

Soundtracks for... Energising

One of the easiest ways to include music in classroom lessons is to use it before the lesson starts. This sets the mood of the room and lets pupils know that something interesting is about to happen. by **Mark McKergow**

'I could have danced all night...' – Eliza Doolittle's famous refrain from My Fair Lady. But could she have done it without music? My guess is not. Regular readers of this series will know that music affects our physiology (heart rate, breathing, blood pressure etc), our mood and the ways our brains function. Music is often used for relaxation, yet we hear less about how sounds can have the opposite effect – energising us and keeping us going. Yet this use of music is not only well researched, but also very common.

If you're ever been to a gym, you'll know the kind of music that's played in the background. Fast, rhythmic, upbeat, and positive. But have you ever thought about how come this music is chosen? If you've ever tried to work-out to a nice soothing string instrumental, you may have a clue. The music gives both energy and rhythm to our physical performance. Research has shown that athletes can work out for 30% longer with the right music than in silence, partly because of the energising effect and partly because it's easier to keep rhythmic exercise going with music.

Music can not only give us energy – things get done faster when there's fast paced accompaniment. Research in the 1970s showed that physical tasks like sorting mail get done faster with fast music – without any other kind of encouragement. This same pace and excitement can be very useful to have on tap in our classrooms – perhaps as a change after a reflective session or when something needs doing quickly.

The music I use for energising my classes and myself include:

- Mozart – The Marriage of Figaro (Overture) – an excellent way to get things going in the morning.
- Mozart – Tune Your Brain CD – a great selection of

fast Mozart at various paces from upbeat to frantic. Allows you to choose the level of excitement you want.

- Mundo Latino – and other latin music compilations. Raise the roof with salsa and percussion!
- Early 60's oldies – Shout (Lulu), I'm A Believer (The Monkees) and so on – one of my colleagues uses this after lunch to get things moving again. This music seems quite timeless now, and will appeal to even a young audience.
- Classical favourites like the flight of the Bumble Bee (Rimskij-Korsakov) and the William Tell Overture (Rossini) can be very effective interludes – try this when you need to rearrange the furniture, put everything away and so on.
- Much modern pop music is designed to be energising and upbeat – I use Robbie Williams' 'Let Me Entertain You' sometimes.

You may have noticed that many of these recommendations contain songs with words. Normally I suggest instrumental music for classroom use as the words and lyrics may be distracting. In this case, you will probably be using the energising music in short bursts and to accompany some other upbeat activity, so this is less of a problem.

The use of energising music is not just a way of raising energy in the classroom – it can be an excellent method of permitting a short 'letting off steam' period before some other more focused activity. The end of the music can act as a signal to calm down, we're moving on to another activity. Ready, steady, go!

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Mark McKergow is a speaker, author and learning consultant. His website www.mckergow.com contains more information and research on music and learning, as well as links to CD, book and web sources.

