

C is for Cookie!
The Effects of Music on an Emergent Group of Readers

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Background Information

Description of my teaching context

“A young child, a fresh uncluttered mind, a world before him-to what treasures will you lead him?”

-Gladys M. Hunt

I am an intern in a full day kindergarten classroom at Ferguson Township Elementary in the State College Area School District. Since I am teaching in kindergarten, I am very cautious when placing my students into categories and groups based on ability levels. They have not been exposed to the school atmosphere long enough to develop these types of labels.

When thinking about my class in room 6 at Ferguson Township Elementary, I think of 23 very different people. My kindergarten class is comprised of students with various cognitive levels as well as different behavior characteristics. When I split the class up by gender there are 12 boys and 11 girls.

I believe that there are three distinct cognitive levels that exist in this classroom; the high, average, and low cognitive levels. About eight of these 23 students are at a high cognitive level, four are girls and four are boys. These eight students have an easier time with their class work than the other students and about four of these students will require extra attention because they finish so much earlier than their peers.

Roughly ten of my students are at an average cognitive level. They complete the work that is given to them in a timely manner; however, they do not go above and beyond what is asked of them. This group consists of five girls and five boys. The remaining five students in my class are slightly below average, when it comes to cognitive levels. These students will attempt to do the work that is given to them, but need more time than normal

to get things done. They need more attention than other students and constantly need to be redirected back on task. This group consists of four boys and one girl.

It is interesting that the cognitive levels have very little correlation with the behaviors of these students I have just described. The degree of students' maturity levels are at two extremes in this classroom. There are students who are very mature for kindergarten and then there are those who frequently need to be redirected when it comes to their behavior. I would say that there are about ten students in my class who are at this higher maturity level. This group of ten is made up of five girls and five boys. These students handle themselves quite well. They get along with all the other students in the class and adapt well to new situations.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are approximately 13 students who are below this maturity level. This group consists of eight boys and five girls. This group has a tendency of becoming easily distracted by other students around them. They seem to not be accustomed to the classroom environment, and because of this they are not used to sharing the attention with their peers.

There are quite a few students in my kindergarten classroom who I consider leaders of the class. Some of my students take control over situations, try to influence others, and are looked up to by their peers. They are the nonconformists of the classroom. I would say there are about four students in the class that would fit this profile; two of the students are girls and two of them are boys.

On the other hand, there are also a few students that I consider very quiet and anxious to conform. This group of students is comprised of eight kindergarteners. Of this eight there are five girls and three boys. In the beginning of the year, these students had a harder time making friends and fitting in with their peers.

In addition to these groups there are some other challenges in our classroom. One of these challenges is working with students who require learning support. Because I teach at such a young level, the students are just beginning to get tested for these things. As of right now, there are approximately six students in the class that would benefit from learning support. These students are struggling academically and seem to always be one step behind their peers. All of these students but one are boys.

Another category that needs to be considered when looking at my classroom is ADD/ADHD. There are only two students who have actually been diagnosed for this disorder; however, I believe that there are some students who will need to be tested in the near future for this problem. When looking at my class this would include two more students.

We also have students who will require emotional support when the time comes. Like ADD/ADHD, there is already one student who will leave for part of the day to go to counseling. In addition to this student, I believe that three other peers can benefit from this type of counseling.

Along with some of these challenges we find students who also need support but in a different way. These students are the gifted ones who get their work done before everyone else. These students need to be challenged in other ways to keep them stimulated and engaged. I believe that there are quite a few students of this type in my classroom. Approximately seven students would fit into this category. Of these seven, three are girls and four are boys.

Out of all the categories I just described, my inquiry is based around four students who work at a level slightly lower than on grade level, have a very low maturity level, depend on teachers to get assignments completed, conform to others, and require learning

support. Even though they seem to have the most struggles when it comes to our classroom, this group works very well together.

Profiles of members in Emergent Reading Group

**Names of group members have been changed for their protection.*

Steven

-Steven is the youngest of three children. He is a very active boy. He has a very short attention span. He needs constant stimulation and if you do not give this stimulation to him he will create his own. He was a huge factor in planning most of my reading lessons because I knew that I would have to keep the group very active at all times. Steven was a very interesting student to observe and to include in my inquiry. In the beginning of this semester when I interviewed Steven he had a great attitude towards school; however he wanted nothing to do with his new reading group. He did not consider the other boys in his group his friends and because of this, he did not like going to his reading group. Week by week, I noticed a difference in the way that Steven interacted with the other boys of the group. He slowly began to include them in his play at both recess and choice time. Another interesting part of teaching Steven was that he wanted nothing to do with learning his letters. In fact, when I would work with him during the beginning of the year he would try everything to get out of working with me. Now he can't wait to come and see which letter we will explore. Steven also has a speech impediment. He is currently seeing a speech therapist to help him work on the way he forms his words and also for language development. Steven also is assisted two days a week with the rest of this group by an Instructional Support Teacher who is helping them learn their letters. Steven also does everything as quickly as he can. It does not seem as though he is completing activities to be

the first one done, rather this is just the pace he knows how to work at and it is still a challenge to get him to slow down.

Casey

-Casey is a middle child, but seems so much younger than all the other students in our class. During the beginning of the year, Casey barely knew any of his letters. When we would assess him, he would give us random guesses at letters. When I first started to work with Casey he was very nervous whenever we did any kind of singing. Casey's family is very musical and I believe that this fear of singing may come from a learned behavior from when he was little. Casey was able to identify the letters in his name when I first started to work with him, however every other letter in the alphabet was unknown to him. Casey also didn't want to really learn about letters. He rarely remembered the letters that we had been working on and would give up quickly. In the beginning of my research, Casey would be easily distracted during reading. He would be on a totally different page than we were or he wouldn't even open his book. It took a few weeks to get Casey to learn to follow directions and to keep up with the rest of the group. Casey and Steven quickly became good friends within our group of readers.

Adam

- Adam is the middle child along with his twin brother. The boys were born prematurely. Adam is a repeating kindergartner and because of this he has an IEP for this school year. In the beginning of the year, it was very frustrating to work with Adam because he had no short term memory. My mentor teacher did a general test with all kindergarten students in the beginning of the year and he could barely recall any letters from the alphabet. He was able to isolate sounds in words; however he had no clue as to what letter made that sound. Throughout the year, we would go over letters together and within seconds he would forget

what we had just worked so hard on. He is the social butterfly of our class and can talk to any one person for hours if allowed. Adam has loved his reading group since the beginning of the semester and has always had a very positive attitude about everything we do in school. Adam loved the idea of singing during reading groups. In fact, Adam asks every week to learn a new song. He was also very interested in learning more about letters when I initially interviewed him. Adam is a hard worker and tries to follow directions to the best of his ability. Adam goes almost every day to either an instructional support teacher or occupational therapist to work on various parts of his learning. Many times during reading, Adam has been pulled out to go work with someone else.

David

-David is one of the older children in his family. In the beginning of the year, David was a very quiet student that kept to himself. It was a challenge in the beginning of the semester to try and get him to say anything at all during reading group. He had very low confidence when it came to reading or knowing letters and his defense against that was to just say nothing at all. Slowly the other teachers and I built up his confidence, and now he is the first one during reading to respond and know the answers. Now, we see that he has become comfortable with his surroundings in the classroom and is more willing to participate in large group discussions. In the beginning of the year, David was assessed on what letters he knew as well. Out of all four boys in his group, David is the strongest when it comes to what was known prior to my involvement. However, he was not very strong at isolating sounds within words or naming the letter that made certain sounds. When I initially interviewed David for my reading group, he wasn't so sure about singing. He knew he liked to sing with the entire class, but he didn't want to sing by himself. I found that with extra help from me, David has developed a terrific memory and loves to sing the new songs that we learn each

week. Out of all four boys in the group, David seems to be the strongest. He is very good at following directions. He has also established three new friendships with the other students in his group because of reading. It is great to see them find each other at recess to play with.

What led me to this particular study?

"I believe it is the right of all children to sing. Music enriches people's lives and we must do all we can to appreciate the joy of music."

--Alfred Brendel

Last year at this very moment, if you would have told me that I would be using music as a main way for my students to learn their letters and begin to read, I would not have believed you. I remember being terrified to sing in front of my peers in my music education class at Penn State. I thought if I could not sing in front of people that I knew, how in the world would I sing for my students?

All of these feelings and uncertainties completely changed when I was placed in a kindergarten classroom for my internship in the PDS. The very first day of school I remember dancing around the room to "Bop till you drop" and singing my heart out to these 23 new strangers. Music brought smiles to my students' faces. It made them laugh and it made learning fun for them. However, I still only would sing when my mentor was there to guide me through it. I knew it was having a positive effect, but I was not ready to take it on by myself.

When December rolled around, I knew that it was time to begin to think about where I might be headed for my inquiry project. Many ideas filled my mind but I continued to be reminded each day how my students were affected by music and singing in our classroom. At my second goal setting conference, my mentor asked me if I would like to take on the challenge of working with our emergent group of readers. I was certainly up for the

challenge, but I didn't want to just teach them word for word out of the book and bore these students out of their minds. I knew that I had a big job ahead of myself, being that the group was comprised of four boys each with very different needs. I think my biggest challenge was that these were four boys that were not necessarily the best of friends in our classroom.

My mentor let me get a feel for this group by sitting in with her while she taught them about the letter J. As I sat there watching the four students I noticed many things about this group. The first thing that I noticed was that they need to learn reading in an environment where there are minimal distractions. The reason that I came to this conclusion was that during this time with my mentor, the students were trying to learn about the letter J, but at the same time another group was taking part in free exploration very near to this group. They were more interested in what their neighboring groups were doing than what they had to do. Another thing that I observed was that I had to think of a way for all of the students to have an equal opportunity to participate within the group. On this first day with the group, I observed one student taking charge. He would answer all the questions before anyone else had the chance. This in turn made his peers bored and less interested in competing with him to be heard. A final observation was that this group became bored easily. If they spend more than five minutes on one particular thing, then it better be very exciting or else they will not stay focused for much longer.

As I stated earlier, I was up for the challenge but where do I go from here? I brainstormed for the next week on ways to make this time enjoyable and worthwhile for these students. Once again the idea of bringing music into this part of their day entered my mind and it finally stuck. I previously heard that music affects a certain part of a person's

brain and may help them remember things. I wanted to explore this area more and see if music would help my students learn their letters and their sounds.

Wonderings and Questions

Because of the challenge that this group presented to me, I decided that I should make this into my inquiry project. Therefore, my research question was “What effect will music have on the development of struggling readers in kindergarten?” I also had sub-wonderings that helped influence my choice to pursue this project. These sub-wonderings are as follows:

- **What types of music will the students respond to best?**
- **Will music benefit these students in any other way, other than with their language and reading development?**
- **Will all the students benefit or will only a few of the students gain from this experience and if so why?**
- **Will the students respond to this form of teaching in a positive way and want to participate?**

How is this connected to what other’s think or know about this topic?

“Music and language are closely intertwined. Hence, music may be used to teach children language and language development.”
--Childhood Education, Winter 1994

According to Laura Woodall and Brenda Ziembski from the “songs for teaching” website, “The successful acquisition of reading and writing in early childhood depends on a solid background in oral language skills.” What better way to gain knowledge and

confidence in oral language than through music? Oral language is an interactive and social process, and music is a natural way for children to experience rich language in an enjoyable way.

According to Dianne W. Park of “The Mozart Connection”, researchers across the nation have conducted studies to justify the importance of music in a child's life. Recent research suggests that listening to the music of Mozart increases spatial scores of high school and college students on IQ tests; this has been called "The Mozart Effect." Spatial understanding is what you need to complete a puzzle. You need to be able to see how the pieces fit together. Well-developed spatial intelligence is the ability to see the visual world accurately, to form mental images of physical objects, and to recognize variations in objects. Spatial intelligence is crucial in activities like higher brain functions of mathematics, music, and chess. Researchers at the University of California at Irvine have found that simply listening to the classical music of Mozart can enhance spatial reasoning performance.

Young children seem to be naturally “wired” for sound and rhythm (Woodall & Ziembroski 2004). Besides providing enjoyment, music can play an important role in language and literacy development. Strong social bonds are encouraged through music and songs beginning in preschool. Toddlers can begin to experiment with grammatical rules and various rhyming patterns in songs and other written text.

Establishing a sense of rhythm can be used to increase a student’s awareness of rhyming patterns and alliteration in other areas of reading and writing. Through music, memory skills can be improved, and auditory discrimination increased (Chong & Gan 1997). Music can focus the mind on the sounds being perceived and promote learning through an interactive process. It is important in teaching early childhood students to be

conscious of auditory and discrimination skills. Music and songs help increase these listening skills in a fun, relaxed manner. Listening skills are key in singing, language and expressive movement, and later reading and writing (Wolf, 1992).

Music has always been a way for children to remember stories and learn about the world around them. Using music as a stimulus can affect one's emotions and make information easier to remember (Woodall & Ziembroski 2004). When most people learn the alphabet for the first time, they learn it by singing their ABC's. To this day, when I have to think of anything in alphabetical order, I catch myself singing the ABC's to myself.

Not only can music help improve literacy and raise test scores, it also creates an environment that is conducive to learning. It can reduce stress, increase interest, and set the stage for listening and learning. The similarities between literacy acquisition and musical development are many. Therefore, teaching that combines music with language arts instruction can be the most effective (Davies, 2000). Furthermore, it is important for emergent readers to experience many connections between literacy in language, music and in print.

Based on these findings, it is obvious that teachers should use music when teaching reading to their students. Throughout this entire semester, I have incorporated some type of music into my emergent readers' reading time and have seen huge improvements in their understanding. I have also noticed a calming environment when playing music in my classroom. Whenever my students are writing in their journals or working independently on something, I try to play classical music in the background and it has a profound effect on their work environment. For example, if you were to enter my classroom in the morning during our "kidwriting" time, you would see all the students working at a table on their own

stories. When I don't play music during this time, the students are out of their seat socializing with their peers or just not doing the task at hand. However, when I do play classical music in the background, a certain mood is set for writing and the students get right to work and remain in their seats hard at work until it is time to stop. This is just one example out of many of how music can be used in the classroom.

My Inquiry Plan

What I did to carry out the inquiry in my classroom

"A master can tell you what he expects of you. A teacher, though awakens your own expectations. --Patricia Neal

I understand the importance of planning a well-balanced day for my students. Their day includes child-centered activities that encourage the use of play and imagination. My mentor teacher created a very welcoming and enjoyable room right from the beginning of the year that allowed for the students to feel comfortable expressing themselves in their own special way.

Throughout most of the year, during the morning centers, I was stationed at a center on a carpet where I would read with the students. This center offered the students many different choices as to what activity they wanted to get involved in. However, it was too busy, in my opinion, to run a center in this location in which the students needed to concentrate on me and their task for the day. (See Appendix C.1)

After evaluating my options for the second semester, I came up with the idea of moving my teaching area to the very back of our classroom, where we were fortunate enough to have an extra room. This room was usually used for computer exploration and building with blocks, but for two days out of our week, I was able to transform it into my own teaching space. (See Appendix C.2)

In this special area, I was able to have my student's full attention. This space also offered me a lot more room to be as creative as possible. I decided to break-up the area into two sections, one section for seat work, and one section for carpet work. This worked out great because the students knew that when we were working at the tables it was time to work hard and concentrate. And when we went to the carpet area, we could be a little bit more relaxed and enjoy our imaginative minds.

The main thing that I did to carry out my inquiry was to change the atmosphere of where the learning would be taking place. This area greatly helped my inquiry research, in my opinion, because the group of students that I focused my inquiry around were much more capable of concentrating in this environment, than they were back in the classroom. My group and I were also able to create an alphabet of the letters we were learning and add them to the walls in this area of the classroom. (See appendix C.3 and C.4)

The next thing that I needed to do was see where my students were at in terms of learning their letters and sounds and what they thought about music. I decided that I needed to design a survey to give to my students. The purpose of this survey was to see what my students thought about music. I decided because of the age of my students to survey them by using a happy face scale. I drew three different faces on a white board. The first face was a happy face and represented – Yes, I like this activity and I enjoy doing it often. The second face was an Ok face. This face represented – I like doing the activity sometimes, but there are times that I don't like doing it. And the third face was a sad face. This face represented – No, I do not like doing this activity. It was very easy for the students to point to a face and then start to talk about how they felt about the activity. It helped them start a conversation with me. I also chose to give the survey to the entire class

rather than just the four students in my group. This way I had something to compare my inquiry group's answers to. (see Appendix A)

I chose to use the words singing and music instead of just music. I decided to do this because I did not want to confuse my students. They already have a special that we call music and I wanted to be clear that this was not what I was referring to. The questions that I chose to ask the students were as follows:

1. How do you feel about school?
2. How do you feel about singing and music?
3. Do you think singing can help you learn?
4. Do you like to come to your sticker group?
5. Do you like to learn how to use letters?
6. Do you like learning about letters?
7. Can you tell me all the letters in your 1st and last name?

The first question was asked because I wanted to see if this had any effect on why the students acted the way they did in their groups? I know that this question could have been a totally different inquiry in itself so this was the only question that tapped into this part of the students' life.

The third question was asked because I wanted to know what they thought about music and singing. I wanted to know if they thought it would help them and if so how. In the fourth question, I chose to ask them about their sticker groups. Their sticker groups are what we call their guided reading groups. These groups are only used twice a week and are different from the other groups that they are in. I chose to ask this question because like question 1 it may help me see why they act a certain way in their groups.

Questions five and six were asked to help me see who was interested in learning about letters and what they liked to learn about them. Finally, question seven was used to see where the students are at as of right now in their learning and understanding. I wanted to see if they could repeat the letters in their name from memory or if they needed to use their nametags. If they did in fact use their nametags, then I was curious to see which letters in their name they couldn't recognize.

Since I had to submit weekly journals as an intern, I chose to work this part of my workload into my inquiry. Each week after I met with my group of young readers I decided to write my reflection on how our meetings went. My journals revolved around what went right, what was effective, what really didn't have any effect, and what student's said. It also helps me to sort my thoughts by writing things down and so I decided to collect field notes that I briefly would jot down after a meeting with my group or after I noticed something extraordinary throughout our day.

I also think that what the students actually put on paper and complete themselves is great proof for my cause. And to see if what I was teaching them was actually effective, I collected their work to examine later on in the inquiry process.

The next aspect of my inquiry that I carried out was to select what types of music the students would respond to best. I didn't know how to incorporate music into my reading group at first because I was not sure which type of music to work with. There are so many different genres of music out there, how was I to know which one would work best? I decided the best way to figure out the answer to this wondering was to experiment in the beginning with a variety of music.

The first type of music that I experimented with was instrumental. I decided that since we were exploring the letter 'S' it would be a good idea to explore the sound the letter

'S' made with sandpaper block instruments. After talking about this letter, I passed out sandpaper blocks to each student. The students were then instructed to practice rubbing the sandpaper together to create the /s/ sound. They seemed to really enjoy playing with these blocks, but they also became very rambunctious and hard to work with.

The next type of music that I chose to experiment with was instrumental music playing in the background of my reading group lessons. The students were definitely a lot calmer when this type of music was playing in the background; however, they were still not learning their letters.

The third type of music that I chose to experiment with was music with lyrics about different letters. The book I chose to use was a Scholastic book entitled, "Sing Along and Learn the Alphabet". It had great lyrics to simple songs that were included on cassette tape. We started with the letter B. The name of the song was "It had to be B". It was a catchy tune that the students picked up right away. In fact as they were leaving my reading group center, they were still singing or humming the tune to themselves. After this strong reaction, I knew that I had to stick with using music with lyrics for my inquiry. My findings were solidified the next day when I briefly quizzed the group on the letter we had learned the previously day. When all the boys answered correctly I knew that I was on the right track.

Once the music aspect of my inquiry was selected, I needed to know if the music was in fact having an effect. I had been implementing music into this center for about five weeks and I knew that the students had become used to this part of our day. I decided that it was important to see what would happen if music was not present for one of the weeks. During the sixth week, I chose to teach word for word out of the teaching guide; no music involved. It was extremely interesting to see the students become bored with the book and

what the lesson involved. They continued to ask me throughout the entire lesson, “when are we going to learn the Gg song?” It literally broke my heart to have to watch them struggle through the G lesson but it was great to have them so eager to learn the new song the next week.

I knew from this part of my inquiry that whether or not the music was having an effect on their learning, it was definitely having a positive effect on their attitude toward school. They enjoyed the music and they were excited to sing a new song.

Procedures within the reading group

Each week, two out of the five days of our week were dedicated to guided reading groups. Within these guided reading groups the students in our class had the opportunity to work with four teachers at different centers. This atmosphere allowed my reading group to not only sing with me, but also participate in a lot of hands-on learning with other teachers. I chose to implement a lot of activities that would keep my group continuously busy. I did this because of the observations I made of this group in the beginning of the year. As stated earlier, this group had a very short attention span. They needed to constantly be stimulated or else they would create their own stimulation.

Some of the activities that they did at these different centers were:

- an ‘S’ hunt around the school
- A balloon popping contest to work with the letter ‘B’ and the sound /b/
- A hands-on rock sorting activity for the letter ‘R’
- A musical hat activity as a review for all of the letters.

Along with these other activities, this group also came to my center to sing. The first thing that I had the students do when they came back to my center was try to get them to think about words that went along with that particular letter. For example, when we learned the letter 'D', we talked a lot about dogs, daisies, and dirt. The next thing that we did was read an emergent reading book that examined the letter more closely. Then, I would make sure that the students understood the book cover to cover. Finally, I would call them over to the carpet to learn our new letter song. We would practice the song at least three times each week.

How I collected Data

I collected data in many different ways. The first way was by giving the students in my reading group a pre and post survey. These were very helpful because they showed me where the students thinking was prior to my research and then again after my research. It was also interesting to look back at how the students used to think about music and singing and compare those answers to the new ones. (See Appendix A)

The next way that I chose to collect data was by providing my supervisor with a list of things to look for as she observed my reading group lessons. This piece of data was very useful because it gave me a more objective perspective to my inquiry. It was hard for me to teach the lesson and take notes, but when my supervisor was able to take these notes for me I had something to look back on after the lesson. (See Appendix B)

The third way that I chose to collect data was by journaling. Each week after my guided reading group lesson, I would sit down and try to remember as many things about the lesson as I could. I would make a list of the positive things as well as the negative things

and then write a journal based on those lists. These were very beneficial for me because they helped me sort my thoughts after a lesson. (See Appendix D)

Along with all these methods of data collection, I also would write small notes to myself when I noticed one of the students from this group using the things that they learned that week. For example, in kindergarten, the students learn their colors by making color books. When they are done making these books, they come to show them to me and read them with me. For the most part, the students in the class memorize the catchy song that goes along with the color and then get to take them home. However, the emergent readers in our room, would normally struggle with these books and only be able to recognize one or two letters in the books. By the end of my inquiry project, the students in this emergent group were reading all the letters and some words in their “Black books”. This is the type of information that I would make notes to myself about and then later place into my inquiry notebook.

Data Analysis

It was rather easy to analyze the data that I had collected for my inquiry project. First, I reread all my journals, notes, and survey results (pre and post) and then compared them half way through my inquiry and then again at the end. As I compared all of my data I would look for similarities. What I mean by this is that if one student seemed to not quite understand one of the letters, I would look to see if this was the only student who had this problem, or if there were others who also seemed to misunderstand. And then I looked to see why this may have occurred. It was clear that the music was having a positive effect on the students’ learning. They were developing a better understanding for the letters of the alphabet. They were remembering simple things that before they would forget easily.

From this analysis I identified several things that I learned from my inquiry project on music. I outlined the things that I learned and provided evidence for each of these claims.

What I Learned from my Inquiry

“Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not. This is the first lesson to be learned.

--Thomas Henry Huxley

Claims

Claim 1: Music can promote literacy in the classroom

Evidence 1: Based on the observations that I made during my group’s guided reading time, I believe that music does promote literacy. I believe this because the students in the beginning of the semester were not able to successfully recognize many letters of the alphabet, let alone the ones in their name. However, later in the semester, after I implemented music into our reading group, the students were remembering more letters and starting to learn simple words. My biggest concern was that the students were not just being exposed to music when learning their letters, but the other activities, I believe, just contributed to the powerful effects that the music had on the students. (See Appendix D)

Evidence 2: I believe that the best way to see if something is working in the classroom is to look to the students. That is why I have included my students’ work as part of the evidence to show how music has helped promote literacy and learning during our guided reading group. The first work sample was a review of the letters after about four weeks of work. These were letters that the students had not known four weeks prior to my inquiry

and now they were pointing them out all over the school building. This is why I chose to create a worksheet where they had to find the letters. (See Appendix E.1)

The second example is of a paper created by one of the students after learning all about the letter 'D'. He chose to draw a picture of a dog and then write the title, "My dog" all by himself above the drawing. (See Appendix E.2)

Evidence 3: Since I was the one doing all the teaching, it was hard for me to make observations at the same time that the students were working with me. Luckily, I had the advantage of having my supervisor observe a lot of my lessons in guided reading. This allowed me to think of questions in advance that she could look for during the lesson. Through these observations I definitely saw a great improvement in the students' understanding of letters. It also helped me see how the students confidence level became greater as the weeks went on.

The observation that I have provided shows how I wrote out questions for my supervisor to look for as I was teaching. These were based off of specific wonderings I had had the week before. (see appendix B)

Claim 2: Students enjoy learning new songs and singing

Evidence 1: When I decided to test my theory of how well the music was working in my reading group, I chose to not have music for one week to see the difference. The lesson was not as exciting and the students continued to ask me, "When do we get to sing our new song?" It nearly broke my heart to have to keep the music portion of the lesson away from them, but it was important to see if it really had been working. After this one particular

lesson, Adam approached me and said, “That lesson was okay, but can we learn the song for Gg now?”

Evidence 2: Based on the observations I have been making all semester, I learned that the students do enjoy learning new songs and singing to the music with me. I know this because of the week that I chose not to include music in the lesson. The students literally begged me to teach them a new song that week. (See Appendix D.2)

Evidence 3: This piece of evidence shows the students in my group playing musical corners. They are walking around the room to jazz music and when the music stops they need to name the letter of the corner they are in. These pictures show the students enjoying themselves and learning their letters. (See Appendix C.5)

Claim 3: Music may benefit students in other ways, other than with their language and reading development

Evidence 1: As my students come to my center they know that the people in their group need to be there and it is not their choice of who they will work with. In the beginning of this semester, my students in this group rarely hung out with one another and really did not get along in our classroom. However, as the weeks progressed I saw a huge change in the choices they made on the playground of who to play with. In fact, on one particular day Steven finished his lap around our outdoor track and said, “Have you seen Casey or Adam?” When I inquired as to why, he simply replied, “I wanted to play with them today.” I was thrilled to see the relationships that were being created through the smaller groups created in the classroom.

Evidence 2: Once again, journaling was a great way for me to sort out my thoughts after a day of reading with my inquiry group. As I stated earlier, this reading group was

particularly tough because they were not friends. I now know that this group is closer than any other group in my kindergarten classroom. Last semester, these students would not even like to stand by each other in line, but now, I see them waiting for each other to go outside for recess. This particular journal explains how the students developed friendships and a longing to belong to a group. (See Appendix D. 3)

Claim 4: All the students benefited from this experience

Evidence 1: I decided to collect some data from the group by giving them a pre and post survey about what they thought about music and learning. In the first survey there were some mixed feelings about the effects of music and how it would affect their learning. However, in the post survey all of the students except one admitted that music helped them learn their letters. I believe that the other student who still insisted that music had no effect was not interested in being surveyed. (See Appendix B)

Claim 5: The students will respond to this form of teaching in a positive way and be willing to participate

Evidence 1: When I first surveyed the group, all of the students but one, did not like the idea of singing in their reading groups. They didn't like to sing like the rest of the class did and did not want to sing in a smaller setting where it would be noticeable that they were not singing. By the end of my inquiry project, however, all of the boys except the one that did not like to be interviewed agreed that music and singing was fun to do and helping them learn their letters. In fact, a student who was terrified of singing in the beginning of the year, opened up to this small group and sang with us each week. (See Appendix B)

Conclusions and Future Directions

Concluding Thoughts

My research main question was: “What effect will music have on the development of a group of emergent readers in kindergarten?” I now believe, based on my findings and the research of others, that music has a positive affect on the development of the emergent readers in my class and possibly other emergent readers. I believe that the use of music promotes a relaxing and fun environment for learning whether it is in reading or other subjects in the classroom. I also believe now that music has a great effect on memory and retention skills. It seems as if when information is put to music or a simple catchy tune it is easier to remember.

I plan to continue to teach my reading group in the same way throughout the remainder of the semester. The students enjoy learning letters and new songs each week. They are able to retain the information that they learn this way. We are continuing to learn new letters each week and add them to our home-made alphabet. We hope to get through all the letters very soon.

I now know that I want music to play a lead role in my future classroom. I do not want to just include music in reading time or for transitions. I want to include it in every subject. I see what a great environment for learning it can create and I see how much fun students can have with it.

New Wonderings

“Music gives a soul to the universe, Wings to the mind, Flight to the imagination...And life to everything.

--Plato

Even though my inquiry project has come to an end, I still have many wonderings about the use of music. One is, when else can music be integrated into a subject and how would that work? Another question that I still have is, was it the music that helped the students the most or was it the hands-on activities in the other centers that helped them learn? Would it work for the students to create their own song to go along with a letter and if so would this help them more because it would be created by them? Hopefully in the last two months of school, I can answer a few of these new wonderings.

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