

IN HARMONY

MUSIC AND MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES SUPPORT CHILDREN'S APPRECIATION OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY.



Sharing songs and music in different languages with children is a good way to introduce them to different cultures. Ms Lavina Chong, Managing Director of Wigglepods, a creative music and movement company, recalls a group of preschoolers' reactions to her singing a 'Hello' song in Tamil during a class.

"The children started asking to learn the same song in different languages," she recounts. "In the early childhood classroom, there are numerous opportunities for educators to introduce and promote cultural diversity to young children. Apart from the usual music and movement activities, children can sing and dance to music and songs in different languages during transitions and circle times, and even learn to greet one another in different languages."

MUSIC BUILDS COMMUNITY

Besides contributing to children's cognitive development, language learning and well-being, music can be the



child's entry point to other cultures — helping to expand their cultural boundaries and make connections with others, Ms Chong points out.

To foster a culturally inclusive classroom environment, she recommends that teachers introduce music and instruments associated with the different cultures. "Introduce children to music from different cultures, where elements of music such as melody, rhythm, form, harmony and texture differ," says Ms Chong. These provide context and better engage children as it makes the musical experience meaningful. For instance, children can move with scarves to the song 'Selamat Hari Raya' or play percussion instruments to lion dance music.

STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL BONDS

In pre-COVID days, Ms Jowell Chua would play her son Titus Tang's favourite songs during family road trips to Malaysia, and they would all sing and move along in the car. This has morphed into weekly

Wigglepods' Ms Lavina Chong

dance parties at home, a great family bonding activity. "Titus, now 3, makes us dance with him and even makes up his own moves," says Ms Chua.

She adds that his social skills have also improved as a result. "Singing and dancing have helped build up Titus' self-confidence. He listens to songs in different languages, including Chinese, and dances to them all. He has become more outgoing and is no longer shy when he meets new people."

Percussion instruments encourage movement and creativity



TUNE IN

How to create a conducive environment that supports children's appreciation for music.

- ➔ **Recognise that each child responds differently.** Being accepting helps children feel safe and secure.
- ➔ **Be flexible.** Use different modalities to cater to different needs. Don't just sing a song; move to the words and play instruments to represent the song.
- ➔ **Respect children's ideas.** Incorporate children's suggestions into songs, such as jumping around or doing arm waves while singing 'Hello'. It makes them feel heard and boosts their self-esteem.



Music can open the door to new cultures and new friends