

2009 EVALUATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL IMPACT OF **TOTAL LEARNING** ON PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADE STUDENTS IN BRIDGEPORT, CT

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Action for Bridgeport Community Development (ABCD), Bridgeport, Connecticut's community action agency, in collaboration with the **Bridgeport Board of Education**, **Head Start**, **Arts Education IDEAS**, **Music Together**, and the **Michael Cohen Group LLC**, has developed the **Total Learning Initiative**, a comprehensive model of educational and social support for children zero to nine and their families. Based on research findings in social policy, education and childhood development arenas, **Total Learning (TL)** is designed to address a critical educational crisis in the US — the **persistent achievement gap** that challenges students from impoverished and historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Total Learning is a "whole child" approach designed to meet the needs of children and families living at or below the poverty level. At its core, **TL's** orientation is that classroom experiences exist in the context of the child's entire life. In order for children to learn and mature, and to close the achievement gap, it is essential to address impoverished families' needs.

The two overall objectives of this evaluation are:

- To assess the effectiveness of **Total Learning** with public school kindergarteners and first graders in Bridgeport, Connecticut.
- Specifically, to evaluate the educational impact of **Total Learning** on student outcome performance, assessed by standardized tests, and determined by a scientific, evidenced-based control study.

This evaluation was conducted from October 2008 through May 2009 by the Michael Cohen Group LLC (MCG) – a research and evaluation team specializing in education.

The evaluation was designed and analyzed by MCG. Data collection and compilation was completed in collaboration with the Bridgeport Board of Education.

This evaluation provides scientific evidence that **Total Learning** achieves its educational objectives.

RESULTS: SIGNIFICANT MAIN EFFECTS

Bridgeport public school kindergarten and first grade students in classrooms assigned to Total Learning (TL) made **significantly greater gains in learning** as determined by standardized test scores than did children in classrooms that did not participate.

Reading Fluency and Comprehension

- **Public school kindergarten and first grade students assigned to Total Learning showed significantly greater increases in emergent literacy skills than did children who did not participate, as measured by the Developmental Reading Assessment.**
 - **First Graders.** Total Learning first graders made significantly greater gains in their DRA scores than did children who did not participate in the program ($p < .001$, $g = .40$).
 - **Kindergartners.** Total Learning kindergartners made significantly greater gains in their DRA scores than did children who did not participate in the program ($p < .001$, $g = .20$).
 - **English Language Learners (ELL).** ELL kindergartners in Total Learning classrooms made significantly greater gains in their DRA scores than did ELL children who did not participate in the program ($p \leq .005$, $g = .60$).

Awareness and Understanding of Print

- **Public school kindergartners assigned to Total Learning showed significantly greater increases in their understanding of printed language than did children who did not participate, as measured by Concepts of Print assessments.**
 - **Kindergartners.** Total Learning kindergartners made significantly greater gains in their awareness of print in the everyday environment and their understanding of the concepts of printed language than did children who did not participate ($p \leq .03$, $g = .24$).

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METHODOLOGY: PRE-TEST, POST-TEST DESIGN

- Scientific, evidence-based control study was conducted with 595 children in 32 public school kindergarten classrooms, and 305 children in 14 public school first grade classrooms in Bridgeport, CT.
- Classrooms were assigned to one of two conditions or groups.
- The intervention period was a standard nine-month school year.
- Standardized assessments were administered to all children both conditions two times during the school year, in a pre- and post-test research design. In addition, first grade students were tested at mid-year. (See "Assessment Measures," below).

CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENT TO CONDITIONS

- **Treatment or intervention condition.** In this condition, public school students in kindergarten and first grade classrooms received the intervention — that is, all elements of Total Learning.
- **Control condition.** In this condition, public school students in kindergarten and first grade classrooms received regular classroom instruction without the introduction of Total Learning elements.

TOTAL LEARNING MODEL

The **Total Learning** model consists of several educational and social support services:

In the classroom:

- An enhanced learning environment (small class sized, reduced student-to-teacher/paraprofessional classroom ratio, an extended school day).
- Delivery of core curricula via a multi-sensory, multi-modal, arts-infused approach to curriculum delivery.
- Embedded, in-classroom professional development for teachers and paraprofessionals.

Outside the classroom:

- Extensive family services and support.
- Assigned family workers.
- Child FIRST services (intensive home-based, mental health interventions for children at risk and their families).

ASSESSMENT MEASURES

Two standardized measures designed to assess emergent literacy skills.

First Grade

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was administered in October '08, January '09, and May '09.

The DRA measures each child's:

- Reading engagement
- Oral reading fluency
- Reading comprehension

Kindergarten

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) was administered in January '09 and May '09.

Concepts of Print assessment (COP) was administered in October '08 and January '09.

The COP measures each child's:

- Awareness of print in the everyday environment
- Understanding of how printed text is structured and functions