

The Effect of Musical Aptitude on Written Responses to Music
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Music listening is a meaningful activity for people throughout the world. Listening is central to music itself because the primary purpose of music is to be heard and shared (Haack, 1992). Listening to music is also of primary importance to music education, essential to each of the nine "National Standards for Music Education" in the 1994 Standards for Arts Education (Reimer, 2003), and fundamental to other musical experiences (Hartshorn, 1957).

Students' listening skills can be directed to enhance their performances and to increase their musical understanding (Shilling, 1989). Music learning theory techniques such as audiation offer ways to focus students' attention on musical tone, articulations, blend, and musical style. The purpose of this study was to determine if musical aptitude, as measured by the Musical Aptitude Profile (Gordon, 1967/1995), had a significant effect on written responses to music listening examples. Although a host of researchers has studied musical aptitude and related concepts (Walters & Taggart, 1989), few have considered the effect musical aptitude has on listeners' verbal descriptions of music. The purpose of the current study, therefore, is to address this gap in the literature.

The ability to listen to music intelligently can be taught, especially using structured pedagogical approaches (Haack, 1969). At the end of the twentieth century, the general music movement began to focus more attention on the learning and teaching of listening skills (Haack, 1992); music educators made considerable progress by including analytical and perceptive listening activities and lessons in music series textbooks and curriculum guides (Haack, 1990). If the central challenge and contribution of general music curricula is to provide musical experiences that are "intensely involved, perceptive, feelingful, creative, richly significant, and satisfying" (Reimer, 1970, p. 120), then music listening is an important educational goal that deserves attention in the classroom. When designing music listening curricula, educators need to consider a variety of factors that impact students' listening experiences and attitudes including age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status, prior experiences, and appropriate resources (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2006). One related issue to students' listening experiences is musical aptitude (Levinowitz, 1989).

When addressed, listening skills are frequently taught didactically by acquiring musical vocabulary or participating in activities in response to music listening. In contrast, the current study used a constructivist model of education, emphasizing students' reflective understanding of musical experiences, including students' associative and affective descriptors of music with standard musical terms. More specifically, the researcher studied the effect students' musical aptitude had on their ability to describe music listening examples.

A total of 81 fifth-grade students served as subjects for this study. The researcher organized them into two parallel groups and receiving two different instructional treatments as a part of a larger investigation. All subjects completed two subtests of the Musical Aptitude Profile prior to beginning the instructional treatments. The researcher designed the instrument "Listening and Thinking" to collect subjects' written responses. Using a word count methodology, three independent judges analyzed and scored their responses to determine their musical term, affective, and associative response scores; the total response score was the combination of these three response scores. The researcher analyzed the data using a two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) in which the covariate was the musical aptitude scores.

As shown by these statistical results, the musical aptitude of the subjects did not have a significant effect on their verbal response scores. The two groups of subjects displayed a

difference in musical aptitude, but that difference was not statistically significant. Had the two parallel groups of subjects demonstrated significantly different musical aptitude scores, their respective musical aptitude may have significantly influenced their verbal response scores. When interpreting this finding, readers should also note that listeners' musical aptitude was found infrequently in the related literature on verbal descriptions of music.

Although the results of this study indicate that musical aptitude had no significant effect on students' descriptions of music, this link between verbal and musical aptitude may be probed more extensively in future investigations. Perhaps words are an imperfect medium to explain musical ideas; however, as succinctly described by Pogrow, words are "the best mirror of the mind," (cited in Willis, 1992, p. 5) and as such are important teaching and learning tools. Direction for future research may include using non-verbal measures of musical understanding and their potential relationship to musical aptitude. Despite the lack of significance found in the current study, the link between written measures of music listening and musical aptitude may be explored in future investigations.