

Strong Start to reading: *Get Ready for School* program Executive Summary 2013

Written by Ashley McKinnon, August 2013

The *Get Ready for School* program was designed as an intervention program to reduce the gap in literacy and school readiness skills that often exist at the time of school entry for children from low-income families, and those learning English as a second language. As an intervention program, the curriculum was designed with an intensive focus on **emergent literacy skills**, including letter knowledge, phonological awareness and vocabulary development, and involves highly predictable classroom routines and repetitive activities and games.



In 2013, the *Get Ready for School* program was expanded to eight community sites within Waterloo Region. The program is designed for 3-4 year olds, who will be entering junior kindergarten in the fall, and runs from January or February to June. There were 130 children who completed the 2013 program, attending two or three sessions per week, each two hours in length, for a total of 44 classes.

To help determine the impact and effectiveness of the program, each child was assessed prior to (**pre-test**) and following (**post-test**) the program, on a number of literacy measures and on one behaviour measure. By comparing scores between these two time points, changes in the children's literacy development were identified. Overall, analysis of the data showed that the gains children made on each of these measures were substantial, in that the scores at post-test were significantly higher than those at pre-test, on all of these measures.

In the *Get Ready for School* program phonological awareness is promoted through repetitive games and activities that involve identifying letter sounds, segmenting syllables, rhyming words, and blending sounds to make words. Upon program completion, children increased their **letter-sound** knowledge from 2 letter sounds to 12 letter sounds. Their knowledge of **letter-names** also increased, from 7 letters to 10 letters. Additionally, children showed improved performance on a **word recognition** task, a **word-pair** memory task, and a **phonological awareness** task. Knowledge of the alphabetic principles and development of phonological awareness skills is important for both reading and writing development, and children's improvement in scores demonstrates the effectiveness of the *Get Ready for School* program to increase this area of learning.



Vocabulary knowledge is also promoted in the *Get Ready for School* program, and is facilitated by experiencing words in a meaningful context through sorting games, storytelling activities, and book reading. After participating in the program, children showed marked gains in their receptive vocabulary knowledge and their improvement rate went beyond what would be expected from natural development over the five month duration. Lastly, in promoting **school readiness** skills children are introduced to the routines that would be expected of them in a classroom setting, such as raising their hand, following instructions, and lining up. Children were evaluated by their Lead Instructor, and their marked improvements in these **learning behaviours** provides further evidence that the program effectively promotes children's social competencies and increases their awareness of learning opportunities. The benefit of which is confidence and enjoyment of their future education.

Comparisons made between assessment results from previous years revealed a pattern of similar literacy gains. The consistency in our results provides further evidence that the *Get Ready for School* program uses effective strategies that promote early literacy development and school-readiness skills. Through the acquisition of these critical early literacy skills, children are better prepared for formal reading instruction and this program has the potential to reduce the frequency and severity of future reading problems that children may experience later in the elementary years.

An expanded version of this report is available upon request.



Get Ready for School™

A Strong Start to reading™ program

*Based on the research of Dr. Luliana Baciu

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