

Using musical activities to support language development



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There are many similarities between music and language, in the way they are organised, processed, and produced. Music therefore has enormous potential as a language learning tool, which can be appealing to even the least engaged or confident learners.

Phonological awareness beyond the individual phonemes of English can be facilitated by tapping into students' existing awareness of fundamental elements of music, such as rhythm, pitch change, volume and speed. This allows language learners to refine their comprehension and production of spoken language, and to communicate more effectively.

There is also evidence to suggest that musical activities can help learners to develop good memory strategies for retaining vocabulary and grammatical structures, so that their working memories are freed up for other, higher-order functions. Some learners need a lot of repetition of a lexical item in order to remember it, to the point that it starts to become tedious, unless we present the repetition as part of a game or a song. In a study by Ludke, Ferreire and Overy (2014), learners who sang the target vocabulary were found to be better able to remember it later, than learners who only spoke it, or spoke it rhythmically. Taking a tune that all the learners know, and asking them to sing some new words to the tune will require them to think about the pronunciation of the individual sounds, where the stress falls in the words, and how they fit together. Some learners may need to go back a step before this activity, and spend a bit of time just practising the words separately, as in the 'Pass the Parcel' activity from the '*Language Learning and Musical Activities*' collection (click on the link to access the activity).

Using musical activities enables us to build positive affect and motivation, to calm or revitalise the energy levels in the group, and offer students an environment in which they can find the focus needed to complete tasks. By introducing collaborative activities, it is possible to develop better group dynamics, and foster a learning environment in which everybody feels part of the group, and able to contribute according to their individual strengths. This is key to implementing genuinely inclusive practices in the language classroom.

References

Evens, M. & Smith, A.M. (2019) *Language Learning and Musical Activities*. Morecambe; ELT well. [Available from: www.ELTwell.com]

Ludke, K., F. Ferreire and K. Overy (2014) 'Singing can facilitate foreign language learning.' *Memory and Cognition* 42: 41 – 52