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Reflections from a Music Educator on Interdisciplinary Audiology Research

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Dr. Cathy Benedict

Preamble: Western University's Jonathan Vaisberg (PhD Student at National Centre for Audiology), Paula Folkeard (Research Audiologist at National Centre for Audiology) Ashley Martindale (MSc from National Centre for Audiology) and Cathy Benedict (Don Wright Faculty of Music) conducted an interdisciplinary qualitative investigation studying the difficulties that amateur instrumentalists face (who are hearing aid users) while listening to and performing music. The primary challenge reported by participants was not related to the perception of music; rather it was the need to hear the conductor's instructions so that participants could effectively participate in the ensemble. Music-listening concerns were generally secondary to participation challenges. In terms of music-listening concerns, participants felt that their hearing loss (1) made them unaware of acoustic information that may have been present, (2) caused some deficiencies perceiving aspects of music like dynamics and melody recognition, and (3) encouraged them to use senses beyond their hearing to perceive music. Participants had mixed attitudes toward hearing aid music sound quality and whether hearing aid music programs effectively improved their music-listening experiences.

Rather than talk about the study itself I am going to share with you our journey as an interdisciplinary team. Because quite honestly, we hear about the importance of doing interdisciplinary work, but less often do we hear from others their experiences with that process. So, in terms of full disclosure let me begin by saying, I did not embrace the concept of interdisciplinary research until this project. Most certainly one reason was because any tenure path I had been on didn't reward thinking with someone in my own discipline let alone outside of my discipline. But if I'm to be completely truthful it had a lot to do with my own ego and not being convinced that thinking and writing with someone could possibly benefit my own scholarship.

There I found myself, however, sitting at a table with a bunch of people in audiology with the expectation that not only would we talk to each other we would come up with a question we could explore together. I remember two things from that initial meeting four years ago. One is that I was only there because I was being a good citizen; it was my first year here and I wanted to be seen as someone willing to explore issues. The other was how incredibly frustrated I was by the ways in which my audiology table mates talked about music and what music was to their research. At one point I remember "telling" all of them, "You do realize that a held tone with random beeps is not music, you get that, right!?

It is really rather remarkable that anyone at that table wanted to work with me. But soon to defend PhD audiology candidate (and generous and willing to forgive unjustified egocentric professors) Jonathan Vaisberg and I did move forward. And in that movement forward we discovered many things. First of all, thoughtful trans or interdisciplinary work doesn't just happen. We first had to

come to terms with assumptions we had about the others' discipline, which meant learning to listen and respond to the other – which, really, we aren't taught to do. We've perfected reacting to the other with our own agendas, but rarely do we listen with intent focused on the other. Even more rare are discussions that uncover the ways in which what we value came to be valued, or the value of these values, as Nietzsche might remind us. Thus, initial conversations such as the ways in which a review of literature is constructed in our respective disciplines and why that is so, became an entry point that led to larger wonderments, including the kinds of questions we are interested in pursuing. Why anyone would choose a more pragmatic 'what' question above a philosophically grounded 'why' question was mystifying to me. Equally as mystifying to him, however, was why, during the interviews we conducted, I would encourage our participants to wander into remembrances that perhaps seemed inconsequential to our research questions.

But we persevered, and in our perseverance, we produced an article that will be part of Jonathan's dissertation and published a less than common qualitative research study in an audiology journal. Because it turns out that if one is going to design hearing aids for musicians one really ought to have discussions with the musicians who wear them. And if one is going to speak to musicians one needs to be prepared to realize that they might not be able to articulate what it is they are hearing or listening for. Which begs the question do music teachers, or conductors teach with the goal of helping students learn to listen?

This project has opened up intellectual spaces I had never considered, never known existed. The thinking that Jonathan and I did together changed both of us as teachers, as researchers, as humans. And quite honestly, it doesn't get any better than that.

Note: This research was initially funded by the Western University Music Across the Lifespan Initiative. The above is an extension from a 3-minute lightning talk at an integrated research graduate day (FIMS, Music and Law - FIMULAW) at the same institution. Our research can be found: Vaisberg J., Martindale A., Folkeard P., Benedict C. (Dec 2019). Qualitative Study of the Effects of Hearing Loss and Hearing Aid Use on Music Perception in Performing Musicians. *Journal of the American Academy of Audiology*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.3766/jaaa.17019