

2017

Singing Our Song: The Affordances of Singing in an Intergenerational, Multimodal Literacy Program

Rachel Heydon

Western University

Lori McKee

Western University, lmckee@uwo.ca

Susan O'Neill

Simon Fraser University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/edupub>



Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), and the [Language and Literacy Education Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Heydon, Rachel; McKee, Lori; and O'Neill, Susan, "Singing Our Song: The Affordances of Singing in an Intergenerational, Multimodal Literacy Program" (2017). *Education Publications*. 62.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/edupub/62>

Running head: SINGING OUR SONG

Author's archived copy prior to peer review.

Revised and published version:

Heydon, R., **McKee, L.** & O'Neill, S. (2017). Singing our song: The affordances of singing in an intergenerational, multimodal literacy program [early view]. *Literacy*, 1-9. doi: 10.1111/lit.12135

Singing our song: An exploratory case study of singing as a multimodal literacy practice within an intergenerational program

Abstract: 187 words

This exploratory case study examined singing as a multimodal literacy practice within ensembles that featured art, singing and digital media produced in an intergenerational program that served a class of kindergarten children and community elders. The program that was set up by the study in collaboration with a rural school and home for seniors, saw participants meet one afternoon a week for most of a school year. Study questions concerned the meaning making and relationship-building opportunities afforded to the participants as they worked through chains of multimodal projects. Data were collected using ethnographic tools in the seniors' home where the projects were completed and in the kindergarten where project content and tools were introduced to the children and extended by the classroom teacher. Themes were identified through the juxtaposition of field texts in relation to the literature and study questions. Results indicate that singing provided opportunities for participants to form relationships and share meaning making as a group while combining modes. Study findings forward the communicative power of singing and suggest how singing, when viewed through a multimodal lens might be a potent tool for multimodal literacy learning.

SINGING OUR SONG

Keywords

multimodal literacy, singing, intergenerational, case study

In a community room in a home for seniors in rural Canada, Martha, an elder, and Karl, a four-year-old child, are paging through magazines to select pictures for a collaborative collage. This collage is meant to signify the songs that get stuck in their head—a visual companion to intergenerational song sharing. The duo's text making is part of an intergenerational programme where children from a neighbouring kindergarten meet at the home with elders from the community. At these once-a-week afternoon meetings, participants are invited to engage in a multimodal literacy curriculum designed to enhance literacy learning and foster intergenerational relationships. As Martha and Karl work on the collage, we witness them, like the other participants in the room, spontaneously singing songs in response to the images that they are viewing. At some times, they share traditional songs that they both know and at others they introduce one another to new songs that are specific to his/her generation. We also notice that Karl smiles and laughs and invents his own songs to accompany the evolving collage, and Martha appears to delight in his expressions. Once completed, the entire group will engage in a multimodal sharing experience where participants will view each other's collages and sing together the songs therein.

Singing is one of the oldest forms of communication and has long been a way for people to share knowledge and pass along news (Potter and Sorrell, 2012), teach others (e.g., Governor et al., 2013), and process events within and across generations (Cusicanqui-Messaud and Salmon, 2005). But what of singing in this era of multimodal literacy and pedagogy? This paper highlights some of the meaning making and relationship-building opportunities afforded to elders and children through singing within a school-initiated intergenerational multimodal program. The program was designed to expand participants' literacy options (Heydon, 2013), that is, to deepen and widen their opportunities and requisite facility to

SINGING OUR SONG

communicate through the most apt modes and media possible. The program's curriculum combined multiple modes for collaborative and participatory meaning making that included singing, storytelling, visual art, and print, as practiced through a variety of media including digital media. Within the curriculum, elders and children created shared meanings by drawing on multiple modes of expression of which singing was integral. Herein, following in the vein of Heydon and O'Neill (2016), we focus on singing *as* a literacy practice, a way of communicating forged through social relationships and shaped by social structures (e.g., Barton and Hamilton, 2000) within the multimodal ensembles of the program.

In this paper we build on notions of multimodal literacy to recognize the potential of singing. We operate from a baseline definition of mode as a "set of resources for meaning-making, including image, gaze, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound effects" (Kress and Jewitt, 2003, p. 1). Although all modes of expression hold potential for meaning making, music and the medium of singing in particular, have been too little studied, especially from the vantage of multimodal literacy. Extant research, as we will show in our literature review, has focused mainly on the ways singing can support traditional print literacies (i.e., linear reading and writing). However, the literature hints that singing is a potent meaning making practice in its own right and has potential for creating and sustaining transformative meaning making and in turn relationship-building opportunities for children (Siegel, 1995) and elders (e.g., Kosky, and Schlisselberg, 2013). Despite this promise for singing in the literacy literature including the recommendation in the multimodally-focused literature to include music in multimodal curricula (Walsh, 2011), few studies examine singing as a literacy practice (Tomlinson, 2014). A key exception is Heydon and O'Neill (2016), and we conducted this study within this new line of inquiry. Research questions included: *How might singing have functioned as a literacy practice within the program? What opportunities for expanded literacy options and relationship building did singing provide to children and elders in the multimodal ensembles?*

SINGING OUR SONG

(H1)Literature Review

There is a limited literature that unites singing and literacy. More common are discussions of music and language with the oft cited observation that the two have a shared evolution or at least have evolved in tangent (e.g., Mithen, 2005). Reviews of the literature suggest that the communicative power of music and singing have been recognized (e.g., Fagan, 2013), but most commonly this has meant examining how music and/or singing could *support* print literacy acquisition, most particularly in young children (e.g., Barclay, 2010; Connors, 2014; Hansen and Milligan, 2012). There is a dearth of research that explicitly deals with singing and literacy, particularly across the lifespan and just as little that considers singing as a literacy practice in its own right. These are two areas that the current study sought to address.

(H2)Music to support literacy.

The most substantial body of literature related to literacy and singing defines literacy as print literacy and employs singing in its service. This literature advocates for singing and music to be employed in classrooms to support children's acquisition of print literacies (e.g., Barton, 2011; Harris, 2011; Frasher, 2014; Gabriel and Countryman, 2014; Walton, 2014). "Music is an excellent pedagogical partner" (Montgomery and Smith, 2014, p. 29) is the generalized sentiment in much of the literature for the teaching of early pre-reading skills, as it has been found to help increase phonemic and phonological awareness (Hansen and Milligan, 2012). Early literacy researchers have also cited singing as beneficial to the acquisition of print literacy given that singing is said to "encourag[e] oral language skills, physical development, and an understanding of concepts such as sequence and patterning" (Connors, 2014, p. 22), broaden vocabulary development, and "enhance children's lexical acquisition and semantic knowledge" (Winters and Griffin, 2014, p. 78). Pairing music and print literacy within song-based picture books has also been shown to support children's oral language and early print literacy concepts (Barclay, 2010; Montgomery and Smith, 2014), while musical prosody (i.e., "the complex interrelationships of rhythm...and pitch" (Gabriel and Countryman, 2014, p. 45)) has been shown to support reading fluency

SINGING OUR SONG

and enhance reading programs (Frasher, 2014). The literature offers evidence that singing has an important place in classrooms for supporting the acquisition of print literacies, literacies that are privileged within schools.

Though print literacy may be at the forefront of the above literature, some of this work has also hinted that singing has more potential for people's meaning making than simply supporting the mechanics of print literacy. Winters and Griffin (2014), for instance, have argued that when traditional literacies and music intersect, communication opportunities change: "Music engages children in language learning, offering them opportunities to understand and express their ideas and communicate with others in ways that go beyond words" (p. 78). It has also been found that the process of "musicking- singing, playing, moving and listening to music" provides children with openings "for exploring the nature of relationships (both sound relationships and people relationships)" (Gabriel and Countryman, 2014, p. 43). Further, communication opportunities have been seen to expand through music "as the sonic interplays with the lexical" (Winters and Griffin, 2014, p. 81). Studies such as these have expressed an appreciation for the expanded literacy and relationship options afforded through music and singing, yet music and singing have less status than print literacy; they have been predominantly appreciated for what they can do to increase and support the more privileged print literacies (Tomlinson, 2014). Few studies exist that explore music and singing as a literacy practice. This is needed if the literacy literature is to make good on its identification of expanded definitions of literacy which take semiosis as the basis for what constitutes literacy (e.g., Albers, 2007). Considerations of singing as a literacy practice are also required if literacy researchers are to more fully understand the range of oral and aural practices through which people make meaning within and across domains and the lifespan.

[H1]Singing as Literacy

The precise links between the origins of music, singing, and language are still being debated (e.g., Mithen, 2006), yet the literature does contain commentary on some of the potential intersections between music and literacy. Frasher (2014), for instance, highlighted that music and print literacy both draw on

SINGING OUR SONG

oral, aural and print forms of communication. Music and print literacy have been described as “parallel” to “each other in terms of grammatical structures, phonemes (the smallest units in language), syntax (rules governing the combination of phonemes into sound sequences), and semantics (ways in which meaning assigned to or carried by these sound sequences)” (Montgomery, 2002, cited in Winters and Griffin, 2014, p. 80). Music and language have also been explained as similar in function with both described as meaning making practices that “define identities, represent thoughts, symbolize feelings, mobilize knowledge, and unite communities through social practice” (Winters and Griffin, 2014, p. 79).

Studies that position singing as a literacy practice come primarily from the multimodal literacy literature (e.g., Heydon and O’Neill, 2014; Tomlinson, 2014). Here, singing has been conceptualized as a semiotic mode, complete with its own grammar, affordances, constraints, and constituents; it has also been described as part of a meaning making process that includes other modes of expression (e.g., Kim, 2014) for instance gesture (Livingstone, Thompson and Russo, 2009) and language (Heydon and O’Neill, 2014). Singing, in these studies, does not solely serve traditional print literacies, and is not privileged over other modes, but instead is viewed as a valid form of communication in its own right, intersecting with other modes and media. The literature in this vein has expressed that as people select, combine, and move between modes in their meaning making, they may gain facility with a diversity of modes including print (McKee and Heydon, 2015), but the emphasis is on how particular modes support meaning making within multimodal ensembles (Heydon and O’Neill, 2014). Recently, Heydon and O’Neill (2016) detailed the characteristics of singing as a mode and the ways in which singing could be leveraged as a multimodal literacy practice for the promotion of wellbeing. This present study now adds to the literature that reimagines singing as a literacy practice by illustrating singing within multimodal pedagogy—its contours and effects.

(H2) Music through a multimodal lens: A theoretical framework.

A multimodal literacy framework served as the foundation for this study. There are various definitions of multimodal literacy: some insist on the inclusion of within multimodal ensembles and are

SINGING OUR SONG

associated with traditional definitions of literacy plus image, gesture, and posture (Walsh, 2011). Other definitions view multimodal literacy in broader terms, defining it as “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). Common within definitions of multimodal literacy is that “representation and communication always draw on a multiplicity of modes, all of which contribute to meaning” (Jewitt and Kress, 2003, p. 277) within a particular social context (Walsh, 2011). As modes are combined, “specific modes may dominate or converge” (Kress, 1997). Given shifts in communication technology, the visual (e.g., images) and aural (e.g., sound effects) are increasingly important modes in meaning making in contemporary society (e.g., Jewitt and Kress, 2003).

Singing is the focus of this paper. Like Heydon and O’Neill (2016), in its broadest terms, we understand singing as “a meaningful human activity” (Potter and Sorrell, 2012, p. 1) whereby people physically produce song. In its broadest sense song is “the fundamental frequency of phonation generated by the larynx” which “is varied systematically” (Fletcher, 2001, p. 10 cited in Potter and Sorrell, 2012, p. 1). Through multimodal literacy singing is a social semiotic practice; singing involves semiosis, defined as “the act of meaning-making using *semiotic resources* (e.g., language, images, gesture, music and sound)” (Jewitt, 2011a, p. 304). In this act the signifier and signified come together in the sign to make meaning (Albers, 2007). Meaning making within multimodal literacy draws on the interrelationships between co-present resources or modes for meaning making (Jewitt, 2011b) and the materiality of those modes (i.e., the physical aspects of the mode as well as the social, cultural and historical practices that influence its use (Kress, 2011)). Meaning making happens as the text designer selects and combines different modes and is influenced by socially and culturally specific practices (Kress, 2011). Given that children do not always privilege language in expressing meaning (Harrop-Allin, 2010), we look to definitions of multimodal literacy that embrace the embodied and material nature of children’s literacies (Dyson, 2001) and include “audio (music), linguistic, gestural, mimetics (digital) spatial and visual modes” (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 4).

SINGING OUR SONG

[H1]Methodology

This exploratory case study (Dyson and Genishi, 2005) was designed to examine the literacy and relationship-building opportunities afforded through singing within the *Intergenerational Digital Literacies Project*. The *Project* included the design and implementation of an intergenerational multimodal curriculum aimed at promoting expansive literacy and identity options for elders and children as they worked together through a chain of projects that featured singing, art, and digital media. The study included the program development phase when the authors worked with the educators, technical support person, and seniors' home liaison to coordinate the program and develop the curriculum as well as observation of the intergenerational sessions and interviews with participants. The program development phase began 4 months before the program was implemented and continued throughout the study.

[H2]Setting and participants.

The study took place in a rural town in Ontario, Canada, that had recently experienced economic hardship, attrition, and the closing of the local public school. The principal of the publically-funded Catholic school, who had read Author A's work, requested her support in the development and implementation of a multimodal curriculum because he saw the potential such a program held for building community relationships and improving the expressive literacies of his students. Data collection took place during the biweekly intergenerational classes in the seniors' home as well as in the kindergarten classroom when project content and tools were introduced to the children by their teacher.

Two teacher participants volunteered to take part in the study: the kindergarten teacher and the special education resource teacher. During the programme development phase, the educator participants, including the principal, collaborated with the authors to develop an intergenerational multimodal curriculum. Since the program took place within the school instructional day, the curriculum developed corresponded with the programmatic curriculum for kindergarten as well as instructional goals identified by the classroom teacher for improving oral language, and the principal's goals of improving literacy and

SINGING OUR SONG

building community (McKee and Heydon, 2015). The kindergarten teacher taught the co-constructed lessons within the intergenerational program as well as in her classroom.

Child participants included students from one kindergarten class from the school, with 13 children (ages 3-5) participating in the research, and six senior elementary students who helped within one intergenerational class. Elder participants were recruited through the seniors' home staff as the elders lived in the community but came to the seniors' home for recreational programs. Seven out of 10 elder participants in the program were also participants in the research¹.

[H2]Data collection and analysis.

Ethnographic tools were used to help construct the case of singing as a literacy practice within the multimodal literacy events and practices of the program. Traditional definitions of literacy events include “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (Heath, 1982, p. 92) and literacy practices have been defined as:

the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about doing reading and writing in cultural contexts. The knowledge, experience, feelings, values and capabilities that play a role in reading and writing of texts including the models or conceptions of literacy held by those practising it (Jewitt, 2011a, p. 299).

Contemporary definitions of literacy events and practices have been extended to account for the multimodal nature of communication. In this study, we understand multimodal literacy events as occasions where meaning making is taking place as the semiotic resources of multiple modes are combined (Jewitt, 2011a). We understand multimodal literacy practices as the ways of constructing texts and artefacts that are situated in time and place and influenced through culture and beliefs (Jewitt, 2011a). Within multimodal events and practices, people shape meaning through the orchestration of multiple modes, of which linguistic modes may or may not have a dominant role (Kress, 2010).

¹ All teachers, students and elders could participate in the intergenerational program even if they did not take part in the research study.

SINGING OUR SONG

Observational data within the program were collected 6 times over 4 months, representing one cycle of activity corresponding with the start of the program and ending with the school's Christmas concert before the winter holiday. Qualitative data were collected through multiple data sources including: photos of multimodal artifacts created in the program, field texts (e.g., audio and video recorded participant interactions, informal conversations with participants about artifacts constructed and interviews), and field notes describing interactions in classes, and the Authors' reflexive journals.

The units of analysis were bounded by the multimodal literacy events that included singing within the program (Jewitt, 2011b) and data analysis was guided by the research questions (Dyson and Genishi, 2005). We analyzed the data by reading across them and looking for instances where singing was used within the program. We triangulated findings by drawing on multiple data sources and comparing them against the literature. As we interpreted and analyzed the data, we identified themes through a juxtaposition of data sources (e.g., photos next to transcriptions) and looked for areas of resonance and dissonance in the data (Pahl, 2007). We constructed "narrative portraits" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 163) of singing as a literacy practice. Throughout the analysis and interpretation phase, we conducted member checks with key participants to share emerging understandings and verify themes.

[H1]Results

Results indicated that singing within the curriculum provided opportunities for participants to form relationships and create and share meanings as a group while combining different modes and media. We next use exemplars from the data that illustrate these findings.

[H2]Singing in the Forging of Relationships: "Can you sing OUR song?" (elder participant, Marg)

Singing provided opportunities for participants to connect with one another as they combined singing with other modes and media. Elder Marg and four-year-old Mackenna's improvised song was a prime example. In the first session entitled "Songs in our Heads", intergenerational partners selected images to represent the songs that held meaning for them and sung these songs *to* and *with* each other.

SINGING OUR SONG

Mackenna selected a picture of two cows to represent the traditional song “Old MacDonald” on her collage (Figure 1). After singing the song together, Marg identified that Mackenna’s picture did not have *one* cow, but *two* so Mackenna and Marg changed the song to suit the image. When Author A asked Mackenna about the images on her collage, Mackenna instead pointed to Marg and explained “she’s MY partner”. Hearing this exchange, Marg looked up, and asked Mackenna, “Can you sing...*OUR* song?” and led the duo in singing:

Marg (singing): *Old...*

Marg and Mackenna (singing):...*MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O, And on this farm he had 2 cows!* [Marg and Mackenna both hold up two fingers at the same time and laugh.]

The improvised song was created within a multimodal ensemble where the participants combined singing, image, gesture, and speaking to collaboratively construct meaning. As Marg and Mackenna sang the improvised song, they remixed the traditional song and thus produced a text that linked them to the past but belonged to them in the present, joining the generations. This connective potential of singing can also be seen in an interview with elder Martha. At the end of the study, Martha affirmed that singing operated in the program to connect the generations. Of singing, she said, “It’s a way of connecting [...] like I mean we both know the same songs. And, we, we’re doing it together. And, we’re having fun together...just through singing...”. In the program singing served as a literacy practice that linked elders and children in the practice of textual production and in the text itself.

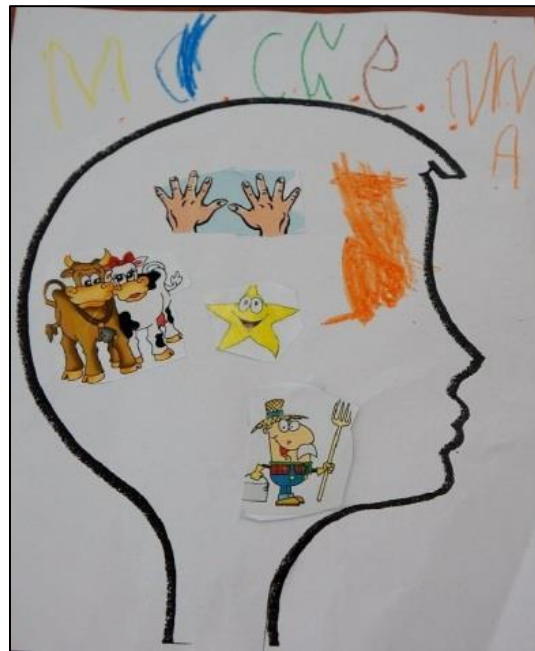


Figure 1. Mackenna's "Songs in our Heads" Collage

The above finding was corroborated in the example of elder participants, Ron and Marilyn. These spouses expressed that singing provided continuity between past, present, and future and ensured that their funds of knowledge and experiences could be useful to the children and the program. Specifically, Ron and Martha shared that Ron had been a school principal in a nearby town and Martha had been a classroom teacher in a local school before she left the profession to raise a family. The couple told us they had been involved in singing, as Ron said, "all of [their] lives", with Ron even "conduct[ing] choirs". They, according to Marilyn, saw singing as a "universal language" and "tool" for use in teaching. They expressed that the children were "enthusiastic" (Ron) singers, and that singing was a means through which one could "always get to children". The power to bring generations together, form bonds and provoke emotion was so great that Ron became very emotional when, after describing his life-long involvement in singing, Ron shared, "So when I hear those kids sing the way that they did, it-- [gets choked up, almost in tears] warmed my heart. It really did." To Ron and Marilyn, singing was a language that enabled them to make meaning with the children and form relationships within the program.

SINGING OUR SONG

[H2]Singing in the Forging of Relationships: “Happier than anything” (child participant, Tyson).

Singing in the program created opportunities for the creation of collective literacy events and practices with the entire group being able to join their voices and bodies to share meaning making en masse. Songs that were familiar to both generations before the program took on new meanings *within* the program. For example, the children, as students in a Catholic school, were preparing to sing, *Away in a Manger* for the school’s annual Christmas concert. In the program, they practiced the song with the actions *for* the elders (Figure 2) and *with* the elders (Figure 3).

SINGING OUR SONG



Figure 2. Children practice performing song for elders



Figure 3. Child and elder practice song together

During the intergenerational sessions leading up to the Christmas concert, the principal invited the elders to attend the concert, and facilitated their attendance by offering to arrange transportation for those

SINGING OUR SONG

who could not drive to the school themselves within this rural area where public transportation was non-existent. Many of the elders did attend and sat together in privileged, reserved seats in the second row of the packed school gymnasium. The following narrative, constructed from the data hopes to encapsulate the elder-child relationships and shared meaning making practices realized through singing.

The children stepped onto the stage looking bewildered by the lights and crowded audience.

When elder Marg saw her child partner from the intergenerational program standing in the front row, she whispered to the other elder participants from the program sitting around her, “Look, she’s all dressed in white! She looks like an *angel!*”

“I see my little buddies too. I had two partners, you know” elder Ron nodded and said proudly.

Elder Martha commented, “Oh! My little fella looks a wee bit nervous!”

Ron agreed and urged, “Come on kids, just like we practiced last week in the program...”

The children started to sing:

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed.

The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.

“It’s just precious!” Marg whispered.

The children continued to sing through the first and second verses, performing the actions just as they had rehearsed. The children started to sing the third verse:

Be near me Lord Jesus I ask thee to stay...

The singing from the children faltered as though they had forgotten the words. The teacher tried to compensate by singing louder.

From her seat, Marilyn quietly coaxed, “Come on, kids. We know this part.”

From his seat, in a strong bass voice, Ron joined the teacher in singing:

Bless all the dear children in thy tender care.

SINGING OUR SONG

The teacher looked over her shoulder, smiled and nodded at Ron, and they continued to sing together. By the final line of the song, the children, elders, and others in the audience sung in unison:

Take us to heaven to live with thee there.

But the song was not quite over. Within the intergenerational program, the participants had practiced repeating the final phrase of the song before concluding it. Since the audience members from the community had not been a part of this rehearsal, they stopped singing and in the final moments of the performance listened to the elders and children sing as a duet:

Take us to heaven to live with thee there.

This singing of *Away in a Manger* was a memorable event for all concerned with several participants referring to the concert in their interviews; for instance, weeks after the concert, we asked four-year-old Tyson what he liked best about the intergenerational program:

Tyson: I like to sing like when we sang *Away in a Manger*.

Author B: Oh, you like that song. How did it make you feel when you were singing that song?

Tyson: Happier than anything.

The singing of *Away in a Manger* expanded literacy options for all participants as they shared interpersonal relationships, combined modes of expression, and conjoined literacy practices.

[H2]Constraints of Singing in the Multimodal Ensembles: “I find it frustrating” (elder participant, Gladys)

The data were unequivocal that singing was a practice that cohered the group, but there were also challenges to communicating through song that needed to be mitigated. Elder Gladys, for instance, explained in her interview that singing was a practice she had enjoyed throughout her life, but in recent years, singing practices had changed and this was a frustration for her:

Author A: how important is singing in your life right now?

SINGING OUR SONG

Gladys: I still enjoy singing very much. I am not a very good singer but I enjoy it and I enjoy being with someone who is [a good singer].

Author A: Would you say that singing is harder or easier now than it was years ago?

Gladys: Um, it's harder because of the contemporary music they are using.... We were used to singing using notes...and I find it very frustrating.

Author A: Right, [because] a lot of people are singing by ear now?

Gladys: Yes!

Gladys explained that she “enjoyed” the program, but issues with her eyesight and hearing made it difficult for her to participate as fully as she would have liked. When asked to identify the most frustrating part of the program for her, she replied “doing the motions with the songs”. Gladys did not know the actions of the children’s songs from school and felt discouraged when she was not able to join in as the children sang these songs together. Although frustrated, she appeared to enjoy watching the children sing these songs with the accompanying actions (See Figure 4). Gladys expressed that she wanted to be a full, active participant with children in song sharing.

SINGING OUR SONG



Figure 4. Gladys watches children sing school songs]

Complications such as these notwithstanding, the singing in the multimodal ensembles of the program provided an opportunity for us to illustrate how *singing re-imagined as a literacy practice* (Heydon & O'Neill, 2016) could link generations and expand literacy options for participants within intergenerational relationship building.

(H1)Discussion

In this study of an intergenerational multimodal curriculum, we asked about the opportunities produced by singing within multimodal ensembles. Our questions were aligned with the multimodal literature that recognizes the meaning making potential of singing as a mode of expression and were asked in response to literatures that call music into service to support dominant print literacies and those that suggested music and singing as a literacy practice. Findings of this study:

- expand understandings of multimodal literacy and contribute to knowledge of singing as a multimodal practice;
- confirm the importance of relationship in literacy practices and provide knowledge of how these can be strengthened;
- demonstrate multimodal literacies as community resources;

SINGING OUR SONG

- provide examples of multimodal pedagogy, particularly in relation to singing, and
- provide support for the intergenerational approaches to the learning of literacies.

Within the literacy events of the program, participants made meaning with each other as they drew on multiple modes (Walsh, 2011). These meaning making practices were impacted by the culturally shaped histories and identities of participants (Pahl, 2007) (e.g., Ron's experience as a choir director). Participants combined singing with other modes of meaning making to suit the occasion of the communication (e.g., gestures to use with songs). Singing was part of a multimodal ensembles where the "resources of the different modes are combined, meanings are corresponding, complementary and dissonant as they harmonize in an integrated whole" (Jewitt, 2011a, p. 301). Singing, as a mode of expression was not in service to print literacies; rather it was inter-related with other modes of expression which supported shared meaning making. As participants constructed multimodal artefacts within the multimodal ensembles, they revealed literacy practices from their past experiences in home, community (e.g., singing in church) and school (e.g., songs from the kindergarten), and generated new, shared literacy practices.

This study confirms that meaning making through singing was inseparable from the intergenerational relationships formed within the program (McKee and Heydon, 2015). The shared meanings created through the improvisation of traditional songs reflected these relationships and were catalysts for further relationship building. The intergenerational relationships formed in the program escaped the boundaries of the program and reached into the community (e.g., with the elders as honoured guests at the school's Christmas concert).

Singing provided opportunities for participants to learn from and with one another as they shared their funds of knowledge (e.g., through intergenerational song sharing) and selected and combined modes for meaning making (e.g., songs in our heads collage activity). There was reciprocity in meaning making between elders and children as they each contributed the resources they had within the meaning making

SINGING OUR SONG

process. This suggests the potential of intergenerational programs for supporting multimodal literacies.

The intergenerational classes provided opportunities for the syncretic sharing of song (Gregory et al., 2004) that created a “third space” as discourses of school, church, and home came together (Moje et al., 2004). Resonant of Marg’s invitation to “sing our song”, as elders and children raised voices and sang together, they shared meanings and practices formed within the intergenerational program.

References

- ALBERS, P. (2007) *Finding the Artist Within: Creating and Reading Visual Texts in the English Language Arts Classroom*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- BARCLAY, K. H. (2010) Using song picture books to support early literacy development. *Childhood Education*, 86.3, pp. 138- 145.
- BARTON, C. A. (2011) Music and literacy development in young children with hearing loss: A duet? *Imagine*, 2.1, 53-55. Retrieved from:
http://www.christinebarton.net/PDF/Barton_imagine2_1_2011.pdf
- BARTON, D., and HAMILTON, M. (2000) 'Literacy practices.' in D. Barton, M. Hamilton, and R. Ivanič (Eds.). *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. London: Routledge (pp. 7-15)..
- CLANDININ, D.J. and CONNELLY, F.M. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- CONNORS, A. (2014) How music sets the tone for learning. *Teaching Young Children*, 7.5, pp. 21-23.
- CUSICANQUI-MESSAUD, M., and SALMON, R. (2005) Seniors, small fry and song: A group work libretto of an intergenerational singing group. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 44.1.2, pp. 189–210.
- DYSON A.H. (2001). Where are the childhoods in childhood literacy? An exploration in outer (school) space. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 1, pp. 9–39.
- DYSON, A. H., GENISHI, C., (2005) *On The Case*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- FAGAN, W. T. (2013) Song: A medium for literacy development. *The Phenomenon of Singing*, 1, pp. 115-121. Retrieved from
<http://journals.library.mun.ca/ojs/index.php/singing/article/viewFile/934/809>
- FRASHER, K. D. (2014) Music and literacy strategies using comprehension connections by Tanny McGregor. *General Music Today*, 27.3, pp. 6-9. doi: 10.1177/1048371314520968

SINGING OUR SONG

GABRIEL, M. A., and COUNTRYMAN, J. (2014) Singing and literacy: An initial investigation in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. *The Phenomenon of Singing*, 8, pp. 42-56.

GOVERNOR, D., HALL, J. and JACKSON, D. (2013) Teaching and learning science through song: Exploring the experiences of students and teachers. *International Journal of Science Education*, 35.18, pp. 3117-3140. doi: 10.1080/09500693.2012.690542

GREGORY, E., LONG, S., and VOLK, D. (Eds) (2004) *Many Pathways To Literacy: Young Children Learning With Siblings, Grandparents, Peers, And Communities*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

HANSEN, D., and MILLIGAN, S. A. (2012) Aural skills at the juncture of research in early reading and music literacy. *Music Educators Journal*, 99.2, pp. 75-80. doi: 0.1177/0027432112462894

HARRIS, D. J. (2011) Shake, rattle and roll – Can music be used by parents and practitioners to support communication, language and literacy within a pre-school setting? *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education*, 39.2, pp. 139-151.
doi:[10.1080/03004270903232691](https://doi.org/10.1080/03004270903232691)

HARROP-ALLIN, S. (2010) Recruiting learner's musical games as resources for South African music education, using a Multiliteracies approach. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

HEATH, S. B. (1982) 'Protean shapes in literacy events: Ever-shifting oral and literate traditions.' In D. Tannen (Ed.) *Spoken and written language: Exploring orality and literacy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex pp. 91–117.

HEYDON, R. & O'NEILL, S. (2014) Songs in our hearts: Affordances and constraints of an intergenerational multimodal arts curriculum. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 15.16, pp. 1-32. Retrieved from <http://www.ijea.org/v15n16/>

SINGING OUR SONG

- HEYDON, R. and O'NEILL, S. (2016). *Why Multimodal Literacy Matters: (Re)Conceptualizing Literacy and Wellbeing through A Singing-Infused Multimodal, Intergenerational Curriculum*. Netherlands: Sense.
- JEWITT, C. and KRESS, G. (2003) 'A multimodal approach to research in education.' In S. Goodman, T. Lillis, J. Maybin, and N. Mercer (Eds.) *Language, literacy, and education: A reader*. Sterling, VA: Trentham pp. 277-292.
- JEWITT, C. (2011a) 'Glossary.' In C. Jewitt (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge pp. 293-308.
- JEWITT, C. (2011b) 'An introduction to multimodality.' In C. Jewitt (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge pp.14-27.
- KIM, M.S. (2014) The multi-literacy development of a young trilingual child: Four leading literacy activities from birth to age six. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 22.2, pp. 154-168. doi: [10.1080/1350293X.2014.883718](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2014.883718)
- KOSKY, C., and SCHLISSELBERG, G. (2013). Oral communication skills in senior citizens: A community service model. *SIG 10 Perspectives on Issues in Higher Education*, 16.1, pp. 28-38.
- KRESS, G. (2007) *Before Writing: Rethinking the Paths to Literacy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- KRESS, G. (2010) *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- KRESS, G. (2011) 'What is a mode?' In C. Jewitt (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge pp. 54-67.
- KRESS, G. and JEWITT, C. (2003) 'Introduction.' In C. Jewitt and G. Kress (Eds.), *Multimodal Literacy*. New York: P. Lang pp.1-18.
- KRESS, G. and van LEEUWEN, T. (2001) *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London, United Kingdom: Edward Arnold.

SINGING OUR SONG

- SIEGEL, M. (1995) More than words: The generative power of transmediation for learning. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 20.4, pp. 455-475. Retrieved from:
<http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.lib.uwo.ca/stable/pdfplus/1495082.pdf?acceptTC=true>
- LIVINGSTONE, S., THOMPSON, W.F., and RUSSO, F. A. (2009) Facial expressions and emotional singing: A study of perception and production with motion capture and electromyography. *Music Perception*, 26, pp. 475-488.
- MCKEE, L. & HEYDON, R. (2015). Orchestrating literacies: Print literacy learning opportunities within multimodal intergenerational ensembles. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 15.2, pp. 227-255.
- MITHEN, S. J. (2005) *The singing Neanderthals: The origins of music, language, mind, and body*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- MITHEN, S. (2006) 'The Evolution of Social Information Transmission in Homo'. In J.C.K Wells, S. Strickland and K. Laland (eds). Boca Raton: Taylor and Francis pp. 153-172.
- MOJE, E. B., LUKE, A., DAVIES, B., and STREET, B. (2009) Literacy and identity: Examining the metaphors in history and contemporary research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44.4, pp. 415-437.
doi:10.1598/RRQ.44.4.7
- MONTGOMERY, A.P. and SMITH, K.M. (2014) Together in song: Building literacy relationships with song-based picture books. *Language and Literacy*, 16.3, pp. 27-53.
- PAHL, K. (2007) Creativity in events and practices: A lens for understanding children's multimodal texts. *Literacy*, 41.2, pp. 86-91. Retrieved from
<http://journals1.scholarsportal.info.proxy2.lib.uwo.ca/tmp/13497725059996773866.pdf>
- POTTER, J., and SORRELL, N. (2012) *A History of Singing* [electronic resource]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from
<http://lib.myilibrary.com.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/Open.aspx?id=357165>

SINGING OUR SONG

- TOMLINSON, M. M. (2014) Transmodal redesign in music and literacy: Diverse multimodal classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, pp. 1-35. doi: 10.1177/1468798414552509
- WALSH, M. (2011) *Multimodal Literacy: Researching Classroom Practice*. Newtown, NSW: Primary English Teaching Association (e:lit).
- WALTON, P. (2014) Using singing and movement to teach pre-reading skills and word reading to kindergarten children: An exploratory study. *Language and Literacy*, 16.3, pp. 54-77.
- WINTERS, K. L., and GRIFFIN, S. (2014) Singing is a celebration of language: Using music to enhance young children's vocabularies. *Language and Literacy*, 16.3, pp. 78-91.