary, magical or childish world;
- a bright outlook on life;
- beautiful and simple poetic language that evokes images of both domestic and wild animals and natural landscapes;  
collective myths and/or powerful spiritual or religious messages.

The material Bildung aspects of the act, which here refers to the various content dimensions of the songs, plays an important role in the forming of a rich ritual and evening atmosphere. The parental personal signature, daily commitment and emotional expression also strongly influence upon the material Bildung potential of the act. I will come back to these influential factors in the chapter of discussion, but now look closer to what the act may promote and enhance for the child.

## **The Child and Lullaby Bildung**

Multi-sensory lullaby singing as enhancing relaxation, self-regulation, integration and wellbeing

Parents, as already mentioned, emphasize the multi-sensory character of the lullaby act, which makes the child feel loved, safe and comfortable:

What I remember most when it comes to the movements is that he puts another part of his body in my lap. He wants a massage over his whole body – first the back, then the neck and so on. And when I have finished singing, he says, 'and there too'. And then I have to massage another part of the body and I also sing another song before I finish the whole séance. My children have gotten so many evening caresses. Very often I lay in the bed together with my children. I did that the first five years. I lay there, singing to them and caressing them, like a bird on my lap, or we lay in front of each other. (Mother no. 2)

When we spent the night at my parents' place or elsewhere, and she felt a little insecure or distressed, I was almost surprised how easy it was to put her to bed, as long as I did the same thing as at home, singing and walking. (Father no. 3)

Singing makes it safe for them to fall asleep, even though the dark night is out there. I create a safe frame for the night. (Mother no. 8)

I can see that my children love me, so I hope that I give them a sense of safety. I am not so strict, and I know that clear boundaries also give children a sense of safety, but I am much softer than my husband. I give them a sense of safety through my loving kindness, I believe. (Mother no. 10)

Most of the parents are aware of the fact that their singing creates a safe space for their children. The predictability of well-known songs and the familiarity of the bedtime routine combine to make the singing a powerful antidote to risk or threat. The singing is part of the children's 'safety toolkit', as another parent puts it. Through parents' singing, the children seem to develop an inner sense of safety. The contact established by the music and its ritualized character is also evident in the child's feeling of 'ownership' or internalization of the songs.

I have created my own lullaby, based upon an Italian Partisan song but with my own lyrics, and I have turned it into a lullaby. The melody is beautiful and I have integrated the names of my children into it, so it is a very personal and private song. This song has a particular place in my children's heart. They own it and I have to sing it over and over again. My daughter says that it is her song and I am not allowed to sing it to anybody else. My second daughter says the same things when I sing it to her. (Father no. 1)

The two daughters have both developed a strong relationship and 'ownership' of the same song. The father needs to hide the fact that he sings the same song twice a day. Each girl insists that the song belongs to her and acknowledges her father's creative 'invention'. Sometimes the lullaby is so strongly integrated into the child's lives and mode of being that the child does not view it 'from outside' as another parent puts it. Early on, then, songs are integrated and internalised almost as part of the children themselves:

If I sing ‘Trollmors vuggeviser’, my son thinks it is so childish. And I wonder why this other one, ‘By, By barnet’, isn’t childish to him. It is just because it has been part of a fixed ritual for years, from the time when he was an infant. He doesn’t evaluate it critically. It is part of him. It is internalised. But when it comes to other songs, he considers them from an external perspective and is much more critical. Some songs are very childish, my son says, so he doesn’t want me to sing them. Others are, to me, made for infants and babies, but I have always sung them, so he doesn’t evaluate them this way – view them from outside – they are part of him. They are so integrated. The songs are part of a fixed pattern of being together, and he doesn’t look at them from outside. They are in him. Other songs are different. They are looked at from outside and can be of interest too, or they are just childish. (Mother no. 2)

For children, the singing seems to become internalised, which makes it even more powerful, partly due the physical and psychological expectancy that the act creates over the course of time. By the way in which the parent and the child softly move together with the lullaby’s rhythm and shared intentional message of calmness, lullaby singing seems to create one space, the space of mutual relaxation. In this respect, the act enables co-regulation, which here means a mutual, synchronized state of calmness and relaxation.

If I relate this state to wellbeing, I think of mindfulness and presence. When I make myself ready for the singing ritual and the bedtime situation and the singing, I leave behind all that doesn’t matter. What has happened and now belongs in the past is left behind – for example, brushing teeth or other trivial matters – and I become fully present. This state creates wellbeing. The singing is, in this respect, a management tool, which is a concept within self-development and coaching. It is a deliberate influence on one’s thoughts and feelings. It is a mental aspect, and I experience this when I am singing to my son. I prepare myself before I start singing and enter this state of fully being present. (Mother no. 9)

Some parents are very conscious about creating a calm and free space, within which there is no more stimulation. They seek to provide an oasis where non-doing is just as important as doing:

-Poor children! They are not supposed to learn anything new when they are in bed and about to fall asleep. The bedtime moment is not a moment

of stimulation and activity. They are supposed to calm down and relax at that time of the day.

-You are a teacher, and I thought that you probably had other intentions when singing. So you don't think about the learning potential of singing?

-Not at all! There is, of course, a conscious and unconscious transmission of my own values and memories from my childhood when I sing to them – a sort of cultural transmission, because I want to show them what meant a lot to me when I was a child – but I don't want this moment to be turned into a moment of teaching and learning. Quite the opposite. It is a time for relaxation and peace. No more stimulation. (Mother no. 6)

This mother emphasises the conscious (relaxation) and relatively unconscious (cultural transmission) benefits of singing to her children. Or simply, the singing is an end-in-itself. She does not want her singing to have any pedagogical function; like the other parents, she favours the calming impact of singing instead.

Through my calm singing, they learn to calm down themselves. This is very important. My calm singing is 'contagious'. I can see that my son turns inwards when I am singing, and that he prepares himself to fall asleep, due to my deep breathing and singing, and I should not forget my massage, which contributes to muscle relaxation as well. (Mother no. 2)

My singing is a tool that makes him calm down and relax. (Mother no. 9)

It's important that it is melodic and calming – a calm séance. (Father no. 1)

At bedtime, there is no more doing. It is a good time to be with your children. You just need to take the time to listen. The singing was the only way we managed to calm our children down. (Father no. 4)

I centre myself and find a calm spot within. I believe that is what I am doing. And then my son calms down too. My singing is contagious. (Mother no. 2)

Parents report that, in their everyday lives, there are often stresses and strains, and they want to put all of this behind them when putting their children to bed. Through singing, parents express, and therefore share, their calm state, helping their children to regulate their own emotions and energies. Parents are also aware of the benefits

of singing in relation to their children's creative, social and cultural capacities and learning processes, and I will now present a few examples of this.

### Lullaby singing as enculturation, learning and skills

Learning about the mother tongue and culture is not always the primary goal of singing to children, but as the parents observe, children are like 'sponges' and 'like to learn new things'. The songs that parents choose tell stories about human desires, hopes, worries and vulnerabilities – often, sadness goes hand in hand with joy and laughter. Lullabies, in this sense, help to shape the child with regard to his or her culture as well as innate intellectual and imaginative skills and abilities. With the support of parents' sensitive and tender singing, the child learns to be a social human being as the bedtime moment unfolds. Several other parents touch upon the connection between singing and language acquisition, as we will see below.

I sometimes stop singing in the middle of the song just to listen to whether they sing the words correctly. I hear them sing along, and I am surprised at how easily they learn new songs and how they can pronounce rather difficult words when singing. (Mother no. 10)

I take long pauses so she can fill in the words of the songs when I sing. (Mother no. 1)

She loves music and songs, and she even sings better than she can talk. Yes, I believe that she started singing before she could talk. It is amazing how easily words come to her while singing. (Father no. 9)

Parents point out that children learn new words very easily through singing, and that the parents' singing facilitates the children's language acquisition. Parents look upon lyrics as a powerful language-teaching tool and try to use the singing process effectively, through pauses, for example.

In general, though, parents encourage learning through singing to different degrees. This process also depends upon the child's developmental phase and personal preferences:

There was a period when I had to sing new songs all the time – this one and this one. She loved learning new songs, and this led to singing the whole songbook. (Mother no. 1)

While the connection between lyrics and emotion seems to be especially salient when singing, parents' expressive capacities also seem to vary a lot. Sometimes reading also starts to replace singing, or at least anticipate it – singing is associated with the last phase of the bedtime ritual (that is, falling sleep), whereas reading is seen to stimulate the imagination more:

Tonight, when we were lying in the bed, my daughter wanted me to read several chapters in her book, and then she wanted me to make up stories. I asked her if I should start singing our regular lullaby, but she didn't want to. 'No', she said, 'I don't want to go to sleep. I want you to tell me another story'. (Lullaby diary, Jan. 2013)

Compared to reading a different book every night, singing the same lullaby over and over again has a more limited effect on the development of the language repertoire. However, if the child learns to sing the lullaby perfectly, word for word, there follows a feeling of mastery; in addition, the parent's singing contributes invaluablely to the child's emotional repertoire.

Lullabies sometimes also contain words, which are not used in an ordinary conversation, and this may contribute to an enrichment of the child's vocabulary, particularly in relation to a given country's dialects (or, in Norway, the second common language of Nynorsk):

Den fyrste song eg høyra fekk  
Var mor sin song ved vogga  
dei mjuke ord til hjarta gjekk  
Dei kunne gråten stogga

[The first song I heard  
was mother's song by the cradle.  
The soft words entered my heart.  
They put an end to my crying]

Some parents, indeed, focus on the human, positive potential of their singing in particular, as we will see next.



Learning the children to express themselves in a free, emphatic, intimate and honest fashion

Parents talk about the importance of learning to be at once unfettered and honest, and singing seems to support this mode of expression:

I feel it is so important to be honest when singing. It needs to be honest, for me – what I express towards my children. I do not say ‘I love you’ all the time like Americans do, so if I don’t feel it, I cannot sing either. (Mother no. 5)

You need to release and liberate yourself, even if you sing very badly. That is what it is all about, and it is fun. And I want them to be free as well. To sing is to set your soul free. I want my children to learn to express themselves, and music and singing gives this feeling of freedom – you let your soul and personality free and express them. (Father no. 10)

From my point of view, singing lullabies in relation to aspects of learning has first and foremost to do with learning about tenderness, intimacy and an inner calm. I am trying to transfer my own human wisdom to my child, so to speak. I am growing into being a mother day by day, and the singing is part of this process. (Lullaby diary, June 2011)

Testimony regarding the positive empathic influence of the act came from my own daughter:

We went to a birthday party, and one of the boys got hurt and was standing against the wall, crying. My daughter went up close to him and started to sing her favourite lullaby. Afterwards she told me that it was a good thing to do, because the song soothes, she said. (Lullaby diary, May 2012)

Through my singing, my daughter seems to have learned the language (and delivery) of intimacy, meaning that she can talk as well as sing in a soft and tender voice. In kindergarten, children often must talk very loudly in order to be heard, and bedtime singing provides a welcome contrast to this commotion.

Bedtime singing can also enlarge the parents’ expressive and performative repertoire:

I can hear that my own voice changes when singing at bedtime, compared to my talking voice. It is not just a matter of longer vocal sounds and phrasing. It has to do with this particular setting, which makes me more tender and sensitive, and the lullabies I have chosen are so innocent and cute that it is almost impossible to sing them in a rude or tough manner. One day I paid attention to my own voice just before I started singing. I said, 'Now you need to go to bed, because it is so late!' My voice was loud and dark. When my daughter finally went to bed, and I started singing, a new, brighter and softer dimension came to life. This makes me think that this tender and soft way of singing to my daughter also influences her way of relating and expressing herself elsewhere in life. (Lullaby diary, March 2012)

Learning to be free, intimate and honest is also linked to parents' confidence about the performing and musical aspects of lullaby singing, and especially their acceptance of imperfection in that regard:

My singing is far from perfect. I don't have a beautiful voice. Nevertheless, I sing for my children. (Mother no. 3)

I am thinking of what I was taking for granted – that's what singing and musicality is about, to connect and just be in it, without being afraid or put off. Just catch the music and participate in it. The easier this is for a person, the more musical this person is. (Mother no. 2)

As already mentioned, parents don't seem to evaluate their singing in aesthetic terms, applauding it instead as the transmission of *imperfection* – a highly organic and human act which allows both the parent and the child to express themselves freely and openly. Parents sing, in other words, even though they are out of tune and use the wrong lyrics. That said, a few of them at least acknowledge the concrete musical dimensions of their singing and their intention to share their love of music, hopefully 'building up' the child's appreciation of the art form.

### Lullaby singing as fostering the love of singing and music

Many of the parents seem to be aware of the importance of musical influences in relation to their children's musical abilities, sense of appreciation and development. However, they seem to emphasize the importance of music and singing differently.

Some of the parents seem to pay especially attention to the musical building potential of their singing:

I want my son to love music the way I did, and I want to share with him the joy that I feel when listening to it, and hopefully he will enjoy music too. Music will be an integral part of him, because it has been in his life from the very beginning. (Father no. 5)

I try to sing relatively in tune. If I start too high and the voice cannot bear it, I restart in a lower voice. You sing better when you stand than when you are lying down, so I normally sit when I sing. (Father no. 1)

Our home has been a living musical. I wanted to stimulate my children in a deep and natural way. (Mother no. 2)

I believe that my singing, in a way, cultivates the child's love of music and singing. I become a role model, and when I express myself through singing, and my child observes that I like to sing, she also feels that it's natural to express herself through music and singing. (Lullaby diary, January 2011)

Parents often include pitch and intonation when they talk about the act from an aesthetic and musical angle. Parents agree upon the fact that it is more important to sing to their children in the first place than it is to sing well. Rather than using the lullaby as a music lesson, they use it as a 'human lesson,' relying upon its calming, supportive influence much more than its musical content. As mentioned, parents are always aware of their children's need for their presence and support in order to be able to relax and fall asleep, and that is behaviour that they try hard to model for them. These simple and childish songs are adapted to the children's world and are also more easily to master for the children. The experience of repeating these songs both at home and in kindergarten give the children the courage to sing along and fosters their love of singing.

### Stimulating the creation of inner images and free associations

The powerful messages of lullabies can also trigger the imagination and a whole range of feelings:

When I start thinking about the Icelandic song I have always sung to my children, it almost gives me chills down my spine. The song is rather scary, and it evokes a very strong image about somebody standing outside the house, watching. I can still see the child's face. What is he doing out there? It is like being in a dream, but it is not necessarily a good dream. (Mother no. 2)

The lullaby singing creates a special space for making imaginative connections, and the musical associations that the songs enable evoke dreams. Parents and children also create nonsense words and sounds with which to modify existing songs using their imaginations:

We create stories together, and this relates to the children's everyday life as well as to their creative world and imagination. I can tell if something has happened during the day, because this becomes interwoven into their free-associative flow. The bedtime moment is very revelatory, and singing provides a moment to take the time to listen and play. (Father no. 4)

I can see that when I sing, and my daughter turns more and more inwards, the words of the songs seems to be experienced in a different way. They are just sounds, and it doesn't matter what they signify. They almost become a sounding carpet. (Lullaby diary, Jan. 2012)

I sing the song over and over again, but my son doesn't know the words of the songs and cannot sing the song by heart. I believe that he listens to the sounds of my voice more than to the words, and he is in a transition state of wakefulness and dream. (Mother no. 3)

Resuming my engagement with the interview with mother no. 6, we can see next that she touches upon the creation of inner images when singing. This was actually an unintended 'effect' of her own parents' singing; when she did not understand the lyrics, or when she only thought she did, she developed her own personal 'interpretations' and images in relation to the songs. They might have been pure nonsense or little stories that made sense to her. She believes that this takes place when she sings to her own children as well:

-This is really funny, because when I hear the songs that I listened to when I was a child, I have often misunderstood the content and the words of the songs. They made no sense, actually. I believe it is the same thing that

happens to my children. They listen to the same songs over and over again, but they often don't understand the song's message or plot. The words of the old lullabies may be very archaic and difficult for them to understand when they are very small, and they start to create their own stories and images that have nothing to do with the actual songs.

-Other parents also touch this upon. It is so funny, actually.

-Yes, it makes me laugh to think about it. I made up my own words and images connected to the songs that didn't have anything to do with the actual song – pure imagination and misinterpretation. It was part of my childhood world and it took me thirty years to realise that I had misunderstood the lyrics! (Mother no. 6)

Other parents relate similar stories, sometimes reflecting a more conscious relationship with the inner images that the songs create. They use visualisation, and imagery plays an important part in their singing ritual:

I always visualise the songs, and I talk to my son about these images, and we create and elaborate on them together. These images are a large part of the singing. My son probably cannot tell me what the name of the song is, but he certainly knows the images that belong to it. (Mother no. 9)

I create my own inner images while singing. (Mother no. 2)

Some parents also connect this creative and communicative process to what has taken place during the day, or to the transition time between awake and asleep, an imaginative in-between state where dream and reality meet:

This is a time of free association. If you take your time to listen, you get to know how your child is getting along and what has happened during the day. (Father no. 4)

The father pays attention to the present moment and emphasizes the importance of a listening stance while singing in order to be able to explore the relationship with his children. The father focuses on the new and unknown in his meeting with his children and this approach brings in "free association" and creativity. Other parents do not pay attention to the cultural heritage perspective, or simply they experience that their children are too tired to be able to learn something new or pay attention to the cultural Bildung potential of the act:

She lies there half asleep, and I don't think she really listens to what I am singing. (Lullaby diary, Jan. 2011)

I have been singing the same song, 'Kvelden lister seg på tå', for years now, and one day my son asked me what the word *Åto* [and two] meant. He connected the words 'and' and 'two', and the phrase was 'And two read light shoes'. It really doesn't make any sense, and this is how he has understood the words for years. (Mother no. 3)

Some parents do not seem to pay any special attention to the importance of these 'nonsense' words or 'misinterpretations', but they are an important part of a personal sounding, imaginative child world that the parents create together with their children at bedtime. The sounds are as important as the semantic content of the words. Moreover, the creation of inner images contributes to a mutual personal experience that is highly valuable from a creative and developmental point of view. This can be linked to the concept of *Bildung* in the sense of the cultivation of the inner life, of the human soul or the human mind (i.e. Humboldt, 1792; Luth, 1996; Naumann, 2006). Simultaneously, when children's world is enlarged and they learn new songs in kindergarten and create images from a shared cultural world and tradition, a collective sense of belonging takes place, and their social and cultural identity is strengthened. Here the social aspect of *Bildung* is emphasized in line with Klafki's formal and normative aspects (Klafki, 1998). I will now dig deeper into the human *Bildung* potentials of lullabies and discuss the notion of quality in a bit more detail.

## Discussion

Lullaby quality and *Bildung* as a dynamic balancing between different forces?

Taking the cue from the Norwegian musicologist Peder Christian Kjerschow, lullaby quality includes spiritual, social, cultural and human depths as well as personal sensibilities, empathic understanding and the loving atmosphere created by a devoted and present mother or father.<sup>6</sup> Adding to this view O'Callaghan (2008) reports that

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<sup>6</sup> The Norwegian musicologist Kjerschow refers to a special lullaby quality where these elements are present (Kjerschow 2000: 310).

lullabies exhibit specific qualities, such as nurturance, care, support, articulated, communicated and embodied love, acknowledgment and truth telling. Though some parents confine their lullaby singing to a practical and everyday mode and dismiss its particular social and existential 'qualities', these possibilities exist. Through them, in turn, meaning arises in the act, manifesting itself in ways large and small: physical signs of contentment, feelings of safety, relaxation, deep relaxed breathing, and the sense of an intimate bond.

According to the parents in this inquiry, the development of a singing ritual, initiated by the parents and insisted upon by their children, seems to have one rather obvious and explicit instrumental function or deeper meaning. It does not overrule the others, but it is surely the most central: creating a calm atmosphere and fixed routine or ritual in order to induce relaxation and sleep. Repetitive, even monotonous singing seems to help children to calm down (Bonnár, 2014). It does other things as well, and parents single them out according to their own convictions and backgrounds or childhood experiences. Lullaby singing is looked upon as an important vehicle for cultivating socialisation, promoting companionship and allowing for intimate sharing. It is also a tool for the maintenance of cultural and family traditions. It can even be considered a situated learning process, through which the child engages with a particular culture, a collective mentality, local or family traditions, and human identity and depth. From a general Bildung point of view, lullaby singing may function as an "approach" to the "aspects of our world and life" that we want our children to sense, experience, understand, imitate, recreate and think about..." (Nielsen, 2007: 275). Referring to Klafki's *basic* education, lullaby singing seems to fit to this notion as lullaby singing in this basic sense does not require complex parental emotional, musical or vocal skills. When children are babies they are omnivore and accept their parents' "good-enough" singing. For many of the parents and their children, it is the intimate, multisensory nature of the act and its context that counts and helps them to come closer together and it easily becomes an integral, natural, almost taken-for-granted part of their daily lives. In this respect, the lullaby singing becomes basic, as a natural everyday musical encounter between the parent and the child. This everyday quality promotes a family ritualized Bildung aspect that gives parents' – through their children – the basic knowledge about the human need for cultural rituals, routines and repetition in order for their children to feel safe and integrated. In this respect, the lullaby singing experience invite to a human growth for the parents. They see how valuable their singing is, and it gives them a sense of mastery.

However, both lullaby choice and singing needs to be strongly connected with the child's needs, response and appreciation, and with the parent-child relationship and with bedtime interaction more generally. The 'historical thickening' of the act balances

its occasional silliness by adding existential depth in terms of either personal parental history or cultural tradition. And all of this significance is in turn balanced by the individual parent's performativity (or purposeful lack thereof). Some parents regret the fact that the meaningfulness of the act can fade, and new meanings and dynamics will cease to appear, as it becomes more and more ritualised. The experience as a whole, though, tends to feel profound, lyrically and musically, as the mother indicates when describing the act as 'getting in contact with these deeper layers of reality'. Certainly part of the richness of the lullaby-singing act arises from the unintended or double meanings of sometimes hard lyrics that are sung in a sweet, positive and affective manner. The act's paradoxes, or even duplicity, likewise evoke parents' expressive as well as more instrumental intentions at bedtime. Parents want to express their loving kindness, but also regulate their children's behaviour and state or condition. Some parents become very goal-oriented and do not "put their soul" into their singing anymore as time goes by. Sometimes a parental ambivalence may occur, as parents sometimes lack energy and just want to get it over with. Drawing upon Humboldt, the actual lullaby "circumstances" (1792) influence the lullaby Bildung potential of the act together with the actual songs used and the lullaby quality depends upon these circumstances.

Lullaby singing needs to be a mutual, reciprocal process of give and receive, initiate and listen or what is often referred to in developmental psychology as turn-taking and infant-directed singing. Adding Klafki's notion of co-determination and Humboldt's self-determination to this picture, we could say that a co-attunement needs to take place. The experienced intimate and *mutual* dimension of lullabies seems crucial, including its multisensory character. Lullaby quality depends upon the sensitivity of gestures and movements, the sincere softness of the parent's voice and the parent's emotional attunement to the child's inner rhythm. It is strongly linked to what evokes presence, tenderness, openness receptivity and authentic behaviour. The act invites the parent to balance the aesthetic, existential, social and practical dimensions of his or her life. These complex experienced meanings of the act can rather easily be identified with Humboldt's different "forces" that are coming into play when singing. When the parent is too narrow-minded and unconsciously transmitting old values in a monotonous uniformity that does not correspond to the actual, modern life of themselves and their children, there will be no "equilibrium". Parents need to balance between new and old. On the other hand, if parents invent or introduce new songs all the time to their children, in an eager effort of cultural Bildung, they will not manage to create identity and progression, or be able to link the present to the past. In order to create a common ground, the right balance between repetition and continuity is needed.



The shared world of references, traditions, emotions and states of affairs, and the dynamic, mutually influencing parent-child relationship, are forces that are all brought into concert by the lullaby act. In this context, the concept Bildung is conceived of as both an inward and outward movement and process, which can foster capacities for lifelong, self-aware engagement with personal, relational and social issues crossing the levels of the individual, the collective and beyond these dichotomies (see Klafki, 1998, 2001). Though some of these initial aspects might dominate, the others are always present and active, via a circular form of interaction that adds individual nuances to the intersubjective understanding that lies at the core of the act. Yet the relational quality of the interaction is an elusive matter and difficult to explain. Nonetheless, a simple lullaby act might 'afford' in terms of its Bildung potential much more than the actual song and the singing. When parents start singing, they signal to the child that it is time to go to sleep, which can produce an increase in energy, as if the child knows this transition is coming and wants to expend the last bit of energy he or she has. This represents a centring on the threshold of sleep, to which the child must eventually surrender. Many parents experience the way children appear to be energetic at bedtime, even though they are in fact very tired. Singing becomes a transitional ritual (rit de passage) toward deliverance from this state. In this sense, the lullaby singing has the potential of creating an important *transitional* Bildung skill. Lullaby singing facilitates an in-between-state of awake and sleep, reality and dream through important self-regulation and relaxation. In this transitional sense, the act is transcending.

This transitional aspect or 'rit de passage'<sup>7</sup> also reflects a type of mediation between the self and the other that belongs to an intersubjective time and space that is between parent and child, wakefulness and sleep, reality and dream. The transition is of an immediate and temporal character, situated within the intimate parent-child daily life world, in which this intimate mode demonstrates the paradox of simultaneously being together and being alone in one's own body. This regular lullaby singing is an important introduction to the ritual character of our culture. Moreover, the parents' repetitive and regular singing adds an important continuous aspect to the parents and their children's life. It can have a restorative function for both of them when their daily lives seem chaotic and unpredictable.

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7 The notion 'rit de passage' or transitional ritual originates from the Belgian anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, who observed structural similarities between rituals from different cultures (Van Gennep, 1908/1977). He refers to this stage as a liminal stage, which in Latin signifies 'threshold' (Van Gennep In Ruud, 1993: 141). It is often characterized by a sense of insecurity and ambiguity. The anthropologist Victor Turner deepens our understanding of this in-between stage by characterizing this 'threshold-situation' as being 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1974: 232). Moreover, Ruud describes liminal states as touched by insecurity, confusion and dissolution (Ruud, 1993).

## Bildung of musical mindfulness – a social sort of mindfulness that safeguards both individuality and the sensitivity to the needs of the others?

The parents' statement about children gaining insight into their parents' love through their singing and how their singing is an important bonding time, demonstrate the strong connection that exists between our innate musicality, the affective state we call love and intimate relationships. According to Ryan and Deci (2001), there has been increasing appreciation within psychology for the fundamental impact of warm, trusting and supportive interpersonal relationships upon wellbeing. They have even defined relatedness as a basic human need that is essential for wellbeing (Deci & Ryan 1991, cited in Ryan & Deci 2001: 154). Assuming that this view is valid, one would expect a powerful and universal association between the qualities of one's relationships and one's wellbeing.

According to Ryan (2009), the premises of a child's wellbeing, human growth and functionality are optimised when internalisation and integration are enabled and children are able to satisfy their basic psychological needs. Internalisation is maximised when children are able to feel non-contingent love from their caregivers, are provided with optimal challenges, and are relatively free from excessive control, all qualities of sensitive parenting (Ryan, 1993, In Ryan & Deci 2000b: 323). In this regard, some parents touch upon the aspect of musical integration or 'ownership' – that is, how children seem to internalise the songs that are sung over and over again. Parents are aware of the importance of parental consistency and continuity and try to satisfy their children's needs for love, care, familiarity and repetition. On this basis, lullaby singing may be seen to represent an evolving and active parental initiative to connect with their children, and an effort in staying focused and attentive towards the child.

However, over time, lullaby singing becomes an everyday, even mundane affair, and its performativity or import sometimes fades; parents grow less inspired, even, by the older child's presence than they were by the infant's, at least as regards the lullaby. When it comes to the act as an *integrated* human means of caring and relating and how this relates to the concept of wellbeing, we need to take into account the parents' experience of caring for themselves as well as their caring for their children. Sometimes, the way in which parents relate to their children before bedtime implies a rather instrumental way of behaving and relating both to themselves and to their children. Much more favourable to the child's integration is the state or mode I have labelled musical mindfulness, within which the parents are more focused and present. The aspect of integration also encompasses a continuous and constant proximity between the mother or father and the child that creates and ensures a secure base

to live upon. Though lullaby singing is only a small part of parents' caregiving, it is a powerful one, channelling energy reserves at a time when it is not always easy to stay balanced and calm. It is also a reliable 'reunion' time after what is often a day's absence from the child.

To be a truly integrated part of the caregiving that promotes intimacy and secure attachment, though, lullaby singing must reflect an optimum balance between reunion and autonomy, and in fact, for many parents, the singing initiates a falling-asleep process that they want their children to conclude on their own. Accordingly, the act can have a positive impact on both the parent-child attachment, through its emphasis on bonding time, and on the child's striving for independence and autonomy. Parents' safeguarding of their own personal lullaby style and signature also plays a role here. Parents as important role models for their children shows creativity and individuality through their singing. Parents also experience a sense of mastery and control when their caring singing contributes to a happy ending of the day.

The connection between lullabies and wellbeing surely includes a relational dimension. As an opportunity for bonding time, the act supports the scholarly notion that secure attachments themselves are indicators of wellbeing (see Simpson, 1990, In Ryan & Deci 2001: 155). Research has shown that family members who have the ability to create attuned relationships promote resilience and longevity (Siegel, 2007: xiv). This connects wellbeing to the particular lullaby quality, which includes an intrinsic sensitive, soft and attuned character and continuous singing style. The lullaby act seems to represent a conduit to the brighter aspects of human functioning. Borrowing the terms 'antecedent' and 'indicator' from Ryan and Deci (2000a), we might well wonder, however, whether it is an antecedent of wellbeing rather than its indicator. Parents' conclusions vary in this regard. Those who do not always bring themselves to sing see the act as an indicator; those who sing regardless of mood tend to favour its impact as an antecedent or even describe it as what I choose to call an incidence of mutual wellbeing – emphasising, as these parents do, the importance of the present moment above all else.

Indeed, two aspects that are intrinsic to the act, love and calmness, actually blur the boundaries between care and self-care, which points towards an emphasis on mutual wellbeing as opposed to some parents' more unilateral focus on the child's wellbeing. I argue that singing lullabies would help parents' to recover from daily stress, as long as their singing absorbs them. The meditative stance that some parents have indicates this possibility. The act can reduce bodily tensions and promote the physiological and psychological wellbeing of both parent and child. In this respect, the singing safeguards the need of the parent as a caring person and the need of the child who needs the presence of his or her parent in order to calm down and fall

asleep. Parents often observe that their singing creates positive emotions for both themselves and their children. The relational and social wellbeing seems to overrule parents' individual one. Some parents also report that they derive energy from singing, and that their singing has an affective mode; others state that the singing comes out of their existing positive emotions, and only when they are positive. The act, by and large, is a symbol of positive emotions and harmony, and its multisensory nature gives children 'all-inclusive' care, particularly regarding the bedtime need to calm down.

When parent have an instrumental approach to their singing, positive feelings and the experience of an extended time seems to be secondary. Some parents don't even want to include feelings when singing to their children. Moreover, instrumentality never seems to fit to the child's playful and sometimes challenging, irrational nature and it may ruin a true moment of mutual sharing. On the other hand, positive relationships seem to grow out of a shared, positive time, based upon good communication and mutual attentive presence, conditions that a lullaby seems to invite to. The relational affordance of lullaby singing, which derives from its specific dynamic and living mode and quality of interaction and communication, rather than from the quality of the singing itself, seems crucial to mutual wellbeing. Many parents are aware of the potential connection between a lullaby and relational wellbeing and they make an effort in staying present and attuned to the moment and to the child in order to work the ground for mutual wellbeing and meaningfulness.

Parents' and children's non-judgmental attitude towards parents' musical shortcomings and imperfections also belongs to a particular accepting focus and mode of singing, and this particular non-judgmental attitude is often included when describing mindfulness (see Kabat-Zinn, 1994: 4). Moreover, parents search for balance and equanimity while singing also describes a special mode of being. I suggest that this conscious balanced, communicative and vital dimension of the lullaby act represents a uniquely musical sort of mindfulness that encompasses sensitive time and timing, dynamic movements, non-judgmental behaviour, attentive presence, social awareness and openness. Musical mindfulness is not intrinsic to the lullaby, but it is something that lullaby singing affords in terms of rhythmical integration, flow and movement, emotional and communicative depth and holding and multisensory elements.

Many interpersonal studies highlight the importance of the parents' presence and attentive awareness in any parent-child interaction (e.g., Malloch & Trevarthen, 2009; Siegel, 2007; Stern, 2004; Winnicott, 1971/1991). This parental state is crucial if the children are to feel vibrant and alive, understood, and at peace (Siegel, 2007: xiv). Mindfulness, in its most general sense, is about 'waking up from a life on automatic, and being sensitive to novelty in our everyday experiences' (Siegel, 2007: 5). Recalling the definition of mindfulness from the chapter of theoretical framework, a mindful

state brings 'complete attention to the present experience on a moment-to-moment basis' (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999: 68). A mindful parental approach to lullaby singing adds important meanings to the act. A personal and intimate lullaby provides the parent with an opportunity to attune to the child, and this in turn distinguishes the genuine lullaby act from the rote fulfilment of its potentially habituated, regulated and automated ritual context. It also introduces a clear distinction between singing actively and reproducing passively, singing for oneself and singing to and with others.

I suggest that we think of this balancing between repetition and novelty, stability and improvisation, and this attuning to one's inner self and to the child, as a state of *musical mindfulness*. In this sense, we can see that the lullaby act affords 'the co-regulation of attention' as a lullaby's simplicity allow the parent to focus on a particular lullaby and the child. Musical mindfulness depends on the given parent's ability to make use of his or her musical resources and to exploit the implicit melodic, rhythmic and formal features and qualities of the lullaby. In this way, the parent adopts a reflective, self-observant and interpersonal listening stance while also performing. Musical mindfulness blurs the boundaries between intrapersonal and interpersonal attunement (see Siegel, 2007). The social, reciprocal aspect of the act is paramount. However, the parents' focus can shift very quickly, as stated by the parents themselves. Following the parents' statements, musical mindfulness reflects a higher degree of social attunement, and it is dynamic, process-oriented and movement-oriented rather than static. Musical mindfulness also encompasses the energetic levels introduced by Stern (2010). The act seems to fall along a continuum between activation and deactivation. In contrast to affective attunement, seen as outside the mother or father's awareness (Stern, 1985/2000), musical mindfulness depends upon parental awareness of the fluid nature of both the interaction and the singing. The easy mastering of a simple song makes this possible. Drawing upon Nielsen (2007), the elementary aspect of lullaby singing seems to involve element (the actual song and lyrics), simplicity (the melodic, rhythmical, poetic and structural simple contours and content), originality (the parents' personal signature and style) and essence (the love and care for the child).

It is based upon the *living and flowing act* of singing, which also, from my point of view, transcends the dichotomy between being and doing, between you and me, as it transports the parent and the child to an 'awareness of their intrinsic connectedness', to use Pavlicevic and Ansdell's formulation (2009: 42). It allows them to 'connect in the third', as one of the parents put it. Musical *mindfulness* means to forget, at least temporarily, chronological time and enter the realm of a perpetual state that is more in line with how children experience time. It demands a sensitive approach to the child's inner rhythm. If a parent's face is an emotional mirror of the child's face, I

propose that lullabies represent an aural or even multisensory analogue to the child's inner state. However, musical mindfulness is not only mirroring, as it seems to move the child towards integration.

Several parents in fact describe the intersubjective and intimate space that is created when they sing to their children, and one even used the term mindfulness when describing the way in which she *centres* herself. Another used the word when describing how she *tunes herself in* on the particular bedtime situation. This state represents a way of being with her son, when they need peace and quiet, as she put it. According to Winnicott, 'It is possible to seduce a baby into feeding and into functioning of all the bodily processes, but the baby does not feel these things as an experience unless it is built on a *quality of simple being*, which is enough to establish the self that is eventually a person' (Winnicott, 1960: 12; my emphasis). Musical mindfulness is the manifestation of this quality of being. Drawing upon the theory of categorial Bildung (Klafki, 1963), musical mindfulness is well being in a broad, social as well as meditative sense where the material and formal aspects of lullaby singing are transcended.

The transcendent or meditative state of musical mindfulness in turn affords co-determination, self-transcendence and shared agreement and wellbeing. For parents who have a hard time expressing their love, the symbolism of the lullaby's simple and poetic language can create a bridge to the parent's emotions in the context of musical mindfulness. Musical mindfulness can create a detached state of mind when the parents' life seems overburdened. An emotionally available parent, through singing, can create stories that are full of 'emotional images based on autobiographical richness' (Siegel 2007: 204). Musical mindfulness in this sense resonates with Humboldt's balance between receptivity and self-activity, between emotion, imagination and sensation on the one hand and reason and reflection on the other (Humboldt, 1792). It becomes an equilibrium of different forces that forms a relational unity, but still safeguard the diversity of individuals.

## Conclusion

The lullaby act is a manifestation of a certain kind of parental attitude, value orientation and intentional behaviour, which, for better or for worse, influences the lullaby's Bildung potential. Drawing upon Klafki (1998), it reflects parents' balancing between their own individuality, value-orientation, style and personal signature and their sensitivity to the needs of their children. Some parents emphasise the importance of bonding time and contact, looking the child in the eyes while singing or otherwise

creating a very physical, multi-sensory ritual, while others are satisfied with a pleasant atmosphere in which the child feels good and learn how to relax. Still others attach importance to an interactive style that privileges the participation of the child and its language acquisition. In each case, the voice of the parent and the voice within the voice (the loving-kindness energy, intention and emotion) are paramount. While singing, some parents open up to their own inner world of images, memory and imagination. Singing lullabies provides parents with stories that evoke an autobiographical richness, and this also helps the child to learn to visualise and develop the ability to create his or her own inner images. The lullaby act has infinite potentials, but very often the “circumstances” may not be perfect (read: parent and the child are both so tired, and the singing becomes monotonous and uniform), thus the Bildung potential of the act becomes rather limited. However, this one-sidedness of the parents’ singing still allows the child to enter into the ritualized world of our actions and thoughts. This ritualized, uniform and everyday way of behaving is part of our cultural and human way-of-being-together over time, and can be cultivated in a way in which joy, wonder and free associations can flourish.

The connection between modest means (e.g. a lullaby’s simplicity, the parents’ good enough singing) and richness (e.g. present, unpredictable interaction, the child’s expectancies and the parents’ representations, childhood memories, intergenerational historical and ritualized thickening) is in no way incompatible in this context. Based on the expressive potential of the human voice, the structural simplicity of a lullaby, the lullaby’s collective and mythological depths, and the parents’ personal communicative skills and sensitivity, the act becomes an important communicative and highly human Bildung event in the lives of parents and their children.

In addition, this inquiry highlights the interdependence of all of the elements in play in order to be able to explore the basic and categorial Bildung potentials of lullaby singing. When parents raise their children musically, they also raise themselves in this way or attend to musical aspects of their own continued Bildung as well. Their musicality is reawakened – they improvise and invent new songs with their children. They then develop an everyday ritual that soon takes on a life of its own, based upon mutual expectation and appreciation. When the ritual finally fades away, it is generally thanks to the child’s drive towards independence from any such parent-child interaction. Parents’ continuous caring singing at bedtime is an important condition or social circumstance in this process towards independence and autonomy.

A lullaby is a ‘Bildung-laden’ event which depends on the parents’ levels of awareness and sensibility towards the moment, the child and the structural, melodic and poetic qualities of the lullaby, and their ability to adapt and attune to the child’s unique and spontaneous physical intentionality, openness and interest in novelty

versus predictability. The act of singing lullabies has the clear potential to be an embodied, expressive, meaningful moment at a shared, purposeful time, one that enables socio-emotional engagement, bonding and companionship. The act has the power to fulfil many needs and promote both relational and mutual wellbeing, as well as a true and vital sense of belonging to a family and culture. Contrasting aspects, such as intuition and tradition, necessity and joy, real and ideal, often act together through the lullaby ritual and are opened to the child as well as to the parent.

From a developmental perspective, lullaby singing can have an affect regulating function (encompassing both dynamic and categorical affects) that is especially appropriate before bedtime, or it can have an emotional-education categorial function for the parent and the child, creating free associations or touching upon happiness, love, loss, loneliness, separation and sorrow. Lullaby stories are very valuable to the child; through them, they get to know their parents as *humans*. The singing creates a potential space for mutual understanding and meaning, and it enhances various kinds of perceptions, included fantasies, dreams and illusions. While singing, they explore together the paradoxes and contrasts of life – of being close but in two separate bodies, of equality and otherness and autonomy and interdependence. Singing lullabies represents a sharing of a resonant form and a precious and intimate dwelling on the threshold to sleep that has nothing to prove and is an end-in-itself. Yet it can lead to physical, psychic, social and spiritual fulfilment and improve the human condition through its creation of a free space and time for personal and interpersonal growth.

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