Singing is ever present in this nursery. As children arrive they are welcomed with a smile, a hug and a favourite song. Songs are improvised or adapted to accompany play and to guide children through the routines of their day. Songs are hummed for comfort and rest, in a variety of languages.

Daily, before lunch, everyone gathers for a sing-along. Although children are free to come and go, most choose to stay and join in. Sometimes one educator plays an electronic keyboard, with help from small hands! Cleverly, she has taped paper over the buttons, so only the keys can be explored. Children choose their favourite songs and educators show skill in ‘interpreting the codes’ of their developing language and in allowing time for children to sing key words or initiate actions.

Some percussion instruments are nearby and occasionally a child brings one into the singing.

Recorded music is not often used. For dancing, instrumental music (classical or world) may be played. Baskets of light fabrics and ribbons are available. Children sometimes watch brief music clips of songs in languages other than English on an iPad™.

Researchers believe that humans are innately musical and singing is an important part of infancy and early childhood (Ilari, 2011). Singing builds social and pretend play experiences. Participation in action songs and singing games promotes togetherness (our natural urge to be part of a group) (Van Oers & Hannikainen, 2001).

Learning songs of their culture supports children’s sense of belonging: in families, communities and early childhood settings.

Being
- Singing aids wellbeing: music therapy research shows that singing can slow heart rate, decrease stress and lift mood.
- Singing is fun: as in the peek-a-boo song above.
- Songs provide a clear and predictable structure for routines and transitions, making the day flow smoothly and happily for children and adults.

Becoming
- Singing helps joint attention, listening and concentration.
- Songs provide an opportunity for children to share their joy.

Singing builds social and pretend play skills: the structure and actions of songs provide a framework, supporting the development of intersubjectivity (shared thinking and understanding).

Our voice is our built-in musical instrument: awareness of beat, rhythm and pitch, acquired through singing and being sung to, lays foundations for all musical learning.

Features are common in our lives: on TV, DVDs, radio or MP3s, in homes and public places. 'Sing a rainbow' with your children and share their joy.

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References

Infant/adult interactions reveal the synchronisation of pulse, pitch and vocal quality, which Treharthen and Malloch have termed ‘communicative musicality’ (2002). Children’s pleasure in music is evident from birth.

There has been much hype about the value of music for future academic success (Ilari, 2011). Confronted by a vast array of choices in an increasingly commercialised and digitised world (Hughes, 2005) and motivated by concern to provide children with the best, educators and families often look to technology as a source of music and learning. However, the singing experiences presented here show the value of an alternative approach. Through singing, children share in rich communication and relationships, a sense of belonging, meaningful learning and many happy experiences.

Singing and the Early Years Learning Framework

Belonging
- Being sung to is special, creating closeness and relaxation.
- Shared singing with adults supports the development of secure and trusting relationships.
- Participation in action songs and singing games promotes togetherness (our natural urge to be part of a group) (Van Oers & Hannikainen, 2001).

Being
- Singing aids wellbeing: music therapy research shows that singing can slow heart rate, decrease stress and lift mood.
- Singing is fun: as in the peek-a-boo song above.
- Songs provide a clear and predictable structure for routines and transitions, making the day flow smoothly and happily for children and adults.

Becoming
- Singing helps joint attention, listening and concentration.

• to communicate more directly with children
• to be responsive to their spontaneous creative ideas
• to adjust the pace and pitch of singing: often recordings are too fast or too low in pitch for very young children
• to enable children to hear and process a song more successfully without many layers of accompaniment
• to provide an alternative musical experience to the electronic, busy, beat-heavy music and singing which are common in our lives: on TV, DVDs, radio or MP3s, in homes and public places.

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