

MUSIC for the mind

Choose the right playlist and sound waves will cause brain waves, says Nina Jackson...

It was a dark and drizzly morning and the pupils, mainly boys, with various learning difficulties, were uncontrollable. They refused to settle for the start of the lesson. It was my NQT year and, as an inexperienced teacher, I tried every trick in my rather limited book to get them to be quiet: 'The Stare', 'The Wait', 'The Raising of the Voice', 'The Individual Coaxing of the Ring Leaders to Be Quiet'. But the panic was rising. How was I going to get their attention? I could feel my heart pounding in my chest.

My career as a music teacher was disappearing before it had even started. This was the end, I thought - teaching was not for me because I couldn't get them quiet, let alone teach them.

Then inspiration struck. Hoping that no one would notice how I was shaking inside, I projected my voice as far as it would reach: 'Put your heads on the desks and close your eyes! We are going on a journey.'

Amazingly, the class fell silent. But there

was no cause for celebration yet. 'Now what?', I thought to myself. Reaching over to my collection of CDs on the shelf, I blindly took one down without even registering which it was, put it in the machine and pressed Track 4. I can still see the display all these years later, flashing at me, 'Track4'. My future career hinged on this one track and I didn't even know what it was. I could hear myself praying silently, 'Not the Mr Blobby Songbook. Not the Mr Blobby Songbook.'

Obediently - or out of fear for a teacher who had quite clearly lost the plot - my unruly class lay their heads on their desks, closed their eyes and waited. My prayer was answered, for when the music started playing the room was filled with the most beautiful tones and musical colours I ever imagined. I had chosen *Gabriel's Oboe* by Ennio Morricone. And they were all listening. When the track finished, I asked them all to raise their heads slowly so that we could share our musical journeys.

It was at this point, ▶

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when all pupils were silent, both willing and wanting to share their experiences, that I began to learn how to teach. The music had allowed me to learn



about the pupils I was teaching and to share some intimate and emotional responses from each and

everyone in that class. For the remainder of the lesson I learnt about the troubles and triumphs of each of those young people and discovered that teaching is about sharing and respect, tears and smiles, openness and privacy, the knowing and the unknown and, most of all, an understanding of each other. This was the power that music in the classroom could have, and I was hooked!

Now is neither the time nor the place to share with you the full nature of my research. (Go to independentthinking.co.uk if you would like that, or take a look at my chapter in *The Big Book of Independent Thinking*.)

From this research has borne *The Little Book of Music for the Classroom* (Crown House Publishing, 2009) which has a step-by-step guide for using the right music for the right reasons at the right time to improve Memory, Motivation, Learning & Creativity.

Getting it right

When choosing the right music it is essential that you consider many factors. You must make sure your choices fit the right criteria for using music as a learning tool. Remember: the right type of music for the right type of reasons. You may not find the perfect music every time but experience and application is the key.

Here are five important questions to consider when it comes to making the right choices:

1. What type of emotional state do you want to create?
2. What is the right volume for the occasion?
3. Have you got music with the right instrumentation?
4. Do you need a piece with a soloist, jazz group, choir, electronic music, orchestral, songs?
5. Consider the age range of your learners and bear in mind the generation gap. Music that appeals to you might not always appeal to them.

Much of the music suggested in *The Little Book of Music for the Classroom* fits a specific learning process: it's not about using any type of music. This is an essential consideration when choosing music for your lessons. And take into account the cultural influences, background and heritage of all your students.

Set the mood

HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTED EXTRACTS OF MUSIC TO USE, BUT THERE ARE HUNDREDS MORE IN THE LITTLE BOOK OF MUSIC FOR THE CLASSROOM.

Music for Learning, Memory & Focus

- > *Liquid*
- Sweet Harmony - (original mix)
- > *Mozart*
- Divertimento in D Major
- > *Adolph Adam*
- Valse from Giselle

Music for Relaxation & Calm

- > *Ennio Morricone*
- Soundtrack from *The Mission*: Gabriel's Oboe
- > *Libera*
- Sanctus
- > *Hans Zimmer*
- Soundtrack from *Gladiator*: Now We Are Free

Music to Motivate, Stimulate & Energise

- > *Eddie Cochran*
- C'mon Everybody
- > *Van Halen (or Girls Aloud)*
- Jump
- > *Sounds of Blackness*
- You Can Make It If You Try

Beware of working to the 'wrong' music! Do not let yourself or the learners fall into the trap of using any type of music which, in the long run, could have an adverse effect.

You are searching for music that stimulates your mind and, when you find it, enjoy the feeling as your neurons fire up and the first sweet strains of musically generated electrical energy flow through your cortex.



The Little Book of Music for the Classroom By Nina Jackson, edited by Ian Gilbert is published by Crown House Publishing (ISBN 9781845900915, £8.99).

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