

On a Brighter Note:
Students' Responses to the
Incorporation of Music in the
Classroom

Maureen Carney
Corl Street Elementary School Intern
1st Grade
mlc297@psu.edu

Inquiry Conference
May 7, 2005

Background Information

My Teaching Context

The twenty-one students in my classroom make our classroom an extraordinary community. Of my twenty-one students, there are 12 girls and 9 boys. Three students speak English as a Second Language, including two native Germans and one American-born Russian. One student lived in Qatar, Iraq prior to moving to State College in August. A few others have close family ties to other countries, including France, India, and Denmark.

The make-up of my class is also diverse in personality. Three of my boys thoroughly enjoy one another's company, though easily distract one another during instructional and non-instructional times. Recently, a clique of girls has been forming who can also become easily distracted by one another, though not as much as the boys. My class gets along rather well with each other, although a couple students have experienced difficulty in making friends, especially at the beginning of the year.

A few of my students have trouble keeping their hands to themselves. Others like to be chatty. Many of my students are hard workers though, and I believe, have high expectations for themselves. A few of my students like to be independent at times to the point of being stubborn. Most of my students are amiable and easy-going.

Several of my students are from musically-inclined backgrounds and are learning to play different instruments such as the piano and violin. Many of the students in my class reflect a personal interest in music. Some of their parents are highly involved in the music environment of State College.

How My Inquiry Topic Developed

Music has always played a major role for me in my life; I played clarinet in band, took piano through elementary school and voice lessons through middle and high school,

sang in school and church choirs, and participated in performing a musical every summer with a local theater group. Through my own experiences with music, I feel that music has the power to affect listeners' moods, emotions, and energy levels.

Prior to having me as her intern, my mentor rarely used music in her classroom. If she did, it was playing a tape with unit-related songs. Because I feel I am musically oriented and inclined, I was interested to see how students would respond to more music being played in our classroom. I also wanted to find ways to make the classroom environment more conducive to focusing students' attention to the activities taking place.

I chose to do my inquiry on the use of music in the classroom because I feel that music is an ever-present entity of the world around us. People are exposed to music daily through television, movies, the radio, and the internet. Everyone in our culture is exposed to music in some aspect, whether they are aware of it or not, through these mediums and others. In these arenas, music is conducive to setting the moods and emotions that its producers want listeners to experience. I wondered that if music could influence people through these mediums, could it influence first grade students in an elementary classroom setting?

I would like to note to the readers before they continue reading, that in this paper, when I refer to the term "music" I mean to encompass anything that incorporates musical instruments and rhythm patterns. More specifically, I consider the use of clapping or snapping a pattern which students then repeat to get students' attention, a musical technique for classroom management.

Research

After spending several hours over a couple of days searching for material that directly related to my inquiry topic, I found many articles on music education, how music education can be incorporated into regular classroom instruction, and how music affects students with special needs, but very little on how the presence of music in a regular

classroom setting affects non-special needs students' learning, behavior, and engagement. In reviewing some of these articles relating to music and special needs students, I was able to find bits and pieces on how music can influence children.

In researching my topic, I found that music plays a meaningful role in engaging students in activities, positively affecting students' behavior, and providing enhanced learning opportunities. Before examining these aspects individually, the way in which music can affect a person's body physiologically should be examined in order to better understand the way in which music can influence a person psychologically.

In a study of children with emotional and behavioral problems and how background music affected their physical state, the researchers found that "there were significant changes in body temperature, blood pressure, breathing rate, and pulse rate. [The researcher] suggests that certain frequencies, or combinations of sounds, may stimulate parts of the brain to produce a calming effect on the pupils" (Hallam 88). Other studies, found that listening to music causes the body to release endorphins, causing feelings of happiness and energy in people (Humpal and Wolf 104). Since music can affect a person's physiological and emotional state, it is likely that music can also have a strong affect in a person's psychological state.

As mentioned in the quote by Hallam in the preceding paragraph, music has a calming effect on children and can encourage them to be engaged and on-task according to various research studies. Students, especially those with hyperactive tendencies, can move into a calm state when background music is initially presented to them. It is in the initial exposure to background music that students in a regular classroom setting have been found to be most productive (Hallam 88). "Music acts as a catalyst to calm listeners, improve special perceptions, and encourage focused, clear thinking" (Humpal and Wolf 104).

Despite these positive findings, people often wonder whether music actually promotes off-task behavior rather than on-task behavior. This is a valid concern. Depending on what kind of music is present, off-task behavior may result. It has been found that instrumental music promoted more engaging behavior than did vocal music. In one study, it was found that students with emotional and behavioral difficulties still talked while they did their work rather than just talking instead of working (Hallam and Price 90). Another study examining the effects of background music on ADHD students found that listening to music was much more beneficial for them than listening to speech or silence as compared to non-ADHD students (Abikoff, H., Courtney, M., Szeibel, P., & Koplewicz, H. 238).

Research shows that off-task behavior occurs when children (particularly ADHD children) are under-stimulated by their environment (Abikoff et al 238). Because children are under-stimulated they seek out stimulation in their environment, causing them to become off-task and distracted. They can become a distraction themselves to others. For these students, music did not interfere with students' on-task behavior and even promoted it.

Other interactions students have had with the music have helped to further our understanding as to how music affects the behavior of students. There are definitely times in the classroom when playing different genres of music is more appropriate than others. The mood that a teacher wants to foster in a classroom needs to be taken into account when deciding on what music selections to play. "The right music at the right time can make [students] less stressed, more relaxed, happier and more productive" (Hallam and Price 88). Again, instrumental music was found to be most beneficial in enhancing student performance and improving behavior, not vocal music (Hallam and Price 88).

On this same study of students with emotional and behavioral difficulties, researchers also noticed that both children and university students were significantly more cooperative

and helpful after they listened to instrumental music as opposed to other types of music or no music (Hallam and Price 88).

Lastly, music has also been shown to influence student learning and performance. It is important to note here that few studies have been done that investigate how music influences the behavior and performance of students in a regular classroom setting (Hallam and Price 88). Music is unique in that it encourages multi-sensory learning to take place as students sing words, learn melodies, and experiment with rhythms and different instruments. Students hear music, feel vibrations, learn new words, and explore movement through dancing to it. In a study of arts integration into a remedial program, researchers found that “as children learn to sing songs and recognize and distinguish melodies, rhythms, and instruments, their listening, auditory, and memory skills improve” (Varnon 325). Across several studies, it has been found that music can have positive results on students’ reading comprehension, silent reading time, learning of multiplication facts, and building of early literature skills.

In conducting my inquiry, I can see how my findings relate to the research I found. I chose to do my research towards the latter end of my inquiry implementation so that my own ideas and perceptions of how I thought music would affect students’ engagement, behavior, and learning might not skew my findings as I tried to make my results match the research.

My Main Wondering

My original wondering was “How does incorporating music in a primary classroom at various times of the day affect students’ quality of work, engagement, and behavior?”

Sub-questions I formed and investigated include the following:

- How does the use of music in the classroom affect students’ ability to stay on-task?
- How do students respond to different kinds of music?

- Is incorporating music more effective at one time of day than another, or more effective in one activity than another?
- Do primary children enjoy making their own music?
- How many ways can music be incorporated into the school day?
- How can music be used in making smooth transitions from one activity to another?

Since I formed my inquiry brief, my main wondering has changed slightly to “How does incorporating music into Kindergarten through 5th grade classrooms affect students’ learning, behavior, and engagement, as well as the teacher’s classroom management across grade levels?” My sub-wonderings mostly remained the same, with only a few minor adjustments.

My Inquiry Plan

Observations in My Classroom

I began carrying out my inquiry by purchasing a CD player along with CD’s to use in my classroom. I also brought in some of my own personal CD’s to use as well. The music I used included: *Paint the Stars: The Best of Enya*, *Sound Bites Volume 1: Nota-Bull Baroque Concertos*, *John Williams: Greatest Hits 1969-1999*, *The Stars at Studio 99 Perform a Tribute to Kenny G*, *Miles Davis: The Jazz Biography*, *Piano Reflections*, and *Rain Forest Symphony No. 2*. In April, I added the soundtracks *Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* to my CD collection after hearing reports from other teachers that students in their classrooms seemed to enjoy these soundtracks. I purchased *Classical Masterpieces: The Best of Mozart* at this time too.

In the beginning of my implementation, I played music in my classroom only during silent reading time in the morning when students first arrived in the classroom and during writing

workshop on days that were non-instructional and students were given time to work on their stories. Later, I began playing music during more activities throughout the day.

Student Surveys

In addition to my observations of students' response to music in the classroom, I also conducted a student survey of students' enjoyment of music. (An example of the survey can be found in the appendix of this work.) Students were asked to draw a happy face or a sad face in response to the following statements:

- *I like listening to music in school.*
- *I listen to music at home a lot.*
- *My parents listen to music at home a lot.*

On the survey, students were also asked to write during which activities they enjoyed listening to music the most and why, as well as during which activities they did not like listening music to and why.

I also pasted pictures on the survey that represented specific genres of music that I played for students. Students were to circle their favorite genre and "x" out their least favorite genre.

Teacher Surveys

In addition to my classroom observations and student surveys, I conducted a survey on the teachers' use and implementation of music in their classrooms. (An example of this survey can be found located in the appendix of this work.) Teachers were asked:

1. Do your children listen to music in your classroom?
2. If you incorporate music, what types of music do you play?
3. When do your children listen to music?
4. For which activities is listening to music most effective for your grade level?
5. Do you feel that music can have a calming effect on students' behavior?

6. Do your students enjoy listening to music?
7. Do you think listening to music can help students focus?
8. Do your children ever ask for music to be played during the day?
9. Is there a time of day that playing music is most effective?

All twelve regular classroom teachers in my school who received the survey participated. My mentor completed two surveys – one with me as her intern and one prior to having me as her intern. I analyzed only the survey she completed prior to having me as her intern as I wanted to look at the use of music in the typical classroom environment. As I had already begun collecting data for my inquiry and sharing that data with my mentor, I felt that her responses on the survey based on music in our classroom this year would be skewed.

In order to make the process of filling out the survey simple and quick for teachers, I standardized the survey's format by having teachers check off or circle their responses to each question. This also made my survey analysis easier as well. For question 2, the list of types of music that students listened to included: classical (such as Bach or Vivaldi), unit-related music, contemporary classic (such as John Williams), jazz, world music (such as Enya), and an "other" category where teachers could mark other genres of music that they include in their classroom. For questions 3 and 4, I listed activities students were involved in during the day. These activities included: opening, math, social studies, Writing Workshop, silent reading, science, seatwork, independent seatwork, lunch, language arts, transitions, Book Buddies, indoor recess, dismissal, and "other." The only activity that teachers marked under "other" was cursive writing.

Teaching Through Singing

At the beginning of April, I incorporated music into a science lesson I was doing on sound. We had been discussing sound waves in our *Light and Sound* unit and I rewrote the words to "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" to:

I taught this song to students at the beginning of my lesson to introduce them to the major parts of a ship. As students sang this song, I had them imagine that their classroom was a ship. As they sang they pointed to where the bow, stern, port, and starboard would be if the dry erase board at the front of the room was the bow. Later on in the lesson, I discussed with the students, the crew, about what other parts of a ship they would need to know if they were going to sail across the sea.

I taught them another song that I “composed” to help them remember this information. This one was a little bit more complicated. It went to the tune of “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes.” After I taught students the words to this song, I also taught them hand motions to help them remember the words as they sang:

Berth, main hatch, cargo hold, cargo hold,

Berth, main hatch, cargo hold, cargo hold,

Masts and pumps and the water closet,

These are on a brigantine!

Teacher and Intern Interviews

A majority of teachers in my elementary school use music regularly in their classrooms during different activities, as I found out when I conducted my teacher surveys. Part of my data collection was to interview three teachers and two interns in my school on their personal experiences with how music affects students’ learning and behavior, and their ability to manage students through the incorporation of music. I will be referring to all five as “teachers” even though two of them are interns because they are all seen as teachers in their classrooms and this will make the reading of this section flow more smoothly. The teachers interviewed teach students in kindergarten, third, fourth, and fifth grades.

The questions I asked during my interviews were based on my original sub-wonderings:

- Why do you use music in your classroom?
- Do you use music at all during transitions?
- How does the use of music in the classroom affect students' ability to stay on-task?
- Do you think students respond differently to different types of music?
- How can music be used to enhance learning in the content areas?
- Do you ever provide students opportunities to create their own music?
- Do you think that there is a correlation between music and writing?
- What do you think music does to children to get them to concentrate?
- Do you believe music encourages students to be more imaginative?
- Do you think music is important to use in the classroom?

The Instructional Support Teacher

One day in March when the Instructional Support Teacher (IST) came to our room to ask my mentor a question, I began discussing my inquiry project with her. I asked her if she had any knowledge on how music affects students' ability to stay on-task when reading. She had never really thought about it before but was very curious and interested to find out. I asked her if she would mind playing music as she worked with students across all elementary grade levels and she was excited to take part in my project.

Susie Schnellbaugh was the IST teacher in my school and another school in the district. She played the *John Williams: Greatest Hits 1969-1999* and the *Sound Bites: Notable Bull Baroque Concertos* while she worked with students at both schools.

Data Analysis

In analyzing what claims I can draw from the information I collected, I looked for key patterns or themes in my data collection of personal observations, student surveys, teacher surveys, teaching reflections, and teacher and intern interviews.

Classroom Observations

In the beginning of my implementation of music into the classroom in February, I began playing music only during silent reading time in the morning and writing workshop. While I played music, I would try to take observation notes of students' behaviors, though this was sometimes difficult as I also had my routine morning duties to perform. At first, students were thrown off as to why I had music playing every morning, but after a few days it became normal to them. Within a few weeks of first implementing the playing of music, I began playing music during snack and times when students were doing independent seat work at their desks.

As I began implementing music into the classroom, my attention became focused on how much students were talking and I think I got hung up on this observation for a little bit. Eventually, I also noticed how students were physically responding to the music. I noticed some students would tap their feet and mouth the words (if they were listening to the patriotic music). Even now, students still thoroughly enjoy moving around to the music. This is not disruptive, but allows students the opportunity to have fun and gain exposure to different genres of music. Also, I've realized that not all talking is bad. Though students may be talking, this does not necessarily imply that they are off-task. Judgment on that depends on the activity students are involved in and what the teacher's expectations are for that specific activity.

During my first weeks of observation, I noticed that one student, a normally loud and particularly high-energy boy, seemed to calm down when the music first began playing in our room.

Within less than a week, students became very aware of how music had affected our classroom with its presence. Only a few days after I began playing music, students would come up to me and ask me to put on music when it was not on. This first happened during a math session when students were working independently at their desks and several students asked if they could listen to music while they worked. Prior to this it had not even occurred to me to play music during math class. Another time I had music playing as students were working, and the tape ended without my realization. Students raised their hands and asked me to put it back on.

In mid-February, soon after I began playing different genres of music in my classroom, I had a class meeting with my students and we discussed when they like to listen to music and why they liked listening to music during specific activities. I also asked them about how different kinds of music affected their ability to stay on-task. Through this discussion and others like it that followed, students told me that music helps them to focus and concentrate. Many commented that listening to music calms them down. However, some noted that when they listen to songs with words either they do not sing because they know they will be distracted or they are distracted by other people singing along to the words.

During our *American Album* unit, students decorated pictures of the American Flag by gluing red, white, and blue tissue paper squares on the paper. While students worked on this each morning, I often put on a tape of patriotic music that went along with our unit. Most students would sit quietly and sing along while they worked. Fewer students were up and out of their seats. It was at this time that I began to think that there was a correlation

between music lyrics and engagement. I noticed that when students worked on their Writing Workshop stories they had a hard time concentrating when the patriotic music was played. However, I also found that when I played non-lyrical music during Writing Workshop, students were more on-task and there were fewer distractions. Since this time, I have only played non-lyrical music during Writing Workshop with the exception of Enya as I find her music, and I believe the students find her music, very soothing. It is not as easy to get caught up in the words to her songs as most lyrical songs are.

Another project my students worked on during the *American Album* unit was the Pony Express. In this project, students wrote letters to other students within the primary division and sent and received mail daily. One day in mid-February I had Bach playing while students were working on their Pony Express letters. I realized how engaged the students were in their writing. It was at this time that I began to think that music helped the students to focus on what they were writing.

At the beginning of March, students began sharing what they were reminded of when they heard certain pieces of music. In one instance, a student told me, “They played a song like that when my grandfather died.” It was so sad, but at the same time it was exciting for me to see my students making connections between the music and how it makes them feel with experiences that they have had.

In mid-March, I began to search for other ways I could implement music in my classroom besides just as a listening device. Through discussions with other interns, I found that some of them had seen music used as a tool to transition students from one activity to another. As students were doing their normal morning routine of silent reading on March 15, 2005 I got students’ attention, played the beginning of Enya’s song “Orinoco Flow” for my students and told them that every time they heard that song, I wanted them to put their silent reading or other morning work away, get out their Math Folders and a pencil, and sit in a

circle on the carpet in the front of our classroom. After I explained my expectations for them, I began playing the song again and students transitioned wonderfully to the carpet. I have been using this song as a classroom management tool for transitions ever since. I mainly use it for the transition to the carpet for our opening routine every day, but have used it since in other scenarios where I want students to put their things away and move to the carpet. On rare occasions I have asked students to return to their seats so they can try to do a better job on our transition if they are too noisy, but for the most part they have responded very well behaviorally to this strategy.

Towards the end of March and the beginning of April, I began incorporating the use of songs into some of my lessons. When we were finishing up our *Light and Sound* science unit, I taught my students a song about sound waves (to the tune of “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.”) I also taught my third grade partner classroom songs about the parts of a ship to the tunes of “The Wheels on the Bus” and “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.” To see how these lessons went and how music affected learning within them, see the section below entitled **“Teaching Through Singing.”**

In my observations of independent activities students did at their desks, I noticed how in playing lyrical music during times when students were doing silent reading or writing activities, the noise volume in our classroom increased. I personally felt at times like there was too much stimulation between students’ talking and moving around and listening to the music. Some mornings I stopped playing lyrical music because things seemed to be too chaotic and put in one of the instrumental CDs. This seemed to calm things down. Students were more focused on their work and the noise level decreased. I could sense the mood of the room change as all of us felt more relaxed.

Almost every morning I played music. However, no matter what genre of music I played, there was always a period between 8:40 and 8:50 that seemed to be unaffected by the

music. It is in these ten minutes that the majority of students are entering the room, placing their belongings in the closet, making their lunch choice, retrieving their homework folders from their desks, searching for books to read in our classroom library, and doing silent reading or other catch-up work. Many of them are walking around and chatting with their neighbors. I feel that this is an unavoidable period of the day in which music has the least effect. However, once students become settled at their seats with something to do, the music has an increased presence.

During silent reading and writing workshop in particular, I noticed what I believe to be a relationship between reading and writing, and listening to music. When students did silent reading, they seemed to be most on-task when instrumental music was being played. I noticed the same thing when students were working on writing activities. Classical instrumental music, I believed, worked best. When lyrical music was played during these two activities, students seemed to be more easily distracted and talkative. Likewise, when students were performing non-reading or writing activities, I found that they were more on-task when lyrical music was played and more easily distracted when instrumental music was played. After I came to these realizations, I began playing more instrumental music as students did reading and writing activities and more lyrical music, namely the patriotic music, as students did coloring, cutting, and drawing activities.

Student Surveys

Because three students were absent on the day I took the survey, eighteen students participated. On the survey, students were asked to draw a happy face or a sad face in response to the following statements:

- *I like listening to music in school.* Sixteen students drew a smiley face. Two students drew a sad face.

- *I listen to music at home a lot.* Eleven students circled “yes.” Seven students circled “sometimes.” Zero students circled “no.”
- *My parents listen to music at home a lot.* Six students circled “yes.” Eight students circled “sometimes.” Four students circled “no.”

Next, students were also asked to write during which activities they enjoyed listening to music the most and why, as well as during which activities they did not like listening to music and why.

- Eight students wrote that they enjoyed listening to music during all activities because:
 - “It tells us to be quiet.”
 - “Everyone wants to listen.”
 - “It helps a lot for everyone to concentrate and calm down.”
 - “I love listening to music.”
 - “It calms me down and makes me quiet so people won’t distract me.”
 - “It helps me work during math, reading, and writing workshop.”
 - “It makes everyone become calm.”
 - “It gets us calmed down.”
- Five students wrote that they enjoyed listening to music during silent reading time the most because:
 - “I can hear it.”
 - “It keeps me quiet.”
 - “It calms most of us down.”
 - “I like listening to songs.”
 - “It helps me to read.”

- Three students wrote that they enjoyed listening to music the most during writing workshop the most because:
 - o “It keeps everyone quiet.”
 - o “It helps me to think.”
 - o “It makes my brain think better.”
- One student wrote that he liked listening to music the most during sharing because “I like when people see my sharing and when I listen to music.”
- One student wrote that he liked listening to music the most during lunch because “It makes me eat better.”

(I have never played music in our classroom during sharing or lunch times. Perhaps students are associating the music to when they do activities similar to these at home. I think the latter one was trying to be silly.)

I also had students write down activities in which they do not enjoy listening to music and explain why. Eleven of the students could not think of any activities in which they did not enjoy listening to music. Two students marked science, two marked language arts centers, three marked book buddies, and one marked writing workshop. (To see their reasoning, see the student survey sheets in the Appendix.)

Next, as I played approximately 20-30 seconds of each genre, students circled ones that they liked, placing a star next to their favorite, and an “x” over the genres that they did not like. Students’ preferences varied widely in this area, as can be seen below:

| Music Genres | Favorite Music Genre | Least Favorite Music Genre |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Patriotic (<i>American Album</i> unit music) | 6 students | 2 students |
| Jazz (<i>Miles Davis</i>) | 1 student | 3 students |

| | | |
|--|------------|------------|
| Piano (<i>Piano Reflections</i>) | 1 student | 1 student |
| Saxophone (<i>Tribute to Kenny G</i>) | 0 students | 3 students |
| Classical | 2 students | 6 students |
| Contemporary Classical (<i>John Williams</i>) | 1 student | 2 students |
| World Music (<i>Paint the Stars: The Best of Enya</i>) | 7 students | 1 student |

Keep in mind that during the time this survey was taken, students were learning the American Album patriotic songs for the culmination they were preparing to do at the high school. Also, they heard the world music much more regularly than the other genres as it is their cue every morning to stop their silent reading, get out their math folders and pencils, and move to their opening circle. Therefore, there is a likely chance that these numbers are not completely accurate.

In looking at all the genres to which each student listened, each genre was the favorite genre of at least one student with the exception of the easy listening saxophone music of the *Tribute to Kenny G* CD. Likewise, each genre was also picked by at least one student to be the least favorite genre. Even though specific musical genres may have been appreciated by some students more than others, I do not believe that students are more on-task when they like the music playing. In fact, I think some students can be more easily distracted by genres that they enjoy listening to. Likewise, eleven students, more than half of the class, could not think of any activities in which they did not enjoy listening to music. Perhaps this means that they appreciated the stimulation music gave them as they worked. Also, maybe students

recognized that they could concentrate more on their work and experienced fewer distractions no matter what kind of music was being played or what activity it was that they were doing.

This survey also showed me that students' interests, likes, and dislikes vary widely as each student is a unique individual. It also showed me how teachers can sometimes look at their students and see how they are all alike, yet have a more difficult time seeing and appreciating their differences. As students do not all like the same genres of music, it is important for teachers to use a variety of music genres in their classrooms so as to appeal to each student while teaching all students to appreciate all types of music at the same time.

Teacher Surveys

Of the two kindergarten teachers, both play only classical and unit-related music. One plays music most days and the other sometimes. I found that these teachers play music at completely different times during the day. One plays it only during quiet time and the other plays it during writing workshop, language arts, silent reading, and dismissal. The latter teacher finds music effective for the activities in which it is used. Both teachers feel that music can have a calming effect on students and that students enjoy listening to it. One noted that listening to music can help students to focus while the other drew a question mark of uncertainty. One thinks music is effective anytime and the other thinks it is effective only in the afternoon.

Of the four primary teachers (Grades 1 and 2), all four said that their students listened to music sometimes. Interestingly enough, all four of these teachers noted that they only play music "sometimes" in their classroom while all other teachers, except for one, marked that they play music "often" or "most days." Only one of these four teachers marked that she played music during Writing Workshop and that she did not find playing music for her grade level to be effective. However, one must take into account that the type of music she played may have been the reason for this. (See Claim IV for more details.) This teacher noted on her

survey that she only played unit-related music, which contains lyrics. Three of the primary teachers marked that they played music during independent seatwork and found it effective during this activity. I would like to point out here that independent seatwork entails anything students do individually at their desks, such as reading, writing, drawing, math exercises, etc. All four teachers played unit-related music. Two said they play music in the morning and two said they play it in the afternoon. Two noted that children do not ask them for music to be played. Interestingly enough, my own mentor said that she would not have thought that music could help her students to focus prior to her experience with me.

Of the four teachers in the intermediate division (Grades 3 and 4), three marked that they play music most days, while one marked often. All of these teachers play classical music, three play unit-related music, two play world music, one plays contemporary classical, and two play “other” types of music, such as Rock and Roll, 50’s and 60’s, and modern popular culture music. All of the intermediate teachers noted that they played music during independent seatwork and writing workshop. All of them found that playing music during writing workshop had an affect on student behaviors while three of the same teachers found playing music during independent seatwork also had a similar affect. All four intermediate teachers believe that music can have a calming effect on students’ behavior, is enjoyed by students, and can help students focus. Students in each of these classrooms ask for music to be played. Three of the four teachers noted that music is effective anytime while the fourth wrote that she did not know.

Of the two teachers in the upper intermediate division (5th Grade) at our school, one plays music most days and the other often. Both teachers play classical, unit-related, and contemporary classical music. One also noted that she plays jazz. Both teachers play music during opening, social studies, writing workshop, and independent seatwork and find music to be affective for the latter three activities. Both marked that they believe music has a

calming effect on students' behavior, is enjoyed by students, and can help students focus. Students in both classrooms ask their teachers to play music during the day. One thought that music could be most effective any time of day while the other did not respond to this question, possibly because she did not know, as the one intermediate teacher noted on her survey.

Music in Lessons

In trying to understand how music affects engagement, behavior, and learning, I looked at lessons I taught that incorporated music in instruction and reflected on students' reactions to it.

The first time I incorporated song into my teaching the lesson was about sound waves. I only taught students this song once and it was at the very end of our unit, so we never went back to review it and I never heard how much of it my students retained. Based upon students' attention and participation, I believe students thoroughly enjoyed learning this song. Each student paid attention and seemed excited as we sang together.

The second lesson I taught that incorporated music was at the beginning of our Wonderful World of Nature unit in which I had students sit on the carpet, close their eyes, and use their imagination as I took them on a mental journey into a wetland atmosphere. While I described to students what kinds of things they could see and smell along their "hike" I had a CD of nature sounds made into a song playing. After this "journey" I regrouped students and found that students felt that they were actually in a wetland environment when they heard birds in the trees, the wind, and other sounds from nature. They have asked for me to do more lessons like this since they enjoyed it so much.

The third grade students in my partner classroom responded really well to the two lessons in which I taught them the parts of a ship through song. The second day I went to their room, I began my lesson by reviewing with them what I had taught them the previous

day. I did not sing the songs for them, but they sang them for me so I could see how much of the songs they remembered. Most of the students remembered the words to the songs, though a few of them had a little difficulty remembering. However, they helped one another out without me having to remind them of words or hand motions or sing the songs for them. Again, I think the hand motions helped to jog students' memories. I was extremely impressed and pleased by their ability to recall the songs with having less than thirty minutes to learn them the previous day.

Interviews

This was probably the most difficult part of my data analysis as so much information was gained from talking with the teachers that it was hard to figure out how to organize it. I transcribed my teacher interviews and printed out a copy to review. After I read the printed version, I could see bits and pieces of information from each teacher that shared some commonalities. I read the transcription a second time, this time dividing it up into the three main ideas I initially stated in my wondering: student learning, student behavior, and student engagement. I included classroom management under student behavior as I color-coded the transcription, noticing that it had come up several times. I underlined statements teachers made relating to **student learning in red pen, student behavior in blue, and student engagement in purple.**

After I color-coded everything and read over the transcription a third time, I realized how messy and spread out statements in each theme appeared in the fourteen page transcription. I decided to restructure my transcription by the themes of student engagement, behavior, and learning rather than by the interviewee as I had originally done. I made a heading for each theme (such as *Statements About Learning, Statements About Behavior, Statements About Engagement, etc.*) and then listed each of the interview questions I asked the teachers and interns during interviews underneath each heading. I copied and pasted the

comments teachers made in response to each question under each theme that I felt were important in understanding how music affects students in relationship to each of my three themes. This way I could focus on one theme at a time more smoothly. Then I went back through the color-coded transcription and copied and pasted interesting and applicable statements teachers made and placed them under the appropriate theme heading and question. For clarification and personal review, a copy of this restructured transcription is located in the Appendix.

During my interviews, I asked teachers to expound upon how they use music in their classroom and how they think it affects students' engagement, behavior, and learning. Interestingly, despite the variance in the age of the students they teach, their responses to my questions were considerably aligned with one another.

Through my discussion with each teacher interviewed, and based on my main inquiry wondering, I organized the information I learned into three main themes: How music affects learning, behavior, and engagement through incorporating music in multiple ways in the classroom. All of the teachers in my school seem to use music mainly as a tool for students to listen to as they work. A few teachers use music beyond merely a listening tool and incorporate it into lessons and transitions. I chose to record each point that follows based on the number of teachers who noticed the same patterns. Each point written below was noted by at least three of the five women during their interviews with me in March.

The teachers I interviewed found music to be engaging to their students by creating a calm environment, focusing students' attention on their work, and by stimulating students' creative energy. Three of the teachers also discussed how music has the power to dictate the atmosphere within a classroom, especially during writing activities. One intern found that "when kids have that music playing in the background they're focusing on their work, but they're also relaxed. They're more relaxed and just not silent and they have something that

kind of escapes them and lets their imagination go as they listen to music” (Davis, L. 2005). They commented that when music is fast and upbeat, students sometimes struggle in accomplishing their work because they are more focused on listening to the music and less on their work. Another teacher said that when listening to music during writing time, “some of my kids will go off into their own world and they’ll stop writing, like they’re daydreaming or something. By now they associate [music] with writing – so when they hear it again they know what they’re supposed to do. I don’t know what it is” (Davis, P. 2005). Barto found similar results as to the atmosphere music creates in her classroom, stating “It’s like I turn on the music and they’re all totally tuned into their writing” (Barto 2005). All of these women found that when the music is calming, smooth, and relaxing, students are more diligent in their work. Slow, steady music was found by all of them to help students to better focus on their work and maintain the level of concentration needed.

The teachers found that students’ behavior was less distracting, more on-task, and more cooperative during times when music was played in their classrooms. All of the teachers felt that there are times when music can be conducive to students being productive, but also that if it is not used carefully and thoughtfully, music can also be a distraction as well. When the music is playing, “then [students] don’t feel like they have to talk because there’s already a background noise” (Barto, 2005). Paije Davis commented that students become upset in some classrooms when they cannot hear the music due to their peers talking. She also stressed that it is important to “feel out your students” to form an idea about kinds of music and what kinds of activities with music a class of students can and cannot handle. She also mentioned that it is helpful to remind students that their voices may not be louder than the music as this creates a more enjoyable environment for everyone present. The teachers interpreted the lower noise level in their classrooms while students worked as students’ desire

to listen to the music as they work because “it helps them to focus and stay on-task” (Slubosky 2005).

Davis and Sluboski specifically noted that they have seen how music has greatly affected their special needs and struggling students in a positive manner. “I was surprised to find that [music] actually worked with my struggling kids, like my Title [One] kids, my kids that had attention issues were able to focus better having almost that distraction in the background... they didn’t have to create the distraction. The distraction was always there so it got them to focus on their work” (Sluboski 2005). Davis found similar results with a particular student in her classroom this year and a student she taught the previous year. “[He] really needs music. For him to focus – he can’t even start writing unless there’s music on, and if it’s not loud enough for him, he’ll say ‘Turn it up.’ ...For children with different kinds of learning needs, I think music can be really great. I know my student from last year had Asperger’s [Syndrome]. She was very low functioning. She needed the music to be on. Neither of these two children I’m talking about really like to write. When the music isn’t on, they won’t write. And when it’s on, they go off into another world and they can write” (Davis, P. 2005).

All of the teachers interviewed had students who would ask for music to be played while they worked. Listening to music was an avenue by which the teachers were able to foster a sense of community in their classrooms. In some classrooms, the teachers presented music to students as a reward for good behavior, that if students worked quietly, they would play music for them to listen to while they worked. Good behavior was seen as a community effort as students would remind each other to work quietly in Paije Davis’ and Abby Barto’s classes. Some students even brought music in for teachers to play, if the teachers deemed the selection appropriate. Barto noticed in her classroom that when specific songs were played, students would “all join in for it and so we have the entire room singing” (Barto 2005).

Not only did the teachers view music a successful tool for promoting good behavior in students, but they also found it to be meaningful in teaching in the content areas. The teachers I interviewed sometimes taught their students about some aspects of music itself as well as other skills and facts in other content areas through the use of songs. Four of the teachers interviewed mentioned that they find music helps their students to remember information when they sing. These teachers had seen this in various academic areas, such as learning to read in kindergarten, multiplication facts in math in 4th grade, slavery in America in 5th grade, etc. This showed me how flexible music can be in teaching a wide spectrum of knowledge and skills. It almost seems as though music has no limit in its ability and usage. When Ashley Ford's class learned the months of the year, students were able to "say them because they had sung the song so many times" (Ford 2005). She found that learning through the repetition in music helped her kindergarten students "with their one-to-one correspondence between words because [students] look at the words as they sing them and also we can go through and point out different words in songs that they're learning." Paije Davis was pleased by how well information that students learn through music is able to be recalled by her students. "Songs you teach at the beginning of the year – it's amazing they can remember them at the end of the year. I think as long as songs are pretty basic, they're not overly deep in content, they can be a great factor. That can be for all grade levels" (Davis, P. 2005). Sluboski found that in the *Story of America* unit she teaches, students in her fifth grade class are able to relate to the curriculum as singing songs and learning about music's influence in American history presents "a way for them to almost jump into history to kind of say 'Okay, this is my connection.' Because it's great to read a book, it's great to watch a video, but it's almost like a hands on thing that isn't hands on... it's just a way to make history almost come alive because kids relate to music" (Slubosky 2005).

Lastly, these teachers all agreed on the importance of making sure that the playing of music is appropriate for the activity taking place, especially during writing workshop. Almost all of these teachers I interviewed play music while students participate in writing workshop. Interestingly, I found that none of them play music with words during this activity. They agreed that music with lyrics can be more of a distraction for students as they sometimes sing along with the music or talk about a song (Sluboski 2005). Paije Davis remarked that “when it’s classical [music], something slower moving, [students] focus more on their work. When it’s a little bit faster, they tend to be a little bit more focused on the music. So it [can go] from being very much in the background to a little bit more and a little bit more... where they see it and hear it more” (Davis, P. 2005) Sluboski agreed with her, saying that non-instrumental music can hinder the flow of students’ writing as it can distract them. I found that both Paije Davis and Abby Barto played music with lyrics while students worked on their cursive as this activity can seem boring to students. They found that when lyrics are added, the activity becomes more enjoyable for students.

I feel that the responses I received from my interviews correlates to the research presented earlier in this paper. Both stress the use of instrumental music rather than vocal music as lyrics can be distracting. Also both sources stressed that music can function to effectively engage students in the activity taking place as well as create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Behavior was also found in the research and by teachers to be more on-task and more cooperative, even in students with special needs. They also agreed that certain kinds of music can cause more distraction for children depending on the activity students are asked to do, particularly listening to lyrical music while performing writing activities. The use of song to teach students was also supported by both sources. The correlation between these two sources, I believe, strengthens the evidence I use in my claims on how students respond to the use of music in the classroom.

The Instructional Support Teacher

I loaned Susie Schnellbaugh, the Instructional Support Teacher at my school and another school, my *John Williams: Greatest Hits 1969-1999* CD and my *Sound Bites: Notabull Baroque Concertos* CD to play as she worked with kindergarten through fifth grade students at both of these schools.

As I met with her after her implementation of music during her time with students, I was excited to learn that her findings correlated well with mine. As she worked with specific students she took notes on their reactions to it. In her notes, Schnellbaugh stated that “I’ve noticed with my needy [students] it is more distracting, they want to nod [their] head [and] beat their hands” (Schnellbaugh 2005). However for some of the students she worked with she found that they were able to get more work than they usually completed in the time that she had with them.

Schnellbaugh said that students’ initial reaction to the music varied. One student stated “What’s with the music? I can’t concentrate.” Schnellbaugh told me later that once this student got used to the music, she was no longer distracted by it. Another student said that he did not want the music turned off when Schnellbaugh asked him if this was what he wanted. He said no, but that he wanted to know where it was coming from. Towards the end of Schnellbaugh’s implementation of music, she found that some of the students she worked with were asking her to play music.

In talking with this teacher after her implementation, I was excited to find that she saw that music had the same effects music had on her students across different grade levels as I had found in my self-contained first grade classroom. Also, though the two CD’s I gave her were both classical instrumental CD’s, she also found that students were more on-task and more productive when the classical baroque CD was played rather than when the contemporary classical John Williams CD was played.

My Claims for What I Learned

Claim I: Music has the ability to create a stimulating environment which students enjoy and it encourages on-task behavior.

I could tell during my observations that music greatly affected students' ability to focus on their work. From the very first day, students were quieter and more on-task. My mentor has noticed this too. On the teacher survey she responded to with me as her intern, she wrote "I see definite positive results on keeping the students focused especially during silent reading and writer's workshop." Likewise, ten of the twelve teachers surveyed noted that they "think that music can help students focus." I feel that my students enjoy the environment that music creates in our classroom. Several times in my observation notes I have instances in which students have asked me to put on music. Sometimes a CD or tape that we were listening to ended without my noticing and students have asked me to put on some more music.

When I asked a teacher if she thought there was a correlation between music and writing, she responded saying that music "helps to put kids in a frame of mind. It helps to put them in a certain state where they'll feel more relaxed, feel more comfortable. When it's silent in here, what kind of inspiring environment is that? I want my kids to be creative and write, but I'm not doing anything to make the environment be creative. And I think adding music when we are expecting them to be creative, in a creative way helps them to do so. I've seen it help them with their writing, both in the depth of their writing and their motivation to write." (Sluboski 2005) This teacher made this comment in relation to music's effect on students' writing, but I believe that this relaxing environment can be carried over into other activities that occur throughout the day as well.

Also, on the student surveys I had students fill out, nine of the eighteen students who participated in the survey said that music either helped to calm them down or that it helped to keep everyone quiet. Four other students noted that listening to music helped them to think better.

Claim II: The use of song is a meaningful venue by which learning via the memorization of facts is enhanced.

The repetition in singing the same words over and over again helps students to not only memorize information easily, but also to retain it. The 5th grade teacher noted, as she talked about the *Story of America* unit her students do, that “A big part of America was music, you know they had certain songs that were being played during the Revolutionary War, slaves sang certain songs in the fields. We learn those songs. We talk about those songs. The kids sing them and it’s a way that they jump into history to kind of say ‘Okay, this is my connection’” (Slubosky 2005).

When I taught my third grade partner classroom the songs on the parts of a ship, they were able to recall not only the words to the songs, but also what the words meant. They could remember what took place within the specific parts of the ship. Also, the first day I taught in their room, students were unsure as to which side of the ship was right and left. After learning my song, none of them felt unsure of this the second day in my follow-up lesson.

Claim III: Music can act as a great classroom management tool.

I’ve found that music can strengthen classroom management in several ways. It can be used in transitions to move students from one area to another quickly and quietly, it can help students to monitor their volume levels, it can allow for whole class participation in singing songs and dancing to songs, and it can be used to get students’ attention quickly.

Since I began using the song “Orinoco Flow” by Enya as a transition cue for students in my classroom on March 15, I believe that this song as a transition tool takes much less time for students to get from their desks to the carpet than if I called them table by table. Also, I let students know what my expectations were for them since the day I introduced the transition to them. They know that if they don’t meet my expectations that I will have them return to their seats so we can try the transition again.

Music also acts as a great noise monitor for students. Paije Davis said during her interview that music “is a great management technique. It allows children to know what voice volume to use because they need to keep their voice quieter than the music.... They enjoy listening to music and they want to be able to hear it and they get upset when someone talks and they can’t hear the music” (Davis 2005).

Claim IV: Playing music that has lyrics in it is more distracting to students when they are involved in writing activities.

On Wednesday, February 16, while I was with my partner classroom, my mentor wrote in my inquiry observation notes while students were writing letters back to another room for our Pony Express mail. She noted that “a few of the children were off-task and singing the words instead of working” as a tape of lyrical patriotic songs that went along with our *American Album* unit was being played.

During my teacher interviews, a few of the teachers commented on how they only have instrumental music playing during writing workshop. Fifth-grade teacher Laura Slubosky noted that “I use music during writing time...For writer’s workshop this year I make sure that it isn’t a distraction for them when they’re writing because it hinders their flow.”

Claim V: Music has similar effects on kindergarten through fifth grade students’ ability to stay on-task, particularly during writing activities.

All of the teachers I interviewed felt “that when the music is calming, smooth, and relaxing, students are more diligent in their work. Slow, steady music was found by all of them to help students to better focus on their work and maintain the level of concentration needed,” as mentioned on page 25. I found during my interviews that none of the teachers play lyrical music during writing workshop because they deemed lyrical music to distract students from their work.

I also found that three of the third, fourth, and fifth grade teachers, along with myself, all agree that playing music with lyrics can be a distraction for students as they work. The kindergarten teacher did not have a specific “writing workshop” time as students in her class are learning to read and the other fourth grade teacher did not play music during writing workshop. The same teachers, including the kindergarten teacher this time, also agreed that music aids students’ learning in the content areas.

When I met with Susie Schnellbaugh, the IST teacher, and discussed the effects music had on IST students she found that students across grade levels were more engaged in their work, especially those students without serious learning needs. She also found that classical music works better than contemporary classical music with students across grade levels.

Claim VI: Music can be a positive distraction for students when used appropriately because it encourages students to stay more on-task rather than to create their own distractions.

A few of the teachers I interviewed mentioned that music is a “distraction,” though not a distraction in how most people generally define the word. I found in my own observations and in talking with other teachers during interviews, that students often become distracted by other students, objects in the room, and their own daydreams. The teachers and I found that when music is played the number of distractions decreased as students became

on-task. Music became a *positive* distraction for students as it provides the level of stimulation needed to help students to better concentrate.

Teacher Laura Sluboski stated “I was surprised to find that [music] actually worked with my struggling kids, like my Title [One] kids. My kids that had attention issues were able to focus better having that distraction in the background... they didn’t have to create the distraction. The distraction was always there so it got them to focus on their work” (Sluboski 2005).

Intern Ashley Ford backed this idea up in speaking about her kindergarten students, saying that, “If [students] are listening to the music then they don’t feel like they have to talk because there’s already a background noise. I think a lot of times kids don’t like silence at all. If they have that music then they can concentrate on what they’re doing and they don’t feel like they have to be talking.”

It is important to note here that music can be a positive distraction only if used wisely. Music, especially using music with words played during reading or writing activities, can be a negative distraction for students. Like Sluboski noted during her interview, “make sure that it is instrumental, that it isn’t a [negative] distraction for them when they’re writing because it hinders their flow” (Sluboski 2005).

Implications as a Teacher

After examining the many ways in which music affects students in a classroom environment I am very excited to continue using it in my own classroom. Through this inquiry, I have come to understand how powerful music can be in creating an atmosphere that is conducive to learning by setting a tone for students to follow throughout the day. Even though I did not do it this year as I thought it may not be best to introduce halfway into the

year, I plan on selecting a classroom song as I found one of the other teachers in my school did once, and play this song every morning as students enter the classroom.

I will definitely continue to play music daily and incorporate it into transitions, lessons, community-building activities, and times when students are doing independent seatwork. I have seen first-hand how music eliminates many distractions, encourages students to be more on-task as they work, and provides a stimulating atmosphere, and I am excited to find new ways to incorporate music into my future classrooms and teachings.

Further Wonderings

Having conducted this inquiry and learning much about how music influences students' learning, behavior, and engagement, new questions about music and its use in the classroom have come to my attention. In the coming years as I take charge of my own classroom, I look forward to continuing my investigation of the effects of music on students in a regular classroom setting. My new wonderings include:

- Does music have similar effects on middle and high school students as it does on elementary students?
- Does playing instrumental music cause more distraction for students as they work on non-writing activities?
- Is the **presence of language** in the music to which they are listening or in the work that they are doing, necessary in order for music to best benefit them and their work?
- How does the incorporation of music into the regular classroom setting affect students with specific learning needs?

References:

- Abikoff, H., Courtney, M., Szeibel, P., & Koplewicz, H. (1996). The Effects of Auditory Stimulation on the Arithmetic Performance of Children with ADHD and Non-disabled Children. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29*, 238-246
- Barto, Abigail. Personal interview. March 4, 2005.
- Davis, Leanne. Personal interview. March 4, 2005.
- Davis, Paije. Personal interview. March 4, 2005.
- Ford, Ashley. Personal interview. March 4, 2005.
- Hallan, Susan and Price, John. (1998). Can the Use of Background Music Improve the Behaviour and Academic Performance of Children with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties? *British Journal of Special Education, 25*, 88-91.
- Humpal, Marcia & Wolf, Jan. (2003, March). Music in the Inclusive Environment. *Young Children, 58*, 103-107
- Miller, Beth Ann. (2003, Spring). Integrating Elementary General Music Instruction with a First Grade Whole Language Classroom. *Bulletin for the Council for Research in Music Education, 156*, 43-62.
- Ringgenberg, Shelly. (2003, September). Music as a Teaching Tool: Creating Story Songs. *Young Children, 58*, 76-79.
- Schnellbaugh, Susie. Personal interview. April 18, 2005.
- Slubosky, Laura. Personal interview. March 4, 2005.
- Varnon, Dolores. (1997, October – Decemeber). Enriching Remedial Programs with the Arts. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 13*, 325-332.

Musical Selections Used in This Inquiry:

- Allegro Corporation. (2001). *Piano Reflections* [CD]. USA: Mastertech Pty Ltd..
- Badelt, Klaus. (2003). *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* [CD]. Burbank: Walt Disney Music Company.
- Davis, Miles. (2004). *The Jazz Biography: Miles Davis* [CD]. Holland: United Audio

- Entertainment, Ltd..
- Enya. (1997). *Paint the Stars: The Best of Enya* [CD]. New York: Warner Music UK Ltd.
- Grout, John. (1996). *Rain Forest Symphony No. 2* [CD]. Clearwater: Imaginary Productions.
- McAlister, Clark. (1996). *Sound Bites Volume 1: Nota-Bull Baroque Concertos* [CD]. North Chicago: Metacom, Inc.
- Mozart, Wolfgang. (1998). *Classical Masterpieces: The Best of Mozart* [CD]. Quebec: Madacy Entertainment Group, Inc.
- Newman, Thomas. (2004). *Lemmony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events* [CD]. New York: Sony BMG Music Entertainment.
- The Stars at Studio 99 Perform a Tribute to Kenny G*. Canada: Legacy Entertainment Inc.
- Williams, John. (1999). *John Williams: Greatest Hits 1969-1999* [CD]. New York: Sony Music Entertainment Inc..