

english through music:

DESIGNING CLIL MATERIALS FOR YOUNG LEARNERS *

JANE WILLIS

Retired language teacher, ELT author and consultant.
jane@willis-elt.co.uk

In Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), there are always two main goals for the teacher:

- Teaching new content material.
- Helping children to acquire the language that goes with that content.

LEARNING THROUGH CLIL

If children are interested in the subject matter, or if they really want to join in an activity, they will listen hard and try to make sense of what they hear so they can participate in the lesson. The more they listen and try to understand, the more they will learn. And everyone learns a language best by experiencing it in use, so using that language to do something that they want to do, or learning something new that interests them, provides a real purpose for listening. It may well be some time before children start to speak English freely in class, but the more they hear from their teachers and other sources, the faster they will pick it up.

Content & Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Learning a subject through English provides young learners with:

- Exposure to spoken English.
- A clear purpose for listening to English and trying to understand.
- A context for using English.
- A reason for reading and writing.

MUSIC AND ENGLISH

Many subjects can be taught using a CLIL approach, but music as a content area has particular benefits, especially for children. As teachers, we know that children love music and singing and that they have a great curiosity about language. Music and language work well together. Singing is an excellent way for children to

Jane offers guidelines for developing a CLIL course for non-music specialist primary teachers of English overseas. Drawing on lively activities from music education materials from the UK, she describes how she and a music specialist co-operated to design a music syllabus and integrate a language component, keeping music lessons fun.

experiencias



Jane Willis.

* **Acknowledgement.** A shorter version of this article was originally published in *IH Journal*, Spring 2009, Issue 26. London: International House.



learn and memorise words and phrases and to develop familiarity with the sounds and structure of the language. Music helps children respond to ranges in tone, pitch and expression in the voice. It encourages children to listen carefully and concentrate hard on small details of pronunciation, stress and rhythm in the context of a song or rhythm activity.

Musical activities, like making music to accompany a familiar story, can also help children to recognise the structure of stories and poems and to sequence ideas. Through music, they learn to use the qualities of sounds effectively and to express their feelings. Through working in groups to devise and practise a music activity they learn to co-operate and listen to each other. Above all, through rehearsing and giving musical performances in a range of contexts, children develop self-confidence in speaking and in performing with control and expressiveness.

CHOOSING THE MUSIC CONTENT: FROM MATERIALS TO SYLLABUS

For any content-based course, you need to have a content specialist to advise on the content syllabus and class activities suitable for that subject matter. In my case, my content specialist was my friend Anice Paterson, who had worked in music education for many years.

I, as language specialist, began by sifting through the music materials that Anice and her team had developed for non-specialist primary teachers. I selected activities which were language-rich in some way and rewarding for both learners (with no or very little English) and for teachers (with no or only basic music skills). I needed to bear in mind that many schools have few or no musical instruments and little by way of resources, but in your school you may be luckier!

CLIL materials are often used alongside other ELT course books, so it is a good idea to cover the topics commonly found in learners' text books, and in well known songs and chants. For example, the activities I selected from Anice's stock already covered diverse topics such as polar bears, caterpillars, giants, food,

every day activities, a visit to the zoo, a journey into space. So I suggested some extra songs on typical ELT topics, for example numbers, colours, weather.

Meanwhile Anice drafted a basic music syllabus and helped me to match each music activity to syllabus objectives. We ended up with six broad syllabus components:

1. Warm-up activities for body and voice.
2. Listening and experimenting with sound: vocal sounds, body percussion and home-made instruments
3. Learning and performing songs, rhymes and chants.
4. Appreciating rhythms and making musical patterns.
5. Different ways of listening and responding to music.
6. Composing and performing class music (story-based music, musical pictures and musical trails).

VOCAL WARM-UPS

Breath control: bees buzzing, snakes, humming

Musical vowels: sirens, scales

Consonant patterns: slow: ping pong
fast: **ch ch ch ch, j j j**

Voice expression: call and response

*Boom chicka boom, boom
chicka chicka chicka boom*

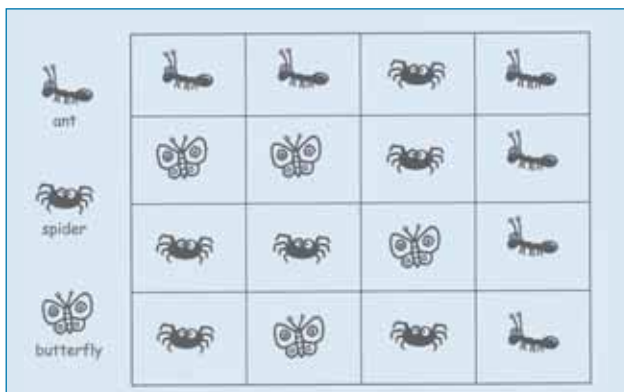
We decided to dedicate one or two units of materials to each music objective. Within each unit, activities could be arranged in order of difficulty in music; beginning with very basic music activities, and building up to more complex ones. Then followed a 'taking stock' stage: after matching our music activities to units, we found we needed to add a few more activities for balance and syllabus completeness.

RECORDING MUSIC ACTIVITIES

Music is something you listen to. We knew from the start we would need some listening materials so that teachers could hear some sample music activities being taught in English, and learners could get an idea of what they might achieve in a parallel music activity.

We found four local teachers, three out of four of whom were not music specialists, with classes of pupils aged between four and twelve. These teachers agreed to let us record them teaching the activities we had selected. They also wanted to include some of their own favourite musical activities - ones that their young learners always liked. We asked them to teach most of the activities from scratch, but also to include performances of songs and music the children had learnt or composed earlier. This meant we would get insights into learning processes (methods of music teaching) and examples of final products (the musical pieces the children could perform).

We spent two interesting days in schools recording warm-up activities with different sounds, rhythm grids like *Spider Ant*, clapping games based on the stress patterns in children's names and their lists of favourite foods, as well as chants and songs with words that teachers had written sung to well-known tunes.



Older children worked in groups on a musical composition on the topic of space travel using their voices and home-made instruments. The children of one school had a great time working up a rhythm piece using body percussion, boxes and pencils. Another class worked towards a musical performance of a story about a lonely giant, using sound effects, voice and body percussion.

ágora de profesores

General guidelines for teachers developing CLIL materials for other topics:

1. Ask a subject specialist to advise you on materials, syllabus content and methodology, including activities and techniques used to get across key concepts.
2. Explore available sources of content materials suitable for your learners. Select a range of topics and materials that will interest them.
3. Observe and, if possible, record subject teachers teaching their subject—preferably to low level or mixed ability classes. AND/OR try to record subject teachers teaching—in the target language—some of the topics you have selected.
4. Analyse the language of the lessons and of the written materials. Identify key topic vocabulary, typical patterns and discourse features in both spoken and written modes.
5. With the insights gained so far, plan units of work with tasks that will engage learners and help them to grasp the key content concepts and skills. Include tasks based on short extracts of spoken material as well as written texts.
6. For each topic / unit, identify useful lexis, patterns and language features that appear in the content materials and devise some form-focused exercises to draw learners' attention to the useful language and help them to systematize what they find.

Our advice would be to co-operate with content specialists at all stages of the process and try things out with learners—getting their feedback. There will inevitably be ups and downs, but the process itself can be very rewarding.

After the recordings we spent a week selecting and transcribing lesson extracts to illustrate each activity. We found we had around 60 activities to choose from—enough material to cover a basic musical syllabus and to fill the gaps we had noted earlier.

TOWARDS A LANGUAGE SYLLABUS: ANALYSING THE LANGUAGE

The recordings of the music lessons gave us more than enough language data to analyse. From the transcriptions we were able to find out exactly what English the teachers typically used in order to set up and carry out musical activities, as well as the language the children used. I also looked at the language used in teacher's books for primary English courses.

It became clear that teaching music through English would give children opportunities to learn English from four different sources of spoken input:

1. General classroom management and classroom language, e.g. starting lessons, getting silence, organizing groups;
2. The language used to set up the music activity itself, to attain the music aims and lead to a musical performance, e.g. talking about sounds, rehearsing rhythms, playing/singing in parts;
3. The words and phonological features of the songs, rhymes, chants, stories and mini-dialogues;
4. Further development of specific language features and/or topic vocabulary arising from the activity to include other topic areas and wider exploration of cross curricular subjects.

These four sources would offer rich and varied exposure to English, and give opportunities for children to gradually begin using it themselves.

INTEGRATING THE LANGUAGE COMPONENT

To clarify the aims of each unit of materials, we set out key topic words, language features and phonological aims alongside the musical skills for each activity.

To support teachers, we set out, in clear numbered steps, simple instructions for what to do and say in English at each stage. Where possible, we used the instructions the class teachers had used for that par-



ticular activity, in the form of direct quotations taken from the recordings. Sometimes we had to simplify them and cut out repetitions.

We had already identified more general functional language useful for the music classroom. In order to keep the activity instructions brief and specific, we added an appendix of this instructional language, for example, under 'Getting started': *I'll start you off with a signal like this... Here's your note, remember your note.'*

Music thrives on repetition and we structured many activities so that they could be repeated many times. We added ideas for musical variations for older children and /or for subsequent lessons, again with language support. For example, we used the giant story to show how any story the children know or make up can be developed into a musical performance.

So what exactly will children be learning while devising, rehearsing and performing musical stories? The following slide shows how we set out music and language aims.

SO WHAT ARE THEY LEARNING?	
<p>Musical skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experimenting with sounds. • Creating sound patterns. • Remembering a sequence. • Performing a piece. • Creating variations. 	<p>Language development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exposure to story text and to teacher talk that engages attention: imperatives, repetitions, on-going commentary. • Opportunities for participatory use of language.

FOCUSING ON LANGUAGE FEATURES

So long as the teacher is using mainly English to carry out each activity, the children will be experiencing a rich input of activity-based interaction. This should help learners acquire naturally. But we felt that a more explicit focus on the language arising from the music activity would benefit some learners and help teachers select music activities that related to their text book.

The ideal thing is to consolidate and extend the language that occurs in the musical activity. This could be controlled practice, like dialogues for intonation work, tongue-twisters, guessing games, or activities for vocabulary revision and extension, for example using rhythm grids for different lexical sets, focusing on syllable stress. Older children who are able to speak or write some English might enjoy mini-projects on themes which could be integrated with cross-curricular work.

ADVISING ON MUSIC METHODOLOGY

This is another area where the subject specialist teacher is vital, in this case to help the non-specialist primary teacher manage the music classroom, for example, how to use music signals, how to warm up the voice (excellent for pronunciation practice!), suggesting ways of teaching new songs and improving children's singing. Our teachers found especially useful

the advice on how to make musical instruments out of tins, boxes and elastic bands (and other things) and on how to get children composing and performing their own music. So, a set of practical guidelines was drawn up for each aspect of music teaching.

USING THE MATERIALS

Music materials such as these can be used in two ways, either as a basic music course per se, or to supplement a general English course. In either case, a clear Contents page is very useful. Teachers wanting a CLIL approach could use relevant units systematically as a basic course in music and music skills. For teachers wanting to dip into the materials to supplement a course book, a clear indexing system certainly helps, with a topic index and a grammar and phonology index.

However flexibly the materials are used, we gave some final advice to teachers:

AND FINALLY...

THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS...

- Use the musical activity to generate opportunities to interact with the children in English.
- Encourage children's language and music development by being positive.
- Make sure you all enjoy making music.

All in all, Anice and I both learnt a lot from co-operating on this CLIL project. I learnt a lot about music and music teaching and Anice learnt a lot about English and how languages are learnt. We hope that you too might benefit in a similar way, and enjoy trying out music in English! ■

Para saber más

- PATERSON, A., and WILLIS, J. (2008). *English through Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- PATERSON, A., and WHEWAY, D. (2010). *Kickstart Music: 3-5 years, 5-7 years, 7-9 years, 9-11years*. London: A. & C. Black.
- PATERSON, A., and WHEWAY, D. (2011). *30 Fun Ways to learn about music*. Silver Spring, MD, USA: Gryphon House Inc.
- COYLE, D. (2008). *Content and Language Integrated Learning: Motivating Learners and Teachers*. Accessed from: <http://bloqs.xtec.cat/clilpractiques1/files/2008/11/slrcogle.pdf>

hemos hablado de:

Actividades musicales, aprendizaje de lenguas, CLIL, diseño curricular.

Este artículo fue solicitado por PADRES Y MAESTROS en febrero de 2012, revisado y aceptado en noviembre de 2012 para su publicación.