

Exploring positive and negative empathic behavior in beginner violin-group players

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Introduction. This paper reports a case study exploring the effects of musical movement games and kinaesthesia on empathic behaviour with young violinists taking group lessons in an Italian state primary school.

Aim. The aim is to explore how movement games develop empathic behavior during violin-group session with beginners.

Background. The interest in this topic comes from the fact that most learning occurs in social contexts and empathy (Deitch Feshbach, Feshbach, 2011) has an important role in this learning process. Empathy is defined as the skill to share and understand others' emotions by also involving cognitive ability. In the Husserlian phenomenology and social neuroscience, imitation and embodied simulation are considered fundamental in developing empathy (Gallese, 2009). Moreover, empathy could underlie motivation in carrying out group activities (Stompe, Ritter, Northoff, 2010).

Methods. The participants were 24 children all from fourth-year Italian primary state school. Due to the lack of sufficient space and instruments, they were divided into 2 groups. Both groups imitated the violin teacher and learned the same songs through movement by memory and then played them on the violin. The monitored variables were movement and children's behavior. Qualitative methods were adopted including observation, focus group interviews, questionnaires, audio-visual material, and children's drawings. All the sessions were video-recorded. In focus group interviews, the phenomenological approach was employed to let children verbalize their impressions after engaging in musical activities through movements.

Results. Results showed that all the children imitated and simulated both their teacher and companions' movements. It was observed that one group was influenced by a child who appeared to be the leader and contributed to developing negative empathic behavior in most of the sessions. The children from this group negatively assessed the violin course, expressing their opinions in the questionnaires and during the verbalization process they had in the 12th session. However, after the last session when all the children performed the songs they had learned on the violin in front of their parents and their companions, most of these children changed their minds, expressing a wish to continue the course.

Conclusions. Possible future implication of this study could investigate the correlation between empathy and movement activities in developing motivation when learning musical instruments in a group.

Keywords: empathy, kinaesthesia, violin-group players