



COMMUNAL MUSIC, PROSOCIAL SKILLS, AND LONG TERM WELLNESS: EXPLORING THE CONNECTIONS



Background

Communal Music → Social Bonding

- Alignment of actions between individuals
- Evolutionary role of social bonding

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL → Wellness

- Studies connect a child's ability to navigate social and emotional challenges to long term health, academic success, and economic stability.



SEL in Music

- What does the literature reveal about the impact of music on SEL development?
- What approaches to music instruction can nurture SEL? Are these approaches being implemented to the best possible effect in music classrooms?

Research Question

Can experience with communal music in children ages six to eleven develop prosocial skills? If so, what are some of the ways?

Methodology

Review, analysis, and synthesis of peer-reviewed studies, limited to effects on children aged six to eleven (based on typical public elementary school age range in US).

Core Studies

- Role of **synchrony** established throughout research on group music in anthropology, psychology, and music research journals
- Synchronous interaction causes the experience of **self-other merging**, considered essential to prosocial skills like empathy.
- In a 2015 study, the effects of synchrony were measured in pairs of 8 to 9-year-olds.
 - Synchronous tapping for three or more minutes led to feelings of **similarity**, a precursor for **empathy**.

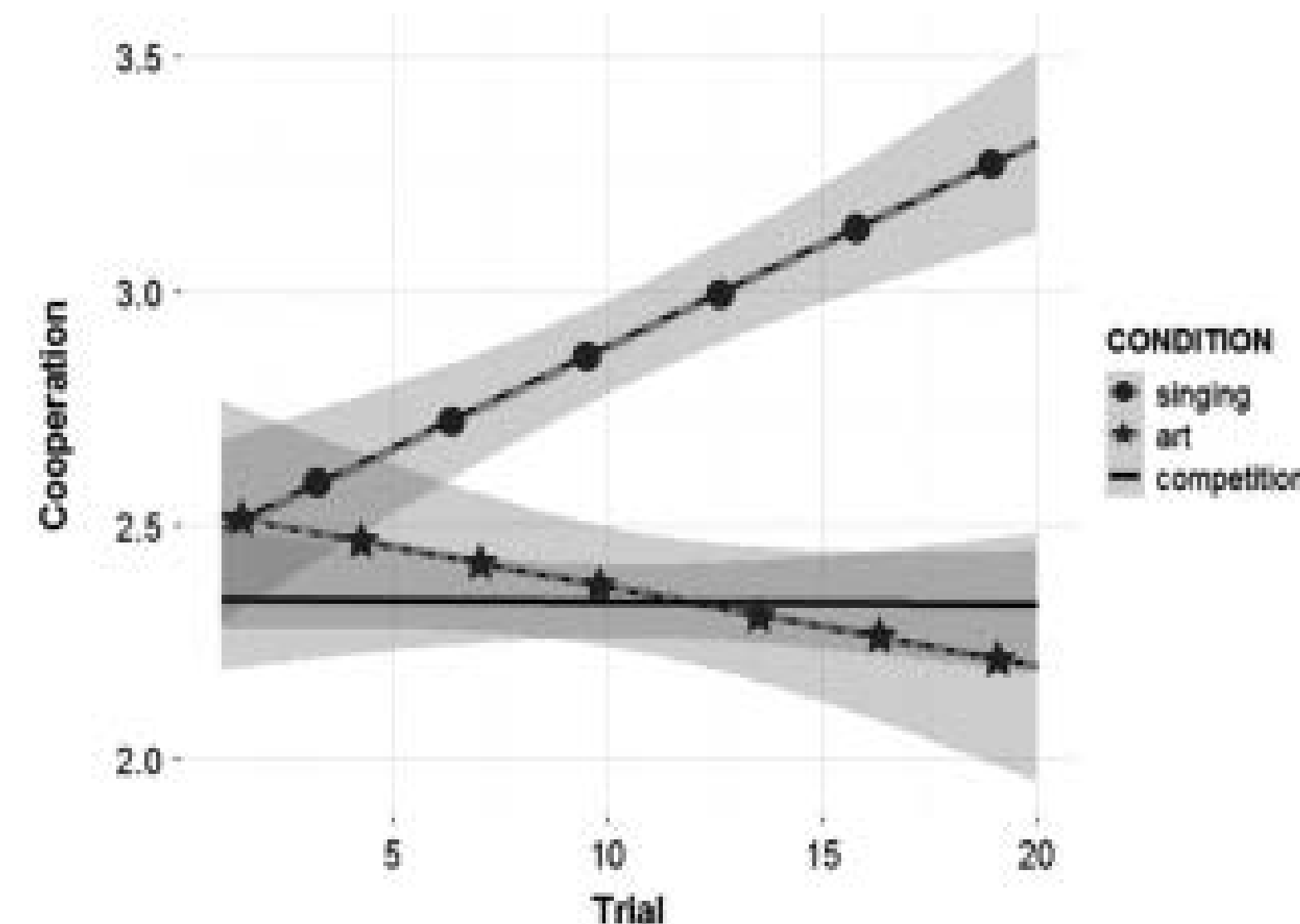


Figure 2. Mean level of cooperation across 20 trials.

- 6 to 11-year-old children who engaged in group singing showed **more cooperation** in a prisoner's dilemma game compared to children in group art or competitive games groups.

(Chart from Good and Russo, *Social Psychology*, 2016, p 343.)

- 8 to 9-year-old students with poor social skills showed **large gains in sympathy and prosocial skills** after one year of weekly music group interaction lessons as compared to control group

Action Research

- Implemented 2-month **social dance unit in own classroom**
 - Cohort of 7 to 8-year-olds who lacked essential SEL skills
 - Met once weekly for 45 minutes in music class
 - **SEL focus:** respectful touching, eye contact, and dancing with various partners while singing and maintaining synchronous beat.
 - **Results:** Students who initially could not connect without conflict were dancing, singing, and respectfully touching by the end of the unit.



Conclusions

- SEL skills can be learned.
- Elementary music classes can be an especially potent environment in which to nurture SEL.
- Music specialists can emphasize communal activities to enhance cooperation and ensemble cohesion among students by:
 - Integrating SEL skill development into curriculum as purposefully as musical concepts such as reading melody and playing rhythms.
 - Highlighting developmentally appropriate prosocial skills at each age level could further amplify effects of music instruction on SEL development.

Next Steps

- **Synthesize** studies and personal experience into seminar presentation for music specialists. Outline research findings and suggest curriculum modifications and improvements to effect positive SEL outcomes.
- **Measure** SEL skill development over longer duration than extant studies.
 - All studies conducted were one year or less and were broad in terms of musical practice.
 - Are amplified prosocial outcomes possible for students in typical public school setting? (One music specialist oversees students from Kindergarten through fifth grade.)
 - Which aspects of music instruction produce the greatest SEL outcomes? (Dance? Singing? Instrument playing?)