

early years are learning years

Singing as a Teaching Tool

It doesn't take an experienced musician to sing with young children. Anyone can sing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat," and make the motions of rowing a boat. Parents and teachers can lead many singing and musical games, even if they consider themselves nonmusical.

Music is a great way to engage young children because it is a natural and enjoyable part of their everyday lives. Children hear music or sing while watching television, riding in the car, at school, and as part of bedtime rituals. We often hear children creating their own songs and incorporating music in their play. Music is a socially engaging way to learn, and especially appropriate for the developmental levels of young children.

The concept of using music to teach is not new. Many young children learn to recite the alphabet by singing the ABCs, and educational television programs for young children, such as *Sesame Street*, use a lot of music in their programming. Researchers have found that music can help children learn multiplication tables and improve early literacy skills. Many adults still remember lessons connected to music from their childhood.

Music helps many children break information down into easily remembered pieces or associate it with previously known information, such as a familiar song. One study found that using familiar melodies helped five-year-olds learn phone numbers at a faster rate than using no music or unfamiliar melodies.

Singing with children can be an especially fun and valuable experience. When you sing with young children, you can adjust the speed and volume to fit their abilities. You don't need to sound like a professional

singer. As long as you are enthusiastic, young children will enjoy it, and want to sing along.

You can also pair singing with movement or visual aids that stimulate the senses. This allows children to not only hear the music, but also feel and move to the rhythms, and see, touch, and play the instruments.

Singing also gives you lots of opportunities to teach new words to young children. By taking familiar songs (such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," "Frere Jacques/Are You Sleeping?" "Three Blind Mice" or other songs from your childhood) and changing or adding words, you can introduce new vocabulary in a way that makes it easy for children to follow along.

You can create individualized songs that will engage children and boost their memories. Fill your songs with people (for example, family members, teachers or friends), objects (clothing, furniture, cars or bikes), daily rituals (brushing teeth, bedtime), and special events (holidays, going on a field trip) that are an important part of children's lives.

While music is a great way to introduce new words, it can also contribute to children's progress and learning in many different areas. Music supports self-expression, cooperative play, creativity, emotional well being, and development of social, cognitive, communication, and motor skills. Music and singing are a fun and effective way to help young children learn.

Excerpted from "Music as a Teaching Tool: Creating Story Songs" by Shelly Ringgenberg – an article in the NAEYC journal, *Young Children*.

Early Years Are Learning Years is a regular series from NAEYC (www.naeyc.org) with tips for parents on giving young children a great start on learning.

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