

As Eagles Spread Their Wings: Using Musical Intelligence to Open the Reading Decoding System in Early Childhood

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Abstract

This study proposes a developmental framework for understanding how musical intelligence may open the reading decoding system in early childhood. Rather than defining reading solely as the early mastery of print, the study argues that reading begins when children are enabled to enter a meaningful world, perceive its structure, and gradually transform understanding into forms that can be expressed, preserved, and publicly recognized. The central concern of the paper is therefore not only how young children learn to decode written symbols, but how they first become able to read meaning through sound, relationship, structure, and embodied participation before conventional print-based literacy is firmly established.

To account for this process, the paper presents nine interrelated conditions: **Context, Home, Affection, Read Aloud, Awakening, Commitment, Transfer, Encoding, and Recognition**. Notably, the initials of these nine conditions spell **CHARACTER**. This is more than a mnemonic device. The word *character* itself carries multiple layers of meaning—including written sign, role, trait, and moral character—and these layered meanings mirror the progressive deepening of reading decoding. Reading begins with signs and symbols, moves into roles and patterned identities, becomes manifest in distinctive traits and expressive forms, and ultimately reaches its highest educational horizon in the formation of character.

The first four conditions establish a learning world that is experiential, inhabitable, relationally grounded, and voiced. **Context** renders abstract content experientially accessible through story, fable, simulation, and lived scenario. **Home** provides an apprenticeship-based environment in which understanding is entered through belonging, guided participation, and peer presence. **Affection** gives expression a relational destination, so that language is not merely produced but directed toward another in care, response, and communication. **Read Aloud** animates text through

shared voicing, role-taking, and expressive participation, enabling written language to become orally alive before it is fully secured in print.

The next two conditions explain how children begin to organize understanding. **Awakening** marks the emergence of structural perception: children begin to notice what matters, recognize patterns, and discern how an experience holds together. In activities such as *Little Broadcaster*, a flowing sequence of events gradually becomes a self-authored account with key words, focus, and structure. **Commitment** deepens this process by enabling children to form preference, priority, qualification, and boundary within a thematic whole. It marks the point at which learners begin to determine what must be retained, what must be excluded, and how genuine entry into a topic differs from merely appearing to understand. Commitment also includes respect for exception: in music, grammar, natural observation, and multicultural learning, children must learn not only to recognize regularity but also to remain intellectually humble before what exceeds immediate expectation.

The final three conditions describe how understanding becomes accessible, representable, and publicly visible. **Transfer** refers to the movement of understanding from one representational mode into another that is more accessible to the learner. This condition became especially evident in English teaching for Indigenous children who struggled to learn through print alone. When vocabulary was reorganized through rhythmic patterns—for example, fruit names mapped onto note values—children quickly grasped distinctions that had not become available through text. Such cases suggest that, for some learners, rhythm becomes readable before print. **Encoding** stabilizes this understanding in revisitable forms, including dictation, rhythmic patterning, movement-based music appreciation, symbolic approximation, and artifacts such as *My Book*. **Recognition** then brings encoded understanding into public visibility through multiplication-table chorus, ensemble performance, presentations, and exhibitions, allowing learners to experience understanding as both socially acknowledged and personally real.

The study draws on sustained classroom practice in early childhood and mixed-age educational settings, including Sim Life, read-aloud relay, music-integrated literacy tasks, vocabulary teaching through rhythm, movement-based listening, and public forms of student presentation. Methodologically, the paper is conceptual and practice-based: it develops a theoretical framework grounded in sustained instructional observation and curricular design rather than in decontextualized skill analysis. Its contribution lies in articulating a developmental ecology in

which musical intelligence functions not as a decorative supplement to literacy instruction, but as a primary pathway through which children enter meaning, perceive structure, form representations, and bring understanding into visible life.

The paper concludes that early literacy education should be understood more broadly as the cultivation of pathways by which children first learn to read the world. In this sense, musical intelligence mediates not merely enjoyment or motivation, but the emergence of structure, representation, visible understanding, and character formation. Reading, therefore, should be reconsidered not simply as technical decoding, but as a developmental process through which meaning becomes alive, organized, embodied, and ultimately lived.

Keywords: musical intelligence; early childhood literacy; reading decoding; character formation; embodied learning