

A Perspective on Alternative Music Scene Involvement and English Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to analyze the relationship between ‘alternative music scene’ involvement and English language learning, as described by 5 non-native English speakers. Today’s times, strongly dominated by the rules of mass media commercialism, have somewhat rejuvenated the learning experience, creating a cultural and generational gap between the teachers and the students. Learners have been increasingly influenced by ‘alternative’ ideas which have formed social rules and subgroups, primarily in the form of ‘alternative music’ genres and subcultures. ‘Alternative music’ has been able to foster and create interest, shape social models and groups, and stand as an alternative option to the cultural mainstream. An extensive corpus of English written music has proved to be the catalyst of the students’ attention towards English language learning. One of the authors’ 10 years personal involvements in the punk ‘music scene’ and the experiences of 4 other individuals representing different stages of participation to a ‘music scene’, as defined by Lena and Peterson (2008), have been considered. A Delphi Panel Meeting was organized in order to individuate and discuss the learning constructs drawn from the qualitative analysis of the data. The findings supported the existence of a positive relationship between ‘alternative music scene’ involvement and English language learning.

Keywords: Alternative music, music curriculum, English and music, Alternative music scene, music scene involvement, language teaching curriculum, generational gap

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INTRODUCTION

21st century classrooms around the world are beginning to witness pockets of students quietly seated in the back rows totally unaware of what is happening because

listening to their MP4 players. To many teachers and other practitioners, this kind of students may be categorized as “at-risk” or “unsuccessful” language learners, only because they are not learning English through the institutionalized curriculum presented in the classroom. Instead, they are constructing their very own curriculum managing the learning of English through the fresh, contemporary and motivating world of today’s hundreds of ‘alternative music’ bands.

‘Alternative music’ has gained a position and role in the contemporary international music industry, becoming an umbrella definition for many musical styles which may not be just limited to the most popular punk, heavy metal, rap, and funk. Being an alternative to mainstream music and using a fresher, less institutionalized form and style, ‘alternative music’ has widened its boundaries and attracted millions of fans worldwide.

Previous literature in the field of English language teaching (ELT) has regarded learners’ motivation among one of the key factors for successful language learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Oxford, 1990). Nevertheless, how such motivational factors may be employed to meet the learning needs of that fringe of students who embrace one or the other subgenres of popular rock, or “alternative” music, is a question that thus far seems to have been completely neglected by ELT researchers. The reasons behind this gap are unknown, but still leave many questions open to interpretation. Would it be possible to capture the attention of these apparently rebellious students?

Why are they not interested by traditional teaching? Would their favourite music styles constitute a complementary addition to the ELT curriculum?

According to Prodromou (1988), English is not only the international language, but it is also the language of international (and often national) rock and alternative music. Students learn English words from the song lyrics and the records’ sleeves; they sing them and quote them back at the teachers. To ignore this variety of English because of its popular background would represent a big mistake (Moi, 2003; Prodromou, 1988). Kirkland (2007) later evidenced how the same motivational value addressed to rock music has great effect on focusing at-risk students by means of employing hip-hop music lyrics as texts the students can relate to and appreciate. In this regard, Cremin (2009) also stresses that music is a useful component to motivate English learners, and may be employed as a key to interpret poetical texts in the lyrical form. Furthermore, music has also been positively associated with the advancement of English reading and writing skills (Diedwardo, 2007).

Nevertheless, teachers and policy makers may still legitimately question the pedagogical validity of ‘alternative music’ genres, mostly because research in the field has not as yet critically explored their positive values, which are often being discouraged by the strong and unconventional imagery of umbrella genres such as punk, heavy metal and their derivative styles. This factor outlines, ultimately, where the pedagogical

challenge emerges: is alternative rock music suitable as an educational tool?

Today's youth communicate ideas by just mentioning 'alternative music' artists, popular songs' titles or citing lyrics. We may affirm that 'alternative music' constitutes an important corpus of the 21st century English language and that students around the world are more inclined to start learning from this "alternative corpus" rather than from institutional (mainstream) music sources (Moi, 1994, 2003). As Moi (2003) outlined, the 'alternative music' context is highly motivating, relevant to student's lives and settings, a potential bridge to more "serious" literature and, most importantly, a source of authentic language readily available as reading and listening material for language classrooms. As outlined by Reddick and Beresin (2002), analysing the social implications of 'alternative music' styles heavy metal and rap, music can be a powerful tool in the social life of adolescents. It is the background of social gatherings, and it also presents the view of the adult world filtered through the perspective of the artists and forms associations and friendship with others recognizing 'alternative music' as a social group, where allegiances and kinships form. In this regard, Jaffurs' (2004) study concluded that popular rock music is a crucial component in the students' culture and everyday life, and it constitutes a helpful tool to focus the attention on classroom activities.

Considering the enlightenment brought about by 'alternative music', can it be a useful pedagogic method to instruct English

language learners? Is its postmodern, sometimes unconventional imagery suitable to transmit learning values? In light of the previous considerations, using the 'alternative music' literary corpus as a multimedia learning tool may prove to be an efficient way to teach English in the classroom. Taking this hypothesis into account, it may be plausible for educators to accept 'alternative music' as a complementary corpus to convey students' attention.

REVIEW ON WORKS CONDUCTED ON MUSIC AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The value of music as an educational approach in the language classroom has been acknowledged by several studies (see Abbott, 2002; Domoney & Harris, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1994; Lake, 2003; Lems, 1996; Moi, 1994, 2003; Murphey, 1992; Paquette & Rieg, 2008; Shuman & Wolfe, 1990).

According to Shuman and Wolfe (1990), music is a composing activity, and focuses the learner's mind - as much as does speaking and writing - on the use of the language and its learning. This is evidence that thought has been occurring, and not only for a mere communicative reason, because "another person's words may be expressed more figuratively as a painting, a musical composition, a photograph, a design, a film, perhaps even a cartoon. It is useful to think of 'words' in the broadest sense as we draw connections between language and cognition" (Shuman & Wolfe, 1990). Murphey (1992) examined a large

corpus of pop songs and concluded that they have several features able to help second language learners; he individuated common short words and pronouns, conversational language and a speech speed rate which is slower and has more pauses between utterances, allowing for better understanding. Validating this contribution, Domoney and Harris (1993) evaluated the employment of pop music in Mexican EFL classrooms, providing a useful list of teachers' activities focused on implementing popular music in the English curriculum.

Lems (1996) further describes the many possible uses of music and songs as powerful teaching aid in the ESL classroom, ideally continuing a study by Fitzgerald (1994) focusing on the motivational dimension of music in the classroom. Fitzgerald demonstrated that by using background music during a lesson it is possible to create a friendlier, more motivating experience, improving English reading skills and vocabulary acquisition for low proficiency level groups.

Lake (2003) worked on the validity of Krashen's Affective Filter Theory (1982) by analysing a range of activities involving the use of music in the English classroom. Lake, an amateur musician, demonstrated that playing a guitar and singing with his students in the classroom may help establish a friendly atmosphere and favour language learning. Similarly, Moi (2003) explored the links between the corpus of popular rock music and higher literature, asserting that students motivation in English language learning increases when they are presented

rock music related items as classroom materials. To a similar extent, Kirkland (2007) proved the value of hip-hop music texts as attention catalyst for urban at-risk students in the language classroom. Kirkland argued that hip-hop culture transcends the music itself, as he observed one of his students' developing the four language skills by immersing totally into the hip-hop culture. In this way, the individual who presents himself as a "hip-hop head" has a concrete opportunity to focus on English learning because he desires to reach a total understanding of the alternative music's subject matter. The implementation of such texts in the English classroom is seen by Kirkland as crucial to shorten the learners' achievement gap (Kirkland, 2007, p. 132).

Ultimately, Diedwardo (2007) devoted his attention on pairing popular music with linguistic activities, discovering that its integration into college linguistic and virtual EFL classrooms might enable students to develop their English reading and writing skills.

Paquette and Rieg (2008) have also concluded that by using music with young learners of English, classrooms can be transformed into positive learning environments where children thrive academically, socially, and emotionally, despite the teacher's level of aesthetic appreciation and musical training.

As much as previous studies have given ample evidence of the positive values music may bring to English language learning, it may be useful to define the boundaries and significance of the term 'alternative music'.

The complex definition deserves more in-depth explanation in order to justify and contextualize its addition among the choices of didactically accepted music for focusing students' attention to English language learning.

THE 'ALTERNATIVE' CONCEPT IN POPULAR MUSIC AND CULTURE

Defining 'alternative music' may prove to be a difficult task: as Taylor (2006) stated, alternative is not a fixed definition but a constantly revolving one. It is not possible to know "what alternative is until we know what it is an alternative to, and we can't know what that is until the alternative shows us" (Taylor, 2006, pp. 2-3).

Under this perspective, the term 'alternative' in popular music appears to indicate an umbrella definition grouping together many performing styles that, before becoming institutionalized and 'mainstream', have to evolve and revolve. 'Alternative' may apply as a categorization under which new realities identify and shape themselves seeking acceptance.

When rock bands such as Green Day achieved large-scale success since 1993, popular music magazines in the USA reported this situation as the outbreak of an alternative music "revolution" (Tsitsos, 1999). Nevertheless, the origins of a link between popular music and 'alternative' connotations have to be traced back to late 1970s punk groups such as the Sex Pistols, the Ramones and the Clash. Punk was a popular music genre born in the UK and transplanted in the USA, which

evolved as a progression and essentially an 'alternative' to the sounds of the early 1970s (Laing, 1985). Punk broke out in 1977's London as a rebellious, provoking and extreme musical 'alternative' and social subculture. According to Pete Lentini (2003), the birth of punk is a product of two "cultural swings" among the UK and the USA in the mid and late 1970s, as some sort of transatlantic musical syncretism of cultural exchanges among the two superpowers. In that particular historical period, the youth of London and New York invented punk as the 'alternative' musical transposition of a feeling of alienation towards the surrounding social, political and economical forces (Dunn, 2008). As Hebdige observed (1979), in those times, the punks materialized into tangible terms what was a sense of crisis permeating the 'mainstream' airwaves and magazines' headlines. Although punk and alternative rock formally differ in the content of their music and style, Moore (2007) state they both represent a commercially autonomous stand from the increasingly dominant corporate conglomerates in the music industry.

Consequently, it may be possible to identify the 'mainstream' as the current thought of the majority, and 'alternative' (or 'independent') as a minority voice, referring to a different category of music opposing the familiar and unthreatening 'mainstream' music for the masses (Halnon, 2005). During the post-punk (1979-1986) era, 'alternative' popular music developed into 'indie' (abbreviation for 'independent'),

a term mostly indicating those record labels who constituted an 'alternative' to the mainstream industry's distribution channels; this tag was later used to categorize a musical genre per se, encompassing at large many different artists playing different 'alternative' music styles (Borthwick & Moy, 2004). A multitude of musical genres, from post-punk to ska to Britpop, were labelled as 'independent' or 'alternative'.

Heavy metal, another musical genre born as an alternative to traditionally blues oriented 1960s rock, kept mutating and increased in popularity during the 1980s and the 1990s, ultimately becoming one of the most followed popular music genres in main worldwide popular culture provider the USA (Weinstein, 2000). Although originally presenting an innovative, sometimes provoking image, heavy metal gradually domesticated and blended into the mainstream's spotlight, creating a choice of 'alternative music' readily available to the general consumers through record stores, radio, the Internet, and cable television (Borthwick & Moy, 2004; Starr & Waterman, 2003; Weinstein, 2000). As Halnon (2005) observed, the original 'alternative music' transformed into a different commercial approach to marketing of music. During the post-punk period in the 1980s, repeated attempts were done to recapture an 'alternative' culture by building new genres upon the heavy metal and punk subcultures of the prior decade. Hardcore, thrash metal, skate punk and death metal are all facets of the new 'alternative' to mainstream heavy metal. These genres were absolutely not commercial, did not receive any mainstream

radio or television exposure, and ultimately constituted an 'underground alternative' to the domesticated heavy rock manipulated by the record industry (Weinstein, 1995).

As Weinstein (1995) continued explaining, the 1990s saw a great deal of musical creativity, greatly supported by a network of college radio stations, independent record labels, fanzines and venue owners that provided a map for a fragmented 'alternative' audience and helped show the diversity of experimentations and enlightening the way towards further 'alternatives'. This situation became a breeding ground for a number of artists and musicians who could literally feed off each other, creating distinctive 'alternative' sounds and scenes to the national and regional levels. The 1990s iconic 'alternative' style was grunge, whose most representative band Nirvana's "Nevermind" album sold millions of copies around the world by mixing punk, heavy metal and hipster college rock (Shevory, 1995). 'Alternative music' in the 1990s became therefore identified with the "Seattle sound", the North western American city, where Nirvana and other famous (and extremely diversely sounding) bands such as Pearl Jam, Alice in Chains and Mudhoney came from (Prato, 2009). Grunge's marginal, destitute flannel wear appeal (a reminiscence of the 1960s hippie culture) revolved in a few years, again, from an 'alternative' and 'underground' movement to a 'mainstream' money maker for the popular music business (Weinstein, 1995).

Waksman (2009) observed that over the last decade, the modern versions of

more authentically ‘alternative’ genres such as punk embraced a definite stand against mainstream commercialism and popular heavy metal music’s domesticated rebellion. This attitude has kept nurturing an ‘independent’ concept of music and record distribution as an extreme consequence of the ‘do-it-yourself’ ethics abundant in the hardcore and punk communities during the 90’s and the first decade of the new millennium (Waksman, 2009). Nevertheless, Waksman concluded that since heavy metal and punk fundamentally embody two different sources of the same ‘alternative’ to the mainstream pop music, the only meaningful difference lies in the listeners’ chosen singular identities: those who identify with rock (the ‘alternative’, at large) and those who do not, preferring other mainstream forms of music.

Based on this perspective, it may be possible to identify a segment of society, particularly the youth, who literally “live and breathe” ‘alternative music’ styles and messages. To this segment of population, the ‘alternative’ cultures may constitute an attractive path to English language learning. This advantage may prove particularly important in those countries where English is not a first or a second language as the ‘alternative’ genres of rock, being highly anglocentric (Gudmundsson, 1999), provide optimal sources of authentic English materials.

FITTING THEORY

In order to justify why students may develop their motivation and improve their English

learning using ‘alternative music’, it is important to consider the Affective Filter Theory postulated by Krashen (1982; 2003). According to this hypothesis, certain emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt and mere boredom, interfere with the process of acquiring a second language. They function as a filter between the speaker and the listener that reduces the amount of language input the listener is able to understand. This theory further states that the blockage can be reduced by sparking interest, providing low anxiety environments and bolstering the learner’s self-esteem.

This assumption may lead to consider “alternative music learning” under a hybrid linguistic and social learning framework. As postulated in the Social learning theory (1977), Bandura asserts that people can learn from one another, including such concepts as observational learning, imitation, and modelling. In the ‘alternative music’ context, the musicians, mostly English speaking, become the model of behaviour. Attempting to be part of their social context, the individual is compelled to approach English learning with stronger motivation.

This paradigm may also be supported by Vygotsky’s theory of Social Constructivism (1978), wherein groups construct knowledge for one another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artefacts with shared meanings. When an individual is immersed within a culture of this sort, he is learning all the time about how to be a part of that culture on many levels. The “zone of proximal development” theory (Vygotsky, 1978) is also fitting, the process of voluntary

acting is distributed between two people, one of whom already knows how to perform a particular act (the adult or “expert”), and one who does not (the child, or “novice”).

The role of ‘alternative’ music for English learning resembles the “concert sessions” of the Suggestopedic teaching method as postulated by Lozanov (1978; 1982). They are theorised as a text being solemnly and dramatically read with specially selected classical background music. The learners listen to the teacher’s voice in a “pseudopassive state” (Lozanov, 1978) as they follow the text and translation, absorbing both the linguistic rhythm and meaning of vocabulary. Similarly to Lozanov’s students, the ‘alternative’ music fans may absorb large amounts of English language input as a result of their psychorelaxation during the musical performance.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA COLLECTION

Qualitative data were collected using one of the author’s 10 years of experience in the ‘alternative music’ genre punk context, and a Delphi Panel Meeting organized with four respondents through a cyber conference. The Delphi Panel members were asked the following questions:

- What aspects of the ‘alternative music’ experience did they use to improve their English?
- How was their English language learning influenced by the “experts” in the ‘alternative music’ social context?

- How did they use the English written ‘alternative music’s lyrical corpus in order to improve their English?

As the nature of an individual’s involvement in ‘alternative music’ is multi-faceted, and being the purpose of the present study to explore how participants relate their different experiences in the world of ‘alternative music’ to their English learning, it was chosen to select four participants with different backgrounds and functions. The choice was operated on the base of the description of the roles in a “music scene” as postulated by Lena and Peterson (2008): a “scene” is a community of artists, fans and supporting small businesses, such as independent record companies, and alternative press. These local “scenes” may connect with other distant local communities whose members share the same musical taste and lifestyle, and cooperate through the exchange of information and music by means of small-parcel shipping and the digital technologies such as the internet. Since the identification of individuals involved in a “music scene” is difficult for outsiders, and because the nature of such a connection has a loose organizational form characterized by varying degrees of commitment to the genre’s ideal (Lena & Peterson, 2008), this study employed snowball sampling in order to obtain a sample of participants who are fully committed and may represent each of the four aspects of involvement in the “music scene”. To this extent, one of the authors, having been involved in several of the alternative music genres for 10 years,

purposely selected four other participants representing a musician, an independent record label owner, a fanzine writer and a simple dedicated concert attendant. Then, to ensure a meaningful selection among the numerous different music styles categorized as “alternative”, four individuals claiming to belong to the hardcore punk, heavy metal, grunge and alternative rock “music scenes” were selected. The participants are four males of Italian nationality, aged between 25 and 31 years old, and have been proactively involved in an “alternative music scene” for more than 5 years. Before answering the research questions, the participants agreed on the use of their answers for the scopes of this research. The data were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively from the notes collected by one of the authors, who moderated the Delphi panel cyber conference. The following sections illustrate a description of the findings in greater detail.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

One of the Author's Personal Experiences

It seemed very valuable to analyse one of the authors' 10 years 'alternative music' social context experience, firstly in his home country Italy and later in the European and North American contexts. The author was involved in the Italian punk community starting from the mid '90s, just after the boom of grunge and the worldwide success of Nirvana gave 'alternative music' a crucial chance to reach the youth worldwide. This first exposure was the lead to discover many other artists, past and present, linked to the same sound. For the author as for many

other young people, Nirvana constituted a starting point to research the shelves of local record shops in order to unearth other music suitable to the new taste. The worldwide influence of grunge music brought back the imagery of rock as an exciting, motivating and liberal movement the youth could relate their lives and problems to (Bell, 1998).

The author's involvement in the punk community spanned a decade, and concluded in year 2007 when the author resigned from duties as a guitarist in the band he played with for 10 years. The author, besides being a musician, experienced deep involvement in the local Italian punk community, not only attending shows, but also taking part in the organization of events, writing reviews and personal opinions on several fan produced magazines, and hosting other touring bands. The experience of the author was gradual, and involved an increase of the time and effort dedicated to attend the musical matters, until they become almost a part time job. However, in a “music scene”, musicians and creative people seldom can support themselves financially from the music alone (Lena & Peterson, 2008). The following is a report of the findings extrapolated from the answers to the research questions.

What aspects of the 'alternative music' experience did he use to improve his English?

In the middle of the 1990s, the English language in Italy was taught in secondary and high schools, but the opportunities of unearthing authentic material in the real world were very limited. Consequently, the average students' level of English was not

very proficient. 'Alternative music' offered a readily available corpus of English written material, although at the time, the scarce availability of the internet made the research for lyrical transcriptions more difficult. Listening to the music by following lyrical reference proved to be a very effective way to enhance English vocabulary knowledge, perfect the pronunciation and understand several grammar structures. Additionally, by discovering the existence of other foreign 'alternative music' social groups, the author was forced to put effort into improving his reading and listening skills to the extent of understanding oral communication and writing letters to "experts" within those foreign groups. When some years later the Italian 'alternative music' environment became more internationalized, the first foreign bands started travelling to Italy to play their shows. This was an opportunity to practise oral English to communicate with them, consequently enhancing the author's oral English fluency skill.

How was his English language learning influenced by the "experts" in the 'alternative music' social context?

The author's first contact with 'alternative music' experts was in the written form of music "fanzines", which are self-produced press created by specialists. He discovered "fanzines" by way of an older friend ("the expert") and started attending concerts. These early meetings fostered his interest for the community and started a "learning process" through behavioural observation of peers and "experts". He learnt that "experts"

knew how to access to the latest musical information by way of foreign English written press and English communication with other foreign "experts".

The author also experienced a performing 'alternative music' career playing guitar in a band. The author had a chance to enter the European 'alternative music' social context supporting a record deal. This experience fully exposed the author to the international 'alternative music' social context where the language of communication is English. Consequently, through a lengthy exposure to the "music scene", the author was able to enhance the four skills of English (reading, writing, listening and speaking) by means of increased oral communication in English language, reading and translating fanzines and song lyrics, writing e-mails and letters to other musicians and articles for the fan based press, and ultimately listening to a substantial amount of English, not widely available in the author's original Italian community.

How did he use the English 'alternative music' lyrical corpus to improve his English?

The author improved his English listening to music and following a visual reference of the lyrics. When he was playing in an 'alternative music' band, he had to write lyrical content in English to make the songs more appealing to the international audience. This process helped him improving his English vocabulary and reading/writing skills by way of using dictionaries to translate ideas from Italian into English.

Considering the author's experience it may be possible to recognize "cognition" and "learning" as important constructs for the use of 'alternative music' to learn English. Accordingly, the involvement in the 'alternative music' social context can also indicate "sustainability" factors: the English learning proved to be effective for the author over a period of 10 years. Finally, we can recognize "learning" as an additional construct because the process of learning from the social context as postulated by Bandura (1977) has affected the whole author's experience in the 'alternative music' community, maximising the improvement of English for communication purposes.

The Delphi Panel Meeting

A Delphi Panel meeting with four experts was organized by interactive cyber conference and moderated by one of the authors. We looked for common constructs related to the different involvement in the 'alternative music' social context and "music scene" as identified by Lena and Peterson (2008), specifically an "alternative musician", a record label manager, a journalist and a simple fan who likes to attend concerts. The participants' recalled their experiences in the 'alternative music' social context and answered the research questions.

Which aspects of the 'alternative music' experience did they use to improve their English?

The respondents reported that reading English written 'alternative music' magazines and fanzines not available in

their mother tongue was very helpful. Listening to music and following a visual transcription of the lyrics also emerged as a favourite strategy. Some of the respondents also asserted that watching original English spoken music documentaries and videos was a contributing factor in their English improvement. Playing in a band was also considered very important. The participants who did not engage in musical activities asserted that the 'alternative music' social context improved their English by means of travel opportunities to countries where English is the language of communication.

How was their English language learning influenced from "experts" in the 'alternative music' social context?

The respondents reported that they enhanced their English oral fluency skills by observing how "experts" exchanged conversation in English with international touring bands. Some of the respondents, motivated by the desire to play in a band and tour internationally, consequently improved their English oral fluency skills also by participating in the international 'alternative music' touring community. Thus, we may affirm that the participants demonstrated an English oral fluency improvement by way of direct observation of a "music scene" social context which uses the English language as medium of expression.

How did they use the English 'alternative music' lyrical corpus to improve their English?

The participants reported that they translated English lyrics to decode the 'alternative

music’ messages. One affirmed that by translating English written alternative music’s lyrics, he learned new key vocabulary items and reviewed grammar rules and structures, as to reach an intermediate level of English, and consequently pass an English University admission test. The participants also reported that they listened to original music while following the lyrical transcription to better understand the meaning. These activities have been indicated as factors of English listening and pronunciation’s skills enhancement.

Compared with the evidence of the author’s involvement in the ‘alternative music’ social context, the findings of the Delphi Panel meeting may confirm that “cognition” and “learning” are recurrent constructs, and it also seems relevant to consider “social value” as one of the main constructs.

In the next section, we attempt to exemplify how the individuated key constructs might be associated to create a functional framework for the use of ‘alternative music’ as a valid tool in the English classroom.

Defining the Key Constructs of English Language Learning through ‘Alternative music’

The following key constructs are postulated on the basis of analytical reflection on the theoretical framework and the evidence drawn from the sources of research information. We may come to a conclusion that the major constructs may be individuated as “sustainability”, “cognition”, “social value” and “learning”.

Further explanation of the indicators resulting from the “Learning” column is given in Table 1.

TABLE 1

List of constructs and indicators derived from the theoretical framework, the author’s firsthand experience in the ‘alternative music’ social context and the Delphi Panel Meeting.

SUSTAINABILITY	COGNITION	SOCIAL VALUE	LEARNING
Youth aggregation	Creativity	Understanding of social problems	Novice/Expert relationship
Self-development	Organization	Cooperation	Mentor/Mentee relationship
Social development	Decision making	Sharing	Social learning
Community participation	Mental associations	Community development	Spoken English practice
Community sharing of knowledge		Creation of a social context	English listening practice
Internationalization of experiences		Active involvement in a social context	English vocabulary decoding
Personal Development		Concerts as social meetings for the community	
		Improvement of youth’s social life in suburban areas	

Novice/Expert relationship: It appears to be common to learn more about 'alternative music' and its culture as a consequence of involvement in the social group. The novice can gradually learn from observing the experts, relying completely on a Social Learning approach (Bandura, 1977). This is also an important key theory in Vygotsky (1978), i.e. novice will learn from the social context, firstly assisted by the expert, and then becoming more and more capable of performing the observed tasks by himself.

Mentor/Mentee relationship: In a spirit of conservation and development of the community, the "experts" seem to be compelled to adopt mentoring positions for particularly interested or skilled novices. The mentor/mentee has a stronger social value and tends to transmit stronger values from highly committed individuals to others that are individuated as possible purveyors of that particular culture.

Social learning: The people involved in the 'alternative music' social group usually identify completely with it and its philosophy. They live the music ideology, talk about it, read about it and actively contribute in its capillary spread. Some of them write about it and publish their ideas and findings on self-produced fan magazines that are sold and distributed through independent channels and further contribute to foster the community's development to broader levels.

Spoken English Practice: In the 'alternative music' social group it is very important to participate actively, to put aside shyness and engage in socialization (Reddick & Beresin, 2002). This appears

to lead to English development in those countries where English is not the first language. English is used as an international language, the majority of the 'alternative music' corpus being in English.

English Listening practice: This happens mostly in two major ways: firstly, listening to the 'alternative music' lyrical corpus, most of the time following a visual transcription; secondly, when the individual engages in oral communication with members of other foreign groups within the community.

English vocabulary decoding: The act of decoding the 'alternative music' corpus is very important for the enhancement of English language knowledge. The individuals are motivated by the 'alternative music' context and thus may be exposed to new vocabulary which they need to decode and understand.

POSSIBILITIES OF 'ALTERNATIVE MUSIC' FOR THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH

One of the strengths of the employment of 'alternative music' in English language learning lies in its broad range of adaptability in the teaching context and its ability to be tailored according to different target learners. In fact, there are a wide number of 'alternative music' genres which appeal to most segments of youth, and it is possible to recognize a wide number of subjects and topics in the lyrics. This aspect facilitates the use of 'alternative music' as a tool for teaching different kind of students and suits a wide range of interests. Furthermore, it has to be considered that music, despite its orality, is also deeply text-driven. Each song

becomes a kind of template for language use, a way to navigate meaning and learn sentence style, use of symbolism, nuances and patterns.

Secondly, 'alternative music' may be employed to attract at-risk students to the learning of English language. According to Reddick and Beresin (2002, p. 58), 'alternative music' constitutes an "alternative appeal" to the less rebellious mainstream music context with which most of the people identify with. The more rebellious youth groups, including at-risk students, tend to identify themselves with a style of 'alternative music' and its community. Consequently, by using 'alternative music' as a source of classroom materials and activities, these at-risk students may be attracted to the scholar curriculum, stimulated by a changed perspective on the school system as an institution they can identify with.

Thirdly, it is easy and naturally employed because it engages students' interest and nurtures their motivation. Its corpus draws inspiration from youth experiences and problems, naturally using the English language to communicate, engaging the students' analytical thoughts, creativity and interpretation.

Additionally, it abandons teacher-centred interpretations and delineations of the texts, developing personal thought and interaction with peers, exchange of ideas between followers of antithetical 'alternative music' subgenres and nurtures language learning through critical discussion.

Finally, it is a linguistic empowering tool as it enables previous vocabulary and

linguistic context knowledge to be expanded with new, familiar input, combine it with existent knowledge and immediately check and revise it through the listening context of the music corpus.

CONCLUSION

The present paper contributes to the body of knowledge and research on ELT by adding an insight on the possibility for English language teachers, policy makers and curriculum developers to use the corpus of 'alternative music' in the classroom, in order to attract students' attention to the English language teaching by means of narrowing the generational gap among teachers and students. To this extent, by researching how strongly committed 'alternative music' individuals have exploited their functions in the "music scenes" as ways to practice and enhance their English language proficiency, the present paper attempts to add to the ELT scholarly literature that, as previously observed (Kirkland, 2007; Moi, 1994, 2003), the use of 'alternative music' for English learning may shorten the gap between students and teachers, increase students' English learning motivation and bring topics of interest in the classroom. By accepting the post-modern and unconventional facade of 'alternative music', teachers and curriculum developers may update their teaching styles and decisions, become closer to the world and opinions of the students, and ultimately increase the learners' English language proficiency. It is also crucial to outline that by adding such an insight into the classroom, at-risk students who generally

tend to identify with one or the other subgenres of 'alternative music' may be attracted to English learning, and thus aided to become more successful English learners. The 'alternative music' implementation into the English teaching curriculum needs more work and thoughtful observation because we cannot dismiss and ignore what is actually happening in the world around us. The mass media have strongly influenced the imagery of the youth of today in such a way to affect its decisions, strategies and educational choices. To understand and use the situation to our educational advantage, we have to give the "alternative music approach" a chance, and consider it a challenge to look deeper inside the minds of the youth and their role and position in the modern social context. It can be used as an effective methodology to focus the learning of English.

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