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Empathy and Creativity in Group Musical Practices: Towards a Concept of Empathic Creativity

Ian Cross, Felicity Laurence, and Tal-Chen Rabinowitch

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Abstract and Keywords

This article examines the role of empathy in creative musical interaction. It first investigates the relationships between empathy and engagement in creative group musical activities. It then describes the ways in which empathy is related to processes that are significant in social interaction; these processes may either be automatic or volitional, reflectively rational, or emotionally embodied. The article then shows how structured musical group improvisations that emphasize other-directed behaviour can help children develop a sense of empathy. It concludes with a case-study involving the collaborative composition of songs by an adult and a group of children.

Keywords: creative music, musical interaction, empathy, creativity, emphatic creativity, musical groups, improvisation, collaborative composition

In this chapter we shall explore the idea of empathy in creative musical interaction, sketching an initial theoretical framework for the concept of “empathic creativity” and outlining empirical work conducted by two of us that illustrates and provides support for the theory that is developed.

We start by investigating the relationships between empathy—the ability to have emotional and experiential responses to the situations of others that approximate to *their* responses and experiences, understood as motivated by their internal states (Lieberman, 2007, p. 264)—and engagement in creative group musical activities. We shall describe the ways the concept of empathy is related to processes that have been identified in contemporary cognitive sciences as significant (p. 338) in social interaction; these processes may be either automatic or volitional, reflectively rational or emotionally embodied. We then show how structured musical group improvisations that emphasize other-directed behavior may help children in the development of a sense of empathy,

allowing for the emergence of empathy through creative practice. We conclude by presenting a case study of empathic creativity in action, in the form of the collaborative composition of songs by an adult and a group of children.

Theoretical Framework and Key Principles

Music is a profoundly social activity. From its earliest manifestations in the caregiver-infant dyad to its mature expression, it involves interaction with the acts and intentions of other people. This is perhaps most evident in many traditional societies, where the dominant mode of engagement with music involves overt action and interaction. But even the apparently passive act of listening—perhaps the dominant mode through which musicality is expressed in contemporary Western culture—implicates the listener in engagement with traces of the behaviors, intentions and identities of performers, composers, producers, and other listeners.

What type of social activity is music? An immediate answer would be “a communicative one.” But precisely what type of communication is involved in music? Human communication is dominated by the use of language, but, while music is surrounded by a web of discourse, it is not itself language nor does it seem expressible by means of words. Yet music seems inherently communicative. While it is unlike language in being unable to articulate propositions, it is certainly capable of expressing attitudes and conveying and eliciting emotions. At the same time, though music is lacking in the capacity to inform or compel—it can be neither declarative nor imperative—musical communication appears to involve and express a sense of togetherness, a phatic functionality that can be thought of as relatable to processes of social bonding (Cross & Woodruff, 2009). Music achieves this sense of togetherness not through processes of rational transaction, though these may play a role, but rather through embodied and affective—emotional—interaction. In this chapter, we explore the possibility that this sense of togetherness can be understood as arising from the actualization of *empathic processes and states* in the course of collective engagement in music-making.

The idea of empathy has a surprisingly short history in the Western intellectual tradition. The term was first coined in the work of Titchener in 1909, as his translation of the German concept of *Einfühlung* which denotes a concept of “feeling into” and whose original context was the field of German aesthetic theory. Once rendered into English, the term “empathy” was subsequently elaborated (p. 339) by a number of philosophers and aestheticians over the last century and, much more recently, in the cognitive sciences (see Stueber, 2008). Current theories of the behavioural and cognitive processes concerned in social interaction recognize that it involves both “innate, automatic and cognitively impenetrable mechanisms, as well as acquired, contextual and volitional aspects that include self-regulation” (Adolphs, 2003 p. 165). At the root of many of these automatic or reflexive (Lieberman, 2007) processes lie the systems that give rise to our emotions—the states that regulate the ways body and mind can function effectively in uncertain and changing environments. The acquired and volitional mechanisms to which Adolphs refers include the capacity to plan our actions and to put ourselves into the position of others so as to infer their intentions and emotional states, processes that have been increasingly attributed to the workings of a “mirror neuron” system (see the

excellent brief outline of current research by Keyzers, 2009). Our abilities to relate to others and to behave in ways appropriate to the social contexts in which we find ourselves derive from the complex interaction of these automatic and volitional mechanisms.

One of the key components of our capacity for social interaction is this ability to “read the minds” of others. Many studies have shown that the ability accurately to attribute mental states to others emerges in the course of a child's development, crystallizing by about the age of five, as the child increasingly acquires the ability to simulate or to imagine the experiences of others (Gopnik, 1999). The development of a full-blown Theory of Mind (ToM) appears to be specific to humans (Tomasello et al., 2005) and lies at the heart of what Tomasello terms *shared intentionality*. This term refers to “collaborative interactions in which participants have a shared goal (shared commitment) and coordinated action roles for pursuing that shared goal” (p. 680). Shared intentionality requires individuals to be motivated to respond to each other—to desire to engage socially with each other, to be able to mutually focus on shared goals, and to be able to coordinate plans and actions, for which each interacting individual needs to be able to adopt the perspectives of other interacting individuals. It has been proposed that shared intentionality is one of the key factors implicated in successful engagement in interactive music-making (Cross, 2006; Kirschner & Tomasello, 2009).

The workings of ToM arise in the course of development, and appear to be volitional (requiring some awareness of the ways the mental processes of others are similar to or different from one's own). In contrast to these reflective processes, the motivational component of shared intentionality is reliant on mechanisms that are more reflexive. Over the last 20 years the latter types of mechanism have been the focus of an increasing amount of research, which has yielded ever more sophisticated accounts of the integrated workings of the mechanisms that underlie our social abilities. One concept that has emerged as key in these accounts is *empathy*: the ability to align one's emotions with, and to understand, another's feelings.

Empathy has been variously defined. Eisenberg (2000, p. 672) has defined it as “an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of (p. 340) another's emotional state or condition and is similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel,” a definition that puts together three crucial features of empathy: an affective response to another's situation, a critical awareness that one's own affective state is elicited by the other's situation, and an awareness that it is aligned with the other's affective state. Singer & Lamm (2009, p. 82) suggest that “in most cases, mimicry or emotional contagion [processes that appear to be largely reflexive or automatic] precede empathy, which precedes sympathy and compassion, which in turn may precede prosocial behaviour.” As Lieberman (2007, p. 264) notes, fundamentally, empathy is “more embodied than logical.”

A similar, though differently nuanced, view of empathy has emerged in the work of philosophers such as Edith Stein (1915/1989, p. 76), who conceived of empathizing as a staged process involving acts of imagination that are required to “grasp” the other's inner consciousness—but not to take it on as one's own—that may result in an affective sympathetic response and, ultimately, a strengthening of interhuman bonds and, beyond that, of community. The concomitant concept of *empathic relationship* can be characterized as involving the pursuit of a *joint project*, in which there is an *active striving* to reach out to the other and to engage in *nonhierarchical* power relationships, which tend to *enhance* the other (Mothe, 1987). In this sense, then, both empathic processes and empathic relationships rely at their core on a most intent *listening* to the other. In this overall view, empathy is neither solely a “feeling,” nor is it only the ability to take another's point of view.

These theories provide frameworks within which we can begin to understand music as a social behavior: as a process that requires us to be sensitive to the inner states of others; as an environment that may allow us to experience feelings that are congruent with the feelings of others; and as a manifestation of a state of shared intentionality, a state of which the goal may be simply the maintenance of that state. Music seems to embody the attitudes and emotions of others, which provides us with a basis for engaging both reflexively and reflectively with the music and with the inferred internal states of those with whom we are busy making music. Active participation in music-making helps make possible the alignment of our own emotional states with those of our collaborators, and may give rise to a sense of empathic community. Its effects might even outlive the activity itself; music may act as a scaffold that can help us to acquire the habit of empathizing.

In the remainder of this chapter we shall explore two differing manifestations of empathy in group musical practices with children. In the first, we will describe a program of group musical interactions that, by virtue of stressing *other-directedness*, are likely to enhance the general empathic capacities of the children who engage in them. The second makes explicit use of musical and verbal interactions with children in a *creative* musical context both to draw on and to help engender the children's empathic sensibilities. These two group musical practices reflect two key attributes of empathy: that it is both reflexive—rooted in embodied and automatic processes that underwrite the human capacity for social interaction—and (p. 341) reflective: it requires conscious awareness of, and active reflection on, the inner lives of those with whom we interact.

Musical Interaction That Inspires Empathic Creativity: Approaches

Sometimes when playing music together a moment of grace transpires. It is not only that we take intense pleasure in the music, but in addition we feel that the other person is playing with us in a most emotionally intimate way. These empathic moments, when they

occur, are characterized by a flowing musical interaction, which feels as if the players are in complete harmony with each other both musically and emotionally. At the same time, when making music together, we add an additional dimension of creativity to the musical process, especially when composing or improvising, as we are the creators or the “designers” of the music being played. We can define the experience of mutual affective alignment underlined by a creative process as “empathic creativity.”

In the following sections we shall describe two approaches for examining how music in cooperative contexts can provide the conditions for the emergence of empathic creativity. We shall first describe a set of musical games that has been developed in order to explore the relationships between other-directed music-improvisational interactions and the growth of a sense of empathy. We shall then provide an in-depth case study describing the processes involved in children's cooperative composition of a song that demonstrate empathic creativity in action.

What are the particular mechanisms that may prompt empathy in creative music making? An analysis of some of the most salient features of musical interaction may provide us with important insights on how empathic creativity emerges during music-making.

First, a key element of musical behavior, especially in a group context, is *imitation*. To a large extent, it is through mimicry that a song, a rhythm, a scale, and the like are learnt (Overy & Molnar-Szakacs, 2009). Furthermore, imitation is fundamental to the emotional perception of music, as implied by the theories of Webb (Webb, 1769/2003) and Langer (Langer, 1953), which posit an isomorphic relation between musical structure and emotion, enabling us to experience music emotionally by implicitly imitating the movement of the music, similar to the “emotional contagion” mechanism proposed by Juslin and Västfjäll (Juslin & Västfjäll, 2008). Concomitantly, as noted, imitation also appears to have an important function in empathy, providing us with an almost first-person experience of others, enabling us to recognize and internalize their emotional states.

Second, *entrainment*, the synchronization of two or more independent rhythmic processes (Clayton et al., 2004), is a particularly prominent feature of music, rendering music especially effective in promoting interpersonal synchronicity and (p. 342) shared intentionality (Cross, 2007). By entraining to the same beat, players can also become physiologically entrained (e.g., breathing rate, heartbeat, and brain wave activity), enhancing their attentional and motoric coordination and strengthening cohesion (Cross, 2007). Such synchronization may also make an important contribution to empathy, facilitating the ability to adjust to someone else's inner pace, to shift from one's own rhythm and accept someone else's different emotional state.

Third, *disinterested pleasure* is the experience of pleasure without presupposing the existence of a pleasurable object (Kant, 1790/1951). The appreciation of music stems to a considerable extent from the pure aesthetic interest in its sounds, colors, and movements,

as opposed to a desire for some functional outcome. Such a pure aesthetic experience, where players are entirely immersed in the music, can help merge their individual intentions into a shared one.

Fourth, throughout the process of music-making within a group of interacting individuals, things are constantly changing; the rhythm, the meter, the harmony, the dynamics, the character of the piece, and so on. Group members must learn to exhibit a considerable degree of *flexibility* in order to stay together and attuned to the music as it comes into existence. A considerable degree of such flexibility is also required for shifting from one's own emotional state to perceiving and responding to another's.

Fifth, as discussed, meaning in music is of an *ambiguous nature*. Cross (2009) describes music as exhibiting *floating intentionality* (intentionality here meaning “aboutness”), permitting specific, but not necessarily uniformly articulated or identical, emotional experiences to coexist. This intrinsic property of music can promote accord, even when agreement is not necessarily found in the intentional dispositions of the interacting individuals. In a similar vein, Winnicott (1989) depicted an experience of being in a state that is neither pure reality nor pure imagination, but some sort of intermediate space. Art (including music) can occupy such a space with no clear rules and interpretations as exist in the concrete world, but providing instead mental freedom for authentic creativity.

Finally, in some instances, *shared intentionality*, which, as mentioned above, may be an integral component of musical interaction, might qualitatively manifest the characteristics of a deeper phase of interaction called *intersubjectivity*, whereby participants come to share not only an object of intentionality but also similar affective and cognitive dynamics (Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001). This is possible thanks to the combined contributions of disinterest, flexibility, and ambiguity that transform shared intentionality from a mere sharing of intentions and attention into a condition in which each individual is completely free to be herself—to the extent that she can openly and unrestrainedly experience others, fully cooperate and merge with them through the music, and feel their affective and cognitive dynamics as if they were her own.

In summary, musical interaction, which is naturally endowed with these features, can serve as a significant platform for the development of self-other sensitivity, enhancing the experience of empathic creativity and perhaps even a general capacity for empathy within the interacting players.

(p. 343) **A Musical Interaction Program for Enhancing Empathic Creativity**

An environment that emphasizes the special features of musical interaction described above could help set the conditions for the emergence of empathy through the creative process. This can be done by designing a program of musical interaction that consists of special games and tasks, each focused on a particular feature of music predicted to facilitate the emergence of empathy (Rabinowitch et al., 2012, p. 7). In table 4.2.1 we provide several examples of such games, two of which are demonstrated in excerpts 1 and 2 in the supplementary video excerpts of musical games accompanying this chapter. Some of these games have been adapted from existing literature, and others have been developed specifically for the music interaction program. Of course, in addition to these examples and the many other games used, additional games that can help instantiate a mutual interaction based on the relevant musical features discussed above may be incorporated into the program.

Importantly, the musical interaction program was developed with the intention of exploring the relationships between group musical interaction and children's sense of empathy. It was designed to ensure that children's interactive musical improvisations should be *other-directed* (rather than directed toward self) and that the children's musical behaviors should be mutually interdependent, seeking to ensure that any dominant behavior would be transient and would occur only in the service of sustaining and renewing the ongoing musical interaction. It should be noted that the games did *not* require children to be aware of any explicit process of empathizing; they were designed to focus children's attention on the process of engaging musically and creatively with each other within the interactive constraints of each game. Nevertheless, a year-long implementation of the musical group interaction program in several schools led to a statistically significant increase in empathy in the participants (Rabinowitch et al., 2012, p. 4), in two out of three independent measures of emotional empathy, including the Index of Empathy (Bryant, 1982) and a novel nonverbal test.

It is important to note that while musical interaction can provide excellent conditions for the emergence of empathic creativity, there is no guarantee that this will indeed occur. Musical interaction is not always successful. There are many factors that can disrupt harmony within the group, such as personal conflict, excessive competitiveness, unbalanced musical skills, lack of patience, unwillingness to cooperate, and perhaps more than anything else, the great difficulty of stepping aside and accepting the group as a whole where no member dominates, but rather all members merge to embark on a joint project. However, if appropriate guidance and attention are put into the musical interaction, it has all the potential to transform the improvisational musical encounter into a positive and promising experience that embodies creative empathy in action.

(p. 344)

(p. 345)

Table 4.2.1 Features, core ideas, and examples of musical interaction program.

Feature	Core Idea of Game	Example of a game
Imitation (video example is available - see Excerpt 1 in the Supplementary Material)	Repeating musical ideas, precisely or just “loosely”	<i>The Mirror-Match Game.</i> Sitting in a circle, each participant plays a short musical phrase, which is either repeated precisely by the following participant, or just “matched” by them (Wigram, 2004).
Entrainment	Entraining to and synchronising the beat together	<i>Improvising rhythm.</i> The groups’ task is to improvise together, as the rhythm changes either intentionally by a designated group member or spontaneously. For example, begin the improvisation with a slow tempo, then a fast one, and finally slow again; or starting with a steady pulse, then an uneven tempo, then chaotic etc., on condition that everybody has to do it together, as one unit
Disinterest	Concentrating on small details in the music of the other group member/s	<i>Closed eyes quiz.</i> One or more group members play a short improvised musical piece. Other members listen with their eyes closed, and are then given a quiz on certain musical aspects. Examples: (a) what are the instruments which are being played; (b) try to sing a small element of the music (the melody, the rhythm, etc.); (c) what is the metre; (d) what could the theme/story be about?

Empathy and Creativity in Group Musical Practices: Towards a Concept of Empathic Creativity

Flexibility	Encouraging the experience of change and surprise in musical interaction as well as more abstract features such as mood, etc.	<i>The capricious game.</i> The only rule in this game is that the rules are constantly changing. A musical excerpt is played together with various accompanying tasks, so that every 2-3 minutes the music is switched off for a few seconds and then a new task arrives, often contrary to the previous task. Examples: (a) tapping the beat together; (b) tapping off-beat together; (c) moving in the room according to the music individually; (d) moving together, connected as a group (without separating, everybody needs to be somehow “connected” to at least one member of the group); (e) singing loudly with the music; (f) being really silent, whispering.
Ambiguity	Experiencing the ambiguous nature of music	<i>Multi-mood improvisation.</i> The group plays together, each participant improvises according to a different preselected individual mood (e.g. happy, surprised, etc).
Shared intentionality (video example is available - see Excerpt 2 in the Supplementary Material)	Focusing on working together to a mutual end, where each group member is indispensable	<i>Group composition.</i> The group composes a piece together, so that each participant has a distinct part to perform.

Empathy and Creativity in Group Musical Practices: Towards a Concept of Empathic Creativity

Intersubjectivity	Encouraging each other's "mind reading" through music	<i>Musical mind reading.</i> Preferably in a dyad, both participants choose a theme (e.g. an animal, a certain mood, etc.) and start improvising together. Their task during the musical interaction is to try and find out what is the chosen theme of their partner, while at the same time they need to try and get their theme across. After a while they stop playing and each tries to guess the other's theme.
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Processes of Empathic Creativity in Children's Song Composition

Having established that other-directed musical group interaction may offer the potential of enhancing children's empathic capacities, we now explore how empathic processes themselves may inform collaborative and *creative* musical activity through processes of composition rather than improvisation. In the project described below an adult composer (“Rosa”) and a small group of children made songs together over a period of several months, in a kind of music-making constructed specifically to favor *empathic* relationships; thus the act of empathizing, and empathic relationships, were being sought both as the foundations and as the *outcomes* of the music-making.

We look now at the specifically *creative* aspect of this kind of musical group practice as carried out in this work, seeking within this the weave and role of empathic processes. The quintessential quality of creativity has been given as “going beyond” (Feldman et al., 1994, cited in Burnard & White, 2008, p. 672); but it is also always situated within, and draws on, what is already there, which in turn builds on what *has been*—both within a person, and from without. In this example of children's musical group practice, what there was to draw on in the process of invention was each participant's accumulated experience, memory, and imaginative capacity; the combined resource that these constituted; and then, in addition, the collective concern (p. 346) and *intention* to build empathic relationships. Each stage of the work grew from what went just before, and this was facilitated by the empathic processes that were being foregrounded; arguably, such processes must underpin all such creative musical group practice, and this notion seems salient in a concept of “empathic creativity.”

As described above, empathic relationship is conceived as involving shared intention and a joint project; clearly, in this case, the very making of the songs was both a creative and a collaborative act, constituting this mutuality of action—that is, the collective musical *making*. In the end, this included not only the thinking and discussion leading to the words and the music but also the ensuing performance of the songs, in which the children continued to suggest ideas affecting their ongoing development.

The philosopher Christopher Small suggests that the meaning of music is best approached through a consideration of the human activity of *doing* it, rather than exclusively through looking at the music itself, and has offered his concept of *musicking* to delineate this shift of perspective (Small, 1998). Small positions the idea of relationship at the core of this concept, positing that in *musicking* we seek, investigate, and celebrate relationships—an entire matrix of intramusical, intrapersonal, between music and person, and also spiritual relationships—that are the right, “ideal” relationships *as we, the participants, find these to be*. Pivotal to Small's *musicking* is its inclusion of *any* human activity connected with a musical performance, offering a reach that takes in rehearsal and *all* processes of composition and preparation. Crucially, this concept allows in this

case, as an integral part, the highly flexible discussions between the children from which the themes and words came, leading ultimately to the collective musical work. Dobbs (2008) also notes the centrality of talk in classroom musical learning contexts, its role in “scaffolding the students’ construction of music understanding while enhancing a sense of collaboration” (p. 148), which in turn has “the potential to become an empathic process [where] the teacher offers both emotional and musical support to the student by attending to the social-musical nature of their relationship” (p. 148).

There are theoretical congruences between this interpretation of what is happening when we (in Small's vision) “music” and the concept of empathy-as-process sketched above. It can be suggested accordingly that in the kind of musicking that favors equality of human relationship and participation, that invites us to listen and attend acutely to our comusicker(s), in which we pursue similar intentions and have a sense of the other as being with us on a joint endeavor, empathic processes and relationships may be served, facilitated, and even brought into being (Laurence, 2005, 2008). Indeed, the ethnomusicologist John Blacking remarked, on observing the intricate interaction of two African drummers playing together, that through such interaction, two people might achieve an empathic experience unavailable in any other way (Blacking, 1987, p. 26).

In this project, the creative activity was the making of songs for which the children themselves identified topics of deep concern about which they, consensually, would like to write and sing. This was new territory for the children in that their collective voice was being sought, and celebrated and *listened to*—in the most literal (p. 347) sense. The process can be seen as an interactive compositional partnership between an adult composer and children as composers-in-the-making. It included constant self-questioning on everyone's part, which gave reality to the intention to find and make the rapport that drove the developing empathic relationships. The resulting songs were different from what *either* the children *or* the adult could have created alone.

This, then, is the particular musical group practice that the following description attempts to bring to life. From the account of the children's thoughts and actions, empathic processes and elements of an emergent empathic relationship may be discerned at the core of the collective creative activity.

A Story from the Field

A group of about six children, from Year 6, aged about 10–11 years, together with their adult coparticipant “Rosa,” are discussing the kinds of things they are thinking about—perhaps worried, perhaps excited—in their impending move to secondary school. (This account is of “real” events and children, drawing on field notes and recordings made of the work described.) They are going to make songs together about themes that *they* feel are important to them, in a process of cooperative musicking, in which these discussions are a preliminary aspect. Some themes are suggested—friendship? bullying? feeling nervous about change?—and then Terese, small, quiet, and badly afflicted with eczema

that constantly flares up everywhere on her body, including her face, speaks up. “Could we make a song about how your appearance doesn't matter? About how it's what's *inside* that should matter?” The others are quick to agree—this clearly catches the collective imagination—and there follows an eloquent discussion of the wrongness of judging people by their appearances, of taunting someone who is “too fat,” “too small,” “looked different”...instead, they say, we should focus on the *real* you—and then comes the idea, so swiftly picked up across the group—“yes a bird,” “and the bird wants to get out,” “yes and to be free,” “the ‘real’ you...that's the bird”—that it's impossible to discern any individual source. It seems to come from a collective leap of imagination (perhaps the first “going beyond?”); the “bird inside you”—who wants to “spring out.”

But now it's Patrick—always-in-trouble Patrick—who takes it to the next metaphorical level, and he explains that it's like a “spirit” inside you, a spirit—your very *own* spirit, locked inside—whom we should allow to be *free*; a spirit perhaps not normally evident, and especially not when buried and invisible under that outward appearance. (Not normally evident for Patrick either; Patrick, for whom not only school but all of the circumstances of his life deny him the “real me” that he now articulates within the group.)

Helen sits in the group, too, a big girl; too big, she feels. She watches the other children quietly for a few minutes, evidently listening carefully, perhaps not only (p. 348) to what is being said, but to make sure that it's truly safe to speak. Then: “People say I'm fat, and I know I'm overweight. But that's not *me*. They judge me, just as someone who is fat. But it's *how you are inside* that matters.”

No one laughs, no one taunts in this space where the children are acutely attuned to each other, listening with perhaps extraordinary attention, given the immediate context of their being in a school hall through which others constantly move. The wider context of their voicelessness and of “not being heard” is within the prevailing curricular context of delivery and management; and, beyond that again, within a society which prioritizes the way you look to an arguably pathological degree. Here they can speak, listen, be heard, and *make* their very own responses, which they intend to turn into a collective response.

Open up your heart to other people
See the bird fly so high
Doesn't matter if you're black or white
Everyone will feel the feelings in the breeze from the bird's wings...Spread your wings and go and fly
Let the feelings go round—feel all your feelings
Let your feelings jump out
It doesn't matter if you're small or big, what clothes you wear...
...people should not tease other children for looking unusual or different. It's how we are inside that counts and whether we are kind to other people
Appearance isn't the only thing in life...your size doesn't matter

And Helen writes down:

It doesn't matter about appearance, it's the inside that counts
Everybody is so different in a way so don't put that against other people, just be
nice...don't put people down for having different features than you or if they come
from a different country than you and your friends
Try your best to be you not someone else

There is clear consensus here, as everyone explores this idea and the kinds of relationships which arise from it.

So—how to find the “right” music for their words. What kind of tune? “smooth,” “quiet,” “high bits and low bits” ... “faster—exciting? slow? gentle?” ... definitely gentle.

“How shall we start the song then?” Rosa asks. The children have already been playing with musical ideas together, and she has shown them how hands can make combinations of sounds on the piano keys, and how notes look on manuscript paper—they know that she can *write down* what they sing as well as what they are saying. They are aware and attentive, and palpably working to enhance each others’ participation with their ongoing comments and reciprocal listening, the mutually benign “gaze” that seems to prevail, and above all the endorsement of the sentiments of Helen and Terese, for whom how they appear—on the “outside”—is a continued source of pain.

(p. 349) So the ground is ready—and clearly in Vygotsky's “zone of proximal development”—and, sure enough, musical ideas come forth. First, Helen herself sings—very low, fairly indistinct, but perceptible nonetheless—a fragment: “It doesn't matter what you look like.” The rhythm of the words is reflected in the melodic contour, which starts low, rises, pauses, then falls, and emphasizes the “look like.” She looks down, and Rosa plays and sings the phrase: “Is that right?” Helen looks up again, little expression, but such a listening attitude. “Um...” “Could you sing it again?” Rosa asks. Again it comes, almost a mumble, but the phrase is there still. “Oh yes, that's perfect! That fits the words so beautifully...” And John says “Can we try it?”—and so the phrase is born: “It doesn't matter what you look like...” What might come next? “As long as you are kind inside” says Terese. How shall we sing that? “High—it could go high” comes a voice. “Like this? What do you think?” “Yes—that's right,” “Yes, that's nice” they say.

Meanwhile, Becky sits humming quietly, as she so often does, and now she puts up her hand and says: “What about this?” and here comes another little phrase, which Rosa notates hastily as she sings, so that it isn't lost, and then hums it back to her. “Is this what you mean? Is that right?”—“No! That bit was like *this*...” “Ah—like this.”

And so it goes on, the children, the singing, the voices and the piano echoing, picking up the musical fragments and steadily “fixing” these, in an ongoing process of reaching forward and beyond. And gradually, the lyric takes its shape, into the first two verses:

It doesn't matter what you look like, as long as you are kind inside
It really doesn't matter, and everyone's unique,
Let the bird inside you spring out.

If we look different from each other, that's just the way it ought to be,
We all have different features, and everyone's unique,
Let the bird inside you spring out.

The group agrees to have an instrumental interlude, a reflective moment after the singing of these first thoughts, where a melodic phrase swoops and leaps for the next eight bars before returning to the next verse...

"So open up your hearts to others, and send the feelings round the world"...it continues, always with the closest representation of the children's own words, now attached to that melody, which itself has grown from Helen's original phrase, and now the last line becomes..."Let the bird inside you be free."

But then—and now comes inspiration—Patrick says "what about something about the bird flying away—you could do this..." and he *sings*—just like that, all by himself, spontaneous, astonishing, "Fly away, feel all the feeling"...high and true in an unlikely and effortless soprano voice, a tiny phrase that falls, rises, falls again, and slots exquisitely into the space it has opened up between the instrumental interlude and the beginning of the third verse. The other children agree immediately—this is *exactly* right.

Perhaps this was one of those moments of grace...the children are in any case utterly absorbed in the flow, and in that moment, in Patrick's creative contribution—his gift to our work.

(p. 350) And so it continues, and in the end the song is judged by all to be complete, and reflective of their shared inspiration.

In this work may be found a growing synchronicity of thought, attention to each other, even musical inspiration, echoing the entrainment that arises in playing music together. Trust was essential, and trust may also be seen as a core aspect of the other-enhancing empathic relationship. The children's creative musicking might be conceived as their striving to "go beyond," and what they were here specifically and explicitly engaged in going beyond included, among many other things, the normal order of power relationships that determined their daily existences, and their existing musical self-concepts and musically inventive capacities. In the words of Christopher Small, they were "exploring" *new* relationships both between each other and in the music they were making, trying these on (as Small explains) for "fit," finding them to be "right relationships" for them, and celebrating them.

Summary and Conclusions

We have defined the experience of empathy as poised between a conscious judgment about similarities of our own with another's emotional condition and an embodied and automatic sharing of another's affective state. We have noted that empathic relationships

have been conceived of as involving the pursuit of a joint project, in which there is an active attempt to engage in nonhierarchical power relationships, and we have suggested that active participation in music-making helps to align our own emotional states with those of our collaborators, and may give rise to a sense of empathic community. We then described how specific features of engagement in music-making, or “musicking,” may play a prominent role in the generation of empathic creativity. These include *imitation*, which may help provide us with a first-person experience of the other; *entrainment*, which may allow us to shift from our own rhythm/emotional state and accept someone else's; *disinterested pleasure* in musicking, which can help merge the individual intentions of a group into a shared intention; *flexibility*, which enables us to shift from our own emotional state to perceiving and responding to another's; and *ambiguity*, which allows all participants to interpret the significance of their musicking in their own terms without requiring that they overtly agree on it. An example of a program of musical interaction for children that is intended to promote instances of empathic creativity is presented, together with an assessment of the likelihood that the empathic capacities of musicking children will be enhanced by the program. We have concluded with a case study of how empathic processes may themselves inform collaborative creative musical activity. In this case study, a group of children and an adult coparticipant make songs together. The children outline and share real-life themes that are important to them, collaboratively transforming these into words and music; (p. 351) this sharing of moments of specifically *musical* creativity allows the children, collectively, to reveal and to recognize their own empathic potential.

The ideas and the research outlined in this chapter have significant implications for the ways music-educational practice may have both immediate and long-term consequences for children's social capacities. The *other-directedness* and *inclusiveness* of both the games and creative song-making help crystallize and reinforce children's capacities for emotional alignment with others as they use and acquire capacities to engage in making music. The particular methods that we sketch here are models rather than prescriptions; we feel that almost any form of structured and inclusive musical activity that directs the attention of children toward each others' actions and emotional states, whether implicitly or explicitly, will be likely to engage and to enhance children's sense of the inner lives of their coparticipants, through processes that we might refer to as *musical empathic creativity*.

The work that we present here also has significant implications for the direction of future research. Empathy has come increasingly into focus as a mainstream topic of cognitive and neuroscientific research, but is only beginning to be explored empirically in relation to music and music education. There are many different research paradigms that might be applied in exploring the ways the processes underlying the concept of empathy relate to the making of music and to the processes involved in the development of abilities to “music.” Musicians and educators presently have the chance to contribute significantly to, and influence the progress of, the emerging field of empathy studies.

Key Sources: Video Excerpts

Excerpts 1 and 2 are video excerpts of musical games designed to emphasize imitation (excerpt 1) and shared intentionality (excerpt 2), as part of a specially tailored music interaction program for children aimed at enhancing emotional empathy (Rabinowitch et al., 2012, p. 7).

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Empathy and Creativity in Group Musical Practices: Towards a Concept of Empathic Creativity

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Ian Cross

Ian Cross, Centre for Music & Science, Faculty of Music, University of Cambridge

Felicity Laurence

Felicity Laurence holds a licentiate in piano performance from the Royal Schools of Music, studied psychology and education at the University of Otago, subsequently took Musikkhovedfag (M.A. in music) at Bergen University College, and completed her doctorate of philosophy at the University of Birmingham. She currently directs the master's program in music and education at Newcastle University. Her international work as teacher, composer (both commissioned and with assignments as composer-in-residence), and children's singing specialist is underpinned by the principles of children's inherent musicality, and their likewise innate senses of quality and of empathy. Her research explores conceptual resonances between musicking and empathy, both within children's school music education, and within intercultural contexts, and includes attention to children's voice and agency. Her published work includes musical compositions, and texts about children's singing, music and empathy, and musicking in the context of peace building.

Tal-Chen Rabinowitch

Tal-Chen Rabinowitch studied psychology and musicology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as performing arts at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance (specializing in the flute). She has a master's degree in cognitive sciences from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which focused on theoretical aspects of emotional perception of music and on the links between music and empathy. She is currently completing her Ph.D. at the Centre for Music and Science, in the Faculty of Music, at the University of Cambridge. This work explores experimentally the effects of musical group interaction on children's every day capacity for empathy, and in

particular, the emotional impact of synchronisation during musical interaction. She is interested in uncovering the cognitive mechanisms and processes that underlie musical group interaction and their relevance to empathy.

