



MUSIC TOGETHER[®]

Parent Notes



SONGS WITHOUT WORDS

What contributes most to the popularity of many children's recordings? Why are certain songs used at certain times in your child's preschool, religious school, or gym program?

It could be that their words and subject matter are especially appealing or appropriate. Music can be a powerful ally in learning nonmusical subjects because words gain meaning and energy when set to music. It is fun to sing songs about dinosaurs when children are learning about them or to sing movement and dance songs with lyrics that describe the movements or dance. However, recent research in music-learning indicates that words can distract children from the music, particularly the tonal elements of a song.

For instance, in toddlers, the rapid development of language is so powerful that it easily displaces other kinds of learning. In Music Together, we sing many songs without words so that children will have the opportunity to concentrate fully on audiating the melody and the rhythm of the song.

Imagine a seesaw. If you place music on one end and language on the other, the seesaw will not balance. In our culture, active music participation has become so de-emphasized for young children that language develops in disproportion to music. When singing songs, children who are strong in language seem to attend more to the words than to the music. Therefore, even though these children are engaging in a music activity, they are actually learning more about language than about music. Singing a song without words allows your child to attend to only the song's melody and rhythm, so that during the singing activity, the seesaw is more nearly balanced.

Songs without words allow even the child with limited language facility the opportunity to sing, using the simple "vocables" or nonsense syllables, like those presented on the recording. Because children essentially teach themselves through play at this time in their music development, it is important that their experiments in expressing a song not be inhibited in any way. Songs without words allow for the free exploration of melody and rhythm, without the distraction imposed by attempts to process language at the same time.



TRY THIS AT HOME!

In your song play at home this week, try singing a few of your favorite "doo, doo, doo" songs from class. To make it more fun, you can then experiment with changing to silly-sounding vocables like "Waah" or "Nya." Encourage your preschooler to come up with her own favorite silly vocable and sing along. Take note of your child's responses, too. Try singing on your baby's favorite sound. Is your baby sounding more when you sing vocables that she can produce—like "Da" and "Ba?" Listen to your toddler or preschooler and let your teacher know next week what you heard!