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Proposal Title:

The Centrality of a Psychological Concept of Learning to Research in the Arts –
The example of the AIRS (Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing) Major
Collaborative Research Initiative

Description:

The AIRS Project (Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing) aims to understand how singing develops across the lifespan, how singing is taught and can be used to teach, and how singing impacts well-being. Over 70 researchers across Canada's 10 provinces and 15 other countries are exploring these themes with respect to the influences of universal and cultural influences and the unique characteristics of individuals. A concept of learning is fundamental to the theme that focuses on singing and education. Here, sub-themes consider three different perspectives: (1) learning to sing naturally (2) formal teaching of singing and (3) using singing to teach other things. In addition, the concept of learning is fundamental to the remaining two themes. One of these focuses on the development of singing. Every infant learns to sing and speak. The AIRS researchers are exploring the entire lifespan trajectory of singing ability as a function of age, culture and musical experience. Finally, the concept of learning in the arts has implications for the theme that focuses on singing and well-being. Here well-being is understood broadly to include the role of singing on improving cultural and intergenerational understanding, as well as the direct benefits of singing on physical and mental health. Learning from a psychological point of view implies changes of both behaviour and attitudes at one level, and changes of synaptic activity in the brain, at a physiological level. This presentation proposes that the psychological understanding of learning can apply to understanding the development of singing, teaching of singing, and using singing to improve well-being. Following the presentation of these examples, it will be suggested that through understanding the nature of learning from a psychological perspective, we may better understand and promote the relation between the arts and learning (supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council).