



The Halls are Alive...

*Bryon Booker and
Danny Hinson exalt the
virtues of using music
as a language teaching
strategy*

Linguists have often connected music with the development

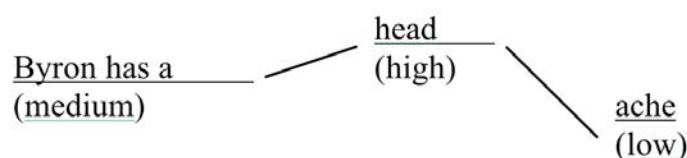
of language in children. The thought has been that as early as the womb, music may influence pre-stages of linguistic development (Le 1999, Fitzgerald 1994), and research shows that a fetus perceives acoustic signals in the womb (Hannaford 1995 and Mora 2000). The functionality of music comprises another phase of music in language learning. Jon Stansell recognizes music as therapeutic, developmental, and mnemonic (2002). In some parts of Africa, the medicine man still uses a magic drum to play over the body of an ailing patient. Amongst the native tribes of Ontario, magicians and medicine men are also the music teachers (Stansell 2002). In America, physicians' offices pipe canned music throughout the waiting room and the patient rooms. What we hear as "elevator music" in a doctor's office or in a dentist chair can paralyze our nervousness. This "elevator music" channels our thoughts away from the "needle" or the "dentist's drill." Thus, we may be able to account for the psychological effects of music. But how do we transfer that effect to the classroom?

To distinguish music as a teaching strategy, we must examine the application of the music to the lesson. Music used for lyrical singing, time-stressed clapping, or listening for pronunciation practice and building vocabulary would constitute a language learning application. "Hearing is one of the most basic and at the same time enriching capacities human beings process" (Mora 2000). Once the human ear determines the order of pitched sounds, then the learner will draw upon the musicality of language. A learner receives and processes the sounds and basic rhythm from a song to assist in the reproduction of that sound or rhythm.

Music manifests the speech sounds of consonants and vowels through intonation, rhythm, and stress. Our natural order of speaking, of saying things whether we are introducing ourselves to strangers or ordering food in a restaurant is defined by the intonation, rhythm, and stress of speech (Graham 1996 & Fitzgerald 1994). This natural rhythm of speaking can be learned through exposure to music.

In his research, Politzer concluded "It is helpful to know just how the sounds of English are produced so that we can learn just how those (sounds) of a foreign language differ, how we modify the English sound in order to produce the foreign sound" (1965), and this works vice-versa for English language learners (ELLs). A connection can be made between the learner's right brain processing of music and rhythm and the left-brain processing of verbal information (Stansell 2002 and Mora 2000). We can assist the learner by using music to teach them the intonation and rhythm patterns of the native tongue.

For example, the following diagram reveals a natural intonation and rhythm pattern in English.



The first three words are spoken with a medium pitch level. The emphasis placed on the fourth word is slightly elevated in pitch with the end of the sentence dropping off in stress and pitch. Music paral-

lets this same intonation and rhythm pattern when being sung or played. It differentiates on four levels of stress and pitch, low, medium, high, and extra high (Marks 1999 and Politzer 1965).

“Discourse intonation, the ordering of pitched sounds made by a human voice, is the first thing we learn when we are acquiring a language” (Mora 2000). Research indicates that the intonation and musicality of language is significant when learning a second language (Politzer 1965, Le 1999, and Mora 2000). New linguistic structures are taught through modeling which occurs repeatedly during the instruction. This repetitive and modified modeling by the teacher produces a melodic contour. The learner hears the musicality of the language through the repeated measures of instruction.

“Teachers adapt their instruction to meet the transitional competence of the learners” (Mora 2000). For example, a teacher selects a song to use in class. First, the learner hears an authentic representation of the language. The melodic structure of the song grabs the attention of the learners. The teacher must consciously emphasize the melody, by taking the lyrics and repeating them several times by giving emphasis to the prominent stresses (Abbott 2002 and Mora 2000). Once the learner internalizes the sounds, then it is a matter of replicating those sounds. In doing so, the learner mirrors a particular element of phonological production. The learner matches the stress, articulation, and/or blend of sounds according to the demonstration they hear in a song. “Intonation, gesture, facial expressions, actions, and circumstances all help (the learner) to know what the unknown words and phrases probably mean,” (Halliwell 1992).

Murphey (1992), Katchen (1991), and Abbott (2002) procure popular songs with the context to isolate certain sounds in production. Jenny Redding, publisher of the *Rock Talk* series, identifies pop music classified according to linguistic discourse (2001). In the series, each song is categorized by grammatical point as well as cultural venue. The lesson presents a five-step process for internalization of the song: listening and singing the song, vocabulary check, rhyming dictionary, hammer the grammar, and role-play discussions (2001). Additionally, the *Rock Talk* series and others like it teach stress, intonation, and breathing. Because the learner tends to speak in short, broken utterances, songs serve as an excellent example of correct pronunciation. The learner applies this linking and phrasing of words in mirrored output. Carolyn Graham’s jazz chants teach linguistic elements of intonation and rhythm. A jazz chant is “a fragment of authentic language presented with special attention to its inherent natural rhythm” (Graham 1996). She believes that simulation of natural or authentic speech patterns is imperative in learning a language. These jazz chants, Graham states, could most effectively enable the language learner to learn an “exact replica of what the language learner would hear from a native speaker in natural conversation” (1996).

For example, the following chart shows stressed words underlined and the underpinning four-count beat listed above the chant.

Language teachers, regardless of musical ability, can write any statement or question with specific attention to time or purpose. Because of the natural rhythm in our speech pattern, a jazz chant sim-

ply adds the clapping of a steady four-count beat (Graham 1996). The downbeat occurs on the first stressed syllable or word, not necessarily on the first word of the statement. Therefore we see that music helps the learner to distinguish between major and minor stress.

Metronomes are helpful to teachers who are not musically inclined, but who wish to teach rhythm and stress.

Also, there are occasions where the music used as a teaching strategy simultaneously serves as an enrichment activity. For example the jazz chants listed below contrast the “k” and “c” sounds. The chants have been carefully selected to demonstrate differences in social application of language through attention to structure, context, and meaning. Use of these jazz chants in successive lessons will demonstrate to the learner how to modify language to reflect the social circumstances and the level of politeness. Most learners will only learn social modification of language through explicit instruction or hands-on learning within the target culture. Thus with strategic planning and implementation, a teacher may present music that aids in acquisition of language and enhancement of the learning environment.

Casual invitation

Let’s have lunch today...okay? Okay.

Apologizing

I’m sorry I can’t. Can we go tomorrow?

Seeking information

Where’s Karisa? She’s in the kitchen. What’s she doing?

She’s cooking dinner.

As the teacher and language learner become more comfortable with music, broadening the base to include popular music will increase interest among the students. Latin rhythms, blues, and dance can also be effective rhythms to incorporate into the classroom (Graham 1996). Hearing sounds sung can be as beneficial to the student as singing the sounds as it equips the student with tools that lead to real communication (Graham 1996). However, not all of the popular tunes in today’s music industry are appropriate. Some of that music may fail to provide suitable rhythms for clapping out patterns or may be grammatically incorrect. Graham, as an author and composer of simulated music, cautions against inclusion of authentic music that may adversely confuse the learner with incorrect grammar or idiomatic phrases (1996).

Both authentic and simulated music aid the teacher with the instruction of language functions and building vocabulary. Practicing select speech sounds like “ch” in the verse from a jazz chant “Charlie’s in the kitchen eating lunch” enables the language learner to hear and produce differences in speech sounds. By simply changing or modifying the content of the sentence in a jazz chant, we can alter the function of that chant. You can teach other aspects of language like greetings, compliments, and casual conversation among friends by changing the statement.

Most listening activities with music will be used as a post listening activity, asking the learners to complete a game, information gap

	1		2		3		4		1		2		3		4
I	went	to	the	movies	last	night	?X	Where	did	you	go	?X	X		