

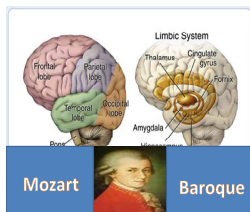
The Power of Music in Religious Education

It is a privilege to share with you my approach, practice and views on the Power of Music in Religious Education.



1. Introduction

Young children seem to be naturally “wired” for sound and rhythm. Music has always been a way for children to remember stories.



MOZART’S music and baroque music, with a 60 beats per minute beat pattern, activates the left and right brain. The simultaneous left and right brain action maximizes learning and the retention of information.

This means that when information is carried with music, there’s a greater likelihood that the brain will encode it in long-term memory.

Classical music from the baroque period causes the heart beat and pulse rate to relax to the beat of the music. As the body becomes relaxed and alert, the mind is able to concentrate more easily.

Activities which engage both sides of the brain at the same time, such as playing an instrument or singing, causes the brain to be more capable of processing information and enhances the ability to learn.

2. Benefits of using Music

Have you ever heard of anyone who doesn’t like music? Some people may not like art, dancing or singing but almost everyone likes one kind of music or another.

Studies have shown that music:

- improves concentration
- improves memory

- brings a sense of community to a group
- motivates learning
- relaxes people who are overwhelmed or stressed
- makes learning fun
- helps people absorb material

Music is something that we can all relate to and something that is very powerful. Music can do what so many things can't. Music fixes you. Music heals us.

3. God gave us Music

Where ever you go, you will hear some sort of music. It affects how you feel, helps you to relax, or makes you want to move and dance. Even your heart has a rhythm to its beat!

Music gives learners new ways of expressing themselves as individuals. Learners have a different understanding once they have sung and danced the Bible story. Learning through music brings joy to learning.

4. If you enjoy what you are doing you will learn from it.

Singing for children is a brilliant way to support learning. Children are exposed to and involved with singing from their earliest years.

Singing encourages children to express their emotions and sharpens their ability to communicate while exercising lip and tongue movement as well as the repeated use of the 'memory muscle.'

Learning a piece of information attached to a tune embeds that information more rapidly in a child's mind. Many children do not think of singing as 'work' and willingly participate in sessions.

If a child hears you sing to him, you are connecting to him, and he is connecting to you. It doesn't matter what the song is, just sing or play the music. It is making a difference. Music has the ability to comfort and soothe children. Children will often sing to themselves as a way to self soothe. If your children is sleepy in the morning or sad, you can sing or play music that is cheery and makes them want to jump around and get moving.

There is nothing more rewarding for a teacher, than seeing their students smile and laugh while they learn. They love coming to class.

Music is part of life in every country and every culture. Music is an important role in our everyday lives.

5. Music is an effective multi-sensory tool to support and enhance learning



We know that if we read something we have a 10% learning retention.
 To hear something we have a 20%.
 To see something we have a 30%.
 To hear and see a 50%.
 To say, hear and see a 70%.
 And to say, hear, see and do we have a 90% learning retention.

Research found that music (If you sing, move, dance, play an instrument, draw to music, pray to music,) can in fact do 60% of the teaching work in about 5% of the time.

An autistic boy who could not tie his shoes, learned how on the second try when the task of tying his shoes was put to a song. The rhythm helped organize his physical movements in time.

6. Rhythm is an important aspect of life and music.

- The actual hearing of the rhythm and
- The physical response to the rhythm organizes physical movements and is very much related to the human body.
- Music carries with it more than just feelings.
- It is a powerful vehicle for information.
- Music can aid memory, which is why singing nursery rhymes and action songs are particularly good for a child's early development.

Music and movement naturally go together. Children most naturally respond to music by moving and being active with it. Music helps children learn about rhythm, timing, orientation, and coordination. You can use music to get children marching, jumping, hopping, praying and working.

7. Albert Einstein

A little known fact about Albert Einstein is that when he was young, he did extremely poorly in school. His grade teachers told his parents to take him out of school. It would be a waste of resources for the school to invest time and energy in his education.

The school suggested that his parents get Albert an easy, manual job as soon as they could.

His mother did not think that Albert was a waste of resources for the school. Instead of following the school's advice, Albert's parents bought him a violin. Albert became good at the violin. Music was the key that helped Albert Einstein become one of the smartest men who has ever lived.

8. What did famous and accomplished people say about music?

Martin Luther:

"I have no pleasure in any man who despises music.

It is no invention of ours: it is a gift of God.

I place it next to theology.

Satan hates music: he knows how it drives the evil spirit out of us."

Oliver Wendell Holmes:

"Take a music bath once or twice a week for a few seasons, and you will find that it is to the soul what the water-bath is to the body."

Hans Christian Andersen: (1805-1875) Danish short-story writer, poet

"Where words fail, music speaks."

J.S. Bach:

"It is easy to play any musical instrument:

All you have to do is touch the right key

At the right time and the instrument will play itself."

Oscar Hammerstein:

"All the sounds on the earth are like music."

INCORPORATE MUSIC INTO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Now that we have looked at the value of music generally in the education of children, let us turn to music in Religious Education

Music is an important part of working with and understanding all the key concepts of the Religious Education curriculum.

I am of the opinion that you don't need a degree in music to be able to use music in Religious Education. It is because music is a tool, that is a means to the objective.

It is not a Music lesson but a Religious Education lesson. We use the music to praise God.

We are blessed by God in so many ways.
 It might take a few times before you and your class, get used to hearing music while learning. Children are natural music lovers.
 If you feel uncomfortable singing in front of the class to teach a song, use a CD player.

We should all remember:
**GOD DOES NOT CALL THE QUALIFIED
 HE QUALIFIES THE CALLED.**

9. Meditation

Use meditation to set the atmosphere in your classroom.
 Listen to the music and think about your relationship with God. (PLAYING SOFT MUSIC)

Loosen your arms and legs and let yourself relax.
 Your body is totally relaxed now.
 Breath in and out slowly.

I want you to feel the tickle in your toes.
 Stretch out a little and relax very deeply.
 You feel very sleepy and your eyes are closed.
 Listen to the music.

You are happy and peaceful
 Breath in the cool fresh mountain air
 Fill your lungs with the lovely fresh air.

It's so green and peaceful
 Take a breath under the shaded trees
 You are cool and sleepy
 Under the green leaves of the tree
 This is your very own special place
 Where you can feel safe and relaxed.

You continue walking enjoy the sound of the birds singing.
 What is that sound?
 Oh, it is a delightful waterfall.
 Falling into a clear lake.

10. Faith

As teachers, it is important to do a “health check” everyday as to the health of our faith.

In faith, the human intellect and will cooperate with divine grace:

“Believing is an act of the intellect assenting to the divine truth by command of the will moved by God through grace.” CCC Article 155 (quoting Thomas Aquinas)

Faith is caught and not taught

Talk to God every day. We have to stay in touch with God and with Christian friends.
That’s what we hope our children will catch from us.
We have to be right with God to help and teach our children.

If we just speak and talk the walk, but we don’t walk the talk, then we are not being authentic.

Children can tell if we are fake.

Your lessons are more who you are than what you set out to teach. Teachers should lead by their example.

Get to know the profile of your class, what they like, what they don’t like.

Children like singing, dancing, movement, games, playing on instruments and art.

Be aware of the different stages of Faith development that the children are in.

Use the most effective method available to help the learners to have a better learning retention.

11. The Lord of the dance

I have used the song “The Lord of the dance” to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The song starts with creation, Jesus on earth and ends with his resurrection.

Please find the words below:

I danced in the morning when the world was young
I danced in the moon, and the stars, and the sun
I came down from Heaven and I danced on the Earth
At Bethlehem I had my birth

Dance, then, wherever you may be
I am the lord of the dance said he
And I lead you all wherever you may be
And I lead you all in the dance said he

I danced for the Pharaoh and the Pharisees
They wouldn't dance, they wouldn't follow me
I danced for the fishermen James and John
They came with me so the dance went on

Dance, then, wherever you may be

I am the lord of the dance said he
 And I lead you all wherever you may be
 And I lead you all in the dance said he

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame
 The holy people said it was a shame
 They ripped me and they stripped me and they hung me high
 Left me there on the cross to die

Dance, then, wherever you may be
 I am the lord of the dance said he
 And I lead you all wherever you may be
 And I lead you all in the dance said he

I danced on a Friday when the world turned black
 It's hard to dance with the devil on your back
 They buried my body; they thought I was gone
 But I am the dance, and the dance goes on

Dance, then, wherever you may be
 I am the lord of the dance said he
 And I lead you all wherever you may be
 And I lead you all in the dance said he

12. Religious Education is to:

- Teach about religion, so that learners understand and value the religious dimension of live.
- To educate through religion so that the riches of religious experience and tradition are brought to bear on the learners' development as whole human beings.
- To ready learners for religion, so that they are able to live their religious tradition in a committed and meaningful way.

Religious Education needs to be down-to-earth, in touch with the young children's daily lives, where-they-are-at. We need to listen to what is going on in their lives and try to find the contact-point between their agenda and ours.

The Religious Educator is the privileged contact-point between Church and the children. The way we put across the Church's teaching will strongly influence the young person's attitude towards the Church and its guidance.

We need to create an environment in which the religious dimension of young people can be activated and developed, and in which they can practise fully what they learn.

We pray and sing together at the beginning of every day, every assembly, meeting and school trip.

“A large-scale survey of school children in CORNWALL in the UK has shown that the vast majority of them find Religious Education lessons boring, irrelevant and of no value to them in forming their attitudes to life.

I have listed the summary of the survey below. You will notice that a number of children did not even bother to participate.

| Question | Yes | No |
|---------------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| RE is boring | 53% | 29% |
| RE helps me find the rules to live by | 14% | 60% |
| RE helps me lead a better life | 9% | 68% |
| Studying the Bible is boring | 63% | 16% |
| RE helps me believe in God | 11% | 68% |
| I like to learn about God very much | 10% | 67% |

If we were to do the same kind of survey in our schools today, we would like to get a more positive feedback of how children relate to Religious Education lesson in our schools.

We would like to find that:

- They really understand and value the religious dimension of life.
- The riches of religious experience and tradition are brought to bear on our learners' development as whole human beings.
- They are able to live their religious tradition in a committed and meaningful way.

And from my experience as a R.E. teacher, working with young children, you can achieve this by introducing music into your Religious Education lessons.

I would like to share some of my practices with you. Time does not permit detailed discussions, but hopefully you will find some ideas to incorporate in your R.E. lessons.

We need to use the best and most effective way possible to teach the children. Incorporating music in Religious Education activities can help make learning enjoyable and therefore easier for children to know and experience their world of religion.

No matter what or whom you teach, you can impart some facts more easily with music. It is fun, natural and non-stressful so children are more willing to listen and learn!

13. Teaching children with music

Set the atmosphere

- Have soft or upbeat music playing before class to encourage a positive atmosphere.

Singing – Kum ba yah



- Teach simple action songs that require children to stand up and move around.
- Have a brief discussion on the theme of the lesson.
- Listen to the song. Use your voice, music from a CD or play the music on an instrument. When teaching children a song, it is a good idea to introduce an instrumental version first. (If an instrumental version is not available, play the song softly in the background while they are working on something or hum the melody before introducing the lyrics).
- Invite the class to join in the singing and miming.
- Sing the song, with the teacher giving the lead in a firm, clear voice. Repeat until the song is known.

Rhythm

- Clap or jump in rhythm. Even tapping a table in time with the music is fun as long as you teach them a sign for starting and stopping. Let the children convey their feelings or the feelings of others through music.
- Invite the class to join in the singing and miming.

Playing with instruments

- Let the children choose an instrument of their own choice.
- Accompany the song with percussion or melodic instruments.

Encourage the children to think of simple ways of recording which instruments they have used and the order so that they can replay their piece. Each group performs their

piece to the class. They can be video or audio taped performing their piece of music. Even singing with while playing the beat and rhythm of the song.

Let them play and praise God with the music. Some very young children might jump up and move while you are singing. This is a happy and natural reaction to the beat. If you stop them, they might be afraid to respond in the future, so just encourage the rest of the class to move to the music and then everyone will be able to sit quietly for the next activity.

Remember, since music can be a very personal part of a child, it is very easy to turn them on and extremely easy to turn them off. Always be complimentary in your reactions.

- Turning the music off is a great way to signal the end of the lesson.

- **Do movements or a dance to the music**

Dance is the hidden language of the soul. Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and dance. Great dancers are great because of their passion.

You don't need a special talent to move. You don't need to be graceful or especially coordinated. You don't need a body that's in shape. Dancing helps us to embrace all this humanity. Dance connects us to what is holy in life. Play music to the children and let them dance to the music. Let them create their own free dancing.

Do a circle dance. Just hold hands and walk in a circle clockwise or anti-clockwise **to the** beat of the music. If you call out the directions, they'll listen. If you tell them to circle left, they'll listen. If you tell them to shake their shoulders, they'll listen.

- **Praying with music** – play soft music while the children are praying. (GET CHILDREN TO PRAY)



- **Praying in colour** – play soft music while drawing your prayers.

- **BIBLE READING**



Children could choose a Bible reading, prayer and appropriate piece of music to use as the background.

Children could create a CD of background music with Bible reading spoken over.

Play a contrasting piece of music and ask the children to respond to the pieces of music only through words, drawings, dance and drama (individual or groups).

When it is time to end the Religious Education lesson remember to end with a quiet song or maybe a repeat of one of the earlier songs sung in a whisper.

Then your class will calm down and be ready for another subject.

14. Wait a second! Dancing and Religion?

The Bible tells us in Psalm 149:3 "Let them praise his name in the dance: Let them sing praises unto him with the timbre and harp.

What about Psalm 150? Let's look at the words again?

Praise God in his Temple!

Praise his strength in heaven!

Praise him for the mighty things he has done.

Praise his supreme greatness.

Praise him with trumpets.

Praise him with harps and lyres.

Praise him with drums and dancing.

Praise him with harps and flutes.

Praise him with cymbals.

Praise him with loud cymbals.

Praise the Lord,

All living creatures!

Praise the Lord.

2 Samuel 6:14

"David, wearing only a linen cloth around his waist, danced with all his might to honour the LORD; and so he and all the Israelites took the Covenant Box up to Jerusalem with shouts of joy and the sound of trumpets."

15. Conclusion

CHILDREN are natural performers. How else do they manage to "manage" us adults, so that they can get their way and our attention? They enjoy doing this so why shouldn't they enjoy getting the attention of an audience and receive applause?

There are children and adults who are afraid to be noticed. Frequently their parents have “labeled” them as shy or nervous or afraid. (Trigger words like these may stay with a person through adulthood). The sooner we start them performing, the better.

Performing is something that all children should experience. Perform your Bible lesson or story to the class or school. Music and thinking are so much alike. Music is another way of thinking. Thinking is another kind of music.

Let our children catch our faith. Let our songs and dance in praise of God touch their hearts and minds and souls, so that they may grow in their love of our Lord God.

Finally – music is a pathway to God!! Let’s use it more often in Religious Education. I challenge you to take this step – you will be amazed!!

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