



Tips for Learning and Teaching Songs in Other Languages

By Pam Bridgehouse

To teach a song in another language you, as the teacher, must first learn the song. You show respect for the people and their language by obtaining accurate translation and pronunciation for each word and paying attention to the rhythm, accent, and nuances of the language. Listen to and practice the song many times. Repetition is a great teacher.

When teaching children, I find that primary aged students quickly learn languages because they are still in their language acquisition stage of development. This begins to fade during the third and fourth grades and seems almost gone by fifth grade. While some children find it easier reading the words while they listen, for others this is a distraction from the sound of the song. Older students seem to gain security with a chart of the words.

As we begin the study, I often give a word and its meaning and I ask students to listen for that word as I sing the song. Using a word near the end causes them to listen carefully to the whole song. Before the next singing, students are invited to sing the selected word as it comes in the song. Often, they pick up more than just that word. I ask if any other words have caught their ears. We practice those sections using the “broken record technique” (repeating a given phrase several times within the context of the song).

When the students have had several exposures to the song, it is used as a “secret song” (Chinning and/or tapping the rhythm of a song to see if students can recognize and name it.) This activity causes them to think in the language of the song. This is important in gaining awareness of that knowledge. Letting students know of the importance of thinking in another language caused them to feel empowered by knowing they have acquired that skill.

To help the children internalize the song, I plan for repetition throughout a music period. At the beginning of class the song can be used to focus the students’ attention, repeated midway through the class and added at the end for closure. Study of the language can be enriched by serving samples of popular foods, or showing clothing, cars, or other items used in daily life in the designated county. Books and stories from or about the country are a favorite for children. It can be

pointed out that music and language are also parts of daily life in that part of the world.

The greatest obstacle to overcome in teaching songs in other languages is the fear of doing it. Practice, listen, speak, consult, sing and practice some more. You can do it!

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