Music: A Tool for Expressive and Receptive Vocabulary for Children Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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Introduction

Some children with hearing loss understand significantly fewer vocabulary words than their hearing peers. This gap can impact language and literacy development and readiness for school.

Music is often included in the typical preschool day. However, many teachers view "music time" separately from the academic curriculum. Researchers are currently studying the correlation between music training and increased comprehension and expressive language skills. However, there is a lack of research stating the specific affects of music instruction for children with hearing loss.

A pilot study to explore the impact of purposefully embedding music into the preschool curriculum for improved language and literacy outcomes

Description

Participants
♪ Preschool children who are deaf or hard of hearing (n=6)
♪ Use hearing technology (cochlear implants, hearing aids)
♪ Primary mode of communication: listening and spoken language

Procedures
♪ Six-week experimental time-series study
♪ Pre-test, post-test on unit vocabulary words every week
♪ Weeks 1, 3, 5: Non-intervention weeks. Teacher carried out classroom routines in typical manner
♪ Weeks 2, 4, 6: Intervention weeks. Teacher purposefully embedded music into the curriculum

Example of activities for embedding music into the curriculum and during natural routines:

Create Simple Songs using Familiar Tunes and Targeted Vocabulary Words

Determine your target vocabulary words and the concepts you wish to reinforce. Then think of a simple familiar children's song to create new lyrics using the vocabulary words. Once you get started, this is easier than you might think! Simpler concepts fit well in repetitive songs, such as London Bridge or Wheels on the Bus. More advanced vocabulary words might be used in songs where each line is original, such as I'm a Little Teapot or Twinkle Twinkle Little Star).

Example:

Target vocabulary:
1. Ladder   4. Her   7. Delicious
2. Author   5. Spill   8. Sneaking
3. Illustrator 6. Sloppy 9. Ransack
                          10. Disappointed
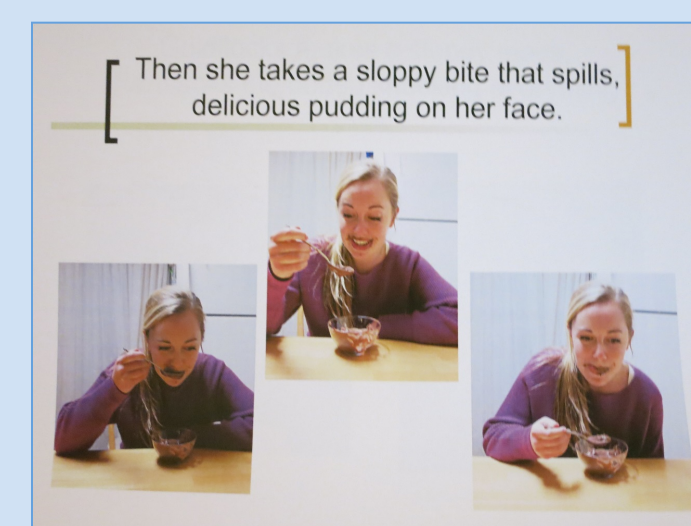
Tune: *I'm a Little Teapot*
Here is goldilocks sneaking into the house.
Inside she finds some pudding in a bowl.
Then she takes a sloppy bite that spills,
Delicious pudding on her face.

Goldilocks makes a sloppy mess.
Ransacks the house knocking everything over.
Then she climbs the ladder way up high.
Finds a bed and goes to sleep.

Embed Vocabulary During Transition

An easy way to incorporate music each week into your routines is to use a song to transition between activities. You can pick only a few target vocabulary words or rotate through several different verses. Choosing a consistent tune for your transition song every week helps your students know the purpose of the song. Adding actions to your transition songs will make the meanings of the words more concrete.

Target vocabulary:
1. Ladder   4. Disappointed
2. Author   5. Pretend
3. Illustrator 6. Delicious
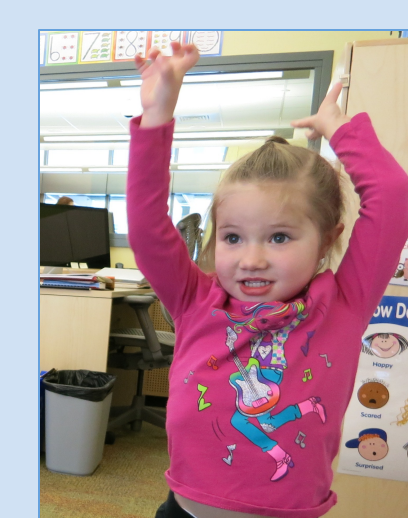
Tune: *The Wheels on the Bus*
Go to the table, writing a book,
Writing a book, writing a book,
Go to the table writing a book,
Just like an author.

Go to the table drawing a picture
Drawing a picture, drawing a picture,
Go to the table drawing a picture,
Just like an illustrator.

Go to the table up the ladder,
Up the ladder, up the ladder
Go to the table up the ladder,
Climb, climb, climb.

Go to the table, look disappointed,
Look disappointed, look disappointed,
Go to the table, but look disappointed,
Not what you want.

Go to the table, pretend to eat,
Pretend to eat,
Pretend to eat,
Go to the table, pretend to eat
Mmm it is delicious.

Use Music at Home

Our goal is for our students to generalize what they learn at school. One way we can help parents to target vocabulary at home is to invite the children to share the songs being sung at school with their parents. Making an experience book using the vocabulary words and the accompanying song provides an opportunity for parents to reinforce the words, the music, and the concepts at home.

Target Vocabulary
1. Hibernate
2. Berries
3. Omnivore

Tune: *The Bear Goes Over the Mountain*

The bear gets ready to hibernate,
The bear gets ready to hibernate,
The bear gets ready to hibernate,
By gathering berries and fish.

By gathering berries and fish,
By gathering berries and fish,
A bear gets ready to hibernate,
By gathering berries and fish.

An omnivore eats everything,
An omnivore eats everything,
An omnivore eats everything,
And then he goes to sleep.

Use Instruments to Target Vocabulary in Books

Music can help children to focus on sound input. While reading books, assign instrumental voices to different characters, feelings, or settings. The students can listen for their 'cue' words and then play their assigned instrument.

Use Visuals to Reinforce Songs

Another way to help students become involved in songs is to use visuals. Visuals can be in the form of books or manipulatives. This helps students stay involved before they learn the songs.
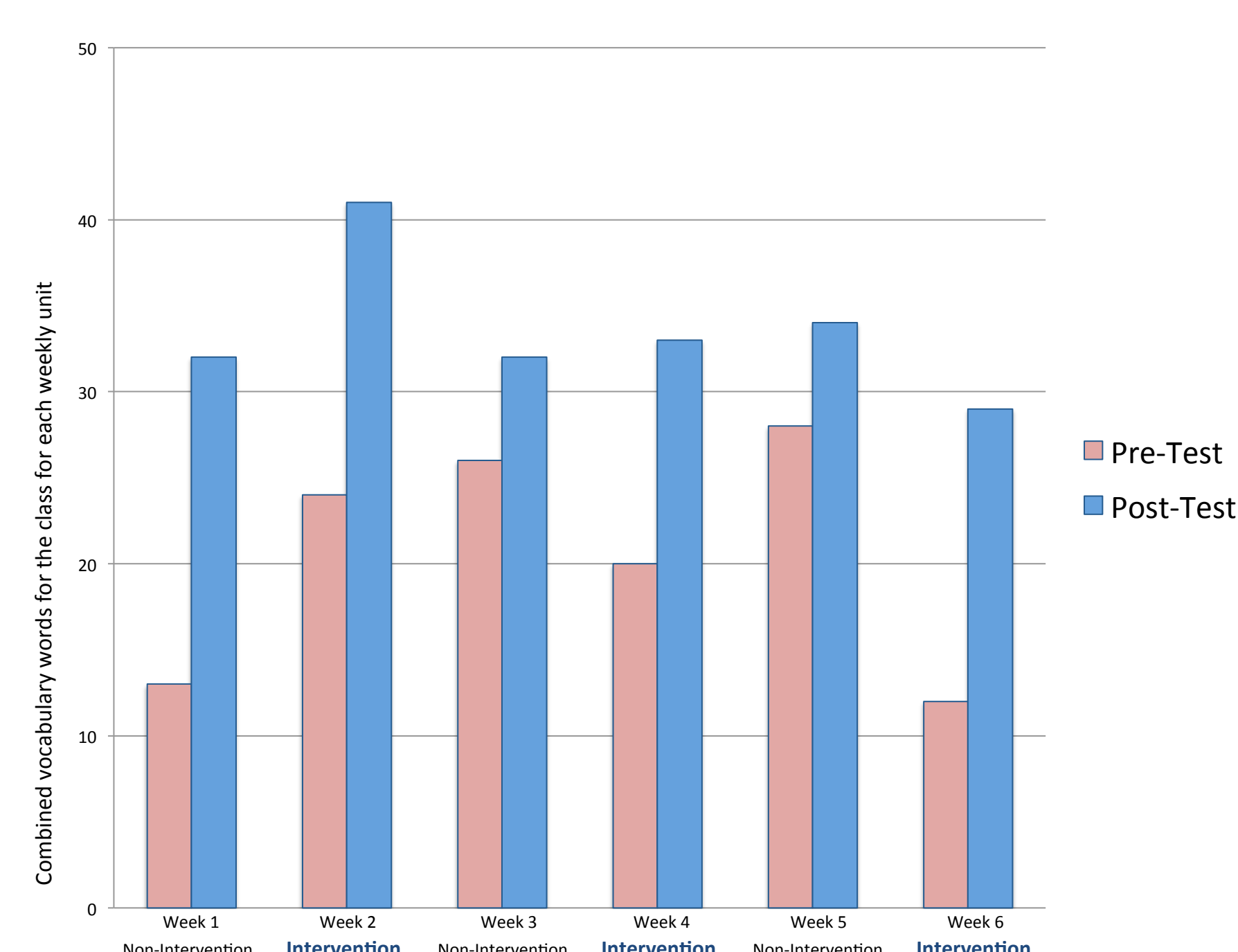
Tune: *Yankee Doodle*
In this barrel we can find,
Some things we find outside.
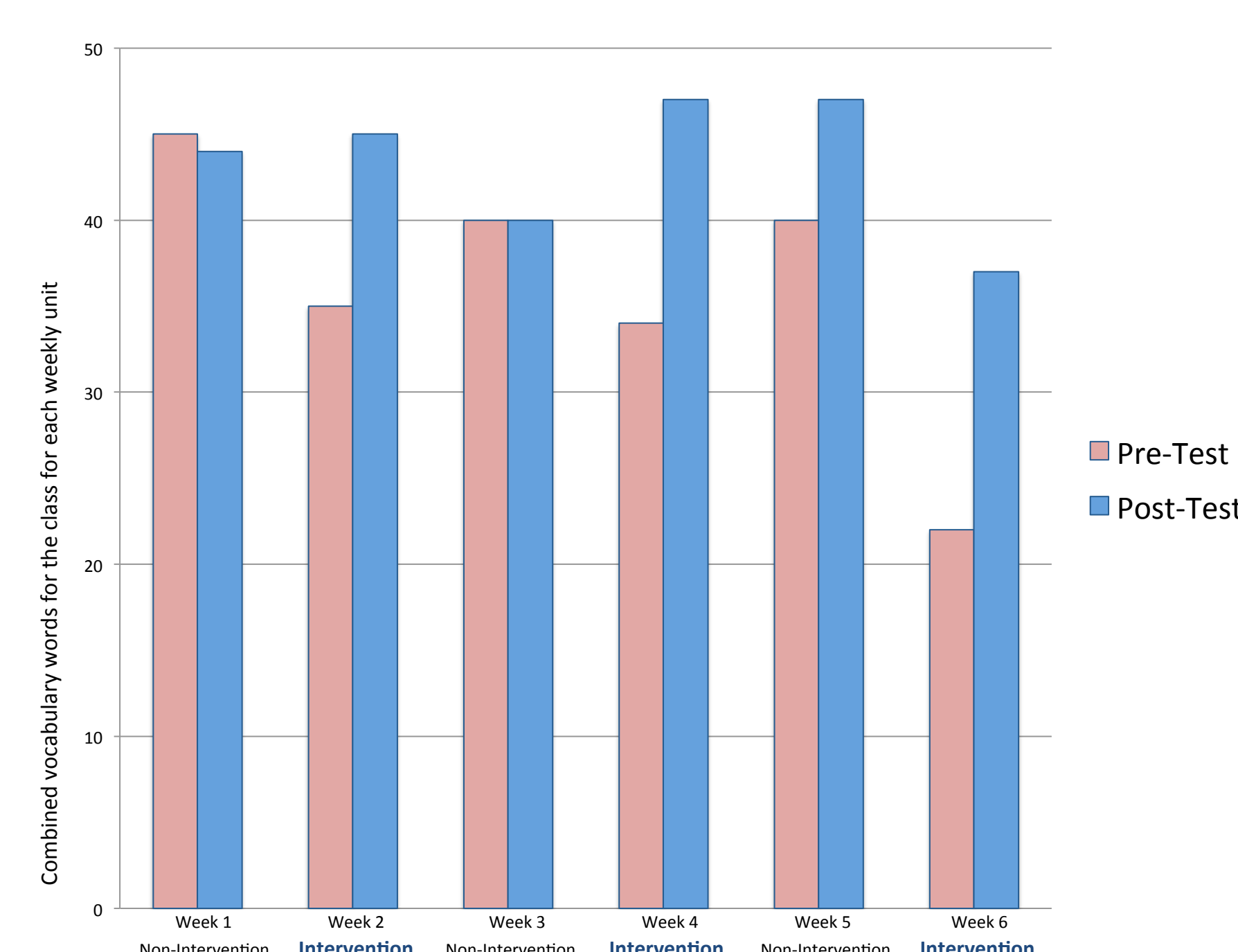Open up to see inside,
and tell me what you find.

Snarling wildcats in the woods,
outside in the sun.
It is fun for you and me,
To look inside a barrel

Target vocabulary:
1. Barrel
2. Snarling
3. Wildcats

Expressive Vocabulary

Receptive Vocabulary

"One day while we were doing a Valentine's activity, student 5 in the study began singing about Cupid. I was surprised that she knew who Cupid was as we had never discussed it in the afternoon preschool class I teach. I later found out she had learned the song in her morning classroom." –S. Fryer

Results

Pilot study findings indicated a potential trend that when the teacher purposefully embedded music into instruction, students learned more expressive and receptive vocabulary than in control weeks. Anecdotally, students were observed singing the songs taught in class during non-instructional times and used vocabulary targets in unprompted opportunities.

- Pair songs with actions
- Incorporate other literacy elements, such as phonemic awareness
- Pick simple tunes you are comfortable singing
- Promote pitch and rhythm activities
- Let the children be the musical leaders
- Assign instruments to characters in books
- Pair songs with visuals
- Put visuals and songs in a take-home book for carryover
- Sing in the children's vocal range, usually higher than normal for adults