

Music at the International Center for Accelerative Learning Music for ESL, EFL and Language Courses

By Libyan Labiosa and Chris Driscoll

At the International Center for Accelerative Learning (ICAL) we have accumulated a data pool of more than 10,000 students. The pool represents students from the Americas, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Central East Asia, and the Far East. The data pool, combined with its diversity, has resulted in the formation of a unique ICAL methodology that draws upon Accelerative Learning and other theories.

The ICAL method is a humanistic approach that includes expressive art theories. Our theoretical foundation includes the work of Lozanov, Gateva, Canfield, Csikszentmihalyi, Bohm, Redfield, Fuller, Gardner, Schmid, and other important researchers.

We began the consistent integration of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences into each of our language class activities in 1986. The resulting ICAL system incorporates the intelligences with seven psychological objectives to achieve consistent results. Our students have taken formal proficiency tests provided by ACTFL, ESU, FSI, TOEIC, and TOFEL. The level of assuredness is such that ICAL guarantees the achievement of proficiency targets in commercial projects.

This paper describes a number of ways music contributes to the ICAL methodology. This is a good place to begin accessing the greater potential of the students' capacity to learn.

Metaphorical Stories

We read metaphorical stories to students as either the first activity of the day or the last. The stories at the beginning of the day serve a dual purpose. First, the metaphor of the story ties to the content of the day's lesson and provides an overview of what's to come. Second, the story provides a foreshadowing of the psychological objectives for the day. The stories at the end of the day provide a metaphorical review of the content and psychological closure for the day.

These stories continue to work for the students even after the course has ended. As important as the metaphor itself, is the music we play along with the reading. Deliberately chosen pieces enable the message of the story to become part of the student. For example, we read The Old Woman and the Wave, by Shelly Jackson, to three pieces from the Dance of the Celts CD. The instrumentals are by Pat Kilbride (#8), Kornog (#9), and Altan (#10). We choose music after reading the story and finding the transition points within it. Then we comb through our music library and find a piece that seems to fit. The Wave is a story about an old woman who has resisted the many urgings to achieve flow in her life. The urgings come from a large wave that is suspended over her house. The wave works to get the woman's attention with droplets of water on her head and an occasional fish for her dinner. Ultimately, the woman and the wave understand each other and off she goes as the wave spreads itself on land and carries the woman toward the mountains she's always wanted to explore. The series of pieces are a perfect match for the book as they take the listener on a cyclical journey before unrolling into a pleasant melody. The metaphor of letting go and realizing ones potential stays with the students. The music serves as a guide and works with the metaphor to encourage the students to consider expanding their lives like the woman in the story.

Miss Rumphius, by Barbara Cooney, is another of our favorites. The story is about a woman who must accomplish three things with her life. She must travel to far away places, come home to live by the sea, and make the world a more beautiful place. The music we use for this is Mozart's Violin Concerto #5. The story and the music are made for each other as both Cooney and Mozart suggest that the students make their lives beautiful.

Classroom Management

Music is far more than a "nice" addition to the ICAL classroom. We use music as a tool to enable effective management of the classroom. It's through the use of music, that teachers and trainers can maintain positive languaging with the students at all times.

• **Persona**

Music is the first thing ICAL's students hear. It greets them as they enter the environment and immediately suggests a unique experience. With this first introduction, students get a taste of their new persona. This new "way of being" is actually closer to the essence of the student, and the music helps them investigate the layers of their true potential.

Each activity has music deliberately chosen to invite the students to reflect, analyze, imagine, and/or create. The music showers the students throughout the days of the workshop and they are able to follow its guide on a journey of discovery. Activities placed throughout the days are interspersed with student presentations. These brief stays in front of the group facilitate the emergence of the persona. ICAL regularly observes the reaction of students as they enter the environment and the music has a tangible, uplifting effect as the students feel the emergence of their true selves.

The importance of persona lies in the freedom to explore new concepts, free of the ego's attachment to the way things "have always been" or "should be". By the end of the workshop, students have experienced their persona with the group and developed it with the protection of the environment. The process of presenting in front of others provides a bridge via which the students take their persona's with them as they leave. In the classes we've taught in the Americas, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Central East Asia, and the Far East, the results are consistent. Music facilitates the evolution of the students and this effect transcends cultural, race, and religious differences. The artificial separation between student and persona falls away and a new awareness returns to the student's life outside of the ICAL classroom.

The environment that music helps create is portable! Our students bring it into their classrooms when they deliver courses and report to us how it has enabled them to immediately "feel" the experience they had with us. The ritual and tradition established in their training class provides energy for the students that they can call up by simply turning on the CD player. Even outside of their classrooms our students experience a revisiting of the ICAL environment. When their environment includes a cubicle, an Inuit igloo, or a dirt floor classroom, they can still pull on the headphones and "plug-in" to a creative, nurturing, and safe environment.

• **Safety**

Establishing the space for persona development requires safety. When asking students to explore layers of their selves, a safety-net is helpful. Music is the safety-net. The most basic service provided by the music, is the suggestion that this is an environment different from the one they're accustomed to. This suggestion gives permission for students to play and experiment.

• **Over-riding entropy through structured consciousness**

Music helps create Flow in the classroom. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's books describe the default state of human consciousness as "entropy," or slight anxiety. In essence, this means that the student's attention, left to its natural functioning, will achieve slight anxiety. One thing we've discovered to create "negentropy," or flow, is music. The structures provided by music enable the consciousness of students to resist the natural temptation toward anxiety. We've observed many stark examples of this when evaluating novice-level instructors.

The novice instructor is learning to juggle a number of new skills when they first take to their classrooms. One of the areas that generally shows a gap is timing with the use of music. The good news is that this provides a wonderful opportunity for the teacher to observe just how effective the music is. For example, we've observed the following scenario repeatedly: The teacher is prepared to transition from one activity to another. Slightly before she's ready to begin speaking, she lowers the volume of the music. During the 3 to 5 second gap between the end of the music and the beginning of her sentence, we'll often see 50% of the students glance at their watches. This occurs exactly when the students move from the negentropy of the accompanying music, to the entropy of silence before the teacher begins speaking.

A glance at a watch is simply a sign that the students have arrived at slight anxiety. It is a brief stay as the teachers voice is soon to come. When teachers advance through the intermediate and advanced levels, their classes take on a seamless appearance and the pauses associated with slips into entropy disappear. When teachers have reached this level they are invoking the power of music as a co-teacher. Music provides the link similar to the passing of a baton in a relay race. Whether the teacher is transitioning from one activity to another, or from herself to a co-teacher, proper use of music hands the students attention off from one flow structure to another, without missing a BEAT!

• Timing

Positive reinforcement is the language of the ICAL classroom. Using music as a timer replaces controlling statements like, "Stop working and come back to the group," and "Quiet down." Instead, the order of events seems natural to the students because the music has enabled them to "resonate with the schedule". Inherent order and rhythm are established by the end of the first half-day. Thereafter, the intention associated with the music selected for various functions, has its affect immediately. For example, when the teacher finishes prelude an activity and the activity music is turned on, the students immediately head for the art tables to collect their supplies for the activity. Throughout the activity-preparation phase the music plays. When the allocated time has passed, the teacher lowers the music and begins the decode without having to usher everyone back together. Instead, the lowering of the music cues everyone and the group re-forms.

The music played to start and end sections has a similar effect. The opening piece is upbeat and it welcomes the students back to the "party". The same type of music is played at the end of the day to provide closure and escort the students out the door. ICAL encourages students to take a 30-minute break every 90 minutes. Optimally, the students spend this time outside of the classroom. This gives them the opportunity to refuel and reflect. If, on the other hand, students spent their break in the classroom, the tendency would be toward the living-room effect. This effect occurs when students use the classroom as a break-room and begin to lounge about. In order to maintain the suggestion of the environment as a lively and creative space, breaks are taken out of the room. Still, it's tricky to "invite" a student to leave the safe environment. So again, music does the inviting. The volume of break music is slightly higher than at any other time. This resonates with the students and literally ushers them out. It's not so loud that the students are chased out. It's only slightly louder so the result is a suggestion.

• Foreshadowing and Review

Break, entrance, and exit music make use of the lyrics in songs for foreshadowing and review. ICAL's library includes music from a wide variety of international artists. We take approximately 300 CD's to every project because no song, or piece of music, is played twice. The wide array of artists have at least one thing in common, all have produced songs with a positive outlook. Two good examples of the singers heard during foreshadowing and review are Desiree and Van Morrison. Desiree's song "Gotta be" is played as students return from break for a section which includes self esteem activities. Lyrics like "Ya gotta be bold," and "Ya gotta stick together," foreshadow the section and suggest a perspective to the students. When the self esteem activities are presented to the students, they are subconsciously expecting them. They explore the content of the activity freely and with greater depth because the music has helped to open the door.

The same section on self esteem ends with Van Morrison's "Did you get healed" or "Till we get the healing done". Each of these songs contains lyrics that address the ever evolving self. When played as the students exit after the personal reflection activities, students take their discoveries with them because the music provides a melodic review of what they've recently explored.

We were recently conducting our intensive Vision Quest tutorial with a CEO in Europe. The activities brought the student through the history of his organization and asked him to feel the organization's evolution and his role in it. The Vision Quest experience focuses on the individual's role in the company, their company's role in the world, and the resulting effect on everything else. It's a day of deep searching resulting in extraordinary insights. At the close of this day, we played "Good Riddance, *time of your life*" by Green Day. The song opens with the lyrics, "Another turning point, a fork stuck in the road," and moves to "So make the best of this test." Sitting across from the CEO we could see in his eyes that the music had provided a perfect review and foreshadowing. He exited as Green Day provided our parting words, "I hope you had the time of your life."

- ***Libyan Labiosa*** is CEO of the International Center for Accelerative Learning