

## The Impact of Music on Language Acquisition

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*As the culture of the American elementary classroom continues to diversify, teachers' practices must also evolve to best meet the needs of students, specifically, English Learners (ELs). This article encourages elementary educators to include music in their general education curriculum by highlighting the lack of music education in the classroom, which fuels the discussion for its need; discusses the historical use of language to support the impact of music on Kingergarten-6<sup>th</sup> grade speakers; and dissects the linguistic, cognitive, cultural, and social aspects of music, all of which have a positive impact on language use and development. Research findings suggest that music can have a positive impact on language acquisition by lowering students' affective filter and making them feel more comfortable while also supporting language instruction and content learning, as well as capitalizing on the common origins between language and music. Through review of journal articles spanning several decades, the conclusions in this manuscript support the benefits of music in the general education classroom, thus encouraging teachers to implement music to both native and non-native English speakers.*

*"You do not need to feel like a musical person to implement music in your classroom."*

(Lila Chavez, Elementary music educator, O'Neil Elementary School)

Despite the historically strong evidence that music is highly beneficial to the language acquisition process for elementary English Learners (ELs) (Loewy, 1995; Engh, 2013) there is very little music education occurring in the language classroom (Nillson, 2018; Engh, 2013; Salcedo, 2010). Teachers are not using music as a resource in the elementary school classroom to help students acquire language and develop literacy skills (Leavitt, 2013; Shayakhmetova, Shayakhmetova, Ashrapova, & Zhuravleva, 2017). This may be due to several reasons: teachers' lack of awareness of the linguistic benefits of music in the classroom; teachers are aware of its effectiveness but do not have much empirical data to support their claims; they do not feel musical themselves; and/or they do not know how to implement music instruction in the classroom/curriculum when they are already focused on meeting state standardized test goals (Leavitt, 2013). Moreover, elementary education teachers feel that due to the implementation of standardized testing, there is little to no time to include music in the curriculum (Engh, 2013).

Historically, music has been used around the world in both linguistic and pre-linguistic societies as one of the earliest methods of communication (Besson, Chobert, & Marie, 2011). There are not only linguistic benefits to implementing music strategies in the classroom (Vidal, Lousada, & Vigario, 2020), but also cognitive connections between language acquisition and music and lyrics in the brain. Additionally, there are positive social aspects and cultural considerations. In

this paper, we first provide information about historically early linguistic communications and their connections with music to give readers a context of the importance of music in language development. This is followed by various benefits to using music in the elementary school classroom to develop language acquisition and use, specifically addressing the linguistic, cognitive, social, and cultural aspects of language learning. Examples of songs that teachers can use in their classrooms to support specific facets of language development are integrated in these sections.

### **Historical Music and Language Use**

It is theorized that music and language have common origins (Besson et al., 2011; Brown, 2001; Mithen, 2005; Ruviano, 2003). As suggested by the philosopher Descartes (1618), there are three basic components of music, all of which interact: the physical sound, sensory perception, and the effect of the music perception on the listener. When people listen to music, they are not only receiving input from the physical sound (i.e. noises), but are also perceiving it emotionally and relating it to previous experiences. People experience these same feelings as they interpret the physical sound of language, perceive the sensory input as they dissect the meter and rhythm of the language, and make sense of the language in the context of their lives (Descartes, 1618).

Brown (2001) has coined the term “musilanguage,” which is a model and theory suggesting a common ancestor for music and language. Based on the intonation of music and language (i.e. the pitch or tone of the speaker/singer/music), the listener can determine the emphasis of specific notes and words as well as determine the emotion of the music or the speaker delivering the language. When language and music are combined (i.e. when there are lyrics with the music), the impact of song has the potential to more positively affect language acquisition because the positive effects from both music and language can apply.

As indicated above with Descartes, music can induce emotions and change behavior, which supports anthropological findings that human ancestors needed to be able to communicate through song to survive challenges (Mithen, 2005). As people speak, they use different intonations or rising and falling of voice to communicate different messages. This phrasing is evident in language, music, and song lyrics. In addition to structural evidence for similar music and language origins, there are also archaeological findings that prove the existence of music which date back to some of the most ancient human settlements (Mithen, 2005; Ruviano, 2003).

In Steven Mithen’s book *The Singing Neanderthals: The origins of Music, Language, Mind, and Body* (2005), he explores the integral role that music has played in social life and the neurological, physiological, linguistic, and ethological analyses and connections between language and music. Mithen (2005) supports two main ideas: that musicality is integral to being human and that the protolanguage of music and emotive expression predates language and influenced its creation. Not only do animals communicate with a type of musical language (e.g., vocalizations of apes and monkeys), but humans can communicate this way as well (Mithen, 2005). Generally, music is interwoven in all parts of life and impacts people and their experiences.

## **Linguistic Benefits of Music**

### **Musical Intelligence & Infant Exposure**

There is an intimate connection between language and music in humans. Music is a prelinguistic strategy for communication (Brandt, Gebrian, & Slevc, 2012; Gardner, 1993; Howle, 1989; Krashen, 1992; Loewy, 1995). In other words, music can be used to communicate prior to language use. According to Howard Gardner (1993), musical intelligence is the first intelligence to emerge. This is among other intelligences that are acquired at later stages of brain development, which include visual-spatial, linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic (Gardner, 1993). Since musical intelligence develops even before linguistic-verbal intelligence, these musical skills should be capitalized on in order to facilitate the development of language and the language acquisition process. Musical knowledge is so important that, “Without the ability to hear musically, it would be impossible to learn to speak” (Brandt et al., 2012, p. 1). Even before birth, fetuses in the womb are susceptible to experiences with language. Newborns are able to recognize familiar environmental sounds, melodies from the prenatal environment, and even distinguish maternal native language heard in the womb from other languages (Paratanen, Kujala, Tervaniemi, & Huotilainen, 2013). At 27 weeks, external auditory input can be recognized in the fetus’s auditory cortex (Paratanen et al., 2013).

Once a baby is born, mothers use a form of song/language known as “motherese” when they are communicating with their newborns (Ramirez, Lytle, & Kuhl, 2020; Loewy, 1995). It is usually high pitched, slow, and rhythmic with more melodic tendencies than typical adult speech. People communicate through sound by song (both music and lyrics) and language (Ramirez et al., 2020; Loewy, 1995). As babies receive input from music, they also begin their speech with music (e.g., babbling). Music learning, or gaining competency with the syntax of a culture’s music, matches the time it takes to acquire a language and the effort that is required to do so (Brandt et al., 2012). Nursery rhymes and lullabies are among some of babies’ first exposure to language (Howle, 1989). They take this input and memorize the songs which they can then repeat back. As children parrot the language that they are hearing in songs, they are practicing more with the language (i.e. how to say it, working with phonemes and semantics) and with multiple interactions can eventually acquire the language (Howle, 1989).

### **Music and Song as Language Learning Tools**

Music introduces and reinforces language pronunciation and grammar, as well as more nuanced aspects of language acquisition (Brandt et al., 2012; Culp, 2017; Degé & Schwarzer, 2011; Engh, 2013; Gordon, Magne, & Large, 2011; Milovanov & Tervaniemi, 2011; Zhang, 2011). These skills include phoneme discrimination, stress patterns, prosody, segmentation of syllables, phonics, rhyming, blending, intonation patterns, and vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, music can influence the basic abilities for pronunciation and reading (i.e. language phonetic coding and auditory perception skills – the way sounds are interpreted) (Gomez-Doninguez, Fonseca-Mora, & Machancoses, 2018; Vidal et al., 2020). Songs with music and lyrics can be used as resources for teaching and reinforcing sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives, adverbs, and more (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Besson et al., 2011; Li & Brand, 2009;

Milovanov & Tervaniemi, 2011). According to Gomez-Dominguez et al., (2018) phonological training programs with and without musical support can have significant effects on second-graders' foreign language early reading skills. However, after further research, they concluded that, "...the results...show a full mediation indicating a close link between the basic auditory analysis skills necessary for music perception, such as rhythmic and tonal discrimination, and early reading abilities across L1 [language one] and FL [foreign language, or L2]" (2018, p. 9). This supports the benefits of a music program to develop language with ELs.

People in general who listen to music can learn aspects of language such as: prosody, rhythmic characteristics, melody, and pitch (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008). In particular, when elementary school students are using songs and music, they are hearing the cadence of the language, as well as practicing the sounds and intonation (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008). Also, using music to supplement instruction is a change from more rudimentary and traditional techniques. Children learn through play (Sakellariou & Banoui, 2020), and they have the opportunity to integrate learning and play while listening to and doing activities with music (L. Chavez, personal communication, December 2018).

As students acquire language skills, they will need to practice rhyming, segmenting, and blending in order to use the language to construct sentences and participate in discourse. Songs can be used to provide exercises with direct instruction in rhythm and analysis of song lyrics to promote training in these abilities (Degé & Schwarzer, 2011). More specifically, Carolyn Graham's Jazz chants are a recommended tool for language acquisition for ELs of all ages because they are a natural, rhythmic expression of language that incorporates rhythms, stress, and intonation patterns that are a replica of native English speaker language (Graham, 1978; Zhang, 2011). As students are chanting the language with a beat, which is less complex than a song with different rhythms and melodies, they have multiple opportunities to interact with the language. The teacher first previews the chant and explains the cultural context. The students listen to the chant; the teacher and students choral chant, and then students participate in group and individual chanting as necessary (Zhang, 2011). A jazz chant resembles poetry. One example is the jazz chant "Rain" (Miroshina, 2015). It begins:

*It was raining, raining, raining hard.  
It was falling on my head.  
It was falling on the stars.  
It was falling on the sun.  
It was falling on my shoes. I got soaking wet.  
I got soaking wet. But I stayed outside.*

From this piece, ELs can learn more about rain, how to describe an event using sensory details, and how to use the present progressive verb tense to describe what is happening now or what will happen in the future.

Another critical skill of language development for ELs is prosody and stress patterns. Prosody is intonation, tone, stress, and rhythm in a language (Gordon et al., 2011). In order for people to develop fluency with language, they must practice prosody. ELs can learn about stress patterns and prosody from music in English, which can increase their English language skills. Well-

aligned songs focus listener attention and then students are better attuned to segmentation of syllables (good for phonics skill development and speaking/reading fluency) and comprehension of songs (Gordon et al., 2011). An example of a well aligned song that focuses on stress patterns and prosody is “The Princess Pat” which includes lyrics like, “The princess pat, (the princess pat) lived in a tree, (lived in a tree) she sailed across (she sailed across) the seven seas, (the seven seas)” (“Princess Pat”). Children have the opportunity to repeat the lyrics twice, which emphasizes the sounds that are made with these words. Two suggestions for using songs in the classroom to develop the aforementioned language skills are studying the grammar of song lyrics and practicing selective-targeted auditory comprehension (Murphey, 1989). This song can be used in a wide range of classrooms from the Kindergarten level to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Another recommendation is writing dialogues using a song’s words, which encourages application of language (Murphey, 1989). Elementary students can use specific language or phrases from a song and create an extended story using what they have learned from the song.

Some of the key features of music make it a great tool for language learning. Pop music includes conversation-like language that occurs at half the speed of spoken discourse (Murphey, 1992). As a result, people who are acquiring the language of the song are receiving less input in the same amount of time as if they might be having a conversation with someone or listening to a dialogue (Murphey, 1992). This can make it easier to understand and digest the incoming information because there is not as much to comprehend. Additionally, language in pop songs (in English) is commonly associated with the level of eleven-year-old native English speaker (Murphey, 1992). Therefore, people can learn natural, everyday discourse and vocabulary by listening to popular songs. This may also be referred to as basic interpersonal communicative skills or BICS, as coined by Jim Cummins (1999). Moreover, songs in different genres such as country, pop, and rap include colloquial language that is specific to either different geographic locations or with different ethnic groups of people. For instance, the country song “Amarillo By Morning” (George Strait, 1982) includes lyrics such as “Up from San Antone,” which refers to San Antonio, Texas, and “When that sun is high in that Texas sky, I’ll be buckin’ at the county fair” which refers to participating in a type of rodeo event at a county fair. This language is specific to the style of country music and the geographic location of the song (i.e. Texas). Not only does the elementary EL benefit from learning the language and colloquialisms, but also, he/she can learn the culture of the people who created this song, which is cross-curricular learning.

### **Applications of Language Supported by Music**

Once ELs have acquired the basics of a language, music can continue to support literacy development, reading, listening skills, writing, and speaking, all of which are applications of language (Culp, 2017; Engh, 2013; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Students who learn through the application of music and song are also more likely to be engaged in reading (Culp, 2017; Jalongo & Ribblett, 1997). From music, students become familiar with the language and have opportunities for enjoyment in both production and expression of language and feelings. Moreover, students are exposed to repetition, an expanding vocabulary, story structures (e.g., as they consider a song that is a story with music and what the songwriter is attempting to communicate), critical thinking opportunities, and chances to foster creative expression (Jalongo & Ribblett, 1997). As students advance from listening to music to producing their own by

writing poetry that can be turned into lyrics and paired with music, they can improve writing skills as they tell their own story through song (Paquette & Rieg, 2008). Students also make literature connections and learn content as songs teach and reinforce new and previously learned information (Batchelor & Bintz, 2012).

### ***Introduction to Academic Language***

Students are introduced to academic language as they learn specific content through song lyrics as well as native speaker discourse and colloquial language (Engh, 2013; Murphey, 1992). This is also known as cognitive academic language proficiency, or CALP, as stated by Jim Cummins (1999). From the song “Head, Shoulders Knees, and Toes,” young students can learn parts of their body as they sing the song.

Additional academic language can be introduced in songs that the teacher selects or creates to teach content in the classroom. Some examples include the songs in the music production “What’s Shakin’ Shakespeare.” “A Dark and Stormy Night” teaches children about the works of Edgar Allan Poe, and “The Moral of the Story” instructs about Aesop’s fables. These songs help children learn about iconic literary works and academic language through lyrics. Cummins argues that CALP should be an instructional focus for ELs as they learn academic content, cognitive skills, and critical language awareness (1999).

## **Cognitive Connections**

### **Similar Processing of Language and Music**

As supported by neuroimaging, music is processed in the language areas of the brain (Brandt et al., 2012; Lake, 2003; Milovanov & Tervaniemi, 2011; Patel, 2003; Reifinger, 2018). Both music and language have, “...perceptually discrete elements organized into hierarchically structured sequences” (Patel, 2003, p. 674). In other words, music and language have smaller units of information that can be combined to communicate a more extensive message. For example, individual music notes can be combined to create an arrangement for a song and letters and their accompanying sounds can be combined to make words, sentences, and longer messages. As people perceive these messages, they must perceive the sound, interpret what it means, and connect it with what they already know.

Songs are linguistically processed in a similar manner as in conversational discourse (Murphey, 1989). When considering syntactic processing in language (Dependency Locality Theory, or DLT), linguistic sentence comprehension demands neural resources (Patel, 2003). In other words, when people are perceiving language, they are using their brain power to perceive the physical sound, interpret the incoming message, and relate it to what they know. A message can be broken down into many components, such as the individual sounds of letters, the meaning of different words, the syntax of the sentence, and the meaning of the whole message. One neural resource is structural storage and another is structural integration. When people use structural storage, they are keeping information in their brains. As they experience language, they remember different syntactic categories of the components of language and store them for use at a later time. This happens with music too. Structural integration involves using what you know

to connect it with incoming information (Patel, 2003). As a person hears language, he/she connects it with prior words that they have heard before to make sense of the sentence. The location of words (i.e. the “locality”) can determine their meaning (Patel, 2003). Accordingly, language follows a pattern and people can predict what is supposed to come next. The same is true of music as well.

### Recall Aided by Music and Lyrics

Language in the form of a song is better committed to memory, which can increase the likelihood of recall (Fonseca Mora, 2000; Murphey, 1992; Novak, Moroni, Des Jardins, Vang, Matoska, & Keenan, 2019). The same brain regions are activated during verbal and musical short-term memory tasks. Furthermore, people who are more exposed to music can hold more information for longer periods of time in auditory memory (Besson et al., 2011). They have trained this memory to focus on songs. This evidence supports music being used as a memory aid. Most songs are typically around three and a half minutes. The average music listener is training his/her brain to focus for this specific amount of time on the message that the song is communicating. This focus can be applied in other contexts, such as when using language. Additionally, people who are musicians are training their brains to focus for the length of time they are playing. The brain is said to be a muscle: it must be trained and used regularly in order to perform at its greatest capacity.

Students are better able to recall text when they have music to supplement instruction (Salcedo, 2010). Melodic text is the easiest to remember. In contrast, spoken text, which is often repeated and simple, is the least frequently recalled (Salcedo, 2010). With melodic text, students store the lexical patterns of songs in their long-term musical memory (Fonseca Mora, 2000). As a result, students remember what a song is communicating and recall the information later (Fonseca Mora, 2000). Examples of songs that can help students recall information are the quadratic formula song for mathematics and “Fifty Nifty” which is a song about the states that make up the United States of America. Not only are students remembering the specific language structures that are used in the song and how to produce them, but also the content and information in the song lyrics (e.g. the names of the states in alphabetical order).



Figure 1. Map of the United States.

The quadratic formula:

$$x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}$$

Figure 2. Quadratic formula for mathematics.

### Similar Brain Processing for Music and Language

Auditory processing is engaged with both language and music. As this incoming information in the form of language or music is interpreted, people are processing it similarly (Degé & Schwarzer, 2011; Gordon et al., 2011; Lake, 2003). While it is known that in the brain, music and language have similar processing despite lateralization that is developed over time (e.g., language in the left hemisphere, music in the right hemisphere), auditory processing is imperative in both language and music (Brandt et al., 2012). Musical training develops a greater processing ability in the temporal region of the brain where auditory information is managed (Milovanov & Tervaniemi, 2011).

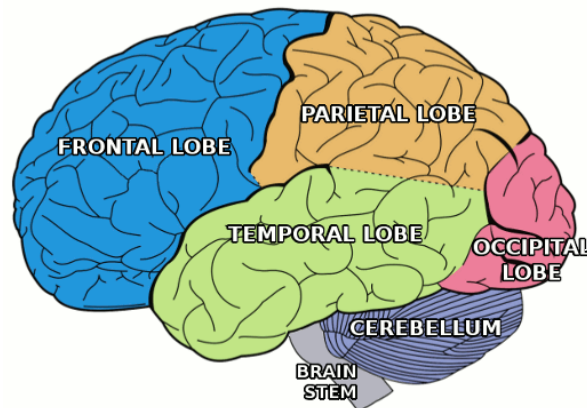


Figure 3. Sections of the brain (Anatomy Info., 2018)

This is important in processing language, and most notably with phonological segmentation. When linguistic stress and musical meter (e.g., beats) are aligned in music, beat tracking and comprehension of lyrics is enhanced and there is increased neural activity with strong syllables in songs (Gordon et al., 2011). Songs that have alignment between beats and strong syllables can aid in language learning because specific sounds are emphasized (Gordon et al., 2011). For example, in the song “Everybody Dance Now!” which was originally sung by C+C Music Factory but has now been adapted for the elementary classroom, children can learn short e, b, d, and n sounds as they listen to the hard beats at the beginning of the syllables in the words *everybody dance now* (Clivillés & Williams, 1990). Another song is “I Like to Move It” as featured in the popular children’s movie *Madagascar*. As students listen to this song, they can learn long i, l, t, m, and short i as these are the sounds that are emphasized with the beat of the song (Morillo & Quashie, 2005).

### Affective Filter

The affective filter can be lowered by music, which increases the likelihood of output and permits greater intake of input (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Claerr & Gargan, 1984; Coe, 1972; Fonseca Mora, 2000; Krashen, 1992; Lake, 2003; McMillian & Chavis, 1986; Merriam, 1964; Murphey, 1989; Murphey, 1992; Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Wilcox, 1995). According to Krashen (1992), the best learning happens when students experience low anxiety, high self-confidence,



and high motivation. When these conditions are not being met, people employ an “affective filter” which acts as a barrier to incoming and outgoing language and inhibits language learning, processing, and production (Oxford, 2000; Krashen, 1992). The teacher must strive to create conditions that support a low affective filter. For example, teachers must be motivating and have a positive attitude, which cultivates a relaxed learning environment (Du, 2009). Music with and without lyrics can meet this need as it makes students feel more relaxed and receptive to learning language, which facilitates a lowered affective filter (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Parlindungan, 2019; Paquette & Rieg, 2008). If students are more relaxed, then their affective filters are lower which supports language acquisition and speech production. Additionally, music can lower levels of stress and anxiety in people in general (Raglio, Bellandi, Gianotti, Zancchi, Gnesi, Monti, Montomoli, Vico, Imbriani, Giorgi, & Imbriani, 2019). This, in turn, lowers the affective filter (Claerr & Gargan, 1984; Coe, 1972; Merriam, 1964; Wilcox, 1995).

Students’ confidence levels in their language abilities often lead to higher levels of motivation to participate in using language in and out of the classroom (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Oxford, 2000). Songs can be used as a motivating factor in the classroom in order to encourage communication. If children are not motivated to communicate, they will not be actively involved or have a positive attitude toward learning (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008, Oxford, 2000). They will have a high affective filter which inhibits and negatively impacts language acquisition. Songs can motivate students in areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008).

While music can encourage discussion of the topic of the song and practice with the language being used, it can also create a sense of calm in the classroom. Students are encouraged to be quiet when the music is playing because they need to focus on the incoming auditory information (Fonseca Mora, 2000). This can be incorporated in meditation, or, “...an act of focusing one’s thoughts completely and fully” (Jenkins, 2015, pg. 36). Not only can this lead to more focus and learning as ELs are listening to calming sounds of ocean waves, rain, a waterfall, or other relaxing music, but it can also decrease behavioral issues among all students. As reported by EL teacher Amy Jenkins, “Meditation in class helped my students to be more focused and open to language acquisition” (2015, p. 38). As a result, the environment is relaxing. A classroom that is calm will help to lower students’ affective filters and promote language acquisition.

### **Sociocultural Aspects**

#### **Emotional Music & Acculturation**

Many elementary ELs come to school feeling uncertain and timid because they are unfamiliar with English (Goldenberg, 2008; Fitzgerald & Noblit, 2009). However, song can help the acculturation process with emotional music and lyrics, thereby creating a more welcoming and empathetic classroom environment (Lake, 2003). According to Cook (2018), acculturation is the retention of one’s own culture and the adaption of some aspects of the majority culture. Not to be confused with assimilation, this process is not negative, as culturally pluralistic societies are strengthened by acculturation. Emotional music and lyrics elicit strong feelings from listeners. For instance, the song “Say Something” by A Great Big World (2013) includes lyrics such as “And I will stumble and fall/ I’m still learning to love/ Just starting to crawl/ Say something, I’m

giving up on you” which can be interpreted as feeling the regret and worry that comes from being separated from someone very important. Likewise, students who listen to emotional music from all language and cultures have the opportunity to connect empathetically and experience acculturation as one of the many factors of second language acquisition (Graham & Brown, 1996).

Additionally, in the monitor model, as people hear language, they acquire it (i.e. take it in) and then make sense of it (Krashen, 1992). When emotion and language are combined in a song, as well as are coupled with visuals created with imagery (e.g., people crying due to the loss of a family member, the destruction of a home by fire, or the end of a relationship) music can be a powerful language learning tool (Krashen, 1992). Using music provides opportunities for students to take in the information and then make sense of it in a few different ways: reading it, listening to it, focusing on the music, focusing on the lyrics, and interpreting it visually.

Music can bring students together by building trust and cooperation and fostering social bonding (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Ruviano, 2003). Music not only enhances harmony among those listening and engaging with the music but can also provide a safe space to experience learning collectively and an opportunity to build community (Paquette & Rieg, 2008). These social benefits support attaining teaching and learning goals because a cooperative classroom requires harmony. While acculturation is not ultimately the goal as students are learning the language, it is a potential outcome as students feel the emotions and underlying messages communicated through language. As students are engaged in singing, there is group participation which supports building trust and support among students (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). One student is not being singled out for not knowing the song. Often students, specifically ELs, approach the school environment with a feeling of anomie, which is social uncertainty, and can be akin to homelessness (Lake, 2003). Students may feel like they are completely separated from their home cultures, and Lake (2003) found that music improves the solidarity feeling of a class. In other words, as music is integrated, students feel more social unity and mutual support within a group.

One specific example of music being a catalyst for the acculturation process is implementing Woody Guthrie’s (1944) song, “This Land is Your Land.” As students read the lyrics and listen to the music in the song, it is the hope that they will feel more accepted in their new environment. Socially, students will feel that they are a part of a common culture:

*“This land is your land  
This land is my land  
From California, to the New York Island  
From the Redwood Forest, to the Gulf Stream water,  
This land was made for you and me”*

Not only can students build social community as they identify with a common culture, but they can also learn content about culture from music.

### **Using Music to Develop Multiculturalism and Intercultural Competence**

Music can be used to cultivate multiculturalism and intercultural competence (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008; Brand, 2007; Howard, 2018; Shayakhmetova et al., 2017; Zhang, 2011). As students listen to the lyrics of songs, they learn about new cultures (Brand, 2007). In particular, students can study different holidays from a variety of cultures (personal communication, Chavez, 2018) (i.e. Diwali, Christmas, and Chanukah). Diwali is the Hindu festival of lights and is celebrated in the fall. Chanukah is the Jewish festival of lights celebrated in fall/winter. Christmas is celebrated in winter. All three cultures have songs and dance forms that students can compare and contrast to help develop a more inclusive sense of belonging (personal communication, Chavez, 2018).

Songs that are culturally relevant can be used as tools for introducing cultural themes and are opportunities to be exposed to ‘authentic texts’ (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008). Lyrics can be considered ‘authentic texts’ because the language that the people are using in the songs are often unique and specific to a particular culture (Ajibade & Ndububa, 2008). Students learn about culture specific language and vocabulary from these different authentic texts. Additionally, they are exposed to different cultural values based on the information that is being presented in the music (Brand, 2007). For instance, in a study during which students listened to music about British culture in order to develop intercultural competence, 17% of students in the experiment group increased their intercultural competence from an initial pre-test to a post-test (Shayakhmetova et al., 2017). This is in stark contrast to the 3% of students in the control group who were able to increase their intercultural competence without music between a pre- and post-test (Shayakhmetova et al., 2017).

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) happens when teachers introduce a cultural context for the information being studied in the classroom. This improves specific language competence and prepares students for the future by cultivating multilingual interests and attitudes (Zhang, 2011). This can be done through listening to the musical notes of a song and how it differs across cultures (e.g., what instruments are used, how are the beats and rhythms different) as well as the language that is used and the information that is being communicated. As students listen to music, they can develop multicultural competence, which is the “...desire or motivation to understand, appreciate, and accept the differences between diverse cultures” (Dziedziewicz, Gajda, & Karwowski, 2014, p. 33). This can be manifested in a variety of ways such as judgmental awareness (e.g., personal and in other people), distinctive traits across cultures, curiosity and motivation to learn, as well as a respect for others (Howard, 2018).

### **Empathy**

Music often creates powerful empathetic emotions in students while they are learning about another culture (Howard, 2018). This can be beneficial for ELs learning about the culture into which they are acculturating or for native speakers in the classroom to understand the culture from which ELs might have come. Moreover, music can be a venue for children to increase their ability to engage in taking another person’s perspective (i.e. experiencing heightening social inferences); work through difficult feelings; and understand, appreciate, and accept the differences between diverse cultures that exist (Howard, 2018). Students might experience group

guilt as they learn about racism in music and recognize the power that some groups of people have over those who are disadvantaged (Howard, 2018). The more exposure that children have to music that is diverse and offers different perspectives, the more empathetic and culturally aware they can be (Howard, 2018). To illustrate this point, one song that perpetuates a stereotype of Arabic culture is “Arabian Nights” from the popular Disney movie *Aladdin*. The lyrics say, “When the wind’s from the east and the sun’s from the west, and the sand in the glass is right, come on down stop on by, hop on a carpet and fly, to another Arabian night” (“Arabian Nights”, 1992). People in Arab nations are not actually flying on carpets. As students listen to this song, they can note the details in the lyrics. Then, it is imperative that the teacher engages the students in a discussion about the difference between the stereotyped culture and reality. Students should understand the danger of stereotypes and the ways in which they can perpetuate a false understanding of culture. By discussing the music and lyrics, ELs are using language that they have been pre-exposed to and can use to fuel their conversations. In order to have these types of conversations, students must be comfortable. These feelings are fostered with a low affective filter, which music has the potential to nurture.

Another example of music that can cultivate empathy in listeners is the songs that slaves sang while working in the fields. One such song is “Hoe Emma Hoe” (Colonial Williamsburg). The songs regulated work pace for laborers, but also served a purpose for slaves to talk about their master, overseers, and the hardships they were enduring (Colonial Williamsburg). “Hoe Emma Hoe” begins:

*Caller: Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Caller: Emma, you from the country.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Caller: Emma help me to pull these weeds.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Caller: Emma work harder than two grown men.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, you turn around dig a hole in the ground, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*(Repeat)*  
 (Colonial Williamsburg)

This first stanza is followed by three more, ending with:

*Caller: Master he be a hard hard man.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Caller: Sell my people away from me.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Caller: Lord send my people into Egypt land.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*Caller: Lord strike down Pharaoh and set them free.*  
*Chorus: Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe, Hoe Emma Hoe.*  
*(Repeat)*  
 (Colonial Williamsburg)

The work song begins by creating a context and as it continues, the listener learns more about the hardships and struggles of the worker. As students listen to this song, they can experience the emotions of the workers in the field and empathize with the challenging labor, physically and emotionally draining lifestyle, and the reality of these people's lives at this time. Music is a conversation starter as students consider blatant discriminatory practices and stereotyping cultures (Howard, 2018).

### **Music as a Social Narrative**

Music is an artifact that can act as a window into the past to help students understand specific cultural contexts (Engh, 2013). Music, like writing, is a way for people to communicate. It should be viewed as a piece of history and a social narrative of what is/was happening in the world at a specific time. The artist is communicating a specific message in music: "Music, while universal, is culturally specific in that the musical context and style mirror a particular culture, acting as a cultural artifact that may both reflect and influence that culture" (Engh, 2013, p. 115). People make music about what is important to them. Music typically represents what was happening at the time the author was writing the song. This is found in folk music, pop music, poetry, and lots of other types of art. One example is: "War, what is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Say it again" (Edwin Starr, 1970). This song was written to protest the Vietnam war. There is an opportunity for students to connect their own cultures to music and historical events, which can make them more invested in learning (Cortés Santiago, 2012; Goldenberg, 2008). In thinking about music as a text for students, the concepts must be relatable so that students not only apply background knowledge and learn new content, but also have a relationship with the information they are learning (Goldenberg, 2008). While music can be a great tool to teach students about new culture, finding songs which students relate to is a powerful teaching tool (Cortés Santiago, 2012; Goldenberg, 2008).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

People make sense of the world around them through communication. As learners in the classroom are educated, they receive input and produce output in the form of language. Elementary ELs can benefit from the infusion of music in the general education classroom in order to acquire and develop language to further their learning. Historically, music and language share connections in terms of development due to emphasis of musical notes, which is similar to sounds in language. By drawing on this relationship, teachers can capitalize on the linguistic benefits of music, such as introducing and reinforcing language pronunciation and grammar. Applications of language, such as reading, listening, writing, and speaking, are also supported by music and lyrics. From the words that accompany song, students can be introduced to academic language. As the brain uses similar processing for music and language, the many benefits of linking them include better recall and a lower affective filter, which can be groundbreaking for the language development of an EL. The sociocultural benefits of implementing music and lyrics in the classroom not only aids in acculturation, but also brings students together and fosters empathy, multiculturalism, and understanding how music tells the stories of people's lives.

This information is imperative as the population of elementary classrooms continues to diversify and the number of ELs continues to grow. Music not only introduces, but also reinforces

language. Teachers who do not feel “musical” are encouraged to try sharing music with their students and unlocking the potential this wonderful tool has to offer, linguistically, academically, socially, and culturally.

### **Author Notes**

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