

Interdisciplinary Connections: Musical and Language Activities

Olga Denac

Department of Preschool Education, Faculty of Education, University of Maribor, Maribor, Slovenia

Email: olga.denac@um.si

How to cite this paper: Denac, O. (2022). Interdisciplinary Connections: Musical and Language Activities. *Creative Education*, 13, 3174-3181.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2022.1310201>

Received: August 10, 2022

Accepted: October 11, 2022

Published: October 14, 2022

Copyright © 2022 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Establishing interdisciplinary connections between musical and language activities encourages perception, comprehension and performance of musical, language and literary contents. In vocal music, language serves as an expressive means. In singing, correct vocal technique and articulation are sought, listening to music influences the ability to express musical experiences and notions verbally, acquisition of terminology and experiencing of literary contents, while creating includes preparation of texts for musical contents and creation of texts and melodies. The present paper presents possibilities for and examples of interdisciplinary planning of musical and language activities.

Keywords

Musical Activities, Language Activities, Planning, Interdisciplinary Connections

1. Introduction

Connections between music and language go far back into the past. Music and language both use sound as a means of communication. Sounds in music and voices in language differ but also connect in various elements: pitch, duration, colour, strength. According to Oblak (1987: p. 78), music and language are linked to elements of sound: music is actualised through tones and other forms of sound, while speech through vocals and consonants. Sloboda (1997) believes that music and language offer possibilities of creative expression for composers to write new compositions and writers to write new stories. The results of Pitt (2020) research confirm that children became more adept at communicating and communicating with peers through musical activities (playing musical instruments, creating music, musical games), but also more confident, as speech was not the only means of communication. Chen-Hafteck (1997) also mentions the close connection between music and language development in early childhood

and highlights the importance of the connection between music and language for more successful learning. Authors Ilari, Chen-Hafteck, and Crawford (2013) explored the relationship between singing and cultural understanding. When we sing songs from different cultures, we have the opportunity to get to know the culture of other nations and to better understand our own culture as well. Thus, singing songs from different cultures can play an important role in shaping the identity of one's own and a foreign nation. Singing multicultural songs can also promote the well-being of male and female students. The results of research (Politimou et al., 2018; Politimou et al., 2019; Putkinen et al., 2013b; Putkinen et al., 2013a) show that informal music activities are positively related to the development of children's musical abilities and that singing and dancing also have a positive effect on children's language development, where children develop more intensively the ability to perceive and distinguish between sounds. Hallam (2010) also explored the impact of music on the intellectual, social, and personal development of children and adolescents. She confirms that through musical activities we influence the development of language, literacy, creativity, fine motor skills, coordination, attention, self-confidence, emotional sensitivity and social skills.

Developing linguistic abilities (articulation, vocabulary, texts, discovering language structures) and learning and experiencing literary contents are objectives which can be pursued in various subject areas, including music.

The purpose of the paper is to explore the possibilities of connecting musical and language activities and to justify the importance of interdisciplinary connections between the fields of music and language based on the interdisciplinary learning unit plan.

2. Connecting Musical and Language Activities

Objectives defined in the syllabi for Music education (Curriculum, 2011b) and Slovene language (Curriculum, 2011a) can be implemented in the framework of the following music activities: singing, listening to music, creating in and along music.

2.1. Singing and Language

Connection between music and language is reflected in various forms of vocal and vocal-instrumental music. Language is also one of the expressive means in music.

The relationship between music and text varies: sometimes the text is in the forefront (speech inserted in the melody) and sometimes the melody which imitates the content described (onomatopoeic expressions), but in most cases both elements are equal.

A song we wish to present to children must satisfy the aesthetic criteria. When looking for a suitable song, we have to perform analysis of music and text, focusing in particular to the following elements of the song:

- Content, which should reflect the world of a child: the nature, toys, children's ideas and feelings;

- Lyrics, which can include repetition of words, couplets, onomatopoeic expressions (imitation of natural sounds);
- Form (sectional, binary or ternary form, strophic form with several stanzas sharing the same melody, or through-composed with each stanza having a different melody in line with the character of the lyrics);
- Melody (range, intervals, tonality);
- Rhythm (measure, rhythmic values, tuples, repetitive rhythm);
- Tempo (moderately, vividly, slowly, lively, fast, speeding up, slowing down);
- Dynamics (moderately loud, quiet, loud, increasing and decreasing);
- Character (sweet, gentle, graceful, playful, determinate, as a march).

The choice must be pupils and time appropriate. Songs with artistic value should be prioritised. The artistic value of a song is determined, among other parameters, also by accordance between its language and musical contents. In forming the melody of a song and the metrics of its lyrics, a composer must take into account changes in expression and sound of the text. According to [Borota \(2015\)](#), the metrics of the lyrics and that of music are in accordance when the accents in the text coincide with the accented beats in music, i.e. when the measure is suitably selected. At first, we choose songs in which musical rhythm is based on the rhythm of lyrics. We can point out certain elements present in the song, e.g. pauses, repetition of rhythmic or melodic motives. Agreement of the rhythm of words and musical rhythm favours the memorisation of the song. Besides a song's content and lyrics, we must also focus on its musical elements: melody, rhythm, tempo and dynamics. We have to make sure the melody range is appropriate for our pupils. When we learn a new song we use its lyrics or content in a short story, discussion or game. We also have to pay attention to individual elements of aesthetic interpretation: expressiveness, dynamics, tempo, breathing, phrasing, diction. To this end, we carry out exercises for relaxation, correct pronunciation of sounds (consonants, vowels, sibilants, rhymes) and breathing. The teacher's task is to choose songs with different particularities and contents which stimulate further development of language skills as well as singing or musical abilities in general.

2.2. Listening to Music and Language

In general, academic literature defines listening as one of the basic language and communication skills. In music, listening is part of various musical activities. Already in the pre-school period, children experiment and research different sound colours, volumes, pitches, create playing instruments and acquire experience in listening to music. They can listen to vocal (songs they can also sing or songs too demanding for them to sing but appropriate in terms of content and lyrics, musical inventions), instrumental (instrumental versions of children's songs, instrumental compositions) or vocal-instrumental music. Children are attracted to compositions which trigger various emotional states (happiness, sadness, fear, surprise, etc.) or those with interesting content (narrative music). They also like musical pieces with accentuated rhythms which stimulate move-

ment (dance music, marches, etc.) and pieces which encourage them to sing along. Listening to music, children perceive and experience contrasts in music, such as quiet-loud, slow-fast, long-short, high-low, upwards-downwards, and express enthusiasm about various sound stimuli. They are also interested in who wrote the composition and who the performer is. We explain to them terms such as soloist, choir, conductor, orchestra, etc.

In the processes of music and language perception, thinking and emotions intertwine and complement each other, while their depth depends on sensitivity, experiencing ability and musical and language awareness of the listener. Experience is crucial for every artistic creation. Children also want to express their experience of a musical work or their mental images of sound. Musical experiences can be expressed verbally, with motion or with art.

Verbal expression depends on the level of a child's abilities to express and the richness of their vocabulary (knowledge of musical terminology). Children, as well as adults, often encounter difficulties in trying to express their aesthetic experience. "Weakness of our vocabulary does not stem from intellectual incapacity. Its true reason lies in the problem how to express our conscious experience at the moment of aesthetic perception verbally, with institutionalised phrases at one's disposal (Mollenhauer, 1996: p. 14)".

Children can verbally express the content of a song or programme music, feelings and moods in a composition or various musical elements (colour, volume, pitch, duration, tempo). At first, children express their musical experiencing with individual expressions referring to the character of a musical work (the music is beautiful, cheerful, sad) or to individual expressive elements (the music is loud, quiet, fast, slow). Later, they form descriptions using various synonyms. Talking about music or discussing it, develops children's ability to verbally express their musical experiencing and perceptions of a musical work, helps them learn musical concepts and terminology and broaden their vocabulary.

Listening to music can also be connected to learning and experiencing literary contents, by telling fairy tales and stories or enacting them. In combining different activities, the role of music can vary from supplementary, e.g. serving as background music to storytelling, to equal in relationship with the text, in which case we talk about musical fairy tale.

Musical fairy tale is a combination of three equal components: content, text and music. Text and music express the content of a fairy tale, each within its own expressive possibilities. Music expresses internal happening, the nature and emotional states of the characters, deepens and enriches the ideas, thoughts and feelings, triggered in a child by the content expressed in words. Music enables children to experience the content of a story more intensely. "Apart from the musical content, a fairy tale also has a verbal content, most often in the form of story, based on fictional events and heroes" (Borota, 2015).

2.3. Vocal Creation and Language

Musical and language activities enable the development of creative potentials

which are shown in a child's exploring and discovering the world. The first forms of creativeness in a child can be detected already in the pre-school period (a child sings an invention). In the beginning, vocal production is linked to a text. Only later, a child can create vocally independently of a text, based on syllables, sounds or mere melodic concepts. With the development of musical abilities, skills and knowledge, possibilities of musical creativeness increase. In developing musical creativeness, a child can work with melody, rhythm, form and expressive qualities (sound colour, tempo, dynamics).

The purpose of creating in music is not in a product with an artistic value, but in the creative process itself. In the pre-school and primary school period, musical creativity is developed by exploring the world of sounds, experimenting with voice and instruments, creating instrumental accompaniments for songs, stories or dramatisations, creating instrumental or vocal contents (making up texts and melodies, melody to a familiar text or text to a familiar melody), finishing up unfinished songs which enable children to create a melody and a text, creating sound pictures, melodic and rhythmical questions and answers. Creating, children learn about accordance between language and musical phrases, tones, rhythms, syllables, accents. They make up rhymes, onomatopoeic expressions, texts and syllables to a given melody, voice games with vowels. They can also write a melody and accompaniment to their own text.

A child can create in music (creating and forming musical contents) or to music (with dance, art or language). Children can use movement, art or language activities to creatively express musical experiences and ideas. In fact, creating to music represents feedback about experiencing and perceiving a musical work.

Musical creativity can arise from literature, which is an important base for musical creativity (e.g. Beethoven talked about the influence Goethe's poetry had on him), and vice versa—language creativity from music (e.g. many poets create under the influence of music; creation of new texts to folk melodies). Children also spontaneously make up simple texts to familiar melodies, both, texts and melodies, rhythmical texts, counting-out songs, etc.

3. Example of a Music-Language Interdisciplinary Learning Unit Plan

As shown above, music and language are closely connected. "Language contents uncover a variety of feelings, situations and environments, while music intensifies expressiveness and experiencing" (Oblak, 1987: p. 78). Literature in all its forms, poetry, prose and drama, often represents the starting point for composers to create music. With its play of words, sounds and rhythms, poetry stimulates an individual's musicality. The following example of a learning unit plan, prepared in line with the current syllabi for Music education and Slovene language (Curriculum, 2011b, 2011a), shows how we can present language within music to young children.

Topic: Listening to poems and music, creating within music

Unit: Listening to a poem by Oton Župančič, listening to vocal-instrumental compositions to Župančič's texts (Ciciban-Cicifuj (Messy Ciciban) by Ciril Pregelj, Dedek Samonog (One-legged Old Man) by Aleksander Lajovic, Na kolenu (Knee Bouncing) by Blaž Arnič, Zlato v Blatni vasi (Gold in the Muddy Town) by Borut Lesjak¹, creating a melody to a poem by Oton Župančič (Kadar se ciciban joče (When Ciciban Cries)).

General objectives:

- Experiencing, learning about and enjoying the arts;
- Development of aesthetic perception and the sense of artistic;
- Critical acceptance of artistic texts by a Slovene poet;
- Development of the ability to express the same experience through different types of artistic expression;
- Development of creativity and specific artistic abilities.

Objective:**Children**

- Enjoy listening to songs and poems,
- Experience the acoustic characteristics of a song or poem,
- Express their understanding of the song or poem,
- Reacts to emotional elements of the text,
- Develop aesthetic sensitivity and a positive attitude towards works with artistic value,
- Develop intentional auditory attention,
- Learn the meaning of the terms poet and composer,
- Create a melody to a familiar text of a poem and an instrumental accompaniment,
- Receiving feedback on inventions, develop self-confidence and positive attitude towards creating,
- Express musical experience and their ideas of a musical work by creating with movement, art or words.

Methods: Experiential listening, making up a melody to a familiar text, creative accompaniment, expression of musical experience and ideas with creative communication through movement, art and words, conversation, explanation, play.

Forms: Class work, group work, individual work.

Means: Drawings, song books, scores, rhythmical instruments, drawing sheets, coloured pencils, CD player, video camera.

Methodical steps

Activities	Teacher	Pupils
1. Conversation about the meaning of the terms poet and composer	Directs the conversation about the key characteristics defining the two terms.	Participate in the conversation, identify and explain the differences between the two terms.
2. Learning about the life and work of the Slovene poet Oton Župančič	Invites children to listen to a short presentation of the poet's life and reads a few poems, e.g. <i>When Ciciban Cries</i> , <i>Messy Ciciban</i> , <i>One-legged Old Man</i> , <i>Knee Bouncing</i> , <i>Gold in the Muddy Town</i> , etc.	Participate in the conversation and listen carefully to poems.
3. Listening to poems by Župančič, put to music	Invites children to listen to songs: <i>Messy Ciciban</i> , <i>One-legged Old Man</i> , <i>Knee Bouncing</i> , <i>Gold in the Muddy Town</i> .	Listen carefully to songs.
4. Repeating a familiar poem	Invites children to repeat the poem <i>When Ciciban Cries</i> .	Repeat the poem.
5. Creating a melody to a familiar text	Assumes the role of a composer and makes up a melody to the text of the poem. Invites children to play the role of a composer themselves and create a melody to the poem <i>When Ciciban Cries</i> .	Listen, assume the role of a composer, create music.

¹The number of chosen songs depends on children's age.

Continued

6.	Accompaniment of the created song with rhythmical instruments	Sings the created melody, accompanying it with a rhythmical instrument, and encourages children to creatively accompany their own melodies as well.	Pick rhythmical instruments and use them to accompany themselves, while they are making up a melody to a familiar text.
7.	Recording creative singing and playing	Encourages children to record his/her invention and then also their own inventions.	Participate in the process of recording and creating.
8.	Listening to/viewing and evaluation of the recordings	Plays the recordings, evaluating the inventions together with children and expressing admiration and positive attitude towards creating.	Listen to or watch the recordings and take part in evaluating the inventions.
9.	Expressing experiences and ideas with creative communication through movement, art and words	Invites children to listen to their creations again and express what they experience with words, art or movement.	Listen to songs, expressing their experiencing through words, art or movement.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Borota, B. (2015). *Musical Activities and Contents*. Univerzitetna založba Annales.
- Chen-Hafteck, L. (1997). Music and Language Development in Early Childhood: Integrating Past Research in the Two Domains. *Early Child Development and Care*, 130, 85-97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0300443971300109>
- Curriculum. Elementary School Programme. Music Education (2011b). *Ljubljana*. Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo.
- Curriculum. Elementary School Programme. Slovene Language (2011a). *Ljubljana*. Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo.
- Hallam, S. (2010). The Power of Music: Its Impact on the Intellectual, Personal and Social Development of Children and Young People. *International Journal of Music Education*, 28, 269-289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761410370658>
- Ilari, B., Chen-Hafteck, L., & Crawford, L. (2013). Singing and Cultural Understanding: A Music Education Perspective. *International Journal of Music Education*, 31, 202-216. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0255761413487281>
- Mollenhauer, K. (1996). *Grundfragen ästhetischer Bildung. Theoretische und empirische Befunde zur ästhetischen Erfahrung von Kindern*. Juventa.
- Oblak, B. (1987). *Creative Music Education Teaching in Primary Education*. Ph.D. Thesis, Akademija za glasbo.
- Pitt, J. (2020). Communicating through Musical Play: Combining Speech and Language Therapy Practices with Those of Early Childhood Music Education—The SALTMusic Approach. *Music Education Research*, 22, 68-86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2019.1703927>
- Politimou, N., Dalla Bella, S., Farrugia, N., & Fabia, F. (2019). Born to Speak and Sing: Musical Predictors of Language Development in Pre-Schoolers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, Article 948. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00948>
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00948/full>

- Politimou, N., Stewart, L., Müllensiefen, D., & Fabia, F. (2018). A Novel Instrument to Assess the Home Musical Environment in the Early Years. *PLOS ONE*, *13*, e0193819. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0193819>
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2018-17212-001>
- Putkinen, V., Saarikivi, K., & Tervaniemi, M. (2013b). Do Informal Musical Activities Shape Auditory Skill Development in Preschool-Age Children? *Frontiers in Psychology*, *4*, Article 572. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00572>
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3756232/>
- Putkinen, V., Tervaniemi, M., & Huotilainen, M. (2013a). Informal Musical Activities Are Linked to Auditory Discrimination and Attention in 2-3-Year-Old Children: An Event-Related Potential Study. *European Journal of Neuroscience*, *37*, 654-661. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejn.12049>
- Sloboda, J. (1997). *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music*. Clarendon Press.