Why Teach Music? The Importance of Music Education

Guest: Julie Rombach-Kendall

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Background and Bio: Julie Rombach-Kendall has taught music for more than 25 years to people of all ages, from infants to seniors. She holds a Bachelor of Music degrees in Voice Performance and Music Education from the University of Michigan and a Master of Music in Voice Performance from the University of New Mexico. In addition to teaching music, Julie has sung professionally with Santa Fe Opera in their traveling Mosaics program. She enjoys free-lancing as a soprano soloist when the opportunities arise. Julie is an Fine Arts Elementary Music Teacher with the Albuquerque Public Schools. Her passion is teaching people how to freely express themselves through singing. She believes teaching music is about feeding the soul by learning how to express oneself through music.

Program Description: Dr. Jane Bluestein and music teacher Julie Rombach-Kendall explore the connections between music and other areas of the curriculum, as well as the ability to build student engagement and academic achievement through the use of music. In addition, they discuss the potential for music and music education to build a sense of community, develop personal and interpersonal skills, and dramatically improve student behavior. Finally, they touch on the therapeutic potential of music and its impact on brain functioning. Ideas and advocacy for anyone living or working with young people of any age.

Highlights of Podcast:

Rombach-Kendall sees music as an all-important umbrella connected to many aspects of learning (and life).

Note that Music programs in school have suffered lately in the current economic climate (as well as from a shift in emphasis on test scores and test preparation).
Math is a big component in music, one that connects different parts of the brain. Music brings together the artistic and analytical parts of the brain (patterning). Even young students notice the connection between patterns they study in music and the math they have learned.

Studying music (patterns, structure, form) enhances math achievement. Explores how rhythm is broken up into fractions, brings a different understanding of fraction, put together by applying their experience and instruction in music to what they’ve learned about fractions. (A different way of experiencing and understanding fractions.)

Helps them see the application of math to real life— not just something you do in math class: These are not separate things, even though they are taught in separate ways (and in separate classes or subject lessons).

Music touches pretty much every area of the curriculum.

Also very motivating: One PE teacher allowed her students to bring in iPods to class. Once the students brought in the iPods, they were willing to get off the bench and run (or walk) to the beat of the music where they had been unwilling to participate prior to their being allowed to bring in personal music players.

Rombach-Kendall always includes dance and music in all her music classes. Ties music in with different themes (working out, nutrition, even testing), stressing the importance of taking care of body, mind, and spirit.

Used music or rhythm to learn spelling or multiplication tables.

History: Uses local music, music in Spanish, to teach history of the state (New Mexico) and area. Urges use of music to explore your own rich cultural and historical heritage.

Foreign language: Rombach-Kendall teaches children songs in foreign languages, which is a part of a music tradition. Ties in with speech and language, exploration of other cultures and traditions.

Poetry: Looking at accent and meter, rhyming words, poetry, different use of language or expressions.

Uses instrument to layer sounds and build texture (different instrumental sounds in conjunction with vocals). Everybody is a part of a mixture of sounds, engaging everyone at something they can do successfully.
“Listening horizontally:” At first they’re only focused on their own part (or their own instrument) but pretty soon they become aware of the product of the ensemble or group effort. (Some social implications of being a part of a group.)

**Appeal to visual/spatial learners:** Seeing spatial relationships of notes on a staff as well as actually putting your hands on a keyboard or fretboard, for example. For kids who learn spatially, music can help build understanding through these modalities.

**Music and behavior:**

Music motivated PE students as in example above. (High school)

First grade teachers let kids dance to music before going into class to “get their wiggles out,” nice transition to being able to sit and relaxed. (Elementary)

Kids behavior on the bus was improved by giving kids iPods to listen to on the bus. Eliminated fighting and rowdiness on bus. (Middle school)

Rombach-Kendall notes that students listening to the same song have a unifying experience, even though they may all be doing their own dances. (When the music stops, they all stop.) She does an opening song and does movement right away to get everyone focused.

Might do lullabies to help counter kids’ belief that good music is loud music. Uses stuffed animals to help kids get a sense of the *feeling* in a piece of music. (Also can help kids get calm and focus.) Changes the whole mood of the class to bring out the “babies” and sing the lullabies.

You don’t have to be a music teacher to use math in your classroom. Use music CDs if you don’t have the voice.

**Building community with music:** People can come together and play music whether they share a word of the same language. Music offers opportunities to connect with other human beings that has powerful global implications. Gave example of operas where people communicate through music and can work together to create a performance even if they don’t speak the local language.

**Therapeutic benefits of music:** Rombach-Kendall cited the story about Gabrielle Giffords being shot in a part of the brain that damaged her speech and language center. Was thought that she would never be able to
speak again. As a part of Giffords’ therapy and recovery, she had music therapy every day: The music therapist brought in her guitar and started playing music Gabby knew and pretty soon Gabby started singing along. Then they accessed the language from those songs. The music was what brought the language back.

Different parts of the brain have to work together to make the music happen.

Referenced a BBC report (link below) that cited studies where people who have experienced brain damage (to the speech and language part of the brain) who are learning to speak again through music. Also, following World War II, physical therapists used Big Band music to help wounded veterans regain their ability to walk.

It is criminal to deny students access to Music Education or to try to teach without Music being a part of the curriculum.

Music can increase work production and time-on-task. Noted a possible correlation between Music programs first being cut in the 1980s and an increase in violence and lack of community in school. Music helps build empathy and compassion for others around you, a sense of humanity and being a part of a community.

“People need music for love, compassion, gentleness, and more life.”

Additional Resource submitted by Mrs. Rombach-Kendall:

**Why Teach Music?**

**Music is a science**

It is exact, specific; and it demands exact acoustics. A conductor's full score is a chart, a graph which indicates frequencies, intensities, volume changes, melody and harmony all at once and with the most exact control of time.

**Music is mathematical**

It is rhythmically based on the subdivisions of time into fractions which must be done instantaneously, not worked out on paper.

**Music is a foreign language**
Most of the terms are in Italian, German, or French; and the notation is certainly not English--but a highly developed kind of shorthand that uses symbols to represent ideas. The semantics of music is the most complete and universal language.

**Music is history**

Music usually reflects the environments and times of its creation, often even the country and/or racial feeling.

**Music is a physical education**

It requires fantastic coordination of fingers, hands, arms, lips, cheek, and facial muscles, in addition to extraordinary control of the diaphragmatic, back, stomach and chest muscles, which respond instantly to the sound the ear hears and the mind interprets.

**Music is all these things, but most of all music is art**

It allows a human being to take all these dry technically boring (but difficult) techniques and use them to create emotion. That is one thing that science cannot duplicate: humanism, feeling, emotion, call it what you will.

**That is Why We Teach Music!**

- So you will be human
- So you will recognize beauty
- So you will be sensitive
- So you will be closer to an infinite beyond this world
- So you will have something to cling to
- So you will have more love, more compassion, more gentleness, more good--in short, more life.
- Not because we expect you to major in music
- Not because we expect you to play or sing all your life
- Not so you can relax
- Not so you can have fun
- Not Because we expect you to major in music

Of what value will it be to make a prosperous living unless we know how to live?

*Note: I have been unable to find an attribution for this piece. I have found it online, including a copy on the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (http://www.pMEA.net/), although the individual I contacted there noted, “We have
researched this on several occasions and we cannot find the author of this piece. It appears to have been submitted anonymously.” If anyone knows the author, please contact me (jane@janebluestein.com) so we can be sure to attribute it correctly.

Additional Resources:


“Increasing Success for All Students.” Handout by Dr. Jane Bluestein, http://janebluestein.com/2012/increasing-success-for-all-students/ (Also available in French.)

Therapeutic Value of Music


For Parents:


Extended searches:

There are hundreds of Web sites with research on music and music activities for educators and parents. Consider the following links to Google searches:

- music activities for kids in the classroom
- music activities for children
- music lesson plans kids
- music activities for preschoolers
- music crafts for kids
- music games for kids
- music worksheets kids
- music activities for elementary students