

Comprehensive Therapy Center

An Analysis of an Early Childhood Family Literacy Program

Read to Me

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Introduction

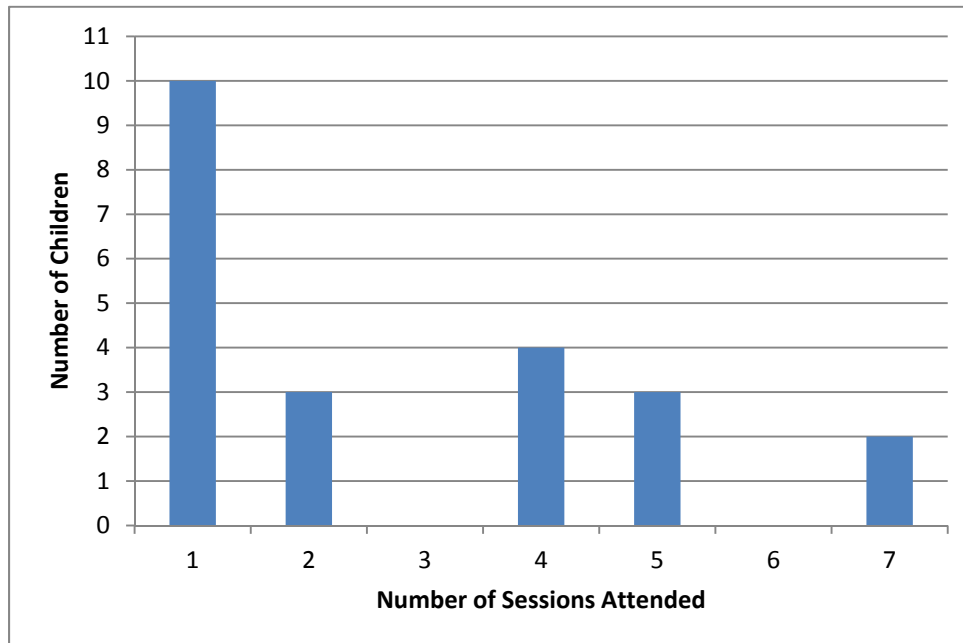
Throughout the fall of 2011, Comprehensive Therapy Center (CTC) worked with South End Community Outreach Ministries (SECOM) to provide a child outreach program for disadvantaged and at-risk pre-school aged children and their families. This program, called Read to Me, was offered once a week for ten weeks. It built pre-reading and literacy skills in the primarily Spanish-Speaking Hope Zone South neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Classes provided were an hour in length and promoted family literacy and child development by targeting language, motor, sensory, and social skills. Read to Me provided parents and their children an opportunity to explore hands-on learning experiences focused on pre-reading skills and literacy. Each week, a new book was featured during story time. Literacy stations were set-up with thematic activities reinforcing skills and strategies to use at home. Music and movement was also incorporated into the program. Songs that correlated with books were enjoyed by all participants. All aspects of the session engaged parent with child. At the end of each session, children were sent home with a book and specific activities for caregivers to do at home. CTC partnered with First Book (www.firstbook.org) to provide the highest quality books at the lowest possible cost for the children we served.

The Read to Me sessions were made possible with the efforts from various groups of people. Two teachers, a speech-language pathologist, and an occupational therapist from CTC developed lesson plans. Two CTC staff members ran each session along with volunteers. A few of the volunteers were college student who had a background in Spanish. The paid staff from SECOM included one or two translators that were present at each class to translate between the Spanish and English speaking individuals. SECOM was also responsible for advertising and marketing Read to Me to their food bank customers in communications that were bi-lingual Spanish and English.

Initially, data was collected at each session in the form of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) in hopes of quantifying the changes in abilities of the children who attended Read to Me. However, families did not regularly attend sessions, so the data could not be calculated. Instead, program evaluation surveys were given to volunteers and families at the end of each workshop to assess parent and volunteer satisfaction as opposed to quantifiable changes in child development.

Over the course of ten weeks, from September 16 – November 18, 2011, surveys were collected from twelve sessions. Twenty-one children from sixteen different families attended the Read to Me program. The number of sessions children attended can be seen in Chart 1 below.

Chart 1. Number of Sessions Attended by Children



Ten children attended the Read to Me program only once, while twelve children attended multiple sessions. Two children from the same family attended Read to Me seven times, which was the maximum number of classes attended by a single child. None of the children attended all ten sessions of Read to Me. Low attendance was not anticipated for the program, so further research is needed to find a way to increase turnout.

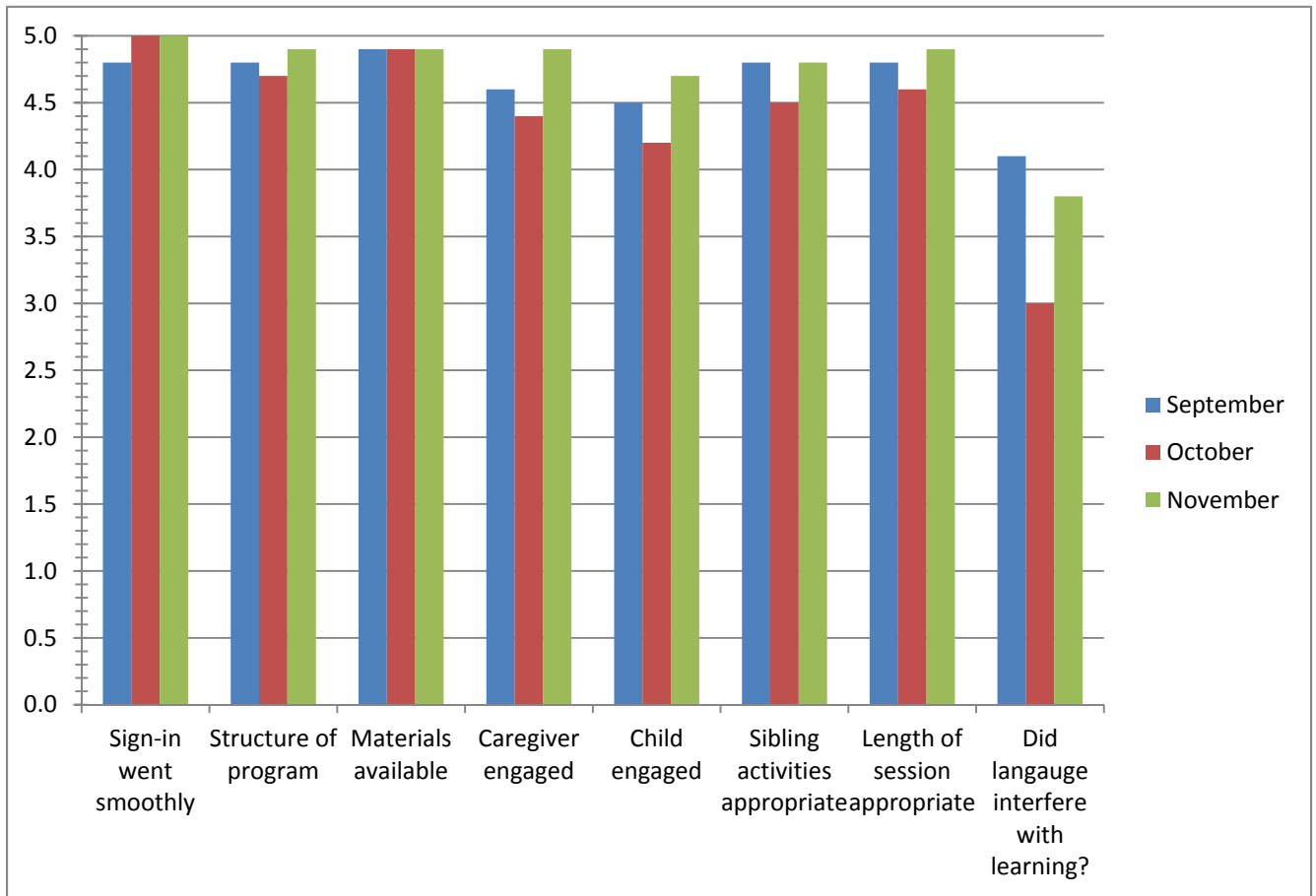
Volunteer Evaluations

Nine volunteers from Grand Valley State University's undergraduate Speech-Language Pathology and Aquinas' Nursing program devoted a total of 68 hours and 15 minutes to the Read to Me program. Fifty-one surveys were collected from the student volunteers. The students were asked to rate the Read to Me program on eight areas using a five-point scale. There was space given on the evaluations to write comments and suggestions. Below are the average scores from all volunteer evaluation forms.

- Sign-in went smoothly: 4.9
- Structure of program: 4.8
- Materials available: 4.9
- Caregiver engaged: 4.6
- Child engaged: 4.4
- Sibling activities appropriate: 4.7
- Length of session appropriate: 4.7
- Did language interfere with learning: 3.6

The data was also analyzed after being separated by month to show a comparison of scores over time. The average scores for September, October, and November can be found in Chart 2 below.

Chart 2. Average Scores from Volunteer Evaluations by Month



As can be seen in the chart above, the Read to Me program seemed to improve with time. It also visualizes the fact that volunteers thought the language barrier moderately interfered with learning. In the open question section, volunteers commented on the difficulty of not being able to communicate with participants. These comments include, “Language was the hardest problem,” and, “The only barrier present was language.”

Other concerns for the student volunteers included timing and attendance. Four students commented on the desire for more children at the program. In the first few weeks of the program, several of the students commented on the need of more time for activities.

The CTC staff took the reviews from the volunteers into account and changed the program accordingly. Students seemed satisfied with the modifications made to the program. This is evidenced by quotes such as, “It was a much calmer atmosphere with less activities. No rushing,” and, “Program runs more smoothly with less activities.”

Overall, the majority of quotes from volunteers were positive. Miscellaneous quotes from the student volunteers are listed below.

- “Very good that the children were starting young”
- “Session went very well. Children enjoyed themselves and parents seemed to like being involved”
- “Went great. I thought having the Spanish words was a great idea! Loved the paintings, too!”
- “The day went great! Kids were engaged and seemed to enjoy themselves”

Parent Evaluations

At the end of each class, parents were also asked to fill out an evaluation on the Read to Me program. Like the volunteer survey, this questionnaire utilized the five-point scale and space was provided for comments and suggestions. However, the questions on the parent evaluations differed from the volunteer surveys. There were five questions provided in both English and in Spanish. The average scores for all parent evaluations are listed below.

- My child enjoyed today’s class: 5.0
- I will use the take home activities with my child: 4.9
- The take home book will help my child learn: 5.0
- The length of this session was appropriate: 5.0
- I plan to come again next week: 5.0

The averages of the scores from the parent evaluations are also very high when separated by date. Many of the ratings are at the highest possible grade of 5.0 as seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Average Parent Evaluation Score by Date

Date	My child enjoyed today's class	I will use the take home activities with my child	The take home book will help my child learn	The length of this session was appropriate	I plan to come again next week
9/16/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
9/19/2001	5.0	4.7	5.0	5.0	5.0
9/23/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
9/26/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	5.0
9/30/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
10/7/2011	5.0	4.7	5.0	5.0	5.0
10/14/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
10/21/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
10/28/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0
11/4/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.7
11/18/2011	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0	5.0

All of the scores above show that the feedback from parents was overwhelmingly positive. This sentiment is reflected again in the comments and suggestions written at the end of the evaluations. A few examples are listed below.

- “Todo esta muy bien” (It was all very good)
- “Me gustaria mas dias si se pudiera” (I would like more days if you can)
- “Mucho excelente” (Very excellent!)
- “We enjoyed this session! Appropriate length and nice mixture of activities to keep all age levels interested. Looking forward to future sessions. Thank you!”
- “Very educational”

Conclusion

The Read to Me program was successful for two reasons; both the volunteers and families served benefited from the program. This benefit is evidenced by the large amount positive feedback from both the parents and volunteers. Even though there was a great deal of positive feedback, there were a few difficulties that occurred with the program. Collecting data in the form of the ASQ was not possible since families did not attend Read to Me on a regular basis. There are multiple variables that may have contributed to inconsistent attendance for this population including transportation availability, work schedules, and living arrangements. In addition, low turnout may have inhibited the program. The volunteers noted a linguistic barrier between families and themselves. The families, on the other hand, rated the Read to Me program as excellent on every level.

Future Read to Me programs would benefit from a few changes being made. Reasons for low and inconsistent turnout should be investigated so that regular attendance can be achieved. This would make pre and post testing possible. With pre- and post-data, the impact of the program on the changes in the abilities of children can be determined. Another solution to this problem would be to find a better evaluation tool for this Hope Zone neighborhood. The dip in scores for engaged parent and engaged child from the volunteer surveys might be helped by improving program design or delivery to mitigate the language barrier. Providing multiple translators at each session would reduce linguistic barriers and increase interaction between parents and volunteers.

Collectively, the families and volunteers seemed to be pleased with the Read to Me program. The program is easy to replicate and, with additional resources and cooperation, more reliable and valid results can be obtained.