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# THE LITTLE BOOK OF MUSIC FOR THE CLASSROOM

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*Using Music to Improve Memory,  
Motivation, Learning and Creativity*

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Nina Jackson Edited by Ian Gilbert

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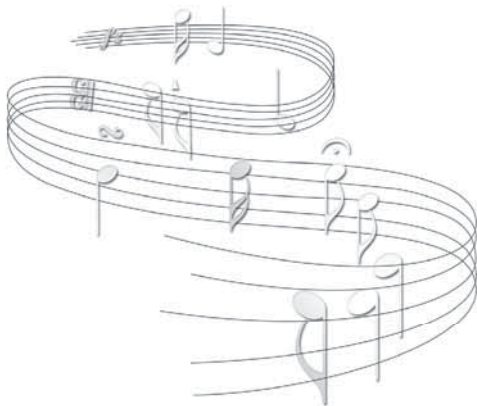
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## Introduction

# Music and the Mind



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.

My classroom contained a stage. I stood in the middle of it, feet slightly apart, digging my heels in to the boards as hard as I could. 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.'

## The Little Book of Music for the Classroom

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, ‘Track 4’. 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, 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!

To this day I still ask myself: if it hadn't been for that entrancing music of Ennio Morricone, would I have walked out of that classroom and never returned? Did this one track change my life to one in which I not only survived teaching but came to make teaching my life? Was this track responsible for my understanding of the power of music in a desperate situation?

On that day I realised that a piece of music could drastically and immediately change the emotional make-up of a classroom and all the individuals in it. Thereafter, I wanted to test the theory and implement the idea that 'Music and the Mind' is a match made in heaven. This quest came to influence the rest of my life as a teacher. Looking back, it now seems obvious that music can enable teachers, parents and pupils to develop personal skills, to learn and share knowledge, and to cultivate a genuine love of learning. Then, I was groping blindly for the key.

That was 1992 and my first teaching post in a challenging school in Hampshire. Fast forward a decade and you'll find me back in my native Wales as Head of Music and Learning in Ogmore School, Bridgend, with a Teacher Research Scholarship from the General Teaching Council for Wales. Now I had the opportunity to undertake a specific research study into what I called 'Music and the Mind' and share with others music's amazing ability to change the way we think, instantly and irresistibly.

This book is a *Little Book*, which means that now is neither the time nor the place to share with you the full nature



of my research. (Go to [www.independentthinking.co.uk](http://www.independentthinking.co.uk) if you would like that, or take a look at my chapter in *The Big Book of Independent Thinking*.)

The results of this research have had a major impact on teaching and learning since 1992. Teachers and pupils are using the philosophy and application of Music and the Mind to raise standards of teaching and learning as well as for their individual needs, be it emotional, spiritual or for a specific occasion. The impact of Music and the Mind in educational establishments has been immense, and once you try out the suggestions in this *Little Book* you too will be amazed at their impact. I continue to seek new tracks, and many other individuals are more confident in choosing their own music as well as my suggested extracts to raise standards. Music and the Mind works because of the link between the neuro-science research and large-scale research work with (to date) over 5,000 pupils, the work in my own school, and teachers applying the methods in their own studies. This has been a long-term study since 1992 and I continue to collect and analyse data about the effects of music on individuals.

Such positive feedback was not only matched by the students' own account of the effects of music on their learning but also by the parents. Some had observed a more positive attitude to work, even towards homework. Some fed back that the behaviour of their children had also changed. When they became frustrated or anxious about home circumstances, the children asked their parents to put on some calm music for relaxation. Occasionally, if there was a family row, some children asked the parents to calm down and listen to the music! One family even

told me how their child had helped save their marriage. The child had told them both to sit down, calm down and stop shouting at each other, instructed them to listen to a piece of music which was relaxing and calming, then asked them to talk about issues in a sensible manner, without raising their voices. Both parents were stunned, to say the least.

The common theme running through this book is '*Sound Waves Make Brain Waves*'. As well as rearranging your neural networks, music plays with your state of mind as the electrical energy generated by firing neurons creates Brain Waves. The alpha, beta, theta and delta frequencies created by neural activity – Brain Waves – determine what functions you're best able to carry out and conduct at that moment in time. The right music at the right time travelling through the air creates these sound waves which in turn alter or affect the Brain Waves. The music you listen to can influence the waves' frequency, and so your state of mind. And not only does the music affect your mind, it also changes the state of your body. Your autonomic nervous system is literally the link between your mental and physical self, and music directly affects its workings.

From calming unruly pupils to improving your grades to maintaining harmony in the home to saving your marriage – music really is, as multiple intelligence guru Professor Howard Gardner declares, 'the master intelligence'.

This *Little Book of Music for the Classroom* draws on my research and experience of using music in my classroom on a daily basis. It is designed to be a handy teacher's

## The Little Book of Music for the Classroom

desk drawer-size guide to which music to use, and when and how to use it. It is divided into a number of chapters according to what you want to achieve at any given time. It also gives details of the music I use for these different outcomes, although I'm sure you will soon start to add your own ideas from your personal library.

I hope that it will help you get the best out of your learners and yourself, and that music will start to become a truly powerful learning tool throughout your school.

## Music for Hooking Up,

### Calming Down and Chilling Out



Music for relaxation and calm can help you and your learners cope effectively with stress and anxiety. You'll be better able to deal with impatience, people problems, panic, lack of balance, and dysfunctional behaviour. It's also good for getting ready for learning, for moving from one lesson to another, for meditation, and for sleep. Above all, it will save you from the ravages of tension.

Relaxing music flows through your nervous system to counteract the effects of stress on your body. In your mind, the right kinds of music can stimulate alpha Brain Waves for clear thinking and patience, or delta waves that signal sleep. When tension gets the upper hand and panic sets in, music can interrupt the negative biofeedback loop between the mind and body. On the interpersonal front, relaxing music has been shown to promote communication among people, easing difficult discussions and averting potential confrontations (remember how some of my own students used music to help calm down arguing parents).

Musical extracts can change or affect the way that you and your learners approach a task, become calm and focused for the beginning of a lesson, and even bring the learners back down from an exciting and thrilling lesson or a hec-

## Chapter 2: Music for Relaxation and Calm

tic lunchtime. For teachers who like to use *Brain Gym*<sup>®</sup> exercises, you can combine the music with the Hook-Up strategy. Follow these prompts to initiate the Hook-Up method:

- First, get the learners to place both arms in front of them with the palms of their hands open and facing outwards.
- Keeping the palms of their hands open, get them to cross one arm over the other then (in a cross position) link their fingers together like a basket weave.
- When the fingers are woven and crossed, turn the arm upwards towards the chest, like an inside-out movement.
- Rest the cross-woven arms and hands in the centre of the chest and relax. Do not bring the arms up too high up as this will be very uncomfortable.



Many teachers have found that combining music with the Hook-Ups is a really powerful way of relaxing the mind and body and getting the students ready for learning.

## How to do this in the classroom

### Listening Stage 1

- Explain and demonstrate the Hook-Up technique. You will only need to do this once, as the learners will know what you mean when you say 'Into Hook-Ups' the next time. Stand in the Hook-Up position yourself.
- Choose your extract carefully from the suggested list. Explain the *Sound Waves Make Brain Waves* notion and the reasons behind using music for relaxation and calm, and that you need the learners to close their eyes. This will help them to listen better and to be inside their own personal music bubble.
- Ask the learners to make themselves comfortable in the Hook-Up position but insist that they close their eyes to listen to the music.
- Begin to play the music quietly and let the music do the rest. (In future lessons, once you indicate the Hook-Up position the learners will know what to do and this means you can have the music playing quietly as they enter the room, or at any other point during the lesson.)
- Raise or lower the volume of the music depending on the strength of impact you wish to achieve. Remember

## Chapter 2: Music for Relaxation and Calm

that if the music is too loud it may cause some discomfort.

### **Listening Stage 2**

- Play the music for a minimum of two minutes. The lengths of the suggested tracks are fine. You will become more familiar with their application as you become more confident in their usage.
- Pupils should be ready for learning by the time you finish playing the musical extract. I always say, 'Now we are ready for learning.' This will re-enforce the *Sound Waves Make Brain Waves* idea.

### **Listening Stage 3**

- Make a note of the track. You may choose to use this track again if the learners become familiar with the fact that it is linked to Relaxation and Calm and Hook-Ups.
- Offer the name of the musical extract and where the learner could get it from if they choose to use it themselves in their homes.

### **Suggested musical extracts to use for Relaxation and Calm**

The extracts are chosen because they will reduce heart rate, calm individuals, and set a relaxation tone to the classroom and individual learners. An average of 60–80 BPM will create Delta Waves, the electrical frequencies of

# THE LITTLE BOOK OF MUSIC FOR THE CLASSROOM

will help you and your students by creating the right mental state for teaching and learning. Nina Jackson's research has shown that using the right music in the right way in the classroom, or for individual study, can improve memory and recall, increase motivation and creativity and, most importantly, improve learning. This book is designed to allow you to quickly and easily identify what music to use, when, how and why.

*"Improving children's learning, motivation and engagement this little book provides everything a teacher needs to get started.*

*Dr Sue Lyle, Head of CPD, Swansea Metropolitan University.*

*"... well structured. Each section provides suggested resources for different occasions and purposes and has a wealth of practical suggestions."*

*Professor Ken Jones, Swansea Metropolitan University*

*"... this adventurous book will challenge you as a teacher. ... The ideas span the subjects and the book lays out its methods simply, with suggested music lists, tips and advice on how to implement each idea."*

*Pete Henshaw, Editor, SecEd*

*"... explains how music can assist in problem-solving and recall as well as perhaps more obviously to act as a stimulus for creative thinking and writing."*

*Maria Boex, Chartered Teacher Manager at The General Teaching Council for Wales, Former Head of English*

**Nina Jackson** is a Head of Music, Learning and More Able and Talented and an associate of Independent Thinking Ltd.



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