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**LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS
USING MELODIC LEARNING**

By
Tara M. Hart

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of Language, Literacy, and Special Education
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
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at
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Thesis Chair: Dr. Susan Brown

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my family, friends, and students who supported and encouraged me throughout this entire process.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my greatest appreciation to Dr. Susan Browne as well as the rest of the professors in the College of Reading Education for their guidance and help throughout this research.

Abstract

Tara M. Hart
LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS
USING MELODIC LEARNING

2014

Dr. Susan Browne
Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this study is to investigate a non-traditional method of enhancing language through the use of songs, chants, and rhymes. To investigate this, data was systematically collected and then analyzed in order to determine the specific benefits on the development of oral and written language from the use of these strategies. Prior to the study, each student was assessed using the second edition of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2). Using the Word Analysis assessment, they were tested on their ability to identify uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet, rhyme, determine initial sounds of words, and read sight words. The melodic learning strategies of songs, chants, and nursery rhymes were applied in addition to the typical elements of the Kindergarten curriculum to establish growth over the one month study period. Each week of the study, songs were introduced and discussed, sight words were practiced with the use of chants, and nursery rhymes were repeatedly read. This melodic learning approach incorporated strategies to help students read, write, and retain information with the use of rhythm. The DRA2 was again administered after addition of melodic learning strategies was incorporated into the classroom to determine development of the specific language skills. The results revealed that students demonstrated an increase in the areas of rhyming, phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, word recognition, as well as overall motivation.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Throughout my life, I have always been fascinated by music in all its forms. Being an auditory learner myself, I was often engaged by anything that included melodies or rhythm, as it always seemed to stick with me. As a student, I would often make up songs and rhymes to help study for tests. I would combine the information I needed to know with a common tune to assist with memorization and recollection of the material. For example, I can still recall the thirty-five prepositions that my sixth grade English teacher had us learn for a test because I put them to the tune of "Santa Claus is Coming to Town". I was amazed with how it always worked for me, but I never heard of anyone else using the same strategy.

When I became a teacher, I became curious if the strategy of using melodies and rhymes while learning would be beneficial to other students as it was for me. As a new teacher, I was extremely hesitant to incorporate such approaches into my teaching. There was often so much focus on curriculum that I felt there was little time in the day to sing songs, chants, or read nursery rhymes. During the first few weeks of teaching Kindergarten this year, I would often hear students singing songs from their preschool experiences, in which they knew every word. I decided to begin reading a few song picture books with them each day. Although my Kindergarteners often have a short attention span and difficulty sitting still, this was the one part of the day in which they seemed extremely engaged, excited, and willing to participate. They began begging me

to read the song picture books more and more. I could see that this was beneficial for many students, especially the ones who were not as verbal as others.

When beginning to teach simple sight words to my students, I often felt like the words were difficult for the students to retain and recognize, let alone spell. Few of my students were able to successfully read these words. When I realized this was an opportunity to test the strategy of using learning that involved melody, I knew this was what I wanted to study. I began to wonder what would happen if I made up a tune to go with the words? Would this method help students hold on to the word easier? What other melodic learning methods could be used to increase the development of their language? I was aware that this challenge would be both fun and complicated at times, but I could not wait to incorporate my passion of music with these students.

Based on the engagement and use of oral language that I initially witnessed with my kindergarten students, I have chosen to focus on the use of melodic learning in the classroom. I would like to specifically study how the use of songs, chants, and rhymes could promote language development for students at the kindergarten level.

Purpose Statement

Various researches throughout the past decade have suggested that incorporating songs, chants, and rhymes into the curriculum can be vastly beneficial for the literacy growth of young students. Paquette and Rieg (2008) state that "providing children with structured and open-ended musical activities, creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, and sharing the joy of creativity with each other all are foundational to bases for the growth and development of the early childhood learner" (p. 227). These musical

opportunities can be implemented to address the needs and give support to diverse learners, including English Language Learners. As the population continues to grow, the diversity in the classrooms does as well. Our schools need to adapt to the cultural and linguistic needs of all students, especially at an early age. In addition to cultural diversity, the number of children with special needs is also increasing in the general education classroom. With inclusion and mainstreaming practices in place, it is the job of the teacher to support these learners by providing them with modifications and strategies to help them learn and achieve. Language development is pertinent to overall literacy growth for all students. This research will investigate how language can be enhanced in kindergarten learners through the use of melodic learning strategies.

Through song, children can build upon their musical interests while enhancing their literacy development. Bill Harp (1988) states that anything we do to teach reading to our students should be consistent with the nature and purpose of language. The idea of using songs to teach reading accomplishes this and puts readers in touch with satisfying meanings. According to Paquette and Rieg, songs can be used to teach a variety of language skills including letter sounds, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, rhyme, sentence patterns, and parts of speech. A child is first introduced to patterned text in songs, chants, and rhymes and when these are utilized, concepts of print become more meaningful and conventions are learned in context (2008).

Chanting is yet another melodic learning activity that can promote oral language, which is the foundation for all literary experiences. Chanting involves the cooperation and participation of a group, so it is considered a shared language experience (Buchhoff,

1994). This often involves modeling from the teacher and then imitation from students, which can facilitate language production and comprehension (Jalongo & Bromley, 1984). Chants can develop rhyming ability, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and assist children in remembering concepts (Richards, 2010). By tapping into children's natural affinity for language and rhythm, chants can be used in a variety of ways to enhance language in the classroom.

In addition to songs and chants, the role of nursery rhymes has been found to be extremely beneficial. According to research done by Dunst, Meter, and Hamby (2011), a child's knowledge of and experiences with nursery rhymes are considered to be "important precursors and determinants of later literacy abilities" (p. 1). The ability to recite and recognize nursery rhymes correlated to both phonological and print-related skills, including emergent reading (Dunst, Meter, & Hamby, 2011). Atta-Alla (2012) found that using nursery rhymes can also create a rich foundation for vocabulary development. As well as teachers providing traditional methods of teaching phonological awareness and vocabulary, nursery rhymes can be utilized to further increase this knowledge.

It is also important for teachers to consider the various ways that students learn. In Howard Gardner's research (1983), he describes how children learn differently and demonstrate different skills and talents when learning. With this, in order for students to be successful, teachers must provide different approaches to learning based on the strengths of students. Gardner's Musical-Rhythmic learners are sensitive to sound and aware of tone and pitch. He stated that musical intelligence is one of the first

intelligences to emerge in young learners. Using songs, chants, and rhymes with these students can increase their attention and interest while motivating them to learn (Gardener, 1983).

This research has implications for all educators, especially those who teach early education. The idea of integrating melodic learning activities into learning could not only be motivating, but increase the language development of young learners. This development is necessary for literacy growth and enjoyment. Songs, chants, and rhymes incorporate melody and music into the curriculum and classroom in a way that traditional methods of teaching cannot. "Music can transform classrooms to pleasant and positive learning environments in which children thrive emotionally, socially, and academically" (Paquette & Rieg, 2008, p. 227).

Story of the Question

Before I began collecting data, I incorporated singing a song from a songbook into our typical morning routine each day. After I began doing this, I would often hear students singing the songs or humming them all day long. They also frequently asked if we could sing the songs again. I soon saw how motivating these songs were to the students and how they easily recalled and recited them after little practice. I also shared a variety of nursery rhymes with students to see if they had any prior knowledge of them, which the majority did not, even my higher students. With this, I knew including nursery rhymes into this study would be beneficial, as I could see true growth and motivation using a strategy that many of them had never been exposed to. In addition, many of the books we had been reading incorporated chants into them. Each time we reread one of

these particular books, the students were able to recall and perform the chant. Although the students could not read or recite the exact written words from the book, upon coming to a page in which a chant was included, they were able to use the exact words and language. These observations showed that the use of incorporating songs, chants, and rhymes into the reading curriculum may greatly benefit their language development. By using these strategies, their vocabulary background could be enhanced, they would have improved pronunciation of words, and develop listening and speaking skills. In addition, this would add fun to learning, motivate reluctant speakers to participate, stimulate interest in language, and create a lively classroom atmosphere.

Statement of the Research Problem and Question

The research question I plan to investigate is: How can the use of melodic learning enhance language development at the kindergarten level? The curriculum and standards play a large part in the creation of lessons, but do not specifically state using the methods of melodic learning. The purpose of this study is to investigate a non-traditional method of enhancing language through the use of songs, chants, and rhymes. These will be integrated into the reading and writing kindergarten curriculum. To investigate this question, I plan to systematically collect data and then analyze it in order to determine the specific benefits on the development of oral and written language from the use of these strategies.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature based on the use of various methods of melodic learning in the classroom. This includes literature which studied the

integration songs, chants, and rhymes into the reading curriculum and its benefits on the development of language. Chapter Three describes the methodology as well as design and context of the study. This contains my procedure, how I plan to collect data, as well as significant information in regards to the context of the students in my classroom community. Chapter Four is a review and analysis of the data and research along with the specific findings of the study. Chapter Five presents the conclusions of the study as well as implications for further teaching. Suggestions for further research on the topic of melodic learning are also discussed.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind,
flight to the imagination, and life to everything.”

-Plato

Introduction

Language development is one of the prerequisites for preparing young students to learn to read and succeed in all subject areas. The goals of this development are to recall and repeat stories, read common words, use descriptive language, increase vocabulary, and repeat rhyming sounds. This acquisition is linked to reading achievement in successive grades (Smith, 2000).

In Kindergarten, much of the reading occurs through the use of melodic learning. This strategy seems to be engaging, motivating, and provides a connection to language learning that emergent readers require. It is the job of Kindergarten teachers to provide their students with a solid foundation of literacy skills in order to become successful readers. Many teachers have long embraced the idea of music and other rhymes as an aid for these emergent readers. Songs, chants, and rhymes seem to be a simple, yet natural part of early childhood. Many students enter Kindergarten possessing a background of songs and rhymes sung to them by their mothers beginning at a young age (Allen, 1996). Besides being engaging and motivating for students, incorporating these strategies into the reading curriculum has many benefits, particularly in the development of various areas of language.

Chapter Two presents a review of the literature in the various areas of melodic learning. This includes utilizing songs, chants, and rhymes in the classroom and the

benefits of the strategies. The first section describes the strategy of Melodic Learning. The second section outlines research on how songs have been used as an intervention to improve literacy. It is followed by a discussion about how chants can be beneficial to students' learning. The next section examines the advantages of using rhymes with younger students. The section that follows describes the theoretical perspectives of these strategies based on research done by theorists. The chapter ends with a summary of the literature and the ways that this study may contribute to the field of education with regard to how incorporating Melodic Learning into the reading curriculum of emergent readers may enhance language development.

Melodic Learning

The method of "Melodic Learning" was created by Susan Homan in 2011. This was a term for a reading intervention strategy that she tested for six years with the use of repetitive singing. It combines visual imagery and melody to add music to learning. Her research was based off of multi-modality learning in which auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic modalities are used during the learning experience. Instruction using rhyming and singing are examples of this multi-modal learning. An example she gives is how many people learn the ABC's through the use of pattern and repetition in song. Homan believes that this integration of Melodic Learning "creates more powerful and permanent learning outcomes" (Homan, 2011, p. 3).

Additionally, Melodic Learning increases participation and motivation through the use of active learning. Homan states that there is a combination of five different ways that students can learn. As learning takes place, aural, visual, kinesthetic, tonal, and

rhythmic processing engage simultaneously (2011, p. 2). Although rhythm and tonality are not often associated with the more well known learning styles, "they can play a vital role in helping to make learning easier and more sustained" (2011, p. 3). As this is fairly new research, it is left off with the hopes of further development and positive outcomes. Overall, Homan suggests that "Melodic Learning is one of the oldest and most underutilized methods to improve learning" (2011, p. 4).

Songs

In many early education classrooms, the reading instruction often incorporates a variety of fiction and informational texts. Students are given opportunities to acquire language through the use of this literature on a daily basis. However, in addition to text, much of our language is also comprised of rhythmical words such as those in songs. We are often so exposed to music and song throughout the day, we do not even notice it. If the lyrics to these songs were written, we would be reading them (Iwasaki, Rasinksi, Yildirim, & Zimmerman, 2013).

The International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children released a joint position statement in 1998 which discussed appropriate practices for reading at each developmental age. They stated that "high-quality book reading occurs when children feel emotionally secure and are active participants in reading" (p. 198-199). This philosophy seems to lend itself to the concept of singing in that it often encourages active participation and emotional security. In addition, these singing activities bring even more opportunities for response, discussion, and participation in literacy instruction.

Although there is little research on the specific language gains attributable to music in the classroom, a study was done by Douglas Fisher (2001) to help expand this knowledge. In his study, a group of students who spoke Spanish at home were assigned one of four teachers which they would have in both Kindergarten and first grade. Students were given initial testing on phonemic awareness, oral language, and reading skills. Two of the teachers used music in their classrooms by incorporating songs into their morning opening, listening stations, and word work activities. The other two teachers did not. After nineteen months, student language skills were again assessed, showing a larger growth in the categories of oral language and phonemic awareness in the students who were exposed to singing in the classroom, as compared to students in the classes where songs were not used. Fisher concluded that "music can be used in an elementary school classroom to benefit students' language development" (p. 46) and musical activities influence literacy development. In addition to these language benefits, students in the classes with music did less unnecessary talking in class, were often humming as they worked, and had a general excitement about school (2001).

In addition to this, Mary Ann Davies (2000) described how music can enhance learning, based on the two hemispheres of the brain working together. The teaching strategy of using music requires using both of the hemispheres which makes learning easier, quicker, and more fun. She found that music creates an emotional involvement in learning, and "this heightened involvement creates a stronger neural connection, which in turn makes it easier to remember information" (p. 149). Thus, when the song or tune is heard in your head, memories will be triggered that are associated with that song. The overall rhyme, rhythm, and repetition of music appeals to many types of learners and

makes it easier to remember facts, which is often particularly beneficial to at-risk learners.

Research suggests that singing and regular, repeated reading of songs has the potential to improve reading for students of all ages. Students learn many things from repeated readings of songs, including how to track words on a page, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, word families, and fluency, as well as developing a motivation to read (Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, & Zimmerman, 2013). Songs often incorporate a variety of vocabulary words or concepts. When emergent readers listen to or sing songs, they are learning and adding to their background knowledge which they may use in future reading and writing experiences. Students can gain a large sight word vocabulary through the use of songs, specifically when songs are picked for the level and age of the students (Smith, 2000).

Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, and Zimmerman (2013) believe that singing, along with having the words visually displayed, is an extremely useful tool for teaching reading to children. A study with adolescent students found that regular, repeated reading and singing of songs over a nine-week period resulted in greater reading achievement than another comparative group of students with a different intervention (Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski, 2008). When students are given the words to track while singing, they are technically reading. While it is known that practicing reading increases the chances of becoming a better reader, singing and reading songs may help increase self-efficacy and motivate students to want to read even more (Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski, 2008).

Jalongo and Ribblett (1997) explored how song picture books could help support emergent literacy in their article. Not only are these types of books appealing to emergent readers, but they also help boost their confidence. The repetition of words in songs is much more appealing than the traditional method of practicing words on flashcards. Students are exposed to various sight words in a meaningful context. In addition, students are given opportunities for vocabulary growth, as opposed to using controlled vocabulary texts or vocabulary lists. Vocabulary is also taught in a meaningful context with concrete representations of the word shown in detailed illustrations. "By including this genre of children's literacy in the preschool and primary curriculum, teachers not only facilitate children's growth in literacy, but also contribute to children's aesthetic developing in art, music, literature, and creative writing" (1997, p. 21).

A study conducted by Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski (2008) discovered that using songs as repeated reading texts with adolescent struggling readers proved to increase their fluency and motivation. Students would read the lyrics silently, sing the song three times, and attempt to improve their fluency during each repetitive reading. In this way, reading was practiced, fluency was improved, and self-efficacy and motivation was increased.

Songs have many features that make them pleasurable for students and are great additions to the early literacy curriculum. The melody and rhythm help make songs easy to learn and recall, which is motivating to students. It is also pertinent that emergent readers develop a large sight word vocabulary, which songs often provide (Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, & Zimmerman, 2013). In addition to this, songs allow for sounds of

language to be manipulated, which links to the idea of phonemic awareness. "Lyrics in children's songs are replete with sound devices that serve to help young children begin to focus on the sounds of language" (Barclay, 2010, p. 140). As many songs rhyme, this idea can also be incorporated and taught with the use of song.

As children sing, they attempt to imitate what they hear. One of the ways that young children develop their language naturally is through imitation, although their imitation may not always be accurate. No matter the differences in their language abilities, imitation is a necessary component of developing language competence (Jalongo & Bromley, 1984). Using songs can allow for imitation that facilitates both language comprehension and language production.

Amanda Niland (2007) suggests that music be used with stories and literary texts to help promote literacy in young students. When adults tell stories, children tend to eagerly participate and think more deeply and creatively. When linking these stories with musical experiences such as song, it provides the potential for greater sensory engagement (Niland, 2007). If literature and music are presented together, children can be invited to respond through chants, singing, moving, or dramatizing. With this, children will be both making and creating meaning. Picture books provide an aesthetic experience and the addition of music furthers this by allowing students to engage with all of their senses, creating a rich potential for expressive responses (Niland, 2007).

Using song picture books with emergent readers allows students to be involved in authentic literacy experiences rather than task-focused instruction in which reading is based upon developing phonemic awareness. Jalongo and Bromley (1984) recommend

using song picture books as an instructional resource to help promote a child's natural ability to imitate rhyme and rhythm. This strategy has the potential for involvement of students, so it is often extremely appealing. It is also suggested that using song picture books increases familiarity and enjoyment, provides repetition and predictability, expands vocabulary knowledge and story structures, promotes critical thinking, and fosters creative expression and language play (Jalongo & Ribblett, 1997). The repetition in song picture books also provides a more appealing means of practicing words rather than using controlled vocabulary texts or flashcards. The authors suggest when students see words repeated again and again in these texts, they can begin to identify these words and phrases. Using this approach teaches language in a meaningful context which is also supported through concrete representations shown in illustrations.

Furthermore, singing songs relates to the strategy of repeated reading, which is a research-tested method for developing reading fluency (Samuels, 1979). The repetitious nature of singing, such as choruses being sung repeatedly, provides opportunities for improving reading fluency (Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, & Zimmerman, 2013). In addition, while singing, the reader/singer must attend to the prosodic nature of the lyrics. The idea of prosody, or reading with expression, is another important aspect of fluency that can easily be forgotten. Also, the rhythm, melody, and other features of songs make them easier and more fun to learn in comparison to having a student simply read a lengthy text. Having beginning readers practice tracking and successfully reading song lyrics could improve confidence and motivation (Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, & Zimmerman, 2013).

Chants

Studies show that using chants helps young children remember concepts and vocabulary, captures their imagination, and develops rhyming ability and background knowledge. A chant can be described as "any group of words that is recited with a lively beat" (Buchoff, 1994, p. 26). There is often a stress on certain words or syllables and less emphasis on other words or syllables (Forster, 2006). They have long been recognized as "fun and child-friendly tools in both first and second language acquisition" (Forster, 2006, p. 63). Studies have shown that the lyrics that occur in chants can help young children learn and remember concepts and words that they hear in literature or may encounter in print (Buchoff, 1994). Furthermore, the repetitive language that occurs in chants helps children become familiar with the syntax of the English language, as in the idea of words in sentences.

Janet Richards (2010) described her experience in a classroom with incorporating chants during shared book reading. She found that an effective way to enhance the literacy and language growth of her students was to "tap into their natural affinity for language play and rhythm" (p. 189) by engaging them in shared book reading accompanied by chants. While reading stories, she found that using chants increased their sense of story structure, understanding of story sequence, phonological awareness, auditory memory, and expressive language (2010, p. 188).

Chanting promotes successful language experiences for all children, despite their differences in background and talent. Using chants, even a shy child, poor speaker, or

reluctant reader can develop confidence and self-expression while working with their class to contribute to chants (Buchoff, 1994, p. 26)

Rhymes

Often beginning at a very early age, children are exposed to nursery rhymes. Since this is recognized as common and natural in the early childhood years, many children choose to voluntarily listen to them. Subsequently, nursery rhymes seem to be very mesmerizing and pleasant to young children (Allen, 1996). Research has begun to grow about the role of using nursery rhymes to help young children in their ability to learn and play with language. Often, to develop reading and language skills, children must develop phonemic awareness and the ability to rhyme. As research focuses on the fact that phonological awareness (the idea that words are comprised of sounds) is important for acquiring reading and spelling skills, using rhymes is viewed as an additional way to enhance this. The use of rhymes also helps students develop other specific phonological skills such as the use of alliteration (Allen, 1996). According to research by Margaret Allen, "when children are sensitive to rhyme and alliteration, they perceive at some level that different words may have a segment of sound in common" (1996, p. 2).

Although not much is known about the origins of phonological awareness, one particular theory is that young children learn to determine the individual sounds in words with the use of linguistic routines. Maclean, Bryant, and Bradley (1987) investigated this theory in a study completed with three-year-old children. This longitudinal study assessed the knowledge of nursery rhymes and their phonological skills. Much focus was

put on the ability to identify and produce rhymes and alliterations. Even though these children were very young, results found that it was possible for them to demonstrate phonological awareness. The researchers stated that "experiences that children have when they are taught rhymes like nursery rhymes may have an important part in their growing awareness that words and syllables can be broken into, and can be categorized by, smaller units of sound" (Maclean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987, p. 278). A strong correlation was found between the knowledge of nursery rhymes and the development of phonological skills. From this, the power of nursery rhyme knowledge was shown.

A research synthesis conducted by Dunst, Meter, and Hamby (2011) explored the relationships between nursery rhyme experiences and awareness of phonological and print-related skills. Fifteen different literacy skills were examined in a large group of preschoolers. Within the synthesis, a study of nursery rhyme knowledge done by MacLean et al. asked young children to recite popular nursery rhymes. In a study done by Boudreau (2005), parents' reports of young children's experiences with nursery rhymes and rhyming games were used as measures of children's rhyming capabilities. Another study asked children to supply the last word of familiar nursery rhymes. By reviewing these studies, Dunst, Meter, and Hamby (2011) determined that experiences with, and knowledge of nursery rhymes proved to be related to success with literacy outcomes. Based on these findings, they suggested a vital role of the teacher is to communicate this knowledge to parents, so that they understand the importance of nursery rhymes in their children's emergent reading and writing competence.

Monir Nazir Atta-Alla (2012) used nursery rhymes to investigate the effects on vocabulary comprehension and production skills with adult English language learners. The forty-five adults were instructed in vocabulary skills through a vocabulary program based on children's rhymes. A vocabulary test was used as both a pre and post-test to determine the effectiveness of these strategies. The results found that the use of the rhymes, even with adults, proved to be valuable in developing both the vocabulary and comprehension skills of the participants. Like these adults, in order for young students to acquire language, there must be a growth in vocabulary. "When teachers use rhymes and poetry in their language classes, language acquisition becomes internalized as a direct result of placing the learners in situations that seem real" (2012, p. 80). Teachers must use a variety of learning strategies to enhance students' growth of literacy strategies, and rhymes continue to be recommended by many researchers.

Theoretical Perspectives

Howard Gardner produced a theory of multiple intelligences (1983), which explained the concept of how intelligence, in addition to linguistic and mathematical ability, can incorporate music, spatial relations, and interpersonal knowledge. He believes music can be especially beneficial for helping young children to develop their musical rhythmic intelligence. Gardner shares that a musical learner learns best through rhythm, melody, and music. They excel at noticing different pitches and rhythms, keeping time, recalling melodies, and picking up different sounds (Gardener, 1983). His theory would stress the use of music in literacy experiences to help students develop a wide range of intelligences. This also justifies the integration of art through music with literature in early childhood education.

Lev Vygotsky's beliefs in social constructivism (1987) would additionally advocate for the use of Melodic Learning in the classroom. This theory centers on the idea that children learn through observation, interactions, and by doing. Through the use of songs, chants, and rhymes, students observe the teacher, interact with others, and perform orally to enhance language development. Language plays a central role in mental development, and learning and this development happen simultaneously. As children often learn as a result of social interactions, this is significant and supports the transition from oral reading to silent reading (Vygotsky, 1987).

The idea of using songs, chants, and rhymes in the classroom goes along with S. J. Samuel's strategy of repeated readings (Samuels, 1997). With the concept of repeated readings, students will read a short, meaningful passage of text over and over until mastery is reached. This method has been researched by many and known to increase fluency. The idea of fluency requires readers to read with proper speed, accuracy, and expression. Especially in beginning readers, exposure to high frequency words is necessary to promote literacy skills. While some teachers believe that "the repeated reading method will lead to boredom" (Samuels, 1997, p. 378), the idea of pairing this method with songs, chants, and rhymes can prove to be extremely engaging for young students. As word recognition is necessary for emergent readers, these strategies can provide students with practice of these words until they become automatic. Samuels encourages this strategy to create automaticity while reading, allowing students to focus more on comprehension than decoding.

Louise Rosenblatt (1978) stresses the idea of the Transactional or Reader Response Theory. This describes how every child has a unique experience when reading,

which is a transaction between the reader and the text. They may take part in an efferent, or factual response based on what the text is saying or they may have an aesthetic or emotional response. When combined with literature, music can enhance the aesthetic stance for reader response. This refers to both cognitive and affective experiences during reading. When students are able to experience emotional responses with text when triggered by music, they become more engaged. This engagement is often a key for motivation and a lifelong love of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978).

John Guthrie's theory of motivational engagement (1997) would also encourage the idea of using songs, chants, and rhymes in the classroom, as they are often intrinsically motivating. These strategies encourage social motivation and reading for fun. By practicing songs, chants, and rhymes daily, over time they may become mastered and show progression. In addition, having students read text in the form of songs, chants, and rhymes may increase their self-efficacy as beginning readers.

Conclusion

Teachers of early grade levels must often find tools to engage and motivate their students in the reading process. Although it is known that young students need to develop language skills, there is little research and information about strategies that can be used to effectively teach them. The research that does exist has shown that when paired with other respected teaching techniques, the use of songs, chants, and rhymes could be effective tools in promoting language growth and student learning, particularly for those at the beginning stages of learning to read. When teachers expose their students to songs, chants, and rhymes, the students become involved in joyful, engaging, authentic

literacy experiences rather than "instruction that breaks up reading into discrete skills" (Jalongo and Ribblett, 1997, p. 110).

This study has as its goal, the aim of discovering the benefits of Melodic Learning in the Kindergarten classroom to aid in the development of language. By obtaining this knowledge, it is hoped that practitioners will gain a better understanding of strategies and methods to further increase language acquisition and literacy in emergent readers. With language enhancement, students will be given early literacy experiences, providing the groundwork for future reading achievement. Optimally, the information learned through this study will contribute to the field of education and future curriculum development.

Chapter 3

Research Design/Methodology

This framework of this study was created based upon the qualitative research paradigm. This paradigm is often used by teacher researchers in collecting and analyzing data in an academic setting. Qualitative research is based on reporting detailed views of the informants and is often conducted in a natural setting. With this, the qualitative research paradigm best suits the idea of teacher research.

When teachers conduct research, they too become part of the study as they instruction and practices they deliver are being evaluated. Supporting the idea of qualitative research, teachers must examine their own practices in the classroom and decide how to improve student learning. Teacher researchers strive to improve instruction and create the best possible learning for their students. By conducting research, they learn how to develop practices which improve the issues that may hinder learning in the classroom (Shagoury & Power, 2012). This is done by investigating these issues with students in a real classroom, where instruction can be closely monitored and assessed. This research "involves collection and analyzing data as well as presenting it to others in a systematic way" (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 3).

Good teachers have always been known to observe the classroom and students, analyze their needs, and change teaching based upon the needs of all students in this classroom. With this, "teacher research is a natural extension of good teaching" (Shagoury & Power, 2012, p. 3). Teacher research requires taking the student's perspective into consideration to determining their learning and needs. As each student

brings something different to the classroom, this diversity much be considered by the teacher researcher. Every child learns in their own way, so it is not practical to be objective. Teacher researchers must take an objective stance while taking into account the differences in students as well as the environment.

This study analyzes student language development through incorporating songs, chants, and rhymes into the curriculum. The purpose of using these strategies is to provide students with an alternative way to learn and increase phonemic awareness, oral language, vocabulary, spelling, and motivation. I will also take into account the motivation of students in the classroom setting when including these strategies.

Many qualitative inquiry strategies will be used to conduct this study. They include student questionnaires, recordings of singing and discussions, student performance tasks, word analysis assessments, as well as my personal teacher-research journal.

Procedure of Study

Prior to beginning my study, each student was assessed using the second edition of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2). Using the Word Analysis assessment, they were tested on their ability to identify uppercase and lowercase letters of the alphabet, rhyme, determine initial sounds of words, and read sight words. Each student was tested individually to determine a baseline of their language and reading abilities. This assessment served as a learning tool for me to see the highest and lowest students as well as determine their abilities in each area.

After observing how much the students enjoyed singing, I decided to choose two song picture books to use throughout the study. Both books are written by Raffi, a famous children's songwriter. The first book is Down by the Bay (1988) and the second is Baby Beluga (1992). Both books include vivid, detailed pictures and language. To incorporate chants, I decided to include a days of the week chant into our morning routine, as the vast majority of my students could not put the days of the week in the correct order. In addition, I planned to add a chant for the months of October and November to help students remember spellings of the month names. I also would incorporate a chant for each new sight word we learned to determine if this would also help their ability to recall, read, and spell words. Along with this, I planned to include a variety of nursery rhymes including Little Miss Muffet, Jack and Jill, Mary Had a Little Lamb, and Humpty Dumpty.

Over a period of four weeks, I incorporated the two songbooks. Prior to reading the first book, Down by the Bay, I gave each student a vocabulary pretest. This consisted of choosing ten specific key words from the book, then pointing to the picture in the songbook and asking students to tell me the word for the picture. The same test would then be administered at the end of the study to determine vocabulary growth. The songs Down by the Bay and Baby Beluga were each introduced by discussing what the books were about, practicing them line by line, and singing the tune repeatedly. Each book was sung for two weeks. The songs were also written on large chart paper and words were pointed to and read using a pointer.

During the first week of the study, students were taught a chant to remember October and as the weeks progressed and November came, a chant was taught about November as well. The chant was repeated each morning during calendar time. Students were also taught the days of the week chant to help them recall the correct order of the days of the week. These chants were repeated each morning throughout the entirety of the study. Two new sight words were also taught each week and when introduced, a chant which included the letters of the word was taught. Sight words and their chants were reviewed each day.

Over the course of the study, four nursery rhymes were also introduced. One new nursery rhyme was introduced each week. These included Little Miss Muffet, Jack and Jill, Mary Had a Little Lamb, and Humpty Dumpty. A new rhyme was practiced each week and given to students to read and follow along with in a packet. Rhymes were introduced and practiced line by line. Each rhyme was practiced daily over a one week period. Students were also asked to draw and depict the rhyme on occasion as well as circle sight words included in each. Students were given multiple opportunities to read these rhymes during independent and shared reading.

During the last week of the study, the students were again assessed using the DRA-2 to determine growth using the incorporated strategies of songs, chants, and rhymes. With the use of these subtests, I was able to conclude about development in the areas of phonemic awareness, rhyming, and high frequency words. This information was very valuable in determining language growth throughout the course of the study.

Data Sources

To establish data for the research of this study, I used a variety of qualitative research techniques. Prior to administering the study, I collected a baseline on students' language and reading abilities using the second edition of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2). I then charted this information to determine the strengths and weaknesses of specific students and the class as a whole. Throughout my study I used audio-recordings to document individual and whole group discussions and recordings of singing, chanting, and rhyming as well as reactions to participation. I created data charts which included their ability to recite lines from songs and rhymes. Furthermore, I kept a teacher research journal throughout the course of the study which allowed me to record my own thoughts and feelings about the data collected as well as student thoughts that they shared. In my research journal, I reflected on my own teaching throughout the course of the research as well as student behavior. Students were given a pre and post-test to determine vocabulary growth in a songbook to collect data, as well. Student and parent questionnaires will also be used to determine language growth and motivation. Finally, student artifacts such as drawings and writing were used to determine language growth and reflect on the impact of the specific strategies used.

Data Analysis

The data that was collected throughout the course of the study was used to help draw conclusions on the impact of songs, chants, and rhymes on student language development. I used the DRA2 assessment to determine student abilities in terms of letter and sound recognition, rhyming ability, and sight word reading. Using this

information, I was able to determine areas of need for specific students and the class as a whole. By charting this data I was able to determine and rank student abilities as well as focus on specific students in need of language growth. My teacher research journal allowed me to find trends on my own thinking throughout the research process as well as reflect on student responses over the course of the four week study. I was also able to gain insight on student motivation and the classroom atmosphere as specific songs, chants, and rhymes were introduced. The journal was beneficial for recording my observations of student behaviors and comments that were not able to be heard through audio-recording. The audio recordings helped me to recall and track specific student and class growth throughout the study. In addition, student and parent surveys helped me add to observations of motivation and language development.

Context

Community. Benjamin Franklin Elementary School is one of eight elementary schools in the Pennsauken Public School District. There are approximately 35,885 people living in Pennsauken Township which is located in Camden County, New Jersey. Pennsauken is an urban, middle class community which is a total of 10.5 square miles. According to the 2010 Census, these 35,885 people reside in 12,633 housing units. Of these 12,633, 71.2% are family households and 30.7% are families with children under the age of 18. Among these family households, 46.9% are led by married couples, and 18.4% are female-led households with no husband present, and 28.8% are non-families.

The racial makeup of this township as taken by the 2010 Census was 47.6% white or Caucasian, 26.8 % Black or African American, 26.9% Hispanic or Latino, 0.59%

Native American, 7.7% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 13.6% from other races, and 3.6% from two or more races.

The population by age consists of 24.1% under the age of 18, 9.7% ranged from 18 to 24, 26.0% from 25 to 44, 27.3% from 45 to 64, and 12.9% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age for residents of Pennsauken Township is 38.0 years.

The Pennsauken Township median income as of the 2010 Census was \$57,241 per household and the median family income was \$65,910. The per capita income for the borough in dollars was \$26,048. At this time 6.4% of families and 8.9% of the population in Pennsauken were considered to be living below the poverty line and 12.4% of those were under the age of 18.

School. Benjamin Franklin Elementary School is currently the largest elementary school in the school district. Having a population with a broad range of ethnic backgrounds, the school is a reflection of the community and a microcosm of society in today's world. It serves the community with educational programs for grades kindergarten through four. The ethnic makeup of the student population is 43% Hispanic or Latino, 29% Black of African American, 21% White of Caucasian, and 6% Asian or Pacific Islander. 62% of the students are eligible for both free or reduced breakfast and lunch. As per testing results, 64% of students at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School are considered at or above proficient in reading and 74% are considered at or above proficient in math.

Classroom. My kindergarten classroom is a full day program consisting of 15 total students. The class is made up of 7 males and 8 females. The overall makeup of the class is 7 Black or African American students, 6 Hispanic or Latino students, 1 white or Caucasian student, and 1 Asian student.

Students. The students as a whole are very energetic and excited to learn. Many of them struggle to remain in their seat, as they are always asking to help assist me and their friends around the classroom. Three of these students attend a before school program run through the YMCA and four of the students attend this same after school program. These students tend to be the ones who most often struggle to follow directions and often display attention-seeking behavior, although they are some of the highest students in the class according to the DRA-2 assessment and academic performance.

Although the class is one of two inclusion Kindergarten classes, there are currently no students with IEP's. One male student is in the process of becoming eligible for testing based on the school's eligibility process. He currently has his own modified classroom schedule in which he chooses the academic subjects he participates in, with frequent breaks included. He has a fascination with the alphabet and enjoys reading books. It is often difficult to get him to participate in activities, as he has a low motivation to complete academic tasks.

Students in the class are often very kind towards each other and helpful to their classmates and adults. There are little instances of bullying, although they frequently "tattle" on one another often after lunch or in instances when less structure and supervision is present. There is a visible sense of community in the class, as students

often work in partnerships with different partners each day. This creates a comfortable and collaborative classroom environment. The classroom is colorful and decorated with various examples of student work. Encouraging posters and anchor charts adorn the walls to serve as motivation and reminders of rules, routines, and student learning. The classroom consists of four large tables with three to four students seated at each table. The room is also equipped with a Promethean board which is used to present much of the academic information and teaching throughout the day. Students enjoy being involved in using this academic tool, which is also often used for student movement breaks. Students also rotate through centers on a daily basis and work together on skills such as phonics, sight words, math, reading, and writing.

Chapter Four of this thesis discusses the results of the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2), daily audio-recordings of individual student responses and class discussions, vocabulary tests, my personal teacher research journal, and student work samples. Chapter Five then presents the conclusions and implications of the study as well as recommendations for further topics of study.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

Chapter Four discusses the findings of my study, focusing on answering the question, “How can the use of melodic learning support language development in Kindergarten students?” After organizing the various data sources, I was able to identify the key data to report. The data sources include my teacher-research journal, student questionnaires and conversations, assessments, and student work samples. A look across all data sources seems to suggest five main areas of growth throughout the study. These include rhyming, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, word recognition, and motivation and engagement.

Revisiting the Study

As Chapter Three explained, I collected data over a period of four weeks in which children were exposed to two song books, four nursery rhymes, and a variety of chants to encourage language developmental through the use of melodic learning strategies. First, I assessed the students using the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA2) Word Analysis assessment to get baseline measures of their abilities. This assessment included rhyming, determining initial sounds in words, identifying upper and lowercase letters, and reading high frequency words. This information was charted to determine the number of students that were gaining or had complete control of these skills. I recorded audio of group singing and discussions as well as conversations, and from this was able

to record student responses and gain insight on how their motivation and language was developing over time. Using my teacher research journal, I recorded student responses, engagement, and my feelings about how the study was going to look for areas of growth. In addition, I also collected a variety of student work to analyze their overall language development. I also conducted student interviews during the last week of the study to determine how the students enjoyed using melodic learning tasks in the classroom. Lastly, students were again given the DRA2 Word Analysis assessment to determine growth throughout the study.

Rhyming

When I began the study during the first week, I introduced the songbook Down by the Bay by Raffi. The song usually follows some kind of variation on "Did you ever see a goose, kissing a moose", with rhyming words. I first modeled how to sing the song as the students attempted to mouth the words and hum along while looking at the pictures. Instantly, the students seemed to enjoy the tune and catch on to some repeated words, as I watched them swaying back and forth while sitting on the carpet. One particular student even shouted out while singing, "Miss Hart, this book rhymes!". This particular student seemed to have previous knowledge of the concept of rhyming and instantly noticed that the words indeed did rhyme. This comment may have helped other students make connections to their knowledge of rhyming, but for others who were not so familiar, it may have given them something further to listen for. I stopped to comment about how these words did rhyme, meaning they sounded the same at the end of the word. An excerpt from my teacher-research journal states, "Today, the students seemed to really

like the song Down by the Bay. Many students who I know did not have preschool experience did not seem to understand the concept of rhyming, while others did. This leads me to assume that the students who attended preschool had been exposed to the idea of rhyming prior to their Kindergarten experience" (journal entry October 29, 2014).

After reciting and singing Down by the Bay for two weeks, I then attempted to assess the rhyming and story language of my students by having them write about the song. We first discussed the patterns of the song, in which the words often repeated and always rhymed. The students were then asked to write their own page to add the songbook, which included drawing a picture and writing a sentence. A passage from my teacher-research journal sums up what this activity looked like in the classroom. It stated "I thought that this activity would be fun and enjoyable for many of my students, but it turned out to be more difficult than I had planned. As a researcher, I hoped to see my students able to create their own rhymes like in the book, but what I did not plan for was the difficulty rhyming that many students had" (journal entry November 14, 2014). With this, I feel that I over-emphasized the idea of rhyming and may have been pushing my students to rhyme difficult words that they were not ready for. I decided to give assistance to some of my lower students who were struggling and let the higher students use their creativity and knowledge of rhyming take flight. The results of this task showed that all but one of the students was able to draw and write and orally explain his/her picture. Out of these students, six were able to rhyme like the book and the other nine simply drew and wrote words that made sense with the story, but did not rhyme. For example, one student wrote "Did you ever see a raccoon using a spoon looking at the moon?". As this is one of my higher students, this type of writing expected. Another

student wrote, "Did you ever see a bear looking at a balloon?". Many of the responses were like the latter, so overall the data showed that my students still struggled with the concept of rhyming and additional teaching was necessary. A full list of student responses is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Down by the Bay Writing Responses

Student	Writing Response
<i>Student #1</i>	Did you ever see a game calling a name?
<i>Student #2</i>	Did you ever see a bird chasing a butterfly?
<i>Student #3</i>	Did you ever see a raccoon using a spoon looking at the moon?
<i>Student #4</i>	Did you ever see a dinosaur eating food?
<i>Student #5</i>	Did you ever see a bear looking at a bird?
<i>Student #6</i>	Did you ever see a reindeer wearing a tie?
<i>Student #7</i>	Did you ever see a dog barking loud?
<i>Student #8</i>	Did you ever see a pony eating bologna?
<i>Student #9</i>	Did you ever see a dog sitting on a log?
<i>Student #10</i>	Did you ever see a bear combing his hair?
<i>Student #11</i>	Did you ever see a spider making it tighter?
<i>Student #12</i>	Incomplete
<i>Student #13</i>	Did you ever see a scorpion looking at Jupiter?
<i>Student #14</i>	Did you ever see a pig wearing a wig?
<i>Student #15</i>	Did you ever see a bear looking at a balloon?

During the third week, another songbook was introduced. The songbook was Baby Beluga by Raffi. The story is about a baby whale that lives in the ocean and plays with other animals. When modeling the song to students, they again immediately took to the melody and began to hum along. There were often choruses of "Aw!" during particular parts of the book and I noted in my teacher-research journal that with this book, many of the boys seemed more apt to sing than previously. I noted that perhaps this may

be due to the fact that often boys are more drawn to non-fiction type books. While initially singing the song to the students, the same student who had previously noticed the rhyming words again shouted, "This book rhymes, too!". We continued to sing this book for two weeks, but I focused more on story language and vocabulary, which will be later discussed.

Throughout the study, the concept of rhyming was not formally taught in hopes of seeing improvement solely from the use of Melodic Learning strategies being used. The results of the DRA2 Word Analysis test showed that in the area of rhyming, the class as a whole improved by 20% throughout the course of the study (see Figure 1). Based on the results, this means that three more students are gaining control or have mastery of the concept.

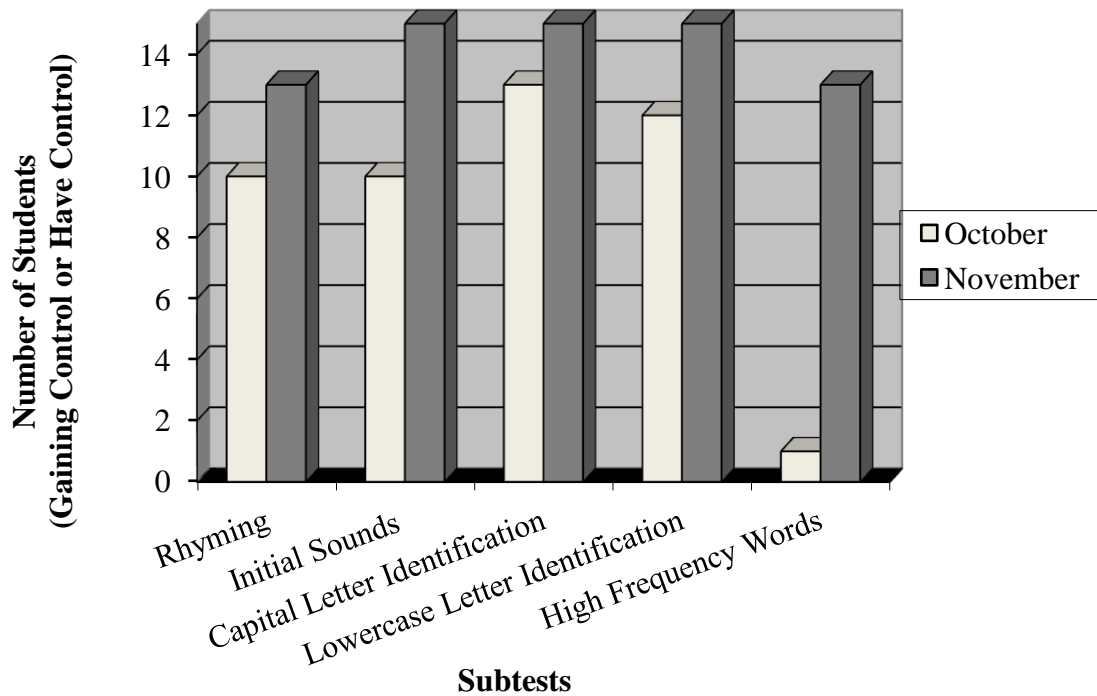


Figure 1. DRA2 Word Analysis Assessment

Vocabulary

Prior to beginning reading our first song book, Down by the Bay, I wanted to take a close look at the knowledge students had of certain vocabulary words in this particular songbook. The words were "bay", "watermelon", "goose", "moose", "whale", "polka-dot tail", "fly", "tie", "comb", and "llama". With this, I chose ten words out of the book (see appendix) and created a simple assessment to use prior to reading the songbook and then after reading it for the first two weeks of the study. During the initial testing, I sat with each student individually and showed them the songbook. I then flipped to different pages, pointing to the pictures that correlate with the chosen vocabulary words. I simply asked the students what the picture was and recorded their responses. The results showed that more than half of my students could not identify the majority of the vocabulary words based on the pictures (see Figure 2).

For the next two weeks, we sang Down by the Bay at least once daily and discussed the vocabulary words and what they were. The students seemed to enjoy the song, as many of them cheered when they saw me take out the book. The majority of them participated in the singing each day. A note in my journal states, "I am happy with the participation of many of my students while singing the songbook. The few students that do not seem to be joining in the singing are still sitting and listening while looking at the pictures. Two of those students also often sway back and forth during the singing. This leads me to believe that although they are not singing, they are still listening and participating in their own way" (journal entry November 6, 2014).

After singing the song for two weeks, I again used the same vocabulary assessment to determine their knowledge of the words. The posttest was administered the same way as the pretest, and the results of the posttest are shown in Figure 1. The results show that 14 out of the 15 total students were able to successfully identify every vocabulary word. One student struggled with the word "polka-dot tail", which she called "coconut tail". That same student could not identify the words "moose" and "goose". In my research journal, I questioned her responses by stating "the difficulty she had with these words may be due to her Hispanic background or her speech difficulty, as she struggles to pronounce many words and is currently being evaluated by our speech pathologist for services" (journal entry November 14, 2014). This evidence suggests that through the repeated singing and reading of the songbook, students are able to learn vocabulary words through the use of singing.

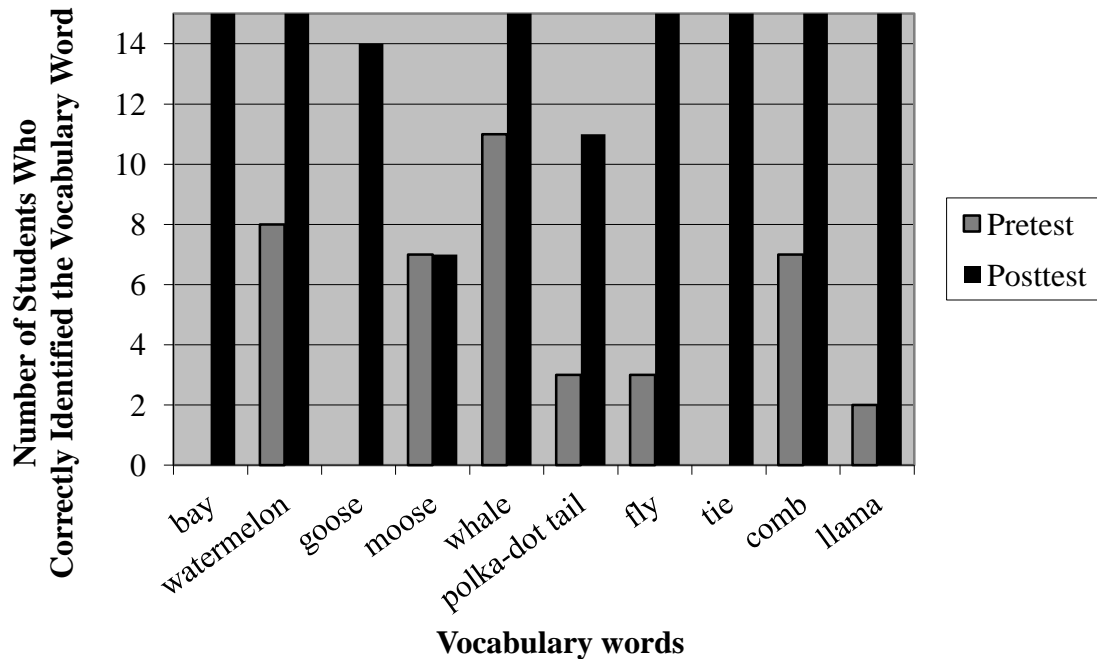


Figure 2. "Down by the Bay" Vocabulary Assessment

The next songbook we read was Baby Beluga, which we sang everyday for two weeks. To also determine if students were using learned vocabulary, I looked at their writing pieces to see if these words were carrying over into their writing. One particular day, I had the students write about the song. From this I learned that many students did not write using the vocabulary words, although some did. One student wrote "Baby Beluga in the deep blue sea, swim so wild and you swim so free". Another student wrote "Baby Beluga with you so happy". These are quotes from the song, showing these students able to use the words in their writing. It seemed more difficult for the students to use the words in their writing than to state what the words were in the vocabulary assessment.

In addition to the writing and vocabulary assessment, I also tried to listen in to see if students used vocabulary in their oral speech. One day, I heard one student state, "I'm sitting on my tuffet" as she sat on a small stool in the back of our classroom. This statement with the word "tuffet" came soon after we read the Little Miss Muffet nursery rhyme, showing that the student understood the meaning of the word and could use it while simply playing with her friends. In addition to this, I heard many students singing the songs with others while playing or buddy reading. These results showed that the use of songs and nursery rhymes helped students with their growth of vocabulary knowledge throughout the course of the study.

Phonemic Awareness

As research has shown that the use of the songs, chants, and rhymes can improve phonemic awareness, I wanted to use these strategies in addition to the phonemic awareness instruction that is required by our school district. When analyzing this data, I tried to examine their writing, which shows their phonemic awareness as they are learning to sound out and write words using letter sounds. One student, Gianna, was writing about a time she went to the skating rink. She wrote "I pt a qutr in the mushn", meaning "I put the quarter in the machine". Another student, Mya, wrote about a time she went to a haunted hayride. In addition to detailed pictures, she wrote "I watd in lin and w finle mvd up", which meant "I waited in line and we finally moved up". Their writing showed that they were taking the time to sound out words and write as many letter sounds as they could hear. Before the study occurred, my students were simply drawing pictures or writing random words on the writing lines. Now, they were truly beginning to

understand that words consist of letters and sounds, showing their growth in their awareness of phonics in language. In my teacher-research journal, I wrote "Students are doing well with sounding out the words in their writing. I can hear many students orally stretching out words to hear their sounds while writing the letters on their paper during writing time. I contribute this to the phonemic awareness we do daily as well as the songs and rhymes we go over each day in class" (journal entry November 18, 2014).

Additionally, I was able to watch the growth of my students' phonemic awareness by watching and listening to them read. Over the course of the four weeks, my students seemed to grow in their ability to sound out words, starting with the first letter of the word. I could see my students attempting to break apart the word and sound out each letter using their gained knowledge of letter sounds. In my teacher-research journal, I noted "Today I focused on listening to students read and attempt to use phonemic awareness to decode words. As my students are currently reading books with a few simple words on a page, I watched as many of them stretched out the words and read each individual sound. One student read words such as 'quit' and 'win' by slowly breaking apart the word and using letter sounds to sound it out letter by letter. This showed me that students were able to recall and use their phonemic awareness skills while reading" (journal entry November 25, 2014). With this phonemic knowledge, their reading began to grow from simply looking at the pictures to tell the story, to focusing on words and sounding them out. This was a huge aspect of development from the beginning of the study at the end of October. Students at that time still struggled to identify letter names, and now they are using their phonemic awareness to read words.

The DRA2 Word Analysis assessment was used as a pretest for phonemic awareness skills such as letter recognition and initial letter sounds. In the pretest, many of my students came in with much knowledge of letters. Based on the data, 13 out of 15 students were gaining control or had control of capital letters and 12 out of 15 students were gaining control or had control of lowercase letter recognition. Identifying initial letter sounds was more difficult for the students, but 10 out of the 15 students had control or were gaining control of this concept. After the four weeks of using the melodic learning strategies in addition to typical phonemic awareness teaching, the posttest was given using the same test. The results of the letter recognition section showed that all of my students had control of both lowercase and uppercase letters. It also showed that all of my students also were gaining control or had control of initial letter sounds in words. With the use of this assessment, development in the area of phonemic awareness was distinctly shown. I was able to conclude that students were increasing their phonemic awareness in just a short period of time with the use of melodic learning strategies in addition to our phonemic awareness program.

Word Recognition

Throughout the course of the study, students were exposed to reading and identifying words through singing songs, reading nursery rhymes, and chanting. While reading the songbooks, the words were enlarged on chart paper so the students and I could point to the words while we sang along each day. The nursery rhymes were displayed on posters around the room so we again could point to words and read together. Students were also given these nursery rhymes in a packet that they kept in their desk and

had available to read during independent reading time. Sight words that were used while chanting were displayed on the word wall for all students to see. With each of these aspects, the students were exposed to a variety of new words through the use of the melodic learning strategies.

Throughout the course of the four week study, a new nursery rhyme was also introduced each week. The nursery rhymes included Little Miss Muffet, Jack and Jill, Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star, and Humpty Dumpty. Each week, a nursery rhyme was shown and read to the students using a large poster with words and pictures. A quote from my teacher-research journal explains initial reactions to the rhymes when I wrote, "It is now the third week of introducing nursery rhymes to my students and I have begun to notice a pattern of the same students who are familiar with every nursery rhyme. When I asked the students where they had heard it, many of them either said they learned it in preschool or they had a book at home that had the rhymes in it" (journal entry November 17, 2014). As I took notes of those students who had prior knowledge of the nursery rhymes, I realized that they were some of my highest readers in the class. As a researcher, this indicated the importance of reading to and with children at a young age and even the significance of nursery rhymes.

Students were given a packet of these nursery rhymes to read in addition to their books during independent reading and the rhymes were also read each day, often as shared reading. To record their reading progress, I kept track of the lines each student was able to recite over a period of five days. At the beginning of the week, the majority of the students were not able to recite any of the nursery rhymes. With each successive

day, more students were able to successfully read the entire rhyme. By Friday, the majority of students could read the entire rhyme, with the exception of Jack and Jill, in which two students still struggled to read and recall the words. This data seems to suggest that the repeated reading of the nursery rhymes helped students to more easily identify the words. The use of nursery rhymes each day exposed students to new words and vocabulary which they were then able to recognize and read. The data shown in Figure 3 below indicates that after reciting the rhymes each day together as a class as well as independently, students progressed in their ability to recall the rhymes as well as use the language of the nursery rhyme. In general, this data showed me that in only a short period of time, my students were able to recall and recite these rhymes through repeated reading. Based on the research of nursery rhymes, I predicted that the results of their final DRA2 assessment will show growth in many areas of language development due to the learning of these nursery rhymes.

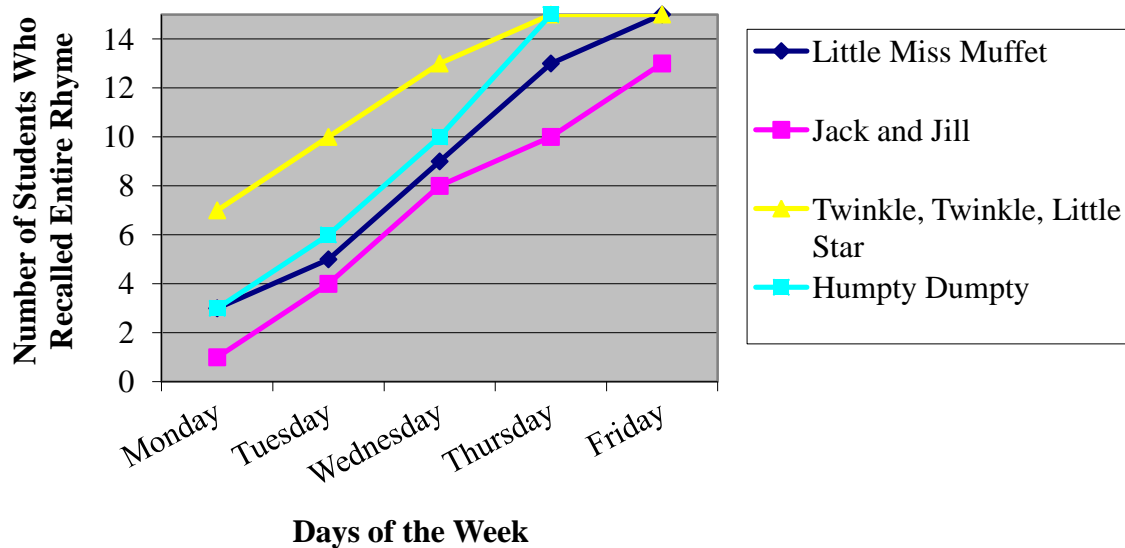


Figure 3. Nursery Rhyme Recall

Much of the chanting in this study was done with the use of sight words. Seeing how well my students were taking to melodic learning, I decided to incorporate chants with each new sight word I taught. I introduced a total of ten words throughout the course of the study. The words that were taught to the students during this time were "the", "said", "for", "you", "look", "and", "in", "to", "it", and "is". Prior to the study, I had my students read each word to me to assess their prior knowledge. The results showed that 4 out of my 15 students were able to read some words, but they could only read less than half of the words. I also asked students to spell each of the words and these results showed that none of the students could spell a single word correctly. Some students could identify a few letter sounds, but not enough to spell any of the words.

With this, I knew I wanted to incorporate chanting in addition to the typical sight word learning. Just simply seeing words and having to memorize them seemed to be

difficult for my students and it certainly did not help their spelling, so this was the perfect opportunity to try the use of melodic learning. With each new sight word that was introduced to the students, I created a chant which incorporated the spelling of the word with a simple rhythm. These chants were practiced a few times each day. A note from my journal on the first day of incorporating a chant stated, "I cannot believe how quickly and easily the students have picked up on reading and spelling the word 'the' with the simple use of a chant. At first, I thought they would look at me like I was crazy for chanting a word but before I knew it they were all chanting with me over and over so much so that I had to ask them to quiet down!" (journal entry November 3, 2014). From that moment on, I knew that chanting would be a powerful tool in helping my students learn and recall sight words, which are pertinent for emergent readers to learn. Each time a new word was taught, I would create a different chant and even had students begging me to let them create the chant. Now and then, I would let my students create the chant for a word and I could see the excitement on their faces as they did so. When practicing these chants, I would occasionally forget the chants that we created, but when I would ask the students, they could always recall what they were. Out of the ten words covered during the study, I chose to not create chants for four out of the ten words. These words were "in", "to", "it", and "is". I decided to not create chants for these words to see if it made any difference in my students' ability to recall or read the words. Although my students were very unhappy when we did not make a chant for these words, I felt it was important for my data to determine if chanting was truly beneficial.

At the end of the study, I decided to again test the students on their ability to read and spell the sight words. The results in Figure 4 show that from the beginning of the

study until the end, students made a drastic improvement in ability to read words. The posttest results showed reading the ten total sight words, no student read less than 7 of the words correctly. The results also showed that the words that students most struggled with were the words that we had not created a chant for. The words we did not create chants for were "in", "to", "it", and "is". Even though those words were the smallest and the students could have easily sounded them out using their phonemic awareness skills, they often relied on the chants we had created to recall the words. In my teacher-research journal, I wrote "While administering the posttest today, many of my students looked at the word I asked them to read, started chanting, and then shouted out the word. They seemed so pleased to be able to recall the chant and read each word. When the students came to the words that did not have a chant, many of them attempted to create a chant for the word, but became frustrated and guessed" (journal entry November 27, 2014). The data showed that the words read incorrectly in the posttest were all one of the four words that we did not create a chant for.

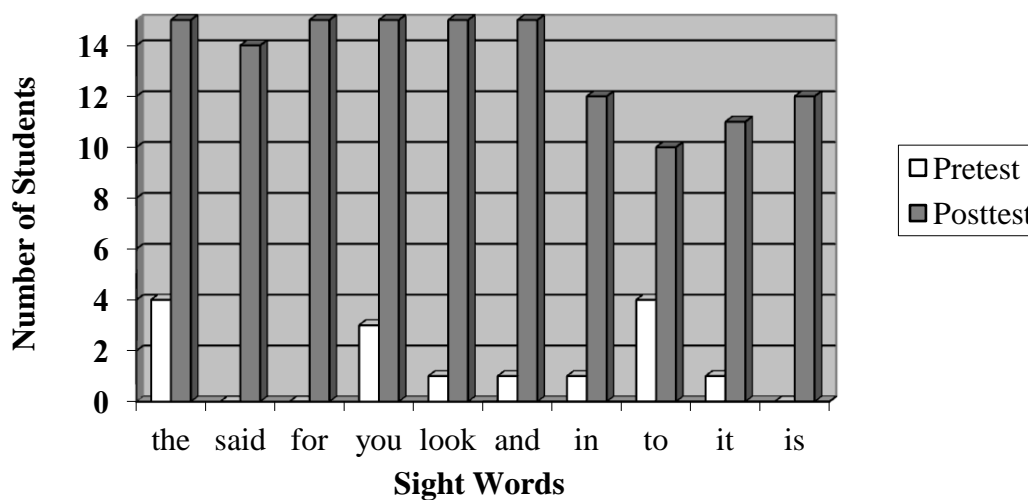


Figure 4. Sight Word Reading Assessment

Students were also given a spelling posttest to determine their development of spelling high frequency words. During the pretest, few students could spell any of the words. When given the spelling posttest, the results in Figure 5 showed that 8 out of 15, over half, of the students could spell all ten words with 100% accuracy. Other students struggled with writing words, again particularly the ones that we did not create a chant for. The overall results show students made significant gains in the ability to write high frequency words. It seemed that spelling was more difficult for my students to do than reading using the chants we created. Using melodic learning, the results show chanting was beneficial for at least recalling the words to read, while also helpful to students in spelling.

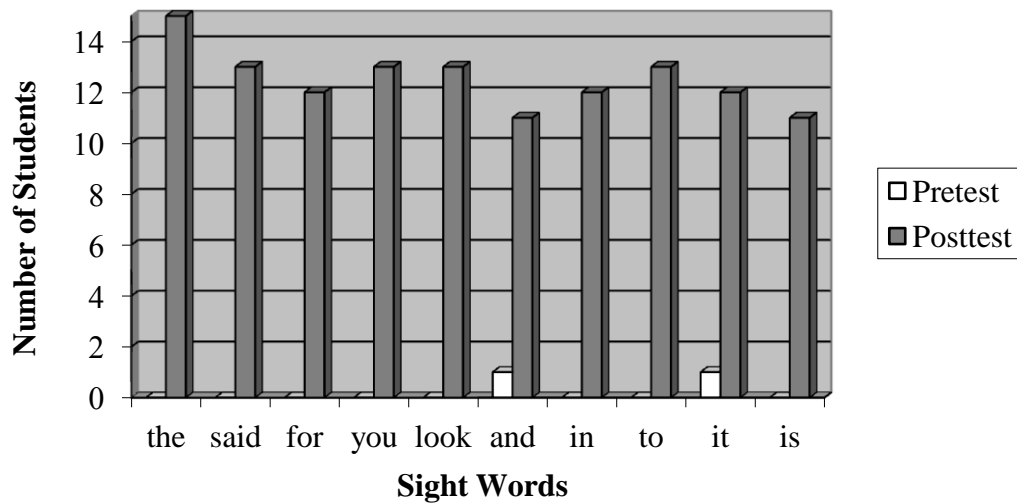


Figure 5. Sight Word Spelling Assessment

With the success of chanting using the sight words, I decided to add additional chants to our calendar time in the morning. As I had noticed little to none of my students were capable of reciting the days of the week in order or at all, I made a decision to create a chant to recite each day during our morning routine. Every morning for three weeks, we would chant about the seven days of the week and listed them in order. At the end of the three weeks, I had each student individually recite the days of the week to me and my results showed that 86% of my students could recite the days of the week in order after using a chant once daily. I found this to be extremely impressive, especially since at the beginning of the month nearly none of the students could do this. In addition, we also recited a chant about the months of October and November. In these chants, the letters that spell the month were listed. The words "October" and "November" are quite difficult words for Kindergarteners to spell, so I thought they would be perfect for determining the use of chants. After practicing these chants once daily through the weeks of the study, I

had students write the words "October" and "November" on a piece of paper. I recited the chant for them, but left out the letters to spell the month. The results of this showed that 7 out of 15 students could spell October & 8 out of 15 students could spell November after reciting the spelling of these months in a song once daily for two weeks. Again, this simple data showed the power of using chanting in the growth of spelling and word recognition.

Using the DRA2 Word Analysis Assessment, the ability of my students to read high frequency words was measured prior to the beginning of the study and then again at the end of the study. The pretest results (see Figure 1) showed that only one of my students was gaining control or had control of this area, meaning nearly none of my students could recognize simple words. After the study, this increased to 13 out of 15 students who had control or were gaining control. The words that students still struggled with were words that were not yet explicitly taught. With the use of songs, chants, and rhymes, the overall word recognition abilities of my students drastically increased throughout the course of the study.

Motivation and Engagement

A final area of growth, although not directly related to language development, was in the area of motivation. Throughout the study, I kept notes in my teacher-research journal about how the study was going, how the students were taking to it, and their willingness to participate. As each week went on, I learned more and more about my students, particularly that they all enjoyed singing. By recording student quotes and behaviors, I was able to determine whether or not the use of melodic learning was

beneficial not only for language growth, but also for overall engagement and motivation to read.

One particular student in my class, Joey, is an extremely high reader, reading at a second grade level at the age of five, but is also extremely shy. For the first two months of school, he would rarely talk to anyone. It was only after beginning to use melodic learning strategies in the classroom that I watched the student blossom and open up to share his knowledge. Although he was reluctant to speak or read, any time that we began to sing or chant, he seemed to perk up and willingly participate. For some reason, the use of rhythm allowed him to come out of his shell, perhaps making him feel comfortable. It was during the course of the study that the student finally began showing me his full potential, beginning by reading the nursery rhymes to me, then songbooks, and soon after he was reading entire books. Since then, he is frequently heard singing songs, chants, and rhymes all day long. Without the use of melodic learning, I wonder if this student would have ever allowed me to see what he was capable of, but I am grateful that these strategies encouraged his participation and motivation to learn.

In addition to this student, many of my other students seemed to fully enjoy the use of melodic learning in addition to our daily classroom routines. While buddy reading one day, I watched as two students conversed about singing. "Can we make a song to sing to this book?", one of them asked the other. Immediately they began creating lyrics about the book they were reading together and put them to the tune of "Jingle Bells". What I witnessed that day seemed to encompass many of the feelings of my students about melodic learning. When I conducted student interviews at the conclusion of the

study, I asked how they felt about the singing, rhyming, and chanting we did in class. All of my students stated that they like to sing and want to keep doing it. When asked if they would rather read a book or sing it, the majority of students said that they enjoyed singing more. When asked why, I received responses such as "I like the tune", "I like the way it sounds when we sing", and "it's fun". Also, many of my students stated that they sing at home with family members or by themselves, which is why they also enjoy it in class. Overall, melodic learning seemed to be an enjoyable experience that allowed students to have fun and be part of a classroom community while learning at the same time.

Summary of Data Analysis

After looking at and triangulating my various sources of data, I found that students made significant growths in various areas of language development through the use of melodic learning strategies being incorporated in my Kindergarten classroom. Students increased their awareness of rhyming through the use of hearing rhymes occurring in songs and nursery rhymes, making them become more easily identifiable. Students even created their own rhymes with their newly acquired knowledge. Furthermore, vocabulary growth also occurred and was shown in both oral and written measures. Phonemic awareness knowledge also increased over the course of the study as students were exposed to letters and their sounds using various songs, chants, and rhymes. Furthermore, students also learned to read and recognize sight words through the use of repeated reading and singing in songs, chants, and rhymes. Overall, the motivation and engagement that was provided through the use of these melodic learning strategies allowed students to grow in many areas of language. The data suggests that

when the use of melodic learning strategies such as songs, chants, and rhymes are incorporated, language learning becomes more enjoyable as well as internalized. Melodic learning supported the literacy growth among my Kindergarten students by helping them learn about what rhyming looks and sounds like, the sounds of letters, specific vocabulary words that were unfamiliar to them, and how to read and write sight words. Over the course of just a month, their language development flourished through both oral and written means.

Chapter Five shares the conclusions and implications of this study as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications for the Field

Summary

After analyzing the data from my research, I found that my Kindergarten students demonstrated growth in various areas of language development with the use of melodic learning strategies. For four weeks, I incorporated songs, chants, and rhymes into our daily language arts curriculum. I found that students developed in the areas of rhyming, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and word recognition as well gained an increased motivation. This melodic learning approach incorporated strategies to help students read, write, and retain information with the use of rhythm.

Over the course of the study, I found that my students were beginning to understand the idea of rhyming without any explicit teaching of the concept. Using two songbooks and four nursery rhymes, we recited and sang the words each day. Those students who already had background knowledge of rhyming could identify the rhyming words. Most students were successful when asked to create their own rhyme to add to one of the books, though others required assistance. The DRA2 post test showed that the class as a whole increased their knowledge of rhyming by 20 percent. This leads me to believe that if rhyming was formally taught in addition to using these strategies, the gains in this area of language development could be even more substantial.

Additionally, students demonstrated growth in the area of vocabulary development. As the same songs were sung and nursery rhymes were introduced each

week, students questioned what certain words meant and additionally learned through reading and the use of context clues and pictures. When initially asking students what words meant, they guessed or shrugged their shoulders. After the repeated reading and singing over four weeks, students were confident with their new knowledge of vocabulary words and even used language from the songs and rhymes in writing pieces and while speaking with others.

Furthermore, the students showed great progression in phonemic awareness by the conclusion of the study. In addition to the phonics program my school district requires us to teach, I used songs, chants, and rhymes to help students begin to put together the sound-symbol relationships required to learn to read and spell. At the beginning of the study, many students struggled to identify both lower and uppercase letters as well as their sounds. After reading, singing, and chanting words, their levels of phonemic awareness drastically increased. In just a short period of time, students could now identify all letters as well as associate letters to their sounds. This was seen daily in their reading and writing, as they were able to begin to sound out words using their phonics knowledge.

Significant improvements were also seen in the area of word recognition. With this use of their learned phonemic awareness as well as melodic learning strategies, the students began to both read and spell many simple sight words throughout the study period. When songs and rhymes were read, the words were enlarged for whole-group reading, so we could point to and identify each word while reading aloud. The repeated reading allowed students to begin to recognize many words and read them not only in

these texts, but other books as well. Each time a new sight word was taught during the study, a chant was created to help students recognize and spell each word. With these chants, many students showed that they could both read and write these words. Students frequently pointed out sight words that they would find in texts as well as spelled sight words correctly in their writing without the use of a word wall or other references. In addition, students read rhymes repeatedly and with each successive reading, they could recall more words and lines independently. Students became more motivated to read and write, as they could now recognize and spell words with ease.

Lastly, in addition to these developments in the area of language, students seemed engaged and motivated through the use of melodic learning strategies. One student who never spoke, read, or wrote, came out of his shell through the use of singing and chanting each day. Students would participate and sway back and forth each time songs were sung. They chose to read nursery rhymes during their free time instead of playing. I would also hear the students chanting words and joining in with others while writing to help them spell. Often times, students would ask if we could sing a book instead of read it or I would hear them creating songs for books they were reading. During the use of the songs, chants, and rhymes, students were on task and willing to learn each day.

Conclusions

After rereading much of the literature surrounding the use of songs, chants, and rhymes in the classroom, I found that my study was beneficial to the students because it provided them with a fun and engaging way to further develop their language skills. This is necessary because these basic skills such as rhyming, vocabulary, phonemic

awareness, and word recognition are critical for emergent literacy. As previously quoted in chapter two, Susan Homan, the researcher who termed "melodic learning", stated that rhythm and tonality "can play a vital role in helping to make learning easier and more sustained" (2011, p. 3). Homan explains that this type of learning is one of the most powerful, yet underutilized methods there is. I found that my research strongly supported this idea in that the use of songs, chants, and rhymes not only motivated students to learn, but created powerful learning outcomes which showed in their student work as well as others assessments I administered.

Davies (2000) shared how through the use of music, both hemispheres of the brain are used, allowing information to be more easily retained. The overall rhyme, rhythm, and repetition can help at-risk learners recall facts. My study confirmed this as I often would hum the tune to a sight word chant when students could not read or write the word and they instantly could recall the information simply from hearing the rhythm.

Iwasaki, Rasinski, Yildirim, and Zimmerman (2013) also discussed the importance of repeated reading of songs to teach students how to track words on a page, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, word families, and fluency, as well as developing a motivation to read. The results of this study show that the repeated readings of songs and rhymes helped the students to increase many of these areas of language development, much like the researchers discussed. As I modeled how to touch the words while reading the songs and rhymes each day, I observed how many of my students learned to track the print while reading independently not only with songs and rhymes, but other books. As students were given the words to track while we were singing or reading the rhymes, they

were technically reading (Biggs, Homan, Dedrick, & Rasinski, 2008). Students also were extremely engaged and motivated to participate in reading songs and rhymes daily and these strategies helped improve their self-efficacy as readers.

Jalongo and Ribblett (1997) stated that through the use of song picture books, vocabulary is taught in a meaningful context with concrete representations of the word shown in detailed illustrations. Instead of simple flashcards to memorize vocabulary, my students were given the opportunity to see the word in written form as well as illustrated. As songs and rhymes were read over and over, students received consistent reinforcement of the words and their meanings. My assessment of vocabulary showed how the use of repeated reading of songs significantly increased students' vocabulary knowledge.

According to Buchoff (1994), chants help young children learn and remember concepts and words that they hear in literature or may encounter in print. The first day of chanting a sight word with my students was extremely memorable to me, as it took my students less than a minute of repeated chanting for them to be able to spell the word "the". This remained consistent throughout the entire study and it was then that I truly realized the power of chants for helping students retain information. My students were able to recall how to read and spell words through the use of chants in this study and their improvements in word recognition showed in their final assessments. Buchoff also discussed how even a shy child, poor speaker, or reluctant reader can develop confidence and self-expression while working with their class to contribute to chants. This was also seen in one of my shy, reluctant readers who I now often hear reciting chants with others and see participating in class more frequently (1994, p. 26). If chants were helpful for

simply recalling sight words, I can only imagine the possibilities for uses in further learning topics.

In addition, Allen (1996) wrote how nursery rhymes seem to be very mesmerizing and pleasant to young children. It is often natural for them to hear these in the early childhood years, but I found many of my students were unfamiliar with them. Those who were familiar from preschool experiences were still willing and excited to participate. These students also happened to be my highest readers and writers. As quoted in chapter two, "experiences that children have when they are taught rhymes like nursery rhymes may have an important part in their growing awareness that words and syllables can be broken into, and can be categorized by, smaller units of sound" (Maclean, Bryant, & Bradley, 1987, p. 278). I can conclude that in some aspect, their knowledge of nursery rhymes could have benefited their currently language skills and word analysis abilities, as I have seen the gains that can occur through using nursery rhymes for only a month with my Kindergarteners. Allen also discussed how using nursery rhymes is important for helping students gain phonemic awareness skills, which my students showed great improvements with throughout the course of the study.

Fisher's (2001) study discussed in chapter two found that in addition to language benefits, students who were exposed to learning with music throughout the day did less unnecessary talking in class, were often humming as they worked, and had a general excitement about school. The same is shown in the motivation of my Kindergarten students. When given free time, they would ask to read the song books or they would take out their nursery rhyme packets located in their desks. When writing, I could hear

them chanting sight words in order to recall the correct letters to write. Often times, I would hear them singing, humming, or chanting mindlessly while completing academic tasks as well as playing. This showed that the melodic learning strategies used were enjoyable and motivating for students, much like the research suggested.

All in all, the findings of my research support the current literature about the use of songs, chants, and rhymes to support language development in the classroom. The children were able to use a variety of learning methods in addition to those already used in the Kindergarten curriculum. The students learned about phonemic awareness, the sound-symbol relationships required for reading, and the way words can sound the same and rhyme. They also were able to read and write simple words that are used frequently in books. The students added to their vocabulary knowledge by learning the language of nursery rhymes and using pictures to correlate to text. Each of these findings, aligned with research about language development, share that rhyming, reading common words, and using rich language and vocabulary are linked to reading achievement in successive grades (Smith, 2000).

Limitations

The biggest limitation to this study was the time available to conduct research. As the Kindergarten curriculum requires many elements of learning for such young students, it was often difficult to find time to implement the melodic learning methods. As the use of songs, chants, and rhymes are not suggested in the curriculum, there was a consistent time restraint to complete these tasks as well as keep data on growth. This affected the study because I would often be so limited for time that I would have to pull

students out of centers or playtime to individually assess student knowledge and growth in the various areas of language discussed.

In addition to the limitations of time each day, the overall time frame of the study was also a limitation. The study was conducted over a period of four weeks from the beginning to the end of November. During the month of November, there are always many days off of school for holidays and other events. This limited time that students were given to focus on certain songs, chants, and rhymes as well as limited my data collection. In order to see more growth in areas of language, I feel that a much longer span of time would have been beneficial. If given more time to conduct research, the researcher could envelop the students in more songs, chants, and nursery rhymes to further this learning. I feel that in this short period of time, it was difficult to see true growth in many areas. The growth of language certainly does not occur in one month, and if the study were conducted over a longer period of time, the results may become even more accurate and confirming.

Implications for the Field

After collecting and analyzing data throughout the course of this study about the use of melodic learning in a Kindergarten class, I realized that there are areas of the study that could be further investigated. One area that could be further researched is what would happen to the results of the study if it were completed over a longer period of time. If similar research were to be conducted in a classroom, the results may change even more if given a whole semester or year to collect data. This would truly allow the researcher to watch the child develop and track progress of language development

throughout a longer period of time. With this, more visible results may be seen in both oral and written language skills.

Another implication for future researchers is the ethnicity or gender of a student participating in similar research. During my study, I wondered if singing, rhyming, and chanting were more engaging to males or females, or if it even made a difference at all. As I worked with a diverse group of students, I also wondered if melodic learning could be examined as a form of culturally responsive practice. I often noticed certain students who enjoyed participating and engaging in songs, chants, and rhymes more than the rest of the class, so teachers who conduct future research may want to focus on the engagement and success of specific genders or ethnicities to determine if melodic learning affects specific students more than others.

In addition, further research could focus on students of a different age. As this study took place in a Kindergarten classroom in an elementary school setting, further research could be done on the use of melodic learning with students at different grade levels. Many research articles found on the areas of songs, chants, and rhymes worked with humans of all ages, from preschool to adults. The use of melodic learning may be beneficial in ways to many types of learners. Future researchers may find different results using students in different grades and compare to the information found in this study.

In summary, the use of melodic learning in the Kindergarten classroom can help students increase rhyming abilities, phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, word recognition, and motivation. This study suggests that teachers should provide students

for opportunities to learn using songs, chants, and rhymes incorporated into the curriculum. If teachers can provide these types of opportunities to learn in addition to the standard methods of teaching, students could drastically increase their language development. As language development is necessary for students at this age to become emergent readers, these methods could not only motivate students to learn and participate, but encourage this growth in a meaningful and fun way.

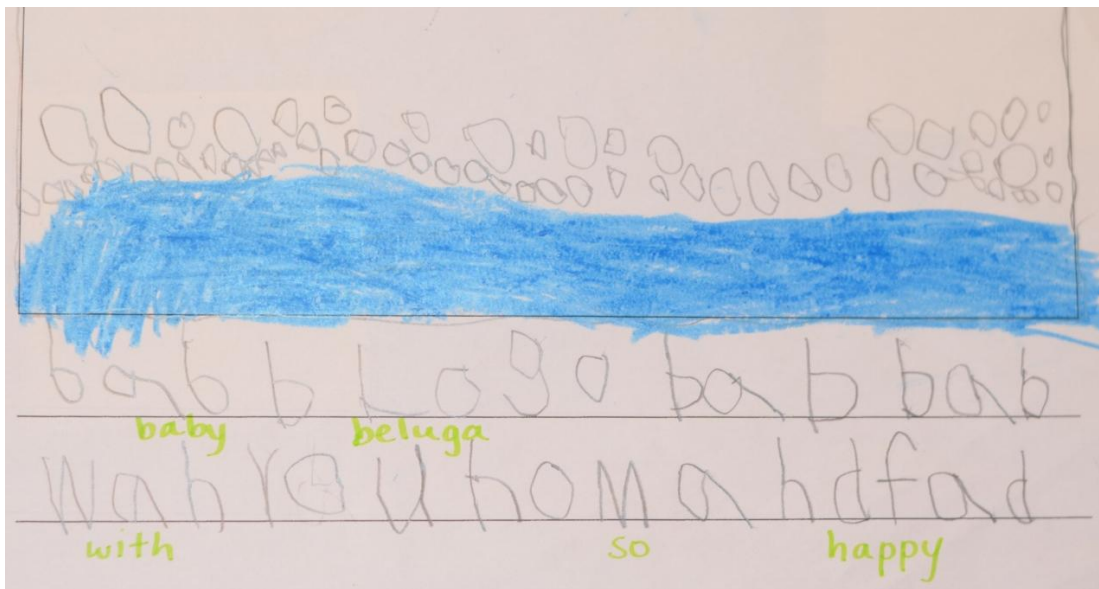
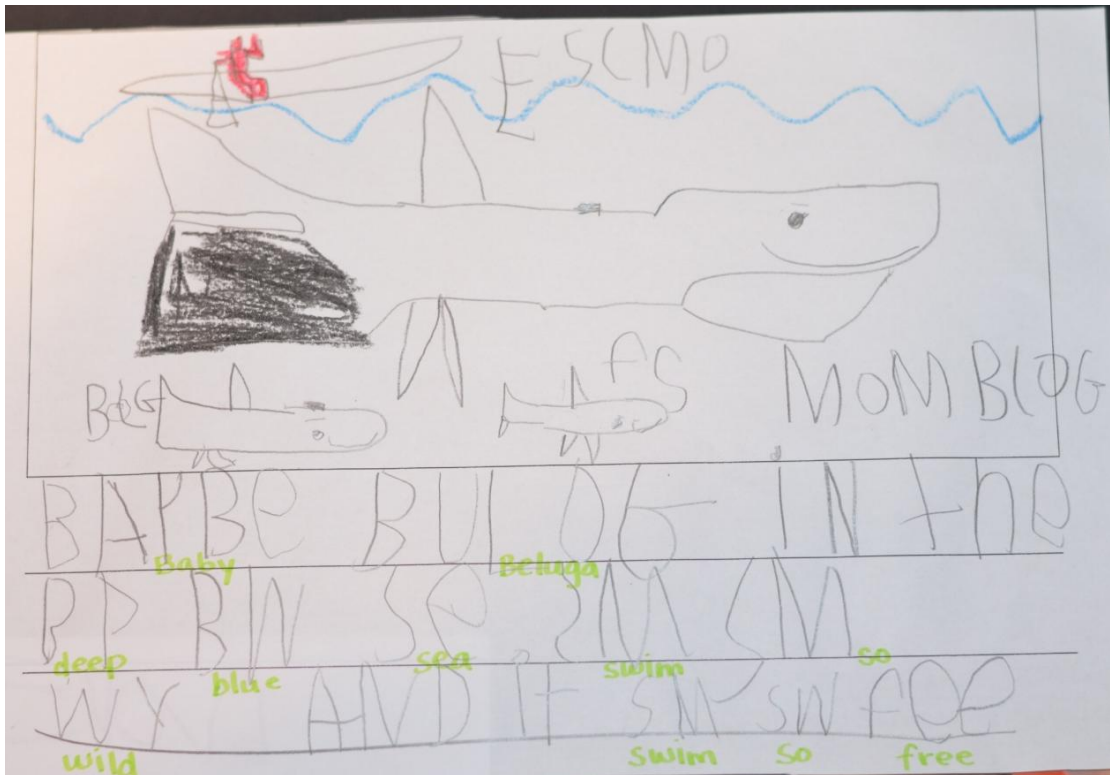
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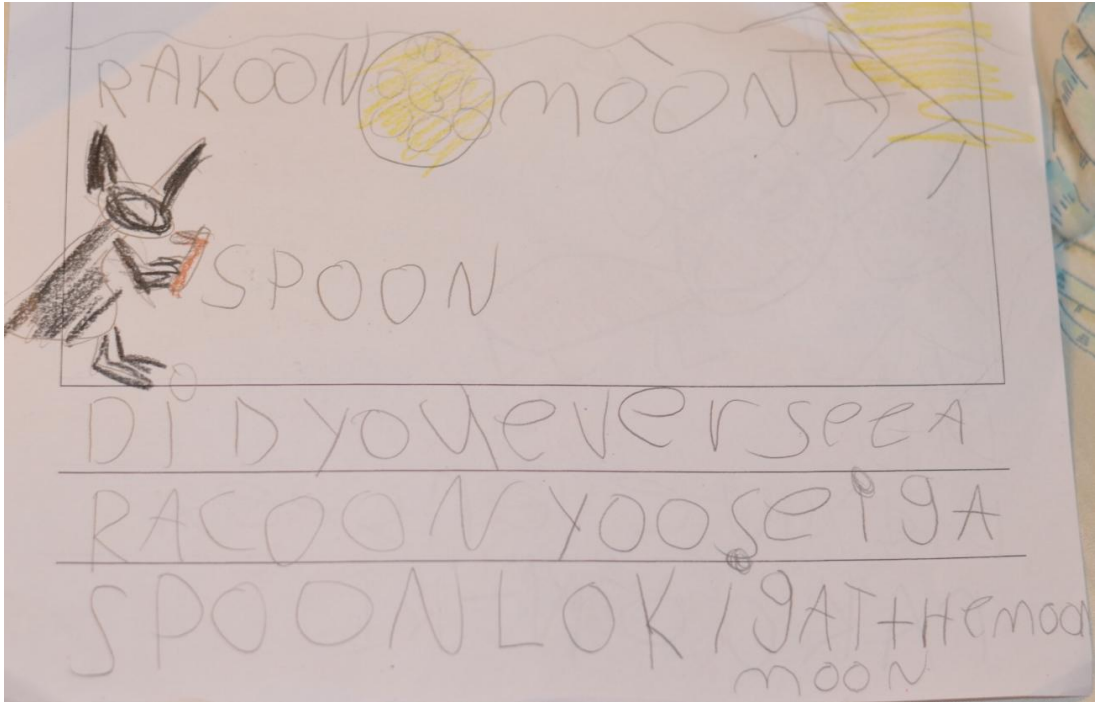
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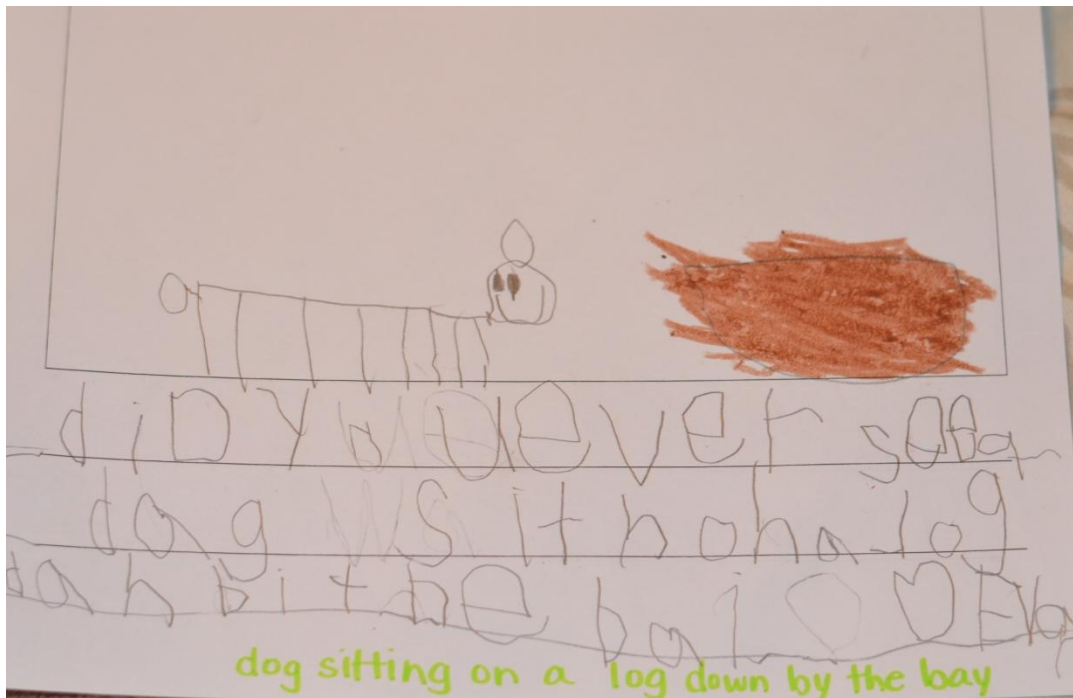
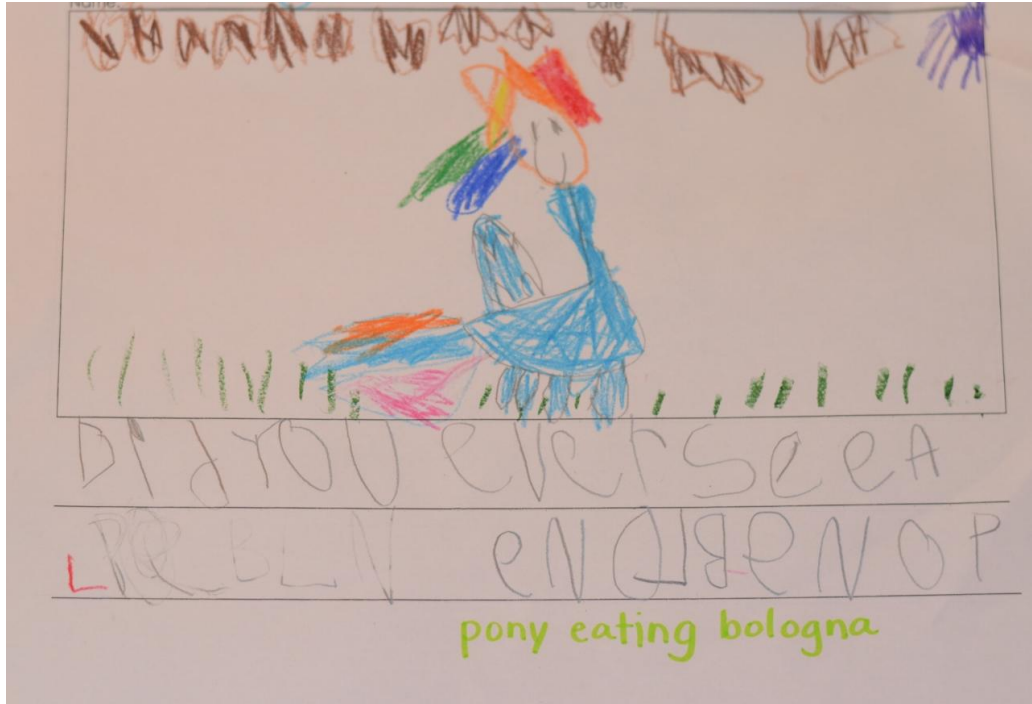
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Appendix A

Student Work Samples







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Appendix B

Students at Work

