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**MUSIC INSTRUCTION CAN HELP CHILDREN IMPROVE READING SKILLS
STUDY PUBLISHED IN *PSYCHOLOGY OF MUSIC***

Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore and Washington DC (March 16, 2009) – Children exposed to a multi-year program of music training with increasingly complex rhythmic, tonal, and practical skills display superior cognitive performance in reading skills compared with their non-musically trained peers, according to a study published by SAGE today in the journal *Psychology of Music*.

Authors Joseph M Piro and Camilo Ortiz of Long Island University studied children at two demographically similar elementary schools with the same comprehensive and balanced literacy programs, except that one school provided music instruction and one didn't. The researchers hypothesized that children who were exposed to keyboard instruction as a part of an increasingly difficult music curriculum would, over three consecutive years, perform significantly better on vocabulary and verbal sequencing.

While the researchers did find that the music-learning group had significantly better vocabulary and verbal sequencing scores than did the non-music-learning control group, the results revealed some complexity in the outcomes. When the study began, the music-learning group had already experienced two years of piano lessons, yet their reading scores started out nearly identical to the control group, which raised the question about how long kids needed to experience music instruction before their reading abilities were positively impacted. The researchers hypothesize that one of the following could explain that finding:

- Children were baseline tested at the beginning of the school year, after a summer break from music instruction, which may have reversed any earlier advances.
- The duration of music study required to improve reading and associated skills is fairly long, so the initial two years might not have been sufficient.
- Or, the developmental time period (of 2nd grade and 7 years-old) is when there are significant spurts of brain growth, which, coupled with the increased complexity of the study matter in that year, brain changes that promote reading skills may have been more likely to accrue.

"All of this adds a compelling layer of meaning to the experimental outcomes, perhaps signalling that decisions on 'when' to teach are at least as important as 'what' to teach," note the authors. "Study of how music may also assist cognitive development will help education practitioners go beyond the sometimes hazy and ill-defined 'music makes you smarter' claims and provide careful and credible instructional approaches that use the rich and complex conceptual structure of music and its transfer to other cognitive areas."

"The effect of piano lessons on the vocabulary and verbal sequencing skills of primary grade students," by Joseph M. Piro and Camilo Ortiz, is published online ahead of print in *Psychology of Music*. It will be free to access online for a limited time at <http://pom.sagepub.com/>.

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Psychology of Music publishes peer-reviewed papers directed at increasing the scientific understanding of any psychological aspect of music, including studies on listening, performing, creating, memorizing, analyzing, describing, learning, and teaching, as well as applied social, developmental, attitudinal and therapeutic studies. Special emphasis is placed on studies carried out in naturalistic settings, especially those which address the interface between music psychology and music education. *Psychology of Music* is published by SAGE on behalf of the Society for Education, Music, and Psychology Research. <http://pom.sagepub.com/>

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