



WELL *worth* A LISTEN



Eleanor Johnson explores the ways in which audio resources can be used to promote children's development...

I have always found that audio resources are an ideal tool for supporting and extending children's learning. They can be used to encourage storytelling skills, support children's exploration of the world around them, and enhance imagination in the role-play area. In this article, I would like to share some of these ideas and observations with you.

We all know how important it is for children to have good listening skills; how crucial they are for a child's language and communication development, as well as reading and social interaction. Planning structured listening activities provides opportunities for children to practise and consolidate these skills, and adds a multisensory element to an activity.

More than ever, publishers and content providers are creating good quality audio resources, and it has also become more straightforward to make your own, so it's easier than ever to offer these activities in your setting.

1. Audio stories

Audio stories usually incorporate sound effects and music, and are often recorded by actors or celebrities. Songs and 'joining in' activities may also be included, and publishers often provide two versions of a story: a 'listen along' version, which is read all the way through, and a 'read along' version, which includes page turn prompts. They are often accompanied by the printed book, but as following a text is quite a sophisticated skill, young children starting out on their reading journey may struggle with this. However, they can follow the story by responding to the page turn prompts. Children can also benefit from listening to the story without the book, allowing their imagination to take over.

2. Songs and rhymes

Young children absorb and retain knowledge so easily through the medium of music and song. Alongside the old favourites, there are many companies creating wonderful new songs which are easy for young children to learn and sing along to.

These songs are often

themed to topics such as animals or healthy living. Songs and rhymes provide an ideal means of introducing children to new vocabulary and concepts, and of consolidating learning.

3. Sounds and listening games

Children's phonological awareness can be supported by using environmental sounds games covering a wide range of subjects, from animals to musical instruments. Listening games also encourage 'active' listening by requiring an action or response. You can encourage sound awareness and early communication skills by choosing songs and rhymes with a strong, steady beat, and singing also supports the new 'three Rs': Rhythm, Rhyme and Repetition.

4. Different languages

Using familiar songs and rhymes can make it easier for children to learn a different language, so many foreign language resources use songs, rhymes and raps as their teaching focus. These resources may be theme-based, for example, around colours, number, days of the week or greetings. Singing familiar songs in a different language also provides an ideal starting point for very young children.

5. Radio programmes, podcasts and websites

These can be a good source of audio resources. The BBC Schools Radio service creates programmes to support the delivery of the early years curriculum. Many of the programmes are available as free podcasts, through the listen again service, or to order on CD.

6. Record your own!

Sometimes it's not possible to find the audio resource you are looking for, so be creative and record your own! There are a variety of recorders available; most MP3 players have a record feature, and you can also record through your computer providing you have a microphone.



Using audio resources

Using audio resources adds another sensory element to an activity, but very young children should initially take part in these activities with the support and interaction of an adult. As your children mature and become familiar with the idea that audio resources are a useful learning tool, they will be able to access them more independently and incorporate them into their own, child-initiated activities.

Telling a story

A children's centre in Glasgow found that by listening to stories, the children began discussing them with the adults more frequently. The children became very involved with the stories and also began chatting to their friends about them and sharing their experiences.

Reading to children introduces them to the language and structure of a story, and provides a model for their own storytelling. When children learn to create, structure and tell their own story orally, they are laying down the foundations for reading and writing. You can never replace the shared experience of reading with a child; however, audio stories are a wonderful way of enhancing and extending the pleasure of listening to a story.

At first, introduce an audio story by listening together with your children, encouraging interaction with the book and the audio track. Some young children may find it easier to listen to very short stories at first, but as they gain experience, the tracks can become longer. If you have some children who are struggling to listen to a story all the way through, then sung or rhyming stories may hold their attention at first. Children should be given opportunities to listen individually, in pairs and in groups.

Book corners

Audio stories can become a regular listening activity by placing MP3 players or CD players in your book corner. If you are using

rechargeable MP3 players, then you can also set up a reading area outside. Props such as puppets and character toys can be placed alongside the players to accompany the stories and songs.

Hideaway listening!

All children love a hidey-hole or den. Enclosed spaces can be very atmospheric and, for some children, can be seen as adventurous, exciting and thrillingly scary. For others, they are spaces of enclosure, safe and inviting. Providing audio stories, songs and sound effects enhances this experience.

By providing children with appropriate resources they can create their own spaces which are themed to a particular audio story. For example:

- Rumble in the Jungle: camouflage fabric makes an ideal jungle den
- Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?: use thick, dark material to create a bear cave

Exploring the world

An early years setting in Durham used 'Percy the Park Keeper' to set up a wildlife role-play area. The practitioner dressed up as a wildlife warden and introduced the children to the animal sounds. These sounds were then loaded onto MP3 players and the children listened to them and matched the sounds to the animals. The animal sounds became an integral part of the role-play area and added a listening activity along with the audio story.

The role-play area is an ideal place to incorporate audio resources. These could include animal sounds, environmental sounds and associated stories and songs. Why not try:

- The seaside: seagulls, whale and dolphin sounds, waves, wind and rain, children playing.
- Space: space rocket sounds, beeping noises.
- The jungle: animal sounds, background jungle sounds, falling rain, running water.

Children have talent!

Another early years unit in Durham was visited by a company of Bollywood dancers. The children had independent access to the



music via a loud speaking MP3 player, enabling them to stage their own dance sessions. Older children taught and coached the younger children, and eventually they created their own performance area, including seating for the audience.

Children love singing and performing. If music and songs are readily available then children can incorporate them into their own, child-initiated play. Try encouraging performing by providing:

- Large construction blocks for children to create their own stages and performing areas.
- Shiny fabric hung over a frame to create a special backdrop.
- Large blocks, logs or crates to create seating.

Creative activities

Listening to audio resources whilst using creative resources can be a truly multisensory experience. For example, listening to a story or song while you and your children explore clay or playdough:

- *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* – make different sized bears.
- *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* – make various sizes of caterpillars and the food to eat.

Audio players

The majority of early years settings have CD players; however, MP3 players and digital audio systems are becoming increasingly popular. Many children are comfortable with current technologies and are familiar with MP3 players of one form or another. The advantage of an MP3 audio system is its versatility and mobility: most are battery powered and this feature makes it so much easier to plan for an outdoor activity. Cassette tape recorders are no longer common in the home and you should consider replacing them with equipment which uses current technology and which children may more easily recognise.

findoutmore

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Sound advice

FIND AUDIO RESOURCES YOUR CHILDREN WILL LOVE...

Audio Book Publishers

- Walker Books • Little Tiger Press • Egmont
- Lawrence Educational
- Yellow Door

Songs and Rhymes

singup.org
www.stickykids.co.uk

Language resources

lingotot.com

Radio

bbc.co.uk/schoolradio
funkidslive.com