Fitting the Arts into Today’s Public Education System

Breaking the mold due to music and arts education budget cuts by implementing an innovative strategy; merging music and arts education into the basic core curriculum classes taught in public schools.

Tag Words: Music; Art; Budget cuts; No Child Left Behind; nutrition; sing-along; producing; lyrics; save; support; public schools; education; research; Rutgers University

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Summary: Arts programs have been dramatically cut back or cut out completely from public school curriculums throughout the country. Because of new laws such as the No Child Left Behind act, schools are forced to adhere to a national standardized testing system, and districts are rewarded based on their students’ average score. Therefore, schools are cutting Arts classes in order to make room for extra math and English courses so they could bolster their standardized test scores. However, research shows that an education in art and music is important for a child’s development, and parents are outraged that their children will not receive a proper and cultured education. In order to circumvent the problem, a teaching technique has been devised here, which allows teachers to incorporate music and singing into the general curriculum. By putting children’s books to music, students are able to read and sing along, exposing young students to music. Incorporating art and music into the general education curriculum may be the only way to keep arts education in schools.

Video Link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5c6OYsAYozI&feature=youtu.be

The Importance of Arts Education

I. Budget Cuts in Music & Arts Education

Over the past decade, arts programs in public schools throughout the country have been suffering. For a variety of reasons ranging from lack of funding to government mandates, schools have been eliminating arts programs from their curricula, and this spells danger for young American students. Exposure to the arts and music has been proven to be an integral part of a child’s development and education, and there are many organizations such as the Arts Education Partnership that have taken up the fight to preserve arts programs in schools. However, not enough is being done. Therefore, a new program has been developed here, which
would take music and infuse it into the general education curriculum. This program would allow for young elementary school children to be exposed to music, while still staying on course with their general education.

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2004, school districts have transitioned into what they refer to as the testing era or the accountability era (Henley et al.). This act mandates that all students receive at least some minimum score on standardized tests, and that the average score for the entire school be above a certain standard. In theory, this mandate is very helpful, in that it ensures that there is a nationwide standard for the required minimum level of education any student should receive. However, the No Child Left Behind act focuses mainly on mathematics, reading, and writing skills, as these are considered the building blocks for a proper education by most educators (Buchanan, 2008). Also, schools are required to have all of their students reach this minimum threshold, otherwise these public schools may be denied public funds or grants set aside to improve public education programs. Schools are therefore focused on expanding English and math programs, budgeting time for more remedial classes to ensure that all of their students score well on these national standardized tests, as higher scores result in increased funding for the school.

While schools are scheduling students into a greater number of English and mathematics classes in order to beef up their test scores, school days are not getting longer. Students are still required to attend school for only 180 days out of the year, and school days still last on average from 8am to around 3pm. Other programs and classes are being cut from public school curricula to make time for the rigorous reading, writing, and math classes designed to improve the average student’s standardized testing abilities. As Henley et al phrases it, “There won’t be a fifth grade musical this year. Children will not be learning to play the recorder nor will they be learning to march to rhythms or learn the traditional songs that have transcended the years of music instruction in elementary schools. There will be no art to display. Daddies’ old long sleeved shirts that were handed down to children to cover up school clothes to keep from being stained with tempera paint and water colors are no longer needed” (Henley et al). School districts are cutting everything from music and arts programs, to gifted children programs, to gym classes and even recess from elementary school curricula in order to make room for the classes that are believed to be important in keeping test scores high. A survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy in 2007 found that 44% of school districts have made significant cuts to the amount of time students spent on art, music, physical education, lunch, recess, and other programs deemed ‘non-essential’ (Buchanan). The problem worsens when schools miss standardized test score benchmarks and become labeled as ‘in need of improvement’. According to the same study, schools with this label spend 5 times as much time per week on reading as they do on arts education. This CEP study also found that 30% of school districts that have at least 1 school that missed testing benchmarks have cut the amount of time students spend on arts education (Buchanan). In another survey of 956 elementary and secondary schools, it was found that 25% have had a decline in their instruction of the arts, and 33% indicate that they will continue to see a decline in arts programs, as a direct result of the No Child Left Behind act.

While legislation such as No Child Left Behind has a profound impact on arts programs, it is not the only reason behind the national decline in arts education. According to a 2006 survey, school principals across the country indicate that the single most important reason for cutting arts programs is financial or budgeting issues (Abril et al.). Cuts in arts education due to
financial reasons are evident throughout American history. During the 1970’s fiscal crisis, New York City experienced a massive budget deficit. This resulted in cuts to public education programs, and most notably, massive cuts to arts programs throughout the city. Schools were quite literally stripped of the arts, as music teachers and school play directors were fired. It took approximately 20 years for the New York board of education to restore music and arts programs in their public school system (Buchanan). The recent economic downturn has had a similar effect, and while Wall Street and the bank system suffered greatly during the recent recession, they most definitely were not the only ones affected. Many individuals have been laid off, and incomes across the country have declined. School districts are finding it difficult to get budgets approved and passed, as parents and the general public alike are reluctant to agree to increased taxes. This comes at the expense of public school education, as schools must make sacrifices in order to stay within budget. Also, school boards are being pressured to lay off educators in order to cut costs and lower their yearly budget, and oftentimes music teachers and band directors are the first to go. New York City now faces a problem similar to the financial crisis 30 years ago. Ironically, Opus 118 Harlem School of Music, which was founded as part of the arts restoration program in the wake of the 1970s budget crisis, was facing a potential shutdown in 2010. Students from the school played their violins at various locations throughout New York City in order to raise awareness and attempt to raise the $500,000 necessary to keep the music playing at the Harlem School of Music (Abdul-Aleem).

This new financial crisis is not just limited to New York; schools in Wisconsin are affected just the same. In 2004, the Milwaukee school board cut $1.3 million from their arts programs, putting a stop to an educational plan that would have bought Milwaukee schools new music textbooks. Educators and parents alike were outraged by this decision, and teamed up to hold a rally at the state capital that summer. This was not the first time the Milwaukee school board has made budget cuts to their arts programs, and protesters claimed that Milwaukee schools have experienced “a decade of budget cuts for the arts” (Buchanan). As the recession continues to cause cutbacks to public school arts programs, these cuts are further exacerbated by the No Child Left Behind Act and other educational mandates (Buchanan). School principals complain “we [schools] spend more money on unfunded mandates than ever before. Especially NCLB” (Abril et al). In addition, these mandates cause scheduling issues that hurt arts programs, as school officials are primarily focused on budgeting for a greater number of required classes and scheduling students into these classes.

With funding being diverted towards NCLB mandates, and a general lack of funding due to economic crisis, school districts throughout the country are financially strained, and they are cutting arts programs in order to balance their budgets. “In difficult economic times, and when facing the pressure of standardized testing, school boards often seek to eliminate the costs of music instruction from the budget…” (Hodges et al). It is the tandem interaction of these two forces, the lack of funding together with government educational mandates, which is behind such a steep decline in arts education. Oftentimes, these program cuts come without any regard for the benefit that arts bring for developing young minds. “Although research ought to play a more significant role in policy decisions, it has often not” (Hodges et al). While education officials are busy cutting arts from public schools, researchers are publishing papers and discovering mounting evidence that arts programs are much more important in a child’s development than previously thought. In fact, music and art have such a profound impact that their removal from curricula may actually be the reason students perform worse in other more traditional subject
classes. “Music programs are often the first to go when budget cuts are needed as most colleges do not require music credits for entrance. Principals should consider the effect of music programs on the academic performance of students before suggesting music is cut.” (Cox et al).

II. The Benefit of Music & Arts Education

When examining arts programs, it is important to look beyond the budget in order to discover the factual benefits that music or visual arts exposure brings to students. While this topic has been studied for quite some time, significant research efforts only began in 1953 with the publication of the Journal of Research in Music Education (Hodges et al). Since then, hundreds of publications have emerged not only linking music education to students’ achievement, but connecting music with all aspects of a child’s growth, development, and education. Research shows that ‘smarts’ exhibited as a result of exposure to music are directly caused by changes within the brain; it is a fundamentally biological process (Salmon). Learning or performing music strengthens synapses between individual brain cells, resulting in increased brain capacity (Cox). Also, the human brain is compartmentalized into two hemispheres, processing certain functions such as language in the left hemisphere, while using the right hemisphere to processes others such as music. In between the hemispheres exists a region called the corpus callosum, which is responsible for communication between the two hemispheres. Researchers have shown that the corpus callosum region of the brain is physically larger in musicians than in non-musicians (Cox). A larger and more developed corpus callosum results in better communication between the two hemispheres of the brain, which allows the brain to process stimuli quicker and have greater mental ability. It is therefore said that the brain has a ‘musical’ intelligence, and this intelligence can be developed through the study of music (Salmon). Combining music with education stimulates use of both hemispheres, which facilitates learning and promotes creative thinking. Sound and music are therefore very important in a child’s development, as children can be seen imitating sounds and noises, using both parts of the brain in the learning process (Salmon).

Being a cognitive process, sound or music is therefore not only vital in child development, but is also very important in allowing children and students of all ages make sense of new concepts and ideas (Salmon). Studies have been done on students of all ages, from preschool through college, and research shows that music is beneficial for education at all ages. In an experiment done on kindergarteners, active listening to a soundtrack accompanying a reading promoted more feedback and class participation, as students were able to better understand and connect to the story (Salmon). In a separate study, 5th grade students were given a comprehensive test of basic skills. Researchers found that students who were a part of a music program scored higher on all areas of the test. They also saw a correlation to the amount of time spent in a music program, as the longer a student has been part of a music program, the higher they tended to score (Cox). In two separate studies on high school students, researchers saw a correlation between participation in a music program and students’ grade point averages. In a Colorado high school, students who participated in either band or orchestra had a significantly higher GPA, on average, than students who have never participated in such a program. In a similar study at a California high school, students did not participate in any music programs had an average GPA of 2.91, while those who did participate in the school’s music programs had an average GPA of 3.59. Also, this study found that while only 4% of non-music students had a
perfect 4.0 GPA, 16% of students who had participated in a music program held a 4.0 GPA (Cox).

The College Entrance Exam Board has also recently put out an interesting statistic that links students’ achievement to musical exposure. They found that students who indicated musical performance on their record scored on average 39 points higher in the math section of the SAT, while students who indicated either musical performance or musical appreciation on their record scored 46 points higher in math (Cox). This linkage of musical exposure to mathematical aptitude is due to spatial-temporal reasoning. Because music plays a biological role in the brain by strengthening synapses, it allows for the development of one’s spatial-temporal reasoning. This process in the brain is responsible for one’s ability to envision and rotate images in the mind, which is key for higher brain functions such as complex geometric concepts and other upper level mathematical skills. In a study done on college students, a spatial-temporal test was administered to participants before and after they listened to a piece by Mozart, and researchers discovered that students’ scores did indeed increase after their short-term exposure to classical music (Cox). A separate study examined the effect of piano training on 3 year olds. Children who received piano training scored 35% higher on spatial-temporal reasoning tests versus children who received no musical training whatsoever (Cox).

Music’s proven positive effect on students’ mathematical ability should already be reason enough for administrators to be weary about cutting arts programs. The argument becomes more compelling however, with data proving that the benefit of music is interdisciplinary. Exposure to music and musical education develops the corpus callosum, forging a greater connection between the left and right brain hemispheres (Cox). This connection allows one to better use both hemispheres simultaneously, which promotes creative thinking and creates a strong link between music, thinking, and language (Salmon). Research by the National Reading Panel shows that mental imagery is necessary for engagement and comprehension of literacy. Music is a proven tool for stimulating a child’s mental imagery by causing stimuli that force the brain to dig up past images and experiences in relation to the sounds being heard (Salmon). Through a separate foundation called the Sounds of Learning research program, researchers examined the relationship between the quality of the music program at a school, and its students’ performance on standardized tests. Researchers sampled thousands of elementary and middle school students in schools throughout the country, and found that students from schools with exemplary music programs perform 20% better on math standardized tests, and 22% better on English standardized tests (Hodges). Another researcher points out that "phonological processing and early reading ability are significantly correlated with music perception skills among preschoolers." (Gillespie). The studies this group conducted show that music education not only helps preschool aged children advance in language, mathematics, and other classroom subject skills, but it also helps develop children’s’ motor skills. They found that preschool children enrolled in a ‘movement and music’ class developed jumping and dynamic balance skills significantly faster than children who were enrolled in a more traditional preschool level physical education class (Gillespie).

However, music and arts programs are not only beneficial to students in a learning environment. Researchers, educators, and parents alike are in agreement that the benefits of exposure and education in the arts extend beyond the classroom. Not surprisingly, the students who participate in music programs throughout the country seem to be the most passionate
activists for keeping arts in schools. As previously mentioned, when the Harlem School of Music was to be shut down due to lack of funding, it was the students of that school who picked up their instruments and played in various locations around New York City in order to raise the money necessary to keep their music program alive (Abdul-Aleem). In another study conducted by the Sounds of Learning research program, researchers set up a national essay contest in order to examine how students felt about arts in schools. Geared towards students ages 13-18, it was titled “Ban The Elimination of Music in the Schools”, and the contest gave interesting insight about how and why students themselves feel they benefit from music education programs. Over 1,000 students were sampled, and respondents overwhelmingly agreed that “music study has benefits that transfer into other areas of life” (Hodges). Many students mentioned that exposure to music from around the world has taught them about other cultures, and has promoted understanding appreciation of other races, religions, ethnicities through the study of traditional music (Hodges). Students also described the emotional benefits they felt from music education, pointing out that music allows for the expression and release of their emotions, which helps students cope with the stresses of school. Many students also mentioned the social benefits they receive from participating in a music education program. Through programs such as band or orchestra, students are able to meet like-minded peers and make new friends. Also, being a part of a band program teaches hard work, self-discipline, and builds students’ self esteem, helping to distract them from harmful behavior such as substance abuse (Hodges). Ultimately, it is the public school students who benefit from music and arts programs, and they are fully aware of the benefits such programs bring. Students advocate to maintain or even increase the presence of arts in the curriculum, suggesting that music class equally important if not more important than traditional subject classes such as math or English because music not only brings educational benefits to students, but brings social and emotional benefits as well.

III. Approaches to Maintain Music Education

As budget towards music programs continue to transpire within the United States’ public education system, there has been numerous approaches and steps to help fix the issue. Many of such approaches involve organization funding money or large corporations donating money. With hopes of creating funds to sustain music education in our schools, these organizations continue to fight the claimed misinterpretation of No Child Left Behind Act. Other approaches include, but are not limited to, the creation of new music education programs, conducting research on music education to show the advantages of maintaining such programs, and using feasible technology to assist instructors in teaching music.

One of the most vital programs participating in the fight against eliminating music programs in schools is the VH1 Save The Music Foundation. This non-profit organization that was created in 1997 two main objectives are to raise awareness concerning the significance of music being a part in a student’s education and reestablishing instrumental music education in America’s public school, especially after the No Child Left Behind Act. The foundation provides various types of instruments to over 1,800 public elementary and middle schools across the United States to sustain instrumental music programs and ensure that all children get exposed to music education. As of now, the VH1 Save The Music Foundation has provided $48 million in new musical instruments, impacting the lives of over 1.8 million children (VH1 Save The Music).
Every year the VH1 Save The Music Foundation creates an Annual Report showing giving a brief overview of how they are trying to help the nation and sharing its successes. According to the 2010 Annual Report, there have been many concise decisions on how to help advocate music education. One method was staying focus in the community, where the foundation decided to order instruments from local music retailers in a neighborhood. Another approach in 2010 was Executive Director Paul Cothran literally visiting Capitol Hill and presenting the benefits of music education to the U.S. Department of Education. The VH1 Save The Music Foundation also held “a series of meetings in June with Congressional leaders to talk about the importance of music in a child's education, and to advocate for education laws that ensure that all children have access to a complete education.” The foundation continues to find ways to help encourage funding and support for music programs.

In addition to the Annual Report, the VH1 Save The Music Foundation also has constructed the “Guide to Building Your Instrumental Music Program.” In this guidebook, the foundation outlines how to create an instrumental music program for schools. The book has many topics such as supplies and space, how to budget and maintain the instruments, a criteria for music teachers, how to expand to national standards, and research done showing the benefits of having music education.

In short, the VH1 Save The Music Foundation has been playing a huge role on fighting for music education. Although the foundation primarily focuses on instrumentation, the purpose goes beyond that. What it appealing about this foundation is that it does more than just help fund for music education. The VH1 Save The Music Foundation as a whole is an educator, activist, and communal supporter in the struggle for pro-music education.

Moreover, other similar approaches to sustain and expand music programs into school curriculums have been made. The state of Wisconsin is commended with having the most advanced musician-training program in the United States of America. Teachers undergo week-long workshops under direction of the Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance program. It is here that the teachers are coached in the field of philosophy and are provided with first-hand guidance with newly created teaching materials. The well developed program has aided instructors to utilize techniques of presenting musical understanding within performance classes. The Wisconsin program has allowed for these teachers to instill confidence and success within the field of music.

The American Composers Forum is recognized for producing an outstanding model for brilliant music composers. The BandQuest Project supports these composers who hold residency in middle and high school bands. During the process new work is composed for the students and rehearsed under direction of the selected composers throughout the process. The conclusion of the residency comprises of a public performance by the students. The success rate of BandQuest has engaged many credible composers to participate in future projects. To provide an example, Gunther Schuller, a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, is noted with having created the work, Nature’s Way in 2006. The program essentially benefits both composers and the students. This well balanced learning partnership has challenged, “their writing and thinking by writing for young students just starting out, who do not necessarily have the full grasp of music theory.” The goal of this program is to demonstrate how composition training can intertwine within a
performance ensemble class. In addition to these benefits, the works are also produced for use of commercial music publishers.

With technological advancement, music composers and students have full advantage of utilizing the Internet, and newly developed software as a tool to studying music theory and other contexts within the field. The Internet, now offers collaboration resources and other means of interacting between audience and artist. Students have access to and are learning to compose music and apply skills on software such as, Garage Band, Finale NotePad, and Acid. Interaction between student and instructor has significantly improved with the application of SmartMusic; allowing students to practice with accompaniment and direct their sessions to instructors through email. The music composed by students has been used by filmmaking students as scores for their films. At the American School of Bombay, pupils have found a method of listening to historical speeches and using music compositional software they are able to construct audio to enhance the quality of the speeches. The Internet has the incredible ability to revitalize music quality and change the way students study sound scores. Colleges now offer courses in music, digital audio production to instructors as is done at Berklee College of Music. These courses can be taken at home or within the classroom setting. Students enjoy learning how to manipulate and rebuild songs through GarageBand. This was applied in a study of a track released by Nine Inch Nails, to the music software for student use.

The initiation of music programs into the education system has progressed since 2005 with the introduction of the International Music Products Association. The association commenced a research program known as, Sounds of Learning. This would soon help to engage music education researchers with school programs. This unique program received full support from the National Association of Music Merchants. Sounds of Learning, dedicates its lessons to exploring the role of music education amongst early years of schooling. In efforts to spread quality education, the program sought guidance from a committee. The steering committee imposed research guidelines. As stated they must consider, “the impact of music education on student achievement; all aspects of a child’s growth and development; the uses and function of music in daily life and home, school and community environments.” The project is reviewed in its entirety by a board. This method of research study has allowed for efficient review of education systems. Research projects also have led to the initiation of new Music programs within the curriculum. For instance, at the University of South Florida, David Williams, produced, Musical Meaning: Teenage Participation in Musical Activities In and Out of School, research based work that investigated sociological aspects of music influence on the youth. The study involved the use of qualitative and quantitative courses of action to explore student participation in school music activities and nonschool music experiences, alongside the behavior displayed by the same groups. Other large-scale case studies have been conducted to analyze designs and organizational research of various subjects including, school board members, students, parents, administrators, artists, musicians, community leaders and music educators. Margaret Barrett, at the University of Tasmania, and Sandra Stauffer at Arizona State University, regulated the study. Their case was entitled, Impacts of an Effective Music Program: Outcomes and Values.

As evident the proposals and work sponsored by Sounds of Learning has created a pathway for publication and conference based presentations. These have encouraged dialogue
with local, state and federal policy as well as education leaders who pose to institute school funding and introduction of music education. The projects and studies coordinated by, Sounds of Learning, are credited with having contributed to discussions about policies dealing with music education in school curriculum.

Preservation campaigns have supplemented research studies in a Manhattan school. The movement towards reviving their school began when violinists performed in public settings and drew attention of surrounding community members. Opus 118 Harlem School of Music managed to raise half a million dollars to sustain music projects at school concerts. The potential resonates amongst students ages 5 to 18 and strengthens with the growth of the curriculum. The music program receives support from parents, teachers and staff. Students demonstrated their skills in 2010 as they performed at the New York Philharmonic, and venues including, the Apollo Theater, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and the Children’s Inaugural Ball in the nation’s capitol. It is because of successful programs such as the one coordinated at Opus 118 that produces motivated students, and improves the quality of music education. The lessons instilled into these students surpasses the ability to develop acute musical skills, they develop self-discipline, committed work ethic, and academic skills to apply to college and professional careers. The effort contributed by the community, teachers and parents inspires the students and fosters their creative endeavors. This program, along with the funding it receives, is greatly needed in certain neighborhoods within the Harlem community. Alumni of the Harlem School of Music have benefitted from the program and proceeded to secure positions in Ivy League schools, careers in business and education as well as transporting the skills they’ve learned in new school environments.

Schools that experience difficulty receiving funding for research or installation of music based programs, have been recommended to turn to media publications and outreach to gather federal and state support. A dean of a Pennsylvania school calls attention to the vital role a prominent music program plays in the overall appeal of the school, “a strong program in the arts is also critical in marketing our evangelical Christian school.” There are methods that can be utilized by schools seeking improvement of introduction of music programs into their schools. The assimilation of information through an enjoyable way will help students to effectively learn lessons and retain the knowledge. Music coordinated activities within daily lessons, are not presented as tests to students, but as opportunities for intellectual growth with the absence of pressure. Experts suggest hands- on creative activities to extract the true potential from students with especially disadvantaged backgrounds. It is believed by Superintendent, Lantz Stein, of an Illinois school, that political parties seek to strategize budget cuts that severely affect arts programs within schools. In this case the education system of these districts could turn to media outlets to draw attention of the community. Despite the success rate of music- based programs on a national scale, any remaining money form taxes are more likely to go towards private school funding.

IV. Why Approaches are Failing

Although many approaches are being taken and a lot of funding is occurring for music education and the arts in general, there still has not been any significant change in the need to manage a functional music education program within public schools’ curriculum. The most
important factors that contribute to this failure are instruments and music supplies are still expensive, music teacher salaries are an additional expense, time constraints in a school day and there is a lot of basic educational material that is considered more important.

V. Our Solution

In order to educate schoolchildren in the arts, we were looking for a way to bring the arts back into education without altering the education curriculum. There are many groups such as the Arts Education Partnership that have campaigned to make Arts classes mandatory under either state or federal law, however none of these groups have succeeded. Because of the No Child Left Behind act, schools are primarily focused on keeping standardized test scores high. They schedule additional classes in Math and English, the two main subjects used in standardized tests, often at the expense of Arts classes. In addition, the recent downturn in the economy meant that school budgets were already constrained, and many districts simply do not have the funding for Arts classes in addition to the extra and remedial math and English classes they are focused on providing. Groups that campaign to restore Arts classes and programs haven’t been successful, because success would involve changing the country’s mindset about education. However, if arts were introduced into the classroom as a part of the math, English, or science classes in the general curriculum, then arts may be brought back into the lives of students without altering curricula. Incorporating music into each class will make learning fun, promote multiple, similar advantages of a normal music education program, and help students learn and retain information regarding their classes.

In successfully executing our solution, our plan is to create an entire music book for an elementary based class in nutrition. Each page of the book will have a different letter, starting from A and ending with Z. For every letter there will be a type of food that begins with letter. Each food will have a written short narrative or poem for the story and then a catchy educational song about the food will follow. The songs will vary in length, but will not be any longer than a minute.

To create the songs we will be using a program called Fruity Loops Studio 10. This program is very similar to the popular Garage Band. With Fruity Loops Studio 10 we will create different beats in various musical genres to include multiple ethnicities. After the beats are composed, we will use the story book to create lyrics. The lyrics that will be used will be simple and straightforward so that children can understand, sing a long, and learn. Following the making of the lyrics, we will then use a real studio to record the songs and add any instrumentation to the beats if necessary.

Children’s Music Book – Educating Youth in both Arts and Nutrition

Presently, many organizations and supporters of the art donate money to assist in maintaining music education in public schools; however, evidently their efforts have made a small impact on emending the issue. As musicians and performers, we felt that it was imperative to uncover another way to solve the issue. Hence, we have originated a way to defy the problem, without continuing to ask for help from donors and organizations. Our solution is incorporating music education directly into the regular academics. To exemplify how our resolution would function, we have constructed a condensed version of a children’s music book based on nutrition.
Together, we teamed up to create songs to go along with a book that could be used in the kindergarten – 3rd grade classroom. This book is designed to educate children about nutrition, teaching them to stay away from unhealthy snacks like jellybeans and moderate intake of high-cholesterol foods such as hamburgers, and instead encourages them to make healthy food choices. Each letter has a designated food item or topic that is taught, and after each letter, we wrote a small musical interlude that should be played after reading that page. We added a sing-along audio portion to the learning experience, as research shows this does wonders for developing minds.

In creating these song clips, Sam was responsible for using a computer program and various tools in order to generate the background beats and music, as he has experience in producing music. One of the major concerns for this project was that the songs were to be created to engage children. To ensure that this would work, the beats had to be created very sensitively. While creating the beats the goal was to create music that was modern, upbeat, and yet still intended for children. All of the beats were generated through the Producer Edition of Fruity Loops Studio 10. To construct them, Sam would start with a simple kick drum and snare. Then he would add a catchy melody using a piano, synthesizer, or bell sound. After the simple melody was laid down, the rest of the percussion section had to be added to give a complete upbeat feel. Some instances called for additional instruments to be added. According to basic composition of music, major scales tend to lead to happier tones. Therefore many of the beats were created using a major scale for the sake of the children. After an entire beat was composed, Sam would mix and adjust the different sounds to make the music quality crisp and then convert the final product into a .mp3 format. This allowed the project to be uploaded and played on the internet.

After the beats were generated, Mark was responsible for writing the lyrics to go along with them since he has had experience writing music and lyrics through being in his band. Writing lyrics with the purpose of educating young children proved to be more difficult than was expected. Mark studied children’s TV shows such as Yo Gabba, as shows of this type often involve music and sing-alongs in order to teach young children certain concepts. Eventually, he was able to write lyrics in a similar simple and catchy style, allowing young children to follow and sing along. After practicing singing the lyrics over the beats and ensuring that the timing of the lyrics fit well over the music, we began the recording process. One of Mark’s close friends is an intern for a producer affiliated with The Four Seasons, and thus we recruited him to help us record this project. Using his studio, equipment, and knowledge of sound engineering, we were able to record and layer our vocals over the beats with professional quality. The final product created was an audio portion to the children’s book on nutrition, emphasizing student participation though singing along. This would allow students to not only read the material, but also actively listen to the material. Research shows that this style of teaching, incorporating music and active listening along with classroom activities, helps students form connections to the material being taught and therefore retain and better understand the material.
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Re-Introducing Arts Programs Back Into Schools

Over the past decade, arts programs in public schools throughout the country have been suffering. For a variety of reasons ranging from lack of funding to government mandates, schools have been eliminating arts programs from their curricula, and this spells danger for young American students.

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2004, school districts have transitioned into what they refer to as the testing era or the accountability era. This act mandates that all students receive at least some minimum score on standardized tests, and that the average score for the entire school be above a certain standard. In theory, this mandate is very helpful, in that it ensures that there is a nationwide standard for the required minimum level of education any student should receive. However, the No Child Left Behind act focuses mainly on writing skills and mathematics, as these are considered the building blocks for a proper education by most educators. Also, schools are required to have all of their students reach this minimum threshold, otherwise these schools may be denied funds or grants set aside to improve public education programs. Schools are therefore focused on expanding English and math programs, budgeting time for more remedial classes to ensure that all of their students score well on these national standardized tests, as higher scores results in increased funding for the school.

While schools are scheduling students into a greater number of English and mathematics classes in order to beef up their average standardized test scores, school days are not getting longer. Students are still required to attend school for only 180 days out of the year, and school days still last on average from 8am to around 3pm. Other programs and classes are being cut from public school curricula to make time for the rigorous reading, writing, and math classes designed to improve the average student’s standardized testing abilities. As one article on the matter phrases it, “There won’t be a fifth grade musical this year. Children will not be learning to play the recorder nor will they be learning to march to rhythms or learn the traditional songs that have transcended the years of music instruction in elementary schools. There will be no art to display. Daddies’ old long sleeved shirts that were handed down to children to cover up school clothes to keep from being stained with tempera paint and water colors are no longer needed.” School districts are cutting everything from music and arts programs, to gifted children programs, to gym classes and even recess from elementary school curricula in order to make room for the classes that are believed to be important in keeping test scores high.

Exposure to the arts and music has been proven to be an integral part of a child’s development and education. There is a plethora of research showing that children who study music expand the capacity of their mind to better comprehend mathematics or physics. The myth that students who listen to Mozart before taking an exam will score better is no longer a myth, it has proven to be true. A solid education in the arts throughout ones childhood is important to develop well rounded, cultural, and educated individuals. These programs should not be cut, especially during a time when government officials are exclaiming that the American standard for education has been on the decline. However it is hard to rapidly undo policies and more importantly, people’s mindsets. Therefore, a new program has been developed here
through my participation in the Ethics in Science course at Rutgers University, which would take
music and infuse it into the general education curriculum. My partner and I are currently taking
a children’s book about nutrition, and integrating music to go along with the story. Kids would
not only be able to read along but also sing along, all while learning. This book is simply the test
pilot of the program; if successful, there is potential for books on any topic, from the history of
the civil war to grammar rules, to be put to music. This program allows young students to gain
exposure to and an appreciation for music, while still staying on course with their general
education.

Samuel M. Ames Jr.

Dear Editor,

What is education without an expansion to the artistic portion of a child’s mind? As the topic is
fairly old now, the problem that children face today is not receiving a complete education due to
less funding and budget cuts for art programs; essentially, music education. Many kids struggle
to find their niche, or what they would want to pursue as a career when they grow up, and not
receiving the proper exposure to music through the educational system contributes to this
uncertainty.

Presently, many organizations and supporters of the art donate money to assist in maintaining
music education in public schools; however, evidently their efforts have made a small impact on
emending the issue. As a musician, a dancer, an actor, and a performer and working side by side
with my partner, Mark Aleynick, who is a musician and singer, we have originated a way to defy
the problem, without continuing to ask for help from donors and organizations. Our solution is
incorporating music education directly into the regular academics. To exemplify how our
resolution would function, we have constructed a children’s music book based on nutrition.
Hence, students can learn about the science and importance of eating healthy while tickling their
artistic fancies by singing along.

With adequate support and furthering the idea of implementing music education, and art as a
whole, into the basic school curriculum, it is our greatest hope that children get a well-rounded
education. If you would like to contact me for further information, you can always reach me at
blessed1@rutgers.edu and I will undeniably reply at my utmost convenience. Thank you for your
time and support.

Sincerely,

Samuel M. Ames Jr.