

**Supporting the Language and Literacy Development of Young Children
through Song Games**

by

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ABSTRACT

Part one of this research report explored what the literature has to say about the ways in which songs, song games and music may support the language and literacy development of young, non-English speaking children. Findings from that review indicated that music and movement can be a powerful tool to introduce, teach, and reinforce curricular and abstract concepts. Part two of this research report identified appropriate music and movement resources and strategies that early childhood educators can use with non-English speaking kindergarten children to support language and literacy development.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Young children whose first language or mother tongue is not English may experience difficulty and/or frustration in primary school as they are often unable to express themselves and/or communicate clearly with others because they may have little or no knowledge or experience with the English language. In many Canadian classrooms today, non-English speaking children or children with little English language experience make up a large percentage of the student population in the public educational school system. These children are expected, to some degree, to follow along as best as they can with their English-speaking peers and somehow keep up with the daily routines, demands, and expectations of the classroom without having much knowledge of the English language. In addition, most young children in British Columbia, whether English-speaking or not, are assessed and evaluated according to a set of detailed Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for each subject area of the curriculum. These learning outcomes have been created with the English-speaking child in mind, which is wholly understandable. This is not a criticism but an acknowledgement of the target population for whom these educational goalposts have been created. This is logical, in a sense, but student populations and demographics have changed rapidly and dramatically. How can educators help the young, non-English speaking students that fill our schools today?

Non-English speaking children need to acquire competent language skills in order to have successful language and learning experiences. Educators must design creative ways to modify and/or adapt the curriculum for these young children and the area most relevant in the development of language and literacy skills is language arts. How then might educators creatively meet the language needs of their non-English speaking students? One engaging way would be through the subtle integration and exploration of the English language through songs,

song games, and music, thereby impacting in a most positive way both oral and written language development. As Kay and Olson (2007) state, “Singing and playing singing games attracts and enlivens children, creates a positive classroom climate, helps children focus, and enables the brain neurologically for processing language” (p. 3).

Background to the Problem

The non-English speaking children about whom I speak and write and with whom I work on a daily basis are the children of recent immigrants and/or refugees. Canada is indeed a country of many cultures and its multicultural status and makeup is evident in the diverse ethnicities and cultures that appear to take root and thrive in many communities. The number of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) students in the public education system is, understandably, quite high in certain areas and communities. Classrooms are becoming increasingly filled with children from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and finding creative and alternative ways to meet their unique language learning needs is a matter of concern that demands and merits much more attention, inspection, and reflection.

Learning and mastering the English language, the understood and agreed-upon dominant language, which is also the language of power and access, is a great priority and wish that many immigrant and/or refugee parents have for their children, with the hope being that their children may lead better lives one day. If mastering the English language is a portal to a better future for these children, then finding alternative ways to lead children through this doorway is essential. Language instruction through the creative use of songs, song games, and music can be a highly attractive way of engaging children in learning the English language. Curtis (2007) writes “high quality literacy instruction is a topic of critical importance as educators seek to meet the needs of all students, assisting them in becoming proficient readers, writers and speakers” (p. 19).

Language and literacy development through songs and music is but one of many instructional methods that educators may seek to employ in their quest for helping children to learn. According to Morgan, et al. (n.d.), young children learn best through their senses, and music and movement can be a powerful tool to introduce, teach, and reinforce curricular and abstract concepts. If music and movement activities can be used as an interactive way to help connect non-English speaking children with the English language then it raises the question: In what ways can music and movement activities support non-English speaking children in their literacy and language development?

Songs, song games, and music are rich linguistic learning opportunities for young children. As Wiggins states, “the integration of music into literacy learning settings may aid in language development” (2007). Through music and song games children develop knowledge and understanding of how a language ‘works,’ provide multiple opportunities to practice fluency, and develop ease and authenticity of expression, proper pronunciation, and enunciation. Singing allows children to hear and develop better understanding of where stresses and inflections are located in both words and phrases in an informal and enjoyable way. In a literature review by Bolduc (2008), he documents how 13 co-relational and quasi-experimental studies researched over the past 20 years have shown a link to music education and “the acquisition of oral and written language in children 4 to 6 years of age” (p. 1). His study demonstrates that musical activities promote the development of phonological memory, auditory perception, and meta-cognitive knowledge, which together are components in the development of linguistic abilities. Warner (2007) purports that learning through music can be a valuable aid in fostering literacy as it is more accessible to young children. Furthermore, musical and multisensory training enhance processing skills in the brain and nervous system which are also required for talking and reading.

Morgan et al. (n.d.) state that children learn better when they are engaged cognitively, emotionally, socially, and physically. They explain in specific detail the benefits of learning through music and movement. For example, songs can challenge children's cognitive skills because they are listening and communicating, following directions, learning new vocabulary, learning to describe and name objects, building an understanding of directionality, and developing an ability to count. Movement to music and songs also challenge children physically as it allows children to explore new movements. Masterson's (1995) research on music and learning joins other bodies of work in linking music to reasoning skills, math skills, brain development and intelligence.

Musical intelligence, as explained by Howard Gardner (1983) in *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, is one of eight intelligences, which describes different ways in which children learn. These different modes of learning reflect different areas of strength. Children who have an affinity for music and those who learn best when music, rhythm, melody, and singing are incorporated into learning may demonstrate musical intelligence. Through musical intelligence other intelligences such as bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence, spatial intelligence, logical/mathematical intelligence, interpersonal, intrapersonal, creative, and emotional intelligence can also be accessed and explored. Tapping into and learning the intricacies and complexities of the English language informally through music and movement activities is a developmentally appropriate, desirable, and joyful way to begin to engage young, non-English speaking children in their English language acquisition.

Several studies (Baney, 1997; Curtis, 2007; Ortis, 2006; Smith, 2000; Wiggins, 2007) report the benefits of using music and movement activities to teach language and literacy skills to young children. Only a few studies (Komur, Sarac, & Seker, n.d.; Paquette & Rieg, 2008)

have specifically addressed and/or shown how music and movement activities can affect and impact the language and literacy development skills of non-English speaking students. This is an area to be examined and studied further and in more depth as the demographic makeup of many Canadian societies, represented by the ethnically and culturally diverse children in our schools today, is changing at an increasing and rapid rate. More than ever before, the minority is becoming the new majority. The diverse learning needs of these children need to be recognized and regarded as worthy of attention when designing meaningful and educational instructional language and literacy lessons. Studies such as Rauscher's (2003) and Harman's (2002) suggest that more research needs to be done regarding how and why certain aspects of music instruction contribute to transfer effects as well. Rauscher mentions also the lack of and need for more longitudinal studies in order to be able to determine the duration of transfer effects.

Research Questions

There is much research and documentation on how music and movement activities influence the language and literacy learning in young children (Harman, 2002; Luppe, 2007), but how do music and movement activities affect and support the language development of young non-English speaking children? As Paquette and Rieg (2008) write, "the value of fostering creativity and enhancing literacy instruction through music is vital in today's diverse early childhood classrooms" and "exciting musical opportunities and meaningful learning experiences can be implemented to address the needs and to give support for diverse learners through the incorporation of music and song" (p. 227). It is my intent to explore what the literature has to say about the ways in which music and movement activities may support the language and literacy development of kindergarten-aged non-English speaking children.

Music and movement activities, as documented by previous research, play important roles in the language and literacy development of young children. The common themes of musical intelligence; language, literacy and linguistic development; social and emotional development; the role of the brain; and music and movement have indeed demonstrated positive effects in young children's learning and language development. The results from previous research, however, appear to come from observations of young children for whom English is their first language. These studies, therefore, are limited and do not accurately reflect the population of young children who live in an English speaking community and whose first language is not English. A research study in Turkey (Komur, et al., n.d.) where educators used English songs to teach English to primary school-aged children has limitations in that both the teachers and the students were not immersed in an English speaking environment and, additionally, the educators were second language learners themselves who reported that they were not entirely comfortable with the English language.

Our communities, particularly here in Western Canada, are becoming increasingly multicultural and the need for educators to help young children to learn and eventually master the English language is becoming increasingly apparent. Children with poor English language skills often seem to struggle year after year trying to pass through the hurdles of the current educational system; evidence of this lack of mastery of the English language, both oral and written, is very evident even at the university level. It is important, then, that educators equip young children with a good grasp and knowledge and understanding of how the English language works in order to increase awareness of the nuances and structures of the English language which may help to lessen the struggle in later years. To that end this research paper will undertake to:

1. Review what the literature has to say about the ways in which music and movement activities may support the language and literacy development of non-English speaking Kindergarten children; and,
2. Identify resources and strategies that early childhood educators can use to engage kindergarten non-English speaking children in music and movement activities that support language and literacy development.

SECTION 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

More qualitative research than quantitative research has documented the effects of music and movement in language and literacy learning. Several resources for this review were dissertations (Curtis, 2007; Luppe, 2007; Mead, 2008); however, few dealt with music and movement and their effects on language learning in second language learners in a full-day kindergarten classroom. To learn a language, a major emphasis ought to be placed on the oral aspect of language acquisition and several research reports (Casiano, 1998; Fein, 1997; Smith, 2000) support this. As Casiano (1998) writes, “children need to experiment with language to establish a repertoire of vocabulary words necessary for communication” (p. 3). Smith (2000) explains, “Music activities can also complement a wide range of literacy learning activities” (p. 646). Additionally, it was noted that each study, review, and journal article was unique and specific in its approach and presentation of information regarding the interconnectedness of music and learning. Common themes, such as, developing language and literacy skills through a music literacy program (Curtis, 2007; Loong, 2007; Morgan, n.d.), and incorporating simple singing and movement activities, song games, and simple rhymes in the classroom (Casiano, 1998; Krause, 2003; Wolf, 2002) were identified as key factors in creating an environment for language development.

“Singing is a primary source for learning” (Kay & Olson, 2007, p. 3) and other reasons to use songs and music in the classroom include: to present a language point or topic; to focus on common learner errors in a more indirect way; to encourage listening, creativity, and use of imagination; to provide a relaxed classroom atmosphere; and to bring fun and variety to learning and teaching (Komur et al., n.d). The following themes were found to be common among many research articles and studies on language development and music: multiple intelligences;

language, literacy and linguistic development; social and emotional development; the effects of music on the brain; and lastly, the importance of music and movement in learning. This research review is organized around these common themes and what these themes reveal about the impact and effects of songs, song games, and music on language, literacy and linguistic development.

Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner

Musical intelligence, as documented by Gardner in his work, *Multiple Intelligences* (1993), is regarded as one of eight intelligences, and as such, attempts to explain one way in which people learn and acquire knowledge and information. Gardner's assertion is that people possess both innate strengths and weaknesses, and that people can maximize their learning potential when a specific intelligence (e.g., musical) unique to that individual is identified, developed, and utilized. Gardner writes that musical intelligence is "the first of the multiple intelligences to become functional in a person" and that "it is the first intelligence to emerge in young learners" (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 2). He believes that a student needs to find one *thing* with which to connect to and get excited by, and also to feel motivated to spend more time with. He believes that this '*thing*' is music, and he has identified musical intelligence as an important intelligence that deserves recognition. Loong (2007), in her article "Early Childhood Music: Materials and Activities" (p. 7), states, however, that musical intelligence is not an intelligence that stands on its own. She prefers to link musical intelligence to other intelligences. For example, she describes how musical intelligence is linked to linguistic intelligence through the acts of singing and chanting, how it is linked to logical intelligence by one's ability to identify musical concepts (e.g., high and low), how it is linked to spatial intelligence by a child's ability to move and explore space around himself/herself, how it is linked to interpersonal intelligence by developing understanding of other people and cultures, and how it is linked to intrapersonal

intelligence by creating music by themselves and thereby increasing their self-esteem. Children, as extraordinarily unique and individual as they are, learn in a myriad of ways, with some children discovering that their learning styles and strengths lie in more particular intelligences and perhaps less in others. As cited in Harman (2002), learning style researchers, Rita and Kenneth Dunn state that approximately 85% of people are kinaesthetic learners, and that 99% of what is learned is unconscious. If this is the case, then the potential impact and effects of music and movement activities in the language and literacy development of young children is significant and, therefore, demands further research and understanding.

Language, Literacy and Linguistic Development

According to the work of de Saussure, language at its base is oral, and consists of an interplay of sounds that when combined create signs and symbols of and for communication, which he termed “signified” and “signifiers” (Culler, 1976). The multitude of sounds descriptive of and contained within a language have their own associated meanings, and young children require multiple opportunities to hear, explore, experiment, and practice forming and speaking these particular sounds in order to be able to begin to develop an understanding of the way in which a language is used. An emphasis on oral language through music, movement, and song games can, therefore, definitely play an important role in a child’s language and literacy development. Young children often begin learning the formal names given to sounds (e.g., the alphabet) by learning the ABC song. Songs and singing can be a delightful way to teach as it allows and encourages children to express themselves naturally and creatively.

Incorporating songs, song games, and music and movement activities in the lives and education of young children support, enhances and enriches language and literacy development. When children are introduced to patterned text through chants, songs, and rhymes, “concepts

about print become more meaningful and conventions of print are learned in context” (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 228). Some additional benefits and skills of learning the English language through songs and song games include: the development of phonological awareness (sensitivity to all units of sound through activities such as recognizing and generating rhyme, beginning and ending sounds, syllables, etc.), phonemic awareness (identifying and being able to manipulate the smallest sound units in words e.g., the individual letters in the word “spot”), fluency (ability to express one’s ideas clearly, both orally and written), print conventions (e.g., left to right), understanding of syllables, practicing rhyming patterns, vocabulary word identification, developing and extending vocabulary, learning to use words in different contexts, being able to follow along with a printed song (e.g., tracking), being able to use music as a means to communicate, and learning to create new lyrics for new songs (Casiano, 1998; Komur et al. n.d.; Ortis, 2006; Smith, 2000).

In addition to improving and strengthening their oral language skills, young children can learn to keep rhythm (which helps in the development and knowledge of sound patterns) through lyrics and melodies and songs and singing. Music enables children to focus their minds on sounds, especially in an interactive and creative learning atmosphere. This focusing on sounds encourages children to learn to discriminate between different sounds, and helps them to become more aware of the individual and unique sounds and sound patterns in a language (Komur et al., n.d.). Casiano (1998) emphasizes that language and literacy development requires the active and creative participation of children during listening, playing, singing, dancing, and musical activities. In addition, she writes that when children are actively and creatively involved during such kinaesthetic activities (e.g., through finger plays and song games, etc.), learning and

language play among children may be more viewed and understood as children who “play to work” as well as children who “play at work.”

Song picture books are an example of an instructional resource that promotes oral proficiency in English. These books often contain repetitive refrains, phrases, and language patterns, which are helpful in supporting language and literacy development. Song picture books have an interactive aspect to them and often integrate relevant musical activities. They also provide enjoyment and familiarity, teach the concept of predictability, help develop knowledge of story structure, aid in vocabulary development, and as Wiggins (2007) states “encourages children to attend during reading activities, invites them to be active listeners, and promotes comprehension and dialogue” (p. 62). Opportunities to develop and practice fluency through dialogue are also crucial and important in oral language acquisition. Music and song games also help in developing problem solving and critical thinking skills in addition to fostering language play and creative expression (Casiano, 1998).

A common theme in the research is to encourage children to create new songs from familiar melodies by substituting the original lyrics with words and/or lyrics of their own. Experimenting and playing with sounds and language helps young children develop vocabulary and emergent language skills, encourages creativity, and increases awareness of language. To increase awareness of sounds, Loong (2007) and Paquette & Rieg (2008) suggest that children should have opportunities to create music spontaneously using ‘found’ materials such as pebbles, pans, coffee cans, paper towel rolls, plastic bottles, and wooden objects, in addition to having access to triangles, drums, and maracas. Loong (2007) believes that children should be free to experiment with and manipulate materials in order to explore sounds and discover different ways of producing and reproducing sounds. Creating new songs and new sounds reflect the

understanding that language becomes real, authentic, and open-ended when children are actively engaged in their own learning. There are no right or wrong answers and this way of learning encourages children to think and use language as a way to solve problems and to ask and answer questions (Sawyers & Weiner, 2007).

One study in particular, Project Zero, a three-year study involving fifty years of arts education research from Harvard Graduate School of Education, found connections between music and drama (e.g., explorations in movement) and evidence of an increase in improved spatial-temporal reasoning, a cognitive skill, when children learned to make their own music. It is believed that music and spatial reasoning are related both psychologically and neurologically, but the findings of researchers have been unable to determine why music affects spatial-temporal thinking (Harman, 2002).

Oral language skills are further strengthened when children are given the opportunity to track the words in a song, as it is being sung, by following the words in a pocket chart or overhead projector with the teacher. This allows children to develop an understanding that language can be both oral and written. The important thing to remember when doing such an activity is to ensure that children are having fun as they make this connection. “Teaching English through Songs” is an example of a quantitative case study by researchers Komur et al., (n.d.) which surveyed and documented the attitudes and beliefs of both teachers and students regarding using English songs to teach and learn English for non-English speaking primary school-aged children in Turkey. The study revealed the importance of using songs that contained examples of English structures, functions, and vocabulary being studied. The study also concluded that the employment of songs to teach the English language could be a precious resource because many songs reinforce the major aspects and components of language (e.g.,

sentence patterns, rhythms, nouns, verbs, etc.) that need to be learned in order to be able to communicate effectively. Rhythm, or the ability to keep a steady beat, is linked to linguistic development (Harman, 2008) as it enables a person to develop a feel and understanding of the rhythm or cadence of a language. This ability to keep a steady beat is involved with the vestibular system, the system, which is located in the part of the ear that is, related to equilibrium, for example, movement and balance, and which also contributes to a person's sense of spatial orientation. These will be discussed later and in more depth.

Social and Emotional Development

Songs and song games help young children develop social and emotional skills, such as self-esteem, confidence, cooperation and working together. Music, movement, and singing games are also enjoyable ways for young children to learn the language of a culture because they create a sense of community in the classroom and are creative ways to enhance the learning process for young children (Kay & Olson, 2007). Loong (2007) emphasizes the rich cultural aspect of folk repertoire, music, songs, and traditions in early childhood settings; the need for educators to be sensitive to the family and cultural backgrounds of their students; and the need to provide a safe and comfortable environment for children to express their own ethnicity. She believes that children “can be helped to understand a wide range of music from many styles, genres and cultures through active involvement in listening and participating” (p. 7). Loong (Ibid.) describes four categories of singing games that foster social and emotional development: acting out games, partner-choosing games, chase games, and winding games. Music has also been linked to emotion and mood, and the presence of certain types of music can create different moods and/or environments (e.g., calm/quiet, lively/excited). Music has the ability of inviting children to explore and experience a variety of emotions when they participate in a variety of

singing activities: “emotions drive attention and attention drives learning” (Ortis, 2006, p. 219). Using music and movement activities as a vehicle for learning is also a gentle and non-threatening way of encouraging reluctant children to participate and become more involved in group activities. Komur et al. (n.d.) acknowledge the fact that “learning English through songs provides a relaxing atmosphere for students who are usually anxious when speaking English in a formal school setting” (p. 111). Using songs and song games is a way to “offer instruction in a low-anxiety setting” (Ortis, 2006, p. 218). In addition, it is important to “create a casual and positive learning environment for young children in order to promote language development” (Ibid., p. 228) and songs and song games can achieve this. They allow children to join in and participate with the rest of the class whenever and wherever they feel most ready and/or comfortable. If children do not yet know the lyrics or movements to a song game, they can safely hum the tune and learn the words and/or actions as the rest of the class sings along. In this way, children can learn and participate at their own pace and experience some degree of success as they participate at their own level of understanding and ability. Time, practice, and repetition of familiar songs and song games aid non-English speaking children to become more familiar with the language. These children learn new vocabulary, grammar structures, and body movements, which in turn results in the development of more self-confidence. With the ability to communicate more confidently in an environment in which many immigrant and refugee children first experienced as both foreign and unfamiliar, their chances of expressing themselves and of being understood by others is that much greater.

Role of the Brain

“Music and movement experiences help develop both sides of the brain . . . and contribute to children’s social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development”

(Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002, p. 423). Music and movement, it is believed, can strengthen the area of the brain called the auditory cortex because movement activates both sides of the brain and thereby enhances learning (Morgan et al., n.d.). The auditory cortex is the area of the brain that is recognized for both memory and language development and is also the area where many learning difficulties take place. The more senses that are involved in an activity (e.g., hearing, feeling, speaking, etc.) the better the rate of success there may be in learning. When music and movement are involved in learning, both hemispheres of the brain are being stimulated and this stimulation of both hemispheres of the brain prepares the brain for more difficult tasks later on in life.

Movement and rhythmic activities also affect learning by stimulating the frontal lobes and by enriching language and motor development (Harman, 2008). The frontal lobes play an important part in retaining longer-term memories which are not task-based, but which are often associated with emotions derived from input from the brain's limbic system. As explained by Ortis, (2006), music is a "highly complex neural activity" (p. 215) and "higher brain functions increase spatial-temporal reasoning" (p. 218) which is the ability to "visualize a problem and its answer." (p. 218). She adds that "many musical experiences can activate the cognitive, visual, auditory, affective and motor systems depending whether you are . . . beating out a rhythm or just listening to a melody" (pp. 218-19). Kay and Olson (2007) explain that changes in brain function actually occur with the act of music making and that this is most evident in auditory development. They add, "By learning folksongs, students develop and strengthen neurological pathways that help them to acquire language and logical thinking skills" (p. 3).

Music also helps to play an integral part in long-term memory and retention because it helps to activate more parts of the cerebral cortex that generates a stronger long-term memory. It

is the strengthened pathways in the brain that link memory to emotional responses and which in turn aid in bringing music to life (Ortis, pp. 218-219). Furthermore, Ortis writes, “music, rhyme and song (can be seen) as a means to cement information into the long-term memory of students” (p. 210). She explains that when information is learned through singing, it is retained longer and can be recalled more easily or, in other words, singing helps children to remember important information. Retention or the power of retaining and/or remembering occurs innately and is especially essential when children learn new songs and play cooperative song games. As Komur et al. (n.d.) describe:

[A]ctivities which employ rhythm practice with songs can reinforce the recalling and retention process as they are highly memorable and motivating . . . music accelerates the process of retrieving background knowledge and the process of feedback. (pp. 111-12)

Music also helps the brain to internalize and process higher-level thinking; a particular skill that is necessary for higher-level thinking is the ability to hear oneself think and listen internally. This skill is more commonly referred to as one’s inner voice or inner speech (Harman, 2008).

Music and Movement

“Play to work” (Casiano, 1998) is a theme that speaks to the importance of making the idea of ‘work’ into the idea of ‘fun.’ Having fun and enjoying oneself while learning is a common theme found in many research articles on music, movement and learning. There is an emphasis on the need for educators to find creative ways to use music and movement activities to spark interest, excitement, and enjoyment in children so that music becomes a pathway to joyful learning in other areas. Music and movement activities are wonderful for young children because all children love music and all children love to move and sing. Movement is a nonverbal response for children who do not yet have language ability (Harman, 2002). Even for

the reluctant learner, music is viewed as a “tool of language, used to create a low anxiety means of participation” (Ortis, 2006, p. 214). For some learners, music and movement are a means of creative expression, as movement helps to create a kinaesthetic experience with music. Music and movement allows moving in rhythmic and expressive ways, thus awakening body awareness. More effective learning can take place when other body parts are involved. For example, actions such as walking, running or jumping, and body gestures such as clapping, patting, knee slapping, and bending can help emphasize and identify the rhythmic quality of a song and, therefore, help in developing the sense of beat (Loong, 2007, p. 7). More crucial though is that movement to music is important in a child’s beginning years as it helps to strengthen the vestibular system and prepare the brain for learning (Harman, 2008). Hannaford (1995) identifies the importance of being able to balance. Being able to balance on one foot is the result of a strong vestibular system and a strong vestibular system is strongly related to language abilities.

The act of singing encourages deep breathing, and deep breathing brings more oxygen to the brain. Increased oxygen to the brain can be invigorating for both the teacher and the students and this can change the mood of the classroom as well as keep the students alert. Simple movement activities also provide oxygen to the brain, which allow the brain to function more optimally. Movement activities help the brain to produce endorphins, which are neuro-chemicals that create feelings of energy, and which also enable the brain to be more receptive to learning. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter that is involved in memory and other neurological processes, is also released during movement activities. It produces a stress relieving effect that enables one to be more receptive to learning (Ortis, 2006). Movement and rhythm stimulate the frontal lobes, which are important for language development. Although not sufficiently supported, music and

rhythm have been linked to body coordination and handwriting. In order for the brain to be ready to learn to write and read, a specific type of movement called *cross lateral movement* is necessary because this type of movement allows the brain to cross the mid-section or, in other words, to go from the left side of the body, across the center to the right side of the body. This type of movement is necessary for reading and writing as one must be able to track print (reading) and writing from one side of the paper to the other side.

Discussion

As many research studies have documented, the effects and impacts of music and movement on the language and literacy development of young children are numerous and varied. The common themes of multiple intelligences; language, literacy, and linguistic development; social and emotional development; the role of the brain; and music and movement have all been identified as key areas for further study. My review focused on one of the common themes: language, literacy, and linguistic development, and explored what the literature had to say about the ways in which music and song games can impact and support learning in this key developmental area. Overall, the articles were helpful in that they were useful and informative resources that provided suggestions for ways to introduce music and movement activities in the classroom.

The educators in the Komur et al. study (n.d.) believed that using songs could help motivate students to learn English, but felt that they themselves were deficient in teaching English to their students because of their own lack of knowledge and expertise in music education, lack of music courses, and lack of music materials in English. For these reasons, they found that using songs to teach English in primary schools was difficult for them. These concerns may not be unique to them. There is a strong possibility that educators elsewhere may

also have chosen not to use songs and song games in the classroom because of the very same reasons. To shed light on and/or confirm whether or not this is a possible concern in Canadian schools, a quantitative study would need to be done in order to find out the percentage and rate of success of those educators who actually do use songs and song games in their classrooms as a way to teach English.

Successful implementation and use of music and songs as instructional tools to teach oral language and literacy skills to young children is often dependent on the teacher's own attitude and belief in herself as able and competent enough to teach children songs and song games whether she has a background in music or not. This was an important factor in the research of Ortis (2006) and she states that educators need to be able to sing comfortably and with confidence because students will be able to recognize discomfort and, if they do, instruction will then be ineffective. More importantly though, Paquette and Rieg (2008) reiterate: "Despite a teacher's level of aesthetic appreciation and musical training, the value of fostering creativity and enhancing literacy instruction through music is vital in today's diverse early childhood classrooms" (p. 227).

Recognizing the diversity in many of our classrooms today, educators need to remember to keep the focus on the positive and to keep the act of learning the English language fun and creative so that young children will have meaningful and authentic learning experiences. Songs and song games pique and stimulate young children's interest and curiosity, and because the English language is both mysterious and complex, the enthusiasm and anticipation of songs and song games make them less so. The beauty, power, and magic of songs and song games create a much-needed opening for young non-English speaking children to walk through with confidence and, in so doing, find their way to developing a better understanding of the English language.

SECTION 3: CONNECTIONS TO PRACTICE

The following section is a detailed description of my classroom, the community school where I teach and the surrounding community in which both are located. Through the descriptions, I hope to be able to portray the reality of our school community and of the lives of many of our students. Our school is both rich in diversity and complexity and can claim to be a truly multilingual and multicultural school that thrives on its uniqueness. The last section contains a list of selected teacher resources, all with an emphasis on language and song games, and which I have used successfully with my young students.

Community and Class Description

I teach a full-time Kindergarten class in a community school which is located in a large, urban city in western Canada. The school has a highly transient and diverse student population of approximately 550 students from Kindergarten to Grade Seven. This figure constantly fluctuates because there is always a continuous stream of students transferring in and out of the school. A large percentage of the students and their families are recent immigrants to Canada having only been here for a few years to having just recently arrived. The school and community is also home to many refugees and new student registrations are received on a regular basis. There are approximately forty different languages that are spoken at the school as many of the students come from all over the world: Afghanistan, Albania, China, Croatia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Mongolia, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, to name just a few.

Socio-economically, the students' family backgrounds are as varied as the countries they come from. Many students are from lower to middle-class families, few are from more wealthy homes, but the majority of the students are new immigrants and refugees. Some families depend

on income-assistance and many rely on and seek support and assistance from the community programs and activities that the community office offers. The school regularly receives donations of food items from local businesses and these items are offered once a week on a first-come first-served basis. These donations help many families in need. The school also provides a hot lunch program which is subsidized in part by the government. This program is available to all students for a monthly minimal fee. Parents are asked to pay what they can afford but more often than not, do not pay anything at all.

This year, the school is supported by a Welcome Center, which aims to help new immigrants and refugees adjust and transition into the local community and culture. Two part-time multilingual immigrant workers are employed to help new parents assimilate into the community. They offer a variety of services to those families who may be encountering difficulty because of language barriers. They also help with liaison between the parents and the school, and are key people in helping to translate and transmit school and community news and information. For the very young siblings of the students at the school, a preschool is housed in a small building adjacent to the main school building. Programs for three- to four- year old children, such as “Strong Start” and “Ready, Set, Learn” are offered free of charge. Parents are encouraged to attend with their younger children and as there is a very high Mandarin-speaking population here, a new immigrant Parents as Literacy Support (PALS) program, called Mandarin PALS (named after the original PALS program), was offered in the fall of last year. ‘Bridges’ is a new preschool program that will be beginning here soon.

The community in which the school is situated is quite expansive and varied. The housing near and around the school is practically all rental housing. This has slowly begun to change in the past year or so as old apartments have been torn down and new apartments have

been and continue to be built. This is actually causing a housing problem for many of the families because their rents are increasing and many are just unable financially to buy an apartment. Because of this, several families have had to move away from the community. Of the apartments remaining, those that are located in close proximity of the school are somewhat old and dreary-looking three story buildings. For many families, extended family members such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, all live together in these one and two bedroom apartments. In contrast, and a bit further away from the school, however, some families live in newer highrises. The attraction of a full-time Kindergarten program has also drawn families that are 'out of catchment,' and these children come from much further away and do not live in the same community as the majority of the children in my classroom.

In my class this year, several of the students have only just arrived from other non-English speaking countries within the past year or two and some just a few months ago. The majority of my students, and in the school in general, are ESL students at various levels of English competency (e.g., between levels 1 to 4; with level one being a student with little or no English). Of my twenty-two Kindergarten students, fifteen are girls and seven are boys. Eleven students are ESL level one, six are between ESL levels two and four, and the remaining five students, two First Nations, one Canadian, one Chinese-Canadian, and one Japanese-Canadian, are all proficient in the English language.

This community school, which is located in the heart of a large urban center, is directly across the street from a popular shopping mall and about two blocks away from a central and very busy SkyTrain station. The local community center, which is well-utilized by the students, is located diagonally across the street from the school, and the local community library is approximately three blocks away. As most shops are nearby and within close walking distance,

this community is an ideal place to live in for many of the new families. The community center, the local library, and the shopping mall are all very central in the students' busy lives.

Faced with the challenge of teaching language and literacy skills to children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs is not new or uncommon for many educators but it is a challenge that requires educators to be creative, resourceful, and especially knowledgeable regarding language acquisition. From which kinds of language and literacy skills and strategies can young children benefit best? There may not be one answer, but perhaps a combination. If children are expected to learn to reproduce the sounds of the English language, in other words, to be able to speak and communicate effectively and fluently, young children need to be exposed to the sounds of language. They need to hear language as it sounds so that it can be internalized naturally and so that it can be retained and recalled when needed. Singing and song games are particularly engaging and playful ways for young children to learn and acquire language skills. Through songs and song games, the beauty and mystery of the English language can be revealed and unveiled under the guise and amusement of alliteration, the joy of rhyme, the patterning of rhythm, the steadiness of beat – and so much more. Learning the English language is pleasurable through music and song games and is but one avenue that educators may consider exploring when trying to reach those young children who come into our care with little to no English language experience. Regardless of what language a child speaks, all children understand and share an interest in both music and songs. The following is a list of fun and creative educational resources that I have used with success in my multilingual and multicultural classroom. My non-English speaking students have responded favorably to many of the songs and activities presented from these collections, and educators may also find them particularly useful in their work with young children as well.

Teacher Resources

The following selection of teacher resources offers a wonderful mix of simple songs, lyrics, song games and activities all with a focus on the language and literacy development of young children from the ages of four to eight. Each resource includes additional information such as an extensive music collection, teacher extensions, song game variations literature connections and bibliographies.

Bennett, P. (1999). *Song Play A Collection of Playful Songs for Children Ages 4 – 7*.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation.

An inviting book of fifteen simple songs and song play games that teach a variety of skills for young children. It includes detailed sections on helpful teaching strategies, proper singing strategies and key perceptual skills. Each song play game includes an explanation of the song's history, a brief description of how to play the game, learning opportunities connected to the song, literature connections, curricular connections and ideas for further development. Booklet comes with a CD of songs that can be sung in different vocal ranges.

Goodkin, D. (1998). *Name Games, Activities for Rhythmic Development*. San Francisco, CA:

Warner Bros. Publications.

A collection of twenty song games that introduce, teach and reinforce different aspects and of language (e.g., alliteration, syllabication), structures (e.g., phonics, grammar) and music (e.g., rhythm, phrasing) by using children's first and last names, the spelling of names, children's birthdays and children's favourite things (e.g., colour, food, sports, etc.) The song games are great beginning of the year 'getting to know you' activities.

Goodkin, D. (1997). *A Rhyme in Time, Rhythm, Speech Activities and Improvisation for*

the Classroom. San Francisco, CA: Alfred Publishing Co. Inc.

A compilation of seventeen Orff-Schulwerk inspired musical activities that focus on the music development of young children through the use of popular Mother goose poems and a few Spanish poems with a main emphasis on the rhythm, rhyme and speech of language. Each song is carefully laid out with a music focus (e.g., high/low), a language focus (e.g., rhyme), activities, song game variations, classroom extensions, and author comments.

Kulich, B. (1989). *Friendly Bear's Song Book Songs and Music Activities for Young Children, Their Families, and Teachers*. Vancouver, BC: The Empire Music Company Ltd.

This 179-page resource is a treasure collection of simple to more complex songs, rhymes and games for young children and is beautifully organized and divided into sections according to the seasons e.g. fall, winter, spring, summer. It includes teaching extensions, a glossary of music and movement terms, suggestions for percussion instruments for children, literature connections, and a bibliography for parents and teachers. Written with the novice music and classroom teacher in mind, the text and music are easy to follow.

Wirth, M., Stassevitch, V., Shotwell, R., & Stemmler, P. (1983). *Musical Games, Finger plays and Rhythmic Activities for Early Childhood*. New York: Parker Publishing Company.

A comprehensive selection of singing activities, song games, and chants focusing on listening skills and auditory development for young children. The singing activities are divided into sections: musical finger games, active musical games, circle games, camp and folk songs, follow the leader, and echo games. The chants are divided into finger game chants and active chants. Additional information such as age appropriateness,

benefits (e.g., learning outcomes), directions on how to play the song game, variations of the song game and helpful author comments accompany each song.

Ziolkoski, D. (2006). *Just for Kids Children's Guide A Simple, Fun Approach to Classical Music*. Vancouver, BC: Fun with Composers, Inc. www.funwithcomposers.com

A fun and creative book with cleverly weaves language and literacy skills with the classical music of great composers such as Mozart, Dvorzak, Bach, Strauss, Saint-Saens, and Haydn. Written specifically for young children from kindergarten to grade three and includes a CD to help children internalize the music and the lyrics. The children's guide includes music maps so children can have a visual arrangement of the music, imaginative stories about the music to inspire the children to role play the characters in the story, activity pages, composer images, and biographies to help bring these classical composers to life.

Music and Movement Ideas and Strategies

When children are engaged cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically, they are more conducive and receptive to learning. In addition, the more senses that are actively involved in an activity, the higher the rate of success will be in learning and retaining information and knowledge. Music and movement activities are very engaging for young children, and because they enhance learning, they can also be used as tools to help educators teach language and literacy skills. The following are some music and movement ideas, activities and strategies that would be especially suitable young non-English speaking children:

- Sing and play: "With Your Partner" (sung to Skip to My Lou): In pairs facing each other, the children sing: "*With your partner... shake their hand (repeat 2 more times)*,"

shake their hand my darling. Other verses: nod your head, turn around, stamp your feet, stand and bend, march in place, etc., and finish with GIVE A HUG

- Teach poems and songs with fingerplay such as: “The Wheels on the Bus,” “Where is Thumbkin?” “The Eensy Weensy Spider,” etc. (See Teacher Resources.)
- Teach singing games and action songs such as “Farmer in the Dell,” “Hokey-Pokey,” etc. and encourage children to make up new verses to these familiar songs
- Learn songs, song games, and dances from different cultures – invite parents to share the music, instruments and songs of their culture
- Have the children participate in a ‘sound story:’ make available a variety of musical instruments and have children insert sound to a story that is being read aloud; have children record themselves during a sound story
- Invite children to make and play their own rhythm and musical instruments using found objects, recycled materials or any objects that children can make music with e.g. tap spoons on a wooden block, knock wooden blocks together, let children bang two pot lids together like cymbals, staple or tape paper plates together with dried beans in the middle
- Provide children with kazoos and play the game, “Guess what this song is:” One child plays a song on his/her kazoo and others have to guess the song. Allow the next child to play a song and so on
- With kazoos, play a repeating rhythm pattern and have the children echo and/or repeat the rhythm pattern

- Children can march with their kazoos or play along with a song
- Organize a musical parade in which children can march and play their musical instruments to the beat of music
- Encourage children to make and use body noises to create rhythms such as claps (e.g., hand to hand, hand to thigh, hand to head, hand to floor, or hand to table), stamp feet, click tongues, or snap fingers
- Invite children to respond to music by playing music that creates a mood (e.g., slow and dreamy music, a march, a gentle lullaby,) or Latin rhythms or music that features one instrument (e.g., a violin, trumpet, organ, or drums). Encourage children to respond by finger painting, painting, using crayons or markers, or shaping play dough. Encourage participation by making thoughtful comments such as, "Why don't you draw how the music makes you feel?" or "That slow music helped you make those long lines." Focus on commenting on the child's activity (e.g., "You are moving quickly now") instead of praising the art (e.g., "That's a pretty picture") is more likely to encourage imagination and creativity in their responses.
- Encourage moving to music: play a wide variety of music, such as classical music, Latin dances, marches, waltzes, and current hits, etc. Provide scarves and children can dance with them and/or throw and catch scarves as they flow from one side of the body to the other.
- Arm Dancing: materials needed - sidewalk chalk, a cassette player and various types of music (e.g., classical, rock, reggae, country, slow, fast, etc.) Take your class outside

where there is a large amount of cement and let each child choose a piece of chalk. Tell your class that you will be playing different types of music and they can move their arms to the beat of the music to create chalk designs. While doing the activity, talk about the music. Is it fast or slow? Ask the students how the music makes them feel. Does it make them feel sad or happy, etc. (from

<http://www.perpetualpreschool.com/movement.html>)

- Children can walk like elephants and sway their arms from side to side like a trunk. Elephant variation: place the left ear on the left shoulder and extend the left arm like the trunk of an elephant with knees relaxed, draw the infinity sign (crossing up in the middle) in front of you switch arms after three to five signs. This activates all areas of the mind/body system (Maguire, 2000)
- Invite children to waddle like a penguin, jump like a kangaroo, slither like a snake, gallop like a zebra, run like a cheetah, etc. Incorporate sounds animals might make.
- Have children work on balancing and strengthening their vestibular system by having them balance on one foot and then balance on the other foot (recall that a strong vestibular system is related to language abilities)
- Paper Plate Dancing: Give each child a paper plate and play different types of music and have the children keep the beat by:
 - Tapping the plate on their head
 - Tapping the plate on their tummy
 - Tapping the plate on their foot

- Tapping the plate on their knee, etc. Once the children are used to tapping the paper plate on different body parts, ask them where they should tap the plate next
(from <http://www.perpetualpreschool.com/movement.html>)
- Do cross crawls to music. This is a cross lateral movement exercise and helps coordinate the right and left brain by exercising the information flow between the two hemispheres. It is useful for writing, listening, reading and comprehension and improves left/right coordination. While standing, alternatively touch your left knee with your right hand then the right knee with the left hand. Continue for 10 to 15 repetitions. Variation 1 - touch opposite elbow to knee. Variation 2 - reach hand behind back to opposite foot (Maguire, 2000)
- Use rhythm sticks to activate hearing, feeling and speaking; learn rhythm stick patterns and use them along with songs
- Blow bubbles while music is playing and encourage children to try and catch the bubbles with their pincer grips (this fine motor skill exercises a muscle in the brain that is used for higher level thinking (Harman, 2002)
- Exercise to music e.g. do windmills (arm circles), jumping jacks, etc.

Summary

The children in my all day kindergarten speak many languages and represent a broad range of cultures. I have found that music and movement activities through songs and song games have helped to develop and strengthen my students' English oral language skills. Songs and song games, by their very nature, stimulate and integrate a variety of intelligences and because of this they are powerful educational resource tools that can teach many skills. English

language learners can benefit from such an approach to learning the English language because songs and song games level the playing field for all and enable non-English speaking children, despite their diverse needs and backgrounds, to grasp and to begin to develop their knowledge and understanding of this idea called of ‘language.’ Songs and song games are wonderful entries and joyful passages on a child’s journey toward language and literacy development.

SECTION 4: CONCLUSION

My focus for this study was twofold: to research what the literature has to say about the ways in which music and movement activities may support the language and literacy development of non-English speaking Kindergarten children, and to identify resources and strategies that early childhood educators can use to engage kindergarten non-English speaking children in music and movement activities that support language and literacy development. The literature has shown that there are many benefits to learning when music is involved, and this is especially evident in the area of language and literacy development. Although a majority of the literature that I reviewed represented research and observations of mainly English-speaking children, I have found that through my own observations of my students, music and movement activities through songs and song games have had a large impact and influence on my students’ language and literacy development. I have noticed that their oral language skills have improved and increased at a rapid pace, and despite the fact that this may be due in part because it is a full-day kindergarten class (as opposed to half-day kindergarten), and one may argue that they have had more time to hear practice and play with the language, my students are speaking and communicating fairly fluently in English now as compared to when they first arrived in September when many had little to absolutely no English language skills. Throughout the day, my students often spontaneously break into song, singing songs from the many song games I

include in my curriculum. Through these songs and song games, my students have experimented with and learned a variety of language skills such as parts of speech, correct grammar structures, pronunciation, rhythm, sentence patterns, and vocabulary. They have learned the proper intonation, stress, and rhythm of words and phrases, and have had many opportunities to play with patterning and rhyme simply through the joy of singing songs and playing song games over and over and over. Through songs, my students have developed 'automaticity' or in other words they know what to say and can produce language without pauses (Paquette & Rieg, 2008).

Not only have the benefits been observed in their language, literacy and linguistic skills, but the benefits have also been observed in the level of their emotional and social development. Songs and song games require active participation by the students and this non-verbal agreement to work and play together encourages and supports the social development of children – it teaches children to learn how to accept others, accept other's contributions, cooperate, work together, and solve problems as a group. Young children have opportunities to develop self-esteem, confidence, and independence through songs and song games – for example when responding to questions such as "Where did you fly to, little bird?" in the song game "Bluebird," and "What would you like us to sing about today?" in "Mary Wore Her Red Dress" (Bennett, 1999). When children are actively engaged and involved and when more senses are involved in the language experience, research has shown that children are more receptive to learning. Music and movement activities through songs and song games can create the kind of rich and opportune moments and environments that are ripe for learning for young children, and who more can benefit from this kind of learning and approach than our non-English speaking children?

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¹ Note: this book is no longer in print but can be found at the Education Library stacks under the call number M1990.K84 F74 1989.

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