

The Benefits of Incorporating Music
in the Classroom

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Chapter I

Abstract

The title of this research project is, “The Benefits of Incorporating Music in the Classroom”. This project will explore the advantages of employing music in all classrooms. The topics that will be discussed are: “The Mozart Effect”, classroom management, eliminating disruptions and behavior problems, and finally using music in foreign language classrooms. All of the topics to be explored can apply to current and future educators. Music is a tool that is often overlooked, however it has many proven benefits and connections to the body, brain and learning that are important and can aid in academic achievement.

During research for this project, many different studies and publications proved to be valuable in the investigation. The primary sources for this project are: “The Role of Music in Classroom Management” by Mary F. Jackson and Donna M. Joyce., “Can the use of Background Music Improve the Behavior and Academic Performance of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties?” by Susan Hallam and John Price and Making it Happen: From Interactive to Participatory Language Teaching by Patricia Richard-Amato. These sources provided thorough insight into the topics that were chosen for the project. Hallam and Price conducted a study of which the findings were particularly pertinent to using music to minimize poor classroom behaviors. The book by Patricia Richard-Amato served as the source for using music in conjunction with foreign language learning. This book provided specific examples and the rationale of why music was an effective strategy to use in foreign language classrooms. The article, “The Role of Music in Classroom Management” provided thoughts regarding why music should be a

primary tool in developing a strong sense of management within the classroom and how it affects the students.

The reader of this project can expect to learn about the above stated topics. There are research findings and professional comments that support the ideas stated and explored within this project.

Chapter II

The “Mozart Effect”

The “Mozart Effect” is the result of research findings. A study was done in which thirty-six college students listened to a Mozart sonata for ten minutes. After listening to the music, the participants scored higher on spatial-temporal tasks, as measured by the Stanford-Binet IQ test.¹ This research suggests that Mozart’s music has positive effects on the brain and its functions.

While the above study focused on adults, Wanda Routier discusses the “Mozart Effect for Children”. Routier discusses the impact that Mozart’s music has on the brain and learning. Her findings are particularly interesting for educators because this knowledge can help teachers incorporate music into their lessons to achieve a higher quality of learning.

There is a connection between music and the brain. . “Music’s physical vibrations, organized patterns, engaging rhythms, and subtle vibrations interact with the mind and body in many ways, naturally altering the brain in a manner that one-

¹ Rauscher, Francis H., “Can Music Instruction Affect Children’s Cognitive Development?” ERIC Digest. Sept. 2003: 3.

dimensional rote learning cannot.”² When children listen to Mozart’s music, “it temporarily heightens spatial awareness and intelligence.”³ The “Mozart Effect for Children” shows that when listening to Mozart’s music there is an increase in concentration and speech abilities, an improvement in reading and language skills of those who listen to music regularly or receive music instruction, and evidence that SAT scores are much higher in students who sing or play an instrument. In addition, music is a set of processes and patterns. By listening to or playing music regularly it aids in the development of the processes and patterns of the brain. “The Mozart Effect for Children” shows a connection between music and reading, writing, memorization ability and mathematical skills.

The evidence that music impacts the body and learning suggests that music should be included in classrooms. Music can be included in any classroom, regardless of grade level or subject matter. The power that music can have on learners is extensive; it can benefit students and lead them to higher achievement and development.

The Effects of Music on Classroom Management

Classroom Management can be defined as, “all of the things that a teacher does to organize students, space, time and materials so that instruction in content and student learning can take place.”⁴ Effective classroom management is vital to the success of any

² Routier, Wanda J., Read Me a Song: Teaching Reading Using Picture Book Songs. (Orlando: International Reading Association, 2003).

³ Routier

⁴ Jackson, Mary F., and Joyce, Donna M. The Role of Music in Classroom Management. (New York: New York University, 2003) 3.

classroom, regardless of the grade level. Classroom management is the most difficult skill to master and it is also the area that teachers worry about the most. Teachers are less concerned with teaching their subject matter in an engaging way, than they are effectively organizing and maintaining order in the classroom. Classroom management is an extensive area of teaching because it “touches every aspect of the learning and teaching process”.⁵ There are numerous strategies that have been proven effective in improving classroom management. One of the most effective methods to increase attention and lower behavior problems is the inclusion of music in the classroom and lessons.

Music is a tool that can be used to help teachers achieve effective and efficient classroom management. Unfortunately, music is often overlooked because there are limitations on funding; however it is a tool that can help teachers maintain a positive and productive environment. The calming effects of music have positive effects on the students when it is introduced into the classroom. Creating a classroom that has low anxiety and stress levels is important to classroom management. Music can help to keep the levels of tension and stress to a minimum. When music is played in the classroom it can help to change the mood. Specific types of music can be played to illicit the desired mood. Susan Hallam and John Price found that, “music has come to be considered as lying on a continuum from highly stimulating and invigorating to soothing or calming.”⁶

⁵ Jackson, 3

⁶ Hallam, Susan, and Price, John. “Can the use of Background Music Improve the Behavior and Academic Performance of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties?” British Journal of Special Education 25.2 (1998):88.

Calming music can be played when the mood is too intense, and if the students are lagging a more upbeat genre of music can be implemented to increase their energy.

There is a proven connection between music and the brain. Research findings indicate that, “both hemispheres of the brain are engaged when music is played.”⁷ The type of music also affects the brain. In a study conducted by Susan Hallam and John Price, it was found that certain frequencies and combinations of sounds stimulate certain parts of the brain, which produce biochemical changes, and in turn produce calming effects on the students.⁸

Music has the power to keep students engaged and reduce discipline problems within the classroom. The inclusion of music in lessons tends to enrich the material and provide more meaning to the lesson. When the learners are more engaged and interested in the lesson, they will stay focused for longer and retain more information. The students will not have as many discipline problems when they are engaged. The learners will be focused on the lesson and disruptions will simply subside. Mary Jackson and Donna Joyce believe that, “if we want to maintain positive classroom management then music can help by making the day more alive and interesting, which in turn leads to increased learning and decreased discipline problems.”⁹ Music can aid teachers in managing their classrooms so that learning of the highest quality can take place.

⁷ Jackson, 6

⁸ Hallam, 88

⁹ Jackson, 6

Using Music to Limit Behavior Problems and Increase Performance

Using background music as a tool to limit disruptions and behavior problems is an effective strategy. Hallam and Price conducted a study in which they observed a classroom without background music and then they observed the same classroom with background music.¹⁰ The results indicated that the children were the most productive when the background music was playing. Before the introduction of background music, there were many occurrences of disruptive behaviors, which included: tantrums, crying, verbal and physical aggression and over-activity. However, when the music was playing, the students became noticeably more calm and cooperative. The research results found that when the music was playing “there were significant changes in body temperature, blood pressure, breathing rate, and pulse rate.”¹¹ The body had a physiological response to the music which triggered the students to calm down.

The results of the study expanded beyond the physiological responses to music. The effects of the background music were measured in the performance of the students. There was a noticeable improvement in cooperation and aggression was reduced. In addition, reading comprehension and math test scores improved. The extent to which the students improved varied, however the use of background music showed some degree of improvement in all students. The use of background music did not show any negative effects on the learners’ performance.

Hallam and Price found that music was an effective method to lower behavior problems and increase performance because disruptive students tend to seek constant

¹⁰Hallam, 88

¹¹ Hallam, 88

stimulus.¹² The background music provided the stimulus that they were seeking, and allowed them to concentrate on the task. They also found that instrumental music was the most effective. Music with vocal accompaniment seemed to provide too much stimulus to the students.

Music and Foreign Language Acquisition

Learning a second language can be a stressful and difficult process. There are many techniques and strategies that foreign language teachers use in their classrooms to aid in the acquisition of the second language. Creating an environment that has a low affective-filter, meaning minimal stress and non-threatening, is essential for second language learning to take place. In addition, second language learners need devices to engage them and allow for retention of the second language. Music is a common technique used by foreign language teachers because it has many benefits that apply to the foreign language classroom.

According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, input must be comprehensible for language learners to retain the information. Within his Input Hypothesis, Krashen developed the "Monitor Model" which offers five hypotheses regarding language learning. The fourth hypothesis deals with comprehensible input. The hypothesis states, "Acquisition occurs only when learners receive optimal comprehensible input that is interesting, a little beyond their current level of competence ($i + 1$)..."¹³ This means that the level of linguistic content that the students receive must be at their level or slightly

¹²Hallam, 89

¹³ Shrum, Judith L., and Glisan, Eileen W. Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction. 2nd ed. (Boston: Thomson Heinle, 2000) 3.

above in order for learning to take place. Chunking, or dividing language up into smaller, comprehensible parts, can aid in language learning. “Through word / sound play, many “chunks” of useful language can be incorporated into the learner’s linguistic repertoire at almost any age or proficiency level.”¹⁴

Using music in the foreign language classroom corresponds with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis. Music tends to reduce anxiety and inhibition in second language learners. Learning a new concept through a song or listening to music is less threatening than a lecture or worksheet. Music breaks down barriers and creates an environment that is friendly. There are different ways in which music can be incorporated into the classroom to produce this effect; for example “group singing can lower the walls between people, decreases competitive instincts and build cooperation in its place.”¹⁵ In addition, music corresponds to the portion of the hypothesis that states that input must be meaningful. Music “is a great motivator in that its lyrics are often very meaningful.”¹⁶ Emotions and real-life situations are often at the core of music, this provides for a connection between the second language and the student’s perspective. Creating relevance for the student is necessary for learning to occur.

All levels of language learners can benefit from using music in the foreign language classroom. Vocabulary can be taught through song. Although beginning language learners will not have a large vocabulary foundation to understand all of the words in songs, they will be able to pick out familiar words. Creating an input that is

¹⁴ Richard-Amato, Patricia A. Making it Happen: From Interactive to Participatory Language Teaching. 3rd ed. (New York: Longman, 2003) 199.

¹⁵ Jackson, 7

¹⁶ Richard-Amato 202

slightly above their current level will create a sense of curiosity and inspire motivation to learn what the new words mean. Using music in the language classroom also fosters participation. The students are often eager to learn the words to the new song and participate in classroom activity. Creativity and critical thinking in the foreign language is also achieved when song is implemented into second language instruction. More advanced students can interpret the meaning of the song or create their own stanza to the song.

Chants are a popular tool in foreign language classrooms. Carolyn Graham developed many of the chants that are used in classrooms today.¹⁷ Chants can be used in the classroom to “expose students to natural intonation patterns and idiomatic expressions”.¹⁸ Chants provide for redundancy and repetition. Through constant revision of grammar and vocabulary, students will begin to store them in long term memory. Pronunciation of the second language is also emphasized in chants. When using a chant in instruction, Patricia Richard-Amato found that, “it unnecessary to stop and correct students’ pronunciation.”¹⁹ Students seem to acquire the correct pronunciation through listening and repetition. Another benefit of chant is that they can help students to remember and internalize patterns. In foreign languages there are many patterns to be learned and memorized, thus a memory device is useful. Chants serve this purpose in the foreign language classroom. Rhyme and rhythm allow the students to remember the chant and therefore remember the grammatical or cultural implication of the chant.

¹⁷ Richard-Amato, 198

¹⁸ Richard-Amato, 199

¹⁹ Richard-Amato, 200

Culture is a large part of the curriculum in a foreign language classroom. Not only are students learning how to form and create language, they are learning about the culture and people who use the language. Cultural awareness is important in any foreign language classroom. Teaching culture can be difficult because it is nearly impossible to travel to specific countries on a daily basis, however “music, if used correctly by the teacher can help teach about cultural awareness and values.”²⁰ Chants teach a lot about culture because they are often in dialogue form. “Students learn the cultural rules of turn-taking and appropriate ways to communicate specific need in a variety of situations.”²¹ After all, “no culture on this planet is without music.”²² Since every culture has a form of music, it should be included into the foreign language curriculum and used as tool to help students remember linguistic structure.

Chapter III

Summary and Conclusions

In conclusion, this project has explored and discussed various ways and reasons that music can be included into the classroom to make the learning experience more effective and enjoyable.

The benefits of music in the classroom are numerous, however some of the principle advantages were discussed in depth. The “Mozart Effect” provides adequate findings to support the idea that music affects how the brain operates and carries out

²⁰Jackson, 7

²¹ Richard-Amato, 200

²²Richard-Amato, 200

processes. Music can be used to nurture students and lead them to their highest potential as a learner. Music can lower the number of disturbances created by students because the inclusion of music keeps them engaged more of the time. Also, research has shown that students learn better and cooperate with each other more when there is music playing in the background while they are completing a task. Students have higher test scores when music is included in instruction because they are more involved and engaged in the lesson; therefore they are retaining more knowledge. The power of music in foreign language classrooms is invaluable. Chants and songs are used to serve as chunks of comprehensible input so that students can understand, create relevancy and retain the second language content.

Music can be used and introduced into any classroom because it serves as a resource for the teacher to gain a sense of effective classroom management, it is a tool to raise scores and it can be used to learn a second language. The capabilities of music are important in the realm of education and learning. It is important not to overlook the benefits of regularly using music in the classroom.

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