

EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF **TOTAL LEARNING** ON PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTENERS IN BRIDGEPORT, CT

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Action for Bridgeport Community Development (ABCD), Bridgeport'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** (TL), 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, 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, the full spectrum of needs of impoverished families must be addressed.

The overall objectives of this study are:

- To evaluate the impact of the *Total Learning Initiative* on public school kindergarteners in Bridgeport, Connecticut.
- Specifically, to evaluate the 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 2007 through May 2008, by the Michael Cohen Group LLC (MCG) – a research and evaluation team specializing in education.

The study was designed and analyzed by MCG as the principal investigator.

The Bridgeport Board of Education collaborated with MCG on data collection and compilation.

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

RESULTS: SIGNIFICANT MAIN EFFECTS

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

Reading Fluency and Comprehension

- **Kindergartners assigned to receive all elements of Total Learning showed significantly greater increases in specific emergent literacy skills (oral reading fluency, reading comprehension, reading engagement) than did children who did not participate in the program, $F(2, 478) = 3.703, p = .025$.**

Developmental Reading Assessment

- **More children in Total Learning kindergarten classrooms achieved the 4-point Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) benchmark set by the Bridgeport Board of Education than did children who did not participate in the program.**
- **Significantly more children assigned to receive all elements of Total Learning gained 2+ points in their DRA scores from January '08 to May '08 than did children in classrooms not participating in the program.**

Awareness and Understanding of Print

- **Kindergartners assigned to receive all or some elements of Total Learning showed significantly greater gains in their awareness of print in the everyday environment and their understanding of how the concepts of printed language work than did children who did not participate in the program, $F(2, 430) = .746, p = .000$.**

Concepts of Print

- **Children in Total Learning classrooms scored significantly higher on the Time 2 Concepts of Print test than did children who did not participate in the program,**

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METHODOLOGY

- 551 children in 32 kindergarten classrooms in Bridgeport, CT, participated in this study.
- Classrooms were assigned to one of three treatment conditions.
- Two standardized assessments were administered to all children twice each, in a pre- and post-test research design. (See below).

TREATMENT CONDITIONS: LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION IN TOTAL LEARNING

- **Full treatment — all Total Learning components** (n = 120). In this condition, public school kindergarten classrooms received all elements of Total Learning: a **multi-sensory, arts-infused approach to curriculum delivery**, an **enhanced learning environment** (small class sizes, reduced student-to-adult classroom ratio, an extended day), **embedded professional development** for teachers, and extensive **family services and support**.
- **Partial treatment — school-based Total Learning components** (n = 132). In this condition, public school kindergarten classrooms received Total Learning's **multi-sensory, arts-infused approach to curriculum delivery** and **embedded professional development** for teachers.
- **Control condition — no Total Learning components** (n = 299). In this condition, public school kindergarten classrooms received regular classroom instruction without the introduction of Total Learning components.

TOTAL LEARNING TEACHERS

- In interviews, teachers participating in TL expressed the belief that the Total Learning Initiative had a positive impact on their teaching.
- They also reported that students' engagement in the Total Learning classroom sessions was very high.
- Perhaps most importantly, participating teachers felt Total Learning had excited their students about reading.

"They have a passion for reading now!"

ELEMENTS OF THE PRE- & POST-TEST ASSESSMENT

Two standardized measures designed to assess emergent literacy skills were used in a pre-test, post-test research design.

Pre-Test

Concepts of Print (COP)

Measures child's:

- Awareness of print and literacy in the everyday environment
- Understanding of the concepts of how print and literacy are structured and function

Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)

Measures child's:

- Reading engagement
- Oral reading fluency
- Reading comprehension

Post-Test

Concepts of Print

Developmental Reading Assessment