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Why should you care about Music Education in Public Schools?

Music education fosters and inspires many positive traits in children. In Canada, music education in public schools is provincially mandated which causes each province and territory to have a different standard of music education. Such discrepancies undermine the advantages that music engenders in children. Students throughout elementary and middle school struggle trying to fit in and finding their self-confidence. Music has been proven to help children with many aspects of their mental health including confidence and motivation. Currently public schools in BC are allotted a budget of $5,3443 million on average per year (Government of British Columbia, pp.2-4), in each province the will number differ slightly. Within each school district in British Columbia, “the Superintendent is responsible for the overall management of the educational and operational programs that are supported by the annual budget” (School District, 2016), which includes the budget allotted for music programs. With not enough money directed towards funding them, arts and music programs are suffering.

With steadily increasing enrollment and frequent budget cuts, there needs to be support for students in music programs (Sherlock, T.,2015). In addition to an increase in enrollment there has been a marked decrease in qualified music educators (Hill, K., 2012, para.4). Without qualified teachers, students are not receiving an adequate musical education which lessens the positive impacts that music has on the students’ mental, emotional, and social wellbeing (Hill, K., 2012, para.2; People for Education, 2017, Arts Education para.1). Music education has many benefits for children and with a tight budget and a dwindling number of qualified teachers it is evident there needs to be changes in our current policies.

With the proper instruction that comes with a proper budget, children can reap many benefits outside of the classroom setting: including, “reducing dropouts, violence, and … negatives that arise from boredom” (Colwell, R., & Davidson, L., 1996, p.59). Throughout their school years children go through many changes mentally, physically, and socially. Though dropouts and violence may not be something associated with elementary students, fostering positive attributes before these issues arise will help the students grow into responsible young adults. Boredom however, is something that is shared by all students through all grades, and despite being common boredom can have devastating effects on a child’s drive to succeed. It has also been proven that music can have a positive impact on young children and aid them in the many mental transitions they face as they grow up. It is not just negative behaviour that music affects: “music ensembles can promote the goals of self-motivation, empathy, and selfawareness [sic]” (Colwell, R., & Davidson, L.,1996, p.59), through active participation in concerts, activities, and exercises. Through music classes children have to learn how to work together to make a piece of music and when performing in front of an audience they feel the reward of persistent hard work.

Music profits the students in the classroom as much as it does outside: as emphasised in the 2017 article written by Benítez, Abrahan, and Justel, children who play a musical instrument demonstrate better auditory and motor skills” (p. 63, translation: mine). Increased auditory and motor skills can help children listen and absorb the material taught in the class, as well as learning fine motor skills such as cutting with scissors and drawing lines with a ruler. In a recent longitudinal study of elementary aged children, it was found “that children following structured music lessons perform better on tasks measuring verbal IQ, planning and inhibition when compared to controls [control groups that did not take music lessons]” (Jaschke, A. C., Honing, H., & Scherder, E. J. A., 2018, pp. 8-9). These three merits, while difficult to nurture, help children as they grow up and begin making decisions surrounding their own life. There are many benefits that come with music education, but we cannot reap those benefits without proper instructors to teach the material.

There has been a definitive decrease in qualified music teachers in public school systems across Canada. Seeing the public school system as unviable, and teaching music within the system as an unhealthy career, many potential qualified music teachers are choosing to work elsewhere (Anderson, A. & Tupman D. F., 2007, p.5). Despite there being many institutions that offer impressive programs for music educators, there has been little interest in becoming a music teacher. While some may not care about the lack of proper music educators, because as long as the children are listening to music it doesn’t really matter who does it. Without that proper educator, the various benefits those children could be flourishing with, would not exist. Specialist teachers provide students with an enriched learning environment where not only do the students learn the general concepts required by the government, but also gain experience with specific theories. Unfortunately, the lack of consistent structure in funding for the arts programs causes undue stress on teachers who do not have the equipment they need to effectively teach their material.

Because music education is provincially mandated, there are considerable differences between each province and territory’s legislation and curriculum requirements throughout Canada (Stathopoulos, T., 2010, np.): and, each set of curriculum requirements are particularly vague about the learning outcomes. Current education policies render it difficult to effectively teach a fully immersive music class, and children can only benefit fully when engaged in music. Some provinces have suggested percentages of time to be spent teaching each course: having suggested timeframes for teaching all subjects is a good idea as it generates a sense of continuity. The issues arise when the amount of time given to music teachers is too short to allow their students to fully engage with the material. Students should not have to suffer because of a lack of consistency on the part of authorities. School regulation should still be provincially mandated, school funding needs to be more consistent across the provinces and territories. The average salary of a public school teacher in British Columbia is $49,410 a year whereas the average salary is $51,000 a year, making it very difficult for teachers to live in Canada. Despite being an issue in attracting qualified teachers, the foremost problem to tackle the teaching environment in public schools. Currently music teachers are having to take on more work as Educational Assistants often have other classes to be in during music class which adds more stress and work to an already busy job. Having a inconsistent budget and teachers that are not wholly qualified makes it all the more challenging for children in public school to profit from the many diverse benefits of a music education.

Due to the absence of suitable and consistent budgets and policies, there will continue to be a deficit in the amount of qualified specialist music educators in the public school system. Without appropriate teachers, students will not absorb the material needed for them to flourish and succeed in their curriculum. In order to improve the level of music education across Canada, funding for the arts programs will have to be increased, but the main priority is in making the environment for teachers more hospitable. Many teachers are turned off by the environment surrounding public schools and would rather teach privately so as to ensure they are healthier. Support needs to be provided for teachers, including music teachers, when teaching class in which there are students who require special attention. Teachers influence the next generation, and if children are taught ineffectively they will not grow to exceed their potential. Why should you care about public school music classes? Music can help a child grow through school and beyond. Self-confidence, motivation, empathy, these are some of the values that music helps nurture: other benefits are increased auditory and motor skills, verbal IQ, and planning skills. All of these benefit the child and help build the character of every person, and are essential in growing up.

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Audience: My paper is directed towards provincial policy-makers and constituents alike. My goal is to change people’s minds in regards to the importance of music education at a public school level, because not every family is capable of paying, or has access to private music classes. It is my hope that using pathos, when referring to students as ‘children’ and in reference to them ‘growing up’, that I can subtly appeal to their emotions. There were not very many statistics to find since government websites are notoriously difficult to navigate, although since the majority of my audience will have access to those same statistics I utilized pathos. For your average constituent, pathos is also a really good tool when attempting to relate to parents and families.

The feedback from the previous assignment indicated that I should give some attention to transitional phrases (such as, moreover etc.). For this assignment, I have valiantly attempted to add sentences between paragraphs that help connect my ideas so that it flows from the next.