

The Significance of Music in the Contemporary World

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One of the goals of the Suncoast Music Education Research Symposium was to understand music from multiple perspectives. The purpose of this presentation was to explore this notion and to consider many different and perhaps infrequently recognized ways that music has significance for the contemporary world.

Figure 1 has been used to illustrate the interdisciplinary nature of music psychology (Eagle, 1996). For the purposes of this article, it will be used as a model to explore how music often plays a significant role in a wide variety of disciplines. Due to space considerations, only selected

Genetic Significance

Neuroscientific Significance

The biological basis of human musicality is now clearly recognized (Zatorre & Peretz, 2001). The brain basis of music performance has been studied in pianists (Parsons, Sergent, Hodges, & Fox, 2005), conductors (Hodges, Burdette, & Hairston, 2006; Parsons, Hodges, & Fox, 1998) and singers (Brown, Martinez, Hodges, Fox, & Parsons, 2004). In these and many other studies, it has become apparent that neural networks serving musical behaviors are widely distributed throughout the brain. Furthermore, there is increasing evidence that early musical training shapes and reorganizes the brain.

Audiological Significance

Musicians spend an inordinate amount of time in loud environments. Over exposure to loud sounds can lead to noise-induced hearing loss. Some university wind ensemble members experienced up to 206% of their maximum allowable noise dosage during daily rehearsals, when anything over 100% may lead to permanent hearing loss (Walter, Mace, & Phillips, in press). Public school music teachers and university music faculty were also found to be at risk, with band directors, brass players and percussionists the most vulnerable.

Sociological Significance

Although there may be (mis)perceptions that music is unimportant and inconsequential, ironically it may be that there is too much music in our society. We live in a music-saturated society where iPods are ubiquitous and where music is found nearly everywhere—in grocery stores, doctor's offices, airport waiting areas, and so on (Hargreaves & North, 1997). Personal and corporate identity is often shaped and expressed musically (Froelich, 2001).

person's spatial orientation, balance and coordination.

Medical Significance

Many physicians use music to reduce pain and anxiety in patients (Pratt & Spintge, 1995; Spintge & Droh, 1992a).

Music listening can cause significant changes in blood chemistry and other physiological systems such as heart rate and blood pressure (Hodges, in press). By

listening to music of their own choosing,

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