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## Bringing Music Back into the Classroom and Its Benefits on Elementary School Students

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## **Bringing Music Back into the Classroom and Its Benefits on Elementary School Students**

### **Introduction/Background**

In my last two and a half years at California State University Monterey Bay, I knew that I had a wide variety of issues in education that I could choose to do my Capstone Research project on. My interest in the lack of music education in elementary classrooms developed when my daughter entered the Sixth Grade this school year, and I realized that she had yet to take a music class or lesson thus far in her public-school education. Additionally, throughout my service learning at public schools across Santa Cruz County, it has come to my attention that there is essentially no music that is being taught in the schools. I feel as though school districts in California have a responsibility to give students the opportunity to learn all subjects in the classroom, which in result in giving students the possibility to finish the school year as wholesome as possible.

Scientifically, music has shown to increase molecular energy, reduce stress, relieve fatigue, and stimulate creativity and thinking. While music education should be part of school curricula, many are not offering any sort of music classes or certified music teachers. Instead of schools incorporating music into their lesson plans, teachers are focused on math, reading, and English so the students can show what the teachers have taught them throughout the year in standardized tests. Music education has been forgotten in the elementary classrooms over the years, and it is one of the many vital assets that contributes to a child's growth and development.

Some schools do not have a classroom specifically for music. Others simply do not have any sort of music classes or instruments anywhere on campus. Music education is incredibly important for many reasons. Studies have shown that it increases students understanding and achievement in other subjects (Rickard, 2012, p.6). Music is a way to express yourself and can help with self-confidence. It can be a way to relieve stress and can be relaxing, benefiting both the teacher and students. Yet with these positive and beneficial reasons, some still argue that music is not as important as the other subjects that the students will have their standardized testing on. Music is beneficial for everyone and must be intertwined with the rest of the academic subjects.

The primary research question that is proposed is: *How does bringing music back into the classroom benefit elementary school students? Related questions: What does research say about the benefits of music on elementary school students? Are the test scores for students at schools that have music classes higher than those ones that do not? If so, are there any correlation? Are there any schools in the Santa Cruz area that incorporate music into their curricula? What types of music instructions as well as musical instruments are currently provided in their schools? If there are, how do they implement music into their classrooms? What do teachers think about the benefits of music on their students? Do they enjoy music? For schools that do not offer music to their students, how would it affect their students? After the enactment of No Child Left Behind legislation, how has it affected music instruction in elementary schools, and to what extent? What would it take to bring music back into the elementary school classroom? If so, how could music be infused or integrated as part of the school curriculum, so students could benefit from it?* This project should be of importance to the groups of people listed

above because of the lack of music education in the state of California, when there is a set standard of music education that is currently not being met.

### **Literature Review**

There are many aspects to understand the importance of music education in elementary classrooms. The benefits of bringing music education back into the classroom is of main importance when exploring and reviewing the literature found for the project. In pursuance to collect the most and best information possible, articles, journals, and books are examined in this section to fully understand the primary research question: How does bringing music back into the classroom benefit elementary school students?

In order to effectively analyze music education in its entirety, it is important to define and understand the different aspects mentioned in the primary research question. According to the State Board of Education (2019), music education is designed to enable students to achieve music literacy, by discovering the expressive elements of music, understanding the basic concepts of music, knowing the terminology that is used to comprehend music, developing the skills necessary to produce music, and being able to reflect, critique, and connect personal experience to music. It has also been proven to have a positive effect on academic success and cognitive performance in elementary aged children.

Researchers (Prof. Susan Hallam, International Society for Music Education), have found a child's academic achievement can be positively affected due to music education. It is also believed that music education in children can provide valuable learning skills which can be used throughout their lifetime. A child's intellectual development, perceptual and literacy skills, numeracy, and creativity, for example, can be influenced by musical instruction. "Music education helps to stimulate learning and encourages children to become active participants in

their own personal learning, which the authors argue is key for students to become successful academically,” (Vitale, 2011, p.12). According to the California State Board of Education (CSBE, 2019), by the time a student completes 5<sup>th</sup> grade, they are to be able to generate musical ideas with such as rhythms, melodies, and patterns, within specific related tonalities meters, and simple chord changes. (CSBE).

Regarding music education, there are strong connections between brain regions and the student can gain better attention. After four weeks of music training, children showed a dramatic improvement in verbal intelligence. Students involved with being musically trained showed better working memory abilities than those were not. Children who were in music lessons versus drama lessons or none at all, showed greater increases in IQ scores (Benefits of Music Education Image, PBS, 2014).

Children who study music compared to their peers who do not, tend to have larger vocabulary and more advanced reading skills. Regardless of socioeconomic level of community, elementary students who participated in high quality music programs scored higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools with inadequate or no music education programs (Bryant, 2014, p.11). In relation, elementary students who participated in music education scored higher on reading and spelling tests. Students with lower-quality instrumental programs scored higher in Mathematics and English compared to students who had no music programs at all. A substantial number of teachers and parents viewed student access to music and art education was either “extremely or very important” (Bryant, 2014, p.13). Also, many teachers and parents think that the budget cuts in the music programs are not adequately funded as other core subjects, and as a result, hurt the students. The teachers and parents are more willing to cut spending of many other programs, such as after school and standardized testing,

than music education. The benefits of learning a musical language could have similar cognitive benefits as those evident in children who are bilingual (Bryant, 2014).

The cognitive benefits of music education are immense. Studies (Rickard, 2012) have shown that musical training develops brain areas involved in language in reasoning. Students learn to think creatively. Research (Vitale, 2012) has also shown that students who study the arts are more successful on standardized tests. Due to the students working together such as in an orchestra, musical education enhances teamwork skills and discipline. Being involved in musical education provides students with means of self-expression, which can enhance self-esteem (Symphony, 2019).

Gersema (2016) from The University of Southern California (USC) did a study to examine the impact of music instruction on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development starting in 2012, during a time when many schools around the nation eliminated or reduced music and art programs. The results showed that the auditory systems of children in a music program were maturing faster than in the children who did not take any music.

At the top of the California State Board of Education Standards information regarding Music, a quote meets the readers eyes, "The fact that children can make beautiful music is less significant than the fact that music can make beautiful children," (Lavender, 2014, p.1). The quote is a powerful message, stating that making the music is not as important as the benefits of music, which in result makes beautiful, well-rounded children. There are five sets of performance standards for music. They are, Music: PK-8, Music: Harmonizing Instruments, Music: Ensembles, Music: Composition and Theory, and Music: Technology. These standards are designed to enable students to achieve music literacy. This consists of discovering the expressive elements of music, knowing terminology, understanding the basic concepts of music,

develop the skills which are necessary to produce music, as well as reflecting, critiquing, and connecting personal experiences to music. These guidelines should be a motivation for music educators to inspire their students and help prepare them for a life-long relationship with music.

Currently, in Grade Four in California for example, there are music content standards for public schools. Some of these standards are that students should be able to read and write music, and also be able to listen, analyze and describe music using the terminology of music. Students also should have the skills to apply vocal and instrumental skills alone and with others. Another standard is being able to explain the relationship between music and events in history. In practicing music, students create, perform, respond, and connect. Although these might be the standards for a fourth-grade class, unfortunately, these standards are not being met in many schools across Santa Cruz County (California State Board of Education, 2018).

According to Brown (2015), 1,000 teachers and 800 parents in the United States were involved in a study called, “Striking a Chord: The Public’s Hopes and Beliefs for K-12 Music Education in the United States 2015”. Within teachers involved, only twelve percent (12%) were art teachers, the rest were a mix of the other subjects. In the study, they would rather cut standardized testing, after-school programs, advanced placement programs, school transportation, teacher professional development, upgrades to facilities, athletic programs, and technology programs. There were twelve different things they would rather see go than music education programs. The only two things that were more important to them were the salaries of teachers as well as the number of teachers (Brown, 2015). No Child Left Behind Act was passed in 2001, and with that Arts education was part of that. Many schools had to cut back on arts programs since the standardized testing became a priority and stress (Brown, 2015).

## Methods and Procedures

The methods and procedures used in this project include but are not limited to peer reviewed articles from the CSUMB Library, as well as articles and websites from the Internet. These articles were about music in the classrooms, teachers' attitudes toward music in the school curriculum and teaching music, the absence of widespread psychosocial and cognitive effects of school-based music instruction, integrating learning with music. Articles that discuss the cognitive benefits of music in elementary students were used to compare and contrast with the standardized test scores for schools that offer music and those that do not, which estimated the costs for adding music education into the classrooms. The California State Standards for music education were utilized to compare what schools in the Santa Cruz area currently offer. The field study in this paper aimed to interview three teachers from elementary public schools (See Appendix A for Interview Questions for Public School Teachers) and three teachers from elementary private schools in the Santa Cruz area (See Appendix B for Interview Questions for Private School Teachers), as well as my own daughter who is currently in the Sixth Grade at a public school in the Santa Cruz area. The data I received from my interview were compared and contrasted between the perspectives of public-school teachers vs. those of private school teachers. I separated the two categories of subject-participants, which is one set of interview questions for the three public school teachers and made a cross-reference in this section (labeled as Appendix A for Interview Questions for Public School Teachers) and another set of interview questions for the three private school teachers labeled as Appendix B, and made a cross-reference in this section. Within these questions, data were analyzed to gain perspectives from teachers' attitude toward incorporating music in their classrooms, and whether students enjoyed music in their classrooms, and if they would want music in their classroom.



## Results and Findings

Throughout my service learning at public schools across Santa Cruz County, it has come to my attention that there is essentially no music that is being taught in the schools. I feel as though school districts in California have a responsibility to give students the opportunity to learn all subjects in the classroom, which in result in giving students the possibility to finish the school year as wholesome as possible.

Out of the four public elementary schools in Aptos, a town in south Santa Cruz County, two out of four offer music education in their curriculum. The two public schools that do not offer music, offer art education. The possible reasons for this, is due to funding. The school only gets an allotted amount of money, which is used for many things, other than music education. I was able to get an interview from a teacher at one of the public schools that did not offer music education at their school.

If music education is listed in the California State Board of Education website, it should be offered at every school in Santa Cruz County. The state is not ensuring the opportunity for every student in elementary school, and beyond, to receive a well-rounded education by not implementing music education. There is extensive research on the benefits of music education on elementary students.

*What does research say about the benefits of music on elementary students?*

The research about the benefits of music on elementary students is astounding. A child's academic achievement can be positively affected due to music education. It can provide children valuable learning skills which can be used throughout their lifetime. A child's intellectual development, perceptual and literacy skills, numeracy, and creativity, for example,

can be influenced by musical instruction (Prof. Susan Hallam, International Society for Music Education). The benefits of learning a musical language could have similar cognitive benefits as those evident in children who are bilingual (Bryant, 2014, p.10). Regardless of socioeconomic level of community, elementary students who participated in high quality music programs scored higher on standardized tests compared to students in schools with inadequate or no music education programs (Bryant, 2014, p.11). Studies (Rickard, 2012) have shown that musical training develops brain areas involved in language in reasoning. Students learn to think creatively. Being involved in musical education provides students with means of self-expression, which can enhance self-esteem (Simphony, 2019). A study was done to examine the impact of music instruction on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development starting in 2012, during a time when many schools around the nation eliminated or reduced music and art programs. The results showed that the auditory systems of children in a music program were maturing faster than in the children who did not take any music (Gersema, 2016).

Appendix A (Public-school teacher)

*It is my understanding that there is essentially no music education in the school right now. Why is this? Is this because of funding? Who decides whether or not music education is provided?*

Funding is a huge issue in the schools here in the Pajaro Valley Unified School District. The district is only allotted a certain amount of money each year, and it is usually spent on other educational programs and materials, such as electronics for teachers in the classrooms, Chromebooks, books, etc. In the beginning of the year, depending on how much funding we receive, the principal and teachers usually decide whether to have art or music education provided at the school. For years now, the school has only provided art education.

*Do you think that music education could benefit students in regard to testing, academic achievement, and intellectual development?*

I absolutely think that music education could benefit all students. I have heard of the amazing benefits specifically regarding students who participate in music and score higher than those students who do not. I also think that music education would benefit students regarding academic achievement and intellectual development. I think it would boost their confidence, and make them more enthusiastic to come to school and learn a new instrument or sing.

*Would you consider yourself musical? No matter the answer, would you be comfortable teaching your current class some music lessons, such as history of music, basic chords of guitar, singing?*

I consider myself somewhat musical. I used to play the piano as a child, having lessons with a music teacher at her house, but only for about one year when I was in second grade. I love singing, and have always wanted to learn how to play the drums and guitar. I would be comfortable teaching my class some music lessons, history of music, basic chords of guitar, and singing. However, I would need to be taught first! I also would need some training for some time to be confident enough to teach other students.

*Do you think the students would enjoy learning about music and playing instruments?*

I think the students would absolutely love and enjoy learning about music and playing instruments. It would be a nice change from the art classes they currently take. The students could still do art classes, but also take music classes.

*What do you think it would take for all the schools in PVUSD to incorporate music education in their classrooms? Or to make a music classroom?*

Oh boy, what do I think it would take for all the schools in PVUSD to incorporate music education in our classrooms? First of all, that would be truly amazing to have that one day. I think it would take better funding from the state of California in order to incorporate music education in all of the classrooms. Also perhaps taking a closer look at where the funding from the district specifically goes. To make a classroom would be very expensive, but would pay off in the long run.

Appendix B (Private-school teacher)

*Where does your music education take place in your school? Is there a teacher that specifically and only teaches music education?*

The music education takes place in a classroom that is designated just for music. Yes, there is a teacher that specifically and only teaches music education.

*What types of music do your students learn?*

They learn all kinds of different things, such as singing in different notes, backgrounds to specific instruments, and a chance to play those instruments, choir. Three times a year, the students sing in front of the school, as well as individually at the end of the year.

*What do you think the benefits are of learning music?*

I think, and know, that the benefits are very positive to students. I know that they increase students testing scores, and it obviously causes some sort of self-esteem boost and self-confidence. The students seem to be in higher spirits and better moods when they come back from music class.

*Can you imagine your school not teaching music education?*

I absolutely can not imagine our school not teaching music education. Our school is known for our performing arts. Children change schools just to be at our special school. The music education department is a huge part of our school, and without it, our school would be totally different.

Appendix C (My daughter- Nahla- 6<sup>th</sup> Grader at a public school in Santa Cruz County)

*Does your current public school in Santa Cruz County offer any music education?*

No. Not one bit. I wish that they did, but they don't at all. We don't even sing anything out loud.

*Have you taken any music education since you started kindergarten?*

No, I haven't. We don't even have a music room on our school campus.

*If your school offered music education, do you think you would like it?*

I would love it! My 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher loved music, so we learned about different musicians and song. We sometimes sang along with our teacher while he played the guitar.

*Do you think there are any benefits to playing music instruments or learning about music? If so, what do you think are the benefits of music education?*

Yes, definitely. You taught me that it improves your mind and makes you smarter. You can process music and more things quicker. And it's easier for you, to know something really fast if you know music notes and know how to play the piano it can help you with other. It can help you improve your mindset.

*What kind of instruments do you wish you learned to play?*

I definitely wish I could play guitar. And violin I want to actually try to do that. It seems really cool. Piano, like a keyboard. I really want to know how to do the harp! I think it's really elegant.

*Do you think you are missing out on furthering your education by not having music education offered at your current school?*

Yes, 1000x times yes!

*Do you think the other students at your school would like to have music education in their classroom or school?*

Oh, I definitely think that other students would like it because *sometimes if you want to take lessons on music, it can take your free time away in the afternoon. Sometimes you can have a lot of homework, and dance, that's what I do. So I can't really take music lessons because I don't have any time. And it would be easier to have music lessons while you were at school because it also makes students more excited and want to go to school more and be ready for the day.*

### **Discussion**

I believe that the connection and relationship between music education and the cognitive benefits for elementary students is evident in my project. Not only does the literature review and results and findings repeat the importance, but both teachers interviewed confirmed this statement. California districts, and the state of California, need to understand the benefits of music education, as well as need to find the appropriate funding, and support music programs in their elementary schools. Children in elementary schools who do not currently have music education offered in their school are missing a key and integral part of their educational upbringing.

## **Problems and Limitations**

Overall, I feel that my resource findings and field study went well. However, there were minor limitations throughout my project. One of the bigger problems I faced was the lack of peer-reviewed resources specifically concerning the benefits of music education in elementary schools. I found many website articles on the matter.

The other issue that I dealt with was the population size of the teachers I interviewed. I was hoping to get interviews with three private school teachers and three public school teachers throughout Santa Cruz County area, however I only was able to get one interview with a public-school teacher, and one interview with a private school teacher. The teachers I sent inquiries to either did not respond, said they did not have time, or our schedules did not match for an appropriate time to meet and discuss the issue at hand. Receiving more completed interviews would have been much more beneficial for my project. I would have appreciated a stronger perspective from the teachers had I the chance to interview the numbers I had in mind. Although I had limitations throughout my project, I have made sure that my research is accurate, important, and precise.

## **Recommendation**

Due to strong evidence that music education is beneficial to elementary school students, I would recommend that all schools across the state of California implement music into their classrooms or schools. Not only is music valuable in regards to a variety of things, it is a positive way to get young children involved in school. It would take much more funding from California, to disperse the money for music education throughout the state of California. The state has the means and the money; however, too much is being spent on other things Those

things are still important; however, it needs to be known how important music education is. I believe music teachers and professors need to go to Sacramento, have rallies, and discussions with the California government to speak about the positive benefits of music education and what it can bring to elementary students.

If a school does not offer music education, perhaps there can be an after-school program that a parent is willing to run. There could also be a school band, with students who have specific talents in different instruments, come together in a band. Some other options is paying teachers to get trained in music education, such as the history of music and certain instruments, learning some chords and notes, and singing if desired. The end result would be the teachers teaching their students some music lessons during a specific part of the regular class day. It would take teachers who were willing to learn or had some music talent already. These recommendations would allow students to receive the best education they can receive.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident through my research, resources, and studies throughout the paper that music education is extremely beneficial to elementary school students. The results found in both the literature review above, and in the field study, prove and show why music education is valuable for elementary students and schools to incorporate into their curriculum. The evidence of the importance is tremendous, and needs to be incorporated in all schools in Santa Cruz County.

Primary education is so important in one's lifetime. It is an opportunity for students to have endless knowledge. English, Math, Science, and Writing are all very important in education. However, bringing music education back to the classrooms can benefit each student immensely. They can be their absolute very best and smartest- with a little music education in



their lives. Students can broaden their cognitive skills, take standardized tests well, focus better in class, learn about different music cultures around the world and more. The possibilities are endless to children if music education is brought back to the classrooms.

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