



Children’s Librarians’ and Library Associates’ Use of Music and Perceptions on Music in Library Programming: An Initial Exploration

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Abstract

Literacy is a common goal of early childhood programs in libraries. Through the “Every Child Ready to Read” initiative of the American Library Association, librarians emphasize educating caregivers and parents to work with their children on early literacy skills (Every Child Ready to Read, n.d.). This program identifies singing as one of five core practices in early childhood library literacy programming. Based on this priority on singing in early childhood library programming, there seems to be a valuing of music by library organizers. However, little is known about the musical background and preparation of librarians and library associates who lead storytimes. This instrumental case study of children’s librarians and library associates’ documented the use of music by participants in library storytime programming (n = 13) as well as their perceptions about music. The researchers employed qualitative data analysis procedures to arrive at four themes, which encompassed the participants’ positive perceptions of the role of music in children’s lives; participants’ passion for early literacy; their emphasis on family mentoring; and the diverse music backgrounds that led to diverse approaches of incorporating music into library programming. In our discussion we note the similarities between our population and early childhood generalist teachers who use music in their classrooms, suggesting potential application of prior research. We conclude with implications for librarians and library associates, early childhood teachers, and the early childhood music community.

Keywords Children’s librarians · Early childhood music · Early literacy · Family mentoring · Music · Storytime

Introduction

I (first author) walked into my neighborhood library, eager to get some work done at one of the large desks nestled among the stacks of books. Before I could get to my destination, I found a familiar scene in the children’s section: a group of young children gathered around a librarian as she read to them from a picture book. I could not help but take a moment to pause and observe. Some of the children sat cross-legged or even stood near the librarian, while others looked shyly from their parent’s lap toward the back of the room.

The librarian suddenly pulled out a ukulele and the room filled with voices as the librarian, children and families joined in singing a familiar goodbye song. All of the children and adults in the room stood up and clapped their hands as they sang along, indicating this was a well-known routine. I saw one child grin as he swept his gaze from the librarian to his mother. As an early childhood music researcher, I was struck by how music affected the atmosphere, and I wondered how music in library storytime programs added to the experience and how it was used as a storytime unfolded.

Children’s librarians frequently embed music into their libraries’ early childhood programming (de Vries, 2008). Musical engagement plays a vital role in developing empathy among children (Cross et al., 2012), fostering musical and social interaction (Custodero, 2009; de Vries, 2008; Ilari, 2016), developing phonemic awareness and establishing the concept of sequence in story and song (Fisher et al., 2001), and promoting focus (de Vries, 2008). For librarians,

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these applications of music provide a unique opportunity to engage with children and families while also reinforcing music's role in school readiness (Brown et al., 2018) and the importance of parent or caregiver modeling at home (de Vries, 2008). A greater understanding of the role of music in early childhood library programming could allow librarians and library associates to encourage musical development and meaningfully integrate music into library programs. In this review of literature we will provide a brief overview of early childhood library programming and the link to school readiness, summarize studies related to music and library storytime programs, and highlight research studies concerning early childhood generalist teachers.

Early Childhood Library Programming

The children's section of a library offers a wealth of opportunities for children to play, read, attend storytime, and develop positive associations with the library. Libraries also serve as a setting for children's librarians to mentor parents and caregivers on how to shape their children's learning experiences and early literacy skills at home (Becker, 2012; Celano & Neuman, 2015). Historically, storytime programs have been offered in public libraries since the turn of the twentieth century, when children's libraries started to emerge (Gerber, 2014). According to Cahill et al. (2020), storytime programs have evolved from the goal of simply sharing books for enjoyment to encompass a number of emergent skills that contribute to a child's school readiness. In one study, Becker (2012) identified three categories of learning within the library: early literacy, learning to use the library, and other developmentally appropriate learning. The researcher also observed how parents and caregivers shaped children's learning experiences in the library through purposeful mentorship. When parents and caregivers modeled behaviors such as finding a book within the stacks or sitting quietly to read, the learning process was amplified as children developed early literacy skills in addition to other developmental skills such as social and communication skills.

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the benefits of services for young children in museums and libraries (Becker, 2012; Brown et al., 2018; Cahill et al., 2020; Sirinides et al., 2017). Sirinides et al. (2017) conducted a survey of museum and library administrators and found that 96% of library administrators who responded indicated they plan to continue or expand their programs for young children in the future. In another study, Cahill et al. (2020) discovered that public library directors considered storytime to be extremely important to promoting children's enjoyment of books and the development of early literacy skills. These goals (book enjoyment and the development of early literacy skills) were one of several areas examined by the researchers related to learning objectives and program

objectives. Respondents also ranked "supporting children's social interaction" (p. 1004) as a high priority among storytime objectives. While public library administrators in this study appeared to understand the importance of children's programming, Cahill et al. suggested that they were unaware of the extent to which storytime services can support children in terms of school readiness. Respondents rated the objective of supporting the state's school-readiness goals as "relatively low" (p. 1004) in the researcher's Likert scale from "not at all important" to "extremely important." While the literature indicates the perceived importance and need for early childhood programming in libraries, there is still a need for additional evidence of the impact of early learning services on children in libraries, specifically the impact of early literacy and storytime programs.

Storytime, Literacy, and Music

The American Library Association's Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) philosophy identifies five practices that connect children's early literacy development to later reading: singing, talking, reading, writing, and playing (*Every Child Ready to Read*, n.d.). Singing is regarded as an activity that helps children learn to read, and children's librarians often incorporate singing and musical play into storytime sessions (de Vries, 2008). In a study on public library storytime sessions for young children in Australia, de Vries highlighted the parent and caregiver perceptions of music in storytime sessions, including the music activities the parents and caregivers implemented at home as a result of the sessions. Overall, de Vries found that parents and caregivers viewed the use of the music in the storytime sessions as beneficial, and many caregivers incorporated songs and ideas used in the sessions in their own homes. Furthermore, de Vries stated that the storytime environment was ideal for encouraging the use of music in the home because both parents and children attend storytime, allowing librarians to demonstrate and share music strategies and techniques to encourage ideas for use at home.

Early Childhood Educators and Music

Within the field of music education, scholars and teacher educators have been interested in early childhood educators and how they use music in their classrooms (Barrett et al., 2019; Bolduc & Evrard, 2017; Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014; Nardo et al., 2006). In a 2006 study on early childhood music education in accredited American preschools, Nardo et al. found that singing, for example, was a daily activity in 93% of the preschools surveyed. Singing was also a formalized activity when programs were put on each season, with children performing on stage. Similarly, Bolduc and Evrard (2017) conducted a study on the practices of French

Canadian early childhood educators and discovered that educators frequently incorporated nursery rhymes, songs, and finger-plays as part of their teaching; however, the frequency and depth of the activities varied depending on the teacher's level of musical background. The main finding of the study was that educators with less musical background used perception-based activities rather than activities that required musical creation or analysis, whereas educators with more musical background used a broader range of practices. Barrett et al. (2019) conducted a study in Australia that looked at the music values, skills, and knowledge of early childhood and care educators. According to the results of the survey, the researchers found that the educators strongly endorsed the ideas that music was an “essential creative outlet for young children,” that it was “a useful tool for the social inclusion of children,” and “a method by which to bolster children's emotional development” (Barrett et al., 2019, p. 6). According to the researcher's findings, regardless of the educator's formal music education background, the majority of those polled had positive attitudes toward music and its role in children's lives. According to the researchers, this optimistic attitude has a lot of potential for more professional development that focuses on music as a content area or as a learning and teaching strategy. These ideas imply that music plays an important role in a child's life, and that early childhood educators value music in their classrooms despite perceived limitations or a lack of formal music education. Children's librarians and early childhood educators have similar specializations in working with young children as well as the use of music in their practice. Understanding early childhood educators's comfort level with the use of music in early childhood classrooms may have implications for children's librarians and other early childhood educators.

As discussed before, many childhood educators value the importance of music and the positive role it serves in children's development (Barrett et al., 2019; Bolduc & Evrard, 2017; Kim & Kemple, 2011). However, due to the perceived lack of training and experience in music among early childhood educators, many do not feel prepared to incorporate music in their classrooms (Kim & Kemple, 2011) or believe themselves to be insufficiently skilled to lead musical activities (Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014). Still others, as found by Nardo et al. (2006), reported singing was a common daily activity, despite educators feeling the least comfortable or skilled in this area. There are a variety of possible reasons why early childhood educators feel unprepared to use music in the classroom. Some have suggested that the increased focus on math, science, and language arts in educational policy marginalizes arts education in both teacher education programs and in early childhood curriculum (Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014; Kim & Kemple, 2011). However, there is growing evidence in the body of literature that indicates the immense importance of music learning and engagement

in music to young children's development, specifically in developing early literacy (*Every Child Ready to Read* n.d.) promoting social inclusion, and bolstering emotional development (Barrett et al., 2019) as a daily activity in many preschools (Nardo et al., 2006), and as a shared activity between children and their caregivers at home (de Vries, 2008).

While researchers have documented the importance of storytime and early literacy, as well as the connections to music, there is no known research on librarians' experiences with and perceptions of music during storytime. The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore the use of music by children's librarians and children's library associates in their library programming, their perceptions about children's musical development, and their self-reported training in the area of music. The specific research questions were:

- (a) How do children's librarians and children's library associates use music in early childhood library programming?
- (b) How do children's librarians and children's library associates describe the role of music in children's development?
- (c) How do children's librarians and children's library associates draw connections between their own musical background and training and their current use of music in library programming?
- (d) What are the resources identified by librarians and library associates as important to the task of incorporating music in early childhood library settings?

Methodology

Our initial intent for this study design was as a grounded theory study including interviews with approximately 30 participants or until we reached data saturation. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the way it interrupted our data collection, we made the hard decision to shift from a grounded theory design to an instrumental case study. While the use of interviews as sole data source for a grounded theory design would have been appropriate, ideally with case study, we would have included observations and artifact collection. Due to the pandemic and the stress it placed on our participants, we chose not to collect artifacts. Observations were not possible because the COVID-19 pandemic curtailed in-person library activities.

In an instrumental case study, the researchers identify a situation of interest, then identify potential participants who embody the case (Creswell & Poth, 2016). We chose instrumental case design for this study because it allowed us to more closely examine the perceptions and self-reported experiences of a group of librarians and library associates.

We employed a two-part recruitment process. First, we reached out to children’s librarians and library associates¹ in two municipal library branches near our campus. The director of children and youth programming assisted with sending study information to individuals who led storytime. This yielded five interviews. As part of these interviews, we sought to employ snowball sampling, but we found that the participants did not make many recommendations. Instead, for the second phase of recruitment, we worked with the manager of youth programming of a large Midwestern urban county library system. The manager sent recruitment information to the supervisors of children’s services at the libraries in the county system. Nine individuals agreed to participate, and of those, eight completed an interview. The end result was 13 participants. We share further information about the study participants and their library contexts in Table 1. Their of experience in the profession ranged from 4 to 30 years. Participants’ self-described musical background spanned a continuum from self-taught to extensive formal musical training.

Each of the three study authors conducted interviews. Because this study occurred both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, we experienced a disruption in data collection. Some interviews occurred in person (prior to the pandemic), and the rest occurred via video conferencing or phone. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the second and third authors of this study. Interviews ranged from 22 to 45 min, with an average of 31 min/interview. We chose the relatively short, one-time interview protocol in part because the participants were completing interviews during their working hours and we did not want to impose unduly on their work schedules or the library operations. We asked participants to describe the early childhood programming at their library branches, followed by an articulation of where and how music played a role in that programming. Several questions elicited participants’ perceptions on the role of music in the library offerings, the role of music in children’s lives more broadly, and what participants had noticed about children’s and families’ participation over time. We also asked a group of questions about the participants’ musical backgrounds and professional development, as well as resources they used when including music in programming. We posed two final questions: what training did participants think other children’s librarians and library associates would find helpful, and what else would participants like to tell us on the topic.

¹ We use the phrase “librarians and library associates” to encompass individuals working in the children’s department of libraries; “librarians” are those with a Master of Library Science degree, and “library associates” are those with other educational backgrounds. Our participants who are library associates made this distinction in describing their job titles.

Following the completion of interviews and transcriptions, we read through the transcripts and created an initial codebook. We then selected a coding method of structural and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015) in order to search for commonalities and differences across codes as well as to foreground participant voice. Two of the research team coded one complete transcript in partnership as a means to develop consistency; we then coded one question from each interview to again seek consistency across the interviews. Next, we divided the remaining transcripts and coded them individually, followed by a review of one another’s coding. Throughout this process we also kept memos of questions or emergent codes to share with one another. Following the coding process, we met to organize the codes into themes. We did this by grouping and rearranging the themes, checking how they fit together, trying different combinations, resulting in the articulation of themes. We summarized this initial analysis in a brief Google Slides presentation as a way to check the organizational structure and so we could share it with participants.

We employed several measures of verification. First, we shared our initial analysis, described above, with all participants, inviting feedback on the analysis as well as an opportunity to review their interview transcript. We heard back from eight participants, with messages confirming their agreement with the accuracy of the themes. A second means of trustworthiness was peer review of coding. The first two authors reviewed one another’s coding, and the third author, who did not participate in the coding, provided a further means of peer review in her checking of the analysis. We reconciled differences in our coding through verbal discussion, which resulted in re-coding several passages and combining certain codes that were redundant. The final step of our analysis occurred when the authors met to further discuss the analysis and explore questions related to the intersection of storytime, music, and participants’ perceptions and preparation.

Findings

Our data analysis yielded four themes. First, participants spoke enthusiastically about the positive role of music in children’s lives. Second, participants articulated their passion for early literacy development, often linking the use of music to helping children develop early literacy skills. Third, we heard participants speak at length about their holistic concern for entire families who were part of the children’s area of the libraries. Finally, the theme of “Diverse Backgrounds, Diverse Approaches” described the ways children’s librarians and children’s library associates utilized music. Each theme is described below, with codes that contributed

Table 1 Participant pseudonyms and contextual information

Participant pseudonym	Interview date	Early childhood library offerings	Number of years in profession as of October, 2021	Self-described musical background
Laura	7/21/2020	Three types: infant/toddler storytime, (combined) preschool program, (3–5) family program. When possible likes to create music programs that help children make musical instruments from recycled materials. So far they have made drums from coffee cans and shaking instruments using clear plastic containers, and "stringed" instruments with rubber bands and boxes. The branch offers a music and movement program for ages 2–5 with a caregiver	16	Played clarinet as a child and own a number of rhythm instruments just for fun! Some workshops/PD with Mo Willems, Eric Litwin, etc. Attends OMEA every year with her music teacher daughter
Jessica	5/27/2020	Four types: infant/toddler storytime, toddler storytime, preschool program, family program. Added a preschool "Music and Movement" about 5 years ago	24	Piano and clarinet lessons; band in high school. Active in children's church choir from age 6 to about middle school, and school choir from middle school through college. Music theatre in high school
Bryce	7/21/2020	Lots of outreach programming, less programming within the library. Infant/toddler storytime at the branch, outreach daycare and preschool programs, middle grade book clubs and craft nights (at the branch) and "play clubs" at the branch	13	Plays music in different bands, sings in front of people as a band member
Kirsten	7/14/2020	Baby and me, toddler, family story times, special themed programs each season	17	Was in choir and musical theatre in high school, danced through childhood and taught dance at a dance studio
Kimberly	4/10/2020	Programs for infant—5th grade; Story time, play and stay, camps, author visits. Outreach in schools. Lots of presenters coming into the library for dance, yoga, etc	19	Knows how to read music and played piano. Has had some music-related in-service PD
Linda	3/3/2020	Infant/toddler story time, family story time, kindergarten readiness programs. Baby Club, Baby & Toddler Sensory Play, Music & Movement storytime, special themed programs each season including music/dance specials	21	Background in theatre. Piano lessons, flute in school, love to sing. Attended music and storytelling workshops
Donna	10/24/2019	Story times for birth—age 5. Baby story time, toddler story time, 2–5 year old story time. Drop-in literacy-based playground. Art/STEM programs	24	Familiar with music and comfortable singing. Taught herself ukulele and uses ukulele extensively in programming. Her mom sang to her a lot as a child. Attended a few workshops with Jim Gill
Melissa	10/1/2019	Story times for birth—age 5. After-school programs for children ages 6–12. Preschool program once a quarter. Infant/toddler story time, family story time, preschool story time	14	Gospel choir in college, loves singing; doesn't play an instrument or read music. Music comes naturally to her
Jennifer	10/3/2019	Infant story time, toddler story time, ages 2–3 story time, family story time. Story +craft program. Once per month preschool program. Outreach programs with preschools. Stay and play programs at the branch with a toy area	4	Sang in school and church choirs. Sang extensively with her own children. Has a seminary degree—took a class on the role of music in church and leading/singing when one is not a singer. Learned rudimentary understanding of piano
Sharon	11/13/2019	Preschool outreach/book loaning to classrooms. After-school programs. Summer caregivers music and early literacy program	15	Played violin, viola, piano and guitar. Self-taught on ukulele. Grew up listening to music all the time
Robin	11/7/2019	Family story time, preschool story time, Infant story time, toddler story time	6	Piano lessons as a child. Participated in several choirs throughout childhood, teen, and young adult years

Table 1 (continued)

Participant pseudonym	Interview date	Early childhood library offerings	Number of years in profession as of October, 2021	Self-described musical background
Diane	2/26/20	Family story time, baby/toddler story time, kindergarten readiness (twice per month)	7	Choirs/theater/band experience from elementary through high school. Self-described “pleasant singing voice—nothing special, but confident and in-tune.”
Steve	3/3/2020	Story times for birth to age 5, Baby and me story time, toddler story time, preschool, and family story time	30	High school choir member, but no longer a confident singer. Appreciates using recordings

to the theme and key quotes and examples to illustrate each theme.

Positive Perceptions of the Role of Music in Children’s Lives

The first theme was participants’ positive perceptions of the role of music in children’s lives, often expressed emphatically with words such as “vital,” “hugely important,” “fundamental,” and “essential.” Kimberly² commented, “Music is engaging. I mean, it really helps them stay with you. Some of them may not sit through the story, but they will feel engaged when they can get up and move.” Participants described the importance of using music for many aspects of learning, including early literacy learning as well as other forms of learning. Participants also commented on their use of music to accomplish a goal, such as Donna’s description of using music for classroom management and community building:

It’s [music is] just a great tool and then witnessing how that really can bring a group together...every time we start singing or bringing up the ukulele, the group quiets down and you can have a group of rowdy toddlers who are moving all over but as soon as you start playing and singing...they just stare! So you know I just keep witnessing how important it is.

It is interesting to note that the classroom management element of music, using the music to quiet a group of toddlers, was paired with the idea of “bringing the group together.” Both of these are uses of music for an extramusical goal, but classroom management is a practical use and could be seen as focused on the teacher’s control, while coming together as a group is a relational goal with a more group- or child-centered focus (Koops & Tate, 2021).

Two participants used the concept of music as an “equalizer” to describe the role of music in children’s lives. Jessica defined equalizer and described how music functioned in this way:

Well, I think that music is one of those things that everybody comes to programs already having some exposure to. It’s like an equalizer. Something that, you know, everybody knows when a song comes on, you sing or dance or something so it kind of brings everyone together on an even playing field. And kind of gets everybody up and moving and evolves from the get go. So it’s good for, you know, allowing everybody to feel included, but it also has a lot more learning intent than just that.

² All participants’ names are pseudonyms.

Jessica went on to note that the music used in storytimes seemed to reach across various socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, helping the grown-ups feel comfortable participating in activities such as movement with a scarf or dancing. This idea of music as shared experience was accompanied by recognition of the potential long-term effects of musical engagement on children. For example, Melissa explained her view on the importance of music in library activities:

Well, it's fun. And it's kind of integral to all human development. You know you read those articles that say, "music inhabits both sides of the brain and fires up all the neurons and sticks with you forever." And other articles that talk about Alzheimer patients and dementia patients who are elderly and have trouble with basic everyday skills, but they can remember a song from when they were a kid, and it helps with their therapy, so it's...music is life for me! I'm always listening to something myself in my own time.

Here Melissa supported her view with research she had read, as well as demonstrated her commitment to using music in her own life.

Participants made specific observations of children's participation in music activities and modified their storytime activities accordingly. For instance, Jennifer noticed that the children participated more when she repeated songs across several weeks, so she began to intentionally choose songs and chants to repeat throughout the session. At times, these modifications were related to the enjoyment on the part of children and caregivers. Enjoyment was a final aspect of participants' self-reported perceptions of the role of music. Several participants stated that music is fun: fun for the children, fun for the families, and fun for the librarians and library associates. Linda pointed out that the children were "learning all kinds of stuff in there. But they're not even really aware that it's learning because it's fun." Linda's description evoked the energy of a storytime session:

There's just so much fantastic music out there and then you know they're having fun, you're having fun, everybody walks away and they're all feeling great, you know. And that's what you want. You want the parents to have a great time, the kids to have a great time...everybody to walk away and that they gained something.

Diane shared several examples of how songs help with developing early literacy skills of rhyming and phonological awareness:

[Music is] huge! That's part of the early literacy tips that we give to their grownups... because songs have rhyming and rhyming is just huge. I mean, [to] put in a

nutshell, rhymers become readers — that's really true— Songs break things down into those syllables which helps too...later when they break words down into syllables.

This link to early literacy bridges to our second theme.

Participants' Passion for Early Literacy

The second theme was participants' passion for early literacy. There was a near-universal mention by participants of the Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR) program, and singing as one of the five practices of the program. ECRR provided one reason, but not the only rationale, for including music in story time sessions. Participants also cited the role of music in many forms of learning, the importance of musical enjoyment, and the connection between families during music activities.

Donna spoke about the role of music in literacy development, a domain that unfolds across a child's early years:

I think [music is] essential to early literacy development. Singing is such a great way to build [phonemic awareness]. You know, one of our key words is phonemic awareness... people don't necessarily know what that means. But since every note corresponds to a sound it's just a wonderful way to get kids listening for that.

Donna's comment that not all people know the term phonemic awareness was accompanied by many comments from participants about teaching families how to guide their children's literacy development. Although using the specific terminology was not necessary, librarians and library associates communicated that music in storytime was one way to assist children in developing pre-reading skills.

Participants were committed to fostering early literacy from birth, following a progression of early literacy activities outlined by the ECRR program. Many of the library programs outlined by participants included different offerings for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers; some of these libraries also had multi-age storytimes. Other libraries had a smaller number of children and families who attended storytime, and so offered only multi-age programs. Bryce described the adaptive storytime he led for children with special needs, such as sensory processing disorders; he used only a cappella music and avoided loud activities or clapping. Librarians and library associates also engaged in community outreach, including traveling to the daycares and preschools in the area.

Participants often had the opportunity to observe families and children grow over time and see the long-term effects of involvement. Diane described growth over time and noted

the link between attention, repetition, participation, and confidence:

Yeah, you do see the growth in the children and you see them paying more attention and then the things that they start to recognize, those repetitive things you do all the time. You know, the letter song, the alpha basket song, the rhyming times on the opening and closing songs, those things that happen all the time. That builds confidence in them because they recognize it and they know the words now and they can sing along and they know what to expect and they know what's coming next, you know, so that builds confidence in it. And it builds I think more attention.

Laura described providing early literacy learning tips to parents and caregivers each week, modeling activities during storytime but also giving them written explanations for why the activities helped develop early literacy skills. Laura elaborated:

We do handouts. We do giveaways. We give books. So it's a modeling program so that we can train caregivers, parents, grandparents, whoever brings the child. Things that they can do to interact and we really want parents and caregivers to interact, face to face, let the kids seek them out.

While the participants could have fulfilled the expectations of their job with pre-packaged storytimes or offerings that they had used for many previous experiences, instead we heard from participants that they were continually seeking new resources, trying new approaches, and responding to family interest or feedback. When participants discussed literacy, in most cases they spoke more authoritatively and with a fervor that explained to us their willingness to continually invest time and seek better ways to help very young children acquire pre-literacy and literacy skills. It was the participants' commitment to going above and beyond, and trying many strategies, that led us to note the librarians' and library associates' passion for early literacy learning.

Participants' Holistic Concern for the Whole Family

The third theme centered on participants' holistic concern for whole families. Libraries serve as a vital point of contact in the community, hypothetically available to all. By extension, those working in the library have the opportunity to help families and young children in myriad ways. Participants spoke of mentoring family members in and through the areas of early literacy interactions, music, socialization, nurturing relationships, and fostering community.

The participants communicated a deep commitment to the needs of entire families, not only for weekly storytime sessions. One of the most important codes that contributed to

this theme was "librarian as a role model." Linda described her willingness to serve as a role model:

We have a lot of families around here who have a lot of pressing concerns. You know, how are they going to pay their rent, how are they going to put food on the table, how are they going to buy clothes. There's a lot of stress going on so first of all [let's] applaud the fact that this parent has brought the child to a library to storytime. And then secondly, we can't assume that everybody knows what they need to do with their child. ... They might not have anybody in their family or neighborhood environment who is a role model for that, do you know what I mean? So we are that role model. So to me it is vitally important to...be that for them, to help them to realize why this is so important, and... applaud them that they are here, you know that they're doing this for the child.

Linda's description highlights not only being a role model, but also an encourager of parents. The time after storytime, "stay and play," or supervised play sessions, were important in facilitating these mentoring interactions between participants and families. For some programs, this was an informal time in which attendees were invited to remain and play with the library's toys, and chat together as families. In other settings, the supervised play was more formalized. For instance, Bryce and Laura described their branches' adoption of a program inspired by the Family Place Initiative (*What Is a Family Place Library?*, n.d.). In Bryce's case, the program was a five-week workshop with a curriculum developed by a child psychologist working within the county library system. The workshop included family mentoring, information on child development, guided play, and open play at stations. Each session began with group time that included music and a story, then transitioned to free play at stations, and concluded with a healthy snack. Whether the play time is structured, as in Bryce's and Laura's case, or more informal, it provided an opportunity for parents and caregivers to interact with their children as well as with other adults. Bryce noted that the families in their program exchanged phone numbers and met outside of class, and he viewed the relationship building as an important outcome of the program.

While the focus on being role models for the caregivers and providing time and space for families to play together are two examples of holistic concern for the whole family, an additional indication came in the form of participants' descriptions of their programs. Librarians and library associates designed and delivered programming with an emphasis on early literacy development that also encompassed a broad range of other developmental domains. These domains outside of literacy included musical, social-emotional (confidence, awareness of self, developing routines), and motor

(fine motor, gross motor). Participants also talked about developing children's executive function, or "soft skills," like following directions, imitating another person, and turn-taking.

Finally, participants spoke broadly about the impact of music on the brain, such as Donna's statement:

I know music activates different parts of the brain too, listening does but also especially when you're actually making music, [it] utilizes so many parts of your brain. Little kids' brains are very malleable and growing and so it really gets them working.

Statements like these helped to explain why participants included music in storytimes. In describing their perceptions of the role of music in children's lives, detailed above in the section "Positive Perceptions of the Role of Music in Children's Lives", participants reported their views that for children, music is engaging, helps children learn other subjects, can be used for classroom management, and is an equalizer. Donna's statement about music activating the brain, echoed by several other participants, suggested that participants saw music as contributing to a child's overall development over time. It was not just a vehicle to help settle a group of children or help them learn the alphabet. Melissa encompassed this view of music:

And it's... integral to all human development. You know you read those articles that say, music inhabits both sides of the brain and fires up all the neurons and sticks with you forever. And other articles that talk about Alzheimer patients and dementia patients who are elderly and have trouble with basic everyday skills, but they can remember a song from when they were a kid, and it helps with their therapy, so it's...music is life for me!

The participants' comments consistently showed an openness to addressing many domains of learning using a variety of methods, suggesting their commitment to children's holistic learning.

Diverse Backgrounds, Diverse Approaches

Participants came from a wide variety of musical backgrounds and described many different ways to use their own musical acumen during children's programming. Some participants described themselves as not confident leading unaccompanied singing, sharing that they preferred to use recordings. Others described similarly scant musical training, yet sang freely with the families, as described in the discussion on singing voice below. On the other hand, there were participants with extensive formal musical backgrounds, including participating in ensembles

and taking private lessons. These participants reported comfort with singing unaccompanied and moving freely to music. We noticed that some participants detailed what we understood to be extensive musical backgrounds, yet they identified themselves as not having formal training. When asked if she was a lifelong musician, Kirsten responded,

No. Well, no, I don't like to actually be the musician part of it. I like singing and I, you know, I was in choir and show choir and stuff in high school and musical theatre. I danced all through childhood and taught dance at a dance studio. So I just...I've always enjoyed it [music]. I mean some training, but not not anything real professional or anything like that.

This coincided with comments from several participants that fell into a "not an expert" category when discussing music. Laura stated,

The problem is people that are doing the programs aren't necessarily musically trained. I'm not musically trained so that presents a little bit of a problem because if I do the best I can, a music teacher might say, "Oh, I wish they wouldn't have done that." But I think exposure to something is better than nothing, so I try to do the best I can.

Despite this theme of "not an expert," many participants shared examples of their high school music participation, such as singing in a gospel choir or piano lessons, and suggested these experiences helped prepare them to feel comfortable leading music activities during storytime.

The use of singing voice was a common topic for participants. Bryce articulated his willingness to sing with the group, although he did not consider himself an accomplished vocalist:

You know, people can be timid about their singing voice or whatever. But I just, I don't know, I just put myself in another headspace and pretend the parents aren't in the room, and the kids don't care if you're a good singer so...and plus, I think it's important to model for parents that you don't have to have music behind you. You don't have to be a good singer.

Steve's assessment of his singing voice was self-deprecating but humorous: "I can't carry a tune if you gave it to me in a bag, so I use [recorded] music all the time, I don't memorize songs, but I sing along with it and also showing that music can be fun." Although he didn't consider himself a strong singer, he identified singing as integral to his storytimes and something he worked on to improve.

Melissa expanded the idea of the importance of singing voice by highlighting the children's need to hear their parents' voices:

They want to hear your voice. That was one of the things I learned too, when I first got this job ten years ago. The kids relate to the parent's voice and they love your voice, it doesn't matter how it sounds. So it's more important for them to hear you than it is for them to hear me.

This belief about the importance of children hearing their parents' voices transferred into Melissa's design for activities. She chose activities that centered the parents' and caregivers' opportunities to sing for their children, including selecting repertoire that was accessible and relatable for families.

Participants reported little formal training in using music in library settings. Several participants had attended branch-level workshops that included musical elements. When we asked participants with Master of Library Science degrees if music was included in their coursework for the degree, no one reported a specific course focused on music, although in several cases music was included as a topic in a youth services course. While participants indicated an expectation of regular professional development for children's library associates, and a stated value on music as part of the ECRR framework, participants shared that music was not currently a common topic for formal professional development. Instead, participants described ways they engaged in self-directed learning and resource seeking related to music. "Most of the children's librarians are always up to learning something new and trying to incorporate new things, whatever will engage the families and help the children develop the literacy skills they need," explained Kirsten. One participant purchased a ukulele and taught herself to play using YouTube videos. Another participant attended general music sessions at a state music education conference, accompanied by her daughter, a general music teacher. When we asked where they found materials for storytime, children's librarians and library associates mentioned books, recordings, ideas from colleagues, websites, Facebook groups, and YouTube. Internet sources were the most commonly mentioned resource.

Near the end of the interviews, we asked participants to consider what music-related training they themselves might appreciate, and what they thought their colleagues would be interested in. Participants shared ideas for potential music-specific library in-services including how to design musical activities to promote multiple aspects of child development, building confidence as a singer, and exposure to different musical genres. Several participants also suggested vocal lessons or an introductory vocal class or choir as a means to support librarians' and library associates' comfort and confidence with singing.

Discussion

In this discussion we begin by returning to our four research questions. We then suggest implications of this study for several groups of stakeholders, and conclude with suggestions for future research. Through our first question, we explored how children's librarians and children's library associates use music in early childhood library programming. We found that the participants described many ways in which they used music during storytime sessions. There were uses of music for group management: to bring children together at the beginning of storytime, to regulate the mood of the group by calming down a crying child, and to communicate instructions or information. These findings align with Bolduc and Evrard (2017) and Ehrlin and Wallerstedt (2014). Participants also used music to promote learning, both in literacy development and other domains, which is also a common finding in research with early childhood educators' use of music in the classroom (Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014; Fisher et al., 2001). For our participants, music was a way to model caregiver-child interactions. This was part of the overall goal of mentoring parents and caregivers during storytime sessions, as well as to encourage transfer of the activities to the home setting. This is a unique aspect of librarians' and library associates' work compared to most early childhood teachers, who spend their time with children, not caregiver-child pairs. However, we see resonance in the emphasis on modeling when we compare these findings to literature on caregiver-child early childhood music classes. For instance, in her multiple case study of caregivers engaged in caregiver-child early childhood music classes, Rodriguez (2019) reported that adults described their appreciation of the early childhood music class teacher sharing information about children's musical development, describing how music development intersected with language development, and teaching activities they could do at home.

Some participants described using music for the purpose of learning musical skills or content, but more often music was described as a tool, not the end goal. The participants described ways that they taught through, not for, music. We found the descriptions of the ways that the librarians used music to be persuasive. Within the field of music education, there is, at times, a hesitancy to talk about music's extra-musical uses or benefits due to a fear that this would eventually lead to a devaluing of music (Runfola, 2019). However, especially in the library setting, perhaps there is room for music educators to recognize the use of music as a tool to be considered equal to music for music's own sake (Gunawan & Zulaeha, 2016; Rajan, 2017; Williams, 2018).

Our second research question encompassed the role of music in children's development. In other words, why

was music important? Many participants spoke about the central role of music in a child's life in relation to early literacy, using words like "prevalent," "engaging," and "crucial." This positive view of music among our participants could be because those interested in music were the ones who volunteered to speak with us. However, we did have several participants who claimed little musical knowledge, experience, or outside interest, and yet demonstrated a commitment to singing during storytime because it was identified as one of the pillars of ECRR. We did not encounter any of the sense of lack of preparation for singing with children that is prevalent in research literature with early childhood educators (e.g., Bolduc & Evrard, 2017; Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014). The participants we interviewed who gave their self-assessment of musical background as minimal did not link this to an unwillingness or hesitancy to sing with families during storytime. This could be due to the small sample size, or that the individuals who volunteered to complete the study were more confident musically than some others. Future research is needed to investigate whether there are more children's librarians and library associates who do not sing during storytime as a result of a perceived lack of training or ability.

We wondered if the participants' commitment to music in storytime is related to the early childhood age group that is the population of interest. Since the American Librarian Association has identified singing as important to pre-literacy (*Every Child Ready to Read – Read. Learn. Grow.*, n.d.), and the children's librarians and library associates take pre-literacy as the function of storytime, it follows that there may be a more universal inclusion of music in early childhood library programming than in some other early childhood settings (Bolduc & Evrard, 2017). While participants noted the importance of music to early literacy, they described many further reasons that music was important to the children and families. We wonder what an ongoing commitment to music in library programming beyond the early childhood years might look like or yield. Because the library is a site that is intended to be accessible to the community and does not charge admission, it is possible that increasing music programs at libraries could help provide more access to community music education opportunities.

For our third research question, we explored how the participants reflected on their own musical backgrounds and training opportunities in relation to their current use of music. Participants described a range of musical backgrounds, from little exposure or education through formal music lessons and university coursework. Participants described little direct training within the library setting regarding music, but there seemed to be an appetite for professional development surrounding music, with a practical emphasis. This finding is similar to Barrett et al.'s (2019)

work with classroom teachers in Australia. Our participants expressed the desire for practical and applicable workshops and groups that would be suited to their settings. Several participants suggested that vocal lessons or a vocal ensemble might be helpful to themselves or their colleagues, in order to build confidence with singing. Another potential model for professional development of librarians and library associates is the pilot program described by Barrett et al. (2019) in which experienced music educators partnered with early childhood teachers as part of an extended, in-situ mentoring program. In addition to the previous programs that focus on improving individuals' skills and comfort with leading music, professional development sessions could also focus on how to teach and lead others using music.

Our final research question focused on resources participants identified as important to the task of incorporating music in early childhood library offerings. Librarians and library associates identified a range of resources and background experiences as important to the task of incorporating music in early childhood library settings. These varied with the individual's background and expertise. One taught herself ukulele, several had been in choir in high school, others claimed very little musical expertise. The Internet was a primary source of repertoire and activity ideas for many participants; participants described searching the Internet for resources that they could incorporate into their storytime settings and picking and choosing songs that would work in their setting. There seemed to be an abundance of many smaller resources on the Internet, such as blogs and Facebook groups, and not a central, comprehensive source for music during early childhood library programming. This approach to gathering resources is similar to that described by Dwyer, et al. (2019) in their survey study with Australian early childhood teachers. They found that teachers listed informal resources such as Pinterest and Facebook groups as primary resources when seeking materials for the early childhood classroom. Participants listed these informal resources more frequently than more formal ones such as a national curriculum and standards website.

Implications

This study was an initial exploration of children's librarian and library associates' perceptions about music and its use in storytime programming. Consistent with qualitative work of this nature, we do not attempt to draw generalizations from this study. However, in the following paragraphs we suggest some initial implications for library staff, early childhood educators, and university faculty. Based on the results of our study, we urge librarians and library associates to recognize their own expertise and knowledge in music, even if it does not coincide with the music academy. Continue to incorporate music and making music in the library programs, and

recognize the importance and impact of it. Finally, librarians and library associates interested in increasing their musical knowledge, skills, and confidence could consider seeking online sources, participating in music ensembles or lessons, or finding workshops. Individuals could find opportunities for musical engagement in the community through exploring community music school offerings and considering opportunities for music-making at houses of worship. If resources allow, bringing music opportunities for adults to the library branches would be an exciting way to both increase one's own confidence and skill as well as facilitate the opportunity for others in one's community. This could take the form of a weekly 45-min open choir or group vocal, piano, or ukulele lessons. Turning to workshops, one way to find them is through state music education associations, located by searching online for "[state] music education association." Many states host regional and state conferences that include sessions related to early childhood music. Specific professional organizations also host local workshops. Examples in the United States include the American Orff-Schulwerk Association (<https://aosa.org/>), American Organization of Kodály Educators (<https://www.oake.org/>), Dalcroze Society of America (<https://dalcrozeusa.org/>), and Gordon Institute for Music Learning (<https://giml.org/>).

In considering implications of this study for early childhood educators, we return to the finding in previous studies that some early childhood educators have expressed hesitation to sing or include music activities in their teaching due to a perceived lack of ability or preparation (Bolduc & Evrard, 2017; Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014; Kim & Kemple, 2011). The participants in our study, including those who reported minimal music experiences or lower confidence with singing, did not express similar hesitation. Further research is needed to determine if this was due to our small and particular sample or if other factors may support the librarians and library associates in their confidence in including music in instruction. One potential factor we identified was the strength and clarity of the Every Child Ready to Read program and the emphasis on singing. Early childhood educators who are not currently familiar with the ECRR program could become familiar with it and consider what aspects, if any, may be supportive of their own literacy teaching in the classroom. Educators wishing to expand their knowledge and skills to incorporate music in the classroom could refer to the suggestions for librarians in the paragraph above. We also encourage members of organizations such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), to include music in early childhood policy initiatives.

Finally, university early childhood music education faculty could consider offering in-services or workshops in support of music during storytime. Preservice teachers could do fieldwork with librarians and storytime programs as an

additional means to early childhood music exposure, as well as a potential partnership between programs. Such collaborations could also strengthen university-community partnerships in neighborhoods near the university.

Suggestions for Future Research

In conclusion, we have several suggestions for future research on music, storytimes, and librarians. First, we recommend a follow-up study with researchers not identified as musicians conducting the interviews. We believe that some of our results, particularly the "not an expert" theme, were influenced by our affiliation with a university music department. A second area for future research is the mechanisms used by librarians and library associates for parent education and mentoring. A better understanding of how to effectively share ideas, activities, concepts, and experiences with parents and caregivers is essential to early childhood music education. Finally, the finding that librarians and library associates did not identify a lack of specific professional preparation in music as a barrier to including music in storytimes is in contrast to findings with participants who are early childhood music educators (Bolduc & Evrard, 2017; Ehrlin & Wallerstedt, 2014; Kim & Kemple, 2011). This contrast merits further exploration: if we sampled a wider population, would we find similar trends between children's librarians and early childhood educators? Or is there a difference between the two groups that could be instructive in supporting early childhood educators in their confidence and use of music in the classroom?

Conclusion

In this study, we began an initial exploration into the perceptions of musical development and use of music by children's librarians and library associates. Through an array of early childhood programming, librarians and library associates provide some of the earliest group educational experiences to children in communities around the United States. These storytimes and other opportunities are typically free and therefore theoretically available to all families. The American Library Association and the participants in this study have articulated a foundational commitment to weaving music into early childhood music programming, as singing is recognized as one of the five practices of pre-literacy. This combination of music and access addresses an urgency within the early childhood music discipline to reach children for early childhood music education in more equitable ways. It is our hope that this article will help spur other early childhood music researchers and practitioners to consider the large role that children's librarians and library associates play in early childhood music experiences, as well

as how partnerships across early childhood specialties may strengthen the early childhood music offerings for children.

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Consent to Participate All participants completed an informed consent document approved by the university IRB.

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