

1. Introduction

Using art in the classroom requires the teacher to relinquish control and expectation. It needs the teacher to submit to the students' interpretations and ideas and use them to spark deeper exploration. If the teacher want their students to learn, the teacher need to allow them to have wonderful ideas as it is the essence of intellectual development. Duckworth (1996, p. 1) elaborates on "wonderful ideas" as: The development of intelligence is a matter of having wonderful ideas and feeling confident enough to try them out, and that schools can have an effect on the continuing development of wonderful ideas. Thus, learning takes place when the students' ideas are honored and respected, when what they suggest and explore are taken seriously and invite further study and scrutiny. Everyone will learn in such a classroom.

Teachers have to plan for multiple classes each day keeping methods and activities fresh and interesting for both students and teachers. However, not many teachers would consider themselves creative enough to be art teachers. Art can be an intimidating subject full of specialized knowledge and techniques where the only approval a person receives is purely subjective. There are plenty of ways to use art as a vehicle to teach English to students and have fun in the process.

English language learners face multiple difficulties in acquiring language. Navigating an unfamiliar language is exhausting and filled with frustration. Learners need to be continuously on their toes and rarely have the opportunity to relax and enjoy their learning. Students should be given a chance to work through language barriers and express themselves completely by offering an artistic alternative to the traditional read-and-write format lessons. This article discusses some practical ideas of using arts, music and songs in teaching English.

The saying says that art is all around us. In its many forms it presents fantastic opportunities for discussion, focused language work and skills-based activities. Art like music can grab students' attention and create stimulating lessons. Music is an important tool for students who are just learning English. For new students, music provides new vocabulary, various accents and cultural expressions. Using music to teach English can be done at all grade levels, but it's important to choose an appropriate song. When students make a major breakthrough in learning, it is music to a teacher's ears. There is nothing more rewarding for a teacher, than seeing their students smile and laugh while they learn. The same can be said for students. Students who are taught in a fun and creative way will love coming to class. Using music in the classroom is a great way for teachers to achieve success with L2 learners.

2. Teaching English through Arts, Music and Songs

2.1 Benefits of Using Arts

The introduction of some well-known pieces of art can be done to students to teach them not only emotions words like *angry*, *happy*, *scared*, and *excited* but more complex emotion words such as *melancholy*, *lonely*, *crestfallen*, and *apprehensive*. The choice of art pieces allow teachers to discuss the specific emotions with the students. The students might be asked about their feeling and the reason. The students will be challenged to use specific emotion vocabulary and connect it with what they see. The teacher can show how Edward Hopper depicts loneliness through his pieces; Edward Munch depicts panic in his painting *The Scream*; embrace the serenity that comes from Claude Monet; and feel sentimental from the love expressed by Mary Cassatt in her mother and child pieces. The teacher can use any piece or art he/she wishes, and the emotions that one person may feel from a piece may be different than what another feels. The students can be motivated to express their individuality and make

personal connections with the art. This activity challenges the students to communicate a new depth of their emotions with new vocabulary and classic art in perfect harmony.

These are some of the reasons why art can be successfully used in the language classroom.

- (1) Responding to art can be very stimulating and can lead onto a great variety of activities. In its simplest form this might be describing a painting, but with a little creativity all sorts of things are possible. For example, the well-known 'grammar auction' activity can be redesigned as an art auction, where the students have to say a sentence about the piece of art – anything they like – and then the rest of the students bid according to how accurate they feel the sentence is.
2. Using art provides a useful change of pace. While many teachers use visual images to introduce a topic or language item, actually asking the students to engage with and respond to the piece of art can encourage students to become involved on quite a different level.
3. Incorporating art into the class or syllabus can take the students out of the classroom and encourage them to use their language skills in the real world. A visit to an art exhibition or an assignment that involves research on the internet can generate all sorts of language.
4. Thinking about or even creating art can be very motivating. It can take the emphasis off of accuracy and put it onto fluency and the ability to clearly express thoughts and ideas. This is great for students whose progress in speaking is hindered by a fear of making mistakes.
5. Responding to art has the potential to develop students' creative and critical thinking skills. Students as low as pre-intermediate level will be able to read a short biography of an artist and discuss how their art depicts different aspects of their lives.

The problem is that art is very subjective and therefore a teacher may be faced with students who are reluctant to engage with the chosen examples of art. Therefore the students should be encouraged to either choose which works of art are explored, or alternatively ensure that a variety of styles are represented. Choosing art that has some relevance to the students is always a good idea, either from its subject matter or the background of the artist. Another problem raised is that the students (and teachers!) may not perceive some art-related activities to be useful for language learning. For this, it is very important to structure activities carefully so that there is a clear outcome and learning point. For example, a simple discussion about the meaning behind a piece of modern art can be combined with input on functional language for giving opinions and agreeing and disagreeing. Meanwhile, other activities can be language-led. For example, using a piece of art to generate wh- questions which are then given to another pair of students to answer. Considering structure will also help to control the direction of discussion/lessons based around responding to art. This can otherwise sometimes be difficult.

There are three ways of using art

1. Looking at art

There are lots of different activities that involve students looking at and responding to pieces of art. For example:

- (a) A ranking discussion where students choose a famous work of art for the school to hang in its lobby or voting for the winner from the Turner Prize shortlist;
- (b) Ask the students to choose a character from a painting or sculpture and write a mini-biography or story about that character;
- (c) Compare two pieces of art with similar subjects, practising comparative language and adjectives;
- (d) Ask the students to look at the website of a famous gallery (see some links below) and write a quiz about the works of art to swap with the other students to answer;
- (e) Write questions to ask an artist or a character in a painting. Then role play the interview in pairs, followed by writing up a news article about the interview (using reported speech).

2. Sharing art (a) Ask the students to identify and bring in a copy of a piece of art by an artist from their country. Make a gallery in the classroom and ask the students to decide on a title for each piece of work in groups; (b) Ask the students to bring in a photograph they have taken and ask the other students to write a short story about the events leading up to the moment the photograph was taken (practising past tenses) and/or what happened after the photograph was taken. Then check whether their guess was right with the owner; (c) Get the students to bring in a

piece of art that represents their childhood and ask the other students to form sentences about what they 'used to do' and/or write questions to ask the owner who brought it in

3. Creating art (a) Put the students into groups and ask them to create a piece of art using a variety of easily found materials – plastic bags, string, tissues, cardboard boxes – whatever you have to hand! Get them to title their piece of work and judge them according to originality, teamwork and use of materials; (b) Do a visualisation exercise where you get the students to imagine painting the most beautiful picture they have ever seen. Then ask them to describe the picture to a partner who tries to draw it; (c) Get the students to record vocabulary by writing the letters in a way that depicts the meaning of a word – this works best with adjectives. For example, 'happy' can be written in the form of a smile; (d) To get feedback on a course, ask the students to draw a picture in groups to represent how they felt about the course and then describe/explain it to you and the other students.

2.2 Benefits of Using Music and Songs

Some people may not like art, dancing, reading, or movies, but almost everyone likes one kind of music or another. Most people like many different kinds of music. Studies have shown that music can (a) improve concentration; (b) improve memory; (c) bring a sense of community to a group; (d) motivate learning; (e) relax people who are overwhelmed or stressed; (f) make learning fun; and (g) help people absorb material.

There are a variety of different ways to use music in the classroom. Some teachers prefer to use background music and others use music lyrics as the basis of a lesson. Music can be used to: (a) introduce a new theme or topic (Christmas/colours/feelings); (b) break the ice in a class where students don't know each other or are having difficulty communicating; (c) change the mood (liven things up or calm things down); (d) teach and build vocabulary and idioms; (e) review material (background music improves memory); (f) teach pronunciation and intonation; (g) teach songs and rhymes about difficult grammar and spelling rules that need to be memorized ('i before e', irregular verbs, phrasal verbs); (h) teach reading comprehension; (i) inspire a class discussion; (j) teach listening for details and gist

Language teachers can and should use songs as part of their classroom teaching repertoire. Songs contain authentic language, are easily obtainable, provide vocabulary, grammar and cultural aspects and are fun for the students. They can provide valuable speaking, listening and language practice in and out of the classroom. Some key reasons songs can work exceedingly well in the foreign language classroom include the following:

1. Songs almost always contain authentic, natural language.

This often contrasts the contrived, stilted language found in many student texts. Of course songs can also go to the other extreme by using overly crude, foul or otherwise objectionable language. With careful screening, an extensive library of usable songs for language learning can be compiled.

2. A variety of new vocabulary can be introduced to students through songs.

Looking to boost student vocabulary with useful phrases, vocabulary and expressions? Songs are almost always directed to the native-speaking population so they usually contain contemporary vocabulary, idioms and expressions. The same amount of vocabulary was acquired from listening to a song as listening to a story. More words were acquired when they were sung rather than spoken. But the greatest amount of vocabulary was acquired when the stories were both sung and illustrated! (Medina, 1993)

3. Songs are usually very easily obtainable.

Songs are usually not that difficult to obtain. Local sources may be available including the students themselves. There's always the internet which can connect you with song downloads in all but the most obscure languages.

4. Songs can be selected to suit the needs and interests of the students.

In English especially, so many songs are available that selection of songs with suitable themes, levels and vocabulary is not at all difficult. Allowances can also be made for complexity or simplicity of language, depending on the students, by selecting and using suitable songs.

5. Grammar and cultural aspects can be introduced through songs.

Most if not all songs have a recurring theme or story. So excerpting cultural elements is usually a possible, but often overlooked aspect of using songs. I still use "Hit the Road Jack" sung by the late Ray Charles to illustrate spoken contractions. He uses spoken contractions is virtually every line of the song.

6. Time length is easily controlled.

Whether you have an hour, 30 minutes, or only 15 minutes or so, a song can be used in the course of a planned lesson. Use of songs is very flexible.

7. Students can experience a wide range of accents.

A good thing about songs is that you can expose the students to many different kinds of English. British English, American English, Caribbean English are all widely available through songs. Accents too are well represented by songs from different regions and in a variety of types and formats. Gospel, soul, R & B, Pop, Rock, Reggae, Jazz and other styles change not only accents, but vocabulary and usage too.

8. Song lyrics can be used in relating to situations of the world around us.

Songs have been used as vehicles of protest for civil rights, workers' rights, even prisoners' rights along with an untold number of other causes. They've expounded on pollution, crime, war and almost every social theme or cause. We won't even mention how many songs are about, related to or explore the theme of sex.

9. Students think songs are natural and fun.

Well actually they are, aren't they? Fun, even silly songs abound in English. Some singers actually made a career out of them. (Ray Stevens, anyone?) They make offbeat, fun changes of pace with classroom use.

3. Conclusion

Art definitely has a place in the language classroom and can be used in many different ways. It is a great resource for discussions as well as practicing a variety of language. Activities incorporating art are motivating for students, provide an often welcome change of pace and can stimulate and develop creative and critical thinking skills. Arts like music and songs are useful in the language learning classroom. They contain authentic language, are easily obtainable, provide vocabulary, grammar and cultural aspects and are fun for the students. They provide enjoyable speaking, listening, vocabulary and language practice both in and out of the classroom.

4. References

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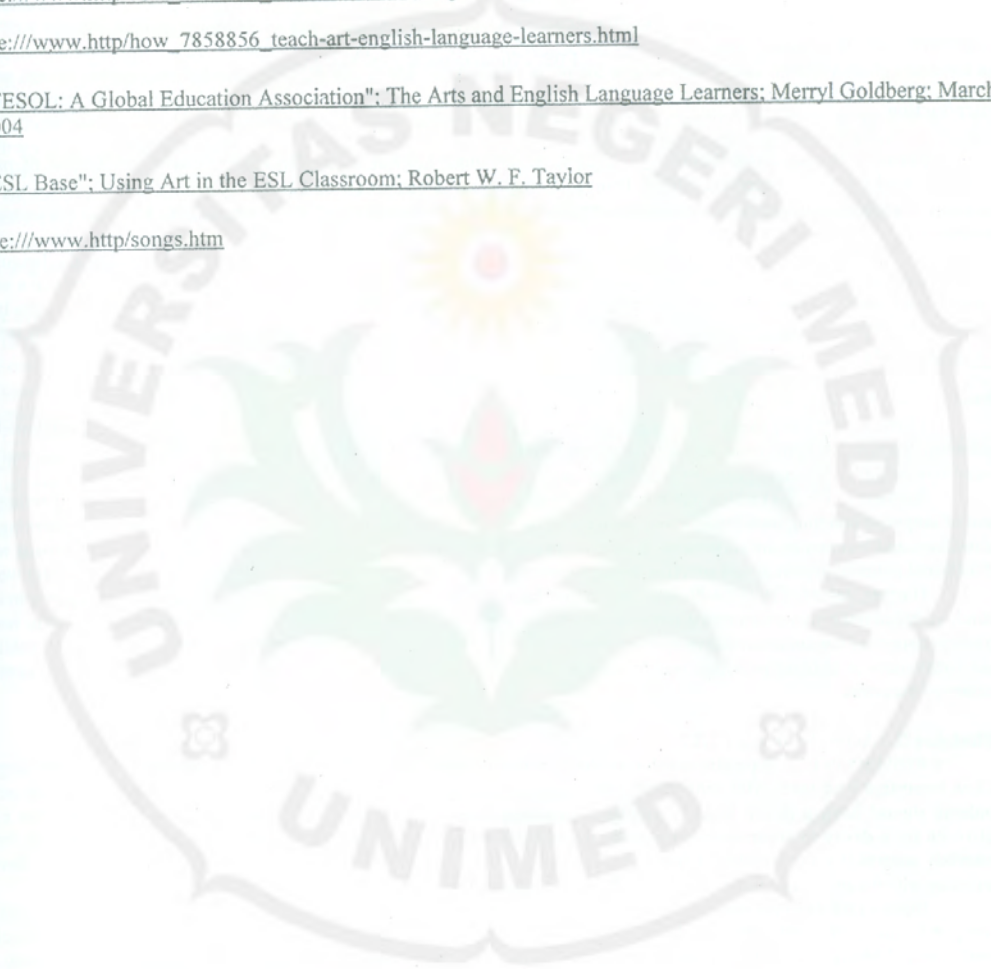
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