

4-2017

Learning with Music: MacPhail's Innovative Early Childhood Program Associated with Social-Emotional Advantage

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Recommended Citation

Brown, E. D., Garnett, M., Labrador, A., Faro, L., Hallenbeck, A., Jackson, B., & Pazmino, S. (2017). Learning with Music: MacPhail's Innovative Early Childhood Program Associated with Social-Emotional Advantage. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/psych_stuwork/1

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Background

Economically disadvantaged children face risks in academic and social-emotional domains. Head Start and related preschool programs must foster children's social-emotional development in order to lay the ground for school success. Recent research suggests that music and arts programming may be used to foster social-emotional development. The present study examines the impact of MacPhail Center for Music's Learning with Music program on social-emotional development for economically disadvantaged preschool children. We hypothesized that children receiving MacPhail's Learning with Music program would show advantages in patterns of change across the year for these social-emotional skills.

Method

Participants

This study included 183 participants and their primary caregivers. The participants were children who attended one of three preschools in St. Paul, Minnesota in one of three cohorts. In total, 143 children received MacPhail's Learning with Music program and 40 did not. All children in the present study were economically disadvantaged.

Measures

Demographics. A demographic interview for caregivers provided information about standard indicators such as child age, gender, race/ethnicity, family size, and family income.

Emotion regulation. The Emotion Regulation Checklist (ERC; Shields & Cicchetti, 1997) is a 24 item teacher questionnaire that measures child positive and negative emotion regulation.

Inhibitory control. We combined the scores on three child tasks to form the measure of inhibitory control: the Day/Night Stroop task (Gerstadt et al. 1994), Peg Tapping task (Diamond & Taylor, 1996), and the Bear/Dragon measure (Reed, Pien, & Rothbart, 1984).



Figure 1. Emotion Regulation Problems by School in Years without (0) versus with (1) Learning with Music

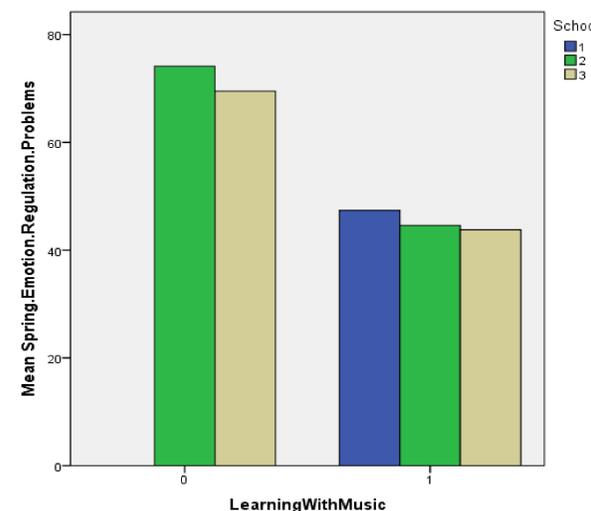
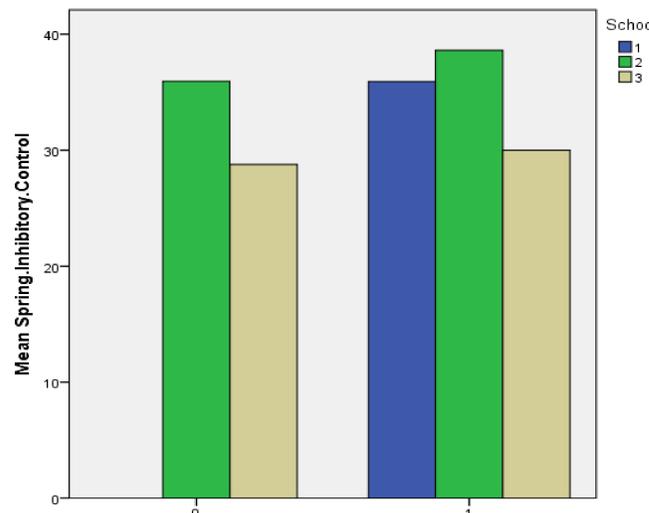


Figure 2. Inhibitory Control Competency by School in Years without (0) versus with (1) Learning with Music



Results and Discussion

We used a multivariate analysis of covariance to examine the impact of MacPhail's Learning with Music Program on social-emotional development. Multivariate tests ($df = 2, 176$) revealed a significant main effect for time (Wilks' Lambda = .71, $F = 34.72$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .283$, power = .99). Overall, children tended to show change on the indicators of school readiness from fall to spring. Multivariate tests ($df = 6, 254$) also revealed a significant interaction between time and Learning with Music (Wilks' Lambda = .71, $F = 36.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .30$, power = 1.00). Overall, children receiving MacPhail's Learning with Music program showed greater change over the course of the year in social-emotional skills, compared with their peers who did not receive the program.

Univariate tests ($df = 1, 181$) indicated a significant interaction of time and preschool type for emotion regulation ($F = 68.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .28$, power = 1.00) and inhibitory control ($F = 4.55$, $p = .034$, $\eta p^2 = .03$, power = .56). Compared to their peers who received preschool programming as usual, children receiving MacPhail's Learning with Music program were less likely to show increased emotion regulation difficulties over the course of the year and more likely to show improved inhibitory control. Figures 1 and 2 display end-of-year scores for emotion regulation problems and inhibitory control competency at the four participating preschools.

In sum, the present study suggests that MacPhail's Learning with Music program is associated with a social-emotional advantage for young children at risk. Compared to their peers, economically disadvantaged preschool children who received MacPhail's Learning with Music program demonstrated more advantageous patterns of change across the year in terms of emotion regulation and inhibitory control. Implications concern providing access to high quality early childhood music education and promoting the positive development of children facing poverty risk.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate the contributions of the participating preschools, teachers, and families, as well as our colleagues at MacPhail, in particular Dianna Babcock and Tricia Wangerin.

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