

TOP LINE EVALUATION FINDINGS

Pilot Assessment of the Effect of Music Together on Parent/Caregiver Involvement

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Introduction

This Top Line report provides an overview of the objectives and findings of a recent pilot study designed to assess the impact of Music Together on parent/caregiver involvement and engagement regarding their young children and learning. The current study was conducted to pilot methods and provide guidance for future evaluations of the effectiveness of Music Together on bi-generational learning.

Background

Bridge Together is an ABCD Bridgeport comprehensive initiative designed to address the persistent achievement gap that characterizes young students' academic performance in the United States. The Bridge Together initiative is grounded in a deep understanding that the impact and consequences of poverty are multi-faceted and multi-leveled. Currently, a large percentage of our young children are failing to acquire the skills that are the required foundations for life-long learning and academic success. A disproportionate number of these children live in families that are historically disadvantaged and represent the lower levels of the economic spectrum.

Additionally, recent advancement in early childhood development and education has identified the importance of positively engaging children - and supporting their parents and caregivers - during the early and formative pre-school years. Bridge Together is a prescient and innovative program that provides a best practice model of a non-profit, private and public sector collaboration focused on addressing the needs of young pre-school children and their families. Based on a deep understanding that the complex challenges facing public education require complex solutions, Bridge Together is comprised of multiple components, designed to meet important programmatic goals.

Music Together is a core component of the initiative, providing engaging developmentally appropriate pre-school experiences for young children, their parent caregivers and educators. Music Together is explicitly designed to engender parent/caregiver and family involvement through engaging music-

based co-activities. The importance of bi-generational involvement, engagement and learning has emerged as a critical dynamic in ensuring young children's success as life-long learners. Additionally, the positive impact on the parent/caregivers and families involved has been well documented.

The research-based Music Together program supports early music learning and also promotes overall healthy development in infants, toddlers and young children. The co-attended, weekly Music Together classes are carefully developed to build young children's motor, social/emotional, language, (pre)/reading and cognitive skills. Music Together classes are designed to model positive parent/caregiver and child interactions. Music Together classes provide important, ongoing opportunities for young children and their parent/caregivers to learn and play together.

The Music Together experience is designed to engender child learning parent/caregiver involvement. Specifically, in the infant and toddler Music Together groups, children and their parents participate in weekly 45-minute classes. Highly qualified trainers deliver the Music Together curriculum that reinforces cognitive, language, literacy, and social skills development. Parents receive ongoing coaching throughout the workshops. Additionally, each family receives a full set of materials (which includes music tapes or CDs, music books, and age appropriate musical instruments) to extend the activities to the home for additional practice and interactions. In the pre-school Music Together classes, early childhood educators receive professional development from Music Together trained educators and parents attend monthly Music Together events. Additional parent/caregiver events are held throughout the year, designed to deepen involvement and engagement for all families.

Additionally, family services are provided to all Music Together participants. Prior multi-year research and evaluation on the ABCD combined model of family services and child programming (previously Total Learning) provided statistically significant evidence of positive impact on Kindergarten students' DRA scores, as well as positive impact on multiple developmental domains for pre-school children. Further, providing early interventions and services for families with young children alleviated chronic stress in the home and reduced the numbers of families becoming at risk.

Objectives

The objectives of the current pilot study include an assessment of the impact of Music Together on several dimensions of parent/caregivers involvement and engagement regarding their pre-school children.

Specifically, the pilot study objectives include an assessment of the impact of Music Together on parental awareness, knowledge and behaviors regarding their young children and learning, school-preparedness and parental self-efficacy.

Additionally, the current study is designed to pilot the combined use of several standardized measures and pilot the survey instrument.

Importantly, the pilot study is designed offer direction regarding the design of future, more robust evaluations of the impact of Music Together on bi-generational learning.

Methodology

In order to meet the stated objectives, a pre- and post-test survey design was utilized to assess the effect of participation in Music Together on parent/caregiver involvement and engagement. The study was also designed to compare pre- and post-test survey responses with parents who did not participate in Music Together.

Measures

The Michael Cohen Group, in collaboration with ABCD and Music Together, created a survey instrument for parents of pre-school children. Survey questions were adapted from standardized measures of parent/caregiver perceptions of their relationship with their children (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011), family and community involvement (Sheldon & Epstein, 2007), and parental efficacy (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Additionally, customized measures as well as measures utilized in prior assessments of Music Together were included. These measures were designed to specifically

assess parents' efficacy, attitudes, and behaviors regarding their children and music.

Surveys were created for both parents attending the parent-toddler Music Together classes with their children, as well as for parents whose children participated in Music Together at preschool. The surveys differed in the inclusion of additional questions for parents who attended Music Together with their infants and toddlers. Surveys for parents of children attending preschool were designed for use with a control (non Music Together) parent sample.

Protocol

Recruitment. All recruitment was conducted by trained researchers and supervised by senior MCG research staff. Informed consent forms were provided to all parents, outlining the scope of the research and assuring confidentiality. All materials were made available in both Spanish and English; and Spanish-speaking researchers were available during recruitment and survey administration. The following recruitment methods were used:

- Parents attending parent-toddler Music Together classes were recruited before and after classes.
- Parents of children attending preschools with Music Together were recruited either: 1) in-person at Music Together monthly parent events; 2) in-person during preschool student pick-up and/drop-off; and 3) via flyers and consent forms sent home with their children.
- Non Music Together parents (control) were recruited from the same neighborhoods and were matched demographically. Recruitment utilized flyers distributed through ABCD and via posters displayed at high traffic businesses within walking distance of ABCD offices. The flyers provided a description of the project as well as a time and date to attend survey administration.

Survey Administration. After informed consent was obtained, pre-test surveys were administered on a one-on-one basis. MCG researchers administered the survey orally to parents as a one-on-one interview or, if parents preferred, they

completed the survey themselves. This strategy was used to allow parents with low literacy to participate without the stigma of needing to request help. At post-test, parents were also offered the option to complete surveys online or in a one-on-one phone interview.

The following chart summarizes the number of pre- and post-tests that were completed as well as the number of completed surveys that met the criteria for analysis.

	Completed Pre-Test <i>N</i>	Completed Post-test <i>N</i>	Used for analysis <i>N</i>
Infant/Toddler Music Together	84	57	44
Preschool Music Together	34	20	17
Non Music Together (control)	103	55	40

Stipend. All parents were received a modest stipend for participating.

Analysis

Surveys were entered into the SPSS Statistics Program for quantitative analysis. Data analysis proceeded in a three phases according to established quantitative methods (i.e. Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). 1) Descriptive analysis was conducted to identify outliers, missing data, and data entry errors; 2) after data was cleaned, basic psychometric analysis was conducted on the survey scales and measures were reduced based on response patterns; 3) mean differences on baseline measures were compared between the control and experimental groups to insure that the groups were statistically similar prior to exposure to the Music Together Program; and 4) t-tests were conducted to evaluate changes in participants responses on pre- and post-tests.

Note: This is a pilot study. Although the results of the analysis are quantitative, they are not projectable to a larger population. The sample

size and the sampling procedure do not allow for generalized findings. Findings are preliminary and provide direction.

Analysis was first conducted comparing all Music Together parents as a sample and then separated as *Infant/Toddler* and *Preschool* Music Together samples. Analysis of control group parents were conducted similarly, and parents were divided into two groups based on child age in order to match the two *Music Together* conditions.

Findings

Highlights of important and significant findings are as follows.

Overall, participation in Music Together increases parents' self-efficacy, awareness and knowledge of school preparedness, and the positive use and value of music, specifically, in young children's learning.

Parents participating in Music Together reported higher gains, as compared to parents in the control group, on measures assessing the following:

I feel successful about my efforts to help my child learn
I know how to prepare my child for school
I am aware of different ways I can use music as a tool for effective parenting¹

Findings indicate that Bridgeport parents who participated in Music Together classes reported higher gains, at a statistically significant level, ($t [67] = -2.961$), $p < .01$), in their perceived success in preparing their children to learn (measure based on Sheldon & Epstein, 2007) than parents in the control group.

Additionally, findings indicate that parents of infants and toddlers who participate in Music Together classes ($n=44$) report statistically significant higher gains than parents in the control group on all measures cited above ($t [66] = -2.425$), $p < .05$).

¹ Questions were answered on a 6-point likert-type scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*.

In sum, findings indicate that participation in Music Together engenders parent/caregiver involvement and engagement. Findings also indicate that parent/caregiver direct participation in Music Together at the infant/toddler level engenders greater gains in efficacy, awareness and knowledge.

Discussion

The results from this pilot study are encouraging. Based on a small pilot sample, findings indicate that Music Together is achieving the stated goal of addressing and engendering bi-generational learning. Parental learning and involvement is a core objective of the Bridge Together initiative overall and a focused objective of Music Together.

Challenges in recruiting preschool parents resulted in a small sample size that potentially dampened evidence of impact. The recruiting difficulties were directly related to low parent attendance at school events and the difficulty of distributing materials to parents. Both of these challenges have implications for the effectiveness of Music Together to achieve meaningful parental impact with the preschool program. Future research should examine ways to increase parent attendance and adoption of Music Together materials at the preschool level.

The measures collected and created for the pilot study were successfully implemented as a unified instrument. The pilot administration of the survey provides evidence for the value of extra support for participating parents, both bi-lingual and survey administration options and support.

Future Research and Evaluation Directions

The implications of the pilot study implementation and findings are meaningful and clear. The pilot study provides a green light for a more robust assessment of the effectiveness of Music Together on bi-generational learning.

Additionally, the Bridge Together project overall will benefit from research focused on evaluating the impact of additional program components, including:

- The efficacy of Family Advocates on a variety of dynamics, including:
 - Recruiting rates; and
 - Percentage of families being connected to services.
- The overall utilization rates of the Family Resource Centers.
- The quality and impact of professional development for preschool Music Together teachers.

Each study will raise new and interesting further directions.

References

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