

Music a "Must" for Public Schools

By Wendy L. Hellyer, B.A., M.A. Music

This fall a new round of discussions will start in PTO's and School Boards regarding 'core curriculum' subjects classified as 'electives' - prompted by the possible cuts in Federal and State Funding for the Arts and Music.

According to the College Entrance Examination Board, students who participate in the arts score 100 points higher on the SAT than students who don't. In addition, the more years students participate in the arts, the higher their average SAT score climbs (*Arts Contact USA Vol. VI, Issue I, Winter '98). In light of this, it's time to re-evaluate the role of music in the public school curriculum.

In 1993 psychologist, Dr. Frances Rauscher and Physicist, Dr. Gordon Shaw published the results of their studies showing that children exposed to ten minutes of Mozart's Sonata in D Major scored 8 or 9 points higher in a spatial-temporal test than when they had 10 minutes of silence or relaxation tapes. In "The Mozart Effect" their studies also indicated that studying music

was even more effective in increasing a child's academic skills than merely listening to music. (F.Y.I. Exposure to heavy metal rock music produced negative results!)

It has become clear to many educators that the same skills necessary to learn music also increase one's capacity for learning anything else. In our music school's "Music Mites" classes, we work with toddlers, pre-schoolers and first and second graders. The attentiveness of youngsters participating in music, songs, games, dances and playing instruments is marvelous to behold.

The additional benefit is the closer connection that develops with their participating parents. We often have children who by the age of five can comprehend single and complicated musical patterns. Recognizing patterns in language or math draws from the

same thinking skills.

Think about what actually happens when children (or anyone) is making music. They must listen, concentrate, focus, analyze, differentiate, repeat sound patterns orally or instrumentally, recognize abstract symbols that represent musical concept and reproduce them. Are these not the same skills that help children overcome attention deficits and mental haziness? When playing music in a group does it not require as much listening, coordination and teamwork as playing sports? Can't diversity issues be overcome by making music "in harmony" with one another?

The Public Schools serve a vital function by providing children with choral and instrumental activities. Some of these children may not have the opportunity for this outside of school. Private Music instructions further develops the skills of the child needing more advanced and thorough musical training or the child needing more individual instruction in order to 'catch up' to

the level necessary to be in the school band, musical orchestra, etc. The more children are exposed to music in the public or private schools, the better it is for everyone because those children are more likely to succeed in life. Perhaps music should be a mandatory part of every child's education!

For further information read: Music Learning Theory, by Dr. Edwin Gordon, Temple University; The Growth of the Mind, by Stanley Greenspan, M.D.; Failure to Connect, by Jane Healy; The Mozart Effect, by Dr. Frances Rauscher and Dr. Gordon Shaw.

Wendy Hellyer holds a B.A. and M.A. in Music from the Ester Boyer College of Music at Temple University. She is also the owner of the Wendy Hellyer Music Studio. Call Wendy at 215-757-7775 to register for Fall Programs.



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