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Research Snapshot No. 24

A Preschool Rhythm and Movement Intervention: RCT Evidence for Improved Social and Behavioral Development

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What do you need to know?

- Active music and movement engagement has been widely integrated in human socialisation across history and cultures and is particularly prevalent in early childhood play and learning.
- In clinical populations, music therapy is known to support social skills and wellbeing for young children.
- There is less evidence for the value of active music engagement for non-clinical populations in terms of supporting social and behavioural wellbeing in the early years.

What is this research about?

- RAMSR (Rhythm and Movement for Self-Regulation) is a music and movement program that translates principles from music psychology, music education, and music therapy into an accessible and engaging classroom-based program that can be delivered by generalist educators with no prior music experience.
- This study evaluated the impact of (RAMSR) intervention on children's early social and emotional development; documenting benefits related to increased prosocial skills and reduced behaviour problems across the transition to school period.
- This study contributes to an emerging body of work that investigates the role of shared rhythmic movement participation in supporting social development.

What did the researchers do?

- The researchers completed a randomised control trial that involved 213 children across eight preschools.
- The intervention group received 16 to 20 sessions of RAMSR over eight weeks while the control group undertook usual preschool programs.
- The researchers used four subscales from the Child Self-Regulation and Behaviour Questionnaire to collect data via teacher reporting. Data was collected pre and post intervention and again six months later once children had transitioned into their first year of school.

What did the researchers find?

- Children who participated in the RAMSR intervention had significantly steeper growth in prosocial skills compared to children in the control group.
- Children who participated in the RAMSR intervention showed a statistically significant reduction in internalising and externalising problems during the transition to school period compared to children in the control group.
- No significant differences were identified for general sociability skills
- The findings from this study reflect prior studies linking group music participation and formal music instruction with pro-sociality in older children.

How does this align with the Best Practice Framework?

- Intervention is evidence informed.
- Intervention is universal and preventative- targeting protective factors of self-regulation and prosocial behaviours.
- Embedded in existing daily routines in places where children live, learn and play.
- Activities reflect play-based, developmentally appropriate practices.
- Supports workforce sustainability and emphasises building the capacity of the everyday workforce.
- It is scalable and cost effective.
- Supports inclusion rather than segregating children with behavioural challenges.

How can you use this research?

- You can use this research in very practical, real-world ways, especially if you work with younger children, design programs, or support early childhood development. The article shows strong evidence that rhythm and movement sessions, when done intentionally and consistently, can improve prosocial behaviour and reduce behaviour difficulties in preschoolers.
- This research paper provides high-quality evidence for a low cost, scalable intervention that is able to be delivered by generalists in everyday settings where children learn and play. This research can be used to support program funding or policy changes.

Where to from here?

- Services can explore or access RAMSR training that will support the delivery of the program with fidelity and allow access to structured plans, audio, and extensions.
- Consider trialling a short-term pilot to support the research into rhythm and movement interventions.
- The article highlights that although an adapted version has been trialled in Hong Kong, full child-outcome data is still unpublished. Further studies are required to examine how well RAMSR works outside Australia and across different languages and cultures.

About the researchers

Kate E Williams – Kate Williams is an Associate Professor in the School of Early Childhood and Inclusive Education, QUT. She leads the Centre for Child & Family Studies and is Academic Lead (Engagement) for her school. Kate is also a member of the Centre for Child Health & Wellbeing.

Dr Laura Bentley – Dr Laura Bentley is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Child Health Research Centre at The University of Queensland. Laura has a background in developmental psychology, and her PhD explored the impact of music on early cognition and self-regulation skills

Citation

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This Research Snapshot was prepared by Trish Wachtel, PRECI Board Director and Developmental Educator.

In the spirit of reconciliation PRECI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.