

## *Language, Literacy, and Singing*

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Studies from around the world have shown that singing is a powerful practice that can promote a variety of positive benefits including bonding and trust between people (e.g., as parents and children, seniors and children), problem solving, socialization, creativity, physical development, and language and literacy development, to name only a few (e.g., Booch & Hachiva, 2004; Campbell, 2010). Heydon, as the theme leader of the Intergenerational Understanding sub-theme of the *Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing* (AIRS) research project, explores wellbeing and singing as a multimodal literacy practice in intergenerational curricula (funded by a SSHRC Major Collaborative Research Initiative; Annabel Cohen, principal investigator) (e.g., Heydon & O'Neill, in press; McKee & Heydon, 2014). She, therefore, initiated this special issue to further illuminate the relationship between language, literacy, and singing and pay tribute to the SSHRC-funded interdisciplinary project.

The papers in this special issue are based in a variety of perspectives and methodologies that focus on language, literacy, and singing across the lifespan, and that feature both in- and out-of-school domains. The papers all provide implications for language and literacy teaching through singing by responding to this thematic question: In what ways might singing be implicated in language and literacy learning and with what effects (e.g., vocabulary building, phonological and phonemic awareness, writing and print)?

Starting off the special issue, Kari-Lynn Winters and Shelley M. Griffin's paper draws on two ethnographically-framed studies that provide rich descriptions of children's embodied music making practices in an array of situated contexts (e.g., homes, classrooms, libraries, and parent groups). These accounts exhibit the power of singing and musical experiences to enhance young children's vocabulary development, particularly lexical acquisition and semantic knowledge.

In June Countryman and Martha A. Gabriel's ethnomusicological study, they observed children's (aged 5-12) language use during non-instructional outdoor recess play at nine elementary schools in Canada. In contrast with the perception that language play is preschoolers' domain, Countryman and Gabriel recorded abundant musically-infused language play of school-aged children on K-6 playgrounds. In their language play which incorporated gestures, kinetic movements, gazes, songs, and vocalizations, the children experimented with rhythmic speech and alliteration, manipulated subtleties of pitch and duration, and orchestrated multiple modes simultaneously. Countryman and

Gabriel hence provide recommendations that can leverage children's fluency with out-of-school literacies within formal educational contexts to engage them as creative and "agentive meaning-makers" (p. 23).

Patrick D. Walton conducted an experimental study that involved a control group of kindergarten children receiving regular language and literacy programmes and a songs group where choral singing and movement were used to teach phonological skills, letter-sound knowledge, rhyming, and word reading. The major findings intimate that teaching letter-sound knowledge and medial phoneme skills through songs and movements can be more effective than regular classroom literacy practices experienced by children in the control group. Walton thus concludes that singing can be used to directly and systematically teach key pre-reading skills and word reading.

Amanda P. Montgomery and Kathryn M. Smith's action research study explores the role that a collaborative, school-based family literacy programme featuring song-based picture books played in supporting preschoolers' early literacy acquisition. Major findings relate that the collaborative school-based family literacy sessions helped forge reciprocal school-home connections to build a shared understanding of singing and emergent literacy, which in turn enhanced parents' self-efficacy for supporting emergent literacy through shared singing and reading. Parents' and guardians' documentation of children's engagement with singing and song-based books also exemplifies the "empowerment of literacy self through multiple meaning making" (p. 43).

The findings of the papers coincidentally relate the opportunities of language and literacy acquisition within multimodal ensembles (e.g., singing, viewing, gesturing, and moving) in both formal and informal educational contexts. The papers, in their unique ways, contribute to the existent literature on the affordances of orchestrating singing, musicking, and language and literacy practices.

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