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Title: Promoting Engagement and Early Literacy through Music in Inclusive Early Childhood Settings

The current study reconsidered the relationships among children’s development, teaching, and learning and the way these related to inclusive practices in early childhood settings. A mixed method study (quasi-experimental and case study) evaluated the effects of a model for embedding music in the early childhood curriculum as an effective instructional tool that can support active engagement and early literacy skills of young children attending a Head Start classroom. For the pre-and-posttest quantitative data collection, children in both the control and the experimental classrooms were assessed at the beginning and at the end of the intervention on their engagement and early literacy skills. A qualitative analysis of the findings complemented the quantitative outcome data by capturing the teacher’s perspectives on the use of music as a teaching tool in her classroom and illustrating the impact of the intervention on children identified with disabilities. The results were promising in regards to the intentional use of music as a tool to promote children’s engagement and early literacy. Music activities promoted all children’s learning but particularly supported children with disabilities to actively engage in the daily classroom routines and benefit from the extended participation during them. Of critical importance was the ongoing, participatory partnership that developed between the researcher and the teacher, which allowed the teacher to successfully take ownership of the intervention and be intentional in implementing a variety of developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant music activities throughout the school day. Such intentional instruction based on careful planning and assessing of the children’s needs was especially important for children identified with special needs and/or at risk for developing learning disabilities. Implications for curriculum design to promote inclusive practices in early childhood settings and the academic and social applications of music with young children will be discussed.