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Introduction

Wprowadzenie

Reading With the Ears and Dancing With Words: The Melodic Fusion of Literature, Music, and Literacy Learning in Early Childhood

From East to West and North to South, no countries in the world do not have lullabies or nursery rhymes. These are the infused forms of music and literature that the humans are exposed to right from birth or as embryos. The interplay between music and literature is a significant cultural phenomenon that has shaped human expression and communication across space and time. Both forms of expression offer rich avenues for emotional expression, storytelling, and cultural transmission. In educational settings, particularly in primary education, the integration of literature and music offers a powerful tool for cognitive and language development, cultural literacy, and emotional growth (Hallam, 2010). This introductory essay examines the relationship between literature in music and music in literature and discusses how these interactions contribute to language and literacy development and the broader educational experience of young children.

Literature in Music

Literature in music refers to the practice of setting words – poetry, prose, or narrative texts – to music, creating an art form that merges linguistic and musical expression. This practice is evident in numerous genres, including nursery rhymes, children's

songs, operas, and musical theater, where literature is inseparable from music. In the context of young children's language development, literature in music has particular relevance. Lullabies, nursery rhymes and chants are some of the earliest exposures to language for children. These musical forms often feature repetitive patterns, rhythmic structures, and rhyming words that help children develop phonological awareness – one of the foundational skills necessary for reading and writing. For example, the repetition of sounds in a rhyme like “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” not only captures a child's attention but also reinforces their understanding of sound patterns, which is critical for later language acquisition (Goswami & Bryant, 2016).

Music enhances the emotional and mnemonic impact of the literary content, making it easier for children to internalize vocabulary, narrative structures, and linguistic patterns (Gardiner et al., 1996). Songs and rhymes also introduce children to a multitude of literary devices albeit in simple forms such as alliteration and onomatopoeia (e.g., in *Baa Baa Black Sheep*), metaphor (e.g., in *You are my sunshine*), simile (e.g., *Its fleece as white as snow* in *Mary had a little lamb*), repetition (e.g., in *Row, row, row your boat*) and imagery (e.g., in *Twinkle, twinkle little stars*). Through this exposure, children begin to grasp Abstract concepts, develop their vocabulary, and gain early literacy skills in an engaging and enjoyable way.

Music in Literature

The most distinctive features of music are rhythm, melody and timbre. Modern concept of literature also includes multimodal digital forms such as films and music videos. In these forms, music, no doubt, plays a crucial role in story-telling (Ngo & Unsworth, n.d.). Literature in the form of poems and short stories are also extremely musical. You can almost dance with the words and walk short and steady steps (/ short rest; // long rest) with the beats (*) as you read *The Gruffalo* by Julia Donaldson aloud:

*A *mouse/ took a *stroll/ through the *deep/ *dark/ *wood//.*
*A *fox/ saw the *mouse/ and the *mouse/ *looked/ *good//.*

The up and down pitch contour (or intonation) of the reader's voice creates the melody of the line, particularly when the story reaches its climax. The climax in *The Very Cranky Bear* by Nick Bland would be read with Rise-Fall (R/F) melody and fast pace (no rest) to express dramatic moments; with tense, breathy and vibrato timbre to vocally represent the characters' fright; and with long rests (// // //) in the middle of a sentence or clause to create suspense.

*Zebra, Lion and Moose ran *out and Bear was *right (R) behind them// (F).
They hid behind the *bushes// // where they hoped // // he *wouldn't// // * find them//.*

The timbre in the reader's voice provides children with an additional auditory cue that helps them follow the narrative stages. Calm slow voice is usually used for the Orientation stage, easing the reader into the exposition of story. Dramatic voice as in the Cranky Bear example above provides hints of tension and rising actions. Happy and relaxed voice can signify the falling actions and resolution (Ngo et al., 2022). This musicality in literature and literature reading assists children in developing prosody, the rhythm and intonation of speech, which is the demonstration of children's Reading Comprehension and a key element of Reading Fluency.

The current journal issue, *Literature and music in children's education*, is among a very few international fora that brings scholars from East and West, North and South together for discussion of this very interesting matter in language, literature and literacy education in primary years. 'Reading with the ears and dancing with words' does not sound illogical at all. It is because we can hear music when reading literature and we can dance with words in music.

References

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