

WELL-BEING, CHILDREN'S VOCAL PLAY, AND MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Background

By definition, playing implies positive emotions such as gaiety or cheerfulness or well-being. Hence, children's vocal play or spontaneous singing may be assigned similar emotional states. Usually emotions in music are assessed by verbal reports or physiological data. Both methods have severe limitations when applied to children's vocal play and spontaneous singing.

Aim

The aim is to clarify the emotional states related to children's spontaneous singing and to determine the indices that allow to identify emotional states and phases. Spontaneous singing or vocal play is defined as self-initiated vocalisations without any immediate preceding social stimulation for this action. It includes at least some metric timing and/ or extended vowels.

Method

Micro-genetic analyses are applied to children's spontaneous singing recorded on audio- or video tapes. The analyses include structural aspects of singing (lyrics, pitches, timing) as well as behavioural and environmental aspects of the child's activities related to singing.

Results

Descriptive data provide insights into the process of how a child generates and maintains the state of well-being, and how this is expressed. One focus is put on vocal patterns that are repeated or slightly varied. Although it is impossible to repeat an experience, it seems that children are able to use singing unconsciously to recreate previous experiences and emotional states.

Conclusions

Spontaneous singing or vocal play is an excellent means to study children's unconscious competence to generate and maintain positive emotional states. The focus on behavioural indices challenges verbal approaches to emotions, and it shows the weakness of verbal reports or predefined verbal categories to communicate emotions. In addition, emotional states related to singing are discussed from a developmental point of view with respect to the intra-psychoic and inter-psychoic regulation of emotions and moods.