Children's music starts with speech. Speech is the beginning of formal language. We progress from speech, to the chant and then the song. Every culture has their own indigenous music. I am sure you have heard people say that music is the universal language. I think all cultures are hard wired for the language of music.

Music is a language and standard English is a language. To enhance one is to work with the other. The Children's indigenous music that we call folksong is a culturally diverse national treasure. Check this out: Virtual Music Classroom Teaching "Whole Music" Literacy - Part 1 (by J. Kit Eakle from Research Forum, 1994, Langley School District, Langley, BC).

Technology provides us with what I refer to as Diversity University. The boundaries between disciplines fall away. Technology allows people with common interests to play together and share their collective knowledge on the cyber playground.

I. THE ORAL TRADITION:

The oral tradition begins with playground chants. All cultures have this in common. This is where you will find the children's living poetry. Yes, it is alive; changing daily as a new kid moves into the neighborhood and brings their repertoire with them. But, partly because of urbanization and violence on the streets, children don't have access to each other anymore.

Games are disappearing.

The oral tradition of folksong is also a collection of stories that children tell to each other, that help them to make sense out of their circumstances and their world. Consider:

1. Ring Around The Rosie

Ring around the rosie, pocket full of posies, ashes, ashes, we all fall down.
This is not a story told about the plague. People carried posies to the grave site for the funeral. The Prayer says ashes to ashes, we all fall down - death. It makes you think...what other stories are being told?...what is the child's view?

2. Four White Horses:

Four White Horses on a rainbow
Hey Hey Hey up tomorrow
Up tomorrow is a rainy day
Come on out and let's shadow play
Shadow play is a ripe banana
Hey Hey Hey up tomorrow

This is very beautiful imagery. I can just see four white horses on a rainbow. What I can't ignore is the subtle reference to sex in the shadows. So innocent and unlike the blunt story told next in "Kiss Kiss."

3. Kiss Kiss:

Down on the carpet I go
Like a black girl in the air
Rise and stand up on your knees and
Kiss the one that you love the best
When I'm married, I'll give you joy,
First a boy and second a girl
He this boy, she this girl,
Kiss, Kiss and say goodbye.

I must mention one of my personal favorites:

4. In Came the Doctor

In came the doctor,
In came the nurse,
In came the Lady with the
Alligator purse.

I was so fascinated with the Lady as a child; what a wild creature she must have been. I always thought she could have been a little like the character of Lucy on the I Love Lucy show. What did you think she looked like?

Click on these 2 songs to see the Music and Hear Real Audio of:

"Down In the River" or "Ding-Dong" from the children of St. Croix as recorded in my book and casette tape "Domino." Depending on your browser this may be
quick or take a while. A new window will open and you will be at the Kennedy Center of Preforming Arts. The page you are reading now will stay here.

II. THE TACTILE COMPONENT:

Folksongs also have an amazing tactile component. Children clap, snap, stamp, and move in dozens of syncopated patterns to dozens of chants, circle games, and songs. Interestingly enough, these tactile pathways seem to help people learn best, especially if they are learning different. Think about it. What you see, hear, and feel, you never forget.

A Chinese Proverb Says:
"Tell me, I forget. Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand."

When is the last time you learned one of these chants and the accompanying clapping pattern; especially a complicated one? Most adults don't do very well. Try it. This will give you a new respect for what children can do and know -- "below the neck". What a repertoire they have!

The most successful way to teach a cognitive and objective awareness is to start working from what's known "below the neck". The beauty of this approach, in both singing games and technology, is that in this mode children already often know more than the teacher. How refreshing! It is your job as teacher to assign labels to what they already know and bring their awareness up "above the neck" -- it's natural this way -- instead of the other way around. Once you can name it, you can claim it!

III. CREATIVITY AND THE PLAYGROUNDS OF LIFE:

I am most interested in the power of creativity that comes from the intersections of the playgrounds of life. Where play and learning intersect and overlap they produce the epiphanies of understanding that sustains our wonderment of learning throughout our entire lives - not just in the classrooms of our youth.

"It is a miracle that curiosity survives formal education."

"Imagination is more important than knowledge."

-- Albert Einstein

Technology is the newest playground. Brought into the classroom it will help the music and classroom teachers intersect in learning and play.

Diversity University - Yes! That's the ticket! The synergistic power of both music and classroom teachers, intersecting on the road to language fluency. With technology the boundaries fall away. Language fluency can be achieved.
Indigenous children's music is a natural source of material for combining their music and their language experience. Teachers from different disciplines can easily work together to enhance language fluency skills using the oral tradition.

In summary, I believe that the core relationship children have with the oral tradition and play is transformation. Children will take the space they play in, the games and songs they are playing with, and create something new with them. This act gives a feeling and sense of ownership. Old traditions are now transformed and given new life.

Cyberspace is the new space, the new playground. As children become familiar with the technology they'll find that it has no fences, no walled yards. This space is wide open, and goes as far as our imagination will take us. Cross cultural communication will be inevitable. It is only natural to expect the kids of this century to adapt their games and folksongs to this new space and thereby claim it as their own. It is the next step in the natural progression of our culture.

Remember -- we don't "work" music, we "play" it! Music as "word play"!

IV. WORD PLAY - THE WORD "PLAY"

word play -- (playing on words or speech sounds)

pun, punning, wordplay -- (a humorous play on words; "I do it for the pun of it")

looseness, play -- (movement or space for movement; "there was too much play in the steering wheel")

wiggliness -- slack, slackness

play, child's play -- (play by children that is guided more by imagination than by fixed rules; "Freud believed in the utility of play to a small child")

house -- (play in which children take the roles of father or mother or children and pretend to interact like adults; "the children were playing house")

doctor -- (children take the roles of doctor or patient or nurse and pretend they are at the doctor's office; "the children explored each other's bodies by playing the game of doctor")

fireman -- (play in which children take the roles of firemen and pretend to put out a fire)

maneuver, manoeuvre, play -- (a deliberate coordinated movement requiring dexterity and skill; "he made a great play")
play -- (a theatrical performance of a drama; "the play lasted two hours"

musical, musical comedy, musical theater

play, drama -- (a dramatic work intended for performance by actors on a stage;

playlet -- (a short play)

morality play -- (an allegorical play popular in the 15th and 16th centuries;
characters personified virtues and vices)

turn, play -- (the activity of doing something in an agreed succession; "it is my
turn" or "it is still my play"

play -- (the act using a sword (or other weapon) vigorously and skillfully)