

The Benefits of ASMR in Education

Fran
Apprich, PhD

Abstract: *Using ASMR (Autonomous sensory meridian response) as a background soundtrack, while studying or writing exams, can calm down anxious students and can help them optimize their academic potential and creativity. Nowadays the constant flow of information and obsessive interaction with technical devices has created a social media generation who are easily distracted, with low attention span, sleeping and eating disorders, anxiety and depression. ASMR audio-visual content has facilitated to experience a sense of peace and calm so alien to nowadays society. This audio-visual content offers today's youth a portal for relaxation and its popularity has grown exponentially in recent years. For this reason, it is important that educators, researchers, parents and youngsters become aware of the nature of ASMR and its unique benefits. Educators are in a unique position to help their students to understand that relaxation is key for their own creativity, innovation and growth.*

I. Introduction

ASMR, which is often described as a 'tingling sensation' and its impact on students in the classroom environment, is not simply another educational tool that can be overlooked. The interaction between the easily distracted social media generation with ASMR defines the need for relaxation especially during studying and examinations; being constantly distracted means to concentrate on nothing and to freeze (one's own potential).

The key to any creativity, academic writing or innovation is to concentrate and focus, to let your imagination take you to places that you yourself are surprised by and to be allowed enough space and time to flourish (like a blank page that is waiting to be filled). This need of nowadays students is apparent by the sheer amount of views of ASMR footage – but the link of ASMR as a tool of education, a relaxed state of mind that can be achieved via the click of a button, should be regarded as one of the most exciting educational methods of our time. What was Rock and Roll for the 50s is ASMR for today's generation; from the liberation of conventions of the 50s to the relaxed utilization of our own relaxed state of mind. That's why we all tune in and want to be part of this peace of mind. Loud Rock and Roll music has been switched for gentle whispering sounds to deal with everyday life and its pressures. Obviously music still has a place in our heart but it is more to stimulate rather than to calm down and follow one's own thoughts.

In this paper I will argue that an analysis of ASMR, understood as a relaxing tool in combination with education, can bring us closer to a more open-minded and inspiring education. Education established itself as a platform, which, from the outset, stimulated and inspired its students by making them perceive, receive, interact, create and most importantly extend knowledge via innovation. Ideally, the students should be encouraged to interact and strive to gain new knowledge, to curiously discover new things by their own efforts and to let their creativity fly. However, unfortunately the ever-rising pressure put on students (by parents, society and not to forget themselves) turns education into a competition against others rather than as an exploration of one's own potential and creativity. This impact can be perceived when students suffer under panic attacks during exams, cold sweat, "their mind going blank", never truly fulfilling their own potential, which results in frustration and hardship. At some stage most students give up and feel helpless and have little faith in their own creativity, intelligence and potential innovations. Obviously this lack of success caused by anxiety can cause anger, frustration, depression, sleeping and eating disorders, low self-esteem which then causes missed opportunities and results in little belief in the world at large. One day these students will become parents and they themselves will put the same kind of pressure on their own kids so that the cycle of anxiety repeats itself over and over again and creates an unhappy society who feel more stuck than alive.

There was a study that people who innovate, who overcome obstacles and who make use of their time (on earth) to create are scientifically proven to age more slowly. Now there is an anti-aging secret! No matter if this study is justified or not – fact is that people who innovate have a more exciting life and seem to be happier. At the end of the day that's what life is all about – a happy society which creates rather than destroys. I remember times in which recycling was greeted with skepticism and ridicule too. Well, it shows that only when we look out for each other and our planet do we have a chance to survive as a species. Education is no different.

We as educators have to face students who are glued to their mobile phones and not to their books. I can see the benefits of mobile phones and their easily accessible and vast amount of information. Mobile phones can be used as another educational tool - if used correctly and innovatively. The right information in

combination with time to reflect, time to digest and one's own active imagination can result in great innovations. It is like composing music – it is the silence between the notes that make it music and not noise.

We as educators have been entrusted with the education of a new generation and we need to adapt to the low attention span and fears of our students. Personally, I love to see the underdog win a talent competition, the shy student sing/scream out heavy metal and the student who always sits disinterested in the back of the classroom (or lecture hall) writing the most extraordinary theatre play (thankfully I witnessed all of these scenarios during my lecturing career). This is what makes education so exciting in my opinion – and not the A plus student who wants to be the teacher's pet.

I also believe that sometimes we expect too much. I have witnessed some educators who were very arrogant towards their students. Arrogance is a stop sign for the flow of creativity of any students. We need to give our students time to grow and not to immediately expect a masterpiece. It would be the same to ask your child to run a marathon or dance tango before it can walk. Let them make mistakes, welcome their mistakes with a smile rather than with sarcasm and disappointment, show them how to improve and most of all keep their hopes up that one day they themselves will become champions (as long as they do not give up). Nothing is more powerful than faith; and nothing more toxic than to belittle and always know better. Always remember the saying: "Those who can't do, teach!" Don't be one of them. Teach because you love it and have faith in your students and not because you yourself could not make it. Don't let the saying become even worse like for example: "Those who can't teach, teach!" In fact I believe that only those who have proven themselves in the cooperate world should be allowed to teach (at least at University level). The stakes are too high and a bad, uninspiring teacher or professor can be the reason why students will learn to hate a specific subject. It is our responsibility to tease out the true potential of our students and ourselves – in my opinion there is no better and more exciting job out there.

ASMR seems a great way to get rid of these fears and doubts of students. Some critics might argue that if students were to listen to ASMR sounds before and during an exam they would fall asleep. Nevertheless, my data collection at the neurologist center proved that ASMR sounds make you experience a state of calm while being fully conscious. This is the best given starting point for any creative as well as critical thinking exercise, exploration of thoughts and drawing connections.

I myself had suffered under exam anxiety as a student. My way to overcome my anxiety was to listen to Beethoven's 5th piano concerto 2nd movement before my exams and to fall in love for the first time. As soon as I understood that there were more important things in life than being a good student my marks got better and better. Suddenly I was free to think. Music and love were my cure and I am sure that the benefits of ASMR are even more substantial as ASMR does not arouse but calms you down (in fact I believe in a healthy combination of all three methods – music, love and ASMR). Only when your mind is free can it be truly creative.

Most media content is to be consumed passively but in paradox demanding the audience's full attention. ASMR reverses this - ASMR provides enough space to think actively while perceiving passively. The repetitive gentle sounds of similar frequency and volume create a space (or even better cocoon) of calm. Whereas music is often too stimulating and distracting also silence can freak people out. We are not used to silence, as it only exists in space and not on earth. In fact a person stepping in a microphone booth at a recording studio (in which all sounds have been shielded off and eliminated thanks to sound proof material) will feel extremely uncomfortable and be freaked out by the sound of one's own beating heart. For us it is terrifying to hear nothing. Silence is death. Therefore ASMR is the perfect balance of sound but not disruption.

If one was to allow students to perceive ASMR while writing their exams one should find out which particular sounds are most calming for each student (e.g. whispering, tapping or crinkle sounds). Also students should have the opportunity to wear headphones, activate and deactivate the ASMR sounds whenever they want or decline the ASMR offering. I remember one particular teacher who used to read the newspaper while we were writing our exams. At a time where ASMR had no name, the sound of turning pages had put me under the spell of ASMR and I wrote a fantastic essay (and not because of his limited invigilation skills).

Academic critics reinforce the sense of the social media content and usage as being a bad development of our time nevertheless it also represents a terrific introduction and platform for young female students to shake off their fear of technology. I remember that when I was young my older brother had a computer but I didn't. I'm sure my parents would have been happy to buy me a computer too...but computers just did not connect with me nor did they interest me. I had a piano instead. Nowadays my female students excel at social media content and coverage, speed of writing messages, website creation, graphic design, filmmaking and even software development. The newest laptop has become the number one Christmas present on their wish list rather than the latest make-up kit. A good development I find (nothing against make-up though – it would be hypercritical of me to deny my obsession with pretty glitter make-up). But please ladies: Mind before beauty! Only then are you a truly pretty lady

Nowadays, even infants are being taught multiple languages and have to attend logical thinking tutorials so that in the future they will succeed in the harsh cooperate world. Their time outside of school is planned out and booked out like the of a cooperate CEO. The anxiety of their parents, their own fear of the future, is being fed to these little guys with the mother milk. On top of that they are too young to defend themselves and are helpless. No wonder a lot of us have turned out to be so neurotic. In my opinion children should learn via play and eat pieces of paper if they think it tastes good. Humans have always been their own biggest enemy. Educators and parents are no different. Harmful patters of pressure and competition are not being dealt with but often repeated just in another class (or practiced on a younger sibling) in the hope that it will work out this time. To repeat something over and over again and expect a different result is a pure sign of insanity.

This article will explore the complexity of ASMR in education through the analysis of a number of specific critical texts wherein ASMR's unique expressive potential may be observed. I use the terminology of ASMR 'in', rather than 'on' or 'with' education since I believe it to be important to reflect on the symbiosis of ASMR with education. Critics are familiar with the basic principles of education but very little analysis has been given to the psychological reality of nowadays student and education.

ASMR sound content spreads three-dimensionally – like any sound, it penetrates the body and becomes part of it. It creates a tingling sensation in the body and mind. The recording of a sound seeks to recreate the sound source's three-dimensional character. This creates an intimate calming environment and a certain illusion of the presence of the other and space. Sound uses its own grammar and even its reproduction remains intact of its own expressive interactive content.

ASMR and its online popularity raises crucial questions about relaxation and the need for it in education. We must ask ourselves weather ASMR is the answer to our stressful competitive lives and acts as a counterpart. Whereas many attempts have been made to analyze education, surprisingly few psychologists nor educators have paid much attention to the rise of ASMR's expressive forms and meanings. When talking to some of my colleagues at international conferences some were very excited about the potential benefits of ASMR whereas others were more skeptical and mentioned the very complexity of teaching and learning. But should the complexity of learning stop us from exploring? Just because we do not understand the full complexity of our brain yet - should we not work even harder to find out more? Especially when it comes to education?

I believe that this liberation of ASMR and its proven benefits can bring us closer to a state of peace and calm – and what better research is there to concentrate on? The introduction of ASMR as a respected and scientifically proven outlet against exam stress could be just the cure that education needs. Rather than feeding our students more and more information and making them memorize facts (often facts that they'll never again need in their lives and the students are fully aware of this insanity called education) we should give them time and space to explore and connect their already gained knowledge with their own imagination. This is what education is all about. Not only learning facts but extending knowledge (and every single person has that ability to bring something truly unique and wonderful to the table of knowledge).

We as educators should become ASMR ambassadors, document its benefits, collect data, explore it and celebrate it. The fact that ASMR was temporary motivated only by sexualized primitive content to gain subscribers should not overshadow its great character and usefulness.

In my previous award-winning paper called *ASMR and its impact on the social media generation* I undertook a scientific ASMR research with a Neurologist center. My scientific research was seeking to explore the relationship between ASMR sound (only the sound of a person chewing gum) with research participants. I argued that we must acknowledge that ASMR has its unique expressive form and that effective use of ASMR sound would lead us to a state of calm.

What we found out was extraordinary – even the neurologists themselves were amazed...something that rarely happens. To summarize: thanks to ASMR all participants entered a state of clam. They were conscious but calm. In fact, people with anxiety problems became calm and even people with depression felt lighter and more relaxed.

I immediately thought of some of my anxious students who suffered under exam stress. I wanted to introduce ASMR to them as a cure for their anxiety. Nevertheless when I shared my idea with some of my colleagues at international conferences the majority said that the students should “pull themselves together”. Life is hard. But in my opinion it is up to us to overcome the skeptics and find solutions rather than sticking to the old way of life.



Fig. 1 Neurologist Center ASMR research EEG measuring



Fig. 2 Neurologist Center ASMR research EEG measuring

The challenge is to see education and ASMR as what it is. In fact we do not know what it is...we can just feel it and we KNOW when it feels right. For us to provide the best education is to explore all aspects of life. Even the neurologists admitted that the brain is still a very much unexplored organ cause of its complexity. How about we recognize and reward education that feels good rather than practice education that feels wrong to the students? We can shape education and we can embed ASMR so that with time and care we will harvest the fruits of inspiration and innovation.

II. Conclusion

Innovative education has often been dismissed as nothing more than hocus-pocus and a love for gadgets rather than a tool to free the imagination of one's students. It is often accused by older educators as being a sort of fetish of young and ambitious educators who think that they know better. Very little supporting evidence has been condemned without a fair trial to the footnotes of any academic study of the impact of ASMR and how it could be embedded into education. It is true that when ASMR and experimental education first popped up that they were guilty of questionable methods but I believe that both have outgrown their bad reputation. Whereas ASMR is only in its early years, education (or more the way how we teach) should be constantly updated to remain relevant and make use of new discoveries that might be beneficial to our students.

The increasing amount of students who suffer under anxiety attacks and depression highlights the social pressure these students are under and (if we as educators care) which we need to tackle. I'm not sure if you know anybody who suffers under allergy symptoms, but if you have ever witnessed an allergy attack... you would want to find a cure as soon as possible. Anxiety is no different or maybe it is even worse because its symptoms are more subtle and internal.

Many new educational methods have been faced with ridicule and very little data collection. From experience, I know that if I tell my students before an exam that "all will be fine" they will perform better, if I play some calming sounds before the exam they will perform better and if I show them that I truly care about their progress they will perform EVEN better. Education is not rocket-science.

I am not sure if you are aware of the concept of Waldorf Schools. My parents thought of sending me to a Waldorf School when I was young and I am sure I would have enjoyed the experience. Waldorf Schools are known for their open-minded attitude towards education. Students are encouraged to choose what they would like to learn, to learn via play, they can follow their passion and explore their own curiosity... similar to Google employees who have been granted one day of their working week to follow their passion, be free to explore and work on their personal projects (needless to say that most of the greatest Google innovations have started here).

The Waldorf education received a lot of criticism from educators as well as academics. But if you ever meet a Waldorf student you will face most of the time a very well-rounded individual who does not ONLY care about marks but passion. The tremendous experimental musician Joanna Newsom is only one example of many. How we learn differs. It is as unique as our fingerprint. Therefore, if we find common ground (like e.g. ASMR and its benefits) should we not use it and benefit from it?

It is our duty to turn our students not into over-competitive backstabbing creatures who see everybody else as a threat but to introduce them to a more interesting and exciting world of innovation based on true team spirit. This might sound like *laissez faire* (translated from French: let go or let alone) education or naïve hippie talk - but what benefit has an unhappy society, which produces even unhappier little ones? The level of unhappiness seems to multiply with each new generation. Time to stop. Time to think. Time to live.

More insights should get discovered, more data collected in regards to ASMR, how it is perceived and its effects on this new generation. Our world is characterized by an overwhelming amount of information, pressure and economic expectations. ASMR artists such as Maria of Gentle Whispering.com continue to clam down an entire generation and whisper them into calmness. She has become a modest ASMR superstar and has creatively challenged ASMR content and revealed its unique expressive potential.

Synchronized nurturing, dialogue-led whispering sounds remain the most dominant representation of ASMR. I suggested in my above-mentioned paper that maybe these nurturing sounds remind us of the nurturing sounds of our own mother. To feel cared for, to feel secure, to feel calm. I know that the gentle voice of my mum has this effect on me. Maybe we are all just looking for a place (or vacuum) to relax in and to be allowed to be ourselves; to be loved for who we are and not for how much we know or earn. Nurturing is part of education. In fact who can educate us better than our own mums? They know our strengths and weaknesses, they are aware of our interests and they know how we learn best. As educators we become some sort of second parents and mentors. It is a very delicate and a very unique relationship that needs to be respected, cherished, protected, enjoyed and championed.

My previous research has shown that people with great anxiety came down by the simple ASMR sound of chewing gum. It was extraordinary to speak to my students about ASMR after the collection of the data. Most of them laughed when I introduced them to ASMR content. I wanted to know their thoughts. The majority believed that ASMR was some sort of strange fetish while others said that they felt sad that our society needs to get nurtured/calmed down by ASMR content. Needless to say I was a little disappointed by their reaction. But then something extraordinary happened. Some of my students came to my office just before the exam week started. Anxiety had kicked in. I tried to calm them down. They were very shy to ask me for the ASMR link and I was more than happy to write it down for them. After the exams my students reported back to me that ASMR had truly helped them to cope with their exam anxiety. Once again ASMR had done its magic!

I'm not sure why ASMR has such a bad reputation. All it does is to nurture in an aggressive world. But like all new innovations the majority of people need to reject it first before everybody can embrace it; the same happened to the light bulb, photography, cinema, the car, the plane, the Internet...the list is endless. It seems that our greatest accomplishments have to be put to the test before accepted by all and become an everyday life reality. People are afraid of the new. They have always been. It's a sort of survival instinct. What you know can't hurt you, but what you don't know can. In an ideal world it should say that what you don't know (and need to explore) might become your biggest safety net (in support of this argument I am thinking of the discovery of penicillin). Therefore it's the crazy (unusual, different, open-minded) people who make innovations happen (and I would be honored to be one of them one day).

I wonder what the future will bring to education and ASMR. I wonder if caring education will disappear or if it will be championed (or if education will just continue as it is - like in a vacuum with no consideration for our ever-changing society, challenges and needs). Well, I have faith - as true educators we have to have faith; in our students, ourselves and society at large. "The cynics shouldn't bring you down" isn't that what we tell our students when they get discouraged and look at us with sad puppy eyes? It is the GOOD that always wins at the end. It has been proven. Time and time again.

Educators seem to ignore the students' newly gained knowledge as well as challenges. I know that in politics, education and snail races things move rather slowly. I wonder if this is due to its long history or participants (whereas the snails are the only ones who have a real excuse - no legs and a primitive brain).

Never before in history were we as exposed to media and content as we are now. ASMR is a learned language of relaxation that can be used in the learning environment. If education wants to be a unique environment where knowledge is gained and imagination encouraged then it has to move with the time just like popular music, fashion or space travel. We can only rock when we have the right sound to rock to.

Similar to all educational tools, mainstream education needs to continually reinvent itself; embodying contemporary cultural and technical developments and advancements. In my belief education has to remain indefinable, unpredictable so that it can be experienced and enjoyed. It has to be flexible and has to be enjoyed by both parties, educators and students. Our brains are still very much unexplored. So there is not an exact recipe how to teach most effectively. Students vary but if we have found a common shared and enjoyed experience, should we not make use of it? Fact is, ASMR is appreciated by a wide range of youngsters and adults alike - so let's make it work for us - even in the classroom. If ASMR was a useful antidote to a certain pain or disease scientists would research it, pharmaceutical companies patent it and doctors happily subscribe it. Just because we cannot touch it - does not mean that it does not exist and that we cannot be touched by it.

In contrast to many theorists and educators I would strongly argue that ASMR is valid to be considered an educational tool. I believe that we have to embrace the newborn ASMR relaxation and allow it to do its magic during the stressful exam environment. If we want to be sophisticated educators we ourselves have to be sophisticated and curious students ourselves. It is this innovative approach that allows us to be role models to our students. ASMR is new to education. It is a tool and we are still the educators. Education is in a constant state of evolution and the informed critical and practical response to this evolution will, I believe, result in an extension of the artistic palette of educators and bring us closer to the essence of how education can be used not only as a demanding but also giving platform. The great artist Hundertwasser once said that: "The straight line is Godless". Well, I would say unimaginative education is inhuman. So let's make it human!