



Those of us who work in education or have children of our own know how much they enjoy music. In fact, a love of music seems to be an inherent characteristic of babies all over the world. As children we listen, dance, sing, wiggle and jiggle to music. As parents, we instinctively sing to our children from birth. As teachers we use song for a range of tasks from forming good classroom routines to delivering a curriculum.

Music is a fantastic educational tool. Scientists say that children who are exposed to music, or those who play an instrument, do better in school than those who don't. Recent research suggests exposure to music may benefit a child's reading age, IQ and the development of certain parts of the brain. In fact, researchers say exactly the same things about language learning.

In my own experience as a languages teacher, I certainly have noticed a link between languages and music; children who are good at languages often have a talent for music. I believe that this important link should be developed and encouraged.

But how can we develop that link? When we think about language learning, most of us conjure up images of sitting in a stuffy classroom conjugating French verbs or listening to an old cassette tape and understanding nothing! The good news is that bringing languages to life with young children is easy to do and its foundations are in a shared love of music.

Very young children learn languages best when it is fun, natural and repetitive. Here are my top tips for using music with very young children.

1. Build up positive associations with the language by singing, dancing to silly songs and generally having fun! Children will be more enthusiastic about the language if they see you having fun with it too.
2. Link the language to actions. Mixing sound with kinesthetic tasks will enrich the learning experience and help the children pinpoint and learn specific vocabulary. This is why I developed my French songs to be "action" songs.
3. Have fun using the language as part of your daily routines. For example, sing songs in the language at the same time every day. I sing French songs with my children after naptime as it cheers up my particularly grumpy eldest daughter! Sing a numbers song as you walk up the stairs or sing a French lullaby at bedtime.
4. Read stories in the foreign language. Children's books often have a singsong rhythm, which aids language learning.
5. Encourage family, friends, childminders, babysitter, siblings and other visitors to join in with a foreign language song. Not only is it fun, but young children value the language more when they use it with a wide

range of people. A song will make adults more comfortable with a language they may otherwise find difficult or embarrassing.

6. Find opportunities for children to share the language with other youngsters. Children learn a lot from each other and singing together will boost the language's prestige and make it more enjoyable for all!
7. As well as listening to music at home, play foreign language songs on long car journeys or through headphones on public transport.
8. We know that children love watching themselves in the mirror or looking at photographs. They also love technology. Why not mix the two together by shooting a short video of a foreign language singing performance and sharing it with family, friends and their peers? Perhaps make an audio recording and use it as your ringtone!

About Angela Sterling:

Angela is a French and German teacher who first experienced very young bilingual children when working as an au pair overseas. She used her training and experience to found Lingotot (www.lingotot.com), a company which offers foreign language classes to babies, toddlers and young children from birth. She developed LingoTunes after many parents and teachers requested copies of the action songs and rhymes she uses in her sessions.