

Can making music make children more helpful and cooperative?
Yes indeed - it CAN!



Both singing and playing a musical instrument can improve young children's behaviour. According to a recent study (2013), children who make music are more helpful to each other and have better problem-solving skills than those who'd listened to a story. The results shed light on an age-old question: is music just a happy byproduct of the human mind or does it serve some purpose?

The researchers randomly allocated 24 four-year-olds to two different groups:

- In the **music group** children played percussion and sang.
- In the **story group** they sat quietly and listened to a story.

Afterward this activity the children were given tests of cooperation as well as helping behaviour. Some of the results were dramatic: children who'd been in the music group were over 30 times more likely to be *helpful* than those in the

story group. In the same vein, the findings were also dramatic for *cooperation*. Children who were in the music group were 6 times more likely to cooperate when tested afterwards.

The lead author of this study makes the important comment that

"This study highlights the need for schools and parents to understand the important role music making has in children's lives in terms of social bonding and helping behaviours. Music making in class, particularly singing, may encourage pupils with learning differences and emotional difficulties feel less alienated in the school environment."

Others researchers similarly found that music is more than just an interesting by-product of the human mind. In fact: it serves to maintain *"social bonds and prosocial commitment among the members of individual social groups, ultimately increasing cooperation and prosocial ingroup behavior."* (Kirschner & Tomasello, 2010).

The very same authors conclude that

"...children today have an innate proclivity to produce and to enjoy musical behaviours This proclivity together with music's efficiency in coordinating voice and action — thereby highlighting the shared intention of acting together as a "we" unit — encouraged the children in our study to behave more cooperatively and pro-socially towards each other."

Is this not so very true of what happens in the ERYO where children of different ages and hues join cooperatively and in a prosocial manner to produce the most beautiful music.

(Adpated from <http://www.spring.org.uk/>. Downloaded 25 February 2014)