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# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Alexander Testa on the Benefits of Learning Music Within the Education System

Our Friends · Monday, November 9th, 2020

As school boards try to find ways to cut down on costs, music programs continue to be put in the spotlight. This is especially true with the number of schools that have a specialist music teacher.

Alexander Testa started learning music as a child, playing many instruments — which he still plays today. Testa obtained a teaching position in the west end twelve years ago after he took additional courses to qualify him to teach music. He has seen first hand the trouble music programs face in the education system where they continue to fall behind other subjects.

### Brain Development with Music

Music still plays an integral role in different aspects of learning; Alexander Testa believes it benefits those in understanding other subjects. Not only does it help develop language skills, but it has been proven that playing an instrument improves a person's memory.

Studies by the LifeSounds Educational Services have shown that those who play an instrument or are exposed to the sounds of music are able to hold their attention longer and stimulate visual images. Different types of music can help in different scenarios, like having classical music on helps calm the mind while studying and in turn, upbeat music can stimulate the mind.

Playing music also helps develop hand-eye coordination, math, and pattern-recognition skills through repetition. It also helps stimulate creativity and think outside of the box when solving problems. Alexander Testa also sees a link between those who learn to play music and the development of spatial intelligence — the ability to retain, retrieve, and transform well-structured visual images.

### Important Benefits Through Music

The benefits of learning music also play an important role in improving teamwork skills especially when playing in a school orchestra. This also teaches the importance of commitment towards practices, attending rehearsals, and preparing for performances.

Alexander Testa also sees that learning music also helps those who struggle in math with the ability to learn different music notations like quarter, half, and whole notes which then helps with fractions. A study conducted by the University of Kansas showed that learning music in school also led to improved test scores in comparison to those who did not participate in music classes.

Musical therapy is also essential to people with special needs as they are able to communicate in ways that would otherwise be more difficult. Having musical education in schools also means that people who cannot afford to have private lessons or unable to access community programs.

Learning how to play an instrument also develops confidence through the mastery of a new skill and learning how to play in front of an audience.

### **Alexander Testa on the Decline in Music Education**

The CBC reported that over the last decade, there has been a steady decline in schools offering music classes. A report completed by People for Education — a non-profit group that tracks and offers policy recommendations for the province of Ontario— found that 41% of elementary schools in Ontario have a “specialist music teacher,” down from 48% from a decade ago.

From 2012 to 2017, 183,000 students in Ontario lost the chance to have musical education, especially in the rural schools. The Ontario Music Educators’ Association continues to push for more access to musical education and it is a challenge that will be tough if there are less qualified teachers to teach these programs.

A part of that has to do with budgets and staff available towards arts programs, considering there are schools that can’t afford to have music programs and without government support, it will be tough to offer the necessary support these programs need.

The Ontario government has taken a step forward by partnering with Music Canada to fix and restore musical instruments in schools and improve music education programming.

As an education professional, Alexander Testa continues to advocate for the benefits of learning music within our education system, especially when it comes to ensuring the development of crucial skills.

*Photo by Wes Hicks on Unsplash*

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