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Critical Thinking and Music Listening in Honors and Non-Honors Undergraduates

Abstract:

To promote critical and creative thinking within the curriculum of a basic studies course for non-music majors, an innovative pedagogical approach was incorporated in an honors section of "Exploring Music." This approach was used to encourage students to combine thinking strategies with musical experiences to engage higher-order cognitive skills in the classroom and included an independent research paper as a final project. In contrast, a non-honors section of the same course was taught during the same semester as a comparison. An equal number of honors and non-honors students ($n = 30$) were randomly selected as participants and completed a pretest and posttest measure in response to four music listening examples. Using a word-count methodology, written descriptors were scored with respect to both number and category (musical term, affective, and associative responses). Written response scores were analyzed using a Two-Way ANOVA with repeated measures and a t-test for independent/correlated samples. A significant difference ($p = 0.001$) was found in the associative response scores by group favoring the honors students. In addition, there were significant differences ($p = 0.001$) in musical term, associative, and total gain scores demonstrated by both the honors and non-honors students from pretest to posttest. Although the results of this study are confounded with honors and non-honors classification, the educational implications include applying critical thinking skills to enhance honors students' achievement and written responses in other subject areas.