

ARTinED online: A new approach to education using the arts



e-ARTinED Background Report Using Music To Teach Curricular Subjects

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Introduction

The overall definition of music in the Western world is changing. Increasing research in the last decades is expanding the knowledge of the meanings and domains of music.

For instance, there has been an explosive interest in music psychology and the discipline has expanded and diversified into several sub-disciplines.

We might get a little closer to the concept found in the ancient Indian tradition for which music is everything that resonate within us when singing voices or playing music instruments remind us of it.



Nevertheless, music is a fundamental channel of communication for people to share emotions, intentions and meanings.

Music is also at the essence of humans' first interactions. The little cries of a baby, the glissando of his/her voice, the rhythms that s/he creates by using repetitive beatings are used to connect to the world.



Adults usually respond freely, without worrying if their voice is good enough for an aesthetical appreciation. What counts is a 'musical communication' with the babies. A good example is the familiar and universal game of peep-bo.

The naturalness of music communication should be cultivated also later as we should not stop this amazing process. We should use it especially to teach and learn, to transfer contents, to create meanings, to inspire creative problem-solving processes.



Music can help to retain what has been learnt

Many have the experience of remembering the exact wording of the lyrics of songs that they learnt in the past and this happens because music was involved in the learning process.

Claudia Cornett (2011) mentions an interesting example of applying the retaining power of music. This is about a math teacher who works in one of the poorest school districts in California.

He noticed that his students did not pay attention, do assigned work, or remember the simplest formula, but they could recite every word of hip-hop songs, so he wrote a song about adding and subtracting decimals.



After one week, students' test scores dramatically improved.

He now has composed more than two dozen rap songs and expanded his topics to include teaching classroom routines. What's more, his students now write math raps.

The more educators use music to assist in learning other material, the more quickly and accurately the material will become embedded (Jensen, 2000).



Music and second language learning

Introduce the subject and ask the students: Can we dance that word, that subject? How can we symbolize that subject with our bodies?

The subject can be danced in the normal way, in slow motion, very fast and on different levels. This could be done as individuals or in small groups.



Language and music are important communication systems of human species and very closely connected cognitive domains.

Jentschke (2007) found that the neural correlates of syntactic processing in music and language strongly overlap. Research confirmed a strong learning facilitation of song compared to speech.

In classroom, music acts as a tool for learning, enhances social harmony and motivation force.



Teachers' music training

Teachers can start using music in classroom by being led by their own passion and interest for music. They do not need to have a specific music training to propose a music listening to their students or to scaffold them while they create their songs.

Teachers should remember how natural for human beings the act of singing is.

How many activities can arouse such a unifying feeling than singing together?



Students will not mind if the teacher does not have a fine singing voice, if genuine enthusiasm leads the activity. Making the effort to sing with students builds relationship and community - staples for discipline. With experience and commitment to have music to teach curricular subjects, all teachers can learn to sing without embarrassment, without being limited by the Western notion that only the talented should sing out.



Those teachers who feel the wish and the need to expand their music knowledge and practice have many ways to fulfil this aspiration, i.e. inviting a music expert; experiencing a music teaching method.

The following methods are among the most effective:

- Willhems
- Dalcroze
- Kodaly
- Orff



Using music listening

The idea is to include music listening in classroom for a variety of purposes. A CD player or a computer and good loudspeakers for sound reproduction are needed.

Select music that you think may be useful for your lesson.

For instance, you may want to let your students experience an historical period through the music that was composed during that time, or you may want to make a geography lesson memorable by playing traditional music related to a country.



You can use music to enhance the feeling and understanding of a specific context of social studies, i.e. you can use gypsy music when teaching about Roma communities across Europe. When you play the music in your classroom, try and ask your students about their impressions, feelings, thoughts about it.



Music listening can be useful to highlight the grammar elements that you need to teach. This can be done by using a song with examples of them included in the lyrics.

The more you will use music, the more you will expand your own ideas and ways to use it.



Using music making

Children innately want and need to create, explore and imitate sounds. They enjoy activities involving improvising and organizing sounds into songs and music. Teachers can capitalize on the intrinsic motivational power of music and combine meaningful music experiences with curricular areas.



They might select a beautiful song representative of an historical period or episode, or one celebrating nature in a particular geographical area and ask the children to sing it together. Choirs are an excellent experience to have in a classroom.



Teachers can use familiar songs and ask students to replace the lyrics by using curricular concepts or can use rhythmic games to explain math concepts.

To further expand music making with students, it would be appropriate to use simple music instruments and children can even build them.

As with music listening, applying music making in teaching curricular subjects can be an extremely varied, interesting, challenging, enjoyable addition to any traditional teaching method.



Pactical examples of activities on using music to teach curricular subjects are available in the “e-ARTinED Educational Programme for teachers, trainers and artists”



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