

The Benefits of Background Music in Elementary Classrooms

Background music can benefit the elementary classroom.

The rhythms, chants, songs and riddles of young children everywhere are a testament to the power of music in their lives. Many believe that music classes are vital to a child's development, even though music programs continue to struggle to survive amidst budget cuts to non-core subjects. But even background music in an elementary school classroom can have many benefits for the child's psychological, social and academic development.

Time on Task Increases

Both children and adults often experience the feeling that they are more focused on an activity when they can listen to music while doing it. Research has shown that there is validity to this assumption. San Diego State University professor Yiftach Levy reported that several studies have shown that "on-task-performance," or OTP, increases when easy-listening music is played in the background during a class. In one study, researchers took data in 42 class sessions and found a "significant increase in OTP for the males in the classroom, and for the class as a whole." The increase was lower for females but still statistically higher than without the background music.

Behavior Improves

Studies on students with emotional and behavioral difficulties have shown that background music, specifically Mozart compositions, created a "significant drop" in disruptive behavior in the classroom, according to teacher and educational researcher Anne Savan. Savan noted that not only did coordination and task-completion improve, but also, the students' "concentration span lasted throughout the 40-minute lessons and there was no attention-seeking behavior." The background music was an advantage in the classroom because it produced changes in the students' physiological state (blood pressure, body temperature, and pulse rate) that produced "an improvement in coordination." Aggressive and disruptive behavior, Savan notes, often "results from frustration due to lack of coordination." Thus, improvements in coordination, which the music evoked, can also improve behavior patterns.

Performance Increases

In many different classroom settings, background music has been shown to be a benefit, increasing performance in such areas as reading comprehension and math scores. Teacher and author Audrey Merrell has studied background music's use in classrooms and reported music as creating "some degree of improvement in all students," and that it increased performance "because disruptive students tend to seek constant stimulus, and the music "provided the stimulus that they were seeking." With music, students can improve their concentration so that, according to Chris Brewer, author of "Music and Learning," "large amounts of content information can be processed and learned." With that processing and improved learning, performance increases.