

# Using Songs to Encourage Sixth Graders to Develop English Speaking Skills

Uso de canciones para motivar a los estudiantes de grado sexto a desarrollar habilidades orales en inglés

**Mónica Duarte Romero**<sup>\*</sup>

**Luz Mery Tinjacá Bernal**<sup>\*\*</sup>

**Marilú Carrero Olivares**<sup>\*\*\*</sup>

Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School, Colombia

This article contains the procedures and findings of an investigation carried out by a team of teachers with the purpose of motivating students to speak English. We observed students' lack confidence to talk and that they had little motivation toward learning English. Thus, we used songs as a main resource in conjunction with different kind of activities thus giving students the opportunity to learn in a fun way during their first years of learning a foreign language. As a result of this research project, we found that learners could pronounce many words freely and accurately in a non-threatening environment. Students acquired new vocabulary and, the most important aspect, they were motivated to learn English.

*Key words:* Promoting confidence, speaking skills, using songs.

Este artículo presenta los procedimientos y resultados de una investigación realizada por un grupo de maestras, cuyo propósito era motivar a estudiantes de grado sexto a hablar en inglés. Observamos en los estudiantes inseguridad para hablar y poca motivación para aprender inglés. Por ello, optamos por usar canciones para articularlas a diferentes tipos de actividades, con el fin de darles a los estudiantes la oportunidad de aprender de manera divertida en sus primeros años de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Con este proyecto de investigación logramos que los estudiantes pudieran pronunciar muchas palabras libre y correctamente en un ambiente de aprendizaje armonioso. Los estudiantes adquirieron vocabulario nuevo y, lo más importante, se motivaron a aprender inglés.

*Palabras clave:* habilidades orales, promoción de seguridad, uso de canciones.

---

This paper reports on a study conducted by the authors while participating in the PROFILE Teacher Development Program at Universidad Nacional de Colombia in 2009-2010. The Teacher Development Program was sponsored by Secretaría de Educación de Bogotá, D.C. Code number: 1576, August 24, 2009.

\* E-mail: monicaduro7@hotmail.com

\*\* E-mail: luzmerytin@gmail.com

\*\*\* E-mail: marcar671@hotmail.com

This article was received on March 28, 2011, and accepted on December 16, 2011.

## Introduction

During the last few years English has become a really important tool in order to succeed professionally in our society; it is the language for business, research, public relations and the Internet. For this reason, teachers are looking for better strategies to teach this subject.

One of the major weaknesses that we have found in students is the lack of confidence to talk, since they do not have the opportunity to learn English in most public primary schools; they usually start only in the last course, fifth grade. On the other hand, students do not have the chance to interact in English in their daily lives and this causes the language not to be very meaningful for them.

In many public schools teachers cannot rely on good resources for teaching and it is a barrier that in most cases does not let students learn English in an interactive and pleasant way.

In this study we implemented songs because doing so was an interesting resource used by English teachers and by teachers of other subjects. In fact, they have used songs as a resource to develop communicative abilities properly in a foreign language, providing students with the opportunity to talk with confidence and giving teachers the chance to teach in a fun way.

For those reasons, we decided to focus on using songs to encourage sixth graders to develop English speaking skills while having two main objectives:

1. To explore different alternatives for exploiting songs in the English class.
2. To examine students' oral production when taking part in activities that involve songs in English.

This article contains a brief description of what we did with students to improve oral skills by using songs based on some important theoretical studies related to music and the development of oral abilities. At the end we will present the outcomes and conclusions.

## Context and Participants

This project was developed at Álvaro Gómez Hurtado public school, located in zone 11 Suba, in Bogotá, Colombia. This school had about three thousand, five hundred students divided between two different branches; the primary branch is situated in a renovated building housing one thousand, two hundred students. Junior and high schools are located in another building with two thousand three hundred students distributed in two shifts (a.m. and p.m. shifts).

The school's philosophy attempts to provide an integral education that allows students an instruction in values, productivity, construction of knowledge and environmental education, with the intention of promoting social interaction and becoming participative in democracy, founded on respect for the dignity of human beings.

On the other hand, the PEI<sup>1</sup> of our school was focused on developing communication abilities as a social and humanistic commitment. Also, it states that speaking is one of the most significant elements that represents communicative competences to provide students with opportunities and tools to demonstrate values and communicative competences. That was one of the reasons that we designed this project, particularly about oral skill production.

We carried out the teaching activities with 84 sixth graders who belonged to two different classrooms: 601 and 602. However, we concentrated our study on the 601 group and focused the analysis and the recollection of information on five specific students who had different profiles. s1 was a high achiever, s2 was a smart student, s3 was lazy, s4 was a difficult student, she did not like English classes; and s5 was naughty. These students were from 11

---

<sup>1</sup> PEI = Proyecto Educativo Institucional (Institutional Education Project).

to 13 years old and belonged to the socio economic strata 2 and 3. The students were selected on purpose to study the different reactions in the different students' profiles.

### **Literature Review**

We found some projects and ideas which were taken into consideration for our project as well as the guidelines based on (Nunan, 1992) about literature reviews. The following two issues were kept in mind: advantages of the use of songs in the English class and activities to promote speaking skills with songs.

#### **Advantages of the Use of Songs in the English Class**

There are many key studies that have proved that including songs in learning English processes is a very useful tool. Morales (2008) considers that when students sing they may improve English speaking skills and practice pronunciation. In addition, they can discuss the different topics in the lyrics like love, hate, revenge, and in this manner they can practice speaking by expressing opinions and reflections about the contents of the songs.

According to Orlova (2003) these are some of the advantages for working in class with songs:

- Practicing the rhythm, stress and the intonation patterns of the English language.
- Teaching vocabulary, especially in the vocabulary reinforcement stage.
- Teaching grammar. In this respect, songs are especially favored by teachers while investigating the use of the tenses.
- Teaching speaking. For this purpose, songs and mainly their lyrics are employed as a stimulus for class discussions.
- Teaching listening. Music can be helpful for comprehension.

- Developing writing skills. For this purpose a song can be used in a variety of ways; for example, speculation as to what could happen to the characters in the future, writing a letter to the main character, etc.

After having developed a musical project, Cuesta (2006) expressed that “students showed behaviors, emotions or feelings particularly to interest in or enthusiasm for the work the activities proposed” (p. 52). Similarly, McCarthy (2006) talks about the use of songs to teach more than just a vocabulary point. Songs allow teachers to cover specific grammar points in an effortless fashion. For example, one teacher, Loretta, who posted on Dave’s ESL Café, mentions the use of Cat Steven’s “Moonshadow” in a lesson on the future tense. She writes: “It has many if ‘clauses’ and uses both ‘will’ and ‘to be going + infinitive’ constructions”<sup>2</sup>. We think that this lesson is exciting for students because not only do they get to hear the song, but they are also able to see their grammar lesson in action. Therefore, even if the student cannot construct the future tense by him/herself, the use of songs allows students to practice speaking (or singing) this grammar point until they have mastered the use of this technique for themselves.

#### **Activities to Promote Speaking Skills with Songs**

There are many activities and ideas that some authors highlight to promote speaking skills with songs; for instance, Morales (2008) states that teachers have to be careful when choosing a song. It should have the right characteristics to fulfill students’ needs in terms of the learners’ context and the possibilities the song gives them in order to introduce new elements of the language teachers

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.eslcafe.com/idea/index.cgi?display:1009678819-28037.txt>

want the students to have contact with. Therefore, careful selection of the songs is important according to the level of speaking that the students have, and it is advisable that songs could be selected for them, according to their own interest.

According to Natasa (2006), sometimes songs can be added, making things a bit different and out of the expected e.g. “Row, row, row your boat” can easily be changed into “Fly, fly, fly your plane”. It is basically the teachers who decide what or how to change the song, and it is always welcomed by the learners. In addition, we think that when students continuously repeat the same words they easily learn new vocabulary and it contributes to improving their oral expression.

Some other researchers like Lindstromberg (2004) and Molinsky (2000) propose activities like the following ones:

- Song Illustrations: Draw simple pictures illustrating a story of the song; then cut them out and make a word sheet with the pictures placed on it properly. Ask students to listen to the song and put the pictures in order.
- Mixed-up lines: Mix up the order of the lines; then, ask learners to listen to the song and put the lines in the right order.
- Finding the word: This activity is based on asking students to listen for words and write them down with certain sounds in the songs.

We considered other proposals that were interesting to apply during the lesson, for instance:

- Act: Create a dramatization with the theme of the song.
- Different rhythms: Have students sing the same song in different rhythms.
- Graphic representation: After listening to the song make a drawing trying to represent the meaning of the song and then explain it.
- Imitation: Have students pretend they are the singers of the song.

Allen and Valette (1977) suggest that students bring to class different kinds of instruments and with these attempt to sing songs they love. They consider that this resource can become a motivator for students to learn a second language.

To conclude, we found main advantages of using songs in the English class and various activities that are important for promoting speaking skills with songs. This information gave us the illumination to develop this project.

### **Procedure**

We organized the different tasks with the team. One of us was the teacher in charge of implementing the teaching activities with students. She collected the data while students were completing the activities. The other teachers were in charge of searching for information of similar investigations in order to help with the development of the whole study. In some opportunities the other two teachers observed the classes to evaluate the process.

We considered that action research was very helpful in developing our study. According to Wallace (1998), the most important function of action research “is to facilitate the ‘reflective cycle’, and this way provide an effective method for improving professional action” (p. 18). On the other hand, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, in Burns, 1999) state that an action research study consists of four essential “moments” –planning, action, observation and reflection– and this was the way we worked.

1. Planning: In this stage we explored the ideas of authors and researchers who had already worked on this kind of projects; also, we observed our students in order to diagnose their previous learning to plan the right activities to develop our project. After identifying the problem we created strategies to develop the project. Then, we designed lesson plans and workshops to work in classes with the students (see Appendixes A and B). We also

designed instruments and activities for collecting and analyzing data, namely: surveys, daily field notes, and videos.

2. Action: In this part we implemented activities already planned like song selections, presentation of the songs and their vocabulary, modeling and practicing pronunciation, discussions of some vocabulary and topics of the songs, listening to the songs, filling in the selected blanks, and practicing the song. This was done by singing as a whole class and then by groups.

3. Observation: That was a permanent activity. We saw the process of the students' behavior and learning, and identified the changes in students' abilities to speak English. Information gathering was done through surveys, field notes and videos as already mentioned. Surveys were employed to know what the students' preferences were and to have an overview of their perceptions toward learning English. Moreover, field notes were useful to collect and analyze the data while videos were utilized to compare the different behaviors and students' different processes class by class. Finally, workshops were adapted to do multiple activities during the classes such as introducing vocabulary, filling in the blanks, completing charts of information and having a guide with which to practice the songs while they got used to pronouncing well. A sample is provided in Appendix B.

4. Reflection: It led us to review the gathered information, looking for new ideas for improving the action part of the study. Along the implementation of the new set of teaching strategies and activities, we found advances and difficulties, which allowed feedback for constant improvement.

### Pedagogical Design

As we said before, our project focused on using songs to encourage sixth graders to develop the speaking skills. During the development of the

project we followed the phases proposed by Burns (1999) as well as the guidance given by Cárdenas (2010). Also, we used the ideas of the authors mentioned in the literature review, especially those of Lindstromberg (2004) and Molinsky (2000).

As already mentioned, we used songs by planning our lessons in the form of workshops. The first thing we did was to select a group of songs; after that, we pre-selected ten of them while considering the important aspects a song should have to be implemented in the project like the vocabulary and grammar range. The ten pre-selected songs were the following:

- "This Love" sung by Maroon Five
- "Lemmon Tree" sung by The Secret Garden
- "Yesterday" sung by The Beatles
- "Yellow Submarine" sung by The Beatles
- "Don't Worry Be Happy" sung by Bob Marley
- "Three Little Birds" sung by Bob Marley
- "No Woman No Cry" sung by Bob Marley
- "Yellow" by Coldplay
- "Dust in the Wind" sung by Kansas.

"All Together Now" sung by The Beatles was the first song included in the project with the students. "I Gotta Feeling" sung by Black Eyed Peas was the second and last song used in the project. Although it was not selected at the beginning, it was chosen after the reflection and the results of the implementation of the first one.

On the other hand, at the beginning we did a chronogram with the first song "All Together Now" and, according to the results of this first action stage, we included modifications in the rest of the activities of the second song, "I Gotta Feeling"; this song enriched the project with new ideas and suggestions given by the learners and derived from the reflection of each stage of the study. Then we followed the steps given by Burns (1999) to organize the data analysis and write the findings.

### Data Collection

For collecting, analyzing and interpreting the data, we followed the five steps proposed by Burns (1999): assembling, coding and comparing the data, building interpretations and reporting the outcomes.

As already stated, the instruments used to collect the data were observations of the classes using daily field notes or videos, and surveys. First, we observed the English classes in order to get an overview about students' speaking; after that, we applied a survey in Spanish. It was applied to eighty students of two sixth grades to get a general idea of their expectations and points of view about English lessons (see Appendix C) and in another survey we explored what students perceived in connection to speaking and songs (see Appendix D).

We had informal talks with students to listen to their perceptions and suggestions about alternatives for exploiting songs in the English class, and their interest in learning as well. In the English classes we wrote field notes daily to observe students' oral production when taking part in activities that involved songs (see Appendix E).

### Data Analysis and Results

In this stage we gathered, organized and coded the information that we took in each one of the instruments. At the beginning of the process we observed the English classes to know about students' English speaking level and knowledge. We could see that most of the students were really shy, nervous and did not express confidence, especially when they took part in oral activities, especially in personal oral presentations.

In the surveys used in the diagnostic stage, we found that 90 percent of the students stated that learning English through music should be interesting and enjoyable. However, 8 percent said that using music could be difficult because they did not

understand the lyrics and the singers usually sang very fast. Besides, in informal talks some of them suggested the use of musical videos and said that music helped to gain confidence at the moment of speaking with their friends. However, others said they would feel ashamed when singing because of their pronunciation mistakes. Nonetheless, they admitted that learning English was necessary in order to succeed in professional life.

We examined the information gathered to see relevant and common aspects, which were connected to our objectives. After a deep study we found the categories and subcategories shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** The Role of Songs in Developing Speaking Skills



As shown in Figure 1, we had two categories and four sub-categories, which are going to be explained in the following paragraphs. To identify each one of the participants we numbered them using the following codes: Student 1 (s1), Student 5 (s5), and Teacher (T). Most of the samples presented here were taken from the students' conversations and were translated from Spanish into English for the purpose of this publication.

### Songs as a Means to Learn New Vocabulary and Pronunciation

When taking part in activities that involved music, students felt more confident because it was easier for them to remember the pronunciation modeled by the song, and with the rhythm it was even easier to keep the songs' vocabulary and pronunciation in their memories. For example, when they sang the first song "All Together Now" it was a little tough to get used to singing and to faithfully imitate the pronunciation at the beginning; but once they got used to it, it was really easy for them to remember the lyrics and to use the vocabulary later in a real context in communicating with peers.

Regarding vocabulary, it was introduced in different ways, but mainly by workshops. There we presented the unknown words; the teacher explained the meanings and modeled the vocabulary, having students repeat after completing some activities. On some occasions, when the song started, we had students practice pronunciation; after that, the teacher reinforced and fostered practice with the vocabulary and had students say the meaning of given words and practice their pronunciation.

Even though there were different problems, students were very enthusiastic and showed a lot of interest. This helped to achieve our first objective.

#### Exploring New Vocabulary and Pronunciation With Songs

We wanted to call the students' attention towards the fact that songs can be seen as a motivational tool. For one, it lets students learn new vocabulary. For example, during the first stage of the pedagogical intervention, the teacher previously introduced some vocabulary of animals, the alphabet, numbers and colors. This vocabulary was more meaningful for students when they heard the words in the song and could learn them by heart.

The teacher exploited the remaining vocabulary by asking for meanings most of the time; that way students could learn it.

In addition to that, during the first stages of the project, vocabulary was the first thing taught. That vocabulary was required to understand the meaning of the song, and was related to animals, the alphabet, numbers, and colors. Luckily after searching very hard, we could find a song that could match basic topics taught in sixth grade. The first topic was animals and it was taught by using flashcards, repeating pronunciation and then playing imitation games. In order to work with the alphabet, a contest was the perfect device to encourage them to practice and learn the words. Students were also asked to utilize the vocabulary in different contexts or in different activities; for example, by saying sentences using the verb to be and animals, having contests with numbers, writing and saying them correctly, and imitating animals along with pronouncing the vocabulary. Also, there were other activities like filling in the chart and completing information.

After introducing the basic vocabulary with the activities mentioned above, the teacher gave them a workshop with the more complex vocabulary and lyrics of the song. At the beginning of the activity students were curious to know the new expressions, as highlighted in the following sample:

T: Ok. It is time to start with the song.

S1: Miss Mónica... What does it mean? Can I have a little more?

T: It means, when you want more food or more to drink...

S2: Miss Mónica, What does it mean? My friend to tea?

T: It means... You guys know what friend and tea mean... It is very similar to Spanish. It is like an invitation to drink tea.

On the other hand, talking about improving pronunciation, the songs were really helpful. The teacher modeled the pronunciation but with the songs it was very easy to practice anytime. Also, with

the rhythm of the songs it was easy to remember the pronunciation of the vocabulary. Furthermore, after listening and practicing many times, students were able to pronounce many words correctly.

We began to encourage the students to work on pronunciation using the first song “All Together Now” by The Beatles. After practice they could sing like this:

T: Ok, it is time to sing the song.

S1: Can I have a little more. Can I bring my friend to tea? Sail the ship, Chop the tree, Skip the rope, Look at me, all together now...

S2: Can I have a little more. Can I bring my friend to tea? Sail the ship, Chop the tree, Skip the rope, Look at me, all together now...

S4: Can I have a little more. Can I bring my friend to tea? Bom bam bum. Sail the ship, Chop the tree, Skip the rope, Look at me, all together now...

According to Natasa (2006), when students repeat the same words continuously, they easily learn new vocabulary and it contributes to improving their oral expression. That was evidenced in the previous example.

From the beginning of the project the teacher explained to the students that at the end of the process with the first song, “All Together Now”, they were expected to make a presentation. After studying the vocabulary, doing different oral and written activities and games related to vocabulary, some students were asked to sing for the whole class. Students were very excited about the new way of learning. Although some of them seemed to be unsatisfied with the kind of songs chosen, most of the learners agreed that it was an enjoyable activity. For instance, some students said the following:

S2: I like this kind of activities because it is a different way to learn.

S5: Uyy! It was really nice. I love that song, the part of the song that I like the most is “bum bam bum”.

S4: I like learning English through songs, but that song, mmm... It is old fashioned and boring.

[The mates of S4, say: “Yeah that’s true, learning through music is cool, but that song was boring”].

S1: The song is really nice and with it I could learn new words and pronounce them well.

S3: This song is nice, I like it.

On the whole, we observed motivated students that improved pronunciation and listening, and who could also learn new vocabulary. It should be noted that some comments like the one of S4 and her mates gave us hints to incorporate modern songs to the project so that they could match what students would like to have in their English class.

In addition, we could confirm what Morales (2008) found in relation to the role songs play in helping students improve speaking skills and practice pronunciation. Likewise, we observed that, as Orlova (2003) asserts, students can learn vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in a pleasant way.

#### Improving Oral Skills While Listening to Songs

At the beginning students were very excited about the project, but when they listened to the song “All Together Now” for the first time, they were very concerned. This can be evidenced in the following excerpt:

T: Teacher asks. Was it difficult?

S5: Yeah. It was really difficult. That song goes so fast... I couldn’t understand anything.

T: Yes, I know, but with the time, you will be able to understand and to follow the lyrics. Trust me.

S5: Uhhmm...

For most of them, it seemed impossible to pronounce many words correctly by following a song. They thought they were not able to accomplish that goal because they were not used to learning or studying English in such a way, and by that moment they had not practiced English in a formal academic setting at all.

For those reasons, the first moments of the implementation of the project were really difficult



for them, since they were not used to listening to spoken English in an academic context, so as the song went fast, they had to go according to its pace, following and repeating the lyrics. Furthermore they were asked to remember the vocabulary while listening. It was many things to do at the same time, but with time and practice they got used to it.

We worked most of the time with only the songs because we ran out of time and the team could not work specifically on other oral activities. The only thing we were sure about was that students could learn some vocabulary and that they were able to develop oral skills using the vocabulary provided by the songs.

On the other hand, at the beginning students practiced individually, but during the process they had the opportunity to work with their favorite peers. This was vital to encourage motivation, and hence, they showed improvement in pronunciation.

### Showing Confidence and Motivation When Singing

Students were motivated just with the fact that they had the opportunity to learn using music. As we know, that is one of the things that kids and teens really enjoy and have contact with nowadays. Additionally, after some practice, when they realized that it was not that difficult, they felt stimulated to accomplish something that at the beginning seemed very tough. For example, at the beginning of the presentation of the song “All Together Now”, they were concerned, but the teacher gave them time to get used to it and also supported them in overcoming their difficulties with some words. Furthermore, and since students were working in groups, she encouraged the teams to cooperate and to help each other.

On the other hand, in the results it is shown that, after developing diverse activities, students have improved their oral skills. Furthermore, after

analyzing the information and students’ process they gave us new ideas to incorporate into the project like using modern songs to make learning more interesting for them.

In this category we derived two sub-categories. The first one refers to team work to overcome fears because we could note how the students encouraged each other in order to sing and develop different activities. Team work was significant because it provided students with confidence to speak English. The second sub-category, talking in a non-threatening environment, refers to the confidence that the students acquired during the development of the project, even when they made mistakes.

#### Team Work to Overcome Fears

As already mentioned, we employed the strategy of having students work with their favourites peers due to the fact that we knew they would feel more comfortable working with their buddies.

During the presentation of the second song, “I Gotta Feeling”, students sang in front of the class, in groups formed freely after practicing the song many times. For this activity the teacher had them perform the song as they liked; they were free to dress up, to dance or act it out, but teacher reminded them that the most important point was the pronunciation of the song. Learners looked very excited planning all kinds of activities with the song and seemed to enjoy the class, as can be evidenced in this excerpt:

T: How do you want to perform the song? Do you want me to organize you or Do you want to do it by yourselves?

S4: Ayy Miss Mónica, let us organize by ourselves with our friends, and you will see that we will do a better job.

We evidenced here that songs were forms to integrate the students working in teams and to create a comfortable environment for learning English.

Throughout the process, and when they talked or sang in groups with their favourite peers, students felt much more confident.

Another important aspect to point out is that the students had the opportunity to use the vocabulary and the grammar patterns found in the songs in a different context, and to communicate. For example, they were asked to speak about their favorite things like their favorite colors, their lucky number, their favorite animals (this was the vocabulary of the song “All Together Now”). Also, with the second song, “I Gotta Feeling”, they talked about parties and dances. Obviously, in this part of the talk they used some expressions in Spanish because they had only a basic knowledge of spoken English. The vocabulary given by the songs was pronounced accurately during the talks.

In this same line of thought, Rengifo (2009) said that when working together, students are capable of doing something that they considered impossible to achieve like singing or talking in English. In our case, it is important to point out that songs in class are a strategy to work in an integrated way, which, in turn, helps us avoid problems of discipline. This way, students can overcome difficulties and fears.

#### **Talking in a Non-Threatening Environment**

In the first steps of the implementation of the songs, “All Together Now” and “I Gotta Feeling”, students were quite afraid of making mistakes when they were asked to sing individually. As could be evidenced in one of the videos, when the teacher played the song, most of them looked down; they did not want to sing the song because they felt embarrassed; and although the teacher kept encouraging them to sing, they seemed to be very shy. Nevertheless, when they sang in groups, they were more confident. This was shown in the video-recording of the last session. Each group was very enthusiastic and most of them looked very excited

when they came to the front of the class. They sang and some of them danced doing it with a lot of confidence and pronouncing their words well.

It means that when students feel free to work with who they want to, they may do a better job, feeling free and comfortable. Also, it seemed that music gave them a lot of confidence and they felt pleased when we had music in class. Students commented about it as follows:

S4: If we always were taught in this way, we will learn a lot more.

S2: Yeah, working with my friends I feel happier and I don't feel very shy.

S1: Definitely that way of learning is nicer. I don't feel ashamed.

S3: For me, it is the same thing. The only thing I care is to get good grades.

S5: No Miss Mónica... I love that way of learning. Please keep teaching us that way.

To conclude, we should restate that if students are given the chance to feel comfortable, they most probably do a better job. We should also highlight that music was a good alternative to relax and learn in a fun way. In this respect, Pérez (2010) points out that most people, especially adolescents, enjoy listening to music as a hobby while working, studying or developing different activities.

As mentioned before, two songs were used. The first one was “All Together Now”, which gave us new ideas for the second one, “I Gotta Feeling”. Students were asked to make a presentation after studying the vocabulary of the second song too. During this presentation they organized their groups as they liked and were free to dance or play musical instruments to make a real imitation of the song while singing. During the second final presentation, students gave a better performance in contrast with the first presentation of the song “All Together Now”. In this stage they felt really confident and expressed progress in learning, as can be read in the following sample:

T: Guys ¿How was the song. Was it difficult? How did you like it?

S1: Miss Mónica, it was really cool. To me, it was wonderful. The rhythm was nice and the lyrics weren't difficult.

S5: Uyyy miss Monica! The song was cool. At the beginning I thought I wouldn't be able to sing it but I could learn and it was easy.

S2: Well, I was a little ashamed, but I really enjoyed the activity, Even I had to practice a lot.

In general, most of the students looked very happy with their learning process because they saw how they could improve their speaking by listening and practicing. Also, the contents of the song "All Together Now" helped to introduce the topics required for the syllabus of the school, such as animals, colors, numbers and the alphabet. The song "I Gotta Feeling" helped to introduce vocabulary of the days of the week and some patterns of the verb to be that were implicit in the lyrics of the song.

### **Conclusions and Pedagogical Implications**

Based on our study, we can point out that songs turn out to be an important part of the daily teaching activities. The combining of curricular activities with music not only helps students to develop speaking, but grammar as well; students can also internalize new vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and improve modulation, among other oral communication skills. Besides, they can acquire new vocabulary and understand the usage of grammar items in a real context through exploring activities related to the songs.

In addition, learners enjoyed the classes while learning a foreign language. When using music, they were more motivated and talked in a non-threatening environment. Learners practiced the vocabulary, laughed and developed the activities with confidence. On the other hand, an average number of students looked very concerned and

shy; they thought it was not going to be possible for them to improve their oral production skills and they experienced some difficulties at the beginning, but along the process they found they could improve little by little. This was possible because they were supported by the teacher and by their mates, and in the last activities they accomplished the objective proposed in the project. This helped them command new vocabulary, improve their pronunciation and learn some new grammar structures. Most of them looked laidback and confident. They finally recognized that making mistakes is allowed and is part of the learning process. And, the most important aspect, they were motivated to learn English.

One thing to take into account is that teachers have to be careful and look for pertinent activities and songs because there are plenty of songs, but the majority does not match the needs of students. At the beginning we chose a song that had very simple grammar structures and vocabulary –because we had beginner students– but it was an old-fashioned song, which means that it was not really interesting to some students. The second song was modern, but it had a lot of new words and expressions thus, it was impossible for students to learn all of them. However, the purpose of this project was to improve oral skills, and we were able to reach this objective because students pronounced many words freely and used this vocabulary in other activities like talks in front of the class. For these reasons, a careful selection of the songs is vital.

There is another important point to make about this project: we could explore just the beginning of the research but it would be good to continue looking for more alternatives adapted to exploring music as the main resource to help students in pronunciation and speaking. So, this project can be easily adapted for primary, high schools, adults, language institutes, etc.

Finally, we should bear in mind that every day our profession is more demanding and we have to be ready to face the challenges that come up, finding solutions or different alternatives to overcome limitations. Therefore, we should admit that the intention to do a project like this is to look for better strategies with which to teach, going beyond the results, and that this search comprises a non-stop activity that we as teachers have to keep in mind.

## References

- Allen, E. D., & Valette, R. M. (1977). *Classroom techniques: Foreign languages and English as a second language*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.
- Burns, A. (1999). *Collaborative action research for English language teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cárdenas B., M. L. (2010). *Pedagogical design*. Melba Libia Cárdenas B. Memoirs. Archives of the PROFILE Teacher Development Programme, Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá.
- Cuesta, M. (2006). Songs in the English Class: A Strategy to Encourage Tenth Graders' Oral Production. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 12(1), 47-57.
- Lindstromberg, S. (Ed.). (2004). *Language activities for teenagers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McCarthy, J. (2006). Songs in the classroom. *TESOL courses*. Retrieved from: <http://www.tesolcourse.com/tesol-course-articles/songs-classroom/article-01-jmc.php>
- Molinsky, J. (2000). *Side by side: Handbook of teaching strategies*. New York, NY: Longman Pearson Education.
- Morales, C. (2008). Using rock music as a teaching-learning tool. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 9, 163-180.
- Natasa, I. K. (November, 2006). Developing speaking skills in the young learners classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 12(11). Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Klancar-Speaking Skills.html>
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Orlova, N. (2003). Helping prospective EFL teachers learn how to use songs in teaching conversation classes. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 9(3). Retrieved from: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Orlova-Songs.html>
- Pérez, D. (2010). The role of music in young learners' oral productions in English. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 12(1), 141-157.
- Rengifo, A. R. (2009). Improving pronunciation through the use of karaoke in an adults English class. *PROFILE Issues in Teachers' Professional Development*, 11(1), 91-105.
- Wallace, M. (1998). *Action Research for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## About the Authors

**Mónica Duarte Romero** holds a BA degree in Modern Languages from Universidad Incca de Colombia. She has attended some courses at Georgetown University in Washington D.C., USA, and studied in a professional development program at Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Currently she works as a teacher at Brazuelos School and at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Bogotá, Colombia.

**Luz Mery Tinjacá Bernal** holds a Bachelor degree in primary education and promotion of the community from Universidad Santo Tomás (Colombia); a specialization in informatics from Universidad Autónoma (Colombia) and she studied in a professional development program at Universidad Nacional de Colombia. She currently works as a primary teacher in Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School in Bogotá, Colombia.

**Marilú Carrero Olivares** holds a bachelor degree in Modern Languages, Spanish and English, from Universidad La Gran Colombia (Colombia). She is an English and Spanish teacher interested in didactics; she studied in a professional development program at Universidad Nacional de Colombia.

## Appendix A: Lesson Plan Sample

### Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School

Grade level: Sixth grade Song: "All Together Now" - The Beatles

#### Objectives:

1. Students will be able to recognize the vocabulary previously studied in the song.
2. Students will start getting familiar with the rhythm of the song.
3. Students will correctly express orally some ideas of the song.

**Estimated time:** One hour

**Description:** Start to get familiar with the song gathering the vocabulary studied beforehand like numbers, animals and the alphabet.

#### Procedure:

Before beginning the class, learners will revise the vocabulary worked and afterwards, the idea is to motivate the students through song using the tape and video and develop the activities planned by using photocopies.

#### Activities:

1. Watch the video and the song to get familiar with it.
2. Discuss with students the possible topics of the song.

**Materials and resources:** Video tape, papers, TV, and home theater.

**Required knowledge:** Students will have previous knowledge of some vocabulary of the songs.

**Motivation:** Teacher will explain the activity having students discuss the Beatles and then showing them the video of the song.

**Statement of purpose:** Teacher will play the song in order for students to listen to the first part two times then discuss the possible topics and meanings of the vocabulary.

After that, the teacher will present the expressions of the song and vocabulary to students in a workshop. They will discuss the meanings and try to memorize them, then they will write the meanings in the workshop.

**Guided practice:** During this part the teacher will play the tape in order for students to fill in the charts with the missing words; the idea is to play the song many times until most of the students get the missing words in the right place.

**Assessment:** Teacher will discuss with the students the answers they get while listening to the song.

## Appendix B: Workshop Sample

Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School

Song: "All Together Now" - The Beatles

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### 1. Expressions:

Can I have a little more?  
Can I bring my friend to tea?  
Sail the ship,  
Chop the tree  
Boom, bam, boom  
Skip the rope,  
Look at me  
All together now  
Can I take my friend to bed?  
I love you

### 2. Listen again to the first part of the song and fill in the blanks with the words in the box:

One, four, five,  
eight, ten, love.

One, \_\_\_\_\_, three, \_\_\_\_\_  
Can I have a little more?  
\_\_\_\_\_, six, seven \_\_\_\_\_ nine \_\_\_\_\_ I \_\_\_\_\_ you.

### 3. Listen to the second part of the song and fill in the blanks with the words in the box:

B, D, friend, F, H, you

A, \_\_\_\_\_, C, \_\_\_\_\_  
Can I bring my \_\_\_\_\_ to tea?  
E, \_\_\_\_\_, G, \_\_\_\_\_, I, J, I love \_\_\_\_\_.  
Boom, bam, boom  
Boom, bam, boom

**4. Listen to the rest of the song and fill the blanks with the words in the chart:**

Me, ship, thee, look, rope, sheep
--------------------------------------

**5. Listen to the 3<sup>rd</sup> part and choose the right word:**

Sail the ship/shop,  
Boom, bam, boom  
Chop the tree/three  
Boom, bam, boom  
Skip the/t rope,  
Boom, bam, boom  
Look at me/my

All together now.... (x16)

**6. Listen to the song again and complete the following table with the numbers, colors, and the letters of the alphabet that you find in the text.**

Numbers	Colors	Alphabet

**7. Correct the mistakes and rewrite them:**

Blak, wite, gren, ret  
kan I teik me frend to bed?  
Pin, bron, yelow oranje and blue I lobe jou  
Oll together naw...(x16)

---

---

---

---

## **Appendix C: Survey Used to Identify Students' Expectations and Views about English Lessons**

*Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School*

**Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_ **J.T.**    **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Objective:** To get a general idea of students' expectations and their points of view about English.

Answer the following questions:

1. Is it important for you to learn English at school?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Why is it important to learn English?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How would you like the English class to be?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you consider an English class could be fun to learn in?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix D: Survey Used to Identify Students' Perceptions  
about Speaking and Songs**

Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School

**Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_ J.T.    **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Objective:** To explore what students perceive in connection to speaking and songs.

1. Do you consider speaking English to be easy?

Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you think that you can learn English through songs?

Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you consider that singing an English song can help you to improve your pronunciation and fluency?

Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. How do you prefer to get oral skills?

a. Presentations \_\_\_\_\_

b. Songs \_\_\_\_\_

c. Musical videos \_\_\_\_\_

d. Dialogues \_\_\_\_\_

e. Other, What? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Field Notes Samples\*

### Álvaro Gómez Hurtado School

Date and Topic	General Observation	Comments
<p>April 9<sup>th</sup> Topic: Alphabet</p>	<p>Students had a great response to the topic they had previous knowledge and they were practicing very exciting, teacher model the pronunciation and by group they pronounce good but when teacher ask individual they are very shy and they do not pronounce ok.</p>	<p>s1: She had a little problem pronouncing some letters like w, z, j. The others were ok. s2: She pronounces ok most of the letters. s3: He is not really interested. Teacher has to push him a lot, he feels ashamed at the time of pronouncing. s4: She did well with most of the letters but they had some difficulties trying to remember some of the pronunciation of the letters. s5: Still having problems with pronunciation and he misbehaves a lot in class, sometimes he is not focus and just forgets the correct way to pronounce and recognizing some letters.</p>
<p>May 13<sup>th</sup> Topic: Presentation Video</p>	<p>Today students were very nervous and excited, at the beginning we practiced together after that they decided to dress up for the presentation, some groups did a great job, some did not, but the most important point was the most of the group could accomplish the objective that was learning English through a song.</p>	<p>s1: She was really nervous, she sang all the song correctly, but she almost could not face the rest of the class because she is so shy. s2: She did great, she did not have any difficulty and she brought some material in order to do her presentation more interesting. s3: He did a good job he sang most of the parts of the song, but he had some difficulties in the colors part. s4: She did not sing in front of the class but she just stood there, just one of three of them sang the song. s5: Though he is not a really advanced student. He performed the song excellent. He danced and introduced in the song new interesting things that made all the class laugh. Also, he sang the song perfectly.</p>

\* The notes are presented as recorded in class by the teacher-observer.