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Teachers' views on working with Music  
in the English Language Classroom

*Lärares syn på att arbeta med Musik i det Engelska Klassrummet*

Victoria Kalliokulju  
Julia Eriksson

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Examinator: Anna Wärnsby

Supervisor: Björn Sundmark

# Abstract

The purpose of this degree project was to investigate the views of four elementary school teachers concerning the use of music in the English language classroom. Additionally we wanted to see how the teachers motivated their choices to use or not use music, and in order to answer our two research questions we chose to do semi-structured interviews with the four selected informants. This method helped us to get an in depth perspective of the teachers thoughts and opinions. Krashen (1983) and Piaget (2008, 1988) provided us with the underlying theoretical concepts for this study: ‘the affective filter hypothesis’ and ‘the theory of cognitive development.’ Furthermore, we used selected previous research studies and theoretical literature for the final analysis. Our findings show that the teachers have an overall positive attitude towards using music and English together and that they all have seen positive outcomes for the students’ motivation and language learning when using it. Their motives for using music were based on their own musical interests, their view of learning, the type of class they teach and their previous positive experiences. Our conclusion for this study is that the benefits that can come from using music in the English language classroom are far more prominent than the challenges, and in the end it is up to the teacher to evaluate if this way of working will suit her learners. Therefore, our suggestion to English teachers is to at least consider the use of music in the English language classroom in order to experience the possible benefits.

Keywords: Music, English, language development, motivation, learning.

# Preface

The following degree project has been co-authored. Some of the interviews were done individually, but we recorded them so that we both had full access to the material for the transcription and the analysis of the empirical data. We hereby state that both authors have contributed to this degree projects completion and that the work has been equally divided.

The above-mentioned statement is authenticated by us both (see signatures below):

Verified on the 23<sup>th</sup> of March 2016.

Julia Eriksson

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Victoria Kalliokulju

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# 1. Introduction

One thing that we have encountered during our weeks of practice out in the schools is the sight of students, sitting at their desks and reading sentences from a textbook during English class. They read one sentence after another but the flow, feeling and confidence is not there in their voices. To learn a new language can be hard, but we think that teachers can make the students' job a lot easier if we are willing to look beyond text- and workbooks and bring the students' own interests and voices into the English language classroom. According to the syllabus for English (2011) teaching should promote the students' "further learning and acquisition of knowledge" based on their own "backgrounds, earlier experience, language and knowledge" (p. 10) and we think that this is something that can be done by taking the students' own interests into account when planning a lesson. As future English teachers, with an underlying interest for music, we wish to incorporate our, as well as the students', experiences and interests of English music into the English language classroom.

The central role of music and language in human existence and the fact that both involve complex and meaningful sound sequences naturally invite comparison between the two domains. Yet from the standpoint of modern cognitive science, music-language relations have barely begun to be explored. (Patel 2008, p. 3)

Inspired by Patel's (2008) words above, we consider that the question of how music and English language learning can cooperate, and how these two elements play a central role for all humans, needs further investigation. Bernal et. al (2012) and Dahlbäck (2011) both did studies where they concentrated on the effects music could have on the students' language learning. However, neither one of the studies investigated how and why the teachers chose to use music together with language and this made us think. There is an empty space in the research where the teachers own voices could be heard, and with this empirical study we wish to shed light on the teachers' thoughts on the matter.

For this empirical study, we want to look at music from the viewpoint of the students' musical interests and how the teacher can make it a part of the English language lessons. Therefore, when we bring up how you can combine music and English, we do not mean music as a subject but as an interest. All schools have music as a subject, but we think that the opportunity to use music in all its forms is not always capitalized on, and in this study we

especially want to focus on combining music and the subject English. The core content, in the syllabus for English year 4-6, implies that “songs” should be a part of English teaching. Since music is something that can be accessible, familiar and emotional to students, we find it problematic that this possible tool for learning is not used enough out in the schools. Furthermore, the curriculum (2011) stresses the importance of that students “should have the opportunity of experiencing knowledge in different ways” and that they should be “encouraged to try out and develop different modes of expression and experience feelings and moods” (p. 12). Additionally, Read (2007) argues that, when you are learning a new language, the use of rhymes, chants and songs play an extra important role in order for the children to produce new language in a natural, spontaneous and amusing way (p. 182). These statements leave you wondering do all students get the opportunity to experience knowledge in different ways, for example, via songs, and if not, how can we as future teachers bring these statements to life and into the classroom?

This empirical study is divided into five sections; in section 2 we present our purpose and our research questions. Section 3 is the background, which consists of our chosen theoretical literature, key terms and previous research. In section 4, we present our method for this study and here we describe the participants, our ethical considerations and the data collection process. Next, in section 5, we show our results and discussion. Section 6, which is our final section in this study, consists of our conclusion.

## 2. Purpose

This empirical study investigates the views and opinions of elementary school teachers concerning the use of music in the English language classroom. Therefore, our main purpose is to develop a deeper knowledge of the effects music might have when bringing it into the English language classroom. By the means of interviews with teachers, previous research, theoretical literature and the Swedish curriculum for the compulsory school we hope to get the information needed in order to answer our two research questions.

Research questions:

1. What views do teachers have on bringing music into the English language classroom?
2. How do the teachers motivate their choices to use or not use music in the English classroom?

## 3. Background

In order to understand the underlying reasons one might have for using music in the language classroom we want to, with the help of theoretical literature and previous research, look at what part music might play for second language learning. In this part we explain key terms and present the underlying theoretical concepts and previous research that are relevant for our study.

### 3.1 Theoretical literature

For this empirical study we make use of two theories concerning second language learning and cognitive development.

#### 3.1.1 The theory of cognitive development

Jean Piaget, founder of the theory of cognitive development, sees the development of intelligence as something that evolves in different stages. According to Piaget (2008) the progress of a person's cognitive development goes from an arbitrary and spontaneous behavior to a more logic and abstract way of thinking (p. 8). This developmental process depends on, among other things, the level of maturity, environment and social experience (Ginsburg & Opper, 1988, p. 210). Intelligence is considered as a behavior that supports an individual's adaptation to its environment and that organizes and reorganizes the thoughts and actions of an individual (Piaget, 2008 p. 8). Moreover, Piaget is more interested in the process of development than in the result itself and Ginsburg and Opper (1988) states, that “for Piaget, learning in a specific sense cannot explain development. Instead, development explains learning” (p. 210) meaning that you have to look at the whole to understand the pieces, for example the learning or result.

The theory sees the child as an active learner that constructs knowledge with the help of its environment, meaning that in order “to speak a language, the infant must hear people talking” (Ginsburg & Opper 1988, p. 214) and it is this part of the theory that is particularly interesting for us to look at. If we assume that our students’ knowledge comes from and is affected by the environment then music could have some kind of impact on the students’ language development. Gibbons (2015) argue that if we look at a child from a Piagetian point of view



we will see the child as an active learner that constructs its own knowledge and teachers should construct or “stage-manage” appropriate learning tasks for each student's level of intelligence (p. 11). The tasks in the classroom should therefore always be seen from the child's point of view in order for learning to occur. Cameron (2012) also draws upon Piaget's theory and proclaims that a child is an active thinker that always tries to make sense of its surroundings by looking at other people's actions and use of language. She states that “realizing that children are active ‘sense-makers’, but that their sense-making is limited by their experience, is a key to understanding how they respond to tasks and activities in the language classroom” (p. 4). Piaget's theory further suggests that activity promotes knowledge and if a teacher works with a child on its own level, with activities that encourage further learning, the knowledge will last longer than knowledge only gathered by memorization of given facts from a teacher or textbook (Ginsburg & Oppen 1988, p. 241).

### 3.1.2 The affective filter hypothesis

The input hypothesis, developed by Stephen Krashen, is a group of five hypotheses concerning second language acquisition. In this study we are only going to focus on one of these five hypotheses and that is the affective filter hypothesis. Krashen (1983) states that when a learner acquires a language it is a subconscious process and that “language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication” (p. 10). According to Krashen the opposite to language acquisition is language learning and he states that this is a conscious process where the learner knows he is learning and is aware of the rules and building blocks of the language (p. 10). Furthermore, Krashen (1983) thinks that acquisition is more meaningful than learning and that in order to acquire a language two specific conditions are needed: comprehensible input that lies just beyond the student's current language level and a low affective filter that lets the input in. To have a low affective filter means that you have a more positive attitude towards learning and to achieve this kind of filter the affective factors such as motivation, self-confidence and level of anxiety must be optimal (p. 31).

Gibbons (2015), who is a big advocate for the sociocultural theory, argues that a teacher should challenge her students with tasks that are just above their knowledge level and while doing so she should provide them with enough support so that they, in the end, can finish the task on their own (pp. 13-14). This sociocultural view of language learning, functions well

with Krashen's view of the importance of challenging comprehensible input. For example, Krashen (1983) states that "our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating a situation that encourages a low filter" (p. 32). In accordance with the purpose of this study, we wonder what impact music might have on the affective factors and if it can aid a student in her language acquisition.

## 3.2 Key Terms

In this section follows a review of the key terms that will be used in this study; music, the English language classroom, intelligent action 'learning by doing', scaffolding and motivation.

### 3.2.1 Music

In the syllabus the music subject is explained in the following way:

Music exists in all cultures and affects people, both physically, mentally and emotionally. Music as an aesthetic form of expression is used in a wide variety of contexts, has different functions and has different meanings for each and every one of us. It is also an important part of what people share socially and can influence the development of the individual's identity. (Skolverket 2011, p. 95)

In the syllabus for English (2011) the core content, for year 4-6, declares that "songs, sagas and poems" should all be part of English teaching (p. 33). According to the curriculum (2011) one of the tasks of the school is to give students the opportunity to "experience knowledge in different ways" (p. 12). The curriculum's (2011) explanation for how this can be accomplished is through "drama, rhythm, dance, music and creativity in art", whom "should all form part of the school's activity", and it is further expressed that all students should be able to acquire creative ability (p. 12).

### 3.2.2 The English language classroom

In Swedish schools, English is taught as a foreign language, considering that Swedish is the first language in Sweden. The syllabus for English (2011) introduces the English subject as follows:

Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Having a knowledge of several languages can provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts and greater understanding of different ways of living. The English language surrounds us in our daily lives and is used in such diverse areas as politics, education and economics. Knowledge of English thus increases the individual's opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in international studies and working life. (Skolverket 2011, p. 32)

According to Gibbons (2002) "second language learners are not a homogenous group, but are varied in the terms of their background, experiences, language, expectations, values, culture and socioeconomic status as any other group of students" (p. 13). She also stress that we should see the English language learner as any other student, with the exception of some specific learning needs (Gibbons 2002, p. 13).

### 3.2.3 Intelligent action 'learning by doing'

Dewey confided in philosophical experientialism, where almost every social phenomenon could be objects of reflection, not only by formulating the problem but also by finding possible solutions, preferably in action. According to Hartman et.al (2003), Dewey called this concept 'Intelligent action' and it was the goal for his philosophy (p. 12). The often used term 'learning by doing' is hard to find in any of Dewey's written work and biographies since the term has been established by his followers in the progressive pedagogy (p. 12). According to the concept of intelligent action, education should lead to understanding for the individual. The individual's interests and motivation to learn and what they want to learn are results of their previous experiences. Therefore, the individual's interests and knowledge of the world should, according to Dewey, be treated respectfully and be a part of teaching (Hartman, Roth & Rönström 2003, p. 112). Music that occur during English lessons can be seen as an active social phenomenon, and in this study we will look at music from the viewpoint of the learners' interests and investigate if the teachers take this into account when teaching.

### 3.2.4 Scaffolding

The term scaffolding was, according to Gibbons (2015), first used by Bruner in 1976 and can be described as "the steps taken to reduce the degrees of freedom in carrying out some tasks so that the child can concentrate on the difficult skill she is in the process of acquiring" (p.

16). Scaffolding in the classroom can be explained as the temporary and essential assistance teachers provide in order to help the learners achieve a task successfully. Scaffolding is a special kind of help “by which a teacher helps a learner know how to do something, so that the learner will later be able to complete a similar task alone” (Gibbons 2015, p. 16). The purpose of this study includes the question if there are any benefits with using music during English lessons, and since scaffolding is supposed to be beneficial for a student’s learning we wish to look at, if music can be used as a scaffolding tool.

### 3.2.5 Motivation

Lightbown and Spada (2013) discuss the concept of motivation in the second language classroom, and they argue that students’ positive attitudes in the classroom can be associated with the willingness to keep learning (p. 87). They further state that in a teacher's mind it is those students who participate, take their time to study and show interest in class that are those who are motivated and that “teachers also have more influence on these behaviors and the motivation they represent” (p. 88). A teacher can have a major affect on a student’s motivation to learn if the teacher is able to create manageable yet challenging learning goals, a content that is interesting, a content that is relevant for the student’s age and level of ability, and a supportive atmosphere in the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, p. 88). Since motivation is one of the affective factors in Krashen’s (1983) ‘the affective filter hypothesis’, we think that this key term, in relation to music, is essential for our study in order to identify if the use of music in the English language classroom can be motivational for learners.

## 3.3 Previous research and literature review

We have found that there has been quite a bit of research done on why one should use music in the language classroom as well as on how one could use it. Consequently, since we are curious about what music can do for the students in the language classroom, we will have to look at studies and literature that represent a number of different outcomes that might come from using music in the English classroom. By doing this, we hope to obtain a more comprehensible view of possible outcomes. We have organized our findings into three broad categories: music and motivation, music and language, and music and learning.

### 3.3.1 Music and motivation

In Colombia an investigation on sixth graders with the purpose of motivating students to speak English was carried out by Bernal, Olivares and Romero (2012). The study's results concluded that the students became more motivated to learn English if teachers used music in various ways during their lessons. Additionally, they concluded that when the students had some time to practice singing songs in English they "realized that it was not that difficult" and that "they felt stimulated to accomplish something that at the beginning seemed very tough" (p. 19). In agreement with the results from this study, Read (2007) argues that the use of different kinds of music in the language classroom can help a student to develop a more positive attitude and motivation towards learning a new language (p. 182).

Paquette and Reig (2008) wrote an article where they describe the possible benefits that can occur from integrating music with language learning. They came to the conclusion that "in an early childhood classroom, a musically, literacy-rich environment will generate interest, encourage creativity, and set the stage for a positive learning environment (p. 231). Music and its influence on the students in the language classroom is also discussed by Dahlbäck (2011) who published an action research study in Sweden, with the aim to examine how first-grade students participate and learn in lessons where music and language interact. She concluded that the learners became more and more involved when music and language were integrated. To be involved means that you actively participate and show interest during lessons, and with the help from a supportive atmosphere in the classroom and a positive attitude from the students the effects on their motivation can be major (Lightbown & Spada 2013, p. 88). As shown above, music can be one way for a teacher to motivate her students to learn a new language. Below we will present two more possibilities for what music can do in the language classroom.

### 3.3.2 Music and language development

Li and Brand (2009) conducted a study in China to research the effectiveness of music on vocabulary acquisition, language usage and meaning for Chinese ESL learners. The results of the study show that the use of songs and music in ESL teaching can be highly effective for language learning. In accordance with the study Read (2007) claims that children develop familiarity with the sounds, rhythm and intonation patterns of English in a natural way if they

are exposed to English in the form of rhymes, chants and songs (p. 19). She further states that it is commonly known that “the use of rhymes, chants and songs contribute to young children’s overall social, linguistic, physical, cognitive and emotional development” and that “children love rhythm, music and movement” (p. 182). Additionally, Bernal et.al (2012) came to the conclusion that because of the rhythm of the songs the students found it easier to remember how to pronounce the words (p. 18).

As we can see, the positive effects of using music to develop language are many and yet there are more to mention. For example, Bernal, Olivares and Romero (2012) observed in their study that the learners’ pronunciation and vocabulary improved when they got to use the language in a more open and accepting environment with the help of music (p. 20). In accordance with this, Cameron (2012) states that singing songs could be classed as a tool for language teaching and learning, and that it can be effectively implemented and evaluated, if it is carefully planned and structured (p. 31).

Paquette and Reig (2008) argue that, for children learning a foreign language, the repetitive nature of songs could be valuable as they hear words and phrases repeated (p. 127). They further state that “linguistically using songs can prepare students for the genuine language they will encounter”, and that songs can offer cognitive opportunities for developing automaticity in the language process (p. 127). In sum, the influence that music can have on a student’s language development is in these statements shown as highly positive and effective.

### 3.3.3 Music and learning

Sayer and Ban (2014) carried out a study that investigated 61 fifth and sixth graders in 15 different schools in Mexico, who has English as a foreign language, and their engagement with English outside the classroom. The study reveals that children often use English more than is generally thought and that they engage creatively with English through music, movies and video games outside the classroom. They further state that “teachers would benefit from taking a more ethnographic perspective towards their students, and find out what they like to do with English when she or he is not around” (p. 328). In addition, an interesting argument is voiced by Li and Brand (2009) who point out that ESL teachers are generally positive towards music, considering that music enlivens both their teaching and their classrooms (p. 74).

Paquette and Reig (2008) stress the importance of a teacher to provide her students with structured and unregulated musical activities and they go on stating that these activities could create an “atmosphere of mutual trust and respect” where everybody can share “the joy of creativity with each other” (p. 227). In the end they suggest that this could help set the base for the growth and development of the students (p. 227). Similarly, Dahlbäck (2011) concludes from her study that if a teacher uses music and language in interaction, individual learning processes might occur (p. 143). To sum up, it has been shown that a teacher can stimulate the students’ individual learning processes if musical activities are used in the language classroom.

## 4. Method

In this section we present our research method, selected participants, ethical considerations and data collection that we have used for this empirical study. As our purpose is to examine the views and opinions of elementary school teachers, we chose interviews as the qualitative method for this study. This method gives us the opportunity to identify, as well as develop a deeper understanding for the teachers' thoughts and opinions concerning integrating music in the English language classroom (Bryman 2008, p. 385). Hatch (2002) suggests that to interview a person is the most effective method if you want to find out what is in and on someone else's mind (p. 92), and additionally he states that:

Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds. These meaning structures are often hidden from direct observation and taken for granted by participants, and qualitative interview techniques offer tools for bringing these meanings to the surface. (p. 91)

Considering our purpose, this method became the clear choice. There are two types of qualitative interviews: semistructured and unstructured. The unstructured interview can be seen as a conversation between two peers, where the interviewer only asks one open question to the informant and then lets her speak freely (Bryman 2008, p. 438). When using a semistructured interview the interviewer normally has an interview guide with specific themes and questions to cover. However, the guide should only be seen as a draft and can therefore be altered along the way (p. 438). We have chosen to use a semistructured interview since this method gives us the opportunity to ask open-ended questions and at the same time it gives the informant the chance to influence where the interview is going (Hatch 2002, p. 94).

The possible risks for us, with choosing this method, is that we as interviewers must be aware of the types of questions we ask, how many and in what way we ask them. The interview must give the informant the opportunity to share her story without feeling interrogated or examined (Alvehus 2013, p. 83). Also, this type of interview requires more from us as interviewers as we have to be active listeners and ask follow up questions to get as much out of the interview as possible (p. 83).



## 4.1 Description of the selected participants

In this empirical study we interviewed four elementary school teachers about their thoughts concerning the use of music in the English language classroom. We started our research by sending out emails to schools, where we asked for teachers who had both music and English as their main subjects. Unfortunately, after looking at the responses that we received from the schools, we realized that these types of teachers would be hard to find. Instead, we took the decision to focus on English teachers, and after having sent our new emails, in which we asked for teachers with English as one of their subjects, we found four teachers who were willing to participate in our study. The teachers work as English teachers at four different elementary schools in Sweden.

As a way to protect the teachers' identities we have chosen not to use their real names, and therefore, the following presentation of the teachers will be done with fabricated names. The first teacher we interviewed, Sara, works as an English teacher at a music school. The school is located in an urban city in the south of Sweden. Sara has been a teacher for ten years and is licensed to teach year 4-9, but she is currently working in year 7-9. The second informant, Anna, is a teacher of both English and music for years 4-6. She works at an elementary school in a municipality located in central Sweden, and she has been a teacher for 13 years. Eva, the third teacher that we interviewed, teaches all subjects except the practical and esthetic ones at a school in an urban area in southern Sweden. The school has a musical orientation and all the students in Eva's class have chosen music as their profile. Eva has been a teacher for twenty years and she has worked at her current school for twelve years. The last person to be interviewed was Klara who is a teacher for years 4-6. She works in a city in the province of southern Sweden and teaches English and social studies, and she has been a teacher for seven years. All four teachers in this study are female, however, we did not plan this and it will not be taken into consideration when doing the analysis.

## 4.2 Ethical considerations

When deciding on the type of questions that we wanted to ask the teachers, we were fully aware of what influence our own interest in music could have. As a consequence, we constructed the questions so that they could generate not only positive or neutral answers but negative answers as well. Accordingly, Hatch (2002) states that "it is unethical to value some

responses over others in the course of interviews” and that researchers should “avoid judging responses because doing so may lead informants to try to please rather than inform” (pp. 106-107).

Vetenskapsrådet (2002) states that it is important to make it clear to the informants that the information from the interviews will not be used for anything else but the intended study (p. 7), and we followed this advice before starting the interviews. Our final ethical consideration was the question of anonymity, and consequently, before we started the interviews we made it clear to all teachers that we would anonymize all answers and that the data would only be used for this study. Bryman (2008) argues that it should not be possible to identify the participants in a study after the study is published and that all records containing information about the participants should be confidential (p. 118). Moreover, we also offered to show them the finished paper so that they could see how we analyzed the collected data, which, according to Vetenskapsrådet (2002), makes it feel more meaningful for the informants to participate (p. 15).

### 4.3 Data collection

It took us about three weeks to collect and transcribe all data. Sara, Eva and Klara were all interviewed in person at their schools by the both of us, apart from Anna, who we decided to do an online interview with, considering that she lives in another part of Sweden. This interview was carried out by one of us. When we established contact with our informants we made it clear that we needed a quiet space for our interviews, and according to Hatch (2002), “interview spaces need to be private so that you are comfortable asking for sensitive information and your informants are comfortable giving it” (p. 100).

Despite the fact that we are writing this study in English, we asked all interview questions in Swedish so that there would be less misunderstandings, insecurities or loss of words during the interviews. Hatch (2002) states that “questions should use language that is familiar to informants” and that “unless two-way communication is established, data will be of questionable value, and interviews will be awkward at the least” (p. 106). As a consequence of the interviews being done in Swedish, the transcriptions of the interviews were done in Swedish, and therefore, the direct quotes from the teacher's occurring in the results and

discussion are translated into English by us. For this reason, some words and expressions may not be 100 percent accurate.

When it comes to our interview we decided to use open-ended guiding questions, which provided the teachers with the opportunity to express themselves with their own words. Moreover, the questions made the interview feel more like a conversation than an interrogation (Hatch 2002, p. 106). We used two main questions where the first one has six follow-up questions (see Appendix 1), this was done as a way to help the teacher through the first main question, considering that it is a big and broad question. The follow-up questions are related to the first question as well as the purpose and research questions of this study. The second question is related to the curriculum and was included as a way for us to see if the teachers chose to use or not use music with the syllabus for English in mind.

Considering that the transcription of interviews can be quite extensive we chose to record audio during the whole interview with the help of a computer. This made it possible for us to go back and listen to the empirical material as many times as we wanted and transcript what was relevant for this study. However, the use of a sound recorder during an interview can have its disadvantages. For example, to have a recording device present during the interview could be perceived as disturbing and cause the informant to not be as open as one might hope. At the same time, a recording device can be a type of security for the informant that all she says during the interview gets saved and that nothing is lost or misplaced (Alvehus 2013, p. 85).

## 5. Results and discussion

In this part of the study, we are going to demonstrate our results and analyze them with the help of theory, literature and previous research. We start with the results where we present the views expressed by the teachers. In the concluding section there is a discussion, where we analyze the material from the results.

### 5.1 Results

When assembling our four transcriptions we noticed that the teachers had several common views and thoughts concerning the use of music in the English language classroom.

Therefore, we took the decision to break down our findings into three categories in order to make the analysis of the data more comprehensible. Two of these categories are: benefits and challenges, and since we received a lot of information concerning how the teachers implements music in their classrooms and their underlying reasons for it, our final category is working with music in the English language classroom.

#### 5.1.1 Benefits

All four teachers could recognize certain benefits that could come from combining music and second language learning. One common thought amongst some of the teachers is that music can have a positive impact on the students' willingness to use English. Eva, who teaches a musical profile class, could see several ways as how the students could profit from this way of teaching. She stated that "their biggest interest is attended to" and that music can make learning English less dramatic and therefore more joyful. Furthermore, Eva thinks that the use of songs together with English can aid the students in their pronunciation since the fear of pronouncing a word wrong "goes away when you sing." When we ask her what her thoughts are concerning the use of music during English lessons she answers:

I think that it is a great tool [...]. Now since this is a music class they have chosen to come here because they love music. And this is an even greater advantage. You learn really well with music.

Sara shares Eva's beliefs as she states that her students dare to speak English when using music and that this outcome is a big advantage. Moreover, she states that music "is a fun thing

to do for them” and that she can see “that when they do not think about that they are learning, they learn.”

Another point of view shows that music can also help bring something new to the classroom. Klara states that when she has used music during English lessons she has felt that her students liked it, and that she did not get the usual negative response of “oh, are we going to dwell through the book again.” She further states that music “was a break from the ordinary” and that she thinks that “those breaks are fairly welcome” on behalf of the students. These thoughts are shared by Eva, who states that music:

[...] is also something that makes it a bit joyful, that it becomes a little fun. And not only to read a text in the book and write English words, that becomes a bit boring eventually.

In addition to the other three teachers stands Anna, who is the only one that talks about the possible benefits that music might bring for the students who struggles during English lessons. She thinks that the use of music in the language classroom can be:

[...] very good for the children who has some difficulties with learning languages. With them you often notice that they are very good at both listening and mimicking. If you have trouble with reading for example, then you are better at listening and so on. [...] Yes, I think that you notice more advantages than disadvantages. [...] that you in some way develop language automaticity, with phrases, pronunciation and things like that.

Furthermore, Anna expresses a worry that her students are listening to music without understanding what it is about. She thinks that it is important to know what you are listening to and what you are singing, and she takes R’n’B music as an example of songs that can contain inappropriate language. However, she still wants to work with music during English lessons because she considers it as “a great way for most people to learn specific words and pronunciation and so on”, and she states that the songs that she uses when teaching can be seen as “fairly prudish.”

Multiple reasons for using music in the language classroom were expressed by all four teachers and we could see that they all had an overall positive attitude toward this way of working. The view of music as something that can make the English lessons more fun for the students was a common theme amongst the teachers, and for instance, Klara stated that:

[...] music is what makes you happy, it can cheer you up. [...] If you can then find something for the students that are already tired, they do not have the energy, then absolutely [...] Then it is a great idea if you can get it right with the music.

Sara, who works at a music school, is a big advocate for using music, not only with English but with all subjects. She tells us of examples of how you can use music during English, social studies and Swedish and that she is often cooperating with the musical teacher when she is planning a new area. Working at a music school means that most of the students have a musical interest and because of this fact she considers that “music is a huge common force that they share.” She further states that she uses:

[...] music on their level as a way into feeling comfortable with speaking English, because this is something that you are going to encounter, that it is extremely hard to get everybody to speak English, especially in front of each other. [...] just with the help of music they dare to open up themselves and I notice that if I do this in the 7th grade there are profits in the 8th grade to retrieve, that they feel more comfortable and that they dare to fool around.

In conclusion, the benefits expressed by all four teachers involve music as a tool for making the English lessons more fun and easy going, as a way to learn new words, promote good pronunciation and lower anxiety.

### 5.1.2 Challenges

Only two of the teachers could see direct challenges with using music during the English lessons. Klara expressed a worry concerning what it might mean for the students that needs structure and she thinks that:

Maybe it depends a little on the type of class, uhm, if it is not the controlled, the usual that we do it can be strange for some students and then you have to attend to them. Maybe you have to go over eventual groups if you are doing something special with music. Uhm, maybe you still have to manage it a little based on what it is that you are going to do. [...] but the challenges could be that it gets too rowdy and that it gets out of the box so to say. And maybe it is not that positive for everyone. All the time.

Similarly, Anna thinks that it depends on the type of class that you are teaching. She stated that:

[...] it depends on the classes you have, if you have a class that likes to sing very much then it works great. If you have a class that does not like to sing at all than it is very difficult.

She further states that when the students become older she feels that they think that some of the songs are a bit corny and that this could contribute to her not using music as much as she might want. Moreover, Anna considers that singing songs during English lessons can make the students feel more exposed than when they sing during music lessons.

In contrast to the other teachers, Eva brings up the fact that she teaches a music class and therefore the only challenges that she can see is that she does not play any instruments and that this could have helped her in her teaching. She goes on stating that:

I do not see any challenges, actually no, as a result of this being a music class. There could be somebody, if it was an ordinary class, that did not like to sing or think that it is awful and then it would have been a disadvantage. But here it is not like that, here they have made a choice for music.

One of the teachers, Sara, was very explicit and just answered “no” on our question if she could see any challenges. However, similarly to Eva, she could recognize that it comes especially easy for her since she works at a musical school, and she also stated that this is the reason why she chose to work there. Still, Sara states that working with music:

[...] takes that I dare, really dare to give myself to the others (laughter) because to get all of the shy girls and boys with me, that is a quite hard.

To sum up, we only heard two teachers expressing some actual concerns regarding the use of music during English class. The importance of familiarity and structure for some students, songs that are too corny, the type of classes and feelings of shyness were the views expressed by Klara and Anna. Eva and Sara on the other hand were both rather sparse when giving their thoughts on the matter. Here we heard similar views concerning the advantages for them both having classes with students who are interested in music, and furthermore, they both seem aware of this being a contributing factor to the lack of concern.

### 5.1.3 Working with music in the English language classroom

All teachers had ideas concerning how to implement music in their classrooms. Two of them incorporate music in their English lessons on a regular basis, and the others do it occasionally. Klara expresses that there is actually a lot that you can do with music and that both education materials and different books have segments containing music. She also talks about when she worked with music in an animal theme once:

I brought in that song [...] ‘What the fox say?’ [...] We worked with it as a blind text once at my previous workplace. The song is pretty fast so it is a little hard for the students to tag along, but they manage it pretty well. [...] So if you do exercises like that you would most definitely be able to accomplish fun English teaching. But otherwise, work freely and open with what you choose based on day and emotion maybe, [...] bring something in spontaneously, it does not always have to be structured.

Furthermore, Klara explains that the use of music does not always have to be intentional and that if you are working with a certain theme you can try to find appropriate texts to match that. In addition to Klara, Anna thinks working with music is:

[...] more of an intentional choice, because I want, either if you work with, you can work with missing word texts also that you listen to a song and they get to fill in the words that is missing and so on. And then because music is a little fun to incorporate. But I think mostly, that it would be more of an intentional choice just because you work with, uhm, words, the vocabulary and pronunciation so that it strengthens when you use music.

Anna brings up the process of when she works with English through songs with her students, and she states that “you listen, you go through what it is about and then you sing it together, until you feel that it has stuck a bit [...] everyone must not now everything by heart, but just so that they know a little.” Then she remembers that she has been working with ‘The Alphabet Song’:

Yeah, that is something that we have done (laughter) now it came to me! Uhm, it is really good actually. To acquire, and there you also notice that they learn to pronounce the letters. [...]. And then I notice that they learn faster when you sing that, instead of just going ‘A,B,C,D’, you sing it many times.



She further state that you can find a lot on YouTube and that she has worked with some ‘nursery rhymes’ that she has found there. Similarly, Eva talks about the music that she uses on her English lessons as an intentional choice and she states that:

The music that exists in education materials is for entertainment only. But if it is something specific that should be learnt then the choices are intentional, and then I search online for that particular thing we need to practice.

Sara’s reason for using music on her English lessons is to get her students to feel comfortable with speaking English, and similar to Anna, she also looks for inspiration on the internet and gets very excited when talking about what another teacher has done with music:

A teacher that is absolutely amazing, that uses rhythms and rap too learn the regular verbs. Where both me and the students gets to come up with our own beats, and rhythms, claps and songs if they want to do that, where the verbs should get stuck in their minds. And then also too, too look at grammar, you can take a rap lyric and look at it and say ‘search for errors in this’ cause they are not grammatically correct at all. [...]. I try to work a lot with materials that are close to reality in relation to music, not textbooks so much.

Additionally, Sara makes it clear that she does not have any education in music and that her reasons for using it is completely based on her own interests. She further states that this interest works really well with the English subject and that she works closely with the music teacher:

[...] we try to cooperate with the music teacher as much as possible, every time I start a new project in Swedish or English I talk to her ‘is it something you feel that, that you would like to join in on?’ [...] So we always try to connect it to music. And we do have pros here since we are so closely tied to Dunkers with their teachers.

In conclusion, all the teachers had some sort of underlying reason for working with music in their classrooms. Therefore, when they combine music with English the choices regarding teaching is mostly intentional, but it can also be something that they bring in spontaneously for the fun of it. When it comes to teaching, they work with music in different ways through songs, beats and rhythms where they practice vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar.

## 5.2 Discussion

Our discussion is divided into the same categories as the result section, we do this as a way to make it clear what specific views it is that we are analyzing and referring to. In this section we are going to connect our findings to the theory, literature and previous research that we presented earlier in this paper. We analyze both similarities and differences between the views expressed by the teachers as well as their reasons for using music during their English lessons.

### 5.2.1 Benefits

When conducting our results we found that all four teachers expressed several benefits that could come from working with music, and furthermore we found that these views correlated well with the theories chosen for this study.

The thoughts concerning how music can make learning English ‘less dramatic’ and how it becomes more joyful for the students was a common thread, and we heard from all the teachers that they saw this amongst their students with their own eyes. Sara stated that she felt that when her students do not think about that they are learning something new, that is when they learn, and according to Krashen (1983) “language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, but are only aware of the fact that they are using the language for communication” (p. 10). Since Sara’s students are not aware of that they are learning English when they are working with music in the classroom this could in fact have a major impact on the students language acquisition, which according to Krashen (1983), is better than learning just the rules and specific grammar.

Sara further states that she uses music that is on the students’ own level since she wants them to feel more comfortable when speaking English and that she can see how music helps them to open up and be more daring. In comparison, Piaget (1988) regards activity as something that promotes knowledge and he considers that a teacher needs to create tasks that encourage further learning, and at the same time, work with the student on her own level. Moreover, Piaget (1988) stresses that this type of gained knowledge will last longer than knowledge based on the memorization of words from a given textbook for example (p. 241). We consider that this statement by Piaget can be connected back to what it means to acquire a language and how this can be more valuable than language learning. Sara’s method of combining music

and English in order to help her students during class is her way of creating encouraging tasks and meeting the students at their own level. Dewey suggests through his concept of intelligent action that an individual's interests and motivation to learn is a result of their previous experience, and according to Sayer and Ban (2014) a teacher should make an effort to look at what their students like to do outside of school (p. 328). Therefore, one could argue that if a teacher brings in her students' own musical interests and takes their earlier experiences with music into account the students' motivation to learn could improve.

As stated earlier in this paper there are several factors such as motivation, environment, type of tasks and self-confidence that can affect how a student acquires a language. Eva and Klara talked a lot about how music can make the lessons more fun and the learning process more joyful for the students, and also that music can help pull you up when feeling down. These positive outcomes relate to the factors mentioned above since fun lessons can be seen as a good learning environment and joyful learning can be fortunate for the students' motivation to learn. In accordance with Klara and Eva's statements, Read (2007) points out that music can help a student to develop a positive attitude and to become more motivated towards learning a new language (p. 182). Moreover, in order for a student to acquire a language Krashen (1983) thinks that you have to have a low affective filter, which means a more positive attitude towards learning. This filter can be achieved if the teacher creates the right classroom environment with comprehensible input that benefits the students' motivation, self-confidence and level of anxiety (p. 31). Paquette and Reig (2008) suggest that "because of the casual learning environment used when singing, songs are one method for achieving a weak affective filter and promoting language learning" (p. 228). Consequently, it would seem like Klara and Eva, along with the other two teachers, are creating a good learning environment for the students with the help of music.

Additionally, the possible benefits concerning how music can help the students to improve their vocabulary and pronunciation were also expressed by both Anna and Eva, and for example Eva stated that the fear of pronouncing a word wrong "goes away when you sing." In accordance with these thoughts, Bernal, Olivares and Romero (2012) concluded that the students in their study improved their pronunciation and vocabulary when they got to use English with the help of music (p. 20). Furthermore, Anna suggested that for the students with learning difficulties music could be a way to help them to just listen and mimic what is being sung. She further states that music can help you develop language automaticity with phrases

and pronunciation, which is something that Paquette and Reig (2008) also argues for. For example, they also think that singing songs can help develop automaticity in the language process and that “ [...] songs can prepare students for the genuine language they will encounter” (p. 127). Even though the teachers did not present us with any actual data where they had tested the impact of music on language development, we assume that the years of experience in the language classroom and the knowledge they have about their students, and the evidence from previous research, can be considered proof enough. In sum, music can benefit the students’ language development and give them the chance to hear and practice the type of English that they may encounter outside of school.

In conclusion, it is clearly shown by the teachers, the theory and the previous research that the beneficial outcomes that could come from using music in the English classroom are many. Furthermore, it is up to the teacher to incorporate it into her lesson plans in order for her and her students to profit from these benefits.

### 5.2.2 Challenges

According to the four teachers that participated in our study the benefits outweighs the challenges when you choose to work with music in the English language classroom, yet they all brought up some concerns that corresponds with our chosen theories, key terms, research and literature.

Both Anna and Eva thinks that it depends on the class that you teach, and that if you have a class that does not have any musical interest it would be difficult to make it work. In a setting where there are multiple learners that have no musical interest the students’ self-confidence and level of anxiety would not benefit from using music, and the motivation to learn could get affected. This stands in accordance to Krashen’s (1983) theory where he mentions that the affective factors must be optimal in order for learning to occur (p. 31). Similar to Piaget, Cameron (2012) maintains that children’s sense making is limited by their experience and that teachers should construct learning tasks from the child’s point of view in order for learning to occur (p. 4). Accordingly, Dewey stresses that the learner’s interests and world knowledge should be treated with respect and be a part of teaching (Hartman, Roth & Rönström 2003, p. 112). Like Dewey and Piaget, we think that it is important to bring in the learner’s knowledge of the world and their own interests when teaching English in order to make learning more

effective and enjoyable for the learners. Therefore, a solution could be that music should be a part of English teaching if the major part of the class has some sort of interest in music.

The lack of structure and stepping out of the box when using music was a concern that Klara expressed, however using music during English lessons does not have to be unorganized. According to Cameron (2012) music can be a tool for language teaching and learning if it is carefully planned and structured (p. 31). Sara mentioned that working with music takes effort, especially when it comes to get the students to open up, which is of importance to Bernal, Olivares and Romero (2012) who claims that if learners get the opportunity to work with music and language in an accepting environment their learning improves (p. 20). Anna thinks that her students feel exposed when they are singing during their English lessons and that some of them think that the songs are too childish. Despite the fact that it is challenging, Lightbown and Spada (2013) stresses that it is up to the teacher to create a content that is interesting, relevant for the students' age and level of ability, and an open environment in the classroom (p. 88). Consequently, working with music demands that the teacher knows its class, or classes, and plan lessons which are relevant and interesting for the learners.

In conclusion, the teachers acknowledged some disadvantages of importance that needs to be considered before bringing in music into the English language classroom. This way of working with English can be demanding, especially for the teacher, when it comes to creating an open environment in the classroom and inspiring the students to develop a musical interest.

### 5.2.3 Working with music in the English language classroom

The teachers incorporate music into their English lessons to some extent and we think that their reasons for bringing in music in their classrooms, and how they decide to do it, stands in accordance with our background section.

Klara and Anna works with English through songs on occasion, where the students get the opportunity to practice both vocabulary and pronunciation, and Anna mentioned that she have noticed that her students learn to pronounce letters faster when they sing a song repeatedly. Paquette and Reig (2008) argues that the repetitive nature of songs could be of value as the learners hear words and phrases repeated, and that songs can offer cognitive opportunities for

developing language automaticity (p. 127). When singing a song the learners are active and hear the words over and over again, which correlates with Piaget's saying that in order "to speak a language, the infant must hear people talking" (Ginsburg & Oppen 1988, p. 214). To practice singing songs in English, can according to Bernal, Olivares and Romero (2012) be a way to make the subject easier and more stimulating for the students (p. 19). Therefore, working with English through singing songs could be a solution to develop language automaticity and to get the students to feel at ease in the process of learning the language.

Three of the teachers told us that the choice to use music is intentional and that they all have underlying reasons for it. Many of their reasons included working with grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, but they also mentioned how they wanted their students to feel comfortable and have fun during English class. Read (2007) claims that if you use different kinds of music in the language classroom, it can help the students to develop a positive attitude towards learning a new language (p. 182). Moreover, Paquette and Reig (2008) assume that if there is a good environment where students and teachers trust each other and respect one another, then everybody can share "the joy of creativity with each other" (p. 227). This way of working in the classroom can be considered as scaffolding for the students, as the teacher provide the learners with enough support so that they in the end feel comfortable with developing and speaking the language on their own (Gibbons 2015, pp. 13-14). In sum, music can be seen as a scaffolding tool that the teacher can use in order to make her students feel more comfortable in the language classroom, and also as a way to challenge her students in their language development.

All teachers mentioned that they have looked for inspiration on the Internet when planning English lessons that consists of some sort of music. For example, Klara and Anna acknowledged that English education materials have segments containing music, which Eva considers to be for entertainment only, and when it is something particular that needs practice she searches online. Sara told us that she tries to work with materials that are close to reality and that she works with English through rap, beats, rhythms and songs with her students. Rhythm and songs can, according to Bernal, Olivares and Romero (2012), be a way for students to remember how to pronounce words easier (p. 18). Additionally, Read (2007) claims that "children love rhythm, music and movement" and if children are exposed to English in the form of rhymes, chants and songs, they develop a familiarity with the sounds, rhythm and intonation patterns of English in a natural way (p. 19). Consequently, it is

common amongst the teachers to look outside the classroom for inspiration when planning English lessons that consists of music, and to teach English through rhythm, music and movement can be a way for the students to learn the language naturally.

In conclusion, the teachers work with music on their English lessons in various ways, and just by using different kinds of music in the English language classroom could have a positive impact on the students' attitude towards learning the language. Moreover, some of the teachers expressed how music can be a break from the ordinary and how the students were grateful for not having to work with the textbook. Therefore, the music that the teachers choose to work with is not collected from the textbooks, instead they look for authentic materials that are grounded either on the student's own interests, themes that they are working with or what they need to practice on.

## 6. Conclusion

In this section we present the conclusions drawn from our research, with a summary of our key results and an evaluation of how these results relate to our purpose and research questions. Furthermore, the limitations for this study are discussed as well as suggestions for future research and the relevancy for our future profession.

### 6.1 Key results

The results regarding our first research question “what views does teachers have on bringing music into the English language classroom?” shows that all of the teachers had worked, or works, with music and that they had all noticed what music can do for English language learners. Even though two of the teachers expressed some concerns for using music, we have come to the conclusion that the views expressed by the teachers were mainly positive. As a case in point, Anna stated that “yes, I think that you notice more advantages than disadvantages” and we could see from looking at our results that, according to the teachers, there were more benefits than challenges with using music.

Our second research question “how do the teachers motivate their choices to use or not use music in the English classroom?” can be answered in the following way; all teachers have used, or uses, music in their classrooms because of the positive effects it could have on the students’ language learning and their motivation. Other reasons for using music, expressed by the teachers, is that the students find that working with music on English lessons is joyful, considering that it is a break from the ordinary where they get to learn the English language in a natural way. However, three of the teachers stated that if the major part of the students does not have a musical interest the choice to use music is not recommended.

### 6.2 Study limitations

We realize that the small number of participants in our study may question the validity of our conclusions drawn from the interviews. However, according to Hatch (2002), the number of participants depends on what kind of study is carried out and what the purpose is (p. 49), and he further suggests that in order to get the answers you need to answer your research



questions, you should interview as many participants that are necessary (p. 50). Considering that we were able to answer our research question with the collected data we suggest that this empirical study is valid.

When we started our analysis we found it problematic that the differences in opinion between the music school teachers and ordinary school teachers were so significant. Eva and Sara work with learners who have a genuine interest in music, and therefore they do not see any challenges when working with music in their classes. For example, Eva's only issue with music is that she does not play any instruments and she mentions that this could have helped her in her teaching. In contrast to Eva and Sara stand Anna and Klara who both works at classic elementary schools and they both mentioned more disadvantages. The differences between the schools and the teachers can be seen as an issue, however, according to Bryman (2008), it can be helpful to conduct qualitative research "in more than one setting" when it comes to "identifying the significance of context and ways of thinking" (p. 387). As a consequence, we think that this is something that we have managed to do when choosing to interview four different teachers from two very different type of schools, for instance the importance of the setting and the type of students becomes clearly evident in the results and discussion.

### 6.3 Suggestions for future research

When we chose to do this study we took the decision to only look at the teachers and their professional and personal thoughts regarding the use of music in the English language classroom. This approach opens up for many other ways of conducting this study. For example, it would have been interesting to compare the teachers views with the students or to conduct actual tests on how music can affect a student's English language learning. Furthermore, it would also have been interesting to expand the number of participants in this study so that we could make a more thorough analysis of the difference between the musical school teachers and the regular school teachers.

## 6.4 Implications for teaching

In our view, working with music in the English language classroom can be a really good method to reach all learners and for them to experience knowledge in different ways, and that is why we both find it important to work with this method in our future profession.

Furthermore, we want to influence other teachers, especially English teachers, to work in this way considering that “songs” is mentioned in the core content for the subject in the syllabus.

The curriculum (2011) also stresses that creative ability is a part of what students should acquire (p. 12), and we consider that this creative ability can be accomplished when the learners get to work with English through music in various ways. Moreover, as a reason for using music we can take Klara’s statement “music is what makes you happy, it can cheer you up” as an example. If music is something joyful for the students then we assume that teaching English with music can facilitate learning. As an ending note, we think that music is such a broad topic, and as a consequence, teaching can be equally broad and open for possibilities. Time, setting, perspective, determination and passion set the boundaries and as future teachers it is those components that will influence our way of teaching.

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# Appendix 1

## Intervjuguide

- Allmänna frågor;
  - Hur länge har du arbetat som lärare?
  - Hur många år har du arbetat på denna skola?
  - Vilka ämnen undervisar du i?
  - Vilka klasser/årskurser har du?
- Hur tänker du kring att använda musik på engelskan?
  - Följdfrågor:
  - Kan du berätta lite om hur du väljer musik för din undervisning? Är det medvetna val?
  - På vilket sätt brukar du lägga upp det?
  - Vilken mängd?
  - Märker du några skillnader i klassen när du väljer att kombinera musik och engelska?
  - Ser du några fördelar med att arbeta på det sättet? Vilka?
  - Ser du några nackdelar/problem med att arbeta på det sättet? Vilka?
- Hur tänker du kring det centrala innehållet för engelska där det står att elever ska lära sig sånger, sagor och dikter och hur tar du tillvara på det?  
(Lgr' 11, Centralt innehåll: "Sånger, sagor och dikter" 4-6 + "Sånger och dikter" 7-9)