

Evan Sandhoefner

April 4, 2017

Psych 1057

Music and the Mind

Professor Kang

Music and Creativity

Questions

Is the positive association between musical training and creativity presented by Gibson, Folley, and Park subject to a kind of sensitive period like the one we discussed last week, such that people who begin musical training at a younger age reap greater total benefits from it?

Should we rethink the role musical education plays in various parts of society to better reflect the benefits it seems to yield for many students? What factors might we consider in doing so, and what obstacles might we face in actually restructuring curricula or institutions?

Discussion

The Fink et al. finding that people who are prone to psychosis do in fact tend to show elevated levels of creativity may have interesting social implications. In particular, I wonder how substantially training in the arts or other creative endeavors is used in therapy for people with psychosis, and how effective it is. I don't know enough about psychosis to speculate about the prospects of art for actually alleviating symptoms, but it does seem intuitively that it may be a kind of low-hanging fruit in terms of providing something that people with psychosis can excel at and enjoy. Insofar as creativity is actually elevated, particularly talented people with psychosis may be able to make a living in the arts (recording great albums in their bedroom, for example) even if they would have trouble holding down a steady job in many domains.

Similarly, I wonder whether music is an under-utilized resource in education generally. It is especially interesting to consider this in terms of K-12 education, because in that case one can make propositions about government policy which would have broad impact. Should a greater level of musical training be required of all students at public elementary schools? I would be very interested to see an economic analysis of the “total value” of an early-age musical education, incorporating the several factors we’ve studied so far as well as the value of personal enjoyment, social signaling, and so forth. Unfortunately, with the state of government and the severity of other problems in K-12 education, this may remain a purely academic endeavor for the foreseeable future. Even if we set that aside, there is a valid question of the wisdom of requiring uniform musical education when people have different endowments of natural talent for music - it may frustrate some students and give them little benefit.

It is a short step from there to asking whether music can be more heavily used as a tool in other domains. Should Google be offering free music classes to its employees to encourage creativity? (Are they already?) If the effect is strong enough, should they even require musical classes for employees in jobs which require particularly high levels of creativity? Should companies ask about musical training in job interviews and on applications? It certainly seems like information that could be at least marginally useful, especially for big companies which can afford to exert the additional effort in their hiring process.