

Incorporating Music Strategies into Early Spanish Language Acquisition

Maria A Barreiro

Florida International University

Author Note

Submitted to Dr. Wynne for EDF 6941 on April 20th, 2012

Incorporating Music Strategies into Early Spanish Language Acquisition

The benefits of the integration of the arts into the core curriculum have been demonstrated by many research studies and practitioners' classroom practices. Specifically, the work of Howard Gardner (1993) on Multiple Intelligences theory (MI) has brought to the pedagogical field a new insight and new considerations regarding individual learning styles (as cited by Paquette and Rieg, 2008). Yet, the benefits of incorporating music to language learning go beyond Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory. Moreover, Don G. Campbell (1992), who has studied the musical brain, states that music has a way of connecting the two hemispheres in the brain via the corpus callosum to enhance learning. Moreover, this connection creates a consistent integration via the corpus callosum between the left hemisphere, which is used for language, and the right, which distinguishes musical intonations. Therefore, language acquisition that is stimulated through music will result in a higher rate of retention of content and memorization.

I have been a music teacher for the past 15 years, and I am currently pursuing a Master's in Urban Education/ TESOL. I am also a World Language/Spanish and ESOL teacher at an urban school in Miami Dade County. In the future, I intend to develop across the curriculum educational materials as well as interdisciplinary strategies that incorporate music into language learning through an engaging and meaningful approach. My interest in the topic of music and language acquisition started through literature review that I carried out for another class where I was able to explore how music is implemented as a language acquisition and assessment tool at different levels of instruction, from an early age all the way to higher education. Subsequently, last semester, I conducted a case study with the purpose to understand how a first grade teacher implemented music in order to achieve specific educational goals and what areas of languages acquisition this teacher wanted to target by using musical strategies within the classroom setting.

Today, I would like to inquire with my current Spanish first grade students how music can be used for instructional purposes in a foreign language class to help these first grades acquire new vowel sounds and simple vocabulary words based on these vowel sounds in Spanish. Can music facilitate the retention and memorization of a new language's early acquisition stage?

Literature Considerations

From Plato to Zoltan Kodaly, music has been linked to student academic achievement. Recently, the work of Howard Gardner (1993) on Multiple Intelligences theory (MI) has brought to the pedagogical field a new insight and new considerations regarding individual learning styles (as cited by Paquette and Rieg, 2008). Gardner's theory gave new understanding on how other forms of intelligences, such as musical intelligence besides linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence, can be stimulated to promote students' achievement within school settings. Moreover, Gardner (1993) has identified that musical intelligence is the first intelligence to manifest in early learners (as cited by Paquette and Rieg, 2008). The studies of Hurtwitzs (1975), Kelley (1981), Wood (1990), and Andrew (1997) have consistently provided evidence regarding the strong relationship that exists between reading skills development and formal musical training among students at all school levels (as cited by Legg, 2009, pg. 2). Specifically, the study of Hurtwitzs (1975) which was based on the renowned composer Zoltan Kodaly's musical activities provided impressive findings. The study included clapping and singing games as well as rhythmic and melodic patterns reading development. Remarkably, the study determined that the students that were exposed to the music program became better readers than those who received extra reading lessons (as cited by Legg, 2009, pg. 2).

Many studies have determined that the brain structure and its hemispheres play a major role in the way we acquire information and learn languages. In her study of the brain, Leslie Hart (2006) describes that while the left side of the brain is concerned with the language functions, the right side of the brain deals with recognition of visual and rhythmic patterns. Nevertheless, both hemispheres are interconnected and share information by means of a bridge called the "corpus callosum", made of 200 million or more nerve fibers (as cited by Adkins, 1997). Don G. Campbell (1991), who has studied the musical brain, states that music allows for both hemispheres to connect via the "corpus callosum" by using the left hemisphere for language and the right to differentiate musical intonations. Although both halves still function separately, the more integrated they become by sharing information, the more effective the retention of information will be and therefore, also the learning process (as cited by Adkins, 1997). Moreover, Renate Nummela Caine and Geoffrey Caine highlight in their book "Making Connections" that "Meaningful Knowledge" can produce access to the millions of rich connections that the brain is capable of making (1994). Furthermore, the way to access "Meaningful Knowledge" can be achieved through singing and creating music to purposefully learn content engaging students in talking, listening and acting out what they are learning.

Additionally, new trends in education, such as the communicative and content-based instruction approaches, have created a new movement in curriculum development that encourages language instruction through meaningful content areas, academic subjects and culture (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). The benefits of music instruction have been evident at different levels of cognition development, from childhood to early adulthood. As Gardner (1992) wrote "the single most important thing in education is for each person to find at least one thing that he/she connects to, gets excited by, and feels motivated to spend more time with. For many

children, music is that thing”, (as cited by Ling Yu, 2009). Moreover, as children learn basic concepts of music, they can relate to simple grammar structures and phonemes in the language that they are acquiring. As an example, the study by Ling Yu, (2009) demonstrated that by using contrasting musical elements and incorporating them into the creative process of composing simple songs, the students demonstrated not only understanding of musical concepts but also developed language skills. That study consisted of 7 children in urban mainland China who were given a pre-test, a middle test and a final test evaluation as part of the empirical study. Students’ improvement was observed both in their musical and language skills, which were intrinsically correlated. The lessons were divided into different themes which involved contrasting musical elements such as fast and slow, loud and soft, high and low, stop and go as well as the understanding of the English meaning. Through repetition, kinesthetic, visual and oral aids such as CD players with different sounds and songs, use of instruments and Total Physical Response strategies, the students improved in their understanding of the musical and English language meaning in context. Children were also able to answer simple questions from the instructors by engaging in both musical and language expressions; the children interacted by singing using their own words and, therefore, creating simple improvised song forms.

Many studies have sustained the benefits of songs and song lyrics to enhance language teaching, yet few studies have analyzed the effectiveness of implementing songs as a tool for language learning. Accordingly, the study by Li, X., & Brand, M. (2009) main purpose was to determine the effect that the usage of songs as well as song lyrics have on vocabulary acquisition, language practice as well as comprehension. The study was carried out at a prestigious university in the Republic of China, and included thirty five students of law attending ESL English classes. Two groups of ESL students were examined; one receiving intensive

implementation of music during their lessons while the other group received music interaction only fifty percent of the time. Both groups of students were exposed to pop songs to increase listening and reading comprehension, pronunciation as well as grammatical structure of the language. Through the flow and the beat of the songs, the students were able to become familiar with the language cadence and words modulations. The analysis of the lyrics helped the students understand grammatical aspects such as verb tenses, meaning and vocabulary acquisition. The results of the study showed that those students that have received intensive music exposure showed significant improvement in their post test scores as well as their disposition towards learning the target language.

Finally, I would like to also refer in this study to Krashen's (1982) natural approach theory to language teaching and 5 hypotheses of language acquisition. In the *acquisition-learning hypothesis*, second language learners "acquire" a language much as a child acquires a first language by being exposed to it in an unconscious way (Richards & Rogers, 2001, p. 181). On the contrary, "learning" a language requires a conscious effort of attention and understanding of rules, language forms and grammar. Also, a low affective filter would help the students to be relax and open to learning, as opposite to learning within an environment that would be conducive to tension and anxiety. Music can help students to attain an internal disposition which will result in receptiveness to learning and acquiring a new language in a natural way. Also, a high affective filter is a metaphoric barrier that prevents learners from acquiring the language even when there is appropriate input. In this sense, a high affect refers to feelings of too much anxiety, tension, or boredom that can have a negative effect for the learners.

Methods

An interpretative theoretical approach was used with the intention to understand how music could facilitate the retention and memorization of a new language, in this case, Spanish, at its early stages of acquisition. The study can also be described as interdisciplinary because it observed how different subjects such as music, language arts and reading could be combined in order to create, or not, a meaningful and engaging curriculum to promote language acquisition.

Setting and Subjects of the Study

The research was based upon observations, students' work samples and interviews of fifteen students from a first grade Spanish class at a MDCPS urban school. The students' names as well as Ms. Smith's name have been altered in order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. The student population in the school is mostly conformed of 50% African American and 50% Hispanic where 90 % of the students received free lunch. Yet, the class that I carried the action research project was mostly composed of African Americans students, approximately between 6 and 7 years old, receiving Spanish as Second Language curriculum. On the other hand, the school has a self-contained first grade ESOL class, mostly composed of Hispanics, which received a special Spanish for Spanish Speakers curriculum, and, therefore, they were not part of the project. Particularly, I considered important to clarify this distinction among students' backgrounds since the validity of the study would be compromised if the participants would be natives or immigrants from Spanish speaking countries and would be fluent Spanish speakers. However, a small amount of students from this group, approximately 4 of them, were born in the United States, but have parents who were of Hispanic origin.

In relation to their exposure to Spanish instruction, students had received during Kindergarten a half an hour of Spanish class every day. I also had the same schedule for their

first grade Spanish class. Still, even though the class lasted for half an hour, the actual instructional time was constantly reduced due to the time spent in the initial classroom preparation. Setting up for the lesson took away instructional time from the students since, as a floating teacher, I was coming from and to someone else's classroom.

Additionally, it is important to point out that the students remained in their homeroom classroom during Spanish instruction, and they did not receive any extra information or stimuli such as posters with words in Spanish or materials covered during Spanish class once I left the classroom. Spanish class was the only time students could interact in Spanish and they had no extra Spanish exposure during the day once the half an hour of class was over.

My group of first graders in Spanish class was very heterogeneous. Many of the students were very outspoken and liked to participate singing, which helped them to develop fluency and oral Spanish language skills. This was the case of students like Kamet, Allen, Shakira N., Daisy and Tennis. On the other hand, many other students such as Connie, Allen and Bria were shy but did some of the best written work. Then, there was Teresa. Teresa had a unique personality; she could not stay quiet in her seat and was always getting in trouble with her homeroom teacher. She was constantly wondering around the classroom, opening the teacher's closets, or standing by the board copying something that she was curious about. Yet, Teresa was extremely bright and did excellent work in this project in spite of her restlessness.

Still, as first graders, many of them were just starting to learn their sounds and to read and write in English. In this sense, Lennie, Shakira V. and Tyrone, were the students within the lower level of proficiency in English. On the contrary, Shakira N., Daisy, Asia, Bria, and Teresa, who could read and write in English, were able transfer these skills to the new language that they were learning. Many studies have shown that foreign language learners who are literate in their

native language have demonstrated increased competence when acquiring a new language. Martin–Beltrán (2006) argues that qualitative studies have shown that students using two languages simultaneously have increased their possibilities for metalinguistic acquisition and interactive dialogue comprehension, and also that dual immersion programs were linked with measures of high academic success. Other studies such Cummins (2005), who formulated the Interdependence Hypothesis (1991), has also researched the implementation of bilingual instructional strategies within dual immersion programs. In regards to the Interdependence Hypothesis (1991) Cummins (2005) states:

“In other words, although the surface aspects (e.g. pronunciation, fluency, etc.) of different languages are clearly separate, there is an underlying cognitive/academic proficiency that is common across languages. This common underlying proficiency makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related proficiency from one language to another.” (pg. 4)

Specifically, I was able to observe that those students that could read and write in English could more easily absorb new sounds and learn new words in Spanish. In the case of this group of students, many of them had also received Spanish instruction during kindergarten even though many of them came from other schools. Another important participant in this student was Ms. Smith, which was their first grade homeroom teacher. Ms. Smith spent the rest of the school day with the students and had been a first grade classroom teacher in this school for the past 5 years. Ms. Smith was a very devoted, African American educator who valued the arts and also understood the children’s backgrounds as well as the needs of the urban student population.

Procedure

Even though many of them had also received Spanish instruction during kindergarten, the majority of the first grades did not know more than just a few Spanish vowel sounds at the beginning of the school year. Since then, I introduced the students to Spanish sounds and vocabulary using visual aids and repetition, and even taught them a song about the Spanish vowel sounds. Yet, I had not used any music strategies that specifically incorporated melodic or rhythmic patterns to teach each individual vowel sounds and vocabulary words. Thus far, the project intervention was intended to promote repetition and retention of the target language through music by singing the words through engaging, musical patterns instead of merely repeating them.

The time frame of the action research project comprehended daily lessons of approximately 20 minutes to half an hour, for a period of 2 weeks.

- Beginning:
- 1) Observation of the students within their regular music class.
 - 2) Interview with the student's regular classroom teacher.
 - 3) Pre-test to determine student's current level of Spanish and exposure to the C major scale (singing and writing).
- Intervention:
- 1) Observation of students' response when incorporating music strategies to phonic and vocabulary lessons in Spanish.
 - 2) Activities that involve repetition of words and sounds in Spanish through melodic patterns.
 - 3) Checking for student's comprehension through drawings and written work.
- Post-activity:
- 1) Observation of students' work after the intervention.
 - 2) Interview with the students to discuss their views on the activity.

3) Post test to determine the level of students' retention and memorization of Spanish words and sounds after the treatment.

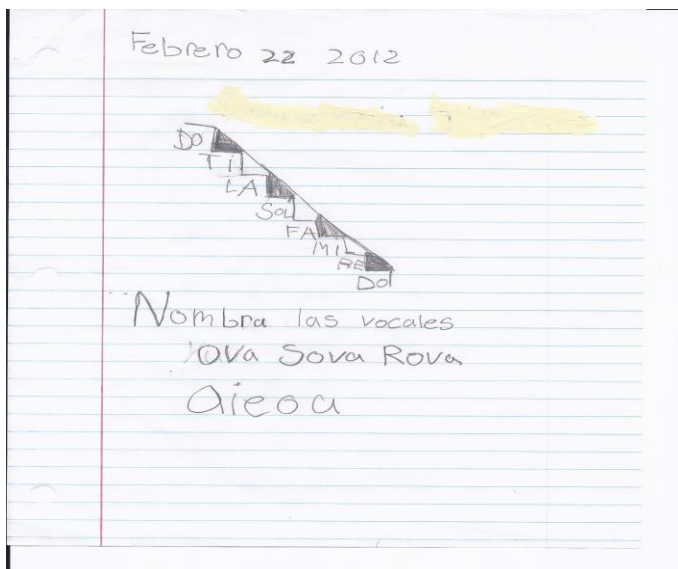
Instrumentation

The different instruments that I developed for the study were intended to not only aid in the collection of the data to be analyzed, but also to help support the validity and reliability of this action research. The method included both qualitative and quantitative data that were gathered through various instruments in order to facilitate triangulation to enhance the study's reliability. As discussed by Hubbard and Power (1999) in their book *Living the Questions*, teacher researchers need to keep in mind that they are the most important tool of the action research project (Hubbard and Power, 1999, p. 104). The notion that I am one of the main instruments of the study regarding qualitative data collection also connects to the possible assumptions that I can bring to my research project and that can affect my subjectivity. In this regard, Ortlipp (2008) discussed the role of the researcher as well as the researcher's subjectivity issues that happened in her own research work as part of her interaction with the participants. Moreover, she stated that "she was not a neutral and objective gathering data tool" (Ortlipp, 2008, p. 698) due to the fact that she was a supervisor in the place where the study took place, and had strong assumptions regarding the topic, which in this case were assessments. In my case, my study also took place in my work location. Being a music teacher, I brought into the study this "expertise baggage" with me because I have an in depth understanding of how music can influence and benefit the students, which of course, was my assumption before starting the action research project. Yet, as a teacher researcher and also participant, I was conscious that my role was to recognize and to be aware of my subjectivity as I carried on my interviews, observations and data analysis. In this regard, my journal entries were an important aid to follow up my

thoughts and guided me to stay focus in my main goal, which was not intended to develop the students' musical skills, but to understand how students could learn basic Spanish sounds and words through music.

I conducted an initial observation of the students during their regular music class with their homeroom teacher to assess their level of exposure to music and musical activities. The following observations were conducted during the intervention as well as the post-test activity. The interviews helped me to understand in depth the repercussions that the activity had in the students as well as the importance of learning a second language, especially, Spanish, I considered important to carry an initial informal interview with my students' homeroom teacher in order to have a better insight on students learning styles, her own perception of music as a learning tool and her opinion of Spanish as a language.

Finally, the pre and post-test were one the main instrument of the action research project. I designed an easy and short pre and post-test that would help the students demonstrate basic notions of Spanish. At the beginning of the pre-test I included an activity where the students had to sing and write C major scale, with the intention to use tones during the intervention to help them remember sounds and words in Spanish. The pre-test required the students to write the names of the vowels in Spanish and to write words that they could remember with those vowels. After the intervention, the students repeated the same test but this time, the samples also included the C Major scale written by memory, writing the names of the vowels in Spanish as well as writing words that they remembered with these sounds and making a drawing of the words to indicate that they really knew what these words meant. Once I had gathered all the students' work samples, I assorted the work by arranging them by each student (pre-test, intervention and post- test) in order to transcribe the data in the most organized possible way.



Marie pre-test sample work

Marie's post- test sample



Results

As a novice teacher researcher, I found that the recommendations given by Hubbard and Power (1999) regarding coding the data were essential to conduct effectively the initial analysis of my research project. In *Living the questions*, Hubbard and Power (1999) advice teacher researchers, “develop no fewer than three codes, no more than six” (Hubbard and Power, 1999, p. 130). Also, Hubbard and Power (1999) recommend trying to visualize the patterns that are going to be used as codes before developing them. My goal in this step of the research project was to keep the data analysis “as simple and clear as possible” in order to be able to manage the facts in ways where I could clearly “see” the results that transpired from the data gathered.

After reflecting extensively on how I was going to approach this big step, I took a deep breath and started sorting out my data. I had even being reflecting about this important section of the project on a short vacation I took to the Bahamas, and, then, looking at the beautiful blue waters of the Caribbean sea, I was able to “visualize” the categories and codes. Once I started coding and manipulating the information, my vacation visualization appeared right in front of me like a revelation. Clearly, the main categories were:

1. Vowels in Spanish (written and sounds)
2. Words in Spanish that had those vowel sounds.
3. Musical pitches, specifically the C Major scale.
4. Drawings of the words to determine comprehension of those words in Spanish.
5. Music as a teaching tool for language acquisition.

Once the main categories were established, I was able to establish codes that gave supporting details regarding these categories such as how many vowels, words or letters they remembered in the pre and post-tests and how many pitches they had remembered as well as drawings that demonstrating words' comprehension.

Early in the project, my initial observation of the students during their regular music class time was meant to serve as an initial evaluation of their perception of music and singing. When I arrived to the class, it was almost the end of the day, and there was a cassette player playing music and the students were running around and did not quite pay attention to the music that was playing. Students were singing their phonic exercises songs. In one corner, a group of four girls were jumping and holding hands while they were singing. I wrote in my field notes,

The girls seemed to be more engaged with the songs and the singing while the boys are not really paying attention except for two or three of them. Also, I believe that they were distracted because it is pajama day, which means the students that paid one dollar for United Way campaign could come dressed in their pajamas. I think I did not choose the best day for the observation!

The phonic songs consisted of the short vowel sounds; in this case, the song dealt with the short “A” vowel. The students were singing with the music and repeating the vowel sound. The song had an upward motion melody, with a repeating pattern. Students were excited and they got out of task very easily. Ms. Smith called the students back to their seats; most of them followed the directions. Ms. Smith was also busy writing some work and was also distracted from the singing activity. Suddenly, some students started singing spontaneously a rhyme which they seem to know quite well: “Ten little monkeys jumping on a gate!” Ms. Smith interrupted them and called their attention back to the song that was playing on the cassette: “You need to hear the month of the year!”

Connecting my observation to the data gathered during my interview with Ms. Smith, I found that her perception of music as a teaching tool as well as the general teacher’s perception of music and her own personal experience with music was expressed by Ms. Smith many times during the interview:

...I feel that the integration of music in the curriculum, it enhances the learning environment. I say that because it increases their memory skills. For example, with the ABC’s, all of us remember the ABC song. It stuck with me this long. You could just mention ABC and everyone will start A-B-C-D-E-F-G. I think it really increases those memory skills as well the listening skills. I think every child should be exposed to music early on...

In regards to her own experience and perception of music, Ms. Smith said:

Ms. Barreiro: In your childhood, you also had this? You used music when you were growing up?

Ms. Smith: When I was growing up, yes, I remember hearing music when I was in first grade, a Spanish song. Let me tell you how it affected me. Note, see how music motivates? Every morning we would hear over the PA this Spanish song. I think it developed an interest in Spanish [...] I begin to develop an interest in wanting to know more about that language because as a young child, that was different. I was so used to hearing English. I would hear this singing and the lady sounds so beautiful. I begin to sing it. Don't ask me to sing it. I forgot but I remember I sung it well...

I could corroborate that Ms. Smith own experience with music and her initial interest in learning Spanish while listening to Spanish songs during her childhood was also was transferred to her own students. Moreover, it was evident by the observations and interview that Ms. Smith valued music as a teaching tool and implemented music strategies for language acquisition within her own classroom.

I decided to interview the students before taking the post-test in order to understand how the process of learning words in Spanish using music affected them and their insight in regards to the learning process. Consequently, I would avoid creating my own assumptions beforehand if I had been able to see the results of the post- test before interviewing them. Mainly, I wanted to know how they feel about singing in Spanish and if the singing had been helpful to them. Most of the student found that the experience was very positive. For example, Shakira N. said, "It help me learn lots of Spanish," while Allen expressed, "When you sing, (referring to me) I can understand better." Another point that really impressed me during Allen's interview was that he felt that know he could better relate to people in his life that spoke Spanish: "It makes me feel better because it makes me 'Very Spanish.' My cousin is Spanish, I don't understand him, but when I come to school and learn Spanish, I understand him more." It is evident that by listening to Allen's experience of learning Spanish through music, he was able to connect to the language in a meaningful and engaging way since he was able to "listen" to the teacher and better "understand" his cousin when he talks in Spanish. Allen could open up to a new language and made

a new connection to his extended family. Another student, Kamet, felt as if, “Music helped me learn a new language, which I need to understand people that speak Spanish.” Unmistakably, even though the emphasis was on music and language relationships, the students’ comments revealed the social importance of learning a language, and how they valued its interactive potential, and the possibility to reaching out to other cultures. I was not expecting these kinds of answers from first graders. These interview revelations brought a new perspective to the action research project, transcending the initial inquiries. I was pleasantly surprised and realized that bilingualism does not only belong in private or magnet schools, but yet, is a necessity that is even recognized by youngsters from urban settings within the diverse environment in which they are living in.

Once I had completed the post- test, I was ready to evaluate the students’ work samples. The analysis of the data showed that the students were able to significantly remembered words in Spanish as well as to demonstrate comprehension by drawing those words. The pre-test results showed that while most students remembered and could accurately write the vowels in Spanish, very few wrote complete words in Spanish (only 4 students from Hispanic background wrote one or two words) and none of the students made drawings of those words. Yet, the post-test showed that fourteen out of fifteen students wrote an average of 4 words in Spanish and were able to demonstrate comprehension of those words by drawing them. In reference to the musical pitch relation aspect of the project, ten students were able to write all the pitches of the C Major scale during the post-test, while the rest remembered at least 6 or 7 pitches.

As I wrote in my reflection journal below, I noticed that students were able to retain orally Spanish words and vowels even though they were not able to write the name of these words,

While I was analyzing the pre and post-tests, I noticed that many students draw words in Spanish but did not write the name of the words. Obviously, many of them knew how to orally say them and knew what these words meant, but could not spell them, so they just made a drawing to show comprehension. Also, other students made drawing but they wrote the incorrect matching word to describe them; therefore, I did not count these words as correct answers.

Chart showing the raw data from the students:

Data From Incorporating Music Strategies to Spanish class

Student	Pre-test			Post-test				
	Vowels/written	Words rem.	Amount of words	Vowels/written	Chorus/Song	Words Reminced	Amount of Words	Drawings
Allen	✓	✓ X	2 X	✓	✓	✓	5	4
Tennis	✓	✓	2 written	✓	✓ 6 lines	✓	4	isolation to meaning
Selenah	✓	X	X	X	✓ All	X	X	1
Katherine	✓	X Write form in English	X	✓	✓ All	X	1	1
Kennet	X	✓	1	✓	✓	✓	1	1
Lennie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	only changes
Connie	X	X	X	✓	✓ All	✓	5	4
Shaktira N.	X	X	X	✓	✓ All	✓	3	3
Tyler	X	X	X	X	X	✓	1	1
Shaktira V.	X	X	X	✓	Reminded on V Do-Do!	X	X	made drawings
Robert	✓	X	X	X	✓ 6 lines	✓	3	3
Daisy	✓	✓	3 written	✓	✓ All	✓	9	9 Hispanic
Sam	✓	✓	3 written	✓	✓ 6 written	✓	5	4
Anna	✓	X	X	✓	✓ All	✓	4	4
Teresa	✓	X	X	✓	✓ 7 Pables	✓	3	3
Mavis	✓ not in order	X	X	✓ in order	✓ All	✓	4	4
Bria	✓	✓	4 written	✓	✓ 7	✓	9	9 this page

Nevertheless, oral comprehension is one of the first steps while learning a language, and, therefore, I could see that the results also showed that the students demonstrated a broader verbal

and oral understanding of Spanish than what they were demonstrating in the writing samples gathered through the written data. On the other hand, matching the drawings with the correct definition of the words served the purpose of validating that students were able to understand, retain and memorize the Spanish vowels and words that they were learning through music.

Conclusion

As per the findings described above, some main points can be concluded from the analysis of the data and the connection with the literature review. These conclusions are associated to my main goal which was to understand how students could learn and memorize basic Spanish sounds and words through music.

One the most important results of the study is, I believe, the relationship between pitch or tones and Spanish vowel sounds and words. This relationship helped the students to connect to the tones, vowel sounds and words in a way that facilitated the assimilation and understanding of Spanish sounds and words. The phonemes in the C Major scale were memorized successfully, so the musical cues helped the students to engage in the activities as well as avoided tedious repetitions, and, therefore, assisted in the retention of meaning and comprehension of the targeted language. In regards to vowel sounds, there was no significant difference between the number of students who remembered the vowels from the pre and post-test but yet, we can see an increment on the words that the students remembered and were able to describe through drawings.

Still, another consideration to take into account is that the time devoted for the study was limited. The results of the research would have improved significantly if the study would have been carried out throughout the whole semester and not just a few weeks. Also, the time that the students interact with Spanish should not be limited to only the half and hour of Spanish class,

but can be incremented through ongoing activities throughout the day and throughout the school such as morning announcement, the cafeteria, interactive games, etc.

The study also reflects how the power of music as a communicating tool helped the students to engage in the language acquisition process, facilitating a relaxed learning environment. In Krashen's (1982) natural approach theory to language teaching and 5 hypotheses of language acquisition, a low affective filter will ensure that the language input could be received and learning can be accomplished. Music can have this positive effect on students. Also, Gardner's (1993) Multiple Intelligences theory can explain how other forms of intelligences, such as musical intelligence can be stimulated to promote students' learning. Music motivated the students to go beyond the challenges and barriers of unfamiliar sounds and phonics, allowing the students to naturally acquire these new Spanish sounds and words.

As I have mentioned previously, the students' interviews brought a new perspective to the action research project, transcending the initial inquiries. During Allen's interview, the student described how, after our activities, he was able to connect and understand his cousin who spoke Spanish. Another student, Kamet, felt that it was important to learn a language to be able to understand other people. By teaching our students a new language, we not only help the students to develop their social and metacognitive skills (Martin-Beltran, 2006), but we cultivate their understanding of other cultures and ethnicities. There are many positive aspects about learning a second language, the main argument being future job opportunities as well as bilingual job qualifications.

Unfortunately, bilingualism and Spanish programs in schools have been endangered due to not only budget cuts, but also by many currents in this country that feel that a bilingual society would jeopardize the official language, English. In today's economic and social globalization area,

educational policies should take into consideration the social and economic benefits of multilingualism beyond any political rationale of overprotecting ethnic or language supremacy. In his article “Talking Points,” Ramirez (2007) explains how the historical development of language policies reflects the financial, social economical and racial fights as well as political power struggles that intend to impose language dominance, and, therefore, discriminate on the basis of language and ethnicity. My personal experience in my native country helped me to appreciate the importance of learning another language and also the benefits of gaining understanding of a different culture. Nevertheless, many researchers like Ramirez (2009) and Wynne (2003) advocate for a change in many of the realities of our educational system, which face us with cultural and idiomatic intolerance by the English established language oppression, which diminishes the vital presence of many other languages and dialects that exist today in our diverse society.

My project...music engages students in creative ways, need for

What a better way to educate children to connect and reach others and to learn to embrace diversity than through the universal language of music and the arts. Here in Miami, we have a natural wealth of races and cultures that can show to the rest of the country that we can make a change and coexist with each other. Let's start with our youth, through the arts. Only the children will show us how transform our society, bringing acceptance, understanding and reverence of each other's uniqueness. We need to educate our children to make this happen; they are ready to embrace diversity. Are we ready too?

References

- Adkins, S. (1997). Connecting the power of music to the learning of languages, *The Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching, Volume IV*, (28-42)
- Banford, H., & National Writing Project (U.S.). (1996). *Cityscapes: Eight views from the urban classroom*. Berkeley, Calif: National Writing Project
- Caine, Renate Nummela, and Geoffrey Caine. *Making Connections*. Menlo Park: AddisonWesley, 1994.
- Campbell, Don G. *Introduction to the Musical Brain*. Saint Louis: MMB Music Inc., 1992.
- Legg, R. (2009). Using music to accelerate language learning: An experimental experience. *Research in Education*, 82 (1), (1-12).
- Cummins, J. (2005). "Teaching for Cross-Language Transfer in Dual Language Education: Possibilities and Pitfalls", TESOL Symposium on Dual Language Education: Teaching and Learning Two Languages in the EFL Setting; Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey.

Fitts, S. (2006). Reconstructing the status quo: Linguistic interaction in a dual-language school. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 30(2), 337-365.

Gardner, Howard. *Multiple Intelligences*. New York: Basic Books, 1993. Hart, Leslie A. *Human Brain and Human Learning*. White Plains: Longman Inc., 1983.

Hubbard, S. R. & Power, B. M. (1999). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers*.

Lightbown, P., & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Li, X., & Brand, M. (2009). Effectiveness of Music on vocabulary acquisition, language usage and meaning for mainland Chinese ESL learners. *Contributions to Music Education*, 36, (1) pp. 73-84.

Ling Yu, L. L. (March, 2009). An empirical study on teaching urban children music and English by contrastive element of music and songs []. *Us-China Education Review*, Volume 6, N 3 (Serial No 52).

Martin-Beltrán, M. (2010). The two-way language bridge: Co-constructing bilingual language learning opportunities. *Modern Language Journal*, 94(2), 254-277.

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process, *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 695-705. Retrieved from

<http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR13-4/index.html>

Paquette, K. R., & Rieg, S. A. (2008, August 15). Using Music to support the literacy development of young English language learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36, (227-232). doi: 10.1007/s10643-008-0277-9

Ramirez, J. D. (n.d.). Bilingual Education: Talking Points. *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: Language*, 178-186/

Richards, J.C. & Rogers T. S., *Approaches and methods in Language Teaching*. Second Edition, Cambridge University Press, NY, 2001.

Hubbard, S. R. & Power, B. M. (1999). *Living the questions: A guide for teacher-researchers*.

Wynne, J. T. (2003). Who talks right? In Delpit, J. & Dowdy, J. (Eds.). *The Skin That We Speak: Thoughts on Language and Culture in the Classroom from Art*. (pp 1-17). New York: The New Press. York, Me: Stenhouse Publishers.