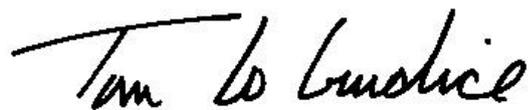


USING MUSIC IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Approved: Tom Lo Guidice

April 7, 2011

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Lo Guidice". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the first few letters.

USING MUSIC IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

USING MUSIC IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
(ESL) CLASSROOM

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Under the Supervision of Tom Lo Guidice, Ph.D.

Music plays an important part in the ESL classroom. There are several benefits to using music in the ESL classroom. Music and language are linked in Howard Gardner's educational theory of multiple intelligences. Advocates of theory of multiple intelligences (MI) imply that a person's musical intelligence can be used to achieve skills in foreign language learning. This is because founding MI theorist Howard Gardner believes that music is a powerful motivator in the language classroom. For instance, using music in the ESL classroom can help students to improve culture awareness and communication skills. In addition, music helps young children to develop language skills. Along those lines, there are several strategies for using music with second language learners. Teachers can take advantage of music and songs to facilitate language acquisition. However, some scholars and teachers have concerns about using music in the ESL classroom. Selecting suitable musical materials is essential for teachers and students. How teachers can utilize musical materials usefully is still a problem. The systematic use of music in language acquisition needs to be studied further.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Music is everywhere in life. Music is always an integral part of human culture.

According to Murphey (1996), a much published author who has used music extensively in language classroom, “There is no human society without its poetry. There is no human society without its music” (p. 3). Poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sums up the experience of music with the axiom: “Music is the universal language of mankind.”

Music can play an important part in English as the second language (ESL) classroom. There are several benefits to using music in the ESL classroom. Researchers have explored some strategies of using music to improve students’ language skills in the ESL classroom. One theory that is well known and respected in China is Howard Gardner's educational theory of “multiple intelligences” which links music and language. According to this theory, the proposition is that people who have the musical intelligence will use songs to memorize information (Gardner, 1985, p.278). The theory of multiple intelligences implies that a person’s music intelligence can be used to achieve skills in foreign language learning. Music is also a powerful motivator in the language classroom and using music in the ESL classroom can help students to improve culture awareness and communication skills (Failoni, 1993, p. 2).

This paper is a report on the importance of music in language learning and the concerns of teachers about using music in the language classroom. Strategies for using music in the ESL Classroom are also reviewed in the context of the topic.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as a question is, “What is the relationship between music and language acquisition in English as a second language (ESL) classroom?”

Definition of Terms

Music. The science or art of ordering tones or sounds in succession, in combination, and in temporal relationships to produce a composition having unity and continuity (Merriam-Webster, 2010).

ESL. Abbreviation for the term English as a Second Language.

Language Acquisition. To learn a language without studying it, just by hearing and/or reading and then using it. This is the way we all learn our first language (University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, Teaching knowledge Glossary).

Delimitations of Research

The research was conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville over ninety (90) days. Primary searches were conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite, and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics included “music,” “language acquisition,” and “multiple intelligences.”

Method of Approach

A brief review of literature on the studies of the importance of using music in ESL classroom was conducted. A second review of literature relating factors, including the concerns and strategies of teachers about using music in language classroom, was conducted. The findings are summarized and recommendations made.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

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Music can play an important part in English as the second language (ESL) classroom. There are several benefits to using music in the ESL classroom. Researchers have explored some strategies of using music to improve students’ language skills in the ESL classroom. One theory that is well known and respected in China is Howard Gardner's educational theory of “multiple intelligences” which links music and language. According to this theory, the proposition is that people who have the musical intelligence will use songs to memorize information (Gardner, 1985, p.278). The theory of multiple intelligences implies that a person’s music intelligence can be used to achieve skills in foreign language learning. Music is also a powerful motivator in the language classroom and using music in the ESL classroom can help students to improve culture awareness and communication skills (Failoni, 1993, p. 2).

As mentioned previously the paper is a report on the importance of language learning and strategies for using music in the ESL classroom.

The Importance of Music in Language Learning

Music is everywhere in life. Students have different musical tastes. But listening to music alone and singing songs can not help students to communicate in another language successfully. Generally learners are unable to transfer language in songs to natural language use (Murphey, 1996, p. 6). Gardner's theory can help transfer language from music to natural language use. One should try to explore advantages of music and use music as enhancer for language acquisition. To this end, Gardner proposed the theory of multiple intelligences in 1983. Gardner postulated people possess seven intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Gardner stated that these seven intelligences usually work harmoniously with each other (Gardner, 1993, p.7). In other words, there are multiple ways to be smart. Some people have musical talent which can help them learn language. The abilities of musical intelligence include pitch, rhythmic, and timbre recognition. Musical intelligence is parallel structurally to linguistic intelligence, and Gardner believes that it is "unscientific" and "illogical" to call linguistic an intelligence and musical a talent (Gardner, 1999, p. 42). Gardner's theory justifies using music in the ESL classroom. Teachers can take advantage of music to facilitate language acquisition. According to some neurological research, music and language processing centers are directly connected and situated near to each other in the human brain which processes music and language grammar similarly (Maess & Koelsh, 2001).

For some second language students, learning English through songs is both interesting and educational. Music can help students to learn language in a natural and pleasant way. Some students complain that it is hard to memorize knowledge found in written texts. But it

is easy for students to learn new songs and remember rhyme, rhythm and chants. People can memorize the lyrics of songs with a good melody easily. In fact, people can forget nearly everything they have learned in another language except songs that they may have heard in the minds (Murphey, 1996, p. 6). Music is highly memorable and motivating. That is the reason why the singing commercial usually works on people as an advertising ploy. Music can help students to memorize vocabulary and speech patterns. Many students express that they enjoy learning a foreign language through their fascination with pop music in other culture. Students will know diversity of different cultures. Some pop music can arouse sympathy among learners, they are willing to take music outside classroom and listen to it after class (Murphey, 1996, p. 8). In this respect, learning English through music is helpful to promote learner autonomy.

Language and music often affect each other. The specific qualities of a language often influence nature of musical sounds. Mandarin Chinese has four different tones. The tones of a word affect the meaning (Kaemmer, 1993, p. 73). In ancient China, a poem was called as “poem song”. In that era, all poems had melodies. People can sing poems. Some European languages are more concerned with stress. The sounds of language link sounds of music closely. Many societies regard the links as an aesthetic quality. These links are one of the reasons that it is hard to make proper translations of songs and operas (Kaemmer, 1993, p. 74).

Studying music helps students to develop their creativity and understand the nature of culture. Students can listen to the lyrics and do a close reading of them to figure out the cultural motivations behind the music. As a powerful art form, music learning enables

students to become sensitive listeners and can have a positive influence on students' academic achievements (Hackett & Lindeman, 1997, p. 3).

Performing music can help children to improve their kinesthetic intelligence, retention and cognitive ability (McClard, 2011, Rationale, para. 1). Music is a natural learning tool used by parents and children. Infants learn music in much the same way they learn a language (Lee, 2009, p. 28). The musical babbling produced by infants, and returned by parents, is essential in developing language skills in young children (Murphey, 1996, p. 7). Brown and Eisterhold (2004) defined this kind of language as "child-directed speech." The speech is also called caregiver speech or "motherese" (p. 64). Child-directed speech can facilitate communication and language acquisition for young children. The high and musical pitch of child-directed speech is an attention-getting device for babies so that they will learn the important parts of sentence (Brown & Eisterhold, 2004, p. 65). Children are natural music lovers. Teachers who incorporate music into early childhood classrooms systematically and consistently may help create a harmonious learning atmosphere and develop children's literacy (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 227). Playing games with sounds, singing songs, and chanting, as well as dancing to music, can help children to practice language skills. Lyrics with repetition never bore children. Children are happy and relaxed to move with music. Educator J. Asher in America developed the method of total physical response which connects language with action to reduce stress for learners. Asher's approach focuses on developing listening comprehension before speaking by getting the learners to respond to verbal prompts from the teacher (Davies & Pearse, 2002, p. 191). First, Asher has students

listen to music, then dance and sing the music as a way to learn vocabulary.

Elementary learners are asked to move with action songs such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” or “Hocky Pocky” and they sing when they are ready. Action songs allow children to have their silent period (Murphey, 1996, p. 122). Using action songs as a wake-up activity or part of daily classroom routine is helpful to motivate children (Lems, 1996, p. 4). Using short and clear songs with action for young children will be useful. Music can associate words and motion together to facilitate retention. At this point, many questions face educators. Can educators transfer musical intelligence to linguistic intelligence in young children? How can educators exploit the advantages of music efficiently to improve learners’ linguistic skills? As noted, researchers suggest that music can be used for these objectives. Music is everywhere in society nowadays but it is seldom being used in the language classroom. To this end, teachers can integrate songs into story or drama teaching in the ESL classroom. Children usually learn songs effortlessly. The celebrated linguist Chomsky assumes that children are born with what he calls “Language Acquisition Device” (LAD), and the repetition mechanism of the language acquisition device can be animated through song (Murphey, 1996, p. 7).

The Concerns of Teachers about Using Music in the ESL Classroom

Some scholars and teachers have concerns about using music in language classroom. These concerns prevent those teachers from trying new things. They do not consider there is any connection between music and language learning. Many teachers and students do not consider music and songs as a serious learning device. Music and

songs are viewed simply as entertainment or just treated as time-fillers in the language classroom. Teachers may complain that music may disturb neighboring classes, and this is a legitimate problem and musical activities should be done in a well sound-proofed room. It is difficult to calm down an over-excited class when using music in class. Teachers hesitate to use music in language classroom because “their unfamiliarity with particular songs, artists, styles, or periods of music” (Kramer, 2001, “The Response of Students,” para. 3). Nevertheless, many websites afford abundant resources and musical materials nowadays. These materials can be helpful for teachers to prepare lessons. A study in 2009 found that if teachers use music in the classroom inconsistently, some students do not get the benefit of music (Li & Brand, 2009, p. 82).

Teachers should put students at the centre of the activity. Students can use their thoughts stimulated by music and their favorite music as teaching materials. Respecting students’ choices can involve students in lessons more; it can create mutual interaction and rapport between teachers and students (Murphey, 1996, p. 14). Some pop songs may have poor vocabulary and bad grammar (Murphey, 1996, p. 8). Some songs are more popular for their rhythms than their lyrics (Carney, 1977, p. 2). Some musical texts are not suitable for students to use in language classroom. Some songs made for academic goals sometimes can not motivate students. The songs should illustrate and stress some grammatical points or themes. Lems (1996) pointed out that “songs should be well-written from a native speaker perspective” (p. 2). The clarity of singer’s diction is necessary. For intermediate and advanced learners, it is better to use

songs introducing grammar points and reflecting cultural knowledge (Saricoban & Metin, 2000, Using songs and verse, para. 7). When teachers do comprehension and discussion work, the selected lyrics should have attractive ideas (Davies & Pearse, 2002, p. 161).

Murphey (1996) stated that “ultimately success depends on successful manipulation of the material by the teacher” (p. 9). It is hard to select suitable musical materials for students. Students have different musical tastes. Students of different levels should be taken into consideration when selecting music as instructional materials. Students incline to learn lyrics of new pop songs or classic songs they have heard but never understood. The proper selection of music materials in language classroom is essential for students (Lems, 2001, p. 3). When teachers try to choose suitable music materials in language classroom, it is necessary to respect students’ choices. Teachers will learn from learners and understand how they perceive and make use of music in this respect. Various musical styles should be selected to reach the widest possible audiences in language classroom (Kramer, 2001, Criteria for selecting songs, para. 2). But teachers should choose songs they relish, because their enthusiasm may arouse sympathy from the students (Lems, 2005, p. 16).

After the appropriate songs have been selected, teachers should annotate musical materials next. Annotation of the songs’ texts is necessary when teachers prepare their musical materials. Annotation includes new vocabulary, complex grammar and brief introduction of composers and performers. Some relevant background information

about the songs can give learners a larger culture context (Kramer, 2001, Annotation of the songs' texts, para. 1).

Strategies for Using Music in the ESL Classroom

There are various techniques for use of music in the ESL classroom. Using music in the ESL classroom can include other strategies than simply listening to a song and using the lyrics. Playing background music at the beginning of class is an effective way to create a learning environment. Playing music can activate students' minds or relax them at the beginning of class (Murphey, 1996, p. 15). Farrug (2008) stated that "playing classical music quietly in the background helps concentration and retention" (p. 2). Learning English through songs can provide a relaxed atmosphere for students (Saricoban & Metin, 2000, Using songs and verse, para. 1).

However, research suggests that not everyone benefits from background music, especially those who are sensitive to music. Some music lovers find that background music distracts their minds, so they can not give full attention to language practice (Weatherman, n.d., p. 5). Perhaps personality plays a role in how music affects the individual. One interesting study found that "personality trait plays a role in the effects of background music on cognitive performance" (Annette & Groot, 2006, p. 496). Background music usually has negative impact on introverts' cognitive performance when carrying out observation tasks; but extroverts generally can benefit from music playing. Learners with different learning styles learn in different ways, so teachers should teach them in different ways.

Teachers can also use music to teach about culture. Music is universal to human cultures. Hackett and Lindeman (1997) stated, “Studying music transmits cultural heritage” (p. 3). Using music in language classroom can demonstrate cultural knowledge. Likewise, Lems (2001) proposed that “songs are a mine of information about human relations, ethics, customs, history, humor, and regional and cultural differences” (p. 2). In addition, Silberstein (2002) pointed out that “folk songs attribute their survival to some aspect of universality while they illuminate particular historical moments” (p. 99). There are diverse types of folk songs in America which can be regarded as historical records of the country’s growth. Folk songs reflect the thoughts and ideas of the singers at the time. For example: Folk songs include cowboy ballads, work-oriented songs, spirituals, gospels, songs glorify individualism of ancestors and “the picturesque beauty of the newly settled land” (Carney, 1977, p. 14). For advanced learners, these musical materials afford a window for the listener into a country’s culture and value systems.

Song lyrics afford authentic language materials that make students aware of different registers of English. Learners in the ESL classroom can learn about different registers of English which include poetic, colloquial, archaic, slang, and non-standard usage (Murphey, 1996, p. 84). These varieties in English usage reflect the integral parts of society and culture. Understanding this fact is helpful to strengthen the linguistic skills of non-native speakers. Students can find many different features of language varieties through comparing song lyrics. Many second language students find that idiom, slang and cultural items make learning English difficult. Traditional songs and nursery rhymes can make sense of many of these confusing aspects and put

students in touch with English speaking cultures (Brown, 2006, “The Value of Rhymes,” para. 1). The lyrics of folk songs are authentic texts representing diverse historical and cultural periods for advanced learners to develop their critical reading skills (Silberstein, 2002, p. 97). Overall, music can be used in many instances to teach students about various cultures. Children’s songs and nursery rhymes are good material to teach English. Brown (2006) asserted that children’s songs and nursery rhymes are integral part of the English speaking culture. Teachers should present these music materials properly for different levels of students (“Value of Cultural Items,” para. 1). Cultivated values and themes can be introduced into class through songs (Lems, 1996, p. 2). Teachers can devise and create units with special songs to introduce different themes in language classroom. Students can compare and analyze different cultures through musical texts and styles (Failoni, 1993, p. 7). Murphey (1996) proposed that teachers will use songs as a good lead-in to introduce themes for discussion. Students will analyze social issues about themes and write reflections about songs (p. 136). Teachers should consider universality and controversial quality when selecting music for cultural discussion. Students will be familiar with the topic and be motivated to talk without much concern for accuracy in speaking (Carney, 1977, p. 7). This kind of musical materials can help students reduce anxiety to improve their oral fluency.

Teachers can use music to develop students’ listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Songs offer good source of authentic language. Many Asian learners perceive second language listening as difficult. They want to understand all the

information when performing listening tasks. Therefore, students are often in a high-anxiety situation. Using music to practice listening is helpful for reducing anxiety (Lieb, 2008, p. 32). Music texts usually provide different grammar points and a wide variety of vocabulary (Failoni, 1993, p. 3). Some lyricists like to use antonyms and synonyms in their songs which are helpful for students to learn new words (Carney, 1977, p. 17). One exercise students often use is to scramble lyrics and then fill them in the blanks to practice target language when listening to songs (Lems, 2001, p. 2). Some students like reading lyrics with interesting ideas in them. For reading comprehension, reading lyrics is a good way to practice students' reading skills. Teachers can make good use of some English newspapers' and magazines' articles on music in the ESL classroom. Some interesting articles may motivate students to read (Murphey, 1996, p. 47). Students can bring some reading materials about their favorite singers and share relevant information with their classmates. Different types of music arouse different reactions among students. For writing practice, students can write responses and new verses to songs. Writing a music journal, in which students reflect on aspects of music they listen to in class, is a good method to encourage students' fluency in writing. Learners describe and give their opinion about the music teacher plays in the class, then write everything which comes into their minds. The feedback from teachers should be given periodically (Murphey, 1996, p. 57). Weatherman (n.d.) considered that "a favorite music-supported exercise involves stream-of-consciousness writing" (p. 3). Students do not need to be concerned about correct grammar and spelling because this exercise is meant to encourage their creativity and ease anxiety. This practice can put students

in a non-threatening atmosphere. Some lyrics may use incomplete sentences and incorrect grammar, but teachers can make good use of these materials to develop students' accuracy in writing. Students can be asked to find mistakes in lyrics and correct them (Carney, 1977, p. 28).

Since there are significant phonemic differences between Chinese and English, using music in the language classroom may help with pronunciation practice. Songs are the effective tool to practice pronunciation for ESL learners. Research by Sleva and Miyake (2006) found that individuals with musical talents are better than other people at picking up foreign language sounds (p. 679). Failoni (1993) stated "music texts provide liaison, linking, colloquial contractions, and rhyme and rhythm of syllables" (p. 3). Songs are effective tool to develop a feeling for the rhythm of language for many second language students (Silberstein, 2002, p. 88). Lems (1996) asserted that "rhythmic element helps reinforce English prosody and fluency" (p. 2). Jolly (1975) stated that "songs and normal speech have rhythmic and melodic content, and represent forms of communication in a linguistic sense" (p. 11). Children develop their ability to imitate and produce individual sounds through repetition of rhymes and songs.

New technologies can facilitate the method of teaching language through songs. Kramer (2001) began to create the web-based multimedia lessons that incorporate music, texts, worksheet, slides, and video clips for language instruction. These available materials will attract more students to immerse themselves in language learning outside the classroom (web-based multimedia format, para. 1). This

multimedia format is helpful to promote learner autonomy. Music videos can be used with different levels of students in language classroom. Teachers should encourage students to choose the videos they like and share them with the class. Students can predict, describe and comment their perceptions about the music videos (Murphey, 1996, p. 102).

Taking into account all of the above research, language and music often affect each other. Gardner's theory justifies using music in the ESL classroom. People who have the musical intelligence will use songs to memorize information. There are various benefits of teaching English through music. Children are the easiest students to use music and song with.

While music seems to be a useful tool in the learning community, some teachers have several concerns about using music in the ESL classroom. How teachers select suitable materials and exploit these materials usefully is difficult to deal with. Several strategies for using music in the ESL classroom have been discussed. These strategies aim to teach or reinforce second language learners' linguistic skills and cultural awareness.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through a review of the literature, it is clear that most research conducted on the relationship between music and language acquisition leads to the conclusion by the reader that there are many benefits of teaching English through music. Language and music often affect each other. Using music in the ESL classroom is not a new methodology but a powerful tool to facilitate language acquisition. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences justifies using music in the ESL classroom. In addition, music might increase students' interests in language learning.

Music is a natural learning tool used by parents and children. Children are inborn music lovers and usually learn songs effortlessly. Music can motivate young children to learn language naturally. In particular, repetition and action songs are generally interesting to children and helpful for beginners to grasp the basic elements of English. However, words in the songs can not help students to communicate naturally. Teachers need to exploit the musical materials usefully and develop suitable exercises and activities for young learners.

While music seems to be a useful tool in the learning community, there are several concerns about using music in ESL classroom. Music and songs are viewed simply as entertainment or just treated as time-fillers in the language classroom. Some teachers and students do not take music and songs as a serious learning device. Using songs in class may disturb the neighboring classes. Pop songs often have poor vocabulary and incorrect grammar which can not be used as suitable materials for

students. Also, teachers may struggle, they are not musical. Selecting songs properly and annotation of musical materials are essential for the success of instruction. How teachers deal with and resolve these concerns has been discussed earlier.

Researchers have explored some strategies of using music to improve students' language skills in the ESL classroom. Some scholars advocate the idea that music can have powerful effects on students' performances. Teachers can use background music to activate students' minds and relax them at the beginning of the class. However, researchers argue that some music lovers can not benefit from background music in language practice. Because of this, learners with different learning styles learn in different ways, so teachers should personalize their approach to teaching music. Second language teachers should adhere to the principle of individualized instruction.

Various strategies for using music in the ESL classroom have been discussed earlier. Teachers can draw on specific techniques to facilitate instruction in the ESL classroom. Firstly, using music in the language classroom demonstrate cultural knowledge. Many second language students find that idiom, slang and cultural items make learning English difficult. Folk songs, traditional songs, and nursery rhymes afford a window for second language learners into a country's culture and value systems. Also, teachers can use these songs as a good lead-in to introduce themes for advanced learners. To this end, students will analyze some cultural differences about themes and write reflections about songs. Secondly, music and songs can be used to improve learners' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Songs and lyrics are authentic language materials. For listening practice, one exercise students often use is to scramble

lyrics and then fill them in the blanks to practice target language when listening to songs. Listening to songs may help learners to ease anxiety when they are performing listening activity. Reading lyrics is a good way to introduce cultural knowledge and develop critical reading skills for advanced learners. Some English newspapers and magazines on music are good reading materials to motivate students. Students are willing to read articles about their favorite singers. Many other exercises are also beneficial for practicing writing skill: Writing in a music journal without too much concern for grammar and spelling is an effective way to practice learners' fluency in writing. Finding grammatical mistakes in lyrics is an excellent way to improve learners' accuracy in writing. Songs are good tools to develop a feeling for the rhythm of language for many second language students. Students are willing to practice pronunciation through songs. Some new technologies of web-based multimedia format can facilitate the method of teaching language through songs. This format, which is available on the internet, may attract more students to learn English through music outside the classroom.

However, music is everywhere in society nowadays, but it is seldom being used in the language classroom. It is important to note that throughout the research for this paper, there are three areas which need to be further investigated. Firstly, how teachers exploit musical materials usefully is still a problem. Using musical materials efficiently and creatively in the ESL classroom is significant when teachers are arranging classes. Another consideration is the idea that teachers should try to incorporate the method of teaching language through songs into their syllabuses. More

studies need to be done in terms of making music a fully integrated part of language learning in the ESL classroom. Finally, for the strategies of using music in the ESL classroom, samples of appropriate music could be offered to strengthen the applicability of various classroom activities and inspire teachers. Teachers should take advantage of music in the ESL classroom and try to find the best ways for language acquisition.

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