SINGING CIRCLES

A collection of EYFS songs to promote language acquisition and social play, with 'Scrunchies', Lycra and parachutes

INTRODUCTION

This book began as a seminar offered at the 'Music and Drama Expo' 2019 - an opportunity to present accessible material that would support language acquisition and greater engagement in social play. At this event, delegates were introduced to songs for 'Scrunchies' (elasticated fabric tubes), Lycra sheets and parachutes, to suit the particular characteristics of each play material. However, having introduced these activities in workshops, I found that Early Years practitioners were requesting more and more ideas, and so this larger collection has become a book … 'Singing Circles'.

'Singing circles' - supporting learning through social play:

- Circles provide an ideally democratic play space with no obvious leader position
- Participants have eye-contact with everyone in the group
- Circle play invites interaction in a strong social environment
- Children who need support for linguistic, vocal or social reasons can be positioned between others to maximise confidence and engagement
- Circle songs incorporate directional and travelling vocabulary e.g. in, out, front, back, inside, outside, turn, walk, skip, hop, jump, glide: they can be sung inside and work well in the outdoor area
- 'Scrunchies', Lycra sheets and parachutes can be of varying sizes to accommodate different learning contexts i.e. whole class or intervention groups

'Singing circles' - supporting musical development and skills:

Songs that demonstrate appropriate repertoire for young singers:

Melodic features which:

- have straightforward tunes with repeated phrases and sequences
- are presented within an appropriate vocal range for young voices
- incorporate 'cuckoo notes' – important intervals for children's vocal development – that will support accurate pitching.
- are memorable and easily learnt, allowing children to revisit songs independently

Lyrics which:

- use repetition to embed language and structural devices such as questions
- introduce stimulating vocabulary
- support the anticipation of rhymes
- invite children to supply vocabulary e.g. rhymes, places, names, descriptors etc..

'Singing Circles' – supporting practitioners:

- detailed notes with advice on how to introduce and teach each activity
- recordings** to support non music-readers
- notated songs with chords
- instructions for making a 'Scrunchie'

Recommendations

**The recordings are intended as a teaching tool – allowing practitioners to become familiar with the songs. Singing with a group of children while holding on to a 'Scrunchie', Lycra sheet or parachute will demand your total attention, with no opportunity, or free hands, to press buttons to access a recording! Enjoy learning the material and lead the songs with your voice - modelling the songs this way will encourage children to sing them independently. If you have a resident or visiting music specialist, you could invite them to provide an accompaniment on piano or guitar, but do this infrequently the best way to enjoy these informal musical activities is through unaccompanied singing.

I hope that this material will enhance your provision and provide you with greater opportunities for informal learning through song.

The royalties from sales of this book will be donated to 'Save the Children'.

Sue Nicholls

INFORMATION ABOUT THE THREE PLAY RESOURCE MATERIALS

PARACHUTES
These are plastic circles made up of coloured segments, available commercially in a variety of sizes. Being extremely lightweight they lend themselves perfectly to activities that maximise floating the sheet up in the air so that players can pass underneath. Parachutes are robust and weatherproof - they work well in the outdoor area.

LYCRA CIRCLES
Lycra (or Spandex) fabric should be 4-way stretch for the best results. It is sold in many colours and usually 1.5 m in width, so buy a 1.5 m length and cut the square carefully into the largest possible circle. Lycra circle sheets are irresistible for bouncing 'cuddlies', beanbags or soft toys… Lycra is virtually indestructible and machine washable, but don't iron it!

SCRUNCHIES
'Scrunchies' are stretchy fabric rings - a long joined-up ruched tube encasing strong elastic: they are sold in different lengths. A 15-metre Scrunchie (at full stretch) will accommodate a class of 30 x Nursery or Reception children. Commercially produced examples tend to be made with fabric of one single design, but there are far more song possibilities if the Scrunchie is constructed of contrasting designs. Fabric pieces with easily recognisable characters, objects or patterns (stripes, spots, zigzags) would be perfect. The song 'Sing a Scrunchie' exploits this idea and a pattern for making Scrunchies is included at the back of the book.

Consider having smaller parachutes, Lycra circles and Scrunchies for work with intervention groups and to encourage child-initiated independent play.