

Music for Every Classroom: Six Things Music Does

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A musical education has so many benefits. There are so many things that music can do for your children and students. Encouraging your students to listen to music and create music is a great gift that will last a long time. Here is a list of six things music can do for your students. There are also examples of how to implement these ideas into your classroom.

1. Motivates

Music is a natural motivator. Some students are motivated by music, some are motivated to create music. Have you ever used music to pump you up or create a mood? Using recorded music can motivate you to do well or set an atmosphere. Teachers have been known to play relevant music during a unit of study. A Social Studies teacher I know plays music from the countries her students' study as they do projects from each culture. Others play popular music at the beginning of the day while students come into their classrooms and get ready while others use certain music to get their students into a groove of working on various projects.

Creating music can also be motivating. Students love making noise on various percussion instruments while others like to show off their talents from private instrumental or vocal study. These experiences can be turned into motivating opportunities to integrate curriculum such as writing. If you use music as a motivator, your students will be excited to do their best.

2. Inspires

A step past motivation is inspiration. Music has been known to inspire people to do great things. When I taught in a second grade classroom, I would invite my students to be inspired by music by allowing them time to listen to music and then do something creative. Some students would create visual art, some would present a dramatic representation of the music while others would be inspired to write a short story. These outlets of interpretation led students to be themselves and express their ideas. Later, we would use these inspired opportunities to integrate curriculum. For example, the visual art would become an exercise in listing adjectives and verbs, the dramatic play would be a way to practice the use of quotation marks and the short story would be the beginning of the writing process.

Whether or not the integration of curriculum and standards are your intent, allowing students to be inspired by music (or any art for that matter) can be a way to see the individuality in your students. Their talents will shine through.

3. Moves us Physically

Listening to music can really move us and so many young people (and old) love to move to music. Movement and dance can be such a release, a healthy way to

get out aggressions, relax and have some plain old fun. In the middle of the day, when your students look a little tired, play some music and have them move!

Using recorded music, have students move as the music inspires them to move. Have them really listen to the qualities of the music: Is it soft or loud? Slow or fast? What is the emotion of the song? How can you move that way?

If you don't have a CD player in your room, the grab two rulers and make your own rhythm to move to. Have the students do different movements to the rhythm such as swaying side to side or moving up and down, clapping, stomping, or making motions to the rhythm such as sawing or chopping movements. Moving to music can re-energize you and your students.

4. Moves us Emotionally

Music helps us to feel many emotions. We can cry when a sad song comes on the radio or get excited when a favorite is heard. Our emotions run free when we listen to and experience music. There is music that we can relate to, with or without lyrics.

Music is said to be the universal language because it can relay a part of the human spirit that words cannot. Students that may have a hard time explaining how they feel may be able to communicate it with an instrument or by playing a recorded song. Giving students a chance to share this with you can be eye opening and exciting. You can gain a glance into someone that you would not normally see.

Drumming circles may be loud at times, but it can be a lot of fun. Without even getting into the technical part of drumming, you can share some great experiences with your students just by experimenting with various percussion instruments. In the past, to get students used to the new instruments they have in their hands, we have done circle sweeps where each person contributes one after another around the circle. These circle sweeps, however aren't done by talking, but by playing. I will ask a question like, "How do you feel today?" and then the students will start their sweep. Just by the way students play, you gain an understanding of how they are doing. Their emotions will be revealed by a 10 second improvisation on an instrument. You can tell who is excited, tired, upset or happy simply by how they play. It is also helpful because students who may have a hard time verbalizing their emotions feel more secure when an inanimate object talks for them. This is a great way to gather together after recess in order to regroup for the afternoon or a great way to end each day to see how students feel about their day.

5. Stimulates the Brain

There have been countless studies that prove the power of a musical education. Scientific research proves that music is very beneficial to students of all ages. It is said to help your brain grow if started at an early age, to improve test scores and help students in their study of math and science.

6. Builds Character

There are so many ways that music builds character. It instills pride, commitment, self-discipline and team work, to name a few virtues. Students who study music take pride in their hard work. Musical study is not easy and becoming “good” does not happen over night. A music student must be committed to their study by practicing every day. This is not always an easy task and it takes a great deal of self-discipline. Often the study of music has its reward in the form of a performance. Sometimes these performances are solo and other times they are in some sort of ensemble. Students who belong to musical groups, such as a school band, orchestra or chorus must work as a team. If they don't the whole group will suffer.

I coach basketball in the winter, and the team that plays on the court is very similar to the team that practices for a performance. My chorus has regular rehearsals that are mandatory and demanding. Commitment is key. We need all singers to attend rehearsals or else we are not playing our best game. The singers are expected to practice their own vocal skills as well as their skills in working together to make a song sound harmonious. Our big game as a chorus is the concert that is held at the end of the season. It is here that students are able to show people how their hard work and self-discipline has paid off.

There are many benefits to integrating music into your classroom. And you don't have to be a musician to do it. Music is something with which students love to experiment,