

## Using Music Appropriately in the Classroom

Music is a powerful tool but it must be used with care and knowledge to use it effectively. Remember that you are the teacher and you are selecting the music with a *purpose*. It is not play time where they bring in their favorite music. Always keep in mind that it is a *tool*.

There are two important guidelines to keep in mind when selecting music:

### 1. Cognitive Load

- a. If you are using music as background for tasks, you must use music without words. Otherwise you will have a Stroop effect – competing pathways. One verbal task will interfere with the other verbal task. Also, it increases cognitive load, leaving fewer attentional resources for the important task. If you are using classical music without words as background, please keep in mind the complexity of the music. Simple rhythmic music is best. The Mozart Effect music was highly complex and was played *before* the students engaged in the math tasks. It stimulated the brain. *Mozart for Focus and Clarity* or *Celestial Mozart* is wonderful for background music.
- b. If you are using music for creative writing, for example, or other purposes you can use music with words but students should just listen to the music. Then they would engage in the task.
- c. If you are using music to set the emotional tone and using it when students enter the classroom, then you may use music with words but see important guideline #2.

### 2. Beats Per Minute

All music can be evaluated in terms of beats per minute. Because a person's heart will naturally entrain to the beat of music, you want to keep this in mind. The relaxed heart rate is 60-80 beats per minute (bpm). Therefore, when you use music for concentration, this rate is best. Here are some guidelines for using various bpm followed by how to calculate bpm.

To energize students, play music with 120-140 bpm. This is ideal for exercise music. Students who listened to music during exercise performed 200% better on mental tasks afterwards.

To improve focus, classical or symphonic music is best with a bpm of approximately 60. This type of music has been shown to activate areas of the brain involved in attention and memory. Ideally, the students listen first for up to 10 minutes and then turn it off and work.

### 3 ways to determine beats per minute if it is not listed on the package or CD

1. With a stopwatch, tap out the drumbeats for 15 seconds and multiply by 4.
2. For digital music, go to MixMeister.com and download the free BPM analyzer and drag your song into the program.
3. For iTunes, download beaTunes 2.1.14 at Apple.com and it will assign a BPM for every song in your library.