Music can have a positive effect on student reading, and be an enhancement to providing the reader with the necessary entree to the very components necessary for a transaction to occur between the reader and the text, considered important to theorists Louise Rosenblatt, Stephen Krashen, Grover Mathewson, and John M. Guthrie and Wigland. Peretz and Zatorre (2005) state that infants sing around the age of one. By the age of five, a child has acquired a number of songs and demonstrates a singing style which remains through adulthood.

Recent research indicates that most studies examining the relationship of music with reading involve primary grades. Many studies involving music and cognition, recall and memory, mood induction, and spatial-temporal development have originated in the fields of Music Therapy, Music Education, Educational Psycholohy and Neuroscience. Future research and collaboration across disciplines with educators in Reading will certainly benefit students and teachers.

The limitations of research have therefore been limited not solely with regard to age group of readers, but with examination of the effects music might have on emergent reading for native English speakers, comprehension, and fluency. Studies of the effects on student/reader performance have indicated that there is no lack of studies and articles in the fields of Reading and Language Arts discussing the positive effects of music on increased recall, word retrieval, vocabulary development, and phonological awareness. These works, however, are not current (prior to 1996), and many are not research based or proven studies, but based on teachers’ classroom experiences using music with reading instruction.

The use of music can affect reader response in an aesthetic stance through a positive change in mood, affect and motivation. For the emergent reader and second language learner, language acquisition is facilitated, and recall, comprehension and fluency are enhanced. The student with emotional difficulties or disorders and/or learning disabilities is given access to a connection to meaning through development of vocabulary, positive memory and recall, thus building on positive prior knowledge. With the use of music, more students find another way to engage in a transaction with text and create meaning.

Upon examination of the overall results from the research in the areas of emergent reading, verbal skills and vocabulary development, mood change/induction and reading/academic performance, the use of music proved to be beneficial, enhancing skills areas in reading and affecting positive changes in attitude and mood.

In examining the effects of music on reading instruction, there may be potential use in developing language acquisition for emergent readers, second language learners and struggling readers; increasing motivation, improving attitude and further developing
reading comprehension and fluency. The studies of music in the fields of Music Education, Music Therapy, Educational Psychology, and Neuroscience are extensive. It can be argued that a collaboration of these disciplines with researchers and educators in Language Arts and Reading is in order. More research of older students and the role of music in reading instruction is needed. In Literature by Exploration, Rosenblatt spoke of the “emotional life” of the older child and adolescent as important in intellectual development. The young reader’s interests are in what helps her make sense of the world and her experiences (Rosenblatt, 1938/1985, p. 2).

References


Guthrie, John T.; Wigfield, Allan; Barbosa, Pedro; Perencevich, Kathleen C.; Taboada, Ana; Davis, Marcia H.; Scafiddi, Nicole T. and Tonks, Stephen.


**Music Resources:**

Children’s Music Network: cmnonline.org

People’s Music Network

Labor Heritage Foundation

songsforteaching.com
The Effects of Music on Reading:  
Reader Transaction through Acquisition, Mood and Motivation

Linda Boyle  
Singer-song writer, educator  
Chicago, Illinois  
lin@lindaboyle.com

Reading Theories:

* **Transactional**: Louise Rosenblatt  
* **Monitor Model of Language Acquisition**: Stephen Krashen  
* **Motivation**: Grover Matthewson  
* **Attitude**: John Guthrie and Alan Wigland

Ways to Use Music with Reading and Writing:

“Readers ... must be helped to develop flexibility of mind, a freedom from rigid emotional habits, if they are to enter into the aesthetic experiences of the artist.”  Louise Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration

- Music with bellringers  
- *Song* as text, essay, poem, narrative  
- **Music listening skills** with prereading (vocal and instrumental)  
- **Music pieces with Prediction and inference skills** with KWL, Think-Alouds, It Says-I say- and So;  Anticipation Guides  
- Music to aid development of **visual imagery**: story mapping, visual scaffolds  
- **Grammar**, rubrics, rules through chants and rhymes  
- Singing, chanting and choral response as enhancement to increasing fluency and comprehension  
- **Reader/Writer response**: student self-awareness, transaction, and self-efficacy building with book clubs, Socratic seminars  
- **Readers Theatre** with thematic and instrumental music and live student performance  
- **Music used for Differentiated Instruction, Multiple Intelligences/Learning Styles**  
- **Listening to and performing pieces for vocabulary development, word recognition**, increased use of prior knowledge and greater recall  
- **Socialization Skills**: listening to music, singing, playing instruments as a reinforcement for whole class and group work  
- Improvement of **attitude** (students who are at-risk, have learning disabilities and/or are struggling readers
- **Mood**: students with depression, experiencing loss ... increase positive, safe feelings
- **Motivation**: assisting students in expression of feelings, beliefs, ideas, concerns and connection to subjects, themes discussed
- **Behavioral Interventions and incentives**: use of music listening, performance, playing instruments, student recording

**Reading Activities with music**

- Authentic reading provided
- Student motivation and interests incorporated
- Developing student voice
- Develop receptive and expressive language
- Reinforce recall, prior knowledge, inference and prediction skills
- Differentiated instruction, multiple intelligences and learning styles included