

## **MUSIC IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM: going beyond the lyrics**

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**Resumo:** Este trabalho tem como objetivo mostrar as vantagens que a música pode oferecer para a sala de aula de língua inglesa, como a motivação, o desenvolvimento das quatro habilidades, o uso de materiais autênticos, além de ajudar os professores a apresentar os aspectos culturais da língua. Também apontamos algumas técnicas que podem ser usadas para melhor explorar músicas com os alunos, especialmente indo além da letra através de atividades feitas antes, durante e após ouvir a música e através do uso de recursos visuais. Para tanto, utilizamos uma pesquisa bibliográfica baseada em autores como Harmer (1994, 2004, 2005), Murphey (1998), Ward (1991), Brown (1998), entre outros, que nos deram suporte para analisar algumas atividades envolvendo uma música. Primeiramente, apresentamos algumas características do processo de ensino-aprendizagem de língua estrangeira. Posteriormente, apontamos alguns benefícios obtidos através do uso da música na sala de aula de língua inglesa. Finalmente, sugerimos atividades para explorar por completo a música do U2 *Miss Sarajevo*.

**Palavras-chave:** música; canções; vantagens; motivação; sala de aula de língua inglesa;

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to reflect upon some advantages that music can bring into the English language classroom, such as motivation, the development of the four main skills, the use of authentic materials, besides helping teachers to present cultural aspects of the language. We also point out some techniques that can be used in the classroom to better explore songs with students, especially by going beyond the lyrics through pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities; and also making use of visual resources. To make it possible, we undertook some bibliographical research based on authors such as Harmer (1994, 2004, 2005), Murphey (1998), Ward (1991), Brown (1998), among others, who gave us support to analyze some activities involving a song. First, we present some characteristics of the foreign language teaching-learning process. Then, we point out some benefits of using music in the English language classroom. Finally, we suggest tasks to explore to the full the U2 song *Miss Sarajevo*.

**Keywords:** music; songs; advantages; motivation; English language classroom.

### **Introduction**

We decided to carry out this research on music in the classroom considering the fact that songs are helpful and motivating resources, as they provide students with lots of advantages for their learning. Also because people are constantly exposed to international music, which can make them more interested in the English language.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to reflect upon some advantages of using music in the classroom and show some techniques to explore songs going beyond the lyrics. Thus, we undertook some bibliographical research based on Harmer (1994, 2004, 2005), Murphey (1998), Ward (1991), Brown (1998), among others, who gave us support to analyze some activities involving the song we have chosen to work with.

First, we describe some characteristics of the foreign language teaching-learning process, holding a discussion about some reasons for learning a new language, the distinction between acquisition and learning, the *ESA* elements that, among other things, bring motivation to the lessons.

Second, we point out some advantages of using music in the English lessons, which is related to the fact that it may improve students' learning skills, as well as make them motivated, and give teachers the opportunity to use authentic materials inside the class. We also mention some techniques to use songs with students that involve different kinds of activities so that teachers have many possibilities to explore them in the teaching-learning process. Besides, a good way to do it is to use visual resources together with the sound of music.

Finally, we designed some activities based on the U2 song *Miss Sarajevo*, once it is a popular band involved in social projects. We prepared a pre-listening activity based on the information about the band and the history of the song so that students can be contextualized and more engaged before listening to the song. Then, a while-listening activity was prepared in a way that the common gap-filling exercise was avoided. Finally, we designed an activity involving the video clip of the song, exemplifying the use of visual resources with music, which are extra tools that can help teachers to improve the song activity.

## **1 Characteristics of the foreign language teaching-learning process**

### **1.1 The importance of English these days**

The English language is considered to be the universal language of communication nowadays. It followed the economic, scientific and cultural growth of the United Kingdom from the Industrial Revolution and of the United States since the end of the Second World War. Thus it has become a *lingua franca* due to its widespread

popularity around the globe. According to Harmer (2005, p. 01), *lingua franca* means, “a language widely adopted for communication between two speakers whose native languages are different from each other and where one or both speakers are using it as a ‘second language’”.

Cook (2007, p. 25-26) exemplifies this expansion of the English language throughout the world:

In recent years the growth of English has been further accelerated by a startling expansion in the quantity and speed of international communication. The rise of international corporations, linked to expanding US power and influence, ensures an ever-increasing use of English in business. Films, songs, television programmes, and advertisements in English are heard and seen in many countries where it is not the first nor even a second language, both feeding and reflecting this growth.

As we can see, this language is used in many means of communication, and it is getting more popular along the years. English is a dominating language in popular culture, as Harmer (2005, p. 3) states, "pop music in English saturates the planets airwaves. Thus many people who are not English speakers can sing words from their favourite English medium songs".

Rajagopalan (2005) corroborates this idea saying that the world's knowledge of English is related to cultural phenomenon such as cinema, and specially musical production spread all over the world by radio and television.

In addition to it, Rajagopalan (2005, p. 149) says:

Estima-se que perto de 1,5 bilhão de pessoas no mundo – isto é ¼ da população mundial – já possui algum grau de conhecimento da língua inglesa e/ou se encontra na situação de lidar com ela no seu dia-a-dia. Acrescente-se a isso o fato ainda mais impressionante de que algo em torno de 80 a 90% da divulgação de conhecimento científico ocorre em inglês. Ou seja, quem se recusa a adquirir um conhecimento mínimo da língua inglesa corre o perigo de perder o bonde da história<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, it is clear that English is present in our everyday life in a way that the ones who are not acquainted with it are left out of good opportunities to acquire knowledge.

Cook (2007, p. 25) reinforces the idea that English is seen as a very important language in the whole world, saying that it "is now taught as the main foreign

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<sup>1</sup> The quotations throughout this paper will be kept in its original language to sustain their authenticity.

language in virtually every country, and used for business, education and access to information by a substantial proportion of the world's population".

## 1.2 Reasons for learning English as a foreign language

Considering the great influence of English nowadays, as we have seen previously, there are many reasons for learning it as a foreign language, for instance: the school curriculum, advancement, target language community, English for specific purposes, culture and miscellaneous.

The first aspect, the school curriculum, is related to the subject that some students must learn at school, and according to Harmer (1994), they are supposed to study it whether they like it or not.

The second aspect, advancement, is concerned with the advantages people have in their professional lives if they know a foreign language. As Harmer (1994a, p. 1) says, "English has a special position here [in advancement]<sup>2</sup> since it has become the international language of communication".

Another reason for learning a new language is the target language community (TLC). In other words, English will be really useful to students if they want to go to an English-speaking country, because they will need it to survive in the English community. There is also the desire to know another language because of the culture of the TLCs. People may want to know more about the way the others speak that language and the countries where it is spoken.

When there is a job that requires specific kinds of English, like in business, scientific and academic areas, people decide to learn English for Specific Purposes, which develops in the learner special abilities and knowledge of specific vocabulary.

Finally, Harmer (1994a, p. 2) describes the miscellaneous aspect as the other various reasons for learning a language:

Some people do it just for fun - because they like the activity of going to class. Some people do it because they want to be tourists in a country where that language is spoken. Some people do it just because all their friends are learning the language.

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<sup>2</sup> The words in brackets were added by the authors.

As we can see, all the reasons mentioned above contribute to the desire and need to learn a foreign language. This leads us to an important distinction which is made in the teaching-learning process, which will be explained on the next topic.

### 1.3 Acquisition and learning

There are many theories about how people are able to develop their language skills. Harmer (1994) presents Stephen Krashen's theory, the *theory of second language acquisition*, which shows a distinction between *acquisition* and *learning*. According to Harmer (1994), Krashen characterized the former as knowing a language, while the latter results only in knowing *about* the language.

Language *acquisition* is a subconscious process, which is the same one that happens with children when they start learning their mother tongue; it is natural language acquisition. On the other hand, *learning* a language is a conscious process, which consists of focusing on "grammar" or "rules" when being exposed to a new input.

Krashen, for example, suggests that comprehensible input means that language is acquired and is therefore available for use (in other words the student can produce the language spontaneously) whereas consciously studied language is only learnt (and is therefore much more difficult to produce spontaneously). Acquired language is somehow 'better' than learnt language because you would have to concentrate to produce the latter, thus interrupting the flow of language production (HARMER, 1994b, p. 37).

Krashen (apud HARMER, 2004) then believes that acquiring a language is more successful and longer lasting than learning it. Thus, to help teachers bring acquisition as close as possible to learning, there are three elements that should be used when conducting classes. They will be better discussed on the next topic.

### 1.4 The ESA elements

According to Harmer (2004), the *ESA* elements, which stand for *Engage*, *Study* and *Activate*, should be part of every lesson so that the learning process is similar to the acquisition process. People can successfully acquire a foreign language when they are exposed to a language that they more or less understand, or when they are motivated enough to learn the language in order to communicate.

As Harmer (2004) says, the *Engage* element is responsible for providing learners with this motivation, making them engaged in the learning process, through materials such as games, music, among others, so that learners may feel engaged with it.

The *Study* element is based on activities that focus on language or information. “It means any stage at which the construction of language is the main focus” (HARMER, 2004b, p. 25). Teachers can teach grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation and students can work in groups to carry out an activity and understand it.

At last, the *Activate* element consists of exercises to practice the language learnt more freely. The aim of this phase is not to focus on language construction, but it is for students to try out real language use with no restriction. “If students do not have a chance to Activate their knowledge in the safety of a classroom, they may find transferring language acquisition and study into language use in the real world far more problematical” (HARMER, 2004b, p. 26).

As we can see, these *ESA* elements need to be present in most lessons or teaching sequences in order to give students a more meaningful learning environment. Moreover, as Harmer (2004) says, the sequence in which the elements appear may vary according to each class, as what is important is their presence in the lessons and not the order they may appear. Altogether, these three important elements foster a great deal of motivation in students. Other ways of arousing students’ interest will be given on the next topic.

## 1.5 Motivation

Motivation is a relevant factor in the teaching learning process. According to Ur (1991) if students are motivated, learning becomes easier and more pleasant, and consequently, more productive. Harmer (1994) complements this idea when he says that the motivation students bring to class has a strong influence in their success.

Motivation is some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue a course of action. If we perceive a goal (that is, something we wish to achieve) and if that goal is sufficiently attractive, we will be strongly motivated to do whatever is necessary to reach that goal (HARMER, 1994a, p. 3).

So, as we can see, motivation is a necessary factor in classroom, because when students are motivated they can have a better and effective learning. Motivated learners are more successful learners, and teachers have a significant role in this process,

because they are providers of materials and conditions for learning. Teachers have the responsibility of helping students in what is necessary and creating good conditions that can make classes more attractive, as well as more productive and learners more interested and involved.

There are different kinds of motivation, *extrinsic motivation* and *intrinsic motivation*. Both play an important role in the teaching-learning process.

Ur (1991) explains that *extrinsic motivation* is related to external incentive, that is, to factors outside the classroom, different from the learner's wish to learn the language for its own sake or interest in tasks. The influence comes from external sources, such as the incentive of the parents, the wish to succeed in an exam, success and its rewards, the need for competition against other people, test, among others.

*Intrinsic motivation*, is related to "the previous attitudes of the learners: whether they see the learning as worthwhile, whether they like the language and its cultural, political and ethnic associations" (UR, 1991, p. 280). Harmer (1994) adds other characteristics of intrinsic motivation: the classroom physical conditions, the method and the teacher. The first concerns the great effect that good physical conditions, provided by the teacher, can bring to the learning process; the Method is another factor that contributes to the motivation students get in the classroom. If they find it (the method) a bit boring, they will probably become de-motivated, as Harmer (1994a, p. 5) says:

[...] if students lose confidence in the method he or she will become de-motivated. And the student's confidence in the method is largely in the hands of the most important factor affecting intrinsic motivation, *the teacher*.

So, the teacher has a very important role in this kind of motivation. The teacher must be the creator of conditions that make learners involved and motivated and they should maintain the interest of students who were initially extrinsically motivated.

One of the main tasks for teachers is to provoke interest and involvement in the subject even when students are not initially interested in it. It is by their choice of topic, activity and linguistic content that they may be able to turn a class around. It is by their attitude to class participation, their conscientiousness, their humour and their seriousness that they may influence their students. It is by their own behaviour and enthusiasm that they may inspire (HARMER, 2004a, p. 8).

Therefore, it is clear that motivation, which is a key element in the teaching-learning process, is mostly promoted by teachers, and besides it, they should also pay attention to their relationship with students. The next topic expands more on it.

## 1.6 Rapport

As we could see, there are some features that contribute to the success of the teaching-learning process. And there is another characteristic that is necessary within classes, the rapport. Rapport is the good atmosphere created by the teacher in the classroom. It is the good relationship that teachers establish with students. When rapport is built between students and the teacher, according to Ur (1991), the relationships within the classroom are likely to be stronger and deeper, making classes more interesting, and the study easier and more pleasant.

Rapport is related to motivation in the way that this harmonic environment helps learners to be attracted to the classes and consequently, as mentioned before, they learn effectively if they are motivated.

According to Harmer (1994), teachers need to do everything possible to create a good rapport with students. Teachers must provide the interaction between them and the class, with the attempt to improve their relationships. As Harmer (1994) says, students like and want a teacher that is near enough to answer their aspirations, and motivate them through enjoyable and interesting classes.

Scrivener (2005, p. 24) complements this idea by saying:

In order to improve the quality of our own relationship in the classroom, we do not need to learn new techniques; we need to look closely at what we really want for our students, how we really feel about them. It is our attitude and intentions rather than our methodology that we may need to work on.

As Hasse (2004) says, building rapport with students makes them willing to learn, besides their feeling motivated. Rapport is a relationship marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity, and all these characteristics improves the teaching-learning process. Harmonic situations are essential for building rapport. Marzano (apud HASSE, 2004)<sup>3</sup> confirms it:

[...] for students to learn, they need a positive atmosphere and a positive attitude toward learning. This is the first dimension of learning, and without a positive attitude, learning is inhibited. Teachers are responsible for setting the stage on that first day of school.

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<sup>3</sup> On-line article, the pages are not available.



It is clear that teachers have a special role in the teaching process, as they are providers of good situations that make it possible for students to learn with pleasure. A nice environment that facilitates learning should be created by teachers.

Music and songs are part of students' everyday life. We can find people who do not like a certain kind of music, but we do not usually find a person who does not like music and songs at all. Therefore, they are ways of creating a good rapport and motivating students. The next chapter will show more details about it.

## **2 Music in the classroom**

The harmonic atmosphere created by the use of music, helps the establishment of rapport between teachers and students. This good relationship among them is, as we have seen before, really necessary for an effective learning. It increases the interaction inside the classroom and consequently, students' knowledge. Music is a great manner of providing interesting classes and it offers several opportunities to create attractive activities that call students' attention and are really useful for their development in the foreign language.

Gobbi (2001, p. 39) says that music enhances learners' receptivity:

[...] com ela podemos desenvolver várias possibilidades de trabalhos e observamos que o aluno mostra-se mais receptivo, dedicado e envolvido do que em qualquer outra tarefa que se exija dele. O aluno estuda e aprende com simplicidade, sem dar-se conta que está estudando. E o faz com prazer e atenção.

Using songs is an effective technique in the teaching-learning process, because it can stimulate people's cognitive function. For the English teacher, working with songs is a great way to make the lesson more interesting and intrinsically motivating, as Pereira (s.d.)<sup>4</sup> mentions:

[...] Vygotsky também enfatiza que os nossos pensamentos são frutos da motivação. Ao sentirmos necessidades específicas, desejos, interesses ou emoções, somos motivados a produzir pensamentos. Trazendo isto para a aquisição de uma língua estrangeira logo chegamos à conclusão de que é necessária uma motivação intrínseca para que o sujeito sinta maior afinidade e interesse por ela. Desta maneira, podemos dizer que a música e o uso de jogos lúdicos estão ligados diretamente com a motivação e a autoconfiança.

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<sup>4</sup> On-line article, the pages are not available.

One of the greatest factors that explain the desire for learning English is that people are much used to hearing many international songs, specially sung in English, and want to sing along with them or to understand the lyrics. Thus, the English classroom contributes with a good opportunity for teachers to use songs in their lessons and keep learners highly motivated, besides the fact that, obviously, the English language will be used. In other words, students will be learning and having fun at the same time.

Activities using music and songs help students to have the motivation they need to be attentive to the classes. As Ward (1991) states, it stimulates the students' interest, and so they can have a better and easier learning.

This teaching resource can provide students with a relaxing learning environment, which makes them more encouraged to communicate inside the classroom, as learners would feel more comfortable to express themselves.

Music started to be used in the classroom many years ago, particularly when Lozanov's created a method called Suggestopedia, in 1979, which consisted of giving students the right conditions for learning through music, as it would promote a relaxing atmosphere so that students could learn more effectively. According to Brown (2000), baroque music was used, as a background in the beginning of the lessons, based on the Suggestopedia Method, to create the kind of relaxing concentration that led to 'superlearning'.

However, as Brown (1998, p. 67) suggests, teachers can use music not only in the beginning of lessons, but also to help in students' concentration when they are doing exercises:

Background music can be played during lessons, particularly when students are engaged on written exercises. It seems to soak up any kind of peripheral or wandering concentration, so that students can actually focus better on the exercises they are doing.

Nowadays, music and songs are frequently used inside the English language classrooms. They are useful tools as they develop students abilities with the language besides motivating them a lot, independently of their ages. That is one of the reasons why this technique is being more and more used with students.

Moreover, not only students benefit from the use of music in the classroom, but also, as Brown (1998) says, music can help teachers as well, once it can combat the

stressfulness of teaching. It “[...] can help make teaching more enjoyable by bringing us closer to our students and, more importantly, closer to ourselves” (BROWN, 1998, p. 68).

The next topic brings a discussion on the advantages of using music in the teaching-learning process.

## 2.1 The advantages of using music songs in the classroom

There are many advantages of using songs in the classroom. According to Ward (1991), teaching with songs can provide students with authentic activities, authentic language, motivation, good pronunciation, new vocabulary, and opportunities to use the language.

As Ward (1991) says, exercises using songs are authentic activities because they are part of students’ real life. “Many of our young students may never have the opportunity to visit an English-speaking country but they are very much involved with British and American pop music” (WARD, 1991, p. 189).

Therefore, it provides students with authentic language, as they are exposed to the language that is spoken by the native speakers and which is not produced for English learners. Thus, learners are exposed to real language, produced for native speakers.

Authentic materials [...] are real in the sense that they are not created for students as the target audience but for native speakers. The obvious advantage, of course, is that by using authentic materials you present students with actual everyday language, just as it appears in real life (FOPPOLI, 2006)<sup>5</sup>.

Merrell (2004) agrees with Ward (1991), above mentioned, that there are lots of possibilities and advantages in using music in the classroom. As Ward (1991), Merrell (2004) says that music is a good way of teaching vocabulary, even at beginning levels, because the unknown words will create a sense of curiosity in the learners. At advanced levels, it is possible to have more challenging activities, arousing, in the same way, students’ interest in the lesson.

Pereira (s.d.)<sup>5</sup> contributes with the idea below:

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<sup>5</sup> On-line article, the pages are not available.

[...] a utilização de músicas para ensinar inglês promove a prática do vocabulário ativo, aquele que é adquirido através da fala. Os alunos de inglês desenvolvem com muita rapidez o vocabulário passivo, o que é resultado de **muitas atividades de listening e reading**, mas o vocabulário ativo, dependendo da metodologia utilizada, é deixado de lado [...].

Therefore, the author discusses the importance of music to develop the productive skills in students, which are writing and speaking, specially the latter, because students will be motivated to sing the songs.

Another good point in using music in the classroom, according to Ward (1991), is that it contributes to the learning of pronunciation. Students will learn the correct rhythm and stress when they sing along. Learners can focus on sounds, on words, and on connected speech. Ebong and Sabbadini (2006) say that songs present many contractions. Thus, it is an opportunity for teachers to discuss with students that contractions are natural in English, and they can also explain to students some differences between the formal and informal style.

Ebong and Sabbadini (2006)<sup>6</sup> talk about songs and their importance to students regarding the learning of connected speech aspects:

Songs, and specially the chorus, provide real and 'catchy' examples of how whole phrases are pronounced often to the extent that students find it difficult to pick out individual words. The music further emphasises the 'flow' of the words.

Richard-Amato (apud MERRELL, 2004, p. 9) corroborates this idea when she says that music can be used to "expose students to natural intonation patterns and idiomatic expressions". The author also emphasizes the opportunity for students to improve their pronunciation. "Students seem to acquire the correct pronunciation through listening and repetition" (MARRELL, 2004, p. 9).

"Songs provide examples of authentic, memorable and rhythmic language. They can be motivating for students keen to repeatedly listen to and imitate their musical heroes" (EBONG and SABBADINI, 2006)<sup>6</sup>.

Gobbi (2001) emphasizes the same idea saying that repetition helps students to remember the known and unknown words, their meaning and pronunciation, once they practice it when they, several times, try to remember how to say a particular word by singing a song.

By singing, learners have a great opportunity to use the language they are

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<sup>6</sup> On-line article, the pages are not available.

learning. Gobbi (2001) says that it helps the development of grammatical structures, stimulates conversation, among others. Besides, students can practice the language not only in the classroom, as “songs are a means of oral reinforcement outside of the class” (WARD, 1991, p. 190), which shows how helpful music is in the teaching-learning process.

Brewer (2005) affirms that music used in lessons, as a background or as an exercise, encourages interaction and builds classroom community, which facilitates the learning and make students engaged themselves, besides the fact that it should always be used to increase the joy of learning, once it is a way of making students motivated and interested in the lessons.

According to Merrell (2004), the management of the classroom is one of the most difficult skills met by teachers. However, it is vital to have an organized atmosphere created by them in the classes for an effective learning. For this reason, the inclusion of music in the classroom and lessons can be useful and beneficial. Merrell (2004, p. 4) says:

[...] It is a tool that can help teachers maintain a positive and productive environment. The calming effects of music have positive effects on the students when it is introduced into the classroom. Creating a classroom that has low anxiety and stress levels is important to classroom management.

It thus becomes clear that music brings good results to the teaching learning process. Therefore, the use of music in lessons enriches the traditional material and gives more meaning to the lesson, making students engaged and participative in the class. “The learners will be focused on the lesson and disruptions will simply subside” (MERRELL, 2004, p. 5).

Music is a good manner of input in the foreign language classroom. Moreover, it is a way of learning with pleasure, an important point to be considered by teachers.

Music tends to reduce anxiety and inhibition in second language learners. Learning a new concept through a song or listening to music is less threatening than a lecture or worksheet. Music breaks down barriers and creates an environment that is friendly (MERRELL, 2004, p. 8).

Furthermore, chants are useful for teaching the language culture in the classroom, although it is difficult for teachers to teach it. “Music, if used correctly by the

teacher can help teach about cultural awareness and values.” (JACKSON apud MERRELL, 2004)<sup>7</sup>.

Music helps to change the pace of lessons as it calms down restless students and, on the other hand, if it is a calm group, teachers can use music to awaken them.

When music is used, students feel more motivated and they can participate better in the lessons, so it can make the classes attractive and students more interested.

There are innumerable ways to explore songs with students: dealing with the lyrics, the singer or composer, and the history of the song. “Finding out more about the background of the music and the composer will help teachers prepare students for listening” (CRANMER and LAROY apud JEDYNAK, 1982, p. 31).

There can be pre-activities, such as a reading or listening prepared to students as a way of contextualizing the song so that learners get familiar with what they will hear afterwards. Some information on the reason why the song was written is also appealing to students, and it gives opportunity to discuss some important topics with them, such as some social issues.

Generally, most activities using songs are carried out through gap-filling exercises, but there are other activities that can contribute to more pleasant moments. On the next topic there will be more details about it.

## 2.2 Techniques for using songs in the classroom

Gobbi (2001) deals with music like a learning strategy, which means, it is an action inside the class that makes the learning easier, faster and well pleasing. This strategy can be adapted in a way that students can develop their four main skills. As teachers can develop students’ listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills, we can see how useful music is in the classroom. To develop the listening skill, teachers can stimulate students look for modified words, identify words, expressions, rhymes, among others. To develop students’ reading capacity, it is possible to identify groups of words, like, prepositions, adjectives. To increase learners’ speaking ability, the teacher can provoke a discussion about the subject of the music; make questions to students, among others. In addition, to develop the writing skill, students can be asked to do exercises about grammar or answer questions about the lyrics.

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<sup>7</sup> On-line article, the pages are not available.

Particularly, any song can offer possibilities to practice the four main skills, and, according to Murphey (1998, p. 134):

The degree to which any of these skills is emphasized depends more upon the teacher's desired focus than the activity or song. We might call an activity like gap-fill a listening exercise, but the students all do reading and writing while completing the task. They may also discuss their answer with their neighbours.

Songs can improve the teaching-learning process, and as it was already said, they can not only motivate students, but also reinforce vocabulary, grammar and other aspects of the English language.

Most importantly, songs can make English unforgettable [...] the key to success is to choose songs that students understand so that the learning process is enhanced (SASLOW, ASCHER and NOTARPIETRO, 2007, p. 23).

There are some techniques outlined by Saslow, Ascher and Notarpietro (2007) that can be adopted in the classroom, by teachers, when dealing with songs. It is worth mentioning that they all involve singing: *safety in numbers* – if students are shy, they can sing together, with or without the lyrics; *male/ female* if a song is a duet, for example, the teacher can ask students to divide themselves according to their gender, so each group would have to sing their part.

*Bit by bit* is another technique in which the teacher may assign each student one part of the song so that they can sing only their part; *raps*, which is a way of guiding students to focus on the rhythm; and in *karaoke*, students can sing in groups or individually. These techniques improve learners' listening and speaking.

There are other techniques suggested by Saslow, Ascher and Notarpietro (2007) that do not involve singing, as we are going to mention below.

Teachers can prepare many different activities, for example, they can write a list of true or false sentences based on the song so that students listen to it and mark if they are false or not, according to the lyrics.

Another good activity is to work with the song titles. For instance, students only read the title of the song, and the teacher asks them to imagine and draw what they think the song will be about. Alternatively, teachers can ask students to listen to a song, and then they can create a new title for the song. These exercises help students improve their readings of the song.

As we can see, there are many different techniques to work with songs that

may vary from singing them or not. What is more significant than it is the fact that “These techniques range from largely receptive to highly productive” (SASLOW, ASCHER and NOTARPIETRO, 2007, p. 23), which means that the productive skills – speaking and writing – and the receptive skills – listening and reading – will be dealt with, whatever the chosen technique is.

Generally, working with music inside the classroom is usually connected to hearing sound-only recordings. However, a good way to explore songs with students is by using other kinds of media in the classroom, together with the sound of music, which will be more detailed on the next topic.

### 2.3 Using visual resources with music

Visual resources used with music are a good way to catch students’ attention, as it can be more stimulating than just the song itself. Song clips, for example, may present rich visual resources, besides the fact that it can be an opportunity for teachers to better explore songs with students, developing activities that are related to the song videos.

Murphey (1998, p. 101) discusses when and how music videos can be used:

Music videos can be used successfully with any age group or level of students when the activities are adjusted to them. They can be used at the end of class for a ten minute uplift, or they can be an integral part of one or more lessons. Teachers can start from a text, a sound recording, or an image (or images) and gradually add on the other dimensions.

It is clear then that teachers are free to choose the best way to use song video clips in their lessons. On the other hand, teachers may find it difficult to find songs that match students’ interest. One of the solutions to this problem is given by Murphey (1998), who says that teachers ought to share the responsibility of choosing songs and videos with students, letting them select and present them in the classroom, and also prepare activities for their classmates, which will give them more responsibilities for their own learning.

Students may be content to be passive watchers, but we, as teachers, need to encourage student interaction with the video, and involve the students initially in predicting, describing, commenting, and sharing their perceptions (MURPHEY, 1998, p.102).



Opinions from students are also welcome as they give teachers some feedback about which kind of music/ video to choose. “Teachers should accept students’ negative responses to any music, because these are as important for language learning as positive ones” (JEDYNAK, 1982, p. 31).

Besides video, pictures can be used with songs in order to make the experience with music even more engaging.

Jedynak (1982, p. 32) exemplifies how pictures can be used with songs:

Slides, photographs, magazine pictures, and reproductions of painted portraits are useful aids. First, show a set of portraits to students. Then ask them to write down what distinguishes the three portraits from each other for example: psyche, age, clothes, expression, position in society. After listening to three musical selections, students decide which portrait fits each piece of music and why.

This is just an example of how some visual resources can be used in the classroom together with music. They are a good way to attract students’ attention and to facilitate the teaching-learning process. It is also important that teachers provide students with activities that involve the reading about what is behind the lyrics of a song, entirely exploring about the singer, the composer, or the history of the song. On the next chapter, we will better discuss some of these possibilities.

### **3 Going beyond the lyrics**

We could see previously that English is the global language nowadays and the most used by many means of communication. Moreover, many people get in touch with the English language as well as get interested in it because of its cultural influence through songs.

Thus, we decided to use a popular musical band, which is known as U2, because this group has not only been popular through generations but has also got involved in social projects. This fact can be a good opportunity to discuss some important social issues with students, which matches the statement given by Jackson (apud MERRELL, 2004) that says that music can help teachers to teach cultural awareness and values. We will try to demonstrate it with an activity that shows the projects in which U2 are involved.

Generally, teachers may find more practical to use gap-filling exercises when working with songs in the classroom. However, as Cranmer and Laroy (apud

JEDYNAK, 1982) say, the activities can be improved by using other pieces of information on the song, for example, finding out about the singer or composer and the history of the song. All these suggestions can be practiced through pre-listening activities, as the information about the song and better elaborated activities can make students more engaged and curious about what comes next. Therefore, we will use some background information regarding the U2 band and one of their songs as pre-listening activities so that learners could be more engaged on the while-listening task itself.

We will also make use of visual resources available for the music to make students benefit more from the song. Consequently, the U2 song video clip will be used as a post-listening activity.

Going beyond the lyrics means doing other activities besides the single task that is carried out, most of the times, by teachers, when dealing with songs in the classroom. It means explore it to the full, as we have just mentioned.

The suggested activities will be possible to be explored depending on the equipment available at school. Then, thinking about this possibility, all the tasks, except for the last one, were designed to be used in any school.

It is worth mentioning, however, that it is important that learners have a previous knowledge of the past simple tense, so that the activities become comprehensible to students.

### 3.1 Songs activities

As a pre-listening activity, students will do two tasks. The first one (see Appendix A) is an activity in which the teacher first asks some general questions to introduce the band whose song they will listen to, followed by a matching exercise, in which students have to connect the U2 members with the instruments they play in the band. The aim of this activity is to engage learners, making them involved and motivated to the topic. As Harmer (2004) says, the *Engage* element is responsible for making learners motivated enough to communicate. Besides, students can show their previous knowledge of the musical group.

The second task (see Appendix B) consists of a brief text about the importance U2 gives to social projects and some information on the background of the song *Miss Sarajevo*, which was written in order to bring forth discussions about the war in

Yugoslavia at that period. In this activity, the teacher can explore more about the band and the music.

The aim of the activity is to bring students some important knowledge of the song, for instance, the reason why it was written, and what it means in the context it was created. Moreover, using this information is an opportunity for the teacher to go beyond the lyrics, finding out more references about the song that can be interesting and newness to students, which will make them motivated to know more about it. Cranmer and Laroy (apud JEDYNAK, 1982) say that in order to prepare students for listening, teachers can find out more about the background of the music and the composer.

A documentary about the history of the song is also available on U2 DVD, and it can be a useful and enriching tool as well, if the school provides the specific equipment so that teachers can use it the classroom. If the school does not have appropriate equipment, the teacher can use the text about U2 and its' song. A true or false exercise is the activity students are supposed to do, based on the text or on the documentary.

The third activity (see Appendix C) involves the use of the song itself. The lyrics are scrambled, in sets of sentences written on slips that learners have to organize while listening to the song. Teachers can arrange the activity the best way possible, according to the conditions of the class: concerning the number of students, learners can work individually or in groups. When the activity is over, after correcting it, the teacher can promote a discussion in class about the message conveyed by the song, asking students' opinion about it. Jedynak (1982) points out, that it is important that teachers listen to learners' opinion, which is a lucky chance for teachers to provide students with the opportunity to practice speaking.

The last activity (see Appendix D) is connected to the use of a visual resource, which is the song video clip. The class will watch the video clip and then students are supposed to answer some questions related to what is shown on the video, as they have already worked with the lyrics themselves. In addition, the visual aspect is a good resource to use in class, as it is always appealing to students.

After the exercise, students can comment on the video, by saying all they had observed, and if it corresponds to what they had discussed before, when they just listened to the song. As Murphey (2008) says, it is the teachers' job to encourage students to interact with the video and to engage them in a way that learners can predict, comment

and share their thoughts and opinions about it.

These suggested activities are an attempt to improve the use of songs in the classroom, going beyond simply listening to it, what is common in most English classes. The pre-listening activities are useful to students in a way that they may feel familiar with what comes next. The song is then, a helpful and pleasing tool, as said before, because it provides lots of benefits in the classroom, among which, it makes students motivated, what is the most important point for an effective learning, as it will make them more receptive to new information. Besides, the video clip is an extra resource that can be used to enrich the activity involving the song and can be as motivating as the song itself, not to mention that its visual aspect collaborates on a different kind of activity, which will certainly provide pleasure to the teaching-learning process, involving both students and teachers in a good atmosphere.

## **Conclusion**

As we have already said, the aim of this paper was to show the advantages of using songs in the English classroom and some techniques to explore songs going beyond the lyrics.

We could see that music can provide students and teachers with motivation, besides offering opportunities to create a good environment and relationship among them by breaking barriers between teachers and students by reducing learners' anxiety and inhibition during the teaching-learning process.

Moreover, it can expose students to vocabulary, good pronunciation, grammar and some cultural aspects of the English language through authentic materials. Besides, it is a way of helping them to improve the four main skills.

Through the analysis presented in this paper, it was possible to show that teachers should go beyond the lyrics so that students benefit more from what songs provide, which can be anything from information about the singers to the visual resources the DVD offers. It was also possible to suggest a technique that can be used by teachers to go beyond the common gap-filling exercise.

Therefore, we can conclude that songs in the classroom is a major tool that brings impressive results to the teaching-learning process.

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## APPENDIX A- Pre-listening activity I

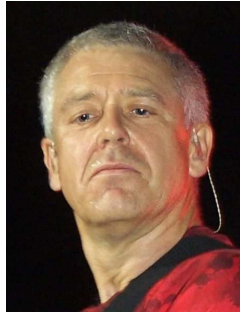
### 1- Lead-in questions:

- Do you know U2?
- What do you know about them?
- Do you like them?
- What's your favorite song? Why?

### 2 - Match the U2 band members to the instruments they play:



a) The Edge



b) Adam Clayton



c) Bono



d) Larry Mullen Jr.

( ) vocals and guitar	( ) guitar, keyboards, backing vocal	( )
bass guitar	( ) drums and percussion	

## APPENDIX B - Pre-listening activity II

**I – Read the information below about U2 and check your answers of the previous exercise. Then, read the information about *Miss Sarajevo*, one of U2 songs, and do the exercise below.**

### U2

There are 4 members in U2: Bono (vocals and guitar), The Edge (guitar, keyboards, backing vocal), Adam Clayton (bass guitar), and Larry Mullen Jr. (drums and percussion). The music of U2 has always been about heart and mind, body and soul. For some years the band have helped campaigning groups who are trying to make the world a better place. U2 have helped the following groups: Amnesty International, Greenpeace, DATA, ONE, (Product (RED) and the Chernobyl Children's Project. U2 have used benefit concerts, songwriting, public campaigning, special visits and fund-raising projects to promote charities and activist communities worldwide.

*Adapted from: <http://www.u2.com/heartsandminds/>*

### *Miss Sarajevo*

The song was based on Bill Carter's documentary about a beauty contest held in the ex-Yugoslavia, which was in war. Bill Carter, who was a journalist, traveled to Sarajevo in the winter of 1993 to provide humanitarian aid and quickly found himself involved in the conflict. He contacted U2 while the band was on an excursion (Zoo TV), and asked them to show the public what was happening in Yugoslavia because they felt that the world ignored the human side of that war.

Bill Carter and U2 showed the world how the population lived in that war, through some satellite links during U2 concerts.

Bill Carter said that that war was just a background, it could be any war, what is important is the vitality of the human spirit to survive, [to] laugh, to love, and to move on. The song protests the war in Bosnia, criticizing the international community for its inability to stop the war or help those affected by it.

*Adapted from: [https://docs.google.com/Doc?id=dgz8hjgt\\_120gqjm4zdd&hl=pt\\_BR](https://docs.google.com/Doc?id=dgz8hjgt_120gqjm4zdd&hl=pt_BR).*

### **II - Mark true or false, according to the texts above.**

- a) Only Bono was involved in social projects ( ).
- b) Bill Carter traveled to Sarajevo on holiday to relax ( ).
- c) U2 showed the public the reality in Yugoslavia ( ).
- d) The band did not agree with Bill Carter and ignored the human side of the war ( ).
- e) The song *Miss Sarajevo* criticizes the society, because it did not help the people who suffered in the war ( ).



## APPENDIX C – While-listening activity

**Put the set of sentences in order according to the song.**

### *Miss Sarajevo*

{ Here she comes  
To take her crown

{ Is there a time for keeping your head down  
For getting on with your day

{ Is there a time to walk for cover  
A time for kiss and tell

{ Is there a time for kohl and lipstick  
A time for cutting hair

{ Oltre i confini  
e le terre assetate  
Dici che come fiume  
come fiume  
L'amore giunger  
L'amore

{ Here she comes  
Surreal in her crown

{ Is there a time to turn the mecca  
Is there a time to be a beauty queen

{ Is there a time for laying tables  
When the night is set to freeze  
(Pavarotti)

{ Dici che il fiume  
trova la via al mare  
E come il fiume  
giungerai a me

{ Here she comes  
Beauty plays the crown

{ Is there a time for high street shopping  
To find the right dress to wear

{ E non so pi pregare  
E nell'amore non so pi sperare  
E quell'amore non so pi aspettare

{ Is there a time for different colors  
Different names you find it hard to spell

{ Is there a time for first communion  
A time for east 17  
(Bono)

{ Is there a time for tying ribbons  
A time for Christmas trees

{ Is there a time for keeping a distance  
A time to turn your eyes away

{ Here she comes  
Heads turn around

## Key

### *Miss Sarajevo* (U2/ Pavarotti)

Is there a time for keeping a distance  
A time to turn your eyes away  
Is there a time for keeping your head down  
For getting on with your day

Is there a time for kohl and lipstick  
A time for cutting hair  
Is there a time for high street shopping  
To find the right dress to wear

Here she comes  
Heads turn around  
Here she comes  
To take her crown

Is there a time to walk for cover  
A time for kiss and tell  
Is there a time for different colors  
Different names you find it hard to spell

Is there a time for first communion  
A time for east 17  
Is there a time to turn the mecca  
Is there a time to be a beauty queen

Here she comes  
Beauty plays the crown  
Here she comes  
Surreal in her crown

(Pavarotti)  
Dici che il fiume  
trova la via al mare  
E come il fiume  
giungerai a me  
Oltre i confini  
e le terre assetate  
Dici che come fiume  
come fiume  
L'amore giunger  
L'amore  
E non so pi pregare  
E nell'amore non so pi sperare  
E quell'amore non so pi aspettare

(Bono)  
Is there a time for tying ribbons  
A time for Christmas trees  
Is there a time for laying tables  
When the night is set to freeze

## **APPENDIX D – Post-listening activity**

### **While watching the video:**

1- Answer the questions according to the video:

a) Who is the famous person that appears in the beginning of the video clip?

- ☐ Princess Diana
- ☐ Madonna
- ☐ Cameron Diaz

b) What are the U2 members wearing?

- ☐ T- shirts
- ☐ jeans
- ☐ suits

c) What is Bono wearing that the other members are not?

- ☐ a pair of glasses
- ☐ a scarf
- ☐ a bonnet

d) What is the message that appears at the end of the contest?

- ☐ Don't kill the children
- ☐ Don't let them kill us
- ☐ Don't kill more people