

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN MUSIC AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISCIPLINES (English, mathematics and religion)

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Abstract. Music is inherent in the spoken language. Many young children appear to be naturally inclined to hum or to sing a tune. In this context, it is beneficial to build upon musical interests and enhance their literacy development simultaneously, by integrating music throughout curricular areas to develop comprehension skills, improve listening and oral language skill development, improve attention and memory, and enhance abstract thinking.

Keywords: music, affective filter, English, religion, maths.

CORELAȚIA DINTRE MUZICĂ ȘI DISCIPLINELE DIN ȘCOALA ELEMENTARĂ (engleză, matematică și religie)

Rezumat. Muzica este un factor inerent în limbajul vorbit. Majoritatea copiilor pot cânta sau fredona o melodie fără dificultăți. În acest context, este benefică stimularea interesului pentru muzică paralel cu dezvoltarea competențelor pentru alte discipline, fapt care va avea drept consecințe dezvoltarea atenției, memoriei, gândirii abstracte, precum și abilităților de înțelegere și de comunicare.

Cuvinte-cheie: muzica, filtru afectiv, limba engleză, religia, matematica

According to the affective filter, a hypothesis developed by Krashen [4], in order to stimulate optimal learning, the affective filter must be weak. A weak filter means that positive attitude toward learning is present. Due to the causal learning environment used when singing, songs appear as a means for achieving a weak affective filter promoting learning [10]. Considering this idea, we emphasize the importance of introducing music in studying elementary school disciplines as a basis for the further development of pupils' intellectual skills.

It is agreed that music plays an important role in language and literacy development. A Child's initial introduction to patterned text, grammatical rules and various rhyming often occurs first in songs. Language lessons addressing grammar, reading fluency and writing, among other literacy skills can be enhanced through music [10]. Music can be used to teach variety of language skills, such as “sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, and parts of speech”.

Learning a second language can be a stressful and difficult process. There are many techniques and strategies that foreign language teachers use in their classrooms to aid in the acquisition of the second language. According to Krashen [4] creating an environment that has a low affective-filter, meaning minimal stress and non-threatening, is essential for second language learning to take place. In addition, second language learners need devices to engage them and allow for retention of the second language. Music is a common technique used by foreign language teachers because it has many benefits that apply to the foreign language classroom. According to Krashen's Input

Hypothesis [4], input must be comprehensible for language learners to retain information. Within his Input Hypothesis, Krashen developed the „Monitor Model” which offers five hypotheses regarding language learning. The fourth hypothesis deals with comprehensible input. The hypothesis states, „Acquisition occurs only when learners receive optimal comprehensible input that is interesting, a little beyond their current level of competence ($i + 1$)” [12]. This means that the level of linguistic content that students receive must be at their level or slightly above so that learning could take place. Chunking or dividing language up into smaller, comprehensible parts can aid in language learning. „Through word/sound play, many „chunks” of useful language can be incorporated into the learner’s linguistic repertoire at almost any age or proficiency level” [2], [4], [5].

Using music in the foreign language classroom corresponds with Krashen’s Input Hypothesis. „Music tends to reduce anxiety and inhibition in second language learners. Learning a new concept through a song or listening to music is less threatening than a lecture or worksheet [4]. „Music breaks down barriers and creates a friendly environment” [5]. There are different ways in which music can be integrated into the classroom to produce this effect; for example „group singing can lower the walls between people, decrease competitive instincts and build cooperation in its place” [4]. In addition, music corresponds to the hypothesis stating that input must be meaningful.

Music „is a great motivator for its lyrics are often very meaningful” [5]. Emotions and real-life situations are often at the core of music, fact that provides for a connection between the second language and the student’s perspective. „Creating relevance for the student is necessary for learning to occur” [5].

All levels of language learners can benefit from using music in the foreign language classroom. Vocabulary can be taught through songs. Although beginning language learners will not have a large vocabulary foundation to understand all of the words in songs, they will be able to pick out familiar words [5]. Creating an input that is slightly above their current level will create a sense of curiosity and inspire motivation to learn what the new words mean. Using music in the language classroom also fosters participation. The students are often eager to learn the words of the new song and participate in classroom activity. Creativity and critical thinking in the foreign language is also achieved when song is implemented into second language instruction. More advanced students can interpret the meaning of the song or create their own stanza to the song [5].

Chants are a popular tool in foreign language classrooms. Carolyn Graham developed many of the chants that are used in classrooms today [80]. Chants can be used in the classroom to „expose students to natural intonation patterns and idiomatic expressions” [12]. Chants provide for redundancy and repetition. Through constant revision of grammar and vocabulary, students will begin to store them in long term

memory. Pronunciation of the second language is also emphasized in chants [5]. When using a chant in instruction, Patricia Richard-Amato found that “it unnecessary to stop and correct students’ pronunciation. „Students seem to acquire the correct pronunciation through listening and repetition. Another benefit of chants is that they can help students to remember and internalize patterns. In foreign languages there are many patterns to be learned and memorized, thus a memory device is useful. Chants serve this purpose in the foreign language classroom. Rhyme and rhythm allow the students to remember the chant and therefore remember the grammatical or cultural implication of the chant [5].

A strong correlation was found between learning music in early age and nerve connections in the brain that is responsible for understanding mathematics [11], [15]. In other researches it was found that students who learnt music got higher achievements in mathematics more than those who did not learn music [13], [9], [8]. A research conducted in Austria and Switzerland found that students that learnt music 5 hours a week instead of learning 5 lessons of mathematics, got the same achievements as their fellows who didn’t learn music and learnt instead mathematics [11].

Historically associated with social permissiveness and licentious behavior, music has been discredited by religious leaders and spokespersons for generations. Nevertheless, religions include music as integral to sacred practice. Musical forms of worship in religions are justified in ancient sacred scripture descriptions of sacred musical events and dictates. While contemporary Israeli society is reigned by secular influences, religious communities of Arab persuasions continue to thrive, striving to uphold religious norms and dictates even as secular and Western exposure cannot be denied. Tensions between tradition and modernity pervade musical pursuit within such religiously observant communities, where historical paradoxes become intensified and complicated by modern-secular influences.

A research conducted by Badarne and Erlich [1] found that associations of permissiveness and licentious behavior become sublimated, as passion is channeled towards religious fervor. Musical actions and behaviors, otherwise forbidden, become permissible when pursued for educational purposes. The prominence of music teacher image emerges as a most dominant theme. The shared experience of the two music educators embodying dual identity as community insiders committed to religiously observant life, but also participating in professional communities of music, is revealed as a major affordance. These religiously observant teachers gain trust of their communities even as they challenge the borderlines of religious dictates in pursuit of enacting their own professionalism. Personal knowledge of religious dictates and dictate histories allow the two teachers to maneuver wisely in bending and stretching religious limits. Musical professionalism and personal musical knowledge inspire the teachers to expand communities’ musical experiences, sometimes instigating acts towards cultural change. This intricate balance depends on the teachers’ ability to maintain a positive religious

image in their communities. Both colleagues confess that what some of their graduates do musically and culturally, they themselves must continue to abstain from in order to continue to influence future generations.

The results of Badarne and Erlich study [1] tell a story of multicultural cross influence in contemporary Israeli society. Music is shown to act as a social practice, as an educational pursuit and as a religious outlet within traditionally religious communities. Music teachers living within these communities as participant observers oscillate between being insiders and outsiders of their communities. When successful, these teachers are able to reinterpret traditional religious dictates, expanding musical presence and practice in their communities, and exposing traditional gaps between traditional religious law dictates, philosophical mindsets of each religion and contemporary practice.

In many religions, music is a topic of dispute. There are some conservative interpretations of Islam hostile to music. There is a preconception among many that Islam as a religion is proscriptive when it comes to music [7], [6], [3]. In Islam, there are hardliners. According to the real hardliners, almost no kind of Mosaqa is acceptable, the sole exception being that women are allowed to play a minor hand-drum called the daveh (like a tambourine without any rattles) in the company of other women. No men are to be present. Men are not allowed to play the Daveh. The next step is allowing young girls to sing songs at 14 (religious feasts), and women to sing for other women at celebrations (but only „decent” songs). This is looked upon as either Makruh (discouraged) or Haram [6], [7], [3].

One of the major modern sources used is the late Sheikh Muhammad Nasir ad-Din al-Al-bani, who lived in Jordan. In 1994, he published a book called “Tahrim Aalati t-tarab” (The prohibition of musical instruments). In the text it is argued that music is to be understood as „idle talk”, quoting the Koran Surat Luqman 31:6. In the early exegesis of the Koran, this phrase is connected with any activity considered morally questionable such as slander or lying, but also sometimes with singing and the playing of instruments. This kind of talk is further connected to the voice of Satan misleading the believers. Instead of giving praise to Allah and learning about Islam, musicians engage in useless and sometimes harmful activities. This is in fact one of the central arguments against music [7]. Music is useless. Nothing is produced; nothing is achieved. For this reason amateurs, rather than professional musicians, are praised for their musicality by some moderate hardliners. Professionals have to spend too much time practicing, time they should use remembering Allah. The fact that some hardliners tolerate military and occupational songs is often backed by arguments about their increasing motivation and productivity [al-Ghazali [d. 1111], cited in 87]. In the modern age the cost of buying music is contrasted with the use that money could be put to as saclike (alms) [7], [6].

One of the most thorough studies of Islam and music is Amnon Shiloah's [14] *Musk in the World of Islam*. In chapter 4, called „Islam and Music”, he reviews classical

Islamic sources. He writes that: „one finds repeated belief in the overwhelming power of music, which exerts an irresistibly strong influence on the listener's soul” [14]. In the same spirit, Abu Hanifa [d. 767] wrote: „Musical instruments are the wine of the soul, and what it does to the soul is worse than what intoxicating drinks do” [cited on <www.islam-qa.com>]. The ninth-century theologian and jurist Abi 'I-Dunyyi [d. 894] wrote in his book *Dhamm Al-Maldld* (The book of the censure of Instruments of Diversion) [14] that music causes believers to stray from devotional life, and it should be treated as other prohibited activities such as gambling and drinking. The crucial issue here is the presumed and acknowledged power of music. Music is seen as a rival for the passion of humans. Passion should be devoted to Allah. Instead this passion is wasted on something useless but powerful that might become an obsession. It can also spread in society, causing a general decline in decency and morals [7], [3]. The ideas above lead to a discussion on the sinful living connected to listening to or performing music. Just as a footnote, it might be mentioned that the hardliners tend to separate listening from hearing; the latter is not forbidden but should be avoided [7]. Intention is one of the most important concepts in Islamic morals, ritual and jurisprudence. If the intention is to listen and enjoy, then it is sinful, but if someone by accident hears but is not set on enjoying, then it is no sin [7]. More liberal minds tend to claim that there is no harm inherent in music as such; more important is the company in which music is listened to or played. In other words, it is where, when and with whom you perform or listen to music that is crucial. If music is associated with forbidden pleasures such as drinking alcohol, taking drugs etc., then that music is regarded as forbidden because it contributes to the sins. Real hardliners would say that music in itself incites sins [7], [3].

Conclusions

Despite the controversial attitudes of Islam religion toward music, the integration of arts in teaching becomes more and more actual in Israel. Music can be naturally integrated throughout language curricular areas to develop and to extend vocabulary and comprehension skills. It can also improve listening and oral language skill development, improve attention and memory, and enhance abstract thinking. In addition, music tends to reduce anxiety and inhibition in second language learners, it has the power to keep students engaged and reduce discipline problems within the classroom, limit behavior problems and increase performance. Moreover, music enhances pupils' **concentration**, **enriches the material** and provides more **meaning to the lesson**. When the learners are more engaged and interested in the lesson, they will stay longer **focused** and retain more information.

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