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# *Ryming the Rhythm* and *Measuring the Metre:*

## Pooling Music & Language in the Classroom



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**S**ongs are part of the teaching-learning processes of the language. However, music can contribute much more, in line with the proposals of the *European Music Portfolio project: A Creative Way into Languages (EMP-L)*. In this article, placing ourselves in the shared space between music and language, we present three illustrative activities of linguistic work that can be developed from music. Finally, we defend the importance of looking for teaching-learning formulas that integrate different types of languages, in a holistic, vivid, and motivating concept of the curriculum.

**KEY WORDS:**

music, language learning, classroom activities, integrated learning

**L**es cançons formen part dels processos d'ensenyament-aprenentatge de la llengua. Amb tot, la música pot aportar molt més, en la línia de les propostes del projecte *European Music Portfolio: A Creative Way into Languages (EMP-L)*. En aquest article, situant-nos en l'espai compartit entre música i llengua, presentem tres activitats il·lustratives del treball lingüístic que es pot desenvolupar a partir de la música. Finalment, defensem la importància de buscar fórmules d'ensenyament-aprenentatge que integrin els diversos tipus de llenguatges, dins d'una concepció holística, vivencial i motivadora del currículum.

**PARAULES CLAU:**

música, aprenentatge de llengües, activitats d'aula, aprenentatge integrat

**M**usic is a language, music and language have common roots, music is a good resource for introducing a new language. These are the sort of affirmations you must have heard on occasion. Likewise, for any language teacher, the use of songs in class – whether singing or listening to them – will have been almost inevitable when initiating pupils in a second or third language. It seems, then, that music can be a good ally in the process of language learning. And even more so when numerous methodologies, research papers and educational manuals proclaim the benefits of music as a teaching tool for helping to learn subjects other than music, or at least as a motivating element of the first order. But to what extent is this true and how can it have a positive impact on the teaching and learning of foreign languages? In this paper, the authors, who had the privilege of participating in a European project that worked towards the integration of music and language in the classroom, will try to address these issues and illustrate their ideas with some examples of activities.

### Language and Music: meeting points

**A**s intimated above, and apart from the relationships known to exist at a neurological level between language and music (Patel, 2008), these two fields of knowledge have a great deal in common. For example, the research carried out by Font-Rotchés and Cantero (2009) suggests that a basic element of every language and its effective use for communication is its melody, its prosody. Consequently, the development of listening and auditory discrimination skills, and the memorization and mimetic reproduction of sounds and melodies are essential to both fields of learning. It is therefore possible that even when very young, children who are able to analyse musical patterns are also able to analyse patterns in oral language (Peynircioglu et al., 2002). In fact, a direct relationship between musical and linguistic aptitudes has been identified (Gilleece, 2006).

Music and language also coincide in that they are both sound phenomena that can be represented by writing in many cultures. Furthermore, as noted by Corral (2008), many of the terms that refer to their components are the same (melody, accent, rhythm, and so on). It comes as no surprise, then, that their similarities and relationships have been researched not only in terms of concepts but also in respect of the processes involved in learning them (Laura and Fernández, 2005; Herrera et al., 2011).

As music teachers we know that the fact that music and language share the basic processes mentioned above such as perceiving, listening, imitating and creating, places the subject area of language in a privileged position with a view to interdisciplinary work that the expression of feelings and emotions forms part of what constitutes the definition of communicative competence in a foreign language.

The union of music –as the expression of an intrinsically artistic discipline– and language –as the expression of

linguistic communication–, both with great interactive potential, may result in the acquisition of the ability to cope in a wider range of cultural and interactional contexts than those that emerge in a traditional foreign language class. Furthermore, they facilitate a dialogic complementarity between the discovery of other traditions and cultures and the learning of other languages apart from those established by the curriculum. Thus, language and music become tools not only for learning, construction and communication of knowledge, but also for artistic creation, assimilation and orientation of one's actions in different contexts. In this respect, the focus on language competence is precisely what allows the most natural integration of resources from the subject area of music (Casals and Suárez, 2010).

**“Language and music become tools not only for learning, construction and communication of knowledge, but also for artistic creation, assimilation and orientation of one's actions in different contexts.”**

### Some current trends and challenges in schools

**T**he use of songs in foreign language classrooms to practice aspects such as vocabulary, phonetics and specific points of grammar is very much popular. This type of activity is not new, nor is the use of rhymes from the pre-school stage onwards. On the other hand, it is hard to find activities focussed on creation, perception and differentiation of sounds, rhythms, voices or tones, and no less so in the case of initiatives aimed at overcoming intracultural, intercultural and cross-generational barriers, despite this being a goal common to music and foreign language classrooms. Concerning this latter point and the global world we live in, the challenge is to create learning contexts and approaches that help us to understand the world. To do so, despite an organization of the curriculum where these subject areas are considered separately, it is necessary to overcome the temptation to work on them in isolation.

From our point of view, the construction of meta-disciplinary areas of teaching and learning is a necessary step if we are to keep to the spirit of the definition of the core competencies and thus achieve our ultimate goal of holistic education. For those worried about the amount of time invested when working in open processes of teaching

and learning, we would like to offer a message of reassurance and encouragement, since – as upheld by Ambròs et al. (2011) – the competence-based approach precisely involves saving time, as a same task dealt with exhaustively can significantly optimize the time required to develop the full array of competences. Therefore, the idea of integrating music and foreign language learning also finds us in agreement with the *Recommendation of the Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (Commission of the European Communities, 2006).

To meet these challenges it is necessary to raise teachers' awareness and adapt their training so that, regardless of their specialty, they are able to draw on other disciplines and skills that can improve their work in the classroom. As noted by Perrenoud (2004), teachers need to be aware of their role in facilitating the overall development of competences and be willing to devote all the time and energy this entails. This requires the development of projects for innovation that often and inevitably involve collaboration and cooperation among teachers.

**“The idea of integrating music and foreign language learning also finds us in agreement with the Recommendation of the Parliament and of the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Commission of the European Communities, 2006).”**

### European Music Portfolio: A Creative Way into Languages

We continue with an overview of the project European Music Portfolio: A Creative Way into Languages (EMP-L), which is tied in with the ideas expressed above. EMP-L was a Comenius multilateral project belonging in the European framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme (502895-LLP-1-2009-1-DE-Comenius-CMP) developed during the 2009-2012 period. The primary aim of the EMP-L project was to empower teachers to support modern language learning by emphasising the deep interrelationship between music and language. EMP-L was based on the following principles: a) that music is a privileged instrument for overcoming language barriers and facilitating social integration, and b) that music helps to enhance intercultural understanding and foster communication skills.

During the three years of the project, an appropriate educational framework (criteria, methodology, resources)






































































was established, materials for primary school teachers and students were developed<sup>1</sup> and training courses were organised for teachers on a national and European level. The key to the success of this project was the close cooperation between music and language departments, represented by specialists (university lecturers and researchers) and primary school teachers active in both subject areas in all the participating countries. The resulting materials and teaching competences were intended to be adaptable to many languages, although in the context of the authors of this paper, Catalonia (Spain), the emphasis is placed on the teaching and learning of English.

### Sample Activities at Primary Level

Below we outline three activities illustrating the focus of the EMP-L project and the possibilities it opens up. The activities have been selected with the aim of presenting a wide range of music resources – specifically avoiding the now very common device of singing songs – and with the intention of demonstrating how we can help to make inroads in the various linguistic topics studied in foreign language classes. Additionally, these three activities – like the other activities in the project – have some common features that should be taken into consideration and respond to the educational and training principles we advocate:

- The activities are not intended to be recipes but rather inspirational ideas open to multiple adjustments and other possibilities<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, the teachers' experience, creativity and ability to think openly are basic to their satisfactory implementation.
- The activities are designed to be used while learning any language. The examples of texts or songs in any particular language serve solely to illustrate more clearly and specifically how the activity is carried out.
- The activities designed in the project are aimed at primary education. Nonetheless, these are proposals that can easily be adapted to a wide range of age and language levels and musical skills.
- As a complement to the linguistic goals under pursuit and in accordance with the principles of active, creative music education, these activities are also intended to foster student participation and creativity.
- The didactic approach underlying language teaching and learning lays the stress on the use of language (communicative approach) and the importance of the idea that all languages are part of a culture.
- All the activities were tested out in primary schools before being approved as EMP-L activities.

### Activity 1: Tak Tak

Author	Language	Music																																																															
Markus Cslovjecsek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pronunciation and articulation</li> <li>■ Vocabulary</li> <li>■ Knowledge of Language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reading music</li> <li>■ Rhythmic vocalisation</li> <li>■ Improvising and composing</li> </ul>																																																															
<b>Standard Procedure</b>																																																																	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To a steady beat, the children read lines 1-7 of the worksheet 'A' (see below) altogether.</li> <li>2. Reading in groups, e.g. alternately even and odd lines.</li> <li>3. Discussing about pronunciation: how should we pronounce these words in English? And these words in German? Followed by practice.</li> <li>4. Step 1 is repeated with worksheet 'B' (using target vocabulary, e.g. animals)</li> <li>5. Each participant chooses individually one line. The aim is to repeat the chosen pattern with the correct rhythm and the right articulation.</li> <li>6. The participants perform their patterns one after another while the class repeats them (call - response).</li> <li>7. Children propose other ideas on how to arrange, fill in and play with this music score.</li> </ol>																																																																	
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The aim of this activity is to transfer the idea of reading music using a given beat to the activity of playing with the vocabulary of the target language. It is a fun way of revising and becoming more proficient in a vocabulary set and gives rise to many variations. Examples suggested by the author:

- One participant reads a line and the others have to guess which line it is.
- Each participant chooses one pattern and learns it by heart. They recite their own patterns while walking around the room and looking for others repeating the same pattern.
- Reading in different tones of voice or assuming another identity (wondering, weepy, happy, cheeky, provocative, like a mouse, a lion, an old man and so on)

- Reading/performance as a canon with two or more voices coming in one after another.
- Each group takes one picture. Reading in shared roles.
- Producing cards with drawings and pictures and composing new patterns out of them.

On the linguistic level, it should be mentioned that apart from the work on vocabulary and pronunciation, in many languages the activity can also be used to work on word syllabication and stress. Specifically, the stress in the word (or one of them, if there is more than one) should fall on the beat (something we do intuitively if we have some notions of the language in question). Here are two examples in Spanish:

	Example 1				Example 2		
stress	>	>	>	>	>	>	>
words	ti - gre	ga - to	ti - gre , ra - tón	e - le - fan - te	e - le - fan - te	del - fín	
beat	*	*	*	*	*	*	

## Activity 2 : Subtitling Workshop

Author	Language	Music
Albert Casals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Listening &amp; understanding</li> <li>■ Reading &amp; understanding</li> <li>■ language awareness, knowledge about language</li> <li>■ Vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Listening to music</li> <li>■ Dancing and moving</li> <li>■ Singing</li> </ul>
<b>Standard Procedure</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teacher distributes pieces of paper with a word or a phrase from a song (as many pieces of paper as there are words or phrases in the song)</li> <li>2. Pupils listen to the song and try to recognize when their word appears.</li> <li>3. Pupils come out and stand at the front of the class (facing the other pupils) according to the order of appearance of the words they have been given.</li> <li>4. Pupils listen to the song (with lyrics) and hold up their piece of paper every time their word or phrase appears in the song (as if they were subtitles). This step should be practiced several times until the pupils have mastered it, before proceeding to step 5.</li> <li>5. Pupils listen to the instrumental version of the song and every time their word is meant to appear, they have to show their piece of paper.</li> <li>6. If the song is suited to their music level, the pupils learn and sing it.</li> </ol>		
Example	<b>Wimoweh (The Lion Sleeps Tonight)</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ First version (with lyrics), performed by Laurie Berkner: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7qc_WPhBck">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7qc_WPhBck</a> (accessed July 2018)</li> <li>■ Second version (without lyrics), performed by Martin Lane: <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7mUG8PD06A">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x7mUG8PD06A</a> (accessed July 2018)</li> </ul>	
	<b>Lyrics</b>	<b>Words</b> (on pieces of paper)
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight</i> (x2), oh... a-wimoweh (x12)</li> <li>2. <i>In the village, the peaceful village, the lion sleeps tonight</i> (x2), oh... a-wimoweh (x12)</li> <li>3. <i>Hush, my darling, don't cry my darling, the lion sleeps tonight</i> (x2), oh... a-wimoweh (x12)</li> </ol>	<p><i>In/ the jungle/ mighty/ the lion/ sleeps/ tonight/ oh</i></p> <p><i>village/ peaceful</i></p> <p><i>hush/ my darling/ don't cry</i></p>



This activity is based on the idea of putting subtitles into a song<sup>3</sup> as a strategy to bring into play various skills related to language: reading, perceiving and identifying words or phrases; listening and understanding; reflecting on language and grammatical constructions. Depending a great deal on the chosen song, the level of difficulty can vary considerably. At very basic levels – and with pupils who still cannot read – pictures can be used instead of words in similar fashion. Furthermore, especially at primary school level, moving to the beat of the music or to a previously established choreography, especially in the chorus lines, can serve as an

incentive or as additional motivation.

In relation to language learning, and apart from other strategies for consolidation, we think it is worth considering the creative possibilities of this activity, such as pupils changing some or all of the words in the song. Retaining the basic grammatical structure and trying to adapt it to the existing melody, in the case of *Wimoweh* for example, could result in new verses:

*In the desert, the lonely desert, a camel walks alone.  
In the ocean, the immense ocean, a cruel shark lies in wait.*

### Activity 3 : Music! Sounds! Story!

Author	Language	Music
Lois Garcia & Rut Dulcet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spoken interaction</li> <li>■ Spoken production</li> <li>■ Writing (creative)</li> <li>■ Language awareness, knowledge about language</li> <li>■ Vocabulary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Listening to music</li> <li>■ Composing</li> <li>■ Using music and ICT</li> </ul>
<b>Standard Procedure</b>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pupils, in groups, search for different sounds in the internet (related to a topic, e.g. the forest) and download them. When they have finished, they search for a piece of music (the teacher can help by suggesting the kind of music).</li> <li>2. They work with audio editing software (see below). They import the music for editing and then insert different sounds in the appropriate places to develop a story.</li> <li>3. Pupils write or tell the story with all the structures and vocabulary provided by the teacher.</li> <li>4. They show their work to their classmates. One possibility is to create an e-presentation (PowerPoint, video) combining music &amp; language.</li> </ol>		
required materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Computers or tablets</li> <li>■ Audio editor (e.g. free software: <i>Audacity</i> <a href="http://audacity.sourceforge.net/">http://audacity.sourceforge.net/</a>)</li> <li>■ Sounds from internet [e.g. free soundbank: <a href="http://eng.universal-soundbank.com">http://eng.universal-soundbank.com</a>]</li> </ul>	

The activity takes advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies and the interest they arouse in pupils to create, in succession, a musical composition and a literary composition. This idea can be used to prepare new proposals. One example would be to reverse the teaching sequence: beginning by producing or selecting the text and finishing up with the composition of the soundtrack. On the other hand, taking things a little further, many musical performances – by different composers and from different periods – contain or may suggest images, stories, feelings and so on. They can easily be used to generate meaningful and motivating learning situations that can help pupils to make progress in the linguistic and communicative aspects proposed for study by the teachers.

### Let's make language rock!

These three activities, which illustrate the approach and possibilities of the proposal developed through the project *European Music Portfolio: A Creative Way into Languages*, highlight our interest in achieving the most across-the-board approach possible in teaching and learning situations. We advocate, therefore, the maximum integration of the materials and, in particular, the different types of language (verbal, musical, physical, visual and plastic), so as to promote meaningful, holistic learning, while constantly paving the way towards greater consolidation of the different subject areas on the curriculum.

In this respect, from the standpoint of the musical dimension, the proposals clearly embrace a wide range of musical possibilities beyond the habitual use of song (such as listening to music, rhythmic vocalization, dancing and moving, reading music, improvising and composing, using music and ICT). All said and done, it is important to point

out that the musical possibilities are not restricted to the above: playing instruments, conducting music and exploring sounds are examples of other options. Furthermore, each of these types of musical activity opens up a boundless field of new activities and resources, with this paper only offering a glimpse of them.

On the linguistic level we have also shown that it is possible to work on different aspects of the curriculum through music (listening, spoken interaction, reading, writing, pronunciation, language awareness, vocabulary and so forth). However, we have paid particular attention to the creative and communicative aspects, and we have prioritized those proposals which clearly require the active participation of students. Similarly, we have given examples of how to develop proposals interesting and flexible enough to be implemented in classrooms with very different levels and socio-cultural contexts.

Finally, we cannot bring this paper to a close without expressing our conviction that innovation is very badly needed in many areas of the language teaching and learning process. In this sense, we believe that from the standpoint of competences, one improvement would be that activities with an important recreational and creative component, which students find meaningful, should be more present in primary and secondary school classrooms. And precisely the ideas with a musical basis presented in this work are intended to make a small contribution in this direction, in a panorama where disciplinary compartmentalization and reticence fade away in favour of the totality, the complementarity and the holistic perception of knowledge.

## Notes

- 1 Available from <http://www.emporfolio.eu/>
- 2 In fact, the authors of this paper present their version or adaptation of these three activities, always respecting and remaining true to the essence of the original authors' proposals.
- 3 This activity was inspired by the Silent Monks' performance of the Hallelujah from the Messiah by G.F. Handel. You can watch it at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pRhjWdr-LAA>

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