

Practicalities of using Music and Rhythm in the everyday teaching of English Language in Malaysian Schools

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2011



In the face of overwhelming evidence regarding the benefits of using music and rhythm in teaching English language, and especially to young children, many teachers are still unwilling to do so. This paper suggests possible reasons for their reluctance and some practical solutions.

Every teacher has anecdotal evidence which strengthens research findings as to the benefits of using music and rhythm in the teaching of young children, and especially those with disabilities. When teaching English to older children and even adults, the use of music and rhythm not only increases motivation and improves attention, but also aids in mastering the tonal and stress patterns on the English language.

Some teachers, while aware of the benefits, are reluctant to apply this resource for a variety of reasons such as embarrassment, lack of knowledge and skill in music, fear of noise disruption to nearby classes, and pressure to deliver content in a set time.

This paper aims to indicate ways that adequate musical knowledge and useful skills can in fact be quickly and easily acquired, the noise problem simply sorted, and the medium of music can in fact be used to deliver the required content.

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Background

After completing my teacher training and earning my education degrees in Australia, I taught in Western Australian primary schools for many years, and then in schools and universities in China, Turkey, the UK, and Saudi Arabia before coming here to Malaysia.

All Australian teachers receive frequent in-service training, and become involved with innovative trends, some of which have changed the face of education. Over 15 years, I held the position of Arts Specialist in four different schools where I engaged all children across the school in appreciating, understanding and using music and performing arts for the full period of their primary schooling. Through this music and drama training, children learned to recognise and use all kinds of patterns and rhythms, to express themselves clearly in a variety of ways, to socialise and be aware of other students' needs, and to develop their own individual creativity in acceptable ways.

Introduction

Some teaching was done a little differently all those years ago when I went to school.

My high school French, Latin and Greek were taught using the old-fashioned method of repeatedly chanting verb conjugations and noun declensions without meaningful context. My Latin teacher would apply the wooden side of the blackboard duster to the head of the nearest pupil as we all chanted the verb conjugations. And my Greek teacher would bounce up and down as he took us through the noun and adjective declensions.

The “Communicative” style of teaching language has become accepted almost everywhere since the 1970s, and nowadays languages are rarely taught that way. And yet I can still remember those little bits of language that I learnt under the blackboard duster or with the bouncing teacher. However, I can speak neither Greek nor Latin, nor even put a meaningful sentence together. In French language lessons, as well as conjugating irregular verbs, we read novels, and listened to music from French radio stations, all of which is more in the modern style where meaningful context is a vital element of language learning. Aside from that, the essential elements of the little bit of Greek and Latin which I retained were most importantly rhythm and some movement.

Why use Music and Rhythm to teach English language?

“Responsiveness to music is an essential part of our neural nature” (Dr. Oliver Sacks, Neurologist NYC)

Firstly as we examine what writers have said about the effects of music on children, we are left with no doubt that music is a valuable aid in learning. ‘If this were a court case, the ruling would be music is valuable “beyond reasonable doubt.”’ (Jensen, 2002) Even without academic study, we are somehow aware that ‘music provides us with a natural and rhythmic way to learn.’ (Wright)

1. Music Enhances Brain Function

Everyone knows that music affects our feelings, but it is not all just in our minds, it is in our brains as well. It has been demonstrated that music has a positive effect on thinking and the working of the human brain. (Woodall & Ziembroski)

Many people are familiar with the so-called “Mozart effect” where students have improved results in their learning while passively listening to music. The mathematical nature of music also ‘provides a fertile place for language learning to take hold and develop’. (Blodget, 2000)

Having music playing in the background while completing a task can have a positive effect, and conscious listening gives an even greater result. Better yet are the positive results of being actively involved in production of music as part of a group.

Being involved in music activates more parts of the brain than any other activity. (Bollinger)
Under the influence of music our thinking improves, our thoughts seem clearer and we experience greater joy, relaxation, inspiration and invigoration.

2. Music Use Improves Motivation and Emotional Well-being

Facing up to a class of eager, motivated students can make even a tired, jaded primary school teacher remember why they entered this profession in the first place. A good teacher comes to every class prepared to present lesson material that will engage their students and motivate them to learn. Coming up with fresh workable ideas consistently can prove time consuming and exhausting, and using music can therefore make this aspect of the task more manageable.

“Children are motivated by music, by the variety of rhythms, by the instrumentation (guitar, contrabass, percussions), by the different voices involved (masculine, feminine, child, adult) and by the themes (boys/girls, circus, family, animals, etc.)”. (Cakir, 1999)

Of course, that’s all well and good when the scheduled class is a music lesson or some other subject that children find naturally engaging, but it can also help with the tough subjects with a heavy content payload. Music can be integrated into all subject areas, and any part of the school curriculum can become naturally engaging for young students. For the purposes of this paper, we are particularly interested in language learning, and “integrating music into oral language instruction creates an easy-learning environment and extends students’ patience.” (Wu & Hsieh, 2008, p. 6)

An essential component of early childhood education involves young children learning to socialise and communicate. “Oral language is an interactive and social process, and music is a natural way for children to experience rich language in a pleasurable way.” (Woodall & Ziembski) Clearly music is not only something they will enjoy, it assists in their social development and provides opportunities for early discovery of patterns in language. Thus a pedagogical approach which utilises the power of music addresses not only ‘cognitive needs, but also affective and emotional needs’. (Lieb, 2008, p. 30)

Children enjoy movement, especially as a response to music. ‘Use of the correct music can engage, motivate, focus, reward and provide the maximum environment for learning. Moving to the right music can compliment and cement in the skill/lesson/goal you are trying to teach’. (La Bella)

If the lesson includes music, then it will always have a positive effect on the students’ mood and motivation. (Stansell, 2005) The most effective way to ensure students are completely engaged in the lesson is to give them music to respond to. (Blodget, 2000)

3. Music Use Assists Memory

Education is all about remembering. Some memories will lead to an automatic response, other memories will be embedded in the development of skills, and other memories will lead

to improved understanding. Under the influence of music, and especially participation in songs, these memories can be greatly enhanced.

Using songs for teaching yields a double advantage, because ‘songs contain the power of music as well as the power of lyrics. (Rosova, 2007, p. 14) While the music itself gives the brain a boost, the words contain the lesson content. ‘One of the basic principles in learning a language is repetition’ (ibid) and while language drills can quickly become dry and dull, the repetition of a good song remains enjoyable. With the learning of a language through a song, it is not only the words that are remembered and learned. Learning takes place whether the student intends it to or not. Very soon the language of the song is stuck in the students’ heads, as the song plays over and over in their minds.

Krashen (1981) discusses the need for ‘comprehensible input’ for language acquisition to take place, and ‘when students experience the “Song Stuck In My Head Phenomenon” (SSIMHP), recall of linguistic prosody as well as vocabulary and grammar is greatly enhanced, due to enhanced “Comprehensible Input”. (Lieb, 2008, p. 32)

Songs can be easily memorised, and in doing so students internalise not only the words but the patterns of the language, which they then use and repeat in their speech. (Wu & Hsieh, 2008, p. 6)

One of the greatest burdens of language learning is vocabulary acquisition, a task that in previous educational styles has involved memorisation of lists of words. Introducing vocabulary through songs not only makes the task more manageable and enjoyable, but provides a meaningful context for the vocabulary. (Rosova, 2007, p. 18) Adding physical response also assists with memory, and music helps to motivate and focus this effort. (Vernon, 2009)

Music will leave its impression on students, and they will remember not only the words but the grammatical structures and vocabulary for the rest of their lives. (Blodget, 2000)

4. Music Use Develops Phonology, Pronunciation and Natural Rhythm

Probably the most difficult aspect of a language for a teacher to impart is natural rhythm; especially when the learners’ first language is ‘syllable-timed’ and they are learning English which is ‘stress-timed’.

A syllable-timed language can be depicted thus:

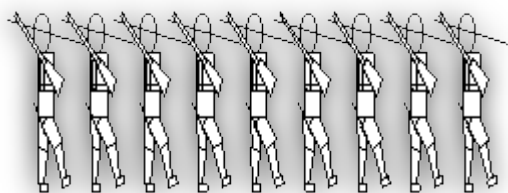


Figure 1 Syllable-timed language (Chen, Fan, & Lin, 1995)

Whereas a stress-timed language would look more like this:

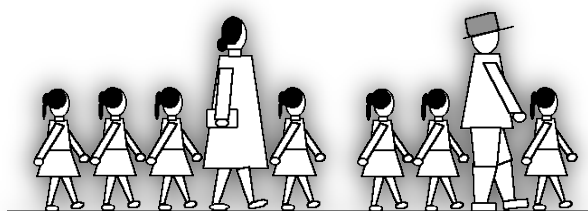


Figure 2 Stress-timed language (Chen, Fan, & Lin, 1995)

To pronounce English clearly and naturally, students need to become familiar with the rhythm of the language. (DeVeto, 2005) Listening to, and being engaged with songs in English is an efficient and enjoyable way for students to master this skill.

In fact it is the rhythm of the song, more than the tune, which assists with this part of language acquisition, but the melody can add pleasure and make it even more memorable. 'Rhythm is both a feature of and product of the phonological structure of English.' (Darn, 2007) With this in mind, many teachers have made use of 'Jazz Chants' designed by Carolyn Graham 'to teach the natural rhythm, stress and intonation patterns of conversational American English.' (Cakir, 1999)

Using simply chants, rather than whole melodic songs, is an effective method to develop natural rhythm in English and improve the pronunciation of stress and intonation. The lyrics of the chants themselves are also valuable to teach phonology and grammar.

5. Music Use Improves Language Listening Skills

Students listening to music are more focused than when they are just listening to the teacher's voice. For instructors struggling to teach listening as a skill, using music can help motivate students to apply themselves to intensive listening practice.

‘Music can focus the mind on the sounds being perceived and promote learning through an interactive process. It is important in teaching early childhood students to be conscious of auditory and discrimination skills. Music and songs help increase these listening skills in a fun, relaxed manner.’ (Woodall & Ziembroski)

6. Music Use Assists with Literacy

Students of English language must master the written as well as the spoken words, and many young language learners are still struggling with literacy in their first language.

Firstly, most songs are full of rhymes, and children’s songs in particular contain a great deal of alliteration, all of which enables young students to notice individual sounds. If the song is also presented in written form, they soon start to recognise key sounds and symbols.

Secondly, songs are repetitious within themselves, and open to repeated use, giving students the opportunity to become aware of grammatical rules and increase vocabulary acquisition in both oral and written forms. A song can also be used as the text for a reading skills lesson. (Bollinger)

As mentioned before, music and songs help children to recognise patterns, and this also helps with literacy skills. Having a strong sense of beat also assists in the process of learning to read. (Stein, 2007) In past years, children with reading difficulties have been taken aside to learn or re-learn to crawl on their hands and knees, to jump on trampolines, and to participate in other physical activities that promote rhythm and patterning. Using music and songs assists in this area too.

7. Music Provides a Cultural Framework for Language Learning

Language and culture are intrinsically linked, and students of language must understand something of the culture to make true sense of the language. Watching videos and listening to songs assist in putting context to the language. ‘Music, being indigenous to its geographical place of creation, as well as to the cultural and social environment in which it arises, naturally transmits and reflects the culture in which it is created.’ (Blodget, 2000)

8. Music Use Is in the Syllabus

The syllabus states firstly:

ii. 'Learning is fun, meaningful and purposeful

Lessons, which emphasise meaningful contexts and the integration of language skills, allow pupils to learn by doing in fun-filled activities. Contextualised as well as purposeful activities will promote the fun element in language learning.'

(Kementarian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2010, p. 5)

The best way to motivate students and encourage a sense of fun is to use music and songs. Students are to be taught to use stress and intonation patterns correctly, and again music is a good way to teach this. Songs and rhymes are to be part of strategies to develop the students' imagination and interest. (Kementarian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2010, pp. 10, 12)

The use of songs and rhymes is encouraged in order to develop correct stress and intonation, and the syllabus states that students will be able to appreciate, recite and even, with guidance, create rhymes, poems, songs and jazz chants. (Kementarian Pelajaran Malaysia, 2010, pp. 16, 26, 27)

Problems – Why Aren’t Malaysian Teachers Using Music More?

Taking all of this into account, one could expect to find every Malaysian classroom filled with the sound of music and children singing.

As a primary school teacher, for many years I taught music and drama as an Arts Specialist in several Australian primary schools. I presented my lessons in a large purpose-built classroom complete which had a small stage, a variety of musical instruments, electronic audio-visual equipment, and I had access to a reasonable budget for purchasing anything I required to be more effective in my task. My mandate was to encourage students’ social and emotional development while educating them in the Arts.

Clearly such resources and equipment are not available in everyday regular classrooms. Teachers are not trained extensively in the arts, and their task is to educate students in basic skills. This is a very different situation.

Firstly, not everyone is comfortable with and confident about singing in front of a class. A teacher who is not musically trained or experienced may well feel that this is not exactly what they signed up for.

Secondly, if teachers are going to present songs in a professional manner, then resources are needed such as audio equipment and CDs, and these are not available in the average classroom.

Thirdly, choosing songs is not easy, as many English language songs have inappropriate lyrics and themes which are unsuitable for use as an English language teaching medium. Other songs are sung too fast for learners to hear and understand. (Vernon, 2009)

Another cause of difficulty comes from the focus on academic standards. The need to deliver content and meet deadlines can leave teachers feeling time-pressured and unable to fit music into the lesson schedule. (Lazar) Teachers need to find time for reading and writing in their lessons, as well as speaking and listening. Some teachers naturally feel that a reading and writing session is not the correct time to include music, and they feel that singing sessions should be limited to maybe once a week.

Some teachers of English in the Malaysian schools, while fairly confident in writing English, are less confident when speaking in English, and, quite understandably, are not willing to speak only in English when teaching young children. They are only comfortable with moving

step by step through the lesson materials as provided and would not dream of augmenting them with some music.

Although the syllabus states that music should be used, no music is actually provided as such. The teacher is expected to know or recognise the recommended tune for the words that are suggested. There is no way to accompany the singing unless the teacher can privately find a CD with the appropriate tune, or can play an instrument themselves. Even when the words for a chant are supplied in the syllabus, the teacher is not told how to accurately present the beat or rhythm. Sometimes the syllabus suggests a particular tune for a set of words, but the teacher may not be familiar with the tune and has no way to learn it. Some teachers make up a tune themselves, or use one that they already know. Other teachers, naturally, just skip ahead to the next step in the lesson.

Ideally most songs taught to young children for language learning purposes will have actions to go along with them, but the teacher may not be comfortable doing them, or not actually know what the actions are, and/or feel unable to devise their own actions. Many teachers also consider that actions are only for the very young students, and so not introduce them with the older pupils who could also benefit from them.

Another problem is the noise factor. Children who are enthusiastically participating in a song are likely to make a quite a lot of noise, and this can be a problem for other teachers in the school who are trying to have a quiet writing lesson with easily-distracted students. As with all of the above difficulties, the teacher of English using music needs to look for a creative solution.

Practicalities – Some Simple and Effective Strategies

Obviously there are Malaysian teachers who are doing a great job, using music and rhythm at every opportunity, and some are probably here today looking, as always, for new and useful ideas. (I hope you will find something here.) A dedicated teacher will always be on the lookout for fresh insights and new ideas.

1. Focussed Listening Using Popular Songs

This is a matter of using a song as a text for listening and/or as a reading text and is most suitable for older students. Importantly, a suitable song needs to be selected. Some guidelines are:

Make sure it is suitable (socially).

Make sure you know it well.

Make sure it is something the students will like reasonably well.

Make sure it contains useful language and teaching points.

Make sure you have a clear copy to play.

The lesson, similar to any study of a text, involves activities for pre-listening, while listening, and after listening. Pre-listening activities could involve, for example, a discussion of the title (in English) and what the song could be about, and a discussion of vocabulary that may be new or unknown.

The simplest idea for activities during or after listening is for the teacher to create a worksheet involving exercises such as:

- listen and fill in the missing words, or phrases
- listen and put the lines in the correct order
- listen for specific words or phrases and then look up their meanings
- listen and choose the right word from two or three
- listen and put the words in the line in the correct order
- listen and remove extra words
- listen for rhyming words
- play BINGO! marking off words as you hear them

The song can be played many times, with a different activity each time, and students can then learn to sing it, dramatise it, and participate in other projects related to the song theme.

2. Using Chants and Rhythms

The use of chants and rhythms has many advantages in a classroom situation, especially when there are technical or practical difficulties with playing melodic music. Chanting together to memorise is, of course, a very old-fashioned method of teaching language. The modern difference can be seen in the material that is learnt this way, including more context and encouraging a greater degree of understanding and much more enjoyment for the students.

There are a number of possible types of chants that can be used in the classroom.

Ready-Made Chants

The name of Carolyn Graham has become well known among English teachers for her now popular 'jazz chants' in which she has taken commonly used expressions and conversational exchanges and developed them into rhythmic chants. Practising and memorising these chants can help students to learn natural spoken English. Her books on jazz chants and 'grammar chants' can be bought, complete with CDs or cassettes containing the chants which makes them simple to teach. (It would probably be up to the individual teacher to obtain these resources.)

It is important that these chants are taught with correct word and sentence stress, intonation and timing. The teacher needs to be careful to practise them well and be confident of speaking them correctly first. However, the chants available in the book may not always meet the needs of teachers, or the books may not be readily available.

There are also a large number of traditional or nursery rhymes that are part of English-speaking cultural heritage and many of them can be useful in the English teaching classroom, particularly for younger students. These are short and rhythmic, sometimes nonsensical, and generally available on the Internet.

Making Your Own Chants

Designing chants is not all that difficult, any teacher can create a chant to teach and practise a particular point. Some possible chants are also included in the teaching syllabus. There are several different types of chants.

1. **Vocabulary chants** are the easiest to create quickly and easily especially using Carolyn Graham's '2-3-1' formula. This is how it works.

Firstly, decide on a theme or topic – such as food, transport, animals, sport, and so on. Then brainstorm 5 to 10 words that relate to the topic. Group the words according to the number of syllables – usually they will have 1, 2 or 3 syllables. Choose three words, a 2-syllable, a 3-syllable, and a single syllable word. Create the chant thus:

Zebra, crocodile, snake *
Zebra, crocodile, snake *
Zebra, crocodile, zebra, crocodile,
Zebra, crocodile, snake *

The jazz chant is designed around a four-beat rhythm, and hence the asterisk at the end of three of the lines indicates the spare beat which should be clapped or clicked on by the students.

(Note that care needs to be taken with the word stress in these words – note in this case they all have first syllable stress, as do most nouns.)

2. **Jazz Chants** are created around a conversation or common exchange between 2 or 3 people. An example would be:

A: Have a great weekend!
B: Yeah, you too.
C: See you next week.
A: OK, bye.

The skill comes in recognizing the accented syllables and the timing, and inserting some of those asterisks where there is a pause. Particularly if English is not their first language, the teacher might need to listen to the conversation repeatedly in context – for instance in a movie – and take careful note of the stress and intonation.

3. **Grammar Chants** are, of necessity, repetitive, and designed to practise specific grammar points.

Initially the chant can be practised with the teacher calling each line and the class copying line by line. This style of chant is likely to be familiar to Malaysian students, and can be repeated until the students are comfortable with the line.

Later the chant can be spoken in two parts, with the teacher, an individual student or a group of students calling one part and the others answering.

As an example, this is a chant about questions:

A: Go!

B: Who goes?

A: He goes.

B: Where does he go?

A: He goes to school.

B: When does he go to school?

A: He goes to school in the morning.

B: How does he go to school?

A: He goes to school by bus.

B: What does he do at school?

A: He learns lots of things.

B: Why does he go to school?

A: Because he wants to learn.

(Beare, 2011)

To create a grammar chant, the teacher needs to decide on a grammar point to be taught or practised and then develop a series of sentences and phrases that demonstrate or typify it. The important thing is to learn the grammatical structure in the context of a sentence or two – rather than just conjugating a verb. Again the teacher needs to be careful to take note of the natural stress patterns in the chant.

3. Using Simple Songs

Popular songs are suitable for language practice for older students, but young children need short simple songs that they can memorise completely and that teach them vocabulary, grammar and even concepts.

Simple songs that are suitable for children are characterised by short lines, lots of repetition and often alliteration in the lyrics, often a chorus that can be quickly and easily learnt first, the possibility for actions, and a simple melody. Many children's songs are written with a 'Pentatonic' melody which is made up of a scale of only five notes (instead of seven).

Nowadays, a great many new songs written and recorded especially for children are readily available in shops and also on the Internet. Some of these are of a very high quality and

educationally sound. For the teacher who really would like something to boost children's motivation, acquiring some of these may be a worthwhile investment.

Traditional Songs

There are a great many traditional songs that are, again, part of English-speaking cultural heritage. Many of these can be very useful in the teaching of English because they are short, simple, rhythmic and fun. Even when the words are inadequate for a particular situation, the tunes are easily adaptable to new words. Many of these are also included, sometimes in a slightly adapted form, in the English language syllabus, and sometimes the tune is recommended for use with a different set of words.

Making your own Songs

The easiest way to make your own song is to borrow a well-known or traditional tune and put your own simple words to it, just as mentioned above where Malaysian school syllabus suggests specific simple traditional tunes to be used with words that are relevant to the lesson. Of course doing this needs an awareness of stressed syllables and a feel for the beat in the tune so that they can be matched up. However there are quite a few suitable tunes available.

The playground tune is another option. This is the musical sequence that children tend to use when boasting, or teasing each other, and the rhythm can be adjusted to fit any words. This tune is extremely simple and adaptable and seems to be used naturally by children in all western countries, maybe Malaysian children use it too, or something similar.

4. Actions and Moving to Music

For young children especially, ideally all songs, and possibly chants and rhymes too, would have actions for more effective learning to take place. Children love to be active, and so actions increase the enjoyment. But also in terms of brain activity, more learning will take place if movement is associated with the words. Some songs and rhymes have actions designated or implied by the words of the song. For others, the teacher can easily devise actions related more to the beat of the song, enough to keep the students engaged and simple enough not to distract them from the lyrics.

Young children and even older students enjoy body percussion, and this can become a good substitute for actions. Children enjoy practising body rhythm patterns and sequences and can become very skilled at them, which is excellent not only for their hand-eye communication, and good brain-gym, as well as helping students to remember the words.

Body rhythm can include clapping, finger-clicking, patchening (patting knees), stamping, and patting other body parts such as shoulders. Clapping can be made more interesting by developing routines of clapping with a partner, or even a group.

5. Musical Instruments

Children are delighted by the opportunity to play musical instruments. Obviously a regular classroom cannot offer a range of musical instruments, and playing musical instruments in the classroom could cause considerable disruption to nearby classes.

Nevertheless, playing a rhythm on something, or hitting something to the beat is enjoyable and helps to reinforce the learning. So anything that is available, and makes a good sound without being too loud can be used as a musical instrument. Objects within the classroom can be used, but banging pencils causes internal damage to the lead and should be strongly discouraged, and it is better to have something especially set aside. Banging on desks also tends to deliver a resonance that the children enjoy but neighbouring classrooms do not appreciate. I have often used chopsticks which are readily and cheaply available in the supermarket for rhythm practice. (However, due care needs to be taken to make sure children do not use these as weapons.)

6. Using Stories with Songs

Storytelling is a very powerful medium because everybody, old and young, loves a story. Children can enjoy a story even without necessarily understanding all of the words. The gaps in their knowledge can be filled with pictures, facial expressions, actions and voice quality. Like songs, stories for children can be repeated again and again, and provide opportunity for a great deal of language learning.

Adding the element of song or repeated rhythmic chant to a story makes this medium even more effective, especially for young children. There are a number of traditional stories, such as the Gingerbread Man, which include a song or rhyme as part of the story. Children listening to the story quickly learn the rhyme, and by the end are telling it along with the teacher. Using a big book or other visual medium with such a story can add the element of literacy learning.

7. Using Songs to Teach Grammar

As mentioned above, with older students a song can be studied like any other text, and grammar points can be noticed and examined in this context.

Simple songs also naturally contain grammatical structure, and with the repetitive nature of these songs, the pattern can be easily seen. Substituting elements as the song is repeated allows for the demonstration of a grammar point. Again, the teacher can devise their own songs, similar to making a grammar chant, making use of familiar tunes.

8. The Noise Problem

When a neighbouring teacher complains about the noise from a classroom where the students are using music and chants to practise their English, it may be that the fault lies with the complaining teacher – maybe they are jealous of the fun the class is having, or they are not very good at controlling their own class. Nevertheless, there are definitely creative ways to avoid the complaints.

Firstly, communication and cooperation between teachers can avoid problems before they start. Sometimes arrangements can be made in the timetable to make sure one class does not disturb another. Schools also usually have a media room where the class can go to safely make more noise.

On the other hand, the noise can at least be reduced. Children do not have to shout the songs or chants at the top of their voices. The children could try whispering or even miming the song, or one or two children at a time could repeat the song – this in fact can increase the learning. When children's clapping makes too much noise, they can be taught to do one or two-finger claps, or fairy claps, whatever works. Musical instruments can be selected, such as chop-sticks, which provide a sense of percussion without excessive noise.

The children's learning is improved through the melody, rhythm and movement, and although some children like a lot of noise, it is not an essential element. On a weekly cycle, the students could withdraw to a media room for one lesson to learn a song or chant, and then for the rest of the week practise it more quietly in their classroom. Being aware of the classes around and what they are studying may also bring discovery some times when a noisy class would not necessarily disturb others.

Periodically the classes could join together and sing and chant altogether or each class could perform to the other.

9. Lifelong Learning

Teachers must be lifelong learners, always looking for opportunities to improve their understanding, knowledge, and skills. This must be especially true in the case of someone who is teaching English when it is not their first language.

There are phonetic difficulties for Malays learning English, but many of these do not cause misunderstanding when they pronounce English words, instead developing an acceptable accent. However, incorrect word and sentence stress and intonation can cause considerable strain and even confusion to the listener.

To teach English confidently, and to be able to create and correctly use chants and rhymes, the instructor needs a high level of proficiency in natural spoken English. This expertise does not happen quickly, and requires effort and perseverance. The best help would come from extended exposure to natural English speech. Where personal contact is not possible, then there are a great many electronic possibilities nowadays for interacting with the English language on a daily basis. A dedicated teacher will make time to improve themselves in order to become more effective in teaching English.

Conclusion

There are a great many good reasons for using music and rhythm as much as possible for teaching English effectively to students of all ages and stages of ability. Young children especially should have music wherever they go to enhance their physical, social and mental development.

Not surprisingly, there are difficulties involved in this undertaking, some of which are very specific to the situation in Malaysian schools. However there is always a creative solution and it is well worth the effort that may be required to overcome these obstacles and serve up as much music as possible to our students.

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