



USING BRAIN-BASED MUSIC STRATEGIES FOR CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

By: Mary Knysh

Is classroom management an issue for you and your school community? If the answer is yes, you are not alone. Worldwide, educators are searching for answers. What if we approached classroom management with a new mindset using music as the pathway toward creating an **optimal learning environment**? Students could be educated in the way that **neuroscientists** tell us they learn best.

Science continues to shape our understanding of the connection between music and neuroscience and the effect that rhythm and music have on brain neuroplasticity. The four key components for rewiring the brain are **making music, movement, creative play and numinous experience** (when many create as one). Brain-based music strategies and rhythmic activities are well-suited for addressing classroom management in fun, accessible and engaging ways.

A key factor for brain-based optimal learning is a **safe, supportive and empowering** environment wherein students can experience a sense of **belonging, identity, value, purpose and joy**. Students and teachers collaborate to co-create a classroom environment wherein all are held accountable and are invested in its success.

I have presented at conferences and clinics worldwide for decades. Educators have shared with me that their biggest classroom management challenges are **focus, engagement, listening skills, daily transitions, apathy, accountability, student buy-in, collaboration, accessing creativity and student leadership**.

Here is a sample of music strategies and activities that my colleague, Patrick Lollis, and I have designed. Each activity can be adapted for body percussion, small percussion, drums, Boomwhackers and melodic instruments.

FOCUS

Breath to Boom - This is a terrific activity to warm up the voice, calm the body and quickly focus students of all ages.

Process

- Take a deep, relaxed breath in as you raise your hands high in the air.
- On the out breath, slide your voice from high to low following your hands as they slowly descend.
- When your hands reach your lap, say, "Boom!" repeat 3x or until the group completes the movement and sound in unison.
- Change "Boom!" from a loud sound to a very soft one.
- Hold out the "m" sound of "Boom" while playing a slow steady beat together.

CONNECT

Musical Home - This is a short, repeatable, rhythmic composition created by the class. This musical family portrait is an excellent example of creative play and numinous activity for the brain. Musical home enables us to come to attention, share our feelings, grow together, remember what collaboration looks and feels like, embrace and celebrate our communal identity and explore new ways of thinking with a safe place to return.

Process

- Exploration 1: Stay connected to the group pulse. Explore sound possibilities on your instrument.
- Simplify: Choose two favorite sounds and create a simple rhythm pattern. Listen to the group composition.
- Exploration 2: Explore freely, listen to others and imitate sounds that inspire you.
- Simplify: Choose two different favorite sounds and create a new pattern.
- Exploration 3: Explore freely. Listen to each other. Hear the emergent rhythmic idea and create one common group pattern.
- Simplify: Work together until everyone is playing exactly the same thing! This new collective rhythm is Musical Home.

REDIRECT

Student Led Music Circle Facilitation - When students step into leadership roles they have "skin in the game." They are invested in the process of moving the class into a self-organizing system wherein everyone is important, recognized and valued as an integral part of the whole.

In a music circle, the facilitator uses any mix of percussion and melodic instruments to guide the group toward spontaneous music-making, focused on the quality of the relationships of those making music together, rather than performance.

Teaching student leaders basic music circle facilitator cues empowers them as they lead their peers. Each music class opens with a student leader facilitating a short music circle. The leader encourages the members of the group to listen, connect, communicate and create together through music.

Look for Mary's new book on this topic next year.

Additional Resources:

- Rhythm Band Instruments (www.rhythmband.com)
- Mary's websites (www.music4wellness.com) (www.musicforpeople.org)

Read more articles for music educators at www.MusicArts.com/TheVault

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Mary is an international conference presenter, Orff Schulwerk clinician, Young Audiences teaching artist, author and is endorsed by Rhythm Band Instruments and Remo Inc.