

Using Music to Teach Reading  
in the Elementary Classroom

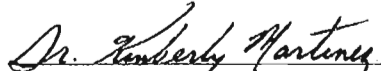
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ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that children's natural love for music makes it appropriate to use songs as a motivational tool for reading, and the growing number of reading professionals advocating the use of music and song to teach literacy, this paper presents a review of the literature on how music is used in literacy instruction. The rationale, instructional uses and methods for using music, as well as how music is brain-based, used with ELL and special needs students, and resources available for teachers are discussed in this paper. Teachers are regularly working to improve the literacy performance of their students, and are looking for ways to motivate and make learning more meaningful. Through music, all children can feel successful. Learning is enhanced when teachers and children enjoy listening to and singing songs together.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

Learning to read and write is critical to a child's success in school as well as integral to living well in our society. There are many students today who enter school with little or no prior book knowledge or reading experiences. Over the years, academic expectations have been increasing in every grade. As an example, in the past, the time a child spent in kindergarten focused on learning social interactions, such as sharing, playing with others, etc. Today many kindergarten classrooms have become replicas of first grade with children sitting at desks completing worksheets, learning to sound out words, and memorizing sight words (Marxen, Ofstedal & Danbom, 2008).

Because there are more and more academic expectations of elementary students, today's teachers are being required to teach beginning reading to five and six year olds (Gurney, 2008). Policy makers do not take into consideration that many kindergartners do not have the ability to learn twenty or more sight words before completing kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers are working hard to improve the literacy performance of all their students and are looking for innovative ways to teach reading. The National Standards for English recommends reading a wide range of print and employing a wide range of writing strategies. In a literary community, where enjoyment and learning go hand in hand, using songs, rhymes and poems can be particularly effective in helping students become successful readers (Feldman, 2005).

One of the earliest predictors of reading success in young children is their understanding of what they read and write. They learn that the message comes from the print and not from the pictures (Fisher & MacDonald, 2001). Another predictor of

becoming a successful reader is phonemic awareness or the ability to recognize that a spoken word consists of individual parts (Eastlund, 2005; Fisher & MacDonald, 2001). Young children need to understand that words are made up of discrete sounds. Music and song nurture phonological awareness such as alliteration, rhyme, and rhythm which help build auditory awareness skills, a necessary component of reading. This can be developed through experiences with listening to, memorizing, and playing with sounds in songs and rhymes (Edge, n.d.).

Nurturing the elementary classroom environment with meaningful music activities may help aid young children in developing skills necessary for success (Wiggins, 2007). Educators can develop the knowledge and skills needed to bring music into the classroom as an engaging and stimulating element of literacy education. Keeping young learners engaged in sixty minutes of uninterrupted daily reading activities, the recommended amount of time by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, has many teachers looking for fun, interesting, motivational ways to help their students learn. When children are having fun, they have more interest in learning. Songs can provide the median through which students can learn information in a fun, engaging manner. They can also act as mnemonic devices which aid in retention of knowledge learned (Hare & Smallwood, 2002). Engaging children in reading activities that keeps their interest is key and music and songs can lure children into a web of enjoyment.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) encourages the use of reading materials to be familiar and predictable. The familiarity and predictability of the stories help the child grow in self-control and self-confidence in their ability to learn how to read (Barclay, 1992). Using lyrics from familiar songs for

reading instruction can be beneficial in providing predictable elements such as repetitive phrases, rhymes, refrains, and sentences. Engaging children in reading activities that keeps their interest is key and using music and songs can lure children into a web of enjoyment.

Music is an important part of everyday life. It is naturally woven into a child's active day (Hill-Clarke & Robinson, 2004). Think back to the first time music was used as a tool to help learn or memorize something – it may have been while learning the “Alphabet Song.” Thanks to some catchy tunes, many people can name the ingredients in a McDonald's Big Mac®, spell the very popular chocolate sandwich cookie with white filling, the Oreo®, or spell Oscar Mayer's® famous sandwich meat, bologna. Songs can be effective in helping students to remember information in a number of different areas.

It has been found that music can help students in their literacy growth in a number of different ways. The use of songs increases oral language development because when they hear and sing songs, young children start to build background knowledge (Register, 2004; Fisher & MacDonald, 2001; Anvari, Trainor, Woodside & Levy, 2002). They also build vocabulary and pre-reading skills which they use as they begin to learn to read. In addition to songs, rhymes can be a fun way to encourage young students to be active participants in their learning. Learning to rhyme is a key element in building a good foundation for learning to read. Songs and rhymes aid memory and learning skills as well as help children improve listening and sound discrimination skills (Masle, 2009).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

In an ideal classroom setting, all students would be flourishing as successful readers. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. To meet the variety of learners,

classroom teachers need to differentiate reading instruction. Using music is one such strategy teachers can use in differentiating this instruction.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to examine the viability of classroom teachers using music to help their students learn to read. This will be achieved by conducting a literature review and a critique of the findings. It will show how integrating music into daily reading activities may help meet the needs of students at their varied reading levels. Children love to sing; music livens up learning and when learning is fun, students have more motivation to learn. Singing songs introduces children to new words and concepts. Music increases attention span, improves listening skills, and promotes oral language development. Music is a fun way to learn, and the songs learned will become a part of each student's long-term memory which will help them be life-long readers.

### *Research Questions*

In obtaining information, which will be relevant to researching this topic, answers to the following questions will be sought:

- 1.) What are the academic effects of using music in the classroom to teach reading?
- 2.) Does music affect students' interest and motivation in learning to read?
- 3.) What resources are available for teachers who want to use music in their literacy programs?

### *Definition of Terms*

*Phonemic Awareness.* A subset of phonological awareness in which listeners are able to hear, identify, and manipulate phonemes.

*Phonemes.* The smallest phonetic unit in a language that is capable of conveying a distinction in meaning, such as the /m/ of mat and the /b/ of bat in English.

*Fluency.* The ability to read accurately and automatically at an appropriate rate using correct punctuation and expression.

*Mnemonic device.* A memory aid that is often verbal, such as a very short poem, special word, or song used to help a person remember something.

*Multiple Intelligences.* An educational theory developed by Howard Gardner that describes an array of different kinds of intelligences exhibited by human beings. Three examples are bodily-kinesthetic (body smart, ability to control body movements and handle objects well), verbal-linguistic (word smart, ability to use words and language), and musical (music smart, ability to produce and enjoy music).

*Instructional aids.* These are used to help students remember important information that was learned. When properly used, they help gain and hold the attention of students. Audio and visual aids and the combination of both these stimuli are particularly effective.

*Brain-based.* A learning theory, which is based on the structure and function of the brain. How the brain works has a significant impact on what kinds of learning activities are most effective. As long as the brain is not prohibited from fulfilling its normal processes, learning occurs.

*Retention.* Being able to keep or hold something in memory.



*Choral Reading.* Often referred to as unison reading. The whole class reads the same text aloud following the pace set by the classroom teacher. Choral reading helps with the ability to read sight words and builds fluency.

*Jingle.* A piece of light singsong verse or rhyme or a catchy, musical slogan.

*ELL.* English language learners.

### *Assumptions of the Study*

It is assumed that most children love music and love to sing. It is assumed most early elementary teachers use music in their classrooms at some point in their day, and learning through music can be an integrated part of their reading activities.

### *Limitations*

The limitations for effective use of incorporating music into the reading program may be the teacher's reluctance to sing songs or lead the students in jingles and songs. Another limitation may be access to resources such as tapes or CD's as well as lack of knowledge on how songs and music can be used effectively in the area of literacy.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is a comprehensive review of the research and literature related to using music, including songs, jingles, poetry, and chants in the regular classroom during reading instruction. The focus of this chapter is on how using music may affect students' achievement and interest in reading, how reading music and reading print are related, how music can be integrated throughout the curriculum, and what resources are available for teachers who want to use music in their literacy programs.

### *Rationale for Using Music in the Regular Classroom*

In an ideal classroom setting, every child is learning and processing information the same way. In reality, this is not the case because each child has his own style of learning, processing, and retaining information. This can be overwhelming and frustrating at times to the classroom teacher who is trying to incorporate effective and relevant learning strategies to address all the different learning styles. As noted by Green (1999), teachers must immerse learners in complex, interactive experiences that are both rich and real, aid in children's learning, and increase their academic achievement.

Using music in the classroom may be an appropriate technique since children exhibit a natural love for music. Even infants start to clap their hands, smile and hum when they hear a familiar tune. A person may start to sing a song and the child will become increasingly excited, giggle and try to sing louder. This is just one of many signs indicating the child's love for music (Sibal, 2004). Children love a good tune with an energetic beat and it is remarkable what music can do. As a powerful stimulant, music can alter someone's mood instantly and it is very much deep-rooted in everyday American culture. Without music, people's lives would be very different. The appearance

and development of song in infants and children has been studied over the years (Weinberger, 1996). It is noted that during the first year of life, song babbling is evident and recognizable natural singing can be observed as early as six months of age.

Experiences with music start in early childhood and undeniably last a lifetime. It is interesting to note that children seem to remember words to songs better than they do the words to stories (Ridout, 1990). In and out of the classroom today, people are beginning to realize that music may enhance the overall learning of students. Singing is a natural, joyful language. When it is combined with early literacy development and other cross-curricular activities, such as math, science, and social studies, the beginning process of reading and writing can be as natural and joyful as a song (Barclay & Walwer, 1992). Songs have been found to support language development by assisting children in learning to connect words and meaning with print as well as focusing attention on rhymes and other sound patterns.

Schiller (2000) states that between the ages of two and six years, children become capable of longer periods of attention and are rapidly developing a more sophisticated vocabulary. During this time, children need multiple and repetitive opportunities, such as learning rhymes and singing songs to help with the formal process of mastering the mechanics of reading. With a lifetime of reading adventures ahead of them, young children are well on their way to becoming literate. When these young learners are guided in developmentally appropriate ways, they learn to name alphabet letters, separate sounds into spoken words, and associate sounds with letters that represent them (Reid, 2007). These skills are necessary for reading and writing. Songs, rhymes, and poems are perfect for familiarizing these young learners with alphabet letters, sounds, and words.

Children may put forth a little more effort into listening and may remember more about what they are learning when rhythm and rhyme are incorporated. Music has the ability to facilitate language acquisition, reading readiness, and intellectual development of learners and it enhances creativity (Weinberger, 1998).

Songs can be used with older students as they move beyond the emergent stage of reading. The predictive characteristics of songs can be used to promote reading fluency, and they offer very useful opportunities for readers to use prior knowledge as they make predictions about story ideas and words (Algozzine & Douville, 2001). Not only does a reader need to read fluently but also needs to be able to make predictions about what will happen next in a story. When readers make predictions about what will happen next, a specific and meaningful purpose for reading is set up. Fluency and knowing the purpose for reading are important components of being a good reader.

*Music is one of the Multiple Intelligences and is Brain-Based*

In his work on multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner (1983) states that out of all the intelligences, musical intelligence develops first. By a very young age, children have become aware of pitch, melody, rhythm and rhyme which are all components of reading, and thus, the use of music may have the potential to meet different learning styles. Each individual student learns in a different way. Because of all the different learning styles, teachers need to use a variety of techniques to meet these varied learning styles, (Hill-Clarke & Robinson, 2004) and music provides the opportunity to use a variety of teaching techniques.

Learning through music may be very effective because it stimulates the brain while it is processing information (Brown & Brown, 2008). Dr. Susan Homan, a literacy

professor at the University of South Florida's College of Education, was approached by Electronic Learning Products® to conduct a research study with their computer software program *TUNEin to Reading*. The program was designed for students identified as struggling readers and provides a fun and engaging environment of repeated reading through the use of song lyrics. Lyrics, by some, are considered another type of text format for reading. After using this program with a group of middle school students over a nine-week period, Dr. Homan found that fluency and reading comprehension increased by more than an entire grade level for these students. As a result of the findings from this project, Dr. Homan conducted a second year of research using 200 elementary, middle school and high school students and a third year with ESL (English as a second language) learners. The results of the studies showed an average gain in fluency and reading comprehension by one grade level and as high as a grade level and a half. Dr. Homan believes that even though the students are reading the lyrics to songs, they are still reading. Students were self-motivated and wanted to read.

Music is considered to be auditory when children hear the melody and words to a song, and it is kinesthetic/tactile when the children move to the beat/rhythm of the songs. It is tactual in how children elicit emotion to what they are hearing, and it is visual if lyrics to words are written out for children to read (Brown & Brown, 2008). Music can be seen as a powerful teaching tool because it helps keep children focused and centered on the task at hand. Teachers who embrace a variety of learning activities that appeal to multiple learning modalities are more likely to achieve early success for all students and music can help accomplish that goal (Hyde, 2007). Wilmes, Harrington, Kohler-Evans & Sumpter (2008) stress that music integrates many elements of the brain, which primes

neural pathways. Music “appeals to emotional, cognitive and psychomotor elements of the brain” (p. 662), so putting academic content to music may lead to an increase in learning. They suggest music be used in the classroom to provide for multi-sensory learning and to create an atmosphere of fun and excitement.

Brain-based education contends that attention follows emotion since music often taps into a person’s emotions and is thought of as a natural conduit for remembering and connecting information. Using music in learning environments may be an important key in building cognitive skills. Owen-Wilson (2007) contends that music can be used to lower stress and boost learning by using a melody or beat to encode the content to be learned, and it can be used to help calm down or energize students.

According to Colwell (1994), music has been used to reinforce school-aged children’s academic skills, such as reading development, quite effectively. Colwell conducted a study to determine if implementing music with a whole language program in kindergarten would aid in these students’ reading accuracy. The results of the study show that text set to music facilitates greater reading accuracy. Because music plays a significant part in the development of young children, it seems logical that using music would benefit these children. Music is used as a carrier when the melody acts as a vehicle for the words. Words of songs are easily remembered because of a strong musical connection and then often used as educational tools. As an example, toddlers may learn the letters of the alphabet through the familiar “Alphabet Song.” Academic content put with music is then connected to the brain (Wilmes, et al., 2008).

*Instructional Uses of Music – Use of Songs, Jingles, Chants, Rhymes, Poems*

As Harp (1988) notes “a most effective way to teach children to learn and to value language is to provide them with a variety of meaningful experiences that fine tune their ability to hear rhythm, sounds and melodies” (p. 454). Exposing children to experiences such as these can help them learn to focus on print in their environment which leads to successful, life-long readers. Music enhances attention, information processing, motivation and communication skills, so it may be an approach teachers could use to enhance early literacy development. Children love music and movement so music activities do not necessarily always need to be centered on a specific concept because when children are having fun, they are learning (Palmer, 2001).

It is important for young children to build background knowledge that will be used later as they begin learning to read and write. When children hear, sing, and play with music they are building a foundation for background knowledge. Emergent readers build this knowledge when they hear, sing, discuss, play with, and write songs. They will eventually use this knowledge in reading and writing experiences. With songs, students learn concepts and word meanings they will at some time encounter in print. As an example, while singing the song “Clementine,” the emergent readers learn words and concepts such as cavern, canyon, excavating, mine, and forty-niner. Children enjoy songs they can easily learn and remember (Smith, 2000). Singing songs and learning to rhyme help build phonological awareness, especially being able to recognize and generate rhyming words and move sounds around to create new words (Bennett-Armistead, Duke & Moses, 2005).

Casiano, Gromko and Curtis (1998, 2004, 2007) agree that using music helps improve reading readiness skills in kindergarten students. For instance, over a ten-week period, Casiano immersed her students daily in song picture books, storybooks, thematic units, and holiday/special event activities (Casiano, 1998). There was noticeable improvement in her students' language development including vocabulary, communication, listening, and critical thinking skills, all components of reading readiness after the ten weeks. Casiano says immersing children in fun and engaging activities leads to faster and better learning. Gromko (2004) found that teachers who used music in their classrooms, along with rhymes, chants and song lyrics, helped kindergarten students develop better phonemic awareness skills. Kindergarten students exposed to music made greater gains in the development of phonemic segmentation fluency than kindergarten students not exposed to music. For nine weeks, Curtis (2007) followed a group of kindergarten students who were immersed daily in a multitude of meaningful learning opportunities in which music was incorporated. Music was used at the beginning of the day during calendar and opening day activities as well as during transitions, quiet time and reading readiness activities. Along with music in the classroom, these students also received music instruction from the school's music teacher. The music teacher incorporated many reading readiness activities into the kindergarten music curriculum. Curtis concluded these kindergarten students became successful readers by being immersed in a program that integrated music throughout their day.

Using music to teach letter names and sounds to children is a practice that has been around for many years (Smith, 2000). While children are being taught to sing the "Alphabet Song," for example, they or an adult may point to the letter as it is sung. By



doing this, the children learn to recognize the individual alphabet letters through visual representations which may lead to a better understanding of the relationship between the spoken word and print. Singing and listening to the sound each letter makes is one way of internalizing information. Simple tunes, chants and rhymes can help a child retain information. Nursery rhymes are great to use since they are deep-seated in cultural literacy, they are full of words that rhyme, and most children find them amusing, fun to listen to and learn. Using song-story books may increase the interest in literacy activities. The use of familiar songs can also be used to help promote vocabulary development and increase comprehension by talking about the lyrics (Harewood & Small, 2003).

An elementary reading specialist at Worcester Elementary School in the Methacton School District took third graders who were behind in reading and used songs to help build reading skills they lacked (Masterson, 1998). Using music helped students understand words, sentences and paragraphs which led to them becoming better readers. It was found that the use of songs aided in improving students' accuracy, phrasing and reading, and that the words connected to melodies had a tendency to stay with young readers. Music imprints language. John Archambault says, "According to Reading First, about one out of two children at the third grade are not fluent readers" (Stanley, 2006). Mr. Archambault is a strong advocate of using music to help develop fluency in young readers. He believes a classroom needs to be full of motivation, desire and joy in order for children to learn and using music helps meet these needs.

Thirty early elementary students considered at-risk for developing reading problems were immersed in a study where researchers used sung children's books to aid these students in learning to read (Kourie & Telander, 2008). The children were either

currently enrolled in a remedial reading class or speech and language therapy program or they had received one of these services in the past. Sixteen different children's books, all on a kindergarten or first-grade reading level, were chosen along with two familiar tunes, "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain" and "The More We Get Together" (p. 334). The two tunes were used to put the children's books into song form. After four sessions using the sung version of the books, it was found that although this type of activity did not help with students' text comprehension, vocabulary development increased, so using the musical form of the books may have played a part in enhancing the children's vocabulary skills.

Reading in Motion® is a supplemental reading program which began in 1993 and uses music and drama in its approach. It is used throughout inner city Chicago elementary schools. Reading in Motion® is a program that was designed to provide at-risk kindergarten through third grade students a tool to help them become better readers. One independent research study (Rose & Harvey, 2005) conducted in 2004-2005 found that seventy-five percent of those kindergartners using the Reading in Motion® curriculum were achieving the expected grade-level reading requirements. In another independent research study (McMahon, Rose & Parks, 2003), it was found that first graders using the Reading in Motion® curriculum showed improvement with their sound-to-symbol correlation in consonants and vowels along with an improvement in phonemic segmentation.

Music may be used in several different ways in the elementary classroom. According to Hill-Clarke and Robinson (2004), music serves three basic functions. It is used to teach specific skills such as word recognition and phonemic awareness; it is used

for transition times during the school day and can be played during quiet time; and finally, children learn about music itself – its rhythm, tone, notes, composers, etc. Comprehension and vocabulary are developed with the use of nursery songs, folk songs and jingles. Learning through music can also build listening skills, enhance abstract thinking, and improve memory. Teachers who integrate music into their daily activities provide a way to meet the individual reading levels of their students.

#### *Instructional Uses of Music – Listening to Music*

Research suggests that listening to classical music may help improve reading comprehension as well as other reading skills. Lewis (2002) conducted a six-week study with first graders and found that listening to classical music seemed to have made a substantial difference in the reading comprehension levels and letter/sound recognition of these students. When classical music was played during reading lessons, the children seemed to be more attentive to the lessons which may have played a role in better retention of the material learned. Listening to music appears to enhance memory. In another study with a group of first grade students, Botwinick (1997) found that although listening to classical music immediately before receiving spelling instruction had no significant increase in test scores, it did show an overall increase in motivation and interest for spelling by the students. Listening to music prior to a lesson being taught may be a facilitator for better learning. Along with this, listening to music throughout the day enriches the learning environment. Music acts as a memory aid for making learning information easier. The experience becomes a memory aid making information to be learned easier to memorize. As an example, young children enjoy being able to listen to

and imitate animal sounds. By doing this, they are developing auditory discrimination, which is an important element in learning to read (Flohr, 2006).

Music has been found to stimulate the inner ear which then stimulates listening responses inside the brain (Savan, 1999). Listening to music has also been used to set the mood for various stories and works of poetry, which aids in helping children remember important details from the story or poem. In a study with kindergarten, second, and fifth grade students, it was found that using classical music and simple songs generally created a more positive emotional correlation for initial learning and recall of facts when the skills were introduced with music (Campabello, DeCarlo, O'Neil, & Vacek, 2002). It was determined that music activities helped in developing intellect, improved listening skills, and lead to an increased interest in overall academic achievement and learning. The researchers concluded that music does in fact enhance learning and has positive effects on memory.

### *Methods*

Using transition periods to augment and accompany literacy activities sets the stage for continued growth and understanding for when more focused literacy activities occur throughout the school day. All students need developmentally appropriate routines and schedules that allow for movement and engaging activities. Using songs when transitioning from one activity to the next, when lining up at the door, when arriving at the classroom at the beginning of the day, and when cleaning up at the end of the day are a few ways teachers can implement songs with their students (Peterson, 2000). Peterson has a "reading notebook" in her room where the words to the songs learned are written and throughout the day students have the opportunity to read this book individually or

with a friend. Transition activities allow for teachers to increase active learning time for their students.

Having students perform the actions to a song is another way to use songs. Students can act out any of the “verbs” in the song. When they hear the word “smile” for example, they should smile. Each student can hold up cards with words from the song and when the word they are holding is sung, they hold it up for all to see. Students can sing songs in different ways such as with loud or soft voices or even in a whisper and quickly or slowly. Movement along with singing acts as a catalyst to help imbed information being learned even that much more (Stannard, n.d.).

There are many songs now that have children’s books written to accompany them. Take for example the song “Three Green and Speckled Frogs.” After singing this song as a group, the book *Five Green and Speckled Frogs* by Priscilla Burris, which is a picture book based on the song, could be read (Bennett –Armistead, Duke & Moses, 2005). Another children’s book based on a song is “Down by the Bay.” After singing the song and then reading the book, students could write their own version using rhyming words. Songs can also be used to help children become adept at moving sounds around to form new words, generating new words beginning with the same sound, and blending sounds together to form words.

Songs can be implemented to help readers in their development of phonological awareness skills such as blending phonemes, segmenting onset and rime and changing phonemes (Combs, 2005). The melody for “If You’re Happy and You Know It” can be used to help children blend phonemes. The tune could be used in this way: *“If you think you know this word, say it now /c/-/a/-/t/, If you think you know this word, say it now /c/-*

/a/-/t/, *If you think you know this word, then tell me what you've heard, if you think you know this word, say it now.*” This activity works best with one-syllable words and after the children become familiar with the activity, they should be encouraged to challenge each other with words. The song “Old MacDonald Had a Farm” can be used to help students learn onset and rime. To segment the onset, one would sing: *“Old MacDonald had a farm E-I-E-I-O. And on his farm he had a dog E-I-E-I-O. With a d-d- (onset) here and a d-d- there, here a d-, there a d-, everywhere a d-d... to then segment the onset from the rime continue with: Old MacDonald had a farm E-I-E-I-O. And on his farm he had a dog E-I-E-I-O. With a d- (onset) -og (rime) here, and a d- -og there, here a d-, there an -og, everywhere a d- -og, etc.”* To be good readers, children also need to know how to make new words. The part *“Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah”* from the song “I've Been Working on the Railroad” can be used to practice adding or substituting sounds in words to make new words. As an example, sing *“I have a song that we can sing, I have a song that we can sing, I have a song that we can sing, it goes like this: Fe-fi-fiddly-i-o, Fe-fi-fiddly-i-oooo, Fe-fi-fiddly-i-o, Now try it with the /s/ sound. Se-si-siddly-i-o, Se-si-siddly-i-oooo, etc.”* After children become familiar with changing the initial consonant sound, this activity can be used for work in blends/clusters and consonant digraphs to make new words (Combs, 2005).

Words to songs can be written on chart paper and as the song is sung, the teacher points to the words. After the teacher has led the activity a few times, children should be given the opportunity to point to the words as they are sung. Children could also be challenged to look for words that appear more than once, rhyming words, words beginning with a certain letter, etc. on the chart (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2001).

The song could also be used with a pocket chart, and the children could insert missing phrases that have been previously written out on sentence strips. The original song should be nearby for the children to refer to if necessary. When words to songs are written out, it also allows for children to become familiar with left to right and top to bottom progression and it also shows children how individual sounds put together form words. Lyrics of songs the children have learned can be sent home with children for them to sing at home. Most children love sharing and entertaining their family with what they have learned during their school day. Song picture books may be put in the classroom listening center along with the CD of the book being read as well as the sung version.

#### *Using Music with Special Needs and ELL in Literacy*

Music can be a fun and motivating force in the lives of all children, but it may be especially beneficial in helping children with special learning needs develop speech and motor skills (Lazar, 2008). For students with special needs, it is suggested that music be used in different ways throughout their day because it allows for participation by all students at their ability level and provides for a sense of community among them (Press, 2006). Press says music can be used to facilitate transition times between activities, and it can be used to help improve gross and fine motor skills. Song picture books can be used to help develop vocabulary and listening skills, audio versions of songs along with the printed words can be used for independent reading time, and music can be used in other content areas, such as science, by helping students learn about sound and hearing. In an interview with a former music educator, music therapist, and educator of children with disabilities, it was learned that music is an approach special education teachers can use with their students (Gallegos, 2006). Music was found to be a great motivator in the

classroom to enhance student learning. It has also been suggested that teachers use music as a mnemonic device to help in memory recall. The belief is that children and their teachers experience joy by having music in the classroom. The school days are long and educators are recognizing that music may provide opportunities for relaxation which helps relieve stress and shift the attention of students to prepare them for learning.

Children with language difficulties may benefit from music being used in the classroom. To assist students with language difficulties, the teacher could make up lyrics to popular tunes. As an example, using the song “Hokey Pokey” can be used to help students learn new words. *“Start with a word like train; sing - You take the “t” out and put a “g” in, you take the “r” out, and look at what you have. You put the sounds together and you try to sound it out. (Kids clap.) What is the new word? Kids: Gain!”* (Prescott, 2005). Along with singing the song, the teacher or students could be writing the words to help facilitate with visual learning. Children learn to work through a difficult word by singing a song and applying it to their reading.

A twenty-year veteran of teaching adult English language learners (ELL) found that using music motivated and inspired the adult learners with whom she was working (Lems, 2005). Lems took lyrics from songs, copied them, laminated them, cut the lyrics into lines, and then had her students put the lyrics in the correct order as they were listening to the song. Lems found that the listening comprehension of her students improved doing this type of activity.

A project that involved the design and implementation of an English reading curriculum was used with Hispanic bilingual early elementary students over a seven-month period (Fitzgerald, 1994). The program, designed using a musical approach, was



used in conjunction with a Spanish reading curriculum. From September 1993 to March 1994, music was used in the classroom as an instructional vehicle with which to teach English literacy (Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 7). The children were immersed in singing, speaking and reading English on a daily basis. Many different children's songs, such as "Tingalayo," "One Light One Sun," "Mr. Sun," and "Baby Beluga," have been turned into children's literature and these were the types of materials used for the project. The songs and books were also used to reinforce meaning and build vocabulary throughout other content areas, such as science and social studies. English was being taught in a fun, entertaining and non-threatening environment, and at the conclusion of the project, it was found that all the bilingual students involved in this study were "singing" the books introduced to them which was considered the equivalent of reading books in English (Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 82).

Music can be seen as three-dimensional, and not only does one see words on paper, but the words to songs convey a message as well. Researchers have found that using music may help train the brain for higher forms of thinking and since language and music are tied together in brain processing, it seems very plausible to use music to teach language (Lake, 2003). Lake, an ELL instructor for over ten years, has been using music in his classroom since he began working with ELL learners. He believes that optimum learning occurs in an environment of high stimulation and low anxiety. Many ELL students come to class in a state of uncertainty and may often feel cut off from their native cultures and struggle to adapt which causes anxiety. He found that using music in the class resulted in a more relaxed learning environment and improved the emotional state of his learners, which helped them learn more quickly. Lake found music to be a

very powerful learning tool when coupled with a visual image, and he sees using music as a tool that may help students make connections to a new language in a fun and meaningful way.

Singable books provide a simple way to combine the benefits of reading children's literature aloud and singing for ELL's. Using children's literature helped increase vocabulary and phonemic awareness which are especially important for literacy development. Singing increases motivation and aids in fluency development. It has been found that ELL's who had books sung to them had an increase in vocabulary acquisition over those who read the book themselves (Smallwood & Haynes, 2008). Singable books also provide opportunities for learners to develop phonemic awareness skills. For example, when children are introduced to rhyming words through singable books, they practice new combinations of phonemes that may not occur in their native tongue. The development of phonemic awareness is key to becoming a successful reader.

#### *Resources Available for Teachers*

Song storybooks capture the interest of young learners and engage them in singing and reading which are both a celebration of language. Research on emergent literacy shows that when a child knows a book so well he will know if there are any deviations in the text as it is being read (Jalongo & Ribblett, 1997). When a young child arrives at school with a repertoire of memorized song lyrics, this oral language skill, when supported by written text and music, may be a valuable resource in becoming a successful reader.

Song storybooks such as "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," "Down by the Bay," "Peanut Butter and Jelly," "I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly," "Jingle Bells,"

“Baa Baa Black Sheep,” “How Much is That Doggie in the Window?” “The Itsy Bitsy Spider,” and “Shoo Fly” (Barclay & Walwer, 1992; Fisher & McDonald, 2001; Newlin & Harris, 2008) are some examples that could be used with early literacy learners. Rhymes, rhythms, repetition of vocabulary and story structure are all part of song lyrics. The key is finding fun and interesting activities that involve reading and writing.

There are a variety of resource books available for educators of young children. *Do You Know the Muffin Man?: Literacy Activities Using Favorite Rhymes and Songs* (Schiller & Moore, 2004) is one such book full of activities children will love. It has over 250 literacy activities that cover the use of songs and rhymes. The activities in this book enhance reading readiness skills and aid in the development of listening and oral language skills along with providing opportunities to build comprehension skills and support print awareness and letter recognition.

*Literacy and the Youngest Learner: Best Practices for Educators of Children from Birth to 5* (Bennett-Armistead, Duke, & Moses, 2005) was written to help early childhood educators nurture early literacy development in their students. The book stresses that research shows literacy—the ability to listen, view, speak, read, and write—begins developing long before children begin formal education. It offers literacy-rich activities and demonstrates how to create an environment for carrying out these activities.

Dr. Jean Feldman (2005), an educator for over 35 years and a member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Kindergarten Alliance, and the International Reading Association, has published many early literacy resource books available for educators. Some of her books include *Teaching Tunes Audio CD and Mini-Books Set: Favorite Songs: 12 Best-Loved Children's Songs With Sing-*

*Along Mini-Books That Build Early Literacy Skills; Teaching Tunes Audio CD and Mini-Books Set: Nursery Rhymes: 12 Delightful Nursery Rhyme Songs With Sing-Along Mini-Books That Build Early Literacy Skills*, and *Best Of Dr. Jean: Reading & Writing*. These resource books were designed to be used by educators to help students build early reading skills. Once children learn the songs, they can read along in their own mini-books. This is a fun way to enhance children's phonological awareness and introduce concept of print.

*Peak with Books: An Early Childhood Resource for Balanced Literacy* (Nelsen & Nelsen-Parish, 2002) was written for parents and early childhood educators alike. This resource shows how to use popular children's literature to build reading, writing, and cognitive skills using a balanced literacy approach. Each chapter is set up with strategies that use music, finger rhymes, poetry and other activities related to the particular story for that chapter. Aside from being fun, singing songs and reciting poems and rhymes with children helps them develop early literacy skills (Silberg & Schiller, 2002). These authors published *The Complete Book and CD set of Rhymes, Songs, Poems, Fingerplays and Chants*, which is filled with an ample amount of activities to provide children opportunities throughout the day to play with and explore rhythm, rhyme, repetition and structural sequence.

*Teaching Reading & Writing With Favorite Songs* (Clark, 2003) takes nine favorite children's songs such as "Wheels on the Bus" and "This Old Man" and turns them into language experience activities. The activities include reproducibles, interactive mini-books, pocket chart activities, and collaborative books for each song which assist children in developing oral language, improving phonemic awareness skills, attending to print, and building early writing skills.

For those educators who would like to include more music into daily learning activities, it is easy to see the variety and availability of sources published and accessible for use. There are many books, websites and CD's available that allow for songs to be utilized in grade-appropriate activities (see Appendix A and B).

### *Conclusion*

The literature appears to show that using music may make learning easier and is therefore a viable strategy for today's classroom. It can create an exciting environment full of emotion and rich language. Music allows the listener to acquire and transfer information kinesthetically and concretely. It can impart valuable concepts to students, which can apply and connect to prior knowledge. Music forms a natural bridge to literacy and is seen as an equalizer for children of all ages and abilities. Given this evidence, early childhood and elementary educators can give young children the opportunity to fully develop their potential in the domains of music and literacy by incorporating music throughout their curriculum on a daily basis. Providing children strong literacy education in their early years has been shown to lead to better outcomes later on (Campbell, et al., 2002).

Children's experiences with songs and music begin early on in their lives. Research says many pre-reading skills, such as pattern, rhyme, rhythm, vocabulary and sequencing, happen naturally when children participate in music. Research also says that 90% of the brain is used when a child actively participates in music, some neural pathways are only connected during musical activities, and 50% more of what has been taught is retained when movement is a component (Peterson, 2009). The use of songs allows for interactive participation by involving students in movement, listening, and

singing. Bayless and Ramsey (1991) state, “words are meanings; words open doors; words have power; words are personal; words are humorous; words tell us what we are. Words are ribbons of the future, and words set to music lead us there” (p. 104). For some, music makes everything better. It stimulates the brain, and helps focus and recall material. It can be incorporated into every classroom to make the classroom a better place in which to learn.

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Appendix A:  
Singable books

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Appendix B:  
Websites

<http://www.songsforteaching.com>

<http://www.drjean.org>

[http://www.caslt.org/resources/english-sl/classroom-resource-links-music\\_en.php](http://www.caslt.org/resources/english-sl/classroom-resource-links-music_en.php)

<http://kids.niehs.nih.gov/music.htm>

<http://www.indianchild.com/nursery%20rhymes.htm>

<http://www.kididdles.com/>

<http://www.mightybook.com>

[http://www.sillybooks.net/music\\_one.htm](http://www.sillybooks.net/music_one.htm)

<http://www.readingsongs.com>

<http://kidsmusictown.com/childrensongslyrics/educational-learning/reading/index.htm>

<http://bussongs.com>

<http://www.happalmer.com>

<http://www.charlottediamond.com>

<http://www.yahooligans.com>

<http://www.nurseryrhymes4u.com>

<http://www.literacyconnections.com/Songs.php>

Music just makes any teaching job, no matter how hard, enjoyable. We also say, "Music makes the world go round" but it also makes learning happen. Please see my presentation on this topic, for all the reasons why. Also, this post has lots of links/resources related to using music and song in the EFL classroom. Or visit our Music Resources. Get all the other "50" lists to help you teach, [HERE](#). Here are some of the best ways to use music in your teaching, each with a nice resource or example. 1. Listening Cloze. I'm starting here because it is the "go to" activity for teachers. Grab t