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Music of Language - Language of Music: Teaching/Learning through Music

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*Music gives a soul to the universe,
Wings to the mind, Flight to the imagination...
And life to everything.*

- Plato

*Music expresses that
which cannot be said and on which
it is impossible to be silent*

- Victor Hugo

Music is an integral part of human life. We use it to communicate, educate, inspire, entertain and instill a sense of social understanding.

I always believed that music is a very strong tool to learn/teach language. Whether it is pure classical music, folk music, film music, pop music or the soft background music being played during teaching-learning process – all contribute in the development of language skills.

This is the reason that I used music in my teaching and have seen positive results of it.

Since my childhood I was very fond of music and the home environment was also very musical. We were told legends about Tansen that he could bring down rains with his rendering of Raga Malhar and start fire or light lamps with Raga Deepak. It is also said that he was able to bring wild animals to listen to his music with rapt attention. Such was the power of his music! So as a teacher I could relate to the importance and power of music in the classroom processes. I had also read a few articles which suggested that the music can contribute to the cognitive process and impact the learning and that the researchers have discovered that music stimulates specific regions of the brain responsible for memory, motor control and language.

Why Music?

The rhythm, rhyme and repetition of musical sounds and lyrics attract children because music engages a child's mind, body and soul in a very interesting way. Use of music makes learning joyful for children and they are able to imbibe new information easily. Even as adults we experience this. Can we ever forget the popular jingles where advertisers have used musical techniques for years? Some of the famous jingles like - "Lifebuoy hai jahan, tandurusti hai vahan", "Vicks ki goli lo, khich-khich dur karo", "Badshah masala" and "Nirma ...Washing powder Nirma", "Hamara Bajaj" or "Karram kurrām lijjat papad..." are created specifically to help us remember these products. If advertisers can get consumers to focus and remember their product, why can't teachers use a folk tune, shloka chant, poem, or for that matter a film song to teach language skills and concepts? It would definitely make teaching learning process more effective. Because music can:

- Increase the ability to listen and learn
- Bring element of fun to the classroom!
- Increase attention, retain and recall information
- Relax the mind
- Improve students' reading, writing, and thinking skills

- Enhance creativity.
- Help multisensory learning (auditory-listening, visual-dancing, kinesthetic-clapping and tactile-playing an instrument)
- Cater to different learning styles - children with special needs

But how to begin? The question did bother me for some time. But I had to start somewhere. So in my primary classes, I began with singing the poems of the text books and making the children to sing them. One child started tapping the desk the moment we began singing. It took just a few seconds for all the children to become ‘tabalchi’ or drum player. One started beating his tiffin box and the other started ‘playing’ his spoon-glass, the third one started clapping and the fourth one was tapping his feet on the ground! It was a little noisy but all were very happy and class was lively! From then on it became a regular practice to sing the poem across all the classes, from primary to +2 levels.

The next challenge was to go beyond singing the poems of the text book and use songs/music to teach new concepts. To do this I planned to pick a few words that were of the children’s level and interest and were pertaining to the competency that had to be taught, write my own songs and set them to a simple tune.

Soon I got an opportunity to implement this idea. I had to teach the Hindi names of ‘weekdays’ to second graders of my English medium school. I chose simple words like ‘chuk-chuk, rail, khel etc. to write the song. Now I needed a simple or very popular tune for the song. Since this was an English medium school, the children were familiar with the rhyme ‘London Bridge is falling down... falling down’. So I composed the ‘weekdays’ song in this tune. The song that finally emerged to teach the names of the days of the week was as follows:

Chhuk Chhuk Chhuk Chhuk chalti rail..... chalti rail..... chalti rail....

Chhuk Chhuk Chhuk Chhuk chalti rail
Sarapat bhagi

Aao khelen dinon ka khel dinon ka khel
dion ka khel

Aao khelen dinon ka khel
Har ik din

Somavar ko sona chhodo..... sona chhodo..... sona chhodo.....

Somavar ko sona chhodo Susti chhodo
Jago-jago School ko doudo..... School ko doudo...
School ko doudo.....

Jago-jago School ko doudo
Ghanti baj gayee

Mangal ka din bada niral..... bada niral..... bada niral....

Mangal ka din bada niral
Kitana pyara

Masti men duba jag sara.... jag sara...jag sara...
Masti men duba jag sara

Nacho gaao

Budhvar ko buddhi chamaki..... buddhi chamaki.....
buddhi chamaki.....

Budhvar ko buddhi chamaki
Padh lo pothi

Sab bachchon ne li thumki..... li thumki..... li thumki.....

Sab bachchon ne li thumki
Nacho tum bhi

Brihaspai ne hamen sikhaya..... hamen sikhaya.....
hamen sikhaya.....

Brihaspai ne hamen sikhaya
Kya hai sikhaya ?

Pedon ka mat karo safaya.....nahin safaya..... nahin safaya

Pedon ka mat karo safaya
Inko bacha lo

Shukravar ko kaho shukriya..... kaho shukriya.....
 kaho shukriya.....
 Shukravar ko kaho shukriya
 Apne prabhu ka
 Prabhu ne kya kuch hamen diya.... hamen diya....
 hamen diya....
 Prabhu ne kya kuch hamen diya
 Socho socho

Shanivar ko adhi chutti.... adhi chutti... adhi chutti...
 Shanivar ko adhi chutti
 Kam padhte ham pothi patti
 Shanivar ko adhi chutti.... adhi chutti... adhi chutti...
 Shanivar ko adhi chutti
 Kam padhte ham pothi patti

Akhir aya hai ravivar...han ravivar... vah ravivar
 Akhir aya hai ravivar
 Chhutti chutti
 Khelo, khao, jhumo yar..... jhumo yar..... jhumo
 yar.....
 Khelo, khao, jhumo yar
 Chhutti chutti

The children moved in a line like a train, clapped,
 danced, jumped and learnt the names in no time.

Later, I went on to write songs on ‘*matras, sanyukt vyanjan*’ and a few more concepts in language.

(Some of these can be heard on the digital learning resource (CD) titled ‘Hu-ba-hu’ produced by Azim Premji Foundation. A few other CDs, produced by Azim Premji Foundation, on Hindi language also have language-related songs.)

Using music in other subjects:

Once I came across a Fraction Song in a U.P. text book:

- Papaji bazaar se aye, sang me ek seb le aye,
 Chunni boli main khaungi, Munni boli main
 khaungi,
 Bantvaaraa ab kaise ho, seb ek hai ladki do,
 Itane me aye nanhi Radha, sujhaya usane
 adha-adha.

- Baba laye ek tarbuz, bole chak kar khao khub,
 Us ghar me hain ladake char, kaise bante karen
 vichar,
 Baba bole aao aao yaar, isake kar den tukde char
 Alag-alag tum khao bhai, isako hi kahate
 chouthai.

Inspired by this I created a song on Addition to the
 tune of “London Bridge” once again and shared it
 with my colleague who taught mathematics. The
 song was:

Addition Song

Thhelam-thhel bhai thhelam thhel,
 Thhelam-thhel bhai thhelam thhel,

Aao khelen jod ka khel,
 Aao khelen jod ka khel,

Ek hai murgi ande char,
 Ek hai murgi ande char,

Kul hain kitane bolo yaar?
 Ho gaye PAANCH, sun mere yaar.

My friend liked it a lot and then all the other subject
 teachers also felt that they should give it a try in their
 respective subjects. Their enthusiasm convinced me
 that music can be used across all the subjects.

Around the year 2000-2001, we started using
 computers for teaching-learning process. It was a
 thrilling experience for both teachers and the chil-
 dren. The children started enjoying the song-music
 method more than before. Because it required them
 to go to the computer lab, record their own voice,
 play harmonium, tabla, mridang, keyboard, violin
 as accompaniments for the song and finally use it in
 their power point presentation. All these activities
 gave new dimensions to the creativity of the children
 and immense satisfaction to me.

At times it was challenging to write a song or provide
 a tune to it. On such occasions I depended on my
 ‘akshay or unfailing bank’ i.e. my students. I would

give them the topic, a few key words and ask them to write tiny little songs. Then we would combine all the songs to come up with the final version. After this we would think of a tune, either original one or some known song (even a film song at times!). The children loved these songs and were very proud of them because they had created them. This proved to be a strong tool to bring out their talent and nurture it.

This was about writing, composing music and singing songs. Apart from it, I have also used music in my classes in various other ways. For example play a small piece of classical instrumental music (sitar, sarod, santoor or flute) and ask the children to write all the adjectives that come to their mind (for example melodious, soothing etc.). Then they would share them with the class, discuss their meaning and different usage and thus increase their vocabulary. I would ask them to observe and discuss the subtle difference between words like pain and anguish OR *shant and shanti*.

There is one more activity that children like very much. Play a song in the class and ask the children to listen to it carefully. Then give them the handout of the same song with blanks in between. The children try to fill in the words from their memory and then sing the song. I would modify this activity a little for the older children and ask them to replace certain original words with their synonyms keeping in mind

the rhyme and the meter. This effort brought forth many ‘*ashukavi*’ or nascent poets. This activity also impacted their listening and comprehension, reading and writing skills as well as improved their pronunciation and vocabulary.

During this period we also started playing soft music before and after the assembly program and during the lunch break. This was appreciated by the parents and children both.

There are many ways to use music to facilitate language learning. We need to explore them and see what works best for us. The students will always remember their language classes and the teachers because those songs will remain in their psyche for years to come.

If music can aid learning by increasing a child’s interest then what are we waiting for?

Music happens to be an art form that transcends language – Herbie Hancock

Music is the soul of language – Max Heindel

‘This article was first published in Hindi on the Teachers of India portal (www.teachersofindia.org), in the year 2010-11.’

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