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Breaking the Silence: *Music as a Means to Foster Student Confidence, Dialogue, and Focus*

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An Average Freshman English Classroom...

- Students are **new** new adults
- **Inexperienced** in college classrooms (Plus COVID!)
- Classes depend on small group **discussion**, peer **feedback**, and student-teacher **dialogue**



Initial Observations

- Students uncomfortable breaking the **silence**
- Students unwilling to volunteer answers – not because they don't know the answer, but they're **uncomfortable** being the center of attention
- Challenges in **transitioning** classroom “modes”: starting classes, ending group discussions, etc.



Their awkwardness made
me awkward.



So I put on music to break the silence.
The change was almost immediate.

With music on in the background...

- Students more willing to **initiate** conversations
- Students more **confident** “in the spotlight”
- Students follow music as **behavioral cues**—sustaining focus, following instructor guidance





What I **Think** is Happening

- ? Students rationally know what they **ought** to do, but lack the **confidence** to do so.
- ? Music helps **reduce anxieties** when students don't want to be **the center of attention**, but still have a desire to share their ideas.
- ? Music helps me **transition** classroom "modes" – when the music is queued, it signals students to switch behaviors: focused writing, "lecture-mode," etc.



What You Can Try

- ? Experiment with **Playlists!** (They mocked my first attempts...)
 - ? Pandora & Spotify
- ? Experiment with music during your own challenging classroom **transition points**
- ? Consider if your classroom is a **comfortable** or **safe-feeling** environment. What in the environment can you tinker with, which may affect student behaviors?

Additional Resources for Encouraging Student Engagement



WGU: “Encouraging Students to Participate: How to Help Shy Students Speak Up”

Edutopia: “9 Strategies for Getting More Students to Talk”

ThoughtCo: “How to Get Students to Talk in Class”