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The Integration of Music and Language in
Whitman's "Proud Music of the Storm"

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To Michèle.

“Language and music are universally human and thus biological characteristic” (Nettl, 2000: 290). No matter the society, both music and language are traced. This universality has triggered the interest of scholars from different disciplines such as neuroscience, psychology, linguistics or biology, since the study of their analogies “can deepen our understanding of the mechanisms that underlie our species’ uniquely powerful communicative abilities” (Patel, 2008: 3). In the linguistics field, and specifically within English as a Foreign Language classrooms (EFL), primary and secondary teachers have used songs and other musical elements as tools to improve some of the students’ language skills and their motivation, although somehow intuitively. In recent years, neuroscience research has pointed out that the use of musical aspects within the language classroom would “foster the relationship between language and conceptual developments, set a positive and constructive learning atmosphere, facilitate language learning and develop both students and teachers’ creativity” (V.V.A.A., 2012: 5-6). Let’s focus on the creativity that this language and music integration brings about.

Creativity is the ability to create; the creation process is usually featured as individual and mental. However, in this individuality, the creator, the artist, the teacher must be aware of the potential audience of its creation. Sometimes, the difference between a performance and a lesson is very subtle. They both occur within a fixed time frame; they both have an interpreter, a message and an intended audience; and their aim is to reach the audience in a way the message becomes meaningful. Many teachers, though, tend to focus on the message regardless of the audience, their students. And that is the mistake, because it is reaching the audience what matters. It is that way that the message prevails. Can we then consider a lesson as a potential piece of art? It all depends on the how. To be careful with the materials, with the words, with the intonation, the prosody, the tone, and waiting for the right moment—all this makes a lesson good. And if there is a connection between teacher and student, even if it is only one, the communication is meaningful. We can consider meaningful lessons as art in the way they can convey emotions, values and knowledge.

Language and music integration can develop rich and motivating lessons in this sense, as researchers in the field claim. In order to achieve so, teachers must

do a careful and cognitive-based selection of the songs, poems, texts and other materials. Some poetry allows a perfect combination of both, for instance Whitman's. Whitman declared, "but for the opera I could never have written *Leaves of Grass*". Few poets have surpassed Whitman in his use of music as an inspiration (LeMaster and Kummings, 1988: 437). His work is imbued with references to music that can be unnoticed for many readers and students. Specifically in "Proud Music of the Storm", "a kind of musical autobiography in which he lists the variety of musical influences on his life and poetry" (LeMaster and Kummings, 1988). Through the reading of this poem in the classroom we can cover many linguistic and musical competences: the use of alliteration and rhythm as both linguistic and musical resources; the importance of prosody in Whitman; the concept of "units of meaning" through the playing of the concrete arias, sounds and other kinds of music Whitman makes reference to; the loss of some prosodic elements in the translation of a poem; the classical music culture of the 19th century in USA; the concept of "interpretation"; interdisciplinarity and multimodality in literature and music; or even intercultural competences such as the importance of tolerance between races and religions.

This is just but an example of a creative integration of music and language within the classroom. There are far more possibilities, as much as topics or contents we deal with. Teach students about racial issues in the USA through Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit"; teach them about the French Revolution through the constraints of Mozart's symphonies or Beethoven Heroic Symphony; or about Lorca through Enrique Morente's *Omega*; teach them about unfair love through Bebo Valdés and El Cigala's "Inolvidable"; teach them about loss through Purcell's "Dido's Lament"; teach them French through *Les Choristes*; to be tolerant through the music of Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Anoushka Shankar or Camaron; or about the gypsies through Ravel's *Tzigane*; or about religion through gospel; the iambic pentamer through their favourite rap songs; war through *The Schindler's List* soundtrack; teach them about death through Fauré's *Requiem*; teach them about Cuban's culture through "Lágrimas Negras"; or love through Puccini's "O Mio Babino Caro"; teach them Whitman's parallelism structure through your own examples. Teach them to be creative through your own creativity.

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