

# Teachers' Opinions of Integrated Musical and Language Learning Activities

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in music and its potential to improve language learning and memory (Wallace, 1994; Schön *et al.*, 2008). Listening, perceiving, imitating, and creating are basic skills in both language and music. The Comenius Lifelong Learning Project *European Music Portfolio – A Creative Way into Languages* (EMP-L) aims to support children's learning in music and languages through a flexible, integrated approach (EMP-L, 2012).

### Aims

This study explored Scottish music teachers' opinions of the integrated music and language resources and activities developed by the international team working on the European Music Portfolio. Special consideration was given to how the EMP-L activities fit with the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), wherein music learning falls into the "expressive arts" curriculum area and modern language learning into the "languages" and "literacy" areas.

### Method

This qualitative study was conducted with 6 trainee primary music teachers and 2 experienced teachers in Scotland who were trained to use the EMP-L activities to support musical and language learning outcomes. Pre- and post-teaching questionnaires and focus groups asked the participating teachers to comment on the applicability of the EMP-L materials and core activities to learning and progression in music, in language and in the CfE. The music teachers' opinions of four EMP-L resources were collected:

1. The Teacher's Booklet (with content and activities specific to the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence)
2. The Teacher's Guide to the Pupil's Portfolio and the Pupil's Portfolio materials (which were designed to be used in all of the partner countries)
3. Additional, online EMP-L activities
4. Teacher's Handbook (providing more detail on the project and on music and language learning)

Pre- and post-implementation data from the teachers who took part was collected and analyzed together with the pre- and post-focus group data, to provide a more complete picture of teachers' opinions of the EMP-L activities.

### Results

Overall, the teachers' opinions of the EMP-L materials were positive, although their experiences using it were mixed.

Prior to teaching, participants reported that they were most likely to use the Teacher's Booklet with the core activities and the Pupil's Portfolio resources. Three teachers reported that they planned to use the online activities, and only one planned to read the Teacher's Handbook.

Based on the post-teaching feedback, the lessons that developed from the EMP-L materials led to successful CfE experiences and outcomes for pupils, with "cross-curricular links and a lot of potential for collaborative learning and practical, hands-on activities," as well as "aspects of literacy, numeracy and ICT". However, a few teachers felt that the activities had not led to greater learning in music, particularly regarding progression. One participant commented, "If they were my pupils I may not see them every week as a music specialist – it may be difficult to get continuity in the learning in language and music." Several teachers also requested that the activities be differentiated by age group and/or level of musical knowledge.

Another teacher raised questions about how to make the children more aware of their learning through the integrated EMP-L activities: "Will the pupils think of it as music? Or will they think of it as language? I'm sure they will be learning music but are they aware of it?"

Another question that arose from the post-teaching focus group was whether generalist primary teachers could use the activities without support from music and/or language specialists. In the post-teaching focus groups, several teachers requested that the core activities show a "more detailed sequence", with more translations and phonetic transcriptions so that generalist teachers could easily follow the instructions to successfully teach an integrated music and language lesson. As one trainee music teacher put it, "We felt out of our comfort zone doing this...but with hindsight...[we] felt that we have grown a lot as teachers, being placed in a situation and having to use [the EMP-L] materials and a foreign language when we were teaching. [...] For us, for our personal development, it ended up being great."

### Conclusions

These music teachers' opinions of the EMP-L activities will be used to improve the materials, but their comments can be applied more broadly. Their recommendations, such as the idea of specific, detailed lesson plans for different ages and stages of learning, have the potential to inform future holistic, integrated music education initiatives.

### Keywords

primary education; music teaching; modern language teaching; teacher training

## REFERENCES

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