

Music for Every Classroom: Make a Music Center

by Elizabeth M. Peterson

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Centers can be a vital part of any classroom. We use them for individual exploration, group station work and free time. Their purposes cover very many goals: team work, curriculum enhancement, skill practice and constructive play. Classrooms have all kinds of centers: writing centers, art centers, math centers, science centers, and reading centers. Now, as a new school year begins, it's time to make sure there's a music center in your room too.

Why Have a Music Center?

Why not? Music plays a large role in all our students' lives. By giving them an option to explore things at a music center, you are reinforcing the importance of music in their life. Students hear music on the radio, on TV, at the movies, during athletic events and of course you will have students who take music lessons. This may be a place for a student to develop skills they already have or it may be a place for a students to experiment with something brand new.

What Goes in a Music Center?

Instruments – Any small instrument can go here. Percussion instruments are fun to keep at the music center and they are easy to use. These instruments could include little drums, tambourines, maracas, and those small egg shakers (which are also relatively quiet instruments.) You can also have other instruments such as recorders or other small or toy wind instruments. If you do have these available, you will need to teach the students to clean them after each use.

Keyboards – Keyboards are ALWAYS a winner at a music center no matter what kind, how small or how old they are. Students of all ages love experimenting with the different sounds made on an electric keyboard. The biggest bonus with a keyboard is that they usually they come with a headphone jack, which means it becomes a silent instrument.

Other Musical Toys – There are all kinds of musical toys out there that have a place at your music center. Some toys make different rhythms, others play familiar songs. Keep your eyes peeled for some fun, age appropriate toys when you take your next trip to the toy store or are cleaning out your closet!

Books and Other Musical Literature – There have been many great music picture books published lately. These books range from stories that talk about the power of music in people's lives to biographies about famous composers. They are not hard to find either! Trips to a local bookstore can have you finding many musical books on display. They all have a wonderful message to them just like the study of music: teamwork, tenacity, acceptance and self-expression, to name a few. These stories are great for independent reading, shared reading and read-alouds.

As for other musical literature- think lyrics and poetry! Put copies of familiar song lyrics and poetry collections at this center. You may use anything from Nursery Rhyme books

to record, tape and CD liner notes. Also, find some modern song lyrics from the internet that your students may know. These are always fun for students to find in the classroom...just check them for content before adding them to the mix!

Music Writing Tools – Staff paper and pencils are a must at a music center whether students know how to write music correctly or not. They can practice things they have learned in music class or just experiment a little...like they used to do before they learned how to write letters. There are always a few students who take private instrumental lessons who can practice and demonstrate their knowledge. If you do not have any staff paper, make some of your own. Just draw sets of five lines across a piece of paper (or do it on your computer.) Other music writing tools may include: a piece of laminated paper with a large staff printed on it accompanied by some wipe-off markers, magnetic music notes or magnetic poetry to write song lyrics.

Listening Station – Have a small listening station at your center. You may choose to have a radio, or a tape or CD player available for students to use as well as a small collection of tapes and/or CDs to play. Be sure to use tapes or CDs you don't mind ruining...just in case. Headphones are a must for a small listening center. Have each student bring in their own set of headphones stored in a zip-lock bag and labeled with their name. That way you will not have to worry about sharing and cleaning headphones.

Recording Devices – Students always enjoy recording themselves talking, singing or playing and then listening to their creations. Inexpensive toy recorders are perfect for this and they are durable, too! The uses for a recorder can also extend into other areas of the curriculum: reading help, story retelling, speech help (diction), or an alternative to a study sheet.

What About the Noise?

This is a very valid question. Of course, we would expect to have instruments at a music center, but here is a hint to keep things quiet. Put any “noisy” articles in a box kept at the center. You can label it “music makers” or put a sign on it that says something like, “Please ask to take these music makers out.” Then, when it is an inappropriate time to use them, (like while others are in reading groups or doing independent work,) the music makers stay inside the box. When the time comes where making music is allowed, like during indoor recess, let your students try out the sounds!

Task Ideas

Just like in other centers, you may want to have free-exploration or you may want constructive tasks from which students may choose. Here are a few task ideas you can put on index cards and keep at your music center:

- Make a small rhythm band! You and a friend each play a rhythm instrument while someone else sings a familiar song. You must play the entire way through the song.
- Write lyrics that have to do with something you are studying in class. You may want to use a familiar tune like *Mary Had a Little Lamb* or *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* or you can make up your own. Be sure to perform it for the class. [You (the teacher)

should put down a few ideas from which to pick. For example, write lyrics that go with how a certain character in a book felt or lyrics that help to learn math or science concepts.]

- Play “Musical Math!” You and your partner decide if you will add, subtract, divide or multiply. One person beats out two numbers on a rhythm instrument, the other person beats out the answer. For example, the first person will beat 2 times on a drum, pause and beat 2 more times. If you have decided to add, then the second person will respond by shaking the maracas 4 times.
- Read a picture book from this music center with a friend. Discuss what the problem is in the story and how the main character solved it.
- Retell one of your favorite stories using some of the instruments for sound effects. Practice this with your friends and then record your final retelling on a tape. Play it for the class.
- Write a composition without using conventional music symbols. Make up your own sounds and symbols to go with them. Then arrange the symbols in a pattern for someone else to perform.

For example: XXX * * sh~~~

Key: X = clap, * = snap your fingers,
sh~~~ = shushing sound

A center should be a place where students can **experiment**, be **creative** and be **constructive**. Allowing them to work at a music center is a great way to get their creative juices flowing. So, don't waste another moment, make your room music friendly with your new Music Center!