

EAL @ BSG

Using Music to support your child's language development



Children love music and singing. There is something magical about words being set to a melody that make children perk up and join in. Since most children's songs consist of catchy beats and poetry-infused lyrics, it is a perfect combination of rhythm, rhyme and fun.

An added benefit to children's songs is that they are often easy to learn. The short, repetitive sentences lend themselves to easy memorisation and retention. What better way to learn words in context than to sing them out loud? Children don't even realise how much their language skills are improving while joining in the singing fun.

Bilingual children, in particular, can benefit from singing songs in their second language. Even if most of the words are unfamiliar at first,

If you would like more information on how to use music to support your Child's English learning, the following websites may be of use:

learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org

supersimplelearning.com

mimicking the words in a song can help children practice producing sounds in the new language. Eventually the sounds give way to actual understanding as the song is practiced over and over again. It is a win-win situation all around.

Here are a few tips to think about when introducing your bilingual children to songs:

- **Repetition:** Pick songs that repeat words and sentences over and over again. Focus on these repetitive parts first with your students. Once your children start to memorise these, they will be more eager to participate and will be excited to learn the rest of the song. Encourage children to try and join in even if only now and then – they may have picked up a word here or there and will want to call it out when the song reaches that point.
- **Movement:** Children delight in songs that include movement. Being able to move our bodies while practicing words and sentences in another language can have a tremendous impact. A favourite movement song for children is the “Hokey-Pokey,” but also see if you can find movement songs that come from a variety of cultures. Another idea is to have your child choreograph their own movements to a song. Choose a song that has a lot of movement words and let your child choose how to illustrate these with their own bodies.
- **Rhythm:** It is important to pick out songs that have a good rhythm. It is easier for children to learn the words when the rhythm of the song is consistent and follows a regular pattern. The words of the song should fit well with the beat. To add to the fun, bring out instruments for students to play during the song, such as drums and shakers. This kind of movement can have an
- **Lyrics:** It goes without saying that the words of the song are key when it comes to bilingual children. If there are too many new, difficult words, then the experience can backfire. Singing songs together should be fun and inspiring, not burdensome and frustrating. However, you will also want to help your children expand their language skills each time they learn a new song. Go over some of the words, or even all of the words, ahead of time. Make sure your children understand what they are singing – it makes for a more meaningful activity. Also try to pick songs that have full sentences which students may use in their everyday lives.

“If everyone started off the day singing, just think how happy they'd be.”

- LAUREN MYRACLE

then choose a song that has at least a good number of rhyming words with the long-o sound. It is a fun way to help children understand the different sounds in words. Another tip is to let your child come up with their own songs! Work as a team, and let them choose the rhythm and then come up with words and sentences to go with it. Or you can ask your child’s teacher for a list of words that they are working on in class to see if they can put them together into rhyming lyrics to go with music.

- **Rhyming:** Songs that rhyme can help children memorise vocabulary more easily. Pick songs that have rhyming words that match what you are working on with your students. For example, if you are working on words that have the long-o sound,

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