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LITERATURA E LÍNGUA INGLESA II

MUSIC AS TEACHING MATERIAL IN ENGLISH AS ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE CLASSES

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1. Introduction

Music is everywhere. It can be playing as background song when you go to a nice restaurant or even on your way home, in the car or on the bus. Music is something that helps in one's welfare and emotions, bringing harmony to this person's life. Nowadays, we see this scenario even inside the classroom. Students use their earplugs when having classes, one of the reasons being to "keep they focused", as a number of them have already reported to me. For this reason, I believe that music can be part of the teaching process, serving as a tool to help in the learning of an additional language (AL), since it is part of people's lives and because AL classes somehow should be connected to students' real lives. According to Farias (2001 apud SOUZA, 2012, p. 3)

> A música como sempre, esteve presente na vida dos seres humanos, ela também sempre está presente na escola para dar vida ao ambiente escolar e favorecer a socialização dos alunos, além de despertar neles o senso de criação e recreação.

Based on this, exploring songs in a classroom may contribute to students' interests and their meaningful learning of an AL, for example.

In order to establish a connection between music and students' real lives, teachers should be willing to work with technologies, or playful material, to make students feel motivated and relate, somehow, their daily lives to learning English as an AL. However, there are several problems and difficulties teachers have to face in Brazilian schools - such as overcrowded classrooms, lack of teaching materials, lack of technological resources, and many others (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2015, p. 12) - to implement these ideas in the real scenario. Besides that and, perhaps, due to this fact, we have students demotivated to learn the English language, which can be so scary for them.

In order to assist school teachers, PCNEM (National Curricular Parameters for High School) were designed in Brazil in 1990's. Its objective is to promote a reworked educational practice, considering the reality of the country and students, and serving as guidelines for schools and teachers, which/who should adapt them according to the specificities of these schools and students. This is a meaningful point to observe here, because it acknowledges difficulties to teach English as an AL mainly in public schools in Brazil.

According to PCNEM (2000, p. 13) the traditional model of teaching (for example, content written on the board and students copying that) is no longer an appropriate choice, considering the globalized context in which we live nowadays. Therefore, students' critical thinking and also ethical and intellectual development are the aspects prioritized in high school.

> (…) buscou-se construir novas alternativas de organização curricular para o Ensino Médio comprometidas, de um lado, com o novo significado do trabalho no contexto da globalização e, de outro, com o sujeito ativo, a pessoa humana que se apropriará desses conhecimentos para se aprimorar, como tal, no mundo do trabalho e na prática social. Há, portanto, necessidade de se romper com modelos tradicionais, para que se alcancem os objetivos propostos para o Ensino Médio (PCNEM, 2000, p. 13).

In this line of thought, the AL under discussion here (English) is seen as a way of contributing to students' communication and access to information worldwide (PCNEM, 2000, p. 19). This perspective can be related to the use of information technology, as a means of communication, when used in a group of activities, such as playful activities (songs and games, for instance), being a strategy to insert technology into the classroom.

In Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio (OCEM), the proposals are similar to PCNEM's. The objectives of AL in OCEM (2006) are, among others, to reaffirm the importance of the citizenship concept and discuss the practice of this concept in Foreign Languages' teaching; and to bring in the theories of language and new technologies (literacy, multiliteracy, multimodality), giving suggestions to Foreign Languages' teaching practice through these technologies. Both documents acknowledge students as participants of a modern world, in which they are able to communicate with other cultures, developing a world perspective. However, people's testimonials from OCEM (2006) indicate unequal results from the English language taught in schools and in language institutes. This aspect results in dissatisfaction from students, who think they cannot learn English in schools, as they show in this part:

> (...) depreende-se que as falas dos alunos e dos pesquisadores defendem que o aprendizado de uma língua estrangeira se concretiza em cursos de idiomas, levando-nos a inferir que não há essa expectativa quanto à escola regular (OCEM, 2006, p. 89).

Participating in both scenarios (being an intern in a public school and working in a private institute), I can say that this is what really happens, but it is even worse. The public schools' students, most of the time, cannot measure their progress, i.e. they do not realize how much they know and understand, and sometimes because of that they do

not have the will to learn. The students in the private institute are more willing to pay attention and to learn, due to several reasons (e.g. pleasant environment, good infrastructure) that are different from the public schools' students, motives that are not going to be discussed in this study. This is my reason of choosing to work with playful activities (songs) and of trying to make it more pleasant to the public schools' students. Therefore, believing that music plays an important part on people's lives, I decided to analyze its relevance on the process of learning English and how helpful it can be to the development of the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

The aim of this study is to analyze worksheets with different songs, which intend to be worked as a classroom-ready lesson plan, published in the Internet portal called *Busy Teacher*, serving as a resource for teachers to draw upon it in their English classes. I intend to analyze each worksheet and suggest a change, in order to readapt, joining the most relevant and interesting activities for teachers to work in class.

2. Methodology

2.1 Corpus

The corpus of my analysis consists of ten song worksheets, retrieved from the website *Busy Teacher* (http://busyteacher.org/), on September 12th of 2016.

To start the analysis, I selected ten songs and one worksheet for each song, considering relevant ones, i.e., worksheets with more than one activity in which the teachers could explore working with vocabulary, context of the song, and so on, and not so relevant ones, which I found a bit incomplete to work in class (with only one activity or with one that repeats, for instance). The criterion to select the level of the worksheets, at first, was the level of the students I was working with in my current job, which was the intermediate level. Afterwards, I connected this choice with my other students (from the public school), due to my internship project. The selection of the song worksheets was made by personal choice. The first step was to establish songs I was aware were being played in several places that time and also that were old, but of students' interest, and which I believe were well known around the world. The second step was to choose significant worksheets, with relevant activities, in which I could manage to work in an one-hour class, and that could cover the four

skills. Besides looking for relevant worksheets, the third step was to choose worksheets lacking in one or more skill(s) and that were not so adequate to work in class due to its ordinary activities, for example. The general principle that guided the choice of the songs was if the song/band was well-known (acknowledging their success), also thinking about the students' context, that means, the songs they asked me to play in class/told me they enjoyed; songs I presumed they would be interested in listening to. In order to identify the worksheets, they received a code (WS1 – WS10), following the alphabetical order of the song's title, as presented on Chart 1.

Worksheet code	Song	Singer/ Band
WS1	Blank Space	Taylor Swift
WS2	Hello	Adele
WS3	Hotel California	Eagles
WS4	Locked Away	R. City feat Adam Levine
WS5	Love Yourself	Justin Bieber
WS6	Marvin Gaye	Charlie Puth feat Megan Trainor
WS7	Perfect	Pink!
WS8	See you again	Wiz Khalifa feat Charlie Puth
WS9	Sugar	Maroon 5
WS10	7 years	Lukas Graham

Chart 1- Worksheets

2.2 Procedures of analysis

In order to carry out this analysis, I adopted four steps. The first one was to consider the worksheets in terms of what was repeated and what was different between the activities each of them presents. The second step was to identify the structure, i.e., if there was a pattern or not among the activities. The third step considered was to analyze if the activities embrace the four skills of English (listening, speaking, reading and writing). The fourth step of the analysis was to consider the worksheets that were more guided for the teacher and for the students, in terms of having activities covering the maximum of comprehension, not only working with the lyrics, but also exploring pre-reading, context of the song/band, and so forth.

3. Results

This section is divided into four sub-sections: 1) the contextual analysis; 2) what the worksheets have in common (in terms of activities and skills required); 3) the structure of the worksheets; and 4) textual analysis.

3.1 Contextual analysis

The website *Busy Teacher* (http://busyteacher.org/) was chosen due to its significant amount of classroom materials related to music, grammar, academic articles and so on. This internet portal was designed with the purpose to help busy teachers out, as its name suggests. *Busy Teacher* is a website that provides free online resources for English teachers who do not have either much time or creativity to design extra material for their classes and it was launched aiming to fill a gap in the educational marketplace, as the founder, Andrei Zakhareuski, states on the website. Moreover, he states that it is in its ninth year of operations as a trusted web presence for teacher worldwide. From several teachers' testimonials, I collected relevant pieces of information, in which I can support my selection criterion. The teachers, in general, state that it is a website which saves time and makes teaching even more fun; it is a good website to look for resources because it is refreshing and updated; it is great for reviewing and introducing grammar points; it is inspirational and practical; and so on. The teachers who access *Busy Teacher* can find extra material for vocabulary, reading,

listening, grammar, pronunciation practices, and so forth, as well as articles, posters, small texts, song worksheets and many more, to be used in class.

3.2 Similarities between the worksheets

3.2.1 Activities' similarities

The worksheets are presented with the song and activities to be worked on. Each of the worksheets has two or more tasks to be performed except for one (WS4) that showed only one task. The first observation was that "Fill in the gaps" is a recurrent activity and it is repeated in all of the ten worksheets (See Figure 1 below).

Fill in the gaps:

Let's Marvin Gaye and _____ it _____
Ooh babe, you _____ the healing that you want (yeah)
Like they _____ it in the song
Until the dawn, let's Marvin Gaye and get it on

Let's _____ _____ and get it on
You got the healing that I _____
_____ like they say it in the song
Until the dawn, let's _____ _____ and get it on, babe
You got to _____ it up to me
I'm screaming mercy, _____ please
Just like they _____ it in the song
_____ the dawn, let's Marvin Gaye and get it on
Just _____ they say it in a song
Until the dawn, _____ Marvin Gaye get it on
Oooh

Figure 1 – WS6

Out of ten, six worksheets presented the "Put the lines in order" activity and three of them have three tasks in common: 1) Circle the correct word; 2) Answer the questions in relation to the song; and 3) Match the halves (refer to Figure 2).

CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORD:

Once I was **eleven/seven** years old, **McRaddy/ my daddy** told me,

"Go get yourself a **wife/white** or you'll be **money/ lonely**."

Once I was **seven/eleven** years old

1. What does Adele sing about?
2. Have you ever been in the situation in your life when you regret hurting someone?
3. Underline all of the phrases with Present Perfect tense.
4. Explain why do we use Present Perfect in those sentences.

4) Match the sentences halves:

1. Screaming, crying, ...filled with thorns
2. I can make   ..... perfect storms
3. Rose garden   ...... guessing like
4. Skip a second, ... all the tables turn

Figure 2 – WS10, WS2 WS1 (respectively)

3.2.2 Language skills required

The first aspect observed in the worksheets was if each activity covered the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The common ground between all the worksheets is the reading, the writing and the listening skill. The reading is needed due to the fact that this skill is required in any textual activity. The students would have the paper printed to work on and the lyrics to read the song and the activities, even though it was not asked a rather complex activity, for instance, a reading activity *per se*. The writing skill is necessary because the students have to fill in the gaps, but what happens again is that they do not have anything complex to do: they only have to complete the gaps with words they hear or words they have in a box. More specifically, out of ten worksheets, four of them require construction of a sentence (or an idea), as the activities present questions regarding the song's interpretation or grammar, in which the students have to really know how/what to write and not just copy a word. Thus, there is no activity in which students have to write a text or anything that requires a big effort from them in terms of writing.

The listening skill is also required in all of the ten worksheets, since to complete the "Fill in the gaps" activity they have to listen to the songs. The last skill,

speaking, is not specifically requested in any of the activities. There is no suggestion for the teacher to make students sing the song or make a conversation using structures found in the activity, for instance.

3.3 Structure of the activities

There is not a common order of the worksheets' activities. Out of ten, seven worksheets start with the listening part, whether they have an activity to fill in the gaps or to put the lines in order, as the example below (Figure 3).

1.Put the lines into the right order.
Bad decisions, that's alright
Made a wrong turn, once or twice
Welcome to my silly life
Dug my way up blood and fire

Look I'm still around
It didn't slow me down
Mistreated, misplaced, misunderstood miss no way it's all good
Mistaken always second guessing, underestimated

Figure 3 – WS7

Two worksheets, out of ten, start with an activity of discussion: discussion of the context of the band/singer. One of them, WS5, has a text to read and the following activity would be to complete with the requested information. The other worksheet, WS9, does not have a contextualization to discuss the questions (see Figure 4 below).

2 Discuss:

Do you like Maroon 5?

What kind of music does it play? What are your favorite songs?

What do their songs usually talk about?

Figure 4 – WS9

The students do not have a warm-up activity to discuss the questions. They should have a previous knowledge of the band and the songs in order to do that. If they do not know the band, the purpose of the activity is lost.

3.4 Textual analysis

3.4.1 Well-conducted worksheets

In order to readapt one worksheet, WS9 was identified as the most guided one, together with WS5, serving as basis to conduct my analysis and, therefore, my idea of readjustment. There are significant points in these two worksheets that can be worked on in class, giving the opportunity for the students to create answers, not only copying words. The first important observation is that there are visual elements in the beginning of the activity (WS9), in which students have to match with the words (words they probably do not know and are not very usual) they have below them, as showed in the following example (Figure 5).

Figure 5 – WS9

Visual elements are an effective and positive way to replace a word or expression, because they make students reason, stepping aside of a possible translation from the teacher, which, in most of the cases, is not the objective of the class. After this activity, there is a contextualization of the band. The students need to answer if they like that band, what kind of music they play, what their songs are mostly about, etc, and this is another significant step because the students are not going to "jump" directly into the song; they will have to discuss about the band and the kind of music first. The next step is to listen to the song and fill in the blanks with the words missing. In the case of this worksheet, they have to pay attention to the song, but they receive the words written to copy in the spaces provided. If they did not receive them, it could be a good point for the students to practice the listening skill and to struggle to understand the words, but also a bad point if the students did not have the reasonable knowledge to understand the lyrics and feel lost in this part of the activity. The following activity is an interpretation of the song. After they listen to the song, they have a controlled practice, to understand the meaning of some of its parts, and there are again visual elements for that, as showed in Figure 6.

a) What does SUGAR in this song mean?

"Sugar, yes please
Won't you come and put it down on me…"

Does this part mean this:

or this?

Figure 6 – WS9

The last activity in the worksheet is about grammar. In this part, students are asked what the verb "killing" is referring to, and also what the verb tense is, if they can find another example in the text and how this verb is formed. Finishing that, students are guided to a grammar activity, outside the context of the song, in which they have to answer questions only about the verb tense proposed in the task.

The beginning of WS5 is a reading activity, which is also important. Students have to answer the questions according to the life of the singer, and, for this, they have to interpret the biography given. The questions are straightforward, but the answers are not ready for them to copy. They have to complete the sentences only with words, but sometimes they have to change the words or the sentence to fill in the blanks (for instance "Canadian" to "Canada", in letter "a" – refer to Figure 7).

Figure 7 – WS5

The last activity that I found very relevant, before "writing the missing word", was to match the expressions in the song to the sentences, what would help them to understand better the meaning of each sentence (refer to Figure 8 below).

Figure 8 – WS5

3.4.2 Less instructed worksheets

There were worksheets I did not find significant for using in class or perhaps a little difficult for the students to understand what they would have to do and complicated to answer by themselves. The first worksheet analyzed in these aspects was WS6, in which the students have to listen to the song and repeat three kinds of tasks: 1) Fill in the gaps; 2) Put the sentences in the right order; and 3) Match the two halves. Besides being repetitive, as soon as they finish the first three activities, they practically have the answers for the other ones, since parts of songs usually repeat. There were few activities in two of the analyzed worksheets, WS4 and WS1. In WS4, students are supposed to fill in the gaps with the information provided in the box, only to review the *second conditional* as it suggests, and in WS1 they only have to complete the song with the words provided, order the lines and match the halves. This worksheet, though, has a different task, one that I considered difficult: students need to correct the mistakes in each sentence of the song's first verse. My question is if they are able to only listen and correct these mistakes right away. In WS2, the lyrics are there with gaps to be completed and the questions that follow this task are very complex, so it could also be difficult. The students should answer what the song is about and there is nothing before that to contextualize the activity. After this, there is a personal question and another one concerning the theme of the song. I believe it would be hard for them to answer it, because it assumes students will understand all the lyrics, and also there is no activity for them to reflect on that previously (see Figure 9, numbers 1 and 2 below).

1. What does Adele sing about?
2. Have you ever been in the situation in your life when you regret hurting someone?
3. Underline all of the phrases with Present Perfect tense.
4. Explain why do we use Present Perfect in those sentences.

Figure 9 – WS2

Besides theses aspects, in activity WS5 (refer to Figure 7on the previous page) students do not have the information to answer letter "d". Below this activity, there are song facts and the only thing informed is that this song is about an ex-girlfriend, but

her name is not given at any time, so not all of the students would be capable of answering it. Another different task from WS9 is to find in the song the contractions of the words they have written in the activity (*because* as *'cause*, for instance). It is important for them to know that most of the times we have informal speech in the songs, so there are contractions of words and even mistakes in the structure or in the grammar. This is another point they mention in this worksheet. The next activity is for them to find a grammatically incorrect sentence in the song and correct it. In this case, they would have to read, think and understand in order to do so. This way, the suggestion is either consider readapting one of the worksheets or design the teacher's own worksheet with the ideas presented in each one here, having in mind the level of students being taught.

In accordance with PCNEM (2000, p. 12), there is a necessity to express contemporaneity and to invest in the teacher training, since the suggested measures demand changes in the selection of contents and incorporation of modern technological devices, for instance informatics. There are two perspectives I can follow when talking about the worksheets presented in this study. The first perspective is showing that teachers must be able to work with informatics, searching for the appropriate worksheets on the internet, and considering that these are authentic texts (lyrics of songs), something seen as positive, based on the OCEM. The students do not need to be in contact with technology to perform the activities, but they are not working with a textbook, as traditionally presented. Students can work with songs, which is a creative means of propagating the AL, also having to understand and discuss the context of the songs, in some of the presented worksheets. The second perspective is that the worksheets, in a broader sense, are not technological. The kind of activities the students have to perform does not put them out of their comfort zone, in which they could explore computers, cell phones or tablets. There are also many activities in common between the worksheets in which they have to fill in the blanks with the song lyrics, and this is something teachers of AL have done for a long time.

One aspect in the analyzed worksheets differs from the idea presented in OCEM (2006, p. 122) of having in mind working with a contemporary epistemology, for students not to have fragmented knowledge, whereby teachers would explain grammar activities and isolated linguistic items. Only in few worksheets (3 out of 10), there are questions to contextualize about the song or the band/singer. The majority of

them present "filling in the blanks" or "put the sentences in the correct order" activities and they are the opposite of what is suggested in OCEM. Filling in the blanks with a word does not require a lot from the students. Another suggestion that appears in OCEM, when talking about writing practice, does not appear in the worksheets, which is for students to be encouraged to produce a text recreating the story expressed in a song lyric, consequently practicing and improving their writing skills.

Unquestionably, the website *Busy Teacher* has many resources for English teachers. However, the worksheets are not technological and modern themselves. At least the ones designed with song lyrics, which were analyzed in this study. Furthermore, the worksheets are in the portal for any teacher to access, even the Brazilian ones who work in public schools, but they do not actually designed for Brazilian students. In reality, we do not have high school students with the appropriate level of English to work with these worksheets. The majority of the students in public schools seem to me not having the desire to learn the English language; they sometimes feel demotivated due to several reasons that, again, is not the focus of this study; they say they do not know and frequently refuse to speak in class, among other examples; therefore, we do not have the perfect scenario to work with this language. In summary, the worksheets are quite difficult and might not work, at least for the students that I am in contact with at this moment.

Conclusion

The website *Busy Teacher* brings many extra activities, as well as useful material. There are thousands of printable worksheets and lesson plans for teachers to download and use them in their class. The songs chosen seem to be adequate; however, the worksheets look as if they were easy and simple to teach an additional language. In relation to the worksheets I have selected, the activities are less guided and less contextualized, in general, to Brazilian students, often assuming a previous knowledge from them. Finally, another aspect that conflicts with what is written in PCNEM's and OCEM's is that the worksheets are not based in an extensive use of technology; they are used in an ordinary and traditional way.

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