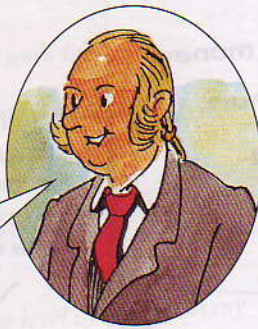


The power of music

Jim Wingate



Why do you play music at the start of the lessons and during pairwork?



I want you to relax, to be open, to speak.

The insights

A small, cheap, A5-sized CD player/tape recorder is light and easy to carry from classroom to classroom. Research has shown that listening to slow movements of Baroque music at 60 beats per minute or fewer enhances learner performance in tests (this is known as the **Mozart effect**). The music produces the brainwave rhythms that are best for learning. Music makes the classroom pleasurable for your learners' aural channel for learning and opens their right-brains, engaging the Musical Intelligence. Playing the same music also acts as a 'positive anchor', connecting your learners immediately with your previous lessons.

I'm not talking here about using music loud or as a stimulus, so the equipment doesn't have to be high quality.

Translating the insights into techniques

1 Start with music

Playing quiet, slow music relaxes your learners as they or you come into the classroom.



2 The invisible teacher

I often set the music playing, then rush off to get something I've forgotten. My learners enter when I'm not there, but the

music 'represents' me and when I arrive they are working well already.



3 Starting pairwork

Bringing the music up quite loud, I say, 'Please talk about xyz in pairs'. Nobody is too shy to start talking. Nobody fears being the first to speak or being heard by others.



4 Finishing pairwork

I fade the music to zero about 30 seconds before I signal for silence. Unconsciously hearing the music cease, my learners begin to finish their pairwork.



5 Relaxation

Every lesson needs to have a nice two-minute (or longer) relaxation period. This is pleasant with music. The relaxation can introduce, for example, a guided visualisation on the topic we have been studying or could be accompanied by me reading a text.



6 Creativity

My learners are quicker to be creative when I play music. For example, when they have read a text or picture story, they respond inside their heads during a minute of music, then they talk in pairs, sharing their creative responses.

7 Learning memory

Using the coursebook vocabulary lists, or ones I create, I play music while my learners look at the lists and I read the words aloud, quickly but in a relaxed way, varying my voice pitch and tone (in monolingual classes I say the mother tongue words/phrases quietly after each English one). In one minute I read a list of 60 words (30 if adding L1). This technique works well for learning new words, and for revising all we've learnt so far.



8 Short-to long-term memory

It takes about eight minutes for a new item to transfer from short-term to long-term memory. Each learner has different strategies for making this transfer. Some need to talk, some to be silent. To minimise the distraction to the Intrapersonal Intelligence (usually silent transferers) by the Interpersonal intelligence (usually chatty transferers), I play music through these eight minutes.



9 The final minute

If the final minute of a lesson is music, with me silent, my learners remember the lesson better. The lesson can 'settle'.

Lesson planning

Use 1 or 2 to start, 3 and 4 in pairwork, 5 once per lesson, eg to do 6, 7 or 8 towards the end of a lesson, and 9 at the end.

Tips

Some people, in particular aural learners with strong Musical Intelligence, can find music distracting. I honour their complaints and turn the music down to a level where they cease to find it distracting.

In 30 years of using background music with all ages and levels, I've found Celtic harp solo folk music receives no complaints.

Jim's latest books are *How to Improve Your English* and *How to have Fun with Culture*. Both are self-development courses for teachers to do for themselves then use with their learners. Jim continues to train 3,000 teachers in six countries each year.

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