Chapter 8
Development of Linguistic Abilities in Bilingual Education Through Musical Stories

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ABSTRACT

Bilingual education at the earlier stages of education is one of the main concerns of current governments and educative policies. This is resulting in the proliferation of new methodologies and educative proposals in order to obtain the best possible results. However, most of the time, teachers and educators focus on teaching linguistic elements in isolation. The aim of this chapter is to propose the use of musical tales in bilingual education in early childhood education as a tool for teachers and students to learn to communicate fluently in the foreign language. The use of music, literature, and drama in the same activity makes the perfect combination to help children learn a new language, since it improves aspects like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and the communicative competence in general.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional language courses in Early Childhood Education and Primary Education are usually based on passive classes in which children are supposed to grasp truthful knowledge in an unidirectional way. Within this widespread methodology, the focus has basically been placed on teaching grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, most of the times, these aspects have been taught out of context, with no real application and very little related to the real students’ world.

Bilingual education in Spain is becoming one of the highest priorities of the national and regional governments, as well as it is of education agents and institutions involved in the design and development of educative laws and programs. However, despite the many efforts made by all those taking part in this project, there are still several aspects that need to be addressed, such as teachers training and new methodological lines specifically designed for this new reality.

The aim of this chapter is to suggest the inclusion of musical tales as a tool for the development of linguistic abilities in bilingual education and outline its advantages when using it with children.

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BACKGROUND

The teaching and learning process of a foreign language at early stages of education has been traditionally reduced to the memorisation of grammatical concepts and vocabulary lists that were subsequently put into practice by students in unreal situations and out of context.

According to Pardede (2011), in the nineteenth century, translating literary texts from the second/foreign language to the students’ native language was one of the main learning activities. From then until now, many pendular movements have occurred introducing and despising the use of literature in education. For example, while in the decades of the sixties, seventies and early eighties of the twentieth century literature was not very much used and the focus was set on the accuracy of grammatical form, literary works began to be considered again by teachers in the language classroom. This author affirms that there are three main reasons for this new interest, which are “authenticity, culture and personal growth”. Collie & Slater (1991) express this very idea, in a very similar way, listing the advantages as follows: authentic material, cultural enrichment, language advancement, and personal growth.

Also, Maley (1989) names some other reasons for using literature to teach a language, which are: universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity.

From this point of view, dealing with real contexts and materials facilitates the acquisition of language in a more natural way, given the fact that they are intended for native speakers. Povey (1967) reinforces this argument by stating that these authentic materials give the students the opportunity to take conscience of the limits of the foreign language they are learning. Besides, it is obvious the usefulness of literature to acquire cultural information and to include intercultural education with little children. Furthermore, since literature enables students to understand and appreciate other cultures, societies and ideologies different from their own, it encourages personal growth and intellectual development (Carter & Long, 1991).

These are not the only authors who are aware of the importance of using literature and short stories to teach a foreign language. For example, Littlewood (2000) states that:

A major problem of language teaching in the classroom is the creation of an authentic situation for language. All language classrooms, especially those outside the community of native speakers, are isolated from the context of events and situations which produce natural language. Literature can overcome this problem because, in literary works, language creates its own context. The actual situation of the reader becomes immaterial as he or she looks on the events created by language. These events create, in turn, a context of situation for the language of the book and enable it to transcend the artificial classroom situation (p.179).

In line with these arguments, authors like Dunn (2010), Murrey (1989) or Gates (2013) claim that in foreign language situations exposure to English can be very limited, the opportunities to use the language even more limited, and the teacher’s knowledge of English often insufficient or incorrect and that since English isn’t used outside the classroom, children may not see any practical use for it which lowers interest and motivation to learn. It is often simply an educational or parental requirement (Gates, 2013).