

9 Practical Tips for Integrating Music in the General Classroom

Brianna Wilson

St. Bonaventure University

9 Practical Tips for Integrating Music in the General Classroom

- 1. Integrate music with academic lessons:** Students have a lot of academic content that they are asked to process and retain during their educational years. Music can be a primer and carrier of that information, as well as an engaging and positive learning experience for students. It can promote content-specific learning as well as developmental objectives through fine and gross motor skills when instruments or movement are involved.
- 2. Begin classroom music rituals:** Music has the potential to encourage positive learning environments through the impact music has on emotion. Teachers should consider incorporating classroom rituals that include music and inspire pleasant emotions. “Encourage participation rituals such as a class applause when learners contribute or present, closing rituals with songs, affirmations, discussion, journal writing, cheers, self-assessment, gestures, etc.” (Jensen, 2000, p. 204). Songs and cheers include musical aspects of melody and/or rhythm that can positively impact students’ emotion in the classroom so they are comfortable, supported and motivated to learn.
- 3. Create piggyback songs:** Some of the most helpful songs used in the classroom are those that are considered “piggyback” songs. The “ABC Song” exemplifies how another song, in this case “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” (a song composed by Mozart), can use a familiar melody with new content related words to aid student learning (Wolfe, 2001, p. 165). When students are already familiar with a melody they are able to simply tag new content to that melody to aid memorization. This builds on prior knowledge and creates additional neural connections. When students have multiple ways of retrieving information from memory they are more likely to retain it in their long term memory. Giving students a song to remember content with simply creates one more connection.

- 4. Use commercial resources:** There are a variety of commercial resources available that educators can use to integrate music in the classroom (Wolfe, 2001, p. 168). Among these are songs, jingles and raps that can be found digitally or on CD. Sheet music can also generally be found, some free and some for purchase, online. There is an ample volume of music material that's obtainable. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, it's important just to use it!
- 5. Consider music volume:** Have you ever heard music that is so soft that it is barely audible to you and can cause frustration because it can't be fully heard or understood? Have you ever heard music that is extremely loud and makes you uncomfortable? "When using music, be gentle on your students' ears. Adjust volume levels slowly, and never go over what you have found to be a comfortable level for all of your students" (Rogers, Ludington, & Graham, 1999, p. 112). Additionally, make sure that when integrating music it can be fully heard by students. If the students can't hear a song that is supposed to help with content understanding, then the purpose of music integration is lost. Be mindful of music volume in the classroom.
- 6. Review the music beforehand:** This may seem obvious, but teachers are responsible for creating developmentally appropriate lessons. "Listen to music selections carefully before playing in class; choose them purposefully and exclude any that are not gentle on the nerves. Do not use selections where lyrics are questionable or not easily interpreted" (Jensen, 2000, p. 70). If teachers are looking to integrate music, especially music from today's age, checking the music for appropriate lyrics is a general rule of housekeeping.
- 7. Explain music use to students:** A basic primer for listening in the classroom is to explain to students that they have a purpose for listening. This rule of thumb can also be

applied to music integration. “Be certain to explain to your students why you are using music in the classroom” (Rogers, Ludington, & Graham, 1999, p. 112). When students know that they should be listening to the music for a certain purpose (memorization, recall, later discussion, etc.) students are able to focus their attention on the music for such content-related purposes.

8. Listen to and involve students: Each student is a valued addition to the classroom.

When teachers recognize each student as such, then individuals are heard. “In dealing with differences, preferences, and complaints, do not disregard anyone’s opinion” (Jensen, 2000, p. 70). This is a practical aspect of creating accommodations in an educational setting. Students receive particular benefits from music in differing ways; teachers should be conscious of these learning preferences and differences in order to meet student needs must accurately and effectively.

9. Fear not: It’s not about having an impressive singing voice or extraordinary skills playing instruments. Music integration is done for the benefit of students and there are a variety of music resources available. The internet can be extremely useful in finding songs for download, music videos, sheet music, etc. Also, know that you do not have to do music integration on your own! Consult teachers in your school, through teacher discussion forums and through other professional conversations to make this possible for the benefit of student learning.

Questions? Check out www.CORSuccess.com© or contact Brianna Wilson at bwilson@corsuccess.com.

References

- Jensen, E. (2000). *Brain-based learning*. San Diego, CA: The Brain Store.
- Rogers, S., Ludington, J., & Graham, S. (1999). *Motivation and learning: A teacher's guide to building excitement for learning & igniting the drive for quality*. Evergreen, CO: Peak Learning Systems.
- Wolfe, P. (2001). *Brain matters: Translating research into classroom practice*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.