Music Listening Policies Within Schools

Action Research Plan – Assignment 3

Timothy M. Paccione

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Marist College
Abstract

With the emergence of cellphones and individual digital devices, many secondary schools have enacted policies restricting the use of personal technology in the classroom, including the prohibition of music listening during student tasks. However, many studies have found that incorporating music into an educational environment can increase a student’s ability to learn rather than limit it. Music therapy has been shown to increase student attention spans, cognitive processes, and memory functions while simultaneously leveling the playing field for students with special needs. The purpose of this study is to determine through an action research plan the impact that listening to music can have on student comprehension of learning objectives. To test this theory, a high school class will be observed through a qualitative design, and subsequent data analysis and findings will dictate a suggested action plan.

*Keywords:* music therapy, qualitative design, cognitive process, action research
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**Area of Focus:**

In my experience as a secondary school teacher, I have often observed school policies that prohibit the use of music listening devices within the classroom. At the same time, throughout my own education I have come across multiple studies expressing the benefits that music can add to the academic process. This contradiction has caused me to wonder: Should school policies be more liberal in their allowance of music listening within the classroom? To help answer this essential question, I have developed an action research plan whose purpose is to determine the impact that listening to music can have on student comprehension of learning objectives.

**Literature Review:**

Studies have shown that listening to music can have numerous benefits in an academic environment. Brodeur (2016) discusses the connection between music learning, remarking that it can improve student speech, motor behavior, language acquisition, and mood enhancement. In addition, she states that adding music to an educational environment can improve student attention and behavior patterns by addressing students’ visual, auditory, and kinesthetic needs. Finally, she notes that music can help students with special needs, allowing those with autism to block unwanted sensors and increase their focus.

Geist & Geist (2012) analyzed music and education through the lens of neuroscience. They discussed how music therapists, neuroscientists, and educators have worked together to discover that music, specifically rhythm-based protocols, have a positive effect with student
attention spans. When young children listen to steady beats, they become more engaged in academic lessons.

Students with special needs have been the subject of additional, more focused, studies involving music and education. Marlyn (2006) showed that music can be an integral part of instruction for students with special needs, as it allows all children to participate in activities at their ability levels and provides a sense of community for many disabled children. She believes this can be accomplished, because music strengthens the neurons in the brain that stimulate cognitive function, and a connection is created between music and spatial temporal reasoning.

Research Question:

In order to answer the essential question, the research action plan will employ a qualitative design and the following Research Question: How does listening to music during academic tasks affect student comprehension of learning objectives?

Research Methods:

Participants

The participants in the study consist of 24 students (12 male, 12 female) taking a 10th grade English class in Poughkeepsie High School. Four of the students in the class have special needs. The study will take place at the individual teacher level with nominal variables including gender, ethnicity, and student needs.

Methods

With the teacher’s permission, I will implement a new music listening policy that allows students to listen to music (through headphones) on their personal devices throughout any independent work that is conducted during class time. During any independent reading, writing,
or practice, students will be allowed to listen to their own music. The policy will be in place for a full academic year.

**Data Collection & Analysis**

In order to determine the impact of the new policy, I will collect data from multiple sources including: student interviews, student questionnaires, student focus groups, teacher interviews, researcher observations, and academic records. The data will be collected before, during and after the policy is put into place. The study will have trustworthiness, validity, and reliability due to the triangulation of data that is achieved from numerous independent sources. To analyze the data, I plan to code interviews, categorize field notes, identify themes, and create concept maps. I will also review possible trends within the academic records.

**Expected Results & Limitations:**

At the end of the study I expect the data analysis to show evidence of increased student comprehension of learning objectives. I will have the following Hypothesis: The implementation of a new music listening policy that allows students to listen to music during academic tasks has a positive impact on student comprehension of learning objectives. Limitations of this study include the need to receive both school and teacher buy-ins before implementation and a lacking of statistical significance due to its qualitative nature.

**Findings & Action Plan:**

Once the results are produced, I will distribute them to the administration, teachers, and students of Poughkeepsie High School. They will receive a summary of the consistent themes found expressed through graphic visuals including concept maps. A plan of action will be developed with the administration and teachers to implement the music listening policy throughout the school. This will require schoolwide teacher training and education. One year
after the schoolwide implementation takes place, I will return to the school to evaluate its success. To do so, I will conduct the same data collection strategies again and compare the data analysis results.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, my study will show that the inclusion of music within the classroom can result in higher student comprehension of learning objectives and that more liberal music listening policies can play a key role in introducing valuable musical elements into academic environments. Further research is suggested on a larger scale in order to replicate the data and further verify its validity.
References


