



# Integrating Music Into The School Curriculum

---

Ruth Gurgel, Ph.D.

# Chapter 1: Music integration in the classroom

## Opening Vignette:



**Vignette:** 3rd grade students at Jefferson Elementary school are working hard in their literature groups. Four students are in each group, and they take turns reading, posing questions, looking up vocabulary and drawing their visualizations of the events in the book. Their teacher, Robert Jackson, or Mr. J as the children call him, knows they will be reluctant to leave their groups in a few minutes and transition into math learning. To help them, Mr. J gives them a two-minute warning, and after two minutes are over, he softly strums his ukulele and begins to sing their “math transition” song, to the tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle.” During the second verse, the students join in with the song and complete their clean-up and move to the tables for math.

“Listen, listen, students dear,  
Reading’s over, have no fear,  
We will read another day,  
You’ve worked hard now, I must say:  
Listen, listen students dear,  
Reading’s over have no fear.

Time for math, get our supplies  
Pencil, eraser, lively minds,  
With our teacher, Mr. J,  
Solving problems in many ways  
Time for math, get our supplies,  
Pencil, eraser, lively minds.”

# Chapter 1: Introduction

In the opening vignette, Mr. J used music to help his students seamlessly prepare for their math class in what Liora Bresler<sup>1</sup> calls the “Affective Style” of music integration.

What role does music play in your life? Do you turn to certain songs when you have had a rough day and need soothing? What about when you are heading in to class? Do you have a playlist you listen to as you drive or walk? How about a special song? Do you recall memories of a special person in your life when you hear a certain song? Music can lighten our burdens, bring us together, sooth our minds and souls, and help us celebrate or mourn. Music can also play an important role in your classroom, helping you infuse joy and warmth into the daily routines of your students. On top of that, music can also help deepen learning for the students, increase the effectiveness of your transitions, and inspire creativity. Watch this video, entitled [“Dancing Away the School Day Blues.”](#)

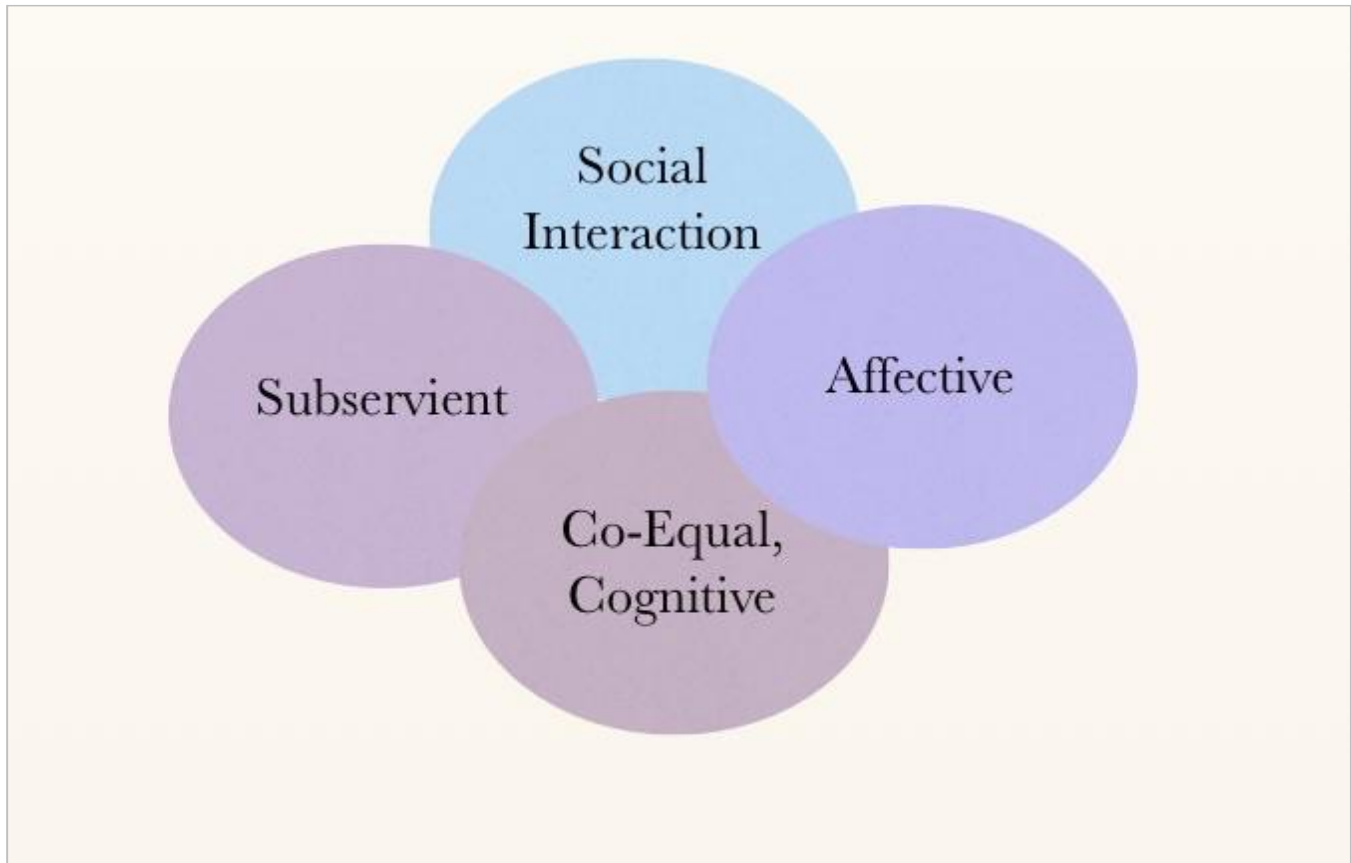
In the video, you noticed that students used songs to help them remember concepts. They also re-wrote words to familiar songs to synthesize issues they were studying. You saw the teachers training at the school using tambourines and other instruments. So how can you learn these skills? The good news: you will get the skills you need from this class, as well as many lesson plans you can use as models.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bresler, Liora. The Subservient, Co-Equal, Affective, and Social Integration Styles and Their Implications for the Arts. Arts Education Policy Review , v96 n5, p31 -37, May-Jun 1995.

# Chapter 1: Four Styles of Music Integration in the Classroom

Before you begin learning the skills you will need, it will be useful to develop and learn a framework for music integration in a classroom. Liora Bresler defined 4 musical integration styles (see illustration below), all useful in the classroom. Let's explore each one.



To begin, watch this video about [how music functions in The Ron Clark Academy](#). Notice how the school uses music, art, and student participation to make the learning environment engaging and exciting. Now, let's explore how this magic can happen.

## Social Interaction Style

In the **social interaction style**, music is used to support and build community. This can be a classroom community; but can also be expanded to include the school, the parents, and the local neighborhood. Here are some examples of the **social interaction style** in a classroom:

- You and your students choose a special song to be the “Monday morning” song and another to be the “Friday afternoon” song. You sing these songs to start and end the week, welcoming the students on Monday and celebrating their accomplishments. The Monday song gets the students pumped up to learn, and you sing with them showing them that you are excited they are there. The students in your class know that they can count on the special songs—they feel like they belong in your classroom.
- You have completed a unit on the state of Kansas (substitute your state if you are not from Kansas!) The students wrote a song incorporating some of the historical facts they learned about Kansas, and want to perform it. You invite the parents to school at the end of the week, and perform the song for them, inviting them into the learning community to celebrate their children’s accomplishments.
- The students created a rhythmic rendition of a Langston Hughes poem and have added instrumental accompaniment. The school board of your district invites students to open each meeting, and you ask if your students can perform. At the board performance, your students share what they’ve learned about Hughes and the community members interact with your students.
- Your school decides to celebrate the end of the standardized testing season, and you suggest a hallway dance party. The other teachers love this idea, and the administrator plays “Happy” by Pharrell Williams over the intercom at the end of the last day of testing. All of the teachers, students, administrators, and other staff head out into the hallways, and boogie down to the song. Everyone feels they have accomplished something together.

## Affective Style

- In the **affective style** of music integration, music is integrated to create a mood or to enhance creativity. Your “affect” includes your emotions and desires and can be then linked to resulting behaviors. When you use music to help students navigate daily emotions one positive outcome is that students can learn to identify and describe feelings as well as choose from a range of responses. In addition, music can be strategically used to support creative thought in other endeavors, such as writing, painting, or movement. The opening vignette provides an example of the affective style of music integration as the teacher used a song to support students as they navigated the sometimes-difficult task of transitioning from one activity to the next. Other examples of the **affective style** include:
- You play a recording of soothing guitar music as students circulate around the classroom. You have put up some art prints in a variety of styles. You invite students to take a gallery walk and stop by one painting that speaks to them. As they gaze at the painting, you

instruct them to write a story about what they imagine in the painting. The music provides a background for their creative writing.

- Students have just returned to your classroom after finishing lunch and recess. A few students began to argue at recess, and you sense a grumpy energy as the students enter. Before dealing with the argument and moving on to learning, you have a feeling that the students might benefit from some calming music. You put on an instrumental track and invite students to join you in the series of steps involved in the **Brain Dance**. ([Watch this video!](#)) This refocuses your students and you see the smiles return as you begin class again.
- You have several kindergarten students who flourish when they can sense predictability in their daily schedules. You develop a visual schedule with words and icons. You also include a simple song that signals all of the students that an upcoming transition is approaching. Your students rely on the songs to help them follow along on the schedule, and their parents report that the children are eager to get started at school each day.

### Subservient Style

In the **subservient style**, teachers use music in the service of other subjects. When they integrate music in the subservient style, they use the song to help students learn a concept or idea from another subject area, or remember something important. In this style, the students may not study the music itself, and typically don't gain much musical understanding other than possibly singing a song or moving to a beat. Here are a few common examples:

- You are working on counting and number concepts with your students. You play the [song "5 Little Monkeys"](#) and have the students act out the subtraction as they listen to the song.
- You teach your kindergarten students a song to help them remember the [days of the week](#).
- You have your 2nd grade students draw pictures of the water cycle. You create an iMovie with their drawings and add a [song about the water cycle](#). The students enjoy seeing their drawings as they learn the song.
- You help your kindergarten students learn the sounds the letters make with this "[Phonics Dance](#)."
- Your third grade students use [songs to remember their times tables](#).

### Co-Equal, Cognitive Style

In the **co-equal, cognitive style**, students tap into higher-order creative and critical thought processes as they explore how music and one or more subject areas connect and enhance one another. Teachers who employ this style understand that interdisciplinary learning provides students with opportunities to analyze, synthesize and evaluate disciplines in new ways, leading to deep learning in all subject areas included. Students are encouraged to think critically, research and problem solve when learning in co-equal, cognitive ways. The teacher who integrates this style must understand how subject areas overlap and intersect, and must also be able to set up learning as a quest for understanding. Examples of the **co-equal, cognitive style** include:

- When studying life science with 1st graders, you wonder with your students how and why living creatures make sounds. The students search for sound bytes of different human vocal sounds and animal sounds. They learn how vocal cords work in humans and explore how and if spoken and sung sounds may vary. Students may ask questions surrounding this topic, such as, “Why do humans sing?” or “Do humans sing for different reasons?” or “Do animals sing?” At the end of the inquiry, students have connected learning in science and music, and many of them are inspired to continue searching for information on animal and human communication when they visit the library the next week.
- When studying the elements of fictional stories with your 2nd grade students, you decide to have them set a story to music using iMovie, choosing different music for the rising action, the climax and the falling action. Students begin by asking questions such as, “How will we know what type of music to select?” “How can we make the mood of the music match the mood of that part of the story?” “Can we play our own music to create those moods?” “Does every story have those 3 elements? What might some different elements be?” “How could music help us find new elements?” You complete a sound story as a class, and then put students in groups to select a new story for which they will compose or arrange music. You have them create a presentation to describe the elements of the story and why they selected the music they chose.
- When 5th grade students are learning about the country of China, you invite them to explore the music made by the people living there. Students ask questions such as, “What songs do the children sing?” “Do people in China listen to the same types of music that I do?” “What is the traditional music like there?” You help them find resources, and they decide they would like to talk to a 5th grade class in China and talk with them about their lives. You find a teacher in China who is willing, and arrange a Skype meeting. Your students develop questions to ask. You decide to create a documentary of students’ work to share with parents.

# Chapter 1: Music Integration: Your Turn

You have now learned about the 4 styles of musical integration most common in classrooms, according to Bresler's work. These are not the only ways we can integrate music into life, as I'm sure you know! We use music in many other ways—worship, for example. This framework, however, helps us realize 4 great ways we can create a joyful, warm, deep learning experience for our students. Try the following suggestions and jot down your notes below:

- 1. Your musical self.** We all integrate music into our lives. **On a piece of white paper, or using a drawing app, draw a picture and use words to describe your favorite types of music, any instruments (including voice) you may have studied, favorite memories where music is involved, special songs that hold meaning for you, any concerts you may have been to, anything else unique to you related to music.** Check out my example [here](#).
- 2. Subservient Integration:** **A. Write out the words for “Row Row Row Your Boat” or “Mary Had a Little Lamb.” B.** Now pick a math or science concept you might teach young students, such as counting by 2s or learning the lifecycle of a butterfly. **List the concept and the elements of that concept you want the students to remember.** Example of Elements involved in counting by 2's: (2,4,6,8,10,etc.) **C. Try changing the lyrics of that song to teach that concept. Write your new song lyrics.**
- 3. Social Interaction:** Think of a song that has a great message for you to use in your classroom as a “Monday Morning” song. **List it.**
- 4. Affective:** Can you find an instrumental piece of music (no lyrics) that will provide a calming affect for your students in the classroom and to which you could have them do basic yoga moves before a stressful test? **List it.**
- 5. Co-Equal/Cognitive:** Go to the website [www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu) . Go to the tab “genre” on the left side. Select a type of music from somewhere in the world. Choose one track, click on it, listen to it, and read the liner notes or introduction. a) What did you learn? b) Describe a lesson idea that integrates this information. c) Do a quick search on Amazon to see if you can find any children's books related to the culture or time period represented by the music you selected. **List it.**