

# Research Findings on the Music Together® Preschool Program Model

Lili M. Levinowitz, Ph.D.

Professor of Music Education, Rowan University; Director of Research, Music Together LLC



The Center for Music and Young Children, developer of the Music Together® early childhood music curriculum, has been deeply committed to bringing the excitement and developmental benefits of music and movement to those preschool children who may

be considered academically challenged based on their family's socio-economic situation.

In the past five years, two large-scale studies have been undertaken to understand how the Music Together Preschool model supports overall learning in the preschool curriculum.

## Action for Bridgeport Community Development

Most recently, a project was designed to evaluate the efficacy of the Music Together curriculum for preschool children in the Bridgeport, Connecticut, public schools (using Creative Curriculum Assessments). This study was funded by the Connecticut Assembly and the U.S. Department of Education, in partnership with Action for Bridgeport Community Development (Charles Tisdale, director). Children in the Music Together experimental group scored better to a statistically significant degree on both the cognitive change and language development Creative Curriculum Assessments. The following was concluded (Michael Cohen Group, LLC, external evaluators, 2008):

*Over the course of the '07-'08 academic year, four-year-olds in preschool classrooms assigned to receive **Total Learning's Music***

***Together** program made **significantly greater progress in the Cognitive, Language, and Physical developmental domains** than did four-year-olds in classrooms that did not participate in the program.*

- **Cognitive developmental gains.** Preschoolers participating in Total Learning's Music Together program made significantly greater gains in cognitive skills (problem-solving) than did preschoolers who did not participate in the program,  $t(471) = -2.453, p = .01$ .

- **Language development gains.** Children assigned to receive Music Together made significantly greater gains in language acquisition and verbal fluency than did children who did not participate in the program,  $t(471) = 2.811, p < .001$ .

- **Physical development domain.** Four-year-olds in classrooms assigned to receive Music Together made significantly greater gains in physical development (coordination) than did children in classrooms that did not participate in the program,  $t(471) = -2.310, p < .05$ .

In the area of social development, children in the Music Together experimental group also scored better, approaching but not meeting statistical significance.

- *Four-year-olds in preschool classrooms assigned to receive Total Learning's Music Together program also made greater gains in the **Social-Emotional developmental domain** (self-esteem, self-confidence) than did preschoolers in classrooms that did not participate in the program,  $p < .1$ .*

## Trenton, New Jersey: Music for the Very Young

In 2003, the Trenton Community Music School and Music Together LLC partnered with the Education Resources Group to design and implement a study in the Trenton Public Schools to understand the impact of the Music Together Preschool model both on preschool children's school readiness (using Brigance Preschool Screen) and on their long-term literacy (using the Terra Nova Test).

This three-year project was funded through the U.S. Department of Education: Arts in Education Innovation Grant (U.S. Department of Education, OMB No. 1890-0004). In the Music Together experimental group, some scores were higher than those in the control group. Notably, the scores did not go down, even though the experimental group spent less time on literacy and numeracy tasks due to their music-making activities. Therefore, it seems that both the content of the Arts Education Program, which includes weekly contact through music classes taught by an early childhood music specialist, and the process for inclusion of home and classroom materials that engage parents and caregivers in music-making, do support the attributes that young children need for school success.

In addition to the school readiness and long-term literacy results, the Executive Summary reported the following: the Music Together Curriculum Model helps bring families together. In surveys, parents re-

ported that, since participating in the Music Together program, they sing more at home. This is particularly important as many parents note how difficult it can be for parents to make time to play with their children. **In a survey, 96% of parent respondents said their children asked them to play the Music Together CDs sometimes or all of the time.**

Typical teacher reports include comments such as, "I don't know how I taught before the Music Together Curriculum Model was introduced into my classroom. I use music for everything now." According to the recent survey of classroom teachers who had participated in this project, a large majority report the continued use of Music Together teaching strategies and use of the materials one to two years after the conclusion of the project. **Eighty-five percent of those teachers reported a desire for Music Together to return to their classrooms.** They clearly found that Music Together enhanced their learning environments sufficiently to offset any "loss" of academic time, affirming the fundamental value of music and movement in the early childhood curriculum.

Considering the data from both the Bridgeport and Trenton projects, it seems reasonable to suggest that a music curriculum model such as the one found in Music Together should be included as an essential part of the core preschool curriculum. **The conclusions from these studies counter the current trend in schools to reduce or eliminate music and other arts programs from school curricula to make time for extra reading and math.**