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Next Time Won't You Sing with Me? The Role of Music Rooted in Oral Tradition as a Resource for Literacy Learning in the Twenty-First Century Classroom

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Research & Scholarship SYMPOSIUM

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Most children learn music by rote long before they begin to learn by note. Early music learning is often facilitated through the oral transmission of music – a practice that has existed since long before the emergence of standardized music notation. Orality has long been linked to literacy and the relationship between the two – both in the past and in the present – has been studied in depth by modern scholars. Although it could be supposed that the innovation of music notation has negated the necessity for oral music transmission, in reality the two music transmission methods work in tandem in modern-day music education. Oral tradition is far from dead, and this is illustrated in folk tunes, nursery rhymes, and traditional songs. Many of these songs, from “Mary Had A Little Lamb” to the “Alphabet Song” to “Ring Around the Rosie,” are rarely taught to children with the aid of sheet music. They are most commonly passed down from one generation to another simply by rote and have been kept alive solely by oral transmission. These timeless songs provide an excellent springboard for music educators, as they contain valuable teaching topics in the areas of language and literature, allude to various historical events and geographical locations, and provide meaningful instruction on how students are to interact with the world in which they live. Since there is such a strong link between orality and literacy, my research seeks to assert that music rooted in the oral tradition should play a central role in the modern early childhood music classroom because it increases students’ language literacy, historical knowledge, and social awareness.