

MAKING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN READING AND MUSIC

READING READINESS - General Considerations

Reading readiness springs from many sources, and among the most important is an environment that from the beginning includes a rich exposure to the mother tongue through words and song, encourages the child to experiment with sounds, and nurtures the child's natural curiosity. Music, movement, play-acting, and drawing all are important during early development for making and communicating meaning in many forms, developing encoding and decoding skills in the language, and for learning and practicing the higher order habits of mind.

In addition, research has found that in an arts-rich environment students are more engaged and cognitively involved than in an environment in which the arts are minimized. When the arts are taught in the context of a sequential curriculum, and especially when they are also integrated across the curriculum, students are more observant, more creative, and have better focus and attitude towards school. The research study, *Champions of Change*, suggests six criteria for effective integration. Integration is productive when

- Students see connections and walk away with bigger ideas.
- Students take their work seriously.
- Expressions and activities in the arts genuinely speak to important areas of the academic curriculum. This also means that the content is seen through more than one form, e.g., beyond the traditional written and spoken word.
- The content lesson and artistic lesson are of equal importance.
- The experience has a planned and ongoing assessment (student, peer, and teacher) with rubrics or scoring guides.
- The lesson plan is based on state curriculum standards in both the arts and the other content areas.

Random ideas using music activities for didactic instruction in reading:

Principle - use song, chant, rhythms to enhance student memory of word sounds, occurrences in history, etc. Always help students to remember and work on musical aspects such as singing tone, pitch acuity, steady beat, etc.

- Word sounds - Use rhyming words set to simple melodic fragments such as sol-mi. Have students make up melodies for the rhymes (composing and phonological awareness) How many words using the "at" sound can the students think of and set to a tune? (phonemic awareness; musical concepts - phrase length, use of singing voice, pitch acuity, etc.)
- Write similar sounding words on the board, have the group or small groups use them in a sentence/song (promotes word and sound recognition).

- Group-write song lyrics, then group-compose music for them. (helps students learn to “chunk” meaning by verses). This is especially effective if the song is for a purpose beyond the classroom, such as a performance for another class, the PTA, a concert, a CD, etc. An extension of this would be writing words and music for a musical based on folk tales, etc.
- Show students how dynamic contrast in music and in words changes the meaning.
- Use unfamiliar words in songs. (helps students to include them in their mental storehouse, understand them by their usage, learn shaping of sentences; promotes singing skills)
- Have students write reflective critiques of their (taped) performance with specific criteria for both writing and for musical aspects.
- Help students recognize similarities of story structure in literature and form in music.

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