

The Impact of Promoting Literacy Through Educational Songs

Rachel T. Orenberg

SUNY Brockport

Fall 2016

A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Introduction

It is just your average Friday in my UPK classroom, and it is time for our morning message. We go through the various messages and students are identifying rhymes stated and images observed when we come to the calendar message. We turn our attention to the classroom calendar and the following interaction ensues:

Teacher: Who knows what day of the week it is?

Student1: Let's sing our days of the week song!

Teacher: Okay, everyone on the count of three...1...2...3.

Class: (The Addams Family Tune) Days of the Week (5x with snaps in between each phrase)

There's Sunday and there's Monday, there's Tuesday and there's Wednesday, there's Thursday and there's Friday, and then there's Saturday! Days of the Week (5x with snaps in between each phrase).

Teacher: If yesterday was Thursday, what is today?

Student2: It's Friday!

Class: F-r-i-d-a-y, It's Friday! It's Friday (sung to a beat)

Although this class of four and five year-old students is still learning to spell their names, they clearly know how to spell Friday. How is this possible? Many are not even able to identify all the letters of the alphabet, yet they can spell a word. When considering how this could have occurred, I recognized that if there is a steady beat, anything can become quite catchy.

## **Problem Statement and Significance of the Problem**

Music is a universal language, but as a teacher, I wanted to know how songs impact my students' learning. My research study addressed how music promotes literacy growth and development in emergent literacy learners. According to Shelly Cooper, "Children who are immersed in music and language are more prepared to listen, more receptive and alert, and more active in their responses" (Cooper, 2010). Reading and singing both have very specific structures and sounds that can provide students with the opportunity to enhance memories, attention spans and language skills (Cooper, 2010). I explored the impact of music within the literacy learning process and sought to determine the kind of growth it stimulates in emergent literacy learners.

When considering the similarities of music and reading, it is apparent that they have many parallels. I determined to discover how they relate to one another, which helped explain how music can ultimately promote literacy growth and development in emergent literacy learners. The other matter this research will address is how I can increase my foundation of knowledge and enhance my repertoire to promote literacy growth in my own classroom. I'm hopeful that my explorations lead me to become a more well-rounded teacher who can take advantage of the benefits that come from incorporating educational songs into my daily teaching.

## **Purpose for the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine how singing educational songs can promote literacy growth and development in emergent literacy learners. I want to know more about the impacts of incorporating music into education, especially when it comes to the acquisition of foundational literacy skills. While doing this research, I gained insights into different strategies and approaches that I can incorporate into my students' literacy learning experiences.

## **Research Questions**

How do children's educational songs promote literacy growth and development for emergent literacy learners?

What benefits can children gain from singing songs in the classroom?

## **Rationale**

As a Universal Pre-Kindergarten teacher working with urban students, I am always trying to discover methods to inspire and engage my students in the learning process. My emergent literacy learners are growing and exploring, and as a teacher, I know it is critical that I thoughtfully design and facilitate literacy instruction and experiences that effectively allow my students to acquire the necessary foundational pre-reading skills required for successful reading. Throughout my teaching career, I have observed the enjoyment and enhanced learning students experience with the incorporation of music into the literacy learning process, and I wanted to know if the truth and explanations based on my current observations.

In addition to determining how educational songs can promote literacy growth and development, I would also like to learn other methods of using songs to help aid my students in the learning process. All teachers have heard the phrase, "don't reinvent the wheel." My continuous search for new and innovative ideas of how to incorporate music into my classroom is a never-ending process. I am optimistic that the process of researching and reflecting on my teaching and its impact on student learning has enable me to enhance my own classroom instruction toolbox.

By not exploring how songs can promote literacy growth, I would limit the impact of my students' literacy learning and development in a variety of areas. Many Pre-kindergarten students may come to the classroom with limited language and literacy exposure. Therefore, it is

imperative for me as a teacher to provide my class with as many enriching literacy experiences as possible to ensure my students receive the necessary jump-start they need to become lifelong readers and writers. In addition, Pre-kindergarten students need engaging activities to further aid in their literacy growth and development. If I removed songs from our daily classroom activities, I would be in some ways denying my students varied and essential literacy elements naturally incorporated within engaging songs, which would aid in the reinforcement of their literacy learning.

“John Blacking (1973) posited that music is not an optional relish for life but a phenomenon that lies at the foundation of society” (Campbell, 1998, p. 5). Music is the backdrop of our lives, it is used to influence all facets of our society (i.e. religiously, educationally, politically, economically, and socioculturally), and “music may be the treasure children prize for their own personal pleasure, and a tool for their use in understanding the world in which they live” (Campbell, 1998, p. 5). Teachers recognize the power of music, but there has been minimal research conducted on songs and the impact they make on students’ literacy learning and development. Before children are even born, studies suggest for pregnant women to start exposing their unborn child to classical music. This recommendation comes based only on preliminary research that indicates unborn children might enjoy and slightly benefit from daily music exposure. Disregarding the amount of research done, it is powerful to know that a baby inside its mother’s womb can have a physical reaction to music, and this reiterates what a powerful tool it can be in the formal educational setting.

Traditionally, we associate songs in teaching as beneficial, and they can affect students on a variety of levels. Young students love music and just as I have noticed in my own classroom, Huertas and Parra’s action research emphasizes that the “use of songs in teaching

English enhanced positive feelings such as happiness, self-confidence, and enjoyment” (Huertas & Parra, 2014, p. 21). Simply put, songs in education are powerful in many contexts. Educators know that songs can be influential, but there is unfortunately little empirical research to examine the effects on the literacy learning, development, and understanding of emergent literacy learners through the facilitation and promotion of emergent literacy instruction incorporating the use of children’s songs (Walton, 2014, p. 54). My study has enabled me to explore how songs can benefit and enhance my students’ literacy skills and development.

### **Study Approach**

I followed a self-study protocol that enabled me to reflect the impact of my literacy instruction on my students’ literacy learning through the incorporation of active singing throughout the course of the academic school day. During my self-study, I used a narrative based approach to my research through my collection of daily observations from songs and reflection journal. I recorded my observations of my students’ reactions and other findings that occur through my use of songs that promote language and literacy growth. In addition, I used my reflection journal to include any additional insights observed in response to the songs sung and my students’ emergent literacy learning, growth and development.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

Songs play a significant role in the various contexts within our daily lives. Socially, music used within the media at times promotes equality, to protest and expose social injustice issues (i.e. Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's *Same Love*, Black Eyed Peas' *Where Is the Love?*). Brands also use songs to encourage and influence consumers to buy their products through catchy jingles and slogans that you cannot get out of your head (i.e. Mentos, McDonald's, lawyers "one call, that's all!"). Another example is the evocation of emotions through songs. I remember always turning my CD player to Savage Garden and the Goo Goo Dolls after a tough day at school. The message and lyrics were powerful and helped me to escape reality and get lost in another world. Songs also have the power to promote education. Several channels on television encourage education through singing songs (i.e. Sesame Street, The Wiggles, and School House Rock). These shows can engage emergent learners through songs while providing knowledge and information that is relevant and beneficial for children's growth and development. Teachers have started using different genres of music as an educational tool to teach subject content materials; because, they realize how these nonconventional forms of teaching aid in their students' understanding and retention of new information.

Upon starting this self-study, I quickly realized that there is a significant lack of research exploring the benefits and advantages of utilizing music to teach literacy concepts to emergent literacy learners. Some consider music and singing with young children, as a fun side-activity, and the true power of songs and their impact on literacy learning is something others have yet to further explore or fully understand. Fortunately, there have been some research studies regarding the importance of music in literacy learning, and this literature review will be referencing some

of the research that has been conducted regarding songs and their impact on learning. “Research in music education and written language learning in primary school have established links between the treatment of musical and linguistic information” (Bolduc, 2009, p. 38). My review primarily focuses on the components of language songs can develop, using songs for concept and skill development, and ways to incorporate music into the classroom.

I used Vygotsky’s social constructivist theory to help guide my study and thinking. According to Vygotsky, the social constructivist theorists believe that developmental growth is socially situated and that knowledge gained comes from interacting with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Infants start to learn language through the social context of hearing dialog and speaking to them, or through catchy nursery rhymes and songs. Not only is talking valuable, but music plays a major role in children’s social experiences. I have observed students who do not speak, yet they will sing before they communicate with others. Singing songs is naturally a social activity that more often than not, requires direct interactions between people. My research has reiterated the importance and value of singing as a social construct; therefore, I have already started incorporating music into my unborn child’s life. When framing my study, it is imperative to remember the social context of my students’ daily experiences in their Pre-K world. All students have their own background knowledge, and I have seen this knowledge applied in my own classroom within a variety of social contexts. From students who are just learning English to ones that have an enhanced vocabulary, I have witnessed the role that songs can play within the literacy learning experiences of all my students. I am excited to continue to explore how these songs can ultimately help foster language and literacy learning, growth, and development within the emergent literacy learners within my classroom.

## **Components of Language Songs Can Develop**

My goal was to determine how songs promote literacy growth and development in emergent literacy learners. In exploring this phenomenon, I examined the pre-reading skills, which are also at the developmental level of my pre-kindergartens students. Old and new research pertaining to songs and their relevance in pre-reading skills reflects the positive impacts songs can have on language development. Through other's research, researchers can deduct that the most impactful areas of growth through song and movement activities are phonological and letter-sound relationships (Walton, 2014, p. 55).

As a Pre-Kindergarten teacher, I have noticed that my students enjoy singing songs and whenever a song has a rhyme, they get excited to identify it. Students learning short jingles that contain rhymes are able to enhance their rhyming skills and letter identification, especially when being provided with word cards and/or songs that focus on the spelling/letter identification of familiar words (Walton, 2014, pp. 67-68). According to Richards (2010), chants can help students to develop their rhyming acuity (p. 188). When teachers incorporate chants into their classroom they are using the "rhythmic speaking of sounds, words, or rhymes all in unison" and more emphasis is placed on specific words and syllables (Richards, 2010, p. 188). Although chants are not technically songs, they include a beat and rhythm, which is the most relevant part when it comes to working with four and five year olds. Using beats and rhythms with young children helps to maintain engagement that also promotes excitement for learning. "One of the best ways to foster young children's word sound and rhyming awareness is to read aloud picture books that are composed in rhyme" (Beaty & Pratt, 2011). Incorporating rhymes through chants, songs, and picture books are wonderful ways to enhance young children's literacy and language learning experiences.

One study suggested that, “songs and movement can be effectively used to teach letter-sounds and medial phoneme skills,” which is something that I have also found with my own students (Walton, 2014, p. 68). When students have the opportunity to manipulate the various sounds within words, it can ultimately improve their ability to identify the phonemes within a word, especially medial sounds. “A substantial body of research has indicated the value of engaging preschool/kindergarten-aged children in specific musical activities as a springboard for the development of phonological awareness” (Montgomery & Smith, 2014, p. 29). Incorporating music naturally promotes language through students hearing phonemes that when put together will form words.

### **Using Songs for Concept and Skill Development**

Singing, used as an educational tool, promotes literacy learning and development and builds skills in students at multiple levels with no limitations to the content it can enhance. When singing in my own classroom, my students are learning new vocabulary while making meaning of words and phrases that they would not necessarily hear within a typical conversation. A variety of research indicates that songs can help students develop concepts and skills that pertain to new vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and long-term memory.

“Strong evidence was found to support the claim that learning to read can be enhanced by using songs and movement to teach children to read, especially if the first words that children learn are words they already know as lyrics in a song” (Walton, 2014, p. 68). Exposure of students to new words and vocabulary through songs, they have an easier ability to transfer that knowledge into other contexts. My students learned a song about a grey squirrel shaking its bushy tail in the fall. Months later, one of my students saw a chinchilla on a field trip and when describing the appearance, she stated how their fur is also bushy, just like the squirrel. Making

these connections and associations reiterates the impact of vocabulary learned through the simple lyrics of a song.

Choral singing also provides students with the opportunity to participate at their own pace. English language learners (ELLs) are slower to communicate in a classroom setting. As students are learning new songs, the students who are less confident can participate at their own pace and feel comfortable singing the parts they can pronounce before learning unfamiliar words. Researcher (Walton, 2014) in the findings of his research indicated that this approach allows children to sing words they knew without feeling insecure next to their peers; furthermore, this also enables students with more experience and confidence to facilitate scaffolding in a Vygotsky paradigm (p. 69). This scaffolding can help teach students, at their own rate, how to properly pronounce and start using these words in a more fluent manner. This is something I have witnessed through my own students and I have found that it also encourages children to speak more and with practice, their language is naturally more fluent, similar to the lyrics of a memorized song.

Walton also found through his study that “the use of songs might have facilitated long-term memory processes” (Walton, 2014, p. 69). Students are able to learn and memorize songs, jingles, and chants very quickly with little repetition. My students can learn a song within a short session or two by simply repeating the lyrics a few times; therefore, building a child’s memory is essential for further growth and development of language learning. According to Brewster et al. (1992), when songs are associated with linguistic items, they can also facilitate memorizing. Students learn new words through songs and they can increase their overall vocabulary and utilize the words in other contexts beyond a particular song’s lyrics. Songs can help improve students’ concentration, listening skills, and attention spans when participating in song-based

activities (Brewster, Ellis, & Girard, 1992). When students are actively engaged in an activity, they are developing their own personal stamina and recollection that will assist in future language development.

### **Ways to Incorporate Music into the Classroom**

Singing in the classroom can be done with purpose and meaning. Children start to sing their ABC's at a young age, and use of this simple song in meaningful activities helps introduce letters to emergent learners. As Montgomery and Smith (2014) have suggested, "singing a text rather than speaking it, may help a child naturally engage with the various components of language through the kinesthetic sensation of lengthening and sustaining phonological sounds on a melodic pitch" (p. 28). The key is incorporating music through using a variety of approaches in the classroom. By implementing music during targeted daily activities, students can gain confidence, enthusiasm, personal interest, and exposure to not only the world around them, but to language and how it can be manipulated in a variety of ways. I know how I have utilized music in my own classroom, but have further looked at other research studies to determine and explore how songs can be incorporated into the literacy learning process through text, singing as an instructional strategy, and through the power of repetition.

Some of the texts I have seen students drawn towards are ones that they originally learned in the form of a song. From *Five Little Monkeys* to *This Little Pig Went to Market*, the songs and chants are a huge hit with my emergent learners. These texts have songs embedded within them as well as in the memories of my own students' minds. Books in a musical format have a natural structure of repetition that can enhance the reading experience for any young child learning to read. Song-based picture books can support literacy learning, growth and development within a variety of language realms, but it all starts from text built upon the lyrics

of a favorite children's song put into the format of a story (Montgomery & Smith, 2014, p. 28). Shared reading experiences can be engaging for some children, but by adding a song or chant, it can create another dimension of engagement. My students are more engaged in stories when I encourage them to participate and having them participate in a chant throughout the story is beneficial on multiple levels. In addition to their ability to help with rhyming acuity, story structure, expressive language, background knowledge, and auditory memory, shared reading can also provide and serve as advance organizers prior to learning new content (Richards, 2010, p. 188). I think the most interesting benefits pertain to the development of story structures and sequence. These are higher-level concepts, and using the method of singing songs, aids in the learning and reinforcement of these concepts in a unique and interactive way. The shared reading and chants encourage students to play an interactive role with a story while capturing their attention with both language and literacy.

Songs have been a long used instructional strategy for literacy development because they support and enhance "personal expression, build community, and connect reading and writing easily and naturally" (Bintz, 2010, p.683). Students need fun and engaging ways to learn new concepts and Bintz (2010) explores the notion of "singing across the curriculum" (p. 684). "Singing across the curriculum," is an instructional strategy that can truly combine writing, reading, and singing to learn around all content areas (Bintz, 2010, p. 684). Bintz's study serves as a reminder to the power of songs and demonstrates the integration of music into classroom instruction in several ways and at various levels. Singing is not just for emergent learning, but rather learning for everyone on a cross-curricular level. I was required to use a similar approach to this during my undergraduate studies in a music course. We had to create music lessons addressing a science or social studies concept covered in a particular classroom. My particular

song encompassed the overarching concepts regarding the three states of matter and when used in the classroom, it expanded the learning approach to teach a fundamental concept in a memorable and educational way. If teachers in all grades can take advantage of this type of strategy, student engagement may increase, and emergent learners will have the ability to obtain basic skills without even realizing that formal class instruction is occurring, since the lesson will appear as fun activities within the academic school day.

When students are learning, it is imperative to use repetition to ensure they hear and understand the information for proper processing and schema building. Researchers observed in their study that the frequency in which children had exposure to vocabulary, pronunciation, and structures through repetition allowed for an increased probability that the students would learn or acquire new content taught (Huertas & Parra, 2014, pp. 17-18). The more often students are provided with opportunities to hear and repeat new words and vocabulary within songs, the more confident and comfortable they will become with their own capabilities. Students also make more connections between meaning and form when teachers can effectively scaffold by repeating challenging concepts. When teachers use repetition of songs that are concept based it means "...that the discourse we have to process is less dense" (Skehan, 1998, p. 33). When teachers can give students material in a less dense format, they will find it less overwhelming and the repetition will ultimately result in student learning.

## **Conclusion**

Studies have indicated that music incorporated into any classroom promote literacy growth and language development (Fisher, 2001). The different research findings do consider songs to be an essential aspect for learning in early childhood classrooms. Songs promote literacy growth by enhancing students' rhyming, phonologic awareness, vocabulary

development, fluency, pronunciation, and long-term memory capabilities. In addition to these influential aspects of development, songs can make literacy-learning fun! Through songs and movement, teachers have the potential to inspire emergent learners while promoting literacy in an interactive and engaging manner. Teachers can also incorporate songs through texts and repetition to develop specific skills while maintaining student engagement.

When a teacher can make learning engaging, fun and appealing through activities like songs, it will assist in the overall process of growth and development, especially within literacy. In addition to testing out various practices and approaches to incorporating music into my own lessons, during my self-study I investigated how songs can be used in my own classroom in order to promote and analyze the language components, concepts, and skills being developed. I evaluated how the aforementioned concepts affects the literacy learning, growth, development, and engagement of my own emergent literacy learners during the course of a six-week summer program. My ultimate goal is to determine how the incorporation of children educational songs within my literacy instruction will promote literacy growth for emergent learners and then to identify the literacy benefits that children can gain from singing songs in the classroom.

## **Chapter Three: Methods and Procedures**

### **Introduction**

My self-study intended to explore how educational songs influences the literacy growth in emergent Pre-Kindergarten learners. In this chapter, I discuss my research questions and the data collection methods that I used in my self-study, and define how I intended to analyze my own reflections and describe the limitations my study could have throughout the process.

### **Participants and Setting**

The qualitative study I conducted is in the form of a self-study in which I was the participant. I explored, with general assistance from my Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) classroom, my own personal reflections based upon my designing and facilitation of literacy instruction and observations of student interactions and responses during their engagement in literacy experiences. Our curriculum explores learning through a variety of activities and I incorporated songs in my daily lessons to facilitate and monitor my students' literacy growth and development. The school is located in an urban area of Rochester, New York and my class is comprised of eighteen students: 11 female students and 7 male students, ranging between the ages of four and five years old. The school's population is diverse and consists of children who are African American, Hispanic, and Caucasian. The UPK classes at my school are a part of a free program that also provides three meals throughout the day for every child in UPK.

### **Positionality as the Researcher**

Singing songs is something that I have done since I was a little girl. From learning my ABC's to Hebrew prayers, I was always singing around the house and in various school settings. Fast-forwarding to my teaching career, I have always sung throughout the day with my Pre-Kindergarten students and knew it was benefiting their literacy growth, but started to wonder

how this fun and simple activity was promoting literacy learning for my emergent literacy learners.

I come from a middle-class family in one of the top suburbs of Atlanta, Georgia. I have been teaching since I completed my undergraduate studies at the University of Georgia in 2009. My teaching career has afforded me the opportunity to teach students at grades levels from second graders to Pre-Kindergarten students, as well as general substituting in multiple elementary schools. I earned a degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Georgia and am currently pursuing my Masters of Science degree in Literacy Education at The College of Brockport, State University of New York. Since 2011, I have spent most of my time in Pre-Kindergarten classrooms. I am currently in the third year of teaching Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) in an urban school located in Western New York.

I truly believe that every child is providing me with new experiences and inspiring my constant re-evaluation of myself personally and my teaching abilities in the classroom. Through all the challenges I have experienced in teaching, there is one consistency – my students' love for songs. A class can go from chaotic to calm in seconds when a teacher simply incorporates a song into the classroom routine. How can a simple song have so much power? Conducting my study helped me to explore a concept for which the discussion has been limited. Why do we sing with our students and what are they gaining from the experience? I want my students to find a love and passion for learning, and if I can ignite this through song, then I would love the opportunity to try.

Even as an adult, I find myself singing around the house, both pop culture as well as songs to which I have made up my own lyrics. This topic is significant to me because it is something I incorporate into my own life as well as my students' lives. Known as the teacher

who uses transition songs, I think that the songs help my students in my classroom not just function, but learn. This is why I have been inspired to conduct my research on the impact of songs and their ability to promote literacy growth and development in my emergent literacy learners.

### **Research Questions**

My methods and procedures will explain my efforts to answer the following questions:

- How do children's educational songs promote literacy growth for emergent learners?
- What literacy benefits can children gain from singing songs in the classroom?

### **Data Collection Instruments and Analysis**

Throughout my self-study, I collected data through my observations/anecdotal notes as well as writing daily reflections in a journal. These two approaches enabled me to gain insight into the effectiveness of designing and facilitating literacy instruction inclusive of the incorporation of songs and its impact on my students and their literacy learning, growth and development over the course of our school's summer program.

**Observations/Anecdotal Notes.** As the classroom teacher, I am required to collect anecdotal notes on various literacy skills (i.e. phonemic awareness, rhyming, letter sounds, letter recognition, and comprehension) over the course of the summer. I utilized these notes as well as my general observations as indicators of literacy growth and development in my students over the course of the 6-week summer program.

**Reflections.** I completed reflections in a journal regarding my experiences and observations related to the songs we sang and the students' reactions and responses. I also recorded any literacy related observations that I had witnessed to help in future data analysis. Completing these reflections provides me with insight into the effectiveness of literacy instruction that is inclusive of the incorporation of songs. This approach could also result in the refinement and improvement of my instruction.

**Procedures.** My study and reflections occurred over the course of a six-week summer program operating from July until August 2016. I utilized songs for educational purposes throughout the academic day, in order to reflect on the effectiveness of my instruction and my students' literacy growth, learning, and development over the course of the summer program.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

My role and responsibility as a teacher and researcher is to ensure that I treat my students with respect and provide them protection. To remain ethical and trustworthy as a teacher researcher, I constantly remained objective while being precise throughout my observations, gathering, reporting, and analyzing of the data collected. My goal was to ensure all my research is valid and accurate and completed without any deliberate omissions or modifications of the data. My obligation, as the sole participant of this study, was to be diligent and respond appropriately to any other potential ethical issues that could arise throughout my study.

### **Limitations**

My study included some limitations. My data collection took place over a six-week period during my school's summer program. A variety of activities were required of me to include as the classroom teacher within the limited timeframe I conducted my study. Another

limitation of my study is the number of students in my classroom. My data is not generalizable because of the small sample set of students in my classroom. Limitations to my study could also arise given the shorter length of time for students to show growth in their literacy learning, as well as the program itself already being full of other required activities and lessons due to funding regulations.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of my self-study was to determine how singing educational songs promote literacy growth and development in emergent literacy learners. I conducted this study with the intention of being able to use self-reflections to determine the impacts of incorporating music into education, especially when it comes to the acquisition of foundational literacy skills. The data for my study originated from teaching my students during my school's six-week summer program that is located at an urban community based organization that hosts Universal Pre-Kindergarten in western New York. In order to reflect on my teaching, I wrote in a journal at the end of each instructional day, detailing and discussing which songs integrated into the students' curriculum. This allowed me to self-reflect on my experience, and the influence of the songs on my students' literacy learning. Using this method for data collection helped me gain insights into different strategies and approaches that I can incorporate into my students' literacy learning experiences. I also collected anecdotal notes on various literacy skills (i.e. phonemic awareness, rhyming, letter sounds, letter recognition, and comprehension) over the course of the summer. I then utilized these notes as well as my general observations as indicators of literacy growth and development in my students over the course of the 6-week summer program.

Throughout the six weeks of my study, I planned for the incorporation of a variety of songs with the hope of promoting literacy in my Pre-Kindergarten learners. I chose songs that encouraged letter knowledge, phoneme sounds, rhyming, and vocabulary exposure. The key for me was to identify growth in my students through using various songs. Over the course of six weeks, I identified several situations within my observations that show how songs can beneficially affect

emergent literacy learners' growth, especially when repetition is consistent and engaging. This chapter will discuss at length, the benefits of incorporating songs in early literacy instruction to improve letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and rhyming skills. Throughout my self-study, I found that the biggest benefit of incorporating songs was my students' abilities to improve their letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and rhyming skills. I also realized that the key to successfully incorporating songs and promoting literacy growth was to provide students with opportunities for repetition, movement, and visual cues. I will discuss how incorporating songs in early literacy instruction promotes literacy learning growth and development.

### **Repetition, Visual Cues, Letter Recognition, and Phonemic Awareness**

During the six-week summer program, we sang, "Who Let the Letters Out" at least three times per week. This song was an essential part of my self-study because I was using it every other day. Whenever we sang this song, I would hold up the specific letter indicated in the song. I used this visual cue to help my students start making the associations between the letter identified, what it looks like, and the sound it makes. My students went from not knowing the song to singing it during their lunch and worktimes. They also used the lyrics of the song to help them determine various letters and their specific phonemes. When showing them a letter, they would reference the song to make the letter sound, "N-/n/, /n/, /n/." My students would also take this skill a step further by listing off students in the class or words that started with a specific letter. As noted in my literature review, researchers had determined that the most impactful areas of growth through song and movement activities occurred with phonological and letter-sound relationships (Walton, 2014, p. 55). This shows that they were not only singing a song, but also enhancing their literacy knowledge through alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness. Singing this song and then

seeing the students' engagement with the knowledge gained reiterates how learning was reinforced throughout the day, and songs could be a bridge for literacy learning over the course of the academic day.

Transitioning between activities is a challenging task for young students; therefore, it is also optimal time for the incorporation of music and songs to help students maintain engagement. We would sing the alphabet with different tunes and voices to help students practice tonality and recognize the different sounds they could make. While singing, I would hold up alphabet cards to provide the students with a visual cue to aid them in making associations between the letter identified and what it looks like. This not only promoted alphabet awareness, but it encourages students to explore their own capabilities, which will be helpful when they start reading aloud. I also encouraged rhyming during transitions by using various chants that encourage students to go to move their bodies to a specific place. Some of the rhymes included bug/rug, chair/stair, hall/wall, and door/floor. The students would hear the first part of the rhyme and start to determine a place that rhymed with the first sentences and eventually knew if I said bug, they needed to go sit on the rug. Hearing the different phonemes in words and being able to recognize similarities is a major part of the reading process and by recognizing these rhymes; students are growing their foundational literacy skills.

## **Rhyming**

Each week there were different themes and activities for the students. During our Beach Week, I taught the students a song by the Learning Station called "Swimming Song." I chose to incorporate this song because of its fantastic beat and focus on rhyming and vocabulary introductions. This song also uses repetition, which helps children gain knowledge and exposure

that transfers into other contexts. The song lyrics discuss going for a walk by a swimming pool and observing the actions of people in the pool. During our summer swimming lessons, the students would recall the song and sing it while we were walking toward the pool. They also took the new vocabulary learned (backstroke, doggy paddle, breaststroke, and snorkel) and referenced it appropriately. For example, I did the backstroke in the water and a student said, “Ms. Rachel, you backstroked, just like in our song!” In the classroom, I took the time to explain and model what the new vocabulary meant, which helped the students gain a clear image and have a deeper context of what the lyrics were referring to throughout the song.

Rhyming is also an important aspect of literacy learning that enables children to make letter sound and word associations. As Richards evaluated, chants in the classroom include the rhythmic speaking of words, sounds, or rhymes in unison and this ensures that emphasis is on specific words and syllables (Richards, 2010, p. 188). Most of the songs and chants we sang in my class had rhymes and this promoted awareness among the students’ abilities to hear similar phonemes. I found that the more I pointed out rhymes to the children, the more they would sporadically identify them in conversation. “Ms. Rachel, did you know that dog and frog rhyme?” A student asked this question during lunch, and we proceeded to have an entire conversation about other words that also rhyme. Singing songs encourages rhyming awareness and even more importantly, and promotes this type of behavior and thinking across the entire academic day through lessons and conversations. The “Pirate Song,” a part of the Rochester City School District’s Music Building Blocks, was a song we sang during Beach Week that promoted rhyming through movement. The entire song encourages students to move and act out the different parts of the lyrics. The song goes as follows:

“When I was one I had some fun,  
Going out to sea,  
I jumped aboard the pirate ship  
And the captain said to me,  
“You go this way, that way, forward, backward,  
Over the deep blue sea!”  
*Continue with rhyming words, i.e.*  
*When I was two, I tied my shoe*  
*When I was three, I climbed a tree*  
*When I was four I shut the door*  
*When I was five I learned to jive*  
*(and continue through 10)*

When singing this song with the students, I noticed that they immediately found excitement in participating and I was particularly impressed with their desire to create new rhymes. We would sing and some students would change the lyric to another word that rhymed. For example, many of them would say, “When I was five I learned to dive.” Making this change showed that the students recognized that five, jive, and dive all rhymed. I also had another student use the word drive. Recognizing and recalling multiple words with the same ending sounds is a critical aspect of literacy development within emergent learners. I also found the students’ changing the song to “dive” powerful because it was beach week, and we had been talking about swimming and they knew that a song associated with water made sense to have a lyric about diving verses jiving. This insight on my students’ parts indicate a higher level of cognitive thinking which will also help expand their awareness as emergent learners.

## **Movement**

While singing, “Who Let the Letters Out,” I used a few movement cues to help students remember specific letters. We put our hand over our mouths to “feel the heat” while making the /h/ sound and then crossed our arms to make an X during the /x/ sound. I noticed that students were more aware of these letters and able to identify them more quickly when discussing letters at

other points throughout the day. I talked to the class and asked them if they wanted to create a few more movements while we sang the song and they were very excited to create their own movements. My students took pride in coming up with movements to associate with different letters and they were very excited to use them whenever we sang our song. Letting children take part and have control also ensures that they are actively engaging in their own literacy learning.

My students loved moving and dancing as much as possible, they were always more interested and engaged in songs when provided with the opportunity to move their bodies. From simple swaying to elaborate movements, that enabled them to act out familiar lyrics, all were very helpful in the learning process. Young children are constantly on the go and engaged learners are happy learners.

Incorporating movement into our singing throughout the day truly encouraged students to engage in educational songs that ultimately promoted them to learn multiple literacy skills that include but are not limited to letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and rhyming. Enhancing these literacy skills proved to be most effective when we did it throughout the day, and repeated it different days of the weeks, used visual cues to help aid students in making associations, and encouraged movement for each song we sang daily.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion and Implications**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of my self-study was to determine how children's educational songs promote literacy growth and development for emergent literacy learners, and what benefits children can gain from singing songs in the classroom. Over the course of six weeks, I was fortunate to be able to step back and analyze the role of educational songs and their ability to help my emergent learners develop various skills. Below are the findings from my self-study and the importance of how they facilitated the literacy learning of my emergent learners.

### **Conclusion**

Through reflecting on my facilitation of emergent literacy instruction using children's educational songs, and my observations of its impact on student learning, my research demonstrated that the most significant benefit of incorporating songs during the academic day was my students' abilities to improve their letter recognition, phonemic awareness, and rhyming skills. Music is major part of our day in a Pre-Kindergarten classroom. My emergent learners are constantly on the go and I use songs and chants throughout the course of the day to encourage literacy learning. My self-study exhibited that incorporating music promotes growth in phonological awareness, letter sounds, and rhyming. I found that just like other researchers, musical activities can act as a springboard in developing phonological awareness (Montgomery & Smith, 2014, p. 29). When my students have the opportunity to manipulate the various sounds within words, it can ultimately improve their ability to identify the phonemes within a word, especially medial sounds. Singing songs throughout the day encouraged students to explore the different phonemes within a word as well as vocabulary that is essential for the reading process.

Just as the researchers had suggested, songs and movement activities are most impactful in the phonological and letter-sound relationships (Walton, 2014, p. 55).

My students rhyming capabilities increased over the course of the summer program as well. They recognized the rhyming words within chants and songs and enjoyed identifying as many rhymes as their cognitive abilities would allow them to capture and process. This reiterates what Richards (2010) states about chants helping students to develop their rhyming acuity (p. 188). I also found that as Walton suggested, when my students learned jingles with rhymes it enhanced their rhyming skills and letter identification, especially when being provided with word cards and/or songs that focus on the spelling/letter identification of familiar words (Walton, 2014, pp. 67-68). By not only singing, but also providing students with letter cards, they formulated a better understanding of various letters and sound associations.

## **Implications for My Teaching**

### **Using Repetition, Visual Cues, and Movement to Aid Learning**

Through conducting my self-study, I witnessed the impacts of using music as a teaching tool within a classroom of emergent learners. My own research indicates the importance of me and other teachers utilizing music to help encourage language and literacy growth in young students. My study provided me with a deeper understanding of how beneficial repetition, visual cues, and movement are for deepening the understanding of literacy skills in emergent learners. I had occasionally incorporated visuals and movement into some songs, but was not aware of how valuable it was in aiding my students understanding. Being encouraged to analyze my students this summer helped me to see how a small image, picture, motion, gesture, or movement can truly benefit students' literacy growth. In future lessons, I will continue to use repetition on a consistent

basis and be sure to either provide students with visuals and movement opportunities and/or encourage them to create their own. This will assist in my students' cognitive growth by solidifying concepts that are essential for further literacy development.

### **Using Songs and Chants to Reinforce Language Skills**

Emergent literacy learners, using songs and music, become exposed to language throughout the day, and this study reiterates the importance of using various chants and songs to help teach children essential skills needed to build a solid literacy foundation. My students could grasp literacy concepts and skills far more quickly when they were associated with a song; therefore, it will be essential for me to use music as a teaching tool throughout the entire day to reinforce language concepts like letter recognition, phonemic awareness and rhyming. When students are able to recognize letters and identify letter sounds, it shows a greater understanding of our written language and that they are advancing towards the beginning stages of reading. As a teacher, it is my job to provide students with the opportunity to learn these essential skills in a memorable way so they will be able to progress forward past the phase of emergent learning.

### **Limitations**

My study included some limitations. My data collection took place over a six-week period during my school's summer program. Despite the short timeframe of my study, I included a variety of activities that were required of me as the classroom teacher. Another limitation of my study is due to the number of students in my classroom. My data is not generalizable because of the small sample set of students in my classroom. Limitations to my study could also arise given the shorter length of time for students to show growth as well as the program itself already being full of other required activities and lessons due to funding regulations.

## **Overall Significance**

It is essential for me, as a pre-kindergarten teacher, to expose children to language and promote literacy growth in a fun and educational manner. I love singing and incorporating songs into my classroom all the time, but I had never considered the true impact of songs and the benefit of using them when working with emergent literacy learners. Upon stepping back and analyzing the impact of using music to promote literacy growth and development, I found that singing songs and chants plays an integral role in my students' literacy and language progression. As a teacher, my job is to design and facilitate emergent literacy learning that not only aid students in acquiring the necessary literacy skills and abilities expected at their level of learning, but also to make learning fundamental skills enjoyable, and what better way to do this than through song!

My self-study reiterates to me the importance of using music in my classroom throughout the entire day and how simple movements and visual cues can truly strengthen the overall understanding and maximize development of foundational literacy skills needed for emergent learners to grow. I also recognize that many songs can be educational and that teachers at all age levels should consider using them on cross-curricular levels. Songs can be helpful for learning and reinforcing letters and their sounds in emergent learners; and also used to reinforce other subjects as well. I always enjoyed when we would learn a song to help us remember math operations in Math class, life cycles in Science, and historical events and government systems in Social Studies. This reiterates that teachers at all levels can incorporate the use of songs to create an environment that makes learning engaging and fun. By completing this study, I am more aware of my students' daily needs, and how I can improve foundational skills, such as phonemic awareness and rhyming, that will be essential for when they start learning to read and write.

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Appendix A

Date	Song Incorporated	Observation