

Sing something Semplice!

Sharing songs is a great way to enhance MFL teaching – says Nigel Pearson...



More and more schools are embracing the primary languages entitlement; in fact, recent figures from the NFER suggest that up to 92% of primary settings are now teaching a second tongue in curriculum time. As a consequence, children and their teachers are acquiring new skills and confidence, making friends in other countries, encountering different cultures, and gaining a wider global perspective - to name just a few of the hugely enjoyable benefits to be gained from the introduction of MFL at this stage. Music and singing - which are such a vibrant and important part of primary school life in this country - can represent a vital element of the process; and no matter how limited your own musical skills, it is possible to utilise them in a huge variety of contexts to support and enrich the language learning experience for your children. For example, many traditional songs enable pupils to glean an insight into other cultures - thus supporting the Intercultural Understanding strand of the KS2 Framework for languages. This aspect can include seasonal songs, or those relating to festivals or specific regions.

Help! I can't sing!

Let's get one myth out of the way from the outset: you don't have to be musically talented to share

songs and dances from other cultures with your class. The children will appreciate your efforts if you are confident enough to give it a try, and there are many excellent CDs and DVDs available, along with a range of websites offering songs the children will enjoy (see panel overleaf for more details). It might even be that you decide to write some compositions of your own. They don't have to be anything complicated - if Status Quo can build a career around three chords then so can you.

This is no time for strict decorum - encourage enthusiasm, creativity... and volume

Down to business

Once you've found a song that you feel will both appeal to your class, and support their learning, it's time to get everyone on board. First, sing it to the group a few times or, if you really can't face the prospect of exercising your less-than-impressive vocal talents in front of a critical panel that is bound to include at least one budding Simon Cowell, make the most of technology and play (and replay) a CD or sound file. Once it is clear that pupils are starting to become familiar with the tune, share the lyrics

(being sure to discuss the meaning) with them on the OHP or interactive whiteboard. Often, younger pupils will already have had a stab at such playgroup favourites as 'Frère Jacques', and may well be astounded to discover how 'sonnez les matines' is actually spelled and pronounced. As well as addressing the Literacy and Oracy strands, this will help the children to make sound/spelling links, and start to build up their own songbook in the new language. With plenty of repetition, go through the song a line at a time - at this point, you really do need to throw bashfulness to one side, as the only way to get everyone singing is to do so yourself. Many songs from other cultures also have actions and movement, encouraging children to join in and to begin to associate an action with a particular word or phrase, helping them memorise the new material. This is no time for strict decorum - encourage enthusiasm, inventiveness... and volume. Above all, everyone should be having a good time! If you are lucky, you might have a music co-ordinator who is willing to help you teach new material - but this is by no means a necessity.





TOP TIP: Why not research *Sur le pont d'Avignon*, *Allouette*, or *Savez-vous planter les choux* with a view to sharing them with your class?

Songs in action

Once you start to build up a repertoire of foreign language ditties, you'll find all kinds of opportunities to bring them into class life:

* Songs themselves, in any language, are always useful fillers and the children will enjoy singing them at any given opportunity - maybe at the end of a language lesson, or to break up long periods of quieter work.

* When your class is confident with a song from another culture, why not present it to families in a special assembly? Pupils could make a short ICT presentation about it, discussing the way it highlights any difference or similarities between children's lives in various countries.

* If you are fortunate enough to have partner schools in other countries, how about recording some of your favourite songs, sending them to your friends abroad and asking them to send you theirs in return? Each group of pupils could then try and learn one tune from the selection, and make a video to share.

Custom compositions

As well as using traditional songs, sometimes teachers will write their own to familiar tunes to reinforce a particular language point or topic. For example, Judith Oldham, a teacher of primary languages in Bolton, came up with a lovely song on ordering food for her upper KS2 group - the tune used is *Hi Ho*, from *Snow White*:

J'ai soif, j'ai soif

Je voudrais un café

Que voulez-vous, que voulez-vous?

Je voudrais un café

J'ai faim, j'ai faim

Je voudrais un sandwich

Que voulez-vous, que voulez-vous?

Je voudrais un croissant

Or how about this one, to explore the topic of 'weather', to the tune of *Frère Jacques*?

Quel temps fait-il ? (x2)

Il fait beau (x2)

Il ne fait pas mauvais (x2)

Il fait beau (x2).

With both examples, there is the opportunity to involve pupils and extend learning, by getting them to come up with new verses on the same theme.

TOP TIP: tap into popular culture and see if you can write new lyrics for a current chart hit, to teach a language point (and, possibly, boost your class credibility...)

What should we sing?

FOUR FINELY TUNED RESOURCES FOR TEACHING MFL...

1 Once you start hunting around, you will find plenty of music-based MFL material to share in school. There are many commercial resources available, but for global songs in a very wide range of languages look no further than the *Mama Lisa* website (mamalisa.com). Many of the songs featured here include sound files, lyrics and translations - and it's all free.

2 Another free resource is provided by the QDCA Schemes of Work in French, German and Spanish (standards.dfes.gov.uk/schemes3), which include a range of songs for use with the units, all of them specially written to support the language taught (my favourite is the weather rap).

3 CILT's Primary Languages website (primarylanguages.org.uk) also has a dedicated section on songs, together with lyrics in a range of languages and detailed suggestions for CPD. When you're looking at it, be sure to check out the children in Devon doing PE to music!

4 Finally, the *Sing Up* website (singup.org) offers a wealth of songs and ideas for teachers to use.

Find out more

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