

Music Can Help

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Music is one of the basic expressions of the human spirit, and it has recently become an important part of foreign-language teaching. Georgi Lozanov's Suggestopedia is accompanied by concert sessions, in which students sit in armchairs listening to new language items accompanied by carefully selected classical music, such as Haydn and Beethoven. Music not only accompanies the teaching, it is one of its essential elements. Folk songs, too, are important to the study of a foreign language, for both their vocabulary and social background. Also, the students' memory is helped by the rhythm and melodies of the songs. They represent national characteristics, customs, and tastes with tremendous clarity and strength.

Creative listening and writing

Beyond these uses, music, when introduced in the foreign-language classroom, can set conditions for creative work for both the teacher and his/her students. Sometimes it can be used as a background for reading poetry to the students. While listening to music, the students can experiment with foreign words and expressions. In an atmosphere of trust, joy, and relaxation the students are ready to enjoy a new and precious experience. Then music can encourage and motivate the students to respond to something that is new and beautiful for most of them.

In teaching and writing poetry in a foreign language, music can be of great interest and help. It stimulates and develops various sensations and feelings. Sweet tunes and sounds of the piano or a movement from a symphony can arouse the students' emotions and make them feel gentler or more intense, fiery or melancholy.

When the classroom is filled with music, the teacher and his/her students have a marvelous source for creative writing. While listening to music the students are encouraged to express their feelings and ideas in the words of the foreign language.

The words that express these feelings, emotions, and ideas are often powerful and original. Later the teacher can discuss with the students how music made them feel and what emotions, images, and thoughts came to their minds.

A poetry-writing experiment

The secondary-school students in the "Ognjen Prica" grammar school in Sarajevo had a most enjoyable and successful experience with the writing of poetry in English accompanied by music. When most of them were able to write simple poems in English, we had them listen for a half hour to Tchaikowsky's Piano Concerto No. 1, and for a second half hour to Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue. These well-known pieces of classical music are quite different in mood, form, and intensity. The students were allowed to write any poem in any form inspired by the music of these two composers. Those who were unable to write poems wrote short pieces of prose.

Some of their poems were naive, prosaic, and simple, but they contained fresh images and metaphors. In most cases Tchaikowsky's gentle music aroused more sentimental feelings. It created a meditative mood, longings, peace, and sadness. The very different rhythms and melodies of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue aroused feelings of a different kind: joyfulness, brightness, and drunkenness -but in some cases a sort of indifference to an outer world as well. Here are two of the poems:

It's stormy weather:
No people, no birds.
No love. Only clouds,
Only rain, only wind.
 The field is empty.
 The grass is swinging.
 The rain is falling.
 The wind is blowing.
A while later:
Silence.
Peace.
End of the storm.
 The sun begins to shine.
 I hear happy voices.
 The grass is growing.
 Bees fly around the flowers.

Rhapsody in Blue,
The song of Joy . . .

I am happy and everybody is.
We like music like this.
My feelings are like the wind,
Which never stops, never tires.

Results

The experiment proved that music could be an essential part of English teaching. It made the students more sensitive to the sound and color of the words. It gave the students' emotions new wings to fly somewhere, to mix in the space that now had a wider and newer dimension. Language classes became more interesting and powerful, and this prompted the students to study the language in a more original and creative way.

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