

WORKING ENGLISH SONGS THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

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ABSTRACT: Digital technology and songs are part of students' lives. As songs are attractive and highly motivating, teachers should work songs in class through digital technology. In this essay music and digital technology are associated with the classroom environment in order to investigate if both of them can facilitate English vocabulary acquisition and motivate students. Class activities were carried out and findings showed that working songs through digital technology is very motivating and contributes to English language learning.

KEYWORDS: Songs. Digital Technology. English Language Learning.

RESUMO: Música e tecnologia digital fazem parte da vida dos estudantes. Como as músicas são atraentes e muito motivadoras, os professores precisam trabalhar com música em sala de aula através da tecnologia digital. O presente artigo associa música e tecnologia digital ao ambiente de sala de aula a fim de investigar se elas podem facilitar a aquisição de vocabulário da língua inglesa e motivar os alunos. Foram desenvolvidas atividades em sala de aula e os resultados mostraram que trabalhar músicas usando a tecnologia digital é muito motivante e contribui para a aprendizagem da língua inglesa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Músicas. Tecnologia Digital. Aprendizagem da Língua Inglesa.

Many are the attempts of teachers on proposing different activities in class in order to achieve the participation of all students and help them to learn indeed. However, it seems that teachers are far from reaching their full mission in the current global society. One attempt to minimize such problem is the proposal of developing pleasurable moments in class, which may be achieved through working English songs and digital technology on the challenging task of enriching teaching-learning process.

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This essay focuses on the contribution of working songs for the acquisition of English vocabulary through digital technology aiming to show how learning may be a stimulating process and school an attractive environment for students. Therefore, it related songs and technology mechanisms in class and proposed to investigate how songs and digital technology may facilitate English vocabulary acquisition through educational software. Such theme resulted from classroom experience and enforcement to understand difficulties most students have to memorize vocabulary and structure of language since their contact with English is practically restricted to classes.

Digital technology x Language learning

Digital technology has recently and increasingly been part of the contemporary society. Nowadays, children are educated manipulating different media devices; therefore, they are creative, critical, and active since they are faced with an incredibly large amount of information. Many of them are developing their own learning, interacting and building their knowledge from doing research, which varies according to their own interest. As they are increasingly being exposed to information, school has to develop educational approaches which develop critical sense in order to discern what is good or not so good for students. In addition, teachers play an important role in this process to what Lied (2002) suggests being the “motivator of the learning process”.

Being aware of changes in society, teachers may use new technologies which are at their disposal, especially those related to education, which involve the exercise of reflection by the students, who should work cooperatively. Thus, computers and informatics systems have been introduced to the educational process in order to contribute for learning which provides better conditions for people to practice citizenship, build knowledge and develop or reinforce new values.

Computers develop playful functions besides of being an extension to human senses and a similar brain machine. According to Pennington (1996), learning mediated by a computer motivates learners to execute tasks and activities through a playful character of interfaces since users can manipulate colors, shapes, sounds, and so on. Furthermore, the effectiveness of learning, for the same author, provides a greater variety of opportunities for learning. Therefore, learners may easily remember what they learn because the abundance of input submitted by computer tends to favor the activation of more intensive mental outline, different from the traditional educational methodology.

Music in the classroom

People love to sing; it does not matter if they are children or adults, if they know or do not know what they are singing. They even perform (or learn by heart) songs in languages they do not speak and are able to appreciate songs in different languages they do not understand or do not catch any clue of meaning. Such performance does not mean that they did not learn any of the sound system of the language. In other words, if they learn an Italian song by heart, it does not

mean that they are able to speak Italian, but if they want to learn that language later, they might recall the words learnt through the songs and connect to the new ones. Such pattern is suggested by Lied (2002) as the “patterns which may form the basis of learning”. It implies that such technique helps in a certain way.

According to Murphey’s (1992)

There is no human society without its poetry. There is no human society without its music. When they are put together, they constitute a powerful force for both cultural cohesion and identity and for individual fulfillment.

Such ideas are really relevant in the sense that human society and music seem always have had an affinity; prehistoric cave paintings depict musicians, and ancient writings mention music. In illiterate society of the past, history could be handed out to succeeding generations by stories and oral epics which had some kind of rhythmic structure (making them easier to remember) that were often sung or chanted or recited to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. Nowadays, in technologically advanced society, people do not feel that far away from those village poets. People still listen to the repetitious chanting of poets even to today’s feelings, taste, and variety besides using many kinds of musical instruments. Regarding poetry and music, Lied (2004) mentions that poems offer pictures in words and songs offer words into the imagination. Whatever both are; both are stimulating.

This study does not suggest that songs themselves will teach anyone how to use language nor songs will make students able to communicate in other languages. However, songs might be helpful for developing certain abilities and when they are explored more creatively in order to involve students in pleasurable activities of listening or singing and communicating language, they will be much more meaningful.

Language acquisition through songs

Regarding language learning, Murphey (1992) offers two major advantages of working songs in class. The first positive point is that music is highly impressive. Whether this is because music creates a state of relaxed receptivity, or because its rhythms correspond in some way to basic body rhythms, or because its messages touch deep-seated emotional, or because its repetitive patterning reinforces learning without loss of motivation – whatever the reason, songs and music ‘stick’ in the head. If they get closer to language, they are connecting it to meaningful interactional process as it is outlined by Lied (2000). That may result on learning.

The second positive aspect is that music is highly motivating, especially for children, adolescents, and young adult learners. Popular music in its many forms constitutes a powerful subculture with its own mythology, its own rituals, and its own priesthood. If we can tap into it, we release unsuspected positive energy. Such

energy is connected to the desire to achieve, if not proficiency, a higher level of understanding of the language.

Many of the assumptions accepted and rarely changed by the teachers have not been useful for students' changing behavior. Teachers may try breaking classroom routine, developing different activities and approaches since students do not learn in the same way; they have own different capacities. Learning English through songs develops a positive classroom atmosphere in which different skills can stand out and positive attitude related to language may be achieved.

Why are songs important for language learning?

Most English teachers have amazingly experienced how quickly students learn songs and rhythms. For a variety of reasons, songs stick in people's mind and that becomes part of them allowing student to easily be very explorative in the classroom. Murphey (1992) points out ten reasons why music and songs are important in language learning:

1. It seems much easier to sing language than to speak it.
2. Songs are extremely important in the development of language in young children. Babbling produced by infants, and reinforced by parents, is extremely important in the development of language in young children.
3. Adolescents' fascination about pop music may be seen as partly stemming from their need and desire for attention. At adolescence, children appear to be adult and go through many changes which seem to reduce the amount of affection they received. Songs may, to a certain extent, replace such feeling; a need that only adolescents have, but all of us have throughout our lives.
4. It is hard to get away from music since it gradually occupies the world around us. It is in restaurants and cafés, shopping malls, at sports events, in cars, computers or MP3, and so on.
5. 'The song stuck in my head' phenomenon (when a song we heard in a shopping mall, for example, is echoing in the mind for hours) also seems to reinforce the idea that songs work on our short-and-long-term memory.
6. Songs may strongly activate the repetition mechanism. It seems that our brain has a natural propensity to repeat what we hear in our environment in order to make sense of it. It certainly seems to do so with children, who learn songs almost effortlessly.
7. Songs in general also use simple, conversational language, with lots of repetition, which is just what many language teachers look for in sample texts. They are more motivating because they are affective, and even so, they can be used to analyze syntax, lexicon and poetic features.
8. Songs are relaxing since they provide fun, encouragement, and harmony within oneself and within a group.
9. Songs are important tools for sustaining culture, religion, patriotism, and even revolution.

10. For language teachers, songs are short, self-contained texts, recordings, and films that are easy to handle in a lesson.

From the reasons mentioned above, it seems evident that there are many advantages for developing music in class. They are readily available for the teacher and immediately motivational to most students; therefore English teachers and other language professional should use them.

The proposal presented by Axt (2001) stresses that the schools need to approach to the students' lives because if schools know students and their life context, it may be the fundamental condition for planning and proposing activities and interactions which really promote participation and interaction. In such activities teachers would also be included not just groups of students.

Regarding using music in the English language classroom, it may be imaginative to think that students learn songs for cultural exposure, grammar practice, or for fun. Young children seem to be naturally "wired" for sound and rhythm (DAVIES, 2000). They love to sing, dance, and play songs even they do not realize they are developing skills. Through songs, students have powerful access to the new language in a pleasurable way, nurturing confidence, and developing attention and motivation to learn. Popular songs and easy rhythms can be used to work games and help children to develop creativity, personal and social skills.

English as a Second Language (ESL) classes use to be limited to few hours a week, so learners need an increasing exposure to the foreign language. Through songs, teachers may create an enjoyable learning atmosphere to experience language in a pleasurable way. Singing can build students' confidence, because they are practicing a foreign language with certain fluency, very different from the spoken language. Particularly, there are affective, cognitive and linguistic reasons: songs are part of culture, representing the history, legends, and the speech of a country.

As people have their own favorite music and songs, this study suggests teachers should not always choose the song by themselves; students may be keen on suggesting and showing their preferences. If responsibility is given, students will be more involved in class and school will be relevant to their everyday lives and concerns. It contributes for students' and teachers' interaction for developing mutual respect besides reducing teachers' time and work spent searching for material. Of course, teachers have to evaluate the quality of the material that students suggest since it is not true that every song is appropriate to be worked in the class, since teachers have to evaluate which content they want to work out; if it is vocabulary, pronunciation, parts of speech, etc. When the goal is teaching listening comprehension, for example, teachers must be careful to select appropriate songs with clear pronunciation and a regular not so fast tune.

Songs can also be used to touch students, that is, to touch their feelings, points of view or even anxieties. Teachers may ask students to express their feelings, experiences, and thoughts which are stimulated by music. There are countless examples of activities with songs (from simple to more sophisticate) that can be used in EFL classes and teachers have to know which ones will be more suitable

for their students and which will not. It is a pleasurable and a positive experience to try several exercises, tasks, and classroom activities; for successful lessons teachers have to know and use a variety of teaching methods. They should have on their fingertips a set of exercises, tasks, and activities that they can use in their classes whenever they may be needed. Translation, gap-fill, cloze, repetition and sequencing are just some examples of activities that can be done using songs. It depends on the teacher's creativity to enrich classes.

According to Silva (2001), in the contemporary society teachers' authorship is a demand more than it had been before. Teachers have to face new students to ensure democracy in the classroom, interactivity and tolerance. So, they promote learning and educate students to our time. In other words, nowadays teachers do not simply teach knowledge, but they access knowledge domains in a complex way and teach students how to transform information into knowledge, encouraging students to participate, establishing new "connections and new neural interactive networks"(LIED, 2002) besides providing an environment of co-authority.

Interviewing students

In order to enhance conclusions for this study, two English class activities using songs were developed by ten students of the 5th grade of a town Elementary School. Such selection resulted from the necessity to have a school which provided computer room - the prerequisites to develop the planned activities. These students were twelve years old - four boys and six girls. Before starting the activities, I watched some of their English and Music classes. After that, I planned the activities according to their background and learning level. Songs were suggested by the Music teacher since he had been working songs in his classes.

Ten students developed the first activity which was based on the song "Have you ever seen the rain" by Creedence Clearwater Revival. Firstly, the teacher explained the activity, in which students were requested to listen to the song, which was played in the stereo system, and complete the gaps of the lyrics with suggestive words. These words were taken from exercises studied in the previous classes. So, students listened to the song three times until they completed the lyrics. The sample is presented below.

In the following week, students received the questionnaire below which should be answered before performing the activity 2. The questionnaire was written in Portuguese in order to ensure they understood the questions.

After collecting the answers to the questionnaire 1, the activity 2 was developed in the computer lab. It was a sequence activity created by using ELO software. Students needed to listen to the song "I'm just a kid", by Simple Plan, clicking on one of the three sentences of the lyrics which were suggested. If they clicked on the sentence that was being sung in the moment, they would get the right sequence of the lyrics and a good score. In this activity students had to pay attention on what was being sung and on the alternatives.

After working on the activity 2, students had to answer the questionnaire 2 in order to express their impression regarding the usage of digital technology to study vocabulary through a song. After gathering the answers, it was possible to compare the answers about both activities; one activity developed in the classroom by using the stereo system and the other activity developed in the computer lab.

Conclusion

Comparing the answers taken from the questionnaires, it was possible to conclude that learners are really integrated with a post-industrial reality, carrying out new values and experiencing new technologies. In such reality, it is essential to re-evaluate teaching and learning methodologies. Since digital games and music are part of students' daily lives, in the classroom, they are also valuable tools because they are excellent motivational devices that must belong to the learning methodological plan paraphernalia.

The results from relevant questions of the questionnaires are show in the figure below:

Questionnaire 1 - Questions/answers	SIM	NÃO	NÃO SEI OPINAR
1.1 Você acha que é possível trabalhar música na língua inglesa com o uso do computador?	8		2
1.2 A professora já trabalhou música usando a tecnologia digital?		10	
1.3 Você acha que trabalhar uma música, usando a tecnologia digital, contribui para a aquisição de vocabulário?	7		3
Questionnaire 2 - Questions/answers	SIM	NÃO	NÃO SEI OPINAR
2.1 Você acha que é possível trabalhar música na língua inglesa com o uso do computador?	9		1
2.2 Você acha que a música trabalhada, usando a tecnologia digital, contribuiu para a aquisição de vocabulário?	10		
2.3 Você gostou de usar o computador para estudar música em inglês?	10		

Answers to the questionnaire 1 show that eight students believe it is possible to study songs through a computer, in spite of the fact that the teacher has never worked this kind of activity in class what is confirmed in the second question since all students said the teacher has never done this kind of activity with them. Their opinion may be justified by the fact that most of them access internet at the public lab or they may have a computer at home. Therefore, they can work on these activities or play games which have music.

When they were asked if they agreed that it is possible to learn new vocabulary through songs using digital technology, 70% agreed to that and 30% did not know to answer. The last question of the questionnaire 1 and 2 was about how often students think they should work with digital technology. The answer

to that question was that 80% of them think they should always work with digital technology which confirms the statement that it is an interesting and effective tool.

Students have short time working schedule with computers at school. During English classes, they had never worked with it, and, even so, they said they should always use computers in the class and that would contribute for English vocabulary acquisition. Those students are the twentieth-first century students – those who are in contact with so many technological tools which are part of their lives. And what is more, they love them. The answer to the first question of the questionnaire 2 showed that, after working songs through the computer, 90% of them agreed to the assumption that it is possible to do this kind of activity. There was an increase on activity satisfaction after developing the activity 2.

Internet is in both classroom and student's daily life and it has made possible the access to English music and lyrics easier. Students use to look for, listen, or sing songs while they are playing a game. So, why not joining technology aid and music in language classes? They pleasurably learn through it what was confirmed by the study group answers to the second questionnaire. All of the ten interviewed students answered that the activity contributed for the acquisition of new vocabulary; they liked to do it and they thought this kind of activity should always be developed in class.

Such conclusion is confirmed to what Murphey (1992) says about using songs in class. Tim Murphy stresses that using music and songs in the classroom may stimulate very positive associations to the study of a language, which otherwise may only be seen as a laborious task, entailing exams, frustration, and corrections. That also confirms what Lied (2002) says about attention and motivation which “are essential for the establishment of connections, which are essential for learning.” Developing pleasurable activities through songs and digital technologies is indispensable for the learning process to be developed.

There is a variety of English activities through songs which can be developed by teachers using different software. It depends on the teacher's creativity and willingness. Regarding to digital technology, the changes promote and seek new ways of interaction among students and teachers. Educational software is part of this century generation along with the new way of thinking, speaking, writing, and English vocabulary acquisition, even considering heterogeneous groups. Such theme reflects a desire to step ahead and move forward concerning English learning and teaching through music and digital technology - a construction process which promotes students' creativity and innovation. Music and computer resources are here for the benefit of new learning environment that nurture man and society; as English teachers, we have to be really aware of that.

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