Multilingual Nursery Rhymes: Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Age recommendation:	3–7
Key Stage:	Early Years–KS1
Duration:	20–30 minutes
Keywords:	Mixing languages (translanguaging), language play, singing
Languages:	English, Italian, Norwegian
Resources provided:	• Soundtrack with animation but no vocals • Soundtrack with animation and vocals mixed up in English, Italian and Norwegian
Other materials:	• Colouring-in sheets based on the illustrations for the animation • Handout with the lyrics of the Soundtrack with animation and vocals mixed up in English, Italian and Norwegian

AIM

This activity is designed to encourage children to be creative and play with language/s and mix up the languages that may be part of their language competence. This approach, often referred to as ‘translanguaging’, sees the users of more than one language as drawing from all their linguistic resources as a single linguistic competence rather than separate ones. In practical terms, a bilingual user of English and Italian will see ‘star’ and ‘stella’ as two words for the same thing rather than two words belonging to different languages. Through this activity speakers that may identify as monolingual can also be encouraged to reflect on the richness of language in terms of synonyms, rhyme, registers and accents for instance.

PREPARATION

In preparation for this activity the teacher will explore the materials attached to this resource and may want to look up this nursery rhyme in different languages. It may also be useful to, if possible, to familiarise oneself with the linguistic profile of the group involved in the activity to understand whether members of the group see themselves as users of one or more languages. This can also be done before starting the activity together with the group. The soundtrack with animation and vocals mixed up in English, Italian and Norwegian is provided as an example for whoever is leading the activity of what a multilingual version of this nursery rhyme may look like. Note that any mixing of languages by the children taking part in the activity should not follow any specific pattern and the soundtrack is for illustration only. Children are encouraged to engage with language/s in a free and uninhibited way and learn from each other. Ahead of the session, the teacher can print out the colouring-in sheets as an additional activity.

ACTIVITY

The teacher introduces the nursery rhyme **Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star** and finds out whether children are familiar with this in English.

The Soundtrack with animation but no vocals can be shown or played to the children to begin by encouraging them to sing this in English as a group. The teacher asks the children whether they know other versions of this song (in other languages they may know from other contexts). It is important to emphasise at this stage that: (1) children who identify as ‘monolingual’ speakers can be creative too and that (2) multilingual children can teach theirs friends about their languages.

The Soundtrack with animation but no vocals can then be played again at this stage to encourage children to sing the nursery rhyme as a group again, but this time with the option of joining in whichever language they want (including English). The teacher can try to identify the same word in different languages used by the children in the group or by other teachers or carers part of the activity (for example ‘little star’ (E), ‘stjerne lill’ (N), ‘stellina’ (I)). Other children can be asked to imitate the sound of these words in the different languages used by the group.

The sample mixed up song in English, Italian and Norwegian may be played here depending on the age of the group. Children who identify as ‘monolingual’ speakers can be supported in reflecting on ways in which different words can be used to express similar concepts (for example, by using synonyms and substituting ‘twinkle’ with ‘sparkle’ or looking at different English pronunciations of ‘twinkle’, or perhaps replacing the star with something else, and finding words to rhyme in the next line).

The teacher can finally ask the group to sing the song one last time and encourage the group to mix up the words in different languages in whichever way feels natural. This activity can also be done in smaller groups and the children can then present their creations to each other. After the activity, the teacher can introduce the colouring-in sheets, which, for older children, could lead to a further activity on the name of different colours in different languages.