



today's **woman**

Education comes to life in song

CHILDREN love music. They love to sing, to jig along to the beat and get right into the rhythm.

Teachers know it, parents know it, and if you ever had a doubt, then take a quick look at the success of the Wiggles and Hi-5.

It's all about the songs, the sounds and the stories that go with them.

Teacher Nuala O'Hanlon saw daily the powerful effect music with her children in primary schools.

"I don't play an instrument or read music, but I was always singing with the lessons," says Nuala, who is based in Sydney.

"And every time without fail, the kids would line up to sing or ask over and over again for new songs. They became so involved, they remembered the words, the stories in the songs."

Nuala was convinced that music, often seen more as entertainment, could be used as a powerful source of learning.

The problem was finding materials that not only were new and fresh, but that also slotted into the learning curriculum of schools.

"It wasn't just a matter of coming up with songs, they needed to be



NATURAL ... music comes naturally to children and is being used to help learn school lessons.

suited to the children's ages and interests.

"And they also needed to relate to subjects they were studying and values that mattered in their lives – but I couldn't find material in the educational library to fit that criteria."

As a result, the familiar story of necessity creating opportunity played its hand.

Nuala contacted fellow educator and musician Kathryn Radloff and pitched the idea of compiling a series of CDs with children and learning specifically in mind.

"We weren't looking at this as merely a way of entertaining the kids, or keeping them amused with a bit of music," says Nuala.

"We were seeing the

powerful effect music had on learning, the attentiveness and connection to the words, the story, the beat, and in the case of children with learning difficulties, they were simply coming alive."

So, with Kathryn writing the music and Nuala the lyrics, the two set about designing a musical world of learning and creativity for primary school children everywhere.

"We took the NSW teaching curriculum and wrote songs directly aligned to what children were learning at various stages," says Nuala.

"We wrote about the seasons and natural situations to tie in with social science courses, we wrote about different cultures and languages, to relate to world studies.

ONE VOICE ... Kathryn, front, and Nuala, back, get some help from a young chorus of enthusiastic students.

"We wrote about health and then offered back-up activities, such as a class picnic where healthy food was shared."

"Or we had the children put together collages of baskets filled with good nutrition."

One song, called *Keep it Clean* that has a catchy rap rhythm, is piped through the PA system of schools at the end of



recess to encourage children to pick up their rubbish.

"When they hear it, they know it's time to clean up," says Nuala.

"We call it pavlovian environmentalism."

The pair also wrote songs aimed at reinforcing values of young students' lives, such as family,

friendship, being shy or feeling lonely.

"We even wrote songs about where things come from, like milk from a cow or fruit from trees, because as silly as it might sound, many children still think it comes out of a carton or from the supermarket."

Nuala and Kathryn, under the working title of Keystone Creations,

designed three initial workbooks aimed at teachers, containing guidelines for classes, back-up programs, song lyrics with accompanying CDS.

These have been taken up by schools in NSW and Queensland, including St Francis Xavier, Runaway Bay.

At this stage, there are four CD sets with publications and resources for kindergarten and primary classes.

Nuala and Kathryn have also put together a *Sing to Learn* CD for parents to use at home, encouraging their children to learn and play.

"We can't emphasise enough the difference it makes to incorporate singing into learning, and lessons," says Nuala.

"This series wasn't just meant to be slotted into a music class, it's for mainstream education, day-to-day learning, and we hope that more schools will take it on as its value becomes more recognised."

For details of the school courses or CDs, visit www.keystonecreations.com.au or phone 0422 865 418.