



Title: Introduction to Papers Presented at the Society for Research in Music Education, Keyfocus Sessions, April 1996

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Introduction To Papers Presented At The Society For Research In Music Education Keyfocus Sessions, April 1996

By Harriet I. Hair
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The emphasis on the research component in professional arts and educational organizations continues to grow. Approximately 250 music educators attended each of the Research Keyfocus Sessions sponsored by the Society for Research in Music Education at the Music Educators National Conference in Kansas City, April, 1996. The purpose of these sessions and of the society is "to encourage and improve the quality of scholarship and research within the profession" (SRME Handbook, JRME, Winter, 1993, 270). The keyfocus sessions were scheduled to provide longer time periods than the usual conference sessions to allow for in-depth presentations and discussions within the divisions of the conference.

As research within the special interest areas of music education has matured, with an increasingly sophisticated body of studies, it seemed appropriate that these special interest groups once again have joint sessions at the conference which focus on renewing a dialogue across these areas to determine our shared problems, questions, and solutions for research.

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Thus, the two Research Keyfocus Sessions were designed to provide a multidimensional view of some of the current thinking in music research. Each of the five speakers (a philosopher, behaviorist, historian, neurologist and music researcher investigating music and the brain) was asked to speak from his unique perspective of research in music.

New philosophical positions provide opportunities for researchers to examine these ideas and their implications for research. During the past decade philosophers, sociologists, and ethnomusicologists have begun challenging many of the traditional tenets of music education philosophy. Thus, the first Research Keyfocus Session began with David Elliott, Professor, University of Toronto, whose paper: "Putting Matters in Perspective: Reflections on a New Philosophy", set the stage for later papers and reactions.

Elliott, as well as other contemporary philosophers are calling for "a reconsideration of ideas that have guided music education during the past decades, and the development of alternative paradigms for music education" (Elliott, enclosed paper, p. 20). He states, "Multidimensional is another word that captures the essence of this [his] philosophy. The praxial approach advocates a multidimensional concept of music and music works, ...of musical understanding...of music's significance in human life, and a multiple approach to achieving the values of music" (Elliott, enclosed paper p. 22).

The above are only a few of the many ideas that provide fertile ground for researchers. In addition, one might investigate what alternative paradigms might be effective, curriculum as practicum, the various social cultural contexts of the music, or the recommendation that all students should be taught in the same essential way.

Clifford Madsen, Professor, Florida State University, in his paper, "Research in Music Behavior," reflected on these ideas and gave a review of behavioral research. (Dr. Madsen's paper will be part of a chapter in an upcoming book, *Musings: Arts Education Essays in Honor of Bennett Reimer* edited by John W. Richmond and Peter R. Webster)

Jere Humphreys, Professor, Arizona State University discussed the implications of Elliott's ideas in "Expanding the Horizons of Music Education History and Sociology." Humphrey states: "To the extent that his [Elliott's] philosophy would legitimize more and different outcomes of music practice and education and would place music education into cultural contexts, it carries implications for expanding the horizons of research in music education as well" (Humphreys, p. 5 enclosed paper). He gives recommendations for this expansion within the context of historical and sociological research. Humphreys contends that if we accept [Elliott's] notion of cultural bases of music making...that this includes learning more about informal, unintentional modes of music education...[which] will require the use of multi-modal research approaches. (p. 10).

Many writers have referred to the 90's as the decade of brain research. The second session focused on the current state of neurological research in music and brain research. Research in brain mapping and the neurological/musical connections are particularly timely for music researchers, and may in time provide the justification for music as a human knowledge system, a unique way of knowing. New imaging techniques are allowing researchers to investigate the "brain in action."

The first speaker, whose medical career has focused on the application of advanced

imaging methods to the study of human cognition, was Peter T. Fox, Director of the Research Imaging Center at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, Texas. He spoke on: "Music and the Brain: The Neuroimaging Experience." He traced the history of brain mapping and discussed recent collaborative experiments with Donald Hodges, Director, Institute for Music Research at University of Texas at San Antonio.

Hodges' presentation was titled: "Neuro-musical Research: A Musician Looks at the Literature." Some of the intriguing research findings that he cites in his paper are that: tracking of form is obviously a hallmark of human musicality (p. 38)...language and music are represented by different neural mechanisms. One hypothesizes that there are neural structures primed for music (p. 39)...The size of the primary auditory cortex...is larger for musically-trained subjects than untrained. This difference was exaggerated for those with absolute pitch or for those who started their musical training before age seven (Schlaug et al., 1995). Also, the size of the right motor cortex, was larger among violinists than non-violinists. The earlier the subject started playing the violin, the greater the effect. (p. 42).

He discusses studies in music medicine that are investigating the relationships between mind, brain, and the immune system. He states that there is a growing notion that music can elicit changes in some biochemicals. Needless to say, there are numerous exciting possibilities for future research in these areas.

The rationale for bringing these researchers together grew from my belief that a renewed dialogue examining the purpose and direction of research within the music community and an exposure to these collaborate projects across disciplines might stimulate thinking that would open new avenues for future research. Hopefully, more collaborative studies which combine expertise across disciplines and methodologies will be initiated and supported by the profession.

