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## **«ЯЗЫК. ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ. КУЛЬТУРА»**

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## Раздел 7

### МЕТОДИКА ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ РУССКОГО, ЛАТИНСКОГО И ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКОВ

#### MUSIC IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM – MOTIVATION AND LEARNING

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Being a teacher is no easy task. Very often one still meets people who are of the impression that teaching is an easy job, with very good working hours and not very much work to do. One can still hear people say “ Oh, so you’re a teacher. Lucky you! You always finish early from work, never work in the evenings and can enjoy lots of holidays”. But reality shows otherwise. Tuffanelli and Ianes (2011: 14) sustain that whoever works within or close to schools can feel a certain sense of uneasiness as well as an uncomfortable feeling. It is becoming always more difficult to motivate students, to maintain discipline and to stimulate learning in class. These, together with other difficulties and everyday challenges in class, is resulting in a dramatic increase in fatigue among teachers,

*Il disagio di chi opera nella scuola oggi, ....., è palpabile ed esteso. Promuovere la motivazione, mantenere la disciplina e stimolare apprendimenti soddisfacenti sembra essere sempre più difficile. Le problematiche d’aula comportano una <fatica> dell’insegnare che cresce con velocità preoccupante.<sup>12</sup>*

The teacher is not a ‘technician’ whose job is to apply, step by step, a prescribed programme of studies to her/his learners. The teacher is a professional who not only should understand and live the art of her/his profession but, above all, has to keep abreast with all the latest developments and changes that keep on happening around her/him. This means that the teacher has to continuously learn how to adapt to the needs of her/his learners in class and how to motivate them to learn the target language even in those difficult circumstances where, at times, constraints are the order of the day both at the curriculum level as well as at school level.

I think we all agree that the greatest challenge a language teacher has to face in class is not determined by what knowledge or skills or content has to be passed on to the learners. In this sense, technology has, without any doubts, taken the upperhand. The main challenge is how to communicate with the learners, how to convey to the learners in class the emotions of learning a language by means of a positive relationship in which the

<sup>12</sup> Tuffanelli, L. e Ianes, D. 2011. *La gestione della classe*. Edizioni Erickson, Trento.



learner is not simply a passive spectator sitting back in class but becomes an active participant in the learning process. In other words the teacher must ascertain that the learner becomes the main protagonist in class. On the teacher's part, this implies admitting that s/he too at times can get it wrong and that the learning process can be reciprocal. The success of a teacher is reflected in her/his organisation and management of the respective teaching and learning tasks by way of engaging all learners of different abilities and levels within that same class. This is by no means an easy task and becomes even more complicated when we remember that the teacher is not dealing with just one student but with a whole class of students with different interests, personal baggage, abilities and ways of learning. It has therefore become of fundamental importance for the language teacher to focus her/his attention on who the learners are and on which learning processes should be adopted in class. One of the teacher's main roles is to accompany her/his students in the learning process by creating the right learning environment. This cannot be achieved unless the students themselves become the focal point of the learning process based on their specific needs which in turn leads to student motivation.

To succeed in this the teacher has to, first and foremost, define the needs of the students in class (very often on an individual basis). Once these needs are identified and demarcated, learning outcomes have to be formulated. These must vary from one class to another so as to reflect not simply the needs of the individual students but also their motivation to learning the language and their predispositions towards the target language. To help students reach the set learning outcomes, it is not enough for the teacher to select with great care the content to present in class or to organise and plan in detail the method/s to adopt with the aim of presenting in class the best learning experience. Far more important is the inclusion of functional aspects of the target language, making it relevant to the students' everyday lives. The more the teacher succeeds in transmitting to her/his students the various contexts and usage of the target foreign language, the more motivating it becomes given that a much wealthier input can be presented in class. This, however, can be quite a challenging and demanding task for the language teacher, even more so in homogenous linguistic contexts where the foreign language is taught to students who are of the same mother tongue. In such a scenario students do not feel the need to use the target foreign language for communication in class given that their L1 fulfils such a need.

On the other hand, another tough hurdle to overcome in the foreign language classroom is how to deal with groups of multilingual and multicultural students sitting next to each other in class, a situation that is becoming the order of the day in most schools in various countries. In today's classrooms, the teaching of languages implies taking into account a vast range of considerations that vary from the teaching/learning of linguistic aspects to diverse cultures and methods of learning that meet and intertwine in class.

Various researchers have, over the past years, highlighted the positive effect that songs have on learning in general and especially on foreign language learning. Rheinberg, Titone, Ciliberti, Caon, Pasqui, Mollica, all state that the use of songs in class contributes to effective language learning given that it increases intrinsic motivation in students which is usually associated with fun and curiosity. It is a known secret that an essential element for success in foreign language teaching and learning is fun. In order to make students enjoy themselves and enjoy learning in class the teacher has the delicate task of choosing the right teaching aids. Undoubtedly the use of songs in class is a safe bet especially with



youth. The danger is that very often teachers use songs in the foreign language class as a “filler”, at times accompanied by some *cloze* activities in which the students are simply asked to identify or find the missing word/s or structures, overlooking the real potential that songs can offer in class.

Songs can prove to be highly motivating, both from an emotional as well as from a personal point of view. They represent a constant in the lives of youth and they are usually the stepping stone to help them make new friends, express their feelings and emotions, start new relationships. In fact Caon and Lobasso (2008) argue that the didactic use of songs in class gives teachers the opportunity to work on both conscious and unconscious processes simultaneously, integrating cognitive stimuli and emotional and affective stimuli which in turn make it possible, for example, to suggest listening or analysing repeatedly the same song without fear that it might become boring or demotivating or regarded as not important for language acquisition. Furthermore, songs can serve as an excellent bridge not only between the classroom and the various cultural realities of the country whose language is being studied, but also between the school tasks/activities and the student’s world outside the classroom. This can be done in several ways given that songs can easily be used in class to:

- ✓ Present occasions, situations and activities that engage the students on a personal and active level in their learning
- ✓ Present activities according to the students’ capabilities, not just from a linguistic point of view but also from a communicative one
- ✓ Assign activities and school tasks that are directly or indirectly linked to the needs, interests and objectives of the individual student as well as of the group
- ✓ Adapt the various tasks given in class according to the linguistic abilities of the students in such a way as to allow each and every one of them to be in a position to complete them successfully
- ✓ Organise and prepare interventions and didactic materials that are focused on the specific learning needs of the students
- ✓ Encourage the learners to take risks – from a linguistic and/or communicative point of view – without too much fear of committing mistakes
- ✓ Present didactic materials that are not simply attractive but useful and motivating by using the technology available in class

There are many researchers and pedagogists who spoke and emphasised the various uses and possibilities that songs can offer in foreign language teaching and learning, both from a linguistic as well as from a didactic point of view. Amongst these, Balboni (2008), Mezzadri (2003), Diadori (2009), Mollica (2009), Pasqui (2003) and Caon (2006). On my part, I strongly believe that the use of songs and their lyrics helps learners in class to:

- Easily memorise vocabulary and idiomatic phrases
- Improve their pronunciation and fluency, or rather, gives them the ability and the courage to speak with ease
- Come in contact with cultural aspects
- Feel more motivated to learn the target language

- Develop positive social dynamics in class by sharing common interests, knowledge and feelings
- Strengthen known grammatical and linguistic structures and learn new structures in an enjoyable way

It is pertinent however, at this stage, to watch out for some practical considerations that can be crucial for the success or otherwise of using songs in foreign language teaching and learning. First and foremost, it is of utmost importance to choose songs whose themes combine well with the topics to be discussed in class. This implies that the choice of the songs is vital, and to make the right choice Pasqui (2003)<sup>13</sup> suggests 3 important aspects that the language teacher needs to keep in mind, namely:

- i. Who are the receivers – their linguistic competence, their cultural background, their tastes and interests
- ii. The intrinsic characteristics of the song – its cultural content, the language used in terms of phonetic, syntactical and lexical aspects, its appeal to the ear
- iii. The lesson's learning outcomes

For this reason, the first consideration to be made has to do with the choice of the song. Not all songs are suitable for classroom use. The teacher has to watch out not only for the linguistic level of the lyrics of the song, but also for the cultural content and the message it conveys. This also depends on the age of the learners in class and the level of their maturity, and whether these are students or adults. Special attention is to be given to the cultural contents of the songs used, even more so in today's multicultural classroom realities, so as not to offend anyone's sentiments or beliefs. Teachers have a crucial role and responsibility in class to promote positive relationships among their students by respecting every student's citizenship, race, and religion. They have to give particular attention in order to defend the human dignity and the human rights of each person in class especially with regards to freedom of expression and of religion. This makes it extremely important to watch out for the cultural content present in the songs used, be it of a political or of a social nature.

Another important consideration that cannot be underestimated is the level of linguistic and lexical difficulty of the lyrics. One has to not simply ascertain that the text presented can be handled by the students in class - the length of the text, the grammatical structures it presents, the rhythm, the syntax, the pronunciation - but above all that the grammatical structures presented in the lyrics do not confuse the student especially if they contain dialects, slang language or regional discourse which might, in turn, be interpreted as being of standard use. Preferably the chosen song should not be characterised by metaphors, symbols and very complex structures that are difficult to understand in a short time span and that require long and elaborate explanations by the teacher as this will transform the lesson to a teacher centred one. On the contrary, it should contain simple captivating phrases that can be easily understood by the students on their own or with the help of their colleagues in class.

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<sup>13</sup> Pasqui, R. (2003). 'L'utilizzo della canzone in glottodidattica', *Bollettino ITALIS*, September 2003.



It is appropriate to make it clear, at this stage, that songs should not be used in class simply as “fillers”, between one activity and another or at the end of the lesson or when the teacher realizes that the students are tired and bored in class. Songs represent an indispensable teaching tool that should be at the basis of a whole or part of a language teaching course. Their intrinsic characteristics help in encouraging all students’ participation in class and they are highly motivating. In fact, besides the potential they offer for the teaching of oral skills and pronunciation, they can help reach various other objectives, namely the teaching/learning of vocabulary, language use, morphology, culture and literature. Furthermore, songs lend themselves perfectly to a very vast range of didactic tasks through which various linguistic competencies can be reached. Just to mention a few examples of these classroom tasks that can be used with songs in foreign language teaching and learning:

- Various types of *cloze* passages that can help comprehension skills, both oral and written
  - Matching of language to picture or of music to picture (for the teaching/learning of the names of the various musical instruments)
  - Listening activities that help improve oral comprehension
  - Writing activities that can help both reading comprehension as well as writing skills
  - Reading tasks
  - Speaking tasks

Needless to say, such techniques and resources are only teaching aids and can never be useful and beneficial for language teaching/learning unless their use is well planned within a learning framework that is built according to the students’ needs, levels and interests. Their use is to be adapted not only for the development of specific abilities but above all in accordance with the various phases of linguistic development aimed towards the communicative competence of the students.

Learning a foreign language can be quite an arduous task for learners and unfortunately it can sometimes lead some to quit. The use of songs can help alleviate such a task allowing for the introduction of alternative teaching/learning methods which can be both useful and above all enjoyable. In fact, as explained, the use of songs in the foreign language class can be a very effective and entertaining tool given that listening and singing songs in the target language can easily and effortlessly lead to improving the linguistic abilities of the learners.

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