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LEARNING ENGLISH CAN BE FUN¹

APRENDER INGLÊS PODE SER DIVERTIDO

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ABSTRACT

This article emphasizes the use of songs for teaching a foreign language (English), not as a simple activity to waste the time of the students but as a pleasurable and motivating activity to make lessons more attractive and fun for the process of student learning, because it emphasizes the learning of the four skills of English (listening, speaking, reading and writing) making classes a time of fun and learning for the students, without losing the focus that is the process of learning a foreign language.

Keywords: music, foreign language, learning.

RESUMO

Este artigo prioriza o uso de músicas para o ensino de uma língua

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estrangeira (inglês), não como uma simples atividade para desperdiçar o tempo do aluno; mas também como uma atividade prazerosa e motivadora para tornar as aulas mais atraentes e divertidas durante o processo de aprendizagem do aluno; pois evidencia o aprendizado das quatro habilidades da língua inglesa (ouvir, falar, ler e escrever) transformando as aulas num momento de descontração e aprendizado para os alunos, sem perder o foco que é o processo de aprendizagem da língua estrangeira.

Palavras-chave: música; língua estrangeira; aprendizagem.

Nowadays English students do not need to attend boring classes anymore to learn English. The teachers have a wide and assorted variety of techniques and methodologies to use to make the class funnier and more interesting.

The use of songs and movies in the class for teaching the language is surprisingly increasing and the teachers can use their creativity to make the exercise funny and useful at the same time. Of course that when we talk about using songs and videos in the class we are not saying that the teachers will play it for the students just to waste some time. The activity must be explored and prepared previously so that the students can learn something from it. The activity must be really useful for the English language learning.

Music has been used in class in many ways and for different reasons, particularly in Suggestopedia (LOZANOV, 1978) through which music creates a relaxing learning environment for students. Music stimulates images for the inner eye, even in students who claim to have no imagination. Music promotes conversation because listeners may interpret the same piece of music differently. Music makes people act spontaneously, not only on a dance floor but also in a classroom. And of course there are many other different reasons why to use music to teach the English language, for instance, we can utilize the music to prepare a whole lesson with the four skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking, it just depends on the way the lesson is prepared.

HOW TO CHOOSE A SONG TO PREPARE AN ENGLISH LESSON

There are many different ways to prepare a lesson using songs. To begin with, it has to be chosen for some reason, not only because it is a top hit, but also because it has something good to offer the students. There are many important points to look at when the teacher is going

to choose the music and he/she must be focused on the objective and the content of the unit he/she is preparing.

Teacher can pick a song because of its vocabulary, because of a grammar point or some idioms, etc. There is a great deal of reasons explaining why the teacher has chosen each song to prepare their lessons, but it is important to choose the right song according to what they are teaching to their students; this way they will be focused on what is really important during the activity.

The song must also be chosen according to the level of the students, because if the teacher chooses a song that is very easy or, on the other hand, that is very difficult for the students; they will not achieve their goal, and instead of providing a funny activity, the class will be considered boring and stressful by the students, what may make them lose the interest in this kind of activity.

AFTER CHOOSING THE RIGHT SONG

After selecting the right song, the teacher must study it to be well prepared to work with it, so that he/she may feel comfortable to use the song with the students, knowing all the expressions, new vocabulary and grammatical topics used in the lyrics of the song. Furthermore it is very interesting to know if the song brings any kind of history or explanation to tell the students, in order to have them a little bit more involved with the song and as a result, in the activity too.

As songs are used to teach English as a foreign language for a long time, we can say that after selecting it, here comes the creative work of the teacher to prepare the lesson that will fulfill the teacher's expectations and motivate the students to get their attention and participation during the development of the activity.

The teachers have many ways to prepare different, funny and interesting activities for the students. Nowadays we can count on the

new technologies for it, especially the internet that offers a lot of tools to the teacher and is very good to catch, which attention of the students, since teachers are using something the students are really interested in. We can download the song from the internet, or find a video for that song and so on, increasing the activity. Students can do it at home as a homework activity, but if the school has a computer lab, the students can also use it to make this search and download from the internet.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO PREPARE A GOOD LESSON

Now let's talk about the next step to prepare a good lesson for the students, that is how to prepare the activity that will be taught to them, which will motivate, challenge and keep the attention of the students.

The teacher can start any activity related to songs by teaching and explaining the students the new vocabulary provided by the song. It can be done as a pre-reading activity, so the teacher teaches the new vocabulary and the new idioms and expressions that will be seen and that will appear in the song for the students. This way they will be able to understand all the new vocabulary as soon as they listen to the expressions in the song.

After studying the new vocabulary, the teacher can play the song in so many different ways that will be explained soon after, and that is when the entertainment starts. Here some common techniques, which are usually successful among my students.

The simplest way to play a song for the students is that when you just play it, ask them to listen to it. After they have already listened to it you can read the lyrics of the song for the students and ask them to repeat it in order to practice the pronunciation of the sentences they have just listened to. Thereafter, depending on the level of the

students you can translate the new words of the song with their help or if it is possible you will just explain them the meaning of the new words and expressions found on it. There is a procedure that is very good to be used when you have an easy song and you want your students to have a moment of relaxation, so if you play the song for the students with the lights of the classroom off, they can have a moment to close their eyes, relax, and feel the song they are just listening to, but it is important to remember that to have a good result with this, it must be a song with vocabulary that the students are able to understand. Otherwise, the result will be a disaster because if they cannot figure the context of the song out, they will be really disappointed after the lights are on again. And all the fun and the relaxation moment that is expected will be gone.

As I said this is just the simplest way to play a song for the students, I have experienced other good and attractive ways to prepare a good and exciting activity that will provide not only a challenge for the students, but also some moments of entertainment and learning in a different way. From now on I am going to explain some different and fascinating procedures to develop such activities with the students:

- There is an activity that is called “Blank song”: in this activity the teacher will prepare the song previously, reading it and according to the level of the students that will work with this activity, the teacher will withdraw some words from it, then he/she plays it for the students, having first given them the page with the lyrics of the song with the missing words and the blank spaces on it. They should complete the song with the correct words that are missing as soon as they listen to them. The teacher should play the song for the students at least three times, doing this he/she will check with the students what they could get from listening to the song. If they could not get all the missing words correctly

or there are still missing spaces in their song, it is necessary that he/she plays it once or twice again, and if they still have not got all the right words, the teacher can help the students to get the missing words by repeating the sentences where they still have missing words, and as a last resource, reading the sentences for them to get it. After it is done and the students have completed the whole song it is good to work with the overall understanding of the lyrics of the song with the students.

- Another very good technique is that, after choosing the right song for the students, the teacher will prepare it by listening to it and then he/she will change some words and/or phrases in the song to different ones rather than the right ones that make part of the lyrics of the song. After that, the teacher will play the song for the students, again three or four times, according to the level of difficulty of the exercise, and ask students to correct the wrong words or sentences while they are listening to it. This activity is really challenging and it is a very good listening exercise for the students.
- There is a technique called “Puzzle Music”. After choosing the song, a puzzle is created with the lyrics of the song by printing them in a paper using a big size of block letters and then whole song is cut in sentences. The students are given the song in pieces and are asked to mix these pieces and then arrange them in half of their chair. Then the song is played for them several times and are asked to try to put it in order on the other half of their chair while they are listening to it. It is not a very difficult activity and the students love to do it, because it is another challenging activity that they are producing and, at the same time they are practising the listening comprehension, they are also developing writing skills of coherence and cohesion.

These are just some of the techniques available to change a song into an exercise and teach my students while having so many moments of fun during the classes, but surely using creativity and searching for other techniques the teacher is able to find out many other ways to motivate their students to learn English from songs, making a nice environment in the classroom, a place where the students know that they can learn by having some fun. Sure these techniques were not created by us, we have experienced them as a students and now we could improve them to comply with the needs of the students.

POST LISTENING ACTIVITIES

Therefore it is very important to say that after producing this kind of activity the teacher is able to produce other exercises and activities with the same song he/she has already used. After finishing any kind of activity using a song the teacher has to read the song with the students to work with its pronunciation and its meaning, and after this, the song becomes a text. So the teacher is able to prepare activities again according to the level of his/her students. These exercises can be comprehension exercises, where the teacher will ask questions about the song for the students. The teacher can also start a discussion about the theme of the song with the students and create a conversation activity for the students, so they can debate their opinions about it, and so on. It will depend on the creativity of the teacher to motivate and get the attention of their students and help them to learn not only with texts and grammar rules, but also with something they really like.

It is noteworthy that the teacher shows the students the importance of using songs to teach English and explain how and how much they can learn with songs, and of course this is going to be used as extra activities to enrich the classes, not as a way of wasting the students' time. It has to be a good interaction between students and teachers,

and between learning and entertainment, because when the teachers prepare pleasurable activities for their students, they can help motivating the students to learn and have pleasure in the classroom while they are learning the English language. Otherwise, if the students do not understand the importance of this activity and the reasons why the teacher is using songs to teach English, they can think that the teacher is just trying to waste their time for nothing instead of teaching something important to them.

CONCLUSION

After the experience of using song activities in the classes, it is amazing to notice how students have improved their listening skills, and of course, how much they have increased their vocabulary from it, because when you use texts to teach new vocabulary, the students will forget these texts and will not read it again. However, they will listen and sing along with the song as much as they want to, which will help them to memorize the new words and expressions they have learnt from them. And the most important is that the students get motivated with such activities, so they do not think their course is just another boring English course, but one that offers an interesting, motivating and funny way to learn English.

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