# Rhythmic Drawing: Exploring the Use of Art and Music on Self-Regulation in a Grade 4/5 Classroom

Brittany McNeil

Curriculum Inquiry, Nipissing University

EDUC-4756-FA209

Dr. Katie Maxwell

November 29, 2024

#### Abstract

This study investigates the impact of combining drawing and listening to music on students' self-regulation after high-energy events like recess. The purpose was to explore creative interventions that facilitate emotional regulation and refocusing in elementary classrooms. The procedure involved a literature review analyzing theories of self-regulation and the benefits of art and music. Findings suggest that while structured approaches are effective, integrating creative activities enhances emotional control and cognitive flexibility, aligning with research by Panadero and Kirschner (2020). The results support educators in adopting blended strategies to cultivate integrated student development.

Keywords: self-regulation, high-energy transitions, recess, emotional regulation, art, music

#### Method

# **Participants**

This action research involved a Grade 4/5 class in Barrie, Ontario within the Simcoe County District School Board. The class had 20 students in a special education setting. All students were identified as gifted, with many also having additional exceptionalities such as autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and anxiety. Every student had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). The small school housed fewer than 300 students from Kindergarten to Grade 8. The class was located in the first room near the entrance and directly across from the main office. The classroom featured a coat room and large windows that allowed ample natural light. Initially, students were arranged in groups, but partway through the research, the seating was reorganized into a "U" shape to encourage more direct interaction and engagement.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection included anecdotal observation notes guided by a checklist (Appendix A) and exit tickets for student reflection (Appendix B). Anecdotal observations provided qualitative insights into student behaviors and engagement levels. The exit tickets gathered qualitative and quantitative data, allowing students to rate their experiences on a scale using emojis. The exit ticket also provided open-ended feedback at the end where students could express in their own words how it made them feel. This dual approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of student responses.

The observational method was appropriate as it captured real-time interactions and immediate reactions during the intervention, while the exit tickets provided individual feedback and measurable data on students' perceived readiness and feelings about the routine. This

combination of methods offered a balanced view of observable behavior and personal student reflections. Resources needed for this process included checklists for note-taking, printed exit tickets, and basic writing materials. Students were offered a conference if they were unable to write; however, this was not needed.

The research timeline began with pre-data collection observations on October 7, 2024, and active data collection started on October 15, 2024, concluding on November 7, 2024. Observations occurred after students engaged in drawing and music activities following the second recess. Depending on the situation, notes were taken immediately or after students were independently engaged in subsequent lessons.

# **Data Analysis**

The analysis involved reviewing anecdotal notes to identify recurring themes related to student engagement and behavior. Observational data were categorized based on the checklist criteria to highlight common responses and patterns. The exit tickets were collated and converted into a quantitative summary to present the mode for student readiness and overall enjoyment of the self-regulation routine. See Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1

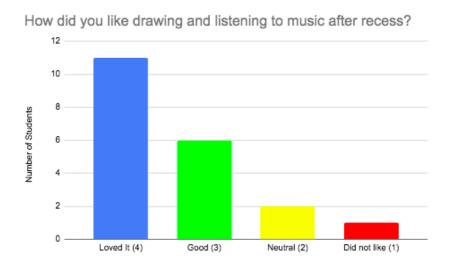
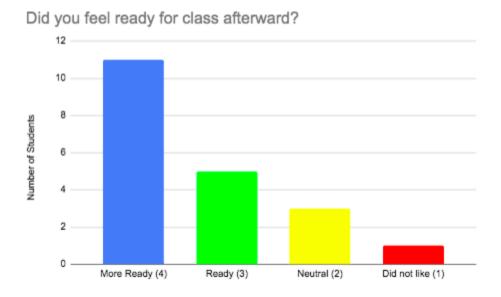


Figure 2



Qualitative responses from the exit tickets were analyzed for common sentiments, providing additional context and depth to the numerical data.

These procedures were appropriate because they allowed for both detailed, context-rich analysis through anecdotal notes and straightforward, quantifiable measures via the exit tickets. This mixed-methods approach provided a more nuanced understanding of the intervention's impact on students.

The data was interpreted through themes such as constructivist theories, strategies for cultivating self-regulation, and observations of student behavior during and after the activities. Responses from students, including direct quotes and behavioral patterns, were examined to understand how drawing and music influenced their emotional readiness and focus. These findings were interpreted within the context of educational theories, including Dewey's experiential learning and Vygotsky's social development frameworks, to identify connections between the activities and students' self-regulation.

#### **Modifications**

The one change made from Part A was conducting the research after every second recess. Initially, I planned to alternate the routine by conducting it after different recesses on various days, eventually covering both recesses. The day was split into 6 periods. Period 3 followed the first recess, but this period often included planning time, Bridge sessions with guest teachers, and Learning Buddy activities with a Grade 1 class, making it impractical for action research.

# **Discussion of Findings**

## **Discussion of Results**

In conducting this action research, I aimed to investigate the impact of implementing the combination of drawing and listening to music on students' self-regulation after high-energy events like recess. First, students exhibited improved self-regulation when engaging in structured drawing and music activities. They transitioned from the energetic state of recess to a more composed and focused mindset for classroom learning.

Observations showed that students who participated in the activity displayed calmer behavior and were quicker to settle into academic tasks. One student expressed, "I felt more relaxed and ready to focus after drawing," demonstrating the positive effect of these activities on their self-regulation. Survey data also supported these observations. When asked, "How did you like drawing and listening to music after recess?", 11 students responded with "Loved it," 6 with "Good," 2 with "Neutral," and only 1 with "Did not like." Additionally, when asked if they felt more prepared for class after these activities, 11 students answered "More Ready," 5 said "Ready," 3 chose "Neutral," and only 1 indicated "Did not like." These results indicate that most students found the combination of drawing and listening to music beneficial for regulating their energy and preparing for subsequent lessons.

The outcomes of this research were both expected and surprising. As anticipated, students demonstrated increased self-regulation, settling down more effectively after recess. What stood out was the impact on students who typically struggled with focus and behavior. These students were observed to be more composed and less disruptive after participating in the drawing and music activities.

Student reflections highlighted this trend, with comments such as, "It made me feel calmer and more ready to learn," and "I felt like it helped me let go of the energy from recess." One student noted, "I have actually stopped fidgeting as much now," suggesting that structured drawing time helped them manage their energy more effectively. There were also varied preferences, such as, "I liked it but I prefer more songs with lyrics," and "I loved drawing but would prefer choosing songs and voting." These responses indicate that while the overall impact was positive, individual preferences for music types need consideration. I tried to alternate between instrumental songs and songs with lyrics.

An unexpected outcome was the love for the routine. With the many exceptionalities, all shared the discomfort of change without discussion. Students began to get ready for the routine without instruction. On days we were unable to perform the routine, students expressed anguish. This demonstrates their desire and joy to complete the routine.

## **Interpretation of Results**

Based on my experiences conducting this inquiry, I understand that integrating drawing and music as a transitional activity after recess effectively enhances students' self-regulation. Students demonstrated greater emotional readiness and focus, allowing smoother transitions into academic tasks. It seemed to provide a structured way for students to decompress and channel their energy creatively.

The increase in self-regulation was particularly noticeable in the gifted classroom because of the multiple exceptionalities potentially affecting their ability to self-regulate. One student mentioned, "Drawing while listening to music made me feel more in control." This outcome reinforces the idea that alternative approaches to transition periods can benefit students' readiness to learn (Hallam, 2010).

This action research had significant successes and some challenges. The most notable success was observing how students' self-regulation improved, with many reporting feeling calmer and more prepared for class. Additionally, the activities appeared to support social-emotional learning, as students mentioned feeling more relaxed and less anxious. This finding aligns with Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory, which underscores the benefits of active, engaging experiences.

# Challenges and Considerations in Implementation

There were challenges, such as managing the time allocated for these activities. Ensuring the drawing and music sessions fit into the schedule without impacting instructional time was sometimes difficult. Additionally, while most students responded positively, a few noted that certain types of music affected their mood negatively, with comments like, "Some songs made me feel angry or sad, so I did not feel very good." This highlights the need for carefully curated music selections to support positive self-regulation (Vygotsky, 1978).

The findings underscore the significance of incorporating strategies that cater to students' emotional and behavioral needs. Structured drawing and music can serve as powerful tools for helping students regulate their energy levels and transition more effectively into learning. This raises questions for future research: How can these activities be tailored to individual preferences

while maintaining their effectiveness? What other types of creative opportunities might similarly enhance self-regulation after high-energy activities?

My experience of student behavior after recess confirmed the power of structured, creative, calming activities for improving self-regulation. The positive response from students supports my belief that using engaging, hands-on methods can ease transitions and enhance focus. This aligns with my practice of creating connections between student activities and their emotional states.

#### Connections to Educational Theories and Future Directions

The success of this action research aligns with the current literature on the importance of self-regulation and emotional readiness in the classroom. Research indicates that activities involving art and music can help manage students' stress and improve focus (Hallam, 2010). Additionally, Dewey's (1938) theory of experiential learning emphasizes that students benefit from active participation, which supports the effectiveness of these structured activities.

The findings of this study connect to constructivist theories, which emphasize that learning is an active, contextualized process (Piaget, 1952). This research provides an example of how drawing and music, as constructivist tools, help students build upon their energy management skills while fostering new learning connections. The observed collaborative interactions align with Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory, highlighting the role of social interactions in learning and regulation.

Lastly, this inquiry has shown that implementing drawing and listening to music opportunities after high-energy activities like recess can positively impact students' self-regulation. While there were challenges, the overall benefits indicate that this approach is worth further exploration and integration into broader teaching practices.

# **Implications and Next Steps**

# **Implications**

The implications of this study on integrating drawing and music into elementary classrooms to create self-regulation are varied, aligning closely with the literature explored. The question examined was: What is the impact of combining drawing and listening to music on students' self-regulation after high-energy events like recess? Major themes in existing research emphasize how creative interventions can serve as effective tools for emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility (Panadero & Kirschner, 2020; Smith, 2019). The findings from this review align with these themes, suggesting that incorporating art and music can provide students with mechanisms for emotional expression, thus enhancing their ability to focus, self-regulate, and prepare for subsequent lessons.

The journey from the original research question to the final insights revealed that while structured self-regulation strategies (Digiacomo & Chen, 2016; Datnow & Castellano, 2000) are effective, creative approaches offer unique benefits. López and Camargo (2022) indicate that creative exercises stimulate neural pathways that enhance self-regulation. This contrasts with more directive, teacher-led approaches which prioritize monitoring and reflection (Zimmerman, 2000). Yet, in my research, it became evident that creative interventions were beneficial for autonomy and provided structured guidance.

A limitation of this study is the classroom sample itself. The research was conducted in a special education class. All students were deemed gifted. With that, some students had other diagnoses such as autism, ADHD, and anxiety. It would be interesting to see how this affected students who did not have the structure of a gifted classroom and had different exceptionalities. Conducting research in different settings, and having a larger sample, could help answer the

question: What is the impact of combining drawing and listening to music on students' self-regulation after high-energy events like recess? For educators, the implications highlight the value of blending structured and creative practices. By integrating art and music thoughtfully, teachers can create an inclusive environment that supports diverse self-regulatory needs, influencing both classroom practice and educational policies to prioritize integrated student development.

# **Next Steps**

I plan to pilot a similar program incorporating art and music activities following high-energy periods in my future teaching. This initiative will involve developing lesson plans that integrate drawing and listening to calming music. I will lead this project, collaborating with students for feedback. The timeline for implementation is a term long, using resources like pencil crayons, scrap paper, and curated music playlists. With the feedback from students, I plan to use songs they pick with guidelines such as low bpm, no vulgar words, or other profanities. I will have an anonymous box for them to submit their suggestions, and I will review them before playing. Supporting materials will include student reflection sheets. This approach, which balances creative autonomy with structured guidance, may provide a replicable model for other educators to enhance students' self-regulation practices.

#### Conclusion

The assimilation of drawing and listening to music into elementary classrooms as a means of encouraging student self-regulation holds optimistic promise, as demonstrated through this study. By aligning with research that highlights the positive impact of creative activities on emotional regulation and cognitive flexibility (Panadero & Kirschner, 2020; Smith, 2019), this project indicates the potential for creative activities to support students in managing their energy

and emotions after high-stimulation events like recess. The findings suggest a balanced approach that combines structured guidance with creative expression. Ultimately, these insights can inform educational practices and policies, cultivating an integrated learning environment where students thrive emotionally and academically.

## References

- Datnow, A., & Castellano, M. (2000). Teachers' responses to success for all: How beliefs, experiences, and adaptations shape implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(3), 775-799. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/00028312037003775
- Dewey, J. (1938). Experience and education. Macmillan.
- Digiacomo, G., & Chen, P. P. (2016). Enhancing self-regulatory skills through an intervention embedded in a middle school mathematics curriculum. *Psychology in the Schools*, *53*(6), 601-616. <a href="https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.21929">https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.21929</a>
- Hallam, S. (2010). The power of music: Its impact on the intellectual, social and personal development of children and young people. *International Journal of Music Education*, 28(3), 269-289.
- López, O., & Camargo, Á. (2022). Creativity and self-regulation in learning: Impact on student well-being. *American Journal of Biomedical Science & Research*, 16(2), 285-297. https://doi.org/10.34297/AJBSR.2022.16.002285
- Panadero, E., & Kirschner, P. A. (2020). Self-regulation and creativity in education: A meta-analytical review. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32(1), 123-145.
- Piaget, J. (1952). The origins of intelligence in children. International Universities Press.
- Smith, J. (2019). Student-centered learning and self-regulation through art and music. *Creative Learning Review*, 7(2), 45-56.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

# Appendix A

## **Observational Checklist**

Are students actively engaging in the lesson?
Are students being disruptive?
Are students talking over each other?
Are students talking with each other while the teacher is speaking?
Are students paying attention?
Are students demonstrating relaxed body language?

## October 7, 2024

The teacher does not use strategies to help students transition such as movement breaks. All students are gifted. Classroom management is pretty relaxed. Students are allowed to get up during lessons to go to the fidget corner in the back of the classroom. They are also allowed to fidget at their desk, so long as they are quiet.

Students are actively engaging in the lesson. Students are disruptive. They are interrupting speakers and talking over each other, including the teacher. They are somewhat paying attention. They are not engaging in active listening body language because they are fidgeting. Body language is not relaxed.

#### **October 8, 2024**

Today was hard to observe. Spend most of the day on an Art Walk Field Trip. When we came back, it was planning time so I was out of the classroom. Following that, it was independent student presentations and students were silent in their observations.

# October 15, 2024

#### **Here Comes The Sun -** The Beatles

Students were a bit excited to start the task. It took some redirecting, which was expected since I was explaining the process. They had questions about limitations, etc. I answered all questions, explaining they could draw whatever came to mind—whether abstract or imagery. They were advised they could use any tools. I advised that I would not be giving instructions again, and going forward, after the second recess, they would walk in, a paper would be on their desk, and a song would start playing.

Afterward, students were quiet for a moment. A pair of students were to do a presentation after. Students began to get disruptive while the presenters were setting up their presentations. Students were talking over each other. A teacher was not speaking, but my associate teacher tried redirecting them with no luck. Students were not paying attention until the presenters began. Their body language was somewhat relaxed, but they were not attentive.

## October 16, 2024

# **Zelda's Lullaby** – *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*

It took students about 1-2 minutes to sit down and be prepared for the transition. It took some redirecting. Once the music started playing, all students were quiet and focused. After the task, a few students were speaking but were able to dial in once redirected and advised we are doing a lesson. During the lesson almost all students were actively engaging in the lesson, no one was disruptive, talking over each other, or speaking while I was speaking. They were mostly paying attention and their body language was relaxed. The lesson I was teaching was an art lesson. Once the activity started, students were loud and talking and needed some reminders to be quiet.

## October 17, 2024

## **Count on Me** – Bruno Mars

It took students about 1-2 minutes to sit down and be prepared for the transition. They were catching onto the routine; however, they were still full of questions. They are curious about the song that is going to play. I might start writing the song on the board. Today some of them quietly sang along to the chosen song. Afterward, when I began my lesson, students were not actively engaged in the lesson. They were very disruptive and silly. They were talking over each other and myself while I was teaching. They were paying attention, but they were being very silly about their participation. Their body language was not relaxed. I'm not certain if this was because it was a song they liked, or if it was because they had 100 minutes of Outdoor Education today the block prior. Once the lesson was over and they were given time to do their activity, they were more quiet and regulated.

## October 18, 2024

No observations today due to a full-day field trip.

# October 21, 2024

# **Hedwig's Theme** – *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

I was late getting to class because of jr. girls volleyball practice. Upon arrival, all students were quiet and reading. I feel like I should not have experimented because once I started playing the song, students began to chat and show their doodles to their classmates. Afterward, there were supposed to be student presentations. However, it was not ready to go straight away. I believe that lag may have affected results. Students were quietly chatting while the associate teacher spoke with the students who were to be presenting. During the presentations, they were engaged and not being disruptive. They were not talking over each other. Students were not speaking with each other. They had their full attention on their students. Body language was relaxed and all eyes were on the presenting student.

## October 22, 2024

Students were very loud after their lunch break. There was a supply in and she did attendance before our transition. She also wanted to chat with them about seeing their friends at another school and talking about potential pen pals. This affects the transition because I won't be able to see them go from the loud to the quiet. I decided not to proceed with the experiment today because of this. The students were disappointed. They appear to enjoy this routine.

## October 23, 2024

## **Riptide** – *Vance Joy*

Students are starting to get more into the routine. They are settling in much faster to prepare for the activity. Students were actively engaging with minor disruptions. They were not talking over each other. They are struggling with speaking while the teacher is speaking in the sense they are not raising their hands to answer questions. They do have full attention. Body language is relaxed

#### October 24, 2024

## **To Zanarkand** – Final Fantasy X

Students are prepared and ready to begin the routine. However, afterward, students were off. Although they were engaged, they had trouble not blurting out and talking over other students participating, myself teaching, and being extremely disruptive. I could not redirect their attention, even when I switched the lesson from math to gym. At the gym, they would not pay attention to me. Body language for the whole 100 minutes was not relaxed and they were consistently moving around.

#### October 28, 2024

## **Somewhere Over the Rainbow** – *Israel Kamakawiwo'ole*

Students are starting to enjoy the transition. They have started to ask if we are doing it and settling into the routine. Sometimes, like with this song, they sing along. As we started moving on to the lesson, the class was interrupted by an evacuation drill. After the evacuation, students were carving pumpkins. They were loud talking to each other and excited about the activity. Their attention did not need to be focused on a lesson; however, they did not meet any criteria in the checklist.

#### October 29, 2024

# "The Fellowship Theme" – The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring

Students were fast to settle into the transition. The activity after was their first time ever doing math centres/games, so students were actively engaged. However, they were really excited, talking over eachother. When I was explaining the centres, they were paying attention, not talking while I was talking and demonstrating relaxed body language.

October 30, 2024

# "Stand By Me" - Ben E. King

Students settled into the routine. Afterward, they were actively engaging in the lesson. They were not disruptive or talking over each other. They did not speak over me and were fully paying attention and their body language was facing towards me and relaxed. This was a very successful transition

# October 31, 2024

This was a really busy day and I was unable to do the transition at the scheduled time.

## **November 1, 2024**

# "You've Got a Friend in Me" – Randy Newman (*Toy Story*)

This was probably the most regulated the students have been. They settled into the routine quickly. They were actively engaging in the lesson, not disruptive. They were fully engaged in the lesson. They were not talking over each other or while the teacher was speaking. They were paying attention, and their body language was relaxed.

## **November 4, 2024**

Students took a little longer to settle into the routine, but once the song started they were focused. Some choose to meditate instead because they said they couldn't think of anything. Afterward, there was a bit of a period to prep for a student presentation. Compared to the first day, students are a lot more quiet. They are still talking, but their body language is fine. They are not disruptive. When the student presentation began, they were engaged, not talking, and paying attention.

## **November 5, 2024**

## "Time" – *Inception*

Students settled into a routine. Afterward, they were actively engaging in the lesson. They were focused and not disruptive. They did not talk over each other or the teacher. All students were paying attention and demonstrated relaxed body language.

## **November 6, 2024**

Students attended an assembly to hear a guest author speak. I did not perform the research.

# **November 7, 2024**

Beautiful Things (Piano Version) - Benson Boone

Students settled into a routine. Afterward, I gave them the survey to complete. They were actively engaged in the survey. They were focused and not disruptive. They did not talk over each other or the teacher. All students were paying attention and demonstrated relaxed body language. They were quiet waiting for their peers to finish.

Appendix B

