

Music Motivates Participation

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How do teachers get students to participate verbally in the foreign language classroom? Students go through a quiet period when at first taking a second language. There is no greater joy than to hear your students participate in class using the target language. The beginning language student often worries about “looking silly or even stupid” while practicing in front of his peers in the target language, so much so that many students do everything they can to avoid it. I acquired my second language through complete immersion. I know it takes making a lot of silly mistakes in order to gain mastery in communicating in the second language. As for my students, I feel that I owe it to them to make their experience as beneficial as possible every day of class. This means, they must speak the language and not feel too awful about making mistakes. Therefore, I set out to experiment with how to get my students speaking more and practicing more in the target language.

Music is a great resource when it comes to acquiring a language. Also, music works well in the classroom for a variety of reasons. In order to increase verbal participation in the classroom, I tried a method called “karaoke”. I first saw this method used at the Michigan World Language Conference in November of 2012. It is used to help students with pronunciation and fluency. I felt that if students would experience success in their verbal skills such as pronunciation and fluency, they would most likely have increased motivation to speak and participate verbally in class. Initially I had observed that students with extroverted dispositions were motivated to participate in language class and did not fear making mistakes as much as other students. These students do not make up the majority of students by any means. Therefore, I was hoping to help those timid, self-conscious, and adolescent students achieve more practice in verbal participation.

### Music Motivates Participation

My coordinating teacher records participation weekly using the attendance list. In order to collect data, I kept to this method. Each time a student participated verbally, I made a tally mark next to his/her name. Therefore, participation points were monitored in order to gauge increase and decrease in participation by individual students. Participation was monitored this way for all of semester I and is still monitored today. Students must receive an average of one point per day to receive 100% in participation. Many grade conscious students are motivated by this fact, but many other students are not at all.

The karaoke project uses music in order to motivate students to pronounce words correctly. Students are given words to listen for in a played song. Each student receives a distinct word. They are to repeat their word once they hear it in the song. The second day, the students are each given a whole group of words or a phrase to listen for and repeat. On the third day, the students are given the lyrics to the song and asked to fill in the blanks and then report back to the teacher with the missing lyrics. On the fourth day, the class may or may not choose to sing the whole song karaoke style. At this point, if the students feel comfortable enough, they may engage in a competition of sorts.

During the first week or two of the activity, students were a bit awkward while repeating their words/phrases. However, over time, as the activity became more of a standard routine, students were much more comfortable and many times I witnessed students singing their words with confidence after the first time hearing the song. Certain groups in particular showed more enthusiasm than others. I witnessed students feel much more comfortable with the target language. This activity definitely lead to greater participation in class as the weeks went on. Certainly they had become more accustomed to saying words in the target language and perhaps

### Music Motivates Participation

they were then less afraid to try new words or express their ideas after seeing that they could pronounce words without looking silly or stupid.

I must mention that I provided students with a lot of praise and smiles when they participated in this activity and when they participated verbally at all. I felt they needed to be rewarded emotionally, not just with a participation point in order for it to work for all students. Sometimes, depending on the student, I acted as though this participation was exactly what should be happening and did not praise or become overly enthusiastic. Determining how to react to students' verbal participation could be another research study. Certainly for some students there cannot be enough praise, but others do not like to receive it publicly.

Overall, students' number of participation points increased as the weeks went on. Measuring how students were doing with participation was not easy. The number of points they received for participation increased, but perhaps the amount of opportunities to participate increased as well. For a future research project, it would be more accurate to keep a record of the amount of participation opportunities as well.

Students were asked to reflect on their experience with the "karaoke" activity. They were asked how the karaoke activity helped them in general. The majority of students reported they it helped them with their fluency and confidence in the target language. In fact, only one out of twenty seven students said they did not help at all. However, this student did say: "I like it [the music] a lot." Yet many more students reflected that it helped with their speaking and listening competence. In the same class, out of the thirty-one students, thirteen improved their participation points within the second week of the activity. The first week only five students received one hundred percent in participation. By the second week, sixteen received one-hundred

### Music Motivates Participation

percent in participation. By week four, twenty out of thirty-one students received one hundred percent in participation. Overall, music in the classroom proved to be a huge success for verbal participation amongst many other benefits.

As this research on verbal participation evolved, I began to see many more benefits to using “karaoke” or music in the classroom. Studies on using music to help acquire a language favor the use of music because of its harmonious relationship with language. “The richness of input [music] made possible by our physiology enables language learning with subtlety, vitality, and humor. Music is nurturing the mind’s acquisition of language much like a mother would nurture and motivate language in their own child. (Hashemi, 2011, p.12) I have always played music in the classroom to help with mood and keep students motivated, but I never would have imagined it to have so many other benefits. The benefits of music are not easily measured by a grade, but scientists have certainly related language acquisition to musical abilities. Hashemi sited that students who have higher musical abilities also have a better time acquiring a second language. (2011, p. 13)

Other benefits of the “karaoke” activity that were unexpected included the learning of grammar. At some points in going over the lyrics of the songs, I was able to point out certain grammar structures and ask students to identify the grammar rule without saying the word “grammar”. The article by Hashemi mentions that music helps students work with grammar intuitively, not by memorizing rules. (2011, p.14) This is a wonderful and welcomed benefit to the classroom!

Support for language learning through music is sited in numerous research studies. One such study relayed: “...learning a foreign language, especially in the first learning phase wherein

### Music Motivates Participation

one needs to segment new words, may largely benefit from the motivational and structuring properties of music in song.” Human senses become stimulated through listening to music in the target language. Therefore, the learner is having an experience with the language which is widely known to provide more meaning for that learner with the target language. Therefore, if learning is connected to a physical experience, you are more likely to remember it. (Schon, 2008, p. 982)

In conclusion, not only did music increase participation in the target language, but perhaps it even engaged them more so benefitting their learning. Music definitely has its place in the World Language Classroom. This is one area where students and teachers can finally agree.

### References

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