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Integrating Music and Language Content and Skills in the Academic Course English Language for Children through Song and Movement

Extended summary

The aim of this paper is to provide theoretical and empirical support to the concept of integrated teaching and evaluating the syllabus of the new elective course English Language for Children through Songs and Movement, attended by pre-service primary and preschool teachers trained to teach English to preschool and early primary school children. The theoretical part focuses on neuromusical, neurolinguistic, phonological and musical-linguistic research, which confirms (Ettliger et al., 2011; Jäncke, 2012; Peretz, 2009, 2015) that integrating such contents is very useful for a child's holistic development as it offers a multifaceted approach to teaching a foreign language.

The empirical part of the paper sheds light on the profile of students who enrolled in this elective course within the English Language Module². The aim was to identify the students' musical experience and preferences, and their knowledge of the phonological elements of the language, in order to make the course as beneficial for them as possible. The research was conducted with the first two generations of attendees of this course which integrates three subjects: English Language, Music Education and Physical Education. The convenience sample includ-

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2 The English Language Module is a programme initiated at the Teacher Education Faculty in Belgrade in 2007, with the permission of the Ministry of Education. Based in the beginning solely on the English language syllabus (Jankovic, Cvetkovic, 2006; Janković, 2009), it was later enriched with the elements of all core subjects included in the young learners' formal education (Janković, 2014a; 2016), growing into an integrated curriculum for teaching preschool and primary school teachers in English. English Language for Children through Songs and Movement is the first of 11 integrated courses.

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ed 58 first-year students of both departments enrolled in the academic years 2017/18 (N = 37) and 2018/19 (N = 21). The survey results have shown what kind of music the students like listening to, what songs they like to sing and in what language(s). We also examined the types of children's songs that have remained in the students' long-term memory, in order to assess their methodological potential. Chants, counting rhymes and hand-clap rhymes were rarely used in our respondents' early English classes although it is exactly this type of content that is of great importance for the initial work on proper articulation in both FL pronunciation and singing practice.

Frequent work on language elements related to musical activities significantly improved the quality of students' pronunciation during the semester. Due to their timely identified potentials and weaknesses (through the questionnaire and the initial and final tests, largely focused on prosody), a range of practice exercises and tasks were designed which helped them progress in the areas of phonology, morphology and syntax and in the activities which, apart from the language, include songs and movement. The final test showed that students had mastered most of the contents and skills pertaining to Music Education, as well as children's action songs and games suitable for outdoor or indoor spaces. The progress in their abilities from the beginning to the end of the course helped us confirm the general and specific hypotheses in the area of music and the specific hypothesis in the field of language.

The research results gave us guidelines for intensive work on orthoepic exercises for enhancing the development of students' speech and singing articulation, thus improving their linguistic and music competences essential for teaching English to young learners. The pedagogical implications jointly recognised by all teachers and students cooperating on the elective course English Language for Children through Songs and Movement are also valuable, as we have concluded that Physical Education classes should revive the "forgotten" action songs and singing games in the learners' mother tongue as well. Apart from motor skills and coordination, activities such as hand-clap rhymes, counting rhymes and similar music games help improve children's speech and articulation and support their holistic development.

Songs and movement are essential for children's education not only in terms of language acquisition, expanding vocabulary and mastering grammar structures; they make an ideal context in which important sociocultural aspects of the language are experienced too, with stress, rhythm and intonation being inseparable elements of speech. Systematic work on increasing children's vocal range and proper interpretation of different types of songs are of special importance. Music games which initiate movement improve children's vocal and physical abilities, and enable spontaneous learning through play.

Finally, a valuable experience for us: as the course progressed, the students felt more and more like a community sharing experiences through teamwork, just as their professors did, which helped them to relax while singing, to feel more self-confident and supportive of those with poorer singing performance, and to express creativity, self-esteem and joy. We may conclude that the work on this elective course has, so far, resulted in positive experience and fully justified integrating Music and Physical Education with English language teaching.

Keywords: integrated teaching, vocal aspect of musical development, phonological aspect of language development, children's action songs, counting rhymes and hand-clap rhymes.

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