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Translating Music Play into Reading Readiness

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Abstract

This study addresses the persistent challenge of low reading proficiency among South African children, as highlighted by the 2021 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). It emphasizes the critical importance of developing pre-literacy skills during the early years, particularly in contexts where many children lack foundational literacy support at home due to factors such as poverty, limited caregiver training, and weak reading cultures. These developmental gaps are often insufficiently addressed in Early Childhood Development (ECD) settings, where constraints such as untrained staff and limited resources further limit early intervention. As a result, many learners enter Grade R without the necessary pre-literacy competencies required for successful reading development. This paper adopts a conceptual and practice-based approach to explore the potential of musicking activities, specifically using Boomwhackers, to support the development of pre-literacy skills in Grade R learners. Drawing on existing literature on early literacy, executive functioning, and arts-integrated pedagogy, the study examines how structured musical engagement may stimulate cognitive processes such as auditory discrimination, memory, sequencing, and attention, which are foundational for reading acquisition. In addition, it considers how rhythm, pattern, and collaborative music-making can enhance language development and phonological awareness in young learners. The paper proposes a series of practical musicking strategies that teachers can implement in resource-constrained ECD contexts. By positioning Boomwhackers as an accessible and engaging pedagogical tool, the study contributes to alternative, arts-based approaches for strengthening early literacy foundations. It offers a theoretically grounded framework to support teachers in fostering pre-literacy development without reliance on extensive empirical intervention.

Keywords: Pre-literacy; Early Childhood Education; reading readiness