

## Music Education

My name is Katri Pitts and I am here to speak about the importance of music education for all children.

The cognitive benefits of music education are well documented in many scientific studies. Musical activity has been shown to activate the brain in ways that no other activity does. When people make music, connections are made across the brain that lead to positive results in other subject areas. In addition to other things, musical training has been shown to enhance verbal memory, spatial reasoning, and literacy skills. *Such benefits are a wonderful byproduct of studying music, but it is important to remember that musical*

Music also connects us to all people across boundaries of time and space. Every human culture has developed its own form of music, and this "common language" connects us all. All musical traditions organize sound over time in a way that we can all connect to; we can all feel the beat. In addition, studying music history allows us to make connections between ourselves and people that lived long ago. Studying world music and music history can help students see how connected humanity is. *Study in and of itself is important. Music and the arts are an essential part of what makes us human.*

Making music with a group of people builds a sense of community. When I work with a group of students on creating music in class, we are not focusing on an end product. We are not focusing on who wins and who loses. Everyone wins in music class. We are focusing on creating something beautiful in the moment and developing the skills that allow us to create such beauty. We are focusing on sharing our own creative ideas while simultaneously honoring and celebrating the ideas of others. When students make music together they get to experience what it is to play an important part in something that is bigger than themselves.

In order to feel comfortable and competent in musical activities, students should have the opportunity to participate in music from as young an age as possible. We learn music in the same way that we learn language, and just as a child who is read to and spoken to will acquire a large vocabulary, a child who is immersed in rich musical experiences from a young age will develop the potential to be successful in music. Often, when I speak to adults about my profession as a music teacher, they say "Oh, I can't sing at all.", or "I'd never be able to play an instrument." This makes me so sad, because every person is capable of participating in music, and having early exposure to music education breaks down these barriers. Not all of my students will go on to play in major symphony orchestras, but I hope all of them will feel like they can sing songs with their children.

Music education should be inclusive and accessible to all students. It should not be exclusive and reserved only for families who can afford private music lessons. I have the joy of watching students benefit from music education every day. There is nothing like the joyful sound of children's voices raised in song, and it becomes even more exciting when they are able to identify the meter, tonality, and form of each song they're singing. Every time I help a student play "Hot Cross Buns" on any instrument, I am stunned by the joy on the students' faces at the moment they realize that they can take this piece of wood or metal and create music with it. All children should have the opportunity to have such experiences, and to reap all the rewards that musical study can provide.