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BOOK BABIES
ANALYSIS OF PARENTS FOCUS GROUPS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to summarize the findings of a qualitative study aimed to understand parents' perceptions of the impact of Book Babies in their families' literacy practices and behaviors, and parents' views of the implementation of Book Babies. The report also includes a series of recommendations for the implementation of Book Babies and quality improvement.

Book Harvest, a non-profit organization based in Durham North Carolina, provides books and literacy support to families and their children, starting at birth. Book Babies is one of its programs and includes a literacy coaching and a book provision program that harnesses the power of parents to ignite literacy in the first five years. The program serves Medicaid-eligible children and their families, and provides coaching and literacy support for parents, in person or virtually. Various community partners refer families to the program. Families in the community are also encouraged to complete a self-referral on the Book Harvest website or call and complete the referral over the phone. The program provides quarterly home visits every year per family paired with at least 100 free and culturally responsive books per child enrolled in the program (20 books per year for 5 years). Books are also provided for siblings of the target child. Book Babies Literacy Coaches meet with families and model dialogic reading strategies (Trivette & Dunst, 2007). Dialogic reading is an interactive shared picture book reading practice to enhance young children's language and literacy skills. The parent is an active listener and questioner, prompting the child, expanding upon the child's responses, and switching roles with the child to allow them to become a storyteller.

During each visit, the Literacy Coach and the caregiver review specific early literacy concepts and strategies for the caregiver to practice during daily reading routines. When the child is 2 years and 6 months old, the Literacy Coach begins bringing the Book Babies Literacy Kit to every visit (which includes writing/coloring pad, pencil, crayons, scissors, and playdough) and models strategies to promote phonological awareness and opportunities for engaging children in emergent writing. The program designers and implementers aim to promote children's early language and literacy development, the caregiver's self-efficacy and competence to promote early language and literacy development themselves, and the creation of cultural settings in which children and adults engage in language and literacy behaviors.

More recently, Book Babies has added a component to the program that aims to facilitate families' transition to pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten. Through transition coaching, families receive individualized family outreach, group information sessions, school application

assistance, and training, helping them make informed decisions on their children's transition to school and make use of community partners whose services they may need.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

The aim of Book Babies, as of other family literacy program, is to enhance the home literacy environments of young children. Previous studies have suggested that efforts to help parents implement literacy activities at home, such as reading aloud or listening to their children read, can be effective in promoting children's language and literacy development (Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Van Steensel et al, 2011). Specific features of Book Babies are modeling dialogic reading (Trivette & Dunst, 2007) and providing books to families. Studies on dialogic reading reveal that enhancing the dialogue and interaction between children and parents during reading can strengthen the impact of reading aloud (Mol et al, 2008) and that parents can learn to promote the child's active participation while reading (Huebner, & Payne, 2010).

With regards to providing books, a recent meta-analysis or review of 44 studies of book giveaway programs (i.e., Bookstart, Reach Out and Read, and Imagination Library) revealed that having access to books from infancy increases the likelihood of parents and children engaging in language and literacy behaviors (De Bondt, Willenberg, & Bus, 2020). Findings of the study indicated that participation in a book giveaway program had significant effects in home literacy environments and in children's literacy behaviors and skills, particularly when the program included several personal contacts with program personnel and reading aloud demonstrations. Furthermore, giveaway book programs were especially effective for low-income families. The meta-analysis concluded that the presence of books in the home encourages parents and children to engage in language and literacy routines, which in turn promotes the ability of parents to be responsive to children's language and literacy development.

This meta-analysis, however, did not include information about the ethnicity or cultural background of the families participating in these programs, nor families' interpretations of receiving books. Most of the studies were conducted in English speaking contexts and the authors of the studies reviewed did not differentiate between English-speaking and non-English speaking parents. The studies reviewed included measures such as parents' interest in shared book reading, frequency of shared book reading, library use, and number of children's books. Studies that included qualitative data were excluded from the study and only information about families' SES was included.

Family literacy scholarship has pointed out the importance of considering class, language and culture when addressing questions of how the different literacies are learned (Compton-Lilly, Rogers, & Lewis, 2012). In the current study we use sociocultural theories of human development to guide analysis of the ways parents orchestrate children's literacy learning and development opportunities (Rogoff, 2003). We draw upon these theories to better understand the sociocultural contexts in which young children participate, as well as how families interpret Book Babies' intentions and their own role as children's first educators (Mistry et al., 2016). Efforts to co-create settings conducive for literacy learning with families should consider the "cultural models" and "cultural settings" where children engage (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001). Gallimore and Goldenberg (2001) define cultural models as the shared ways of thinking

and interpreting how the “world works or, ought to work” (p. 47) and cultural settings as “those occasions where people come together to carry out joint activity that accomplishes something of value” (p. 48). Examining parents’ interpretation, enactment and perceived impact of Book Babies’ recommendations and interactions at home will allow to uncover parents’ cultural models and settings and go beyond the knowledge gained through the quantitative methods of inquiry.

As part of their program quality improvement plan, Book Babies conducted a series of focus groups with parents participating in the program to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of the program’s impact on their ability to support their children’s early language and literacy development. Once the data was collected and transcribed, Dr. Gillanders provided advice regarding the transcription of the focus group recordings and conducted the analysis of the transcriptions. The result of this partnership is summarized in this report. This report synthesizes the findings obtained from these focus groups interviews. We have organized this report by first describing the methods used to obtain data from the participants, then summarizing the findings of each of the research questions, and finally listing recommendations based on the findings obtained.

METHOD

This qualitative study aimed to understand parents’ perceptions of the impact of Book Babies on their families’ literacy practices and behaviors, and their views of the implementation of Book Babies. The goal of the study was not to count the number of parents who describe specific experiences or their literacy behaviors, but rather to understand the different ways in which parents interpret or attach meaning to the Book Babies experience. The study also relies on the expertise of the families as they are the main beneficiaries of the Book Babies program. Specifically, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What do parents perceive to be the benefits of their participation in Book Babies?
2. What literacy practices do parents report engaging in with their children at home?
3. What challenges do parents encounter as they implement literacy practices?
4. What are parents’ views on the implementation of Book Babies?
5. What are parents’ views of programs to support children and families’ transition to Pre-Kindergarten and kindergarten?

Participant Recruitment

Book Babies personnel conducted the participant recruitment. The Book Babies Lead Coach and Book Babies Program Coordinator invited the focus group participants based on following criteria:

- Alumni families that had completed 80% of literacy coaching home visits since their enrollment in the Book Babies program. Their children were currently in kindergarten through second grade.

- Families that had completed 80% of the literacy coaching home visits and had engaged in transition to kindergarten consultations.
- Currently enrolled families that have participated in at least two virtual home visits as well as in-person home visits.

Ninety-three parents were invited to participate and 43 participated (46%, which is an adequate response rate). The parents invited to participate in the focus groups represent 17% of the total population of families who have participated in Book Babies in the last seven years.

Participant Characteristics

Participants included 37 mothers, 4 fathers, and 1 grandmother. Most parents were 26-45 years old, and were born in the USA, Mexico, Central and South America, and Africa. All parents had more than five years living in the U.S. (see Table 1).

Thirty seven percent of parents had college degrees or had taken college courses, and 52% completed middle school and some or all high school. Thirty two percent of parents spoke only English, 46% spoke mostly Spanish, 16% spoke two different languages (English, Spanish, Arabic, Swahili, Sign Language), and less than 1% spoke mostly another language at home. Thirty-nine of the parents were Black (although not all were African American) and 53% were Latinx.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

| <i>Characteristics</i> | | <i>N (% of study participants)</i> |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Relationship with Child | Mother | 38 (88%) |
| | Father | 4 (1%) |
| | Grandmother | 1 (>1%) |
| Parents Ages | 20-25 | 3 (>1%) |
| | 26-35 | 19 (44%) |
| | 36-45 | 19 (44%) |
| | 46-55 | 2 (>1%) |
| | Over 55 | NA |
| Country of Birth | USA | 18 (41%) |
| | Mexico | 12 (27%) |
| | Central America | 8 (18%) |
| | South America | 2 (>1%) |
| | Africa | 2 (>1%) |
| Race/Ethnicity | Black/AA | 17 (39%) |
| | Latinx | 23 (53%) |
| | Other | 3 (>1%) |
| Number of Years in the United States | 5-10 | 6 (14%) |
| | 10-20 | 15 (35%) |
| | Over 20 | 20 (46%) |
| Highest Educational Level | Some or completed elementary school | 2 (>1%) |
| | Some middle school or high school | 14 (32%) |
| | Completed high school | 9 (20%) |
| | Some college or completed | 16 (37%) |
| Primary Language use at home | English | 14 (32%) |
| | Spanish | 20 (46%) |
| | Bilingual | 7 (16%) |
| | Other | 2 (>1%) |
| Occupation | Home maker | 11 (25%) |
| | Low paid service job | 20 (46%) |
| | College education profession | 9 (20%) |

Procedures

The Book Babies Team Leader and Book Babies Literacy Coach facilitated twelve focus group interviews over Zoom in Spanish and English. Each session lasted approximately one hour, and all focus groups were recorded, transcribed and edited for accuracy. Examples of interview questions were:

- What are the parts of your experience with Book Babies that were most helpful for your family?
- Did participating in Book Babies changed your literacy practices at home? If so, can you tell us how these practices change?
- Describe the literacy routines you currently have at home.
- Tell us about the kinds of reading and writing strategies you are using at home.
- What has been your experience with the Book Babies Transition Coach as you prepare to your child to transition to pre-kindergarten or kindergarten?

All participants received a \$50 gift card for their time and participation.

Transcription of focus group recording was conducted using TRINT transcription software and later edited for accuracy by the Book Babies Program Coordinator and Lead Coach. All identifiable information was deleted from the transcripts.

Analysis

Edited transcripts were uploaded to Dedoose. Dedoose is a cross-platform software for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research with text, photos, audio, videos, spreadsheet data and more. Dr. Gillanders had no access to any identifiable information in the transcripts. Dr. Gillanders developed an initial coding that focused on the research questions and included codes such as: parents' views of in-person Book Babies, suggested changes to in person Book Babies, parents' views of virtual visits, suggested changes to virtual visits, frequency of visits and benefits of Book Babies. Then, Dr. Gillanders coded all focus groups transcripts. A few initial codes were eliminated, and others added. After all transcripts were coded, Dr. Gillanders summarized the similarly coded interview excerpts into memos. These memos served as the basis of the findings discussed in the next section.

FINDINGS

The purpose of the study was to understand parents' perceptions of the impact of Book Babies on their families' literacy practices and behaviors, and their views of the implementation of Book Babies. We have organized the description of the findings according to the research questions. To protect participants' privacy, names have been substituted with pseudonyms. We have included interview excerpts in the original language (Spanish) with an English translation below.

1) What do parents perceive to be the benefits of their participation in Book Babies?

Adults learning English

Spanish-speaking parents indicated that one benefit of Book Babies was that they could also learn and practice English. Reading children's literature in English allowed parents to continue developing their English vocabulary in books that were predictable and easy to understand. Remedios summarizes this idea, saying:

“Entonces eso también ayuda a... Nos ayuda a nosotros a practicar la lectura, practicar la escritura también, porque aunque son palabras pequeñas, son palabras para niños, pero nos ayudan a nosotros como latinos que el inglés no es nuestro primer idioma.” [So, this helps us too... It helps us practice reading and writing, because although they are small words, words for children, but it helps us Latinos since English is not our first language.]

In addition, parents who did not feel capable of reading in English felt confident that they could engage their children in language learning opportunities by speaking about the pictures in the children's books provided by Book Babies. María summarized this sentiment as she expressed:

“Y pues para mí fue de grande inspiración, motivación que aunque no sé leer inglés pero con dibujos, palabras que se saben, palabras que no pero las que uno sabe se las enseñan y los niños aprenden mucho. Y ahora ello. Él me está enseñando a mí.”
[Well, for me was a great inspiration, motivation, and although I don't know how to read in English, with the pictures and the words I know and those I don't, I teach them and children learn a lot, and now they are teaching me.]

Being part of the community

Eight English-speaking parents reflected on how Book Babies had promoted a sense of community, both with other parents with children of similar age and among the children. When the home visitor would visit the home and other children and adults were also visiting, the home visitor would involve the other families as well, creating a sense of community among the different families present in the home. Furthermore, participant parents shared how they encouraged other parents with children of similar age to participate in Book Babies. Since several parents who knew each other were participating in Book Babies at the same time, this also contributed to a shared sense of community or common experience. Book Babies was an experience that could be shared and commented about. Furthermore, parents commented on how they appreciated events in which they could meet other parents and children could play with children of their same age who were not part of their family circle. Young mothers new to the region appreciated the opportunity to meet other mothers with more experience, as stated by Shonda:

“So, yeah, and also the meeting and me volunteering with you guys and helping out with the graduation and setting up and everything and put my input in and being that I am not from here I'm from Florida. So, I didn't know anybody and being young, so connecting with older women. And that was really great....So that was really great.”

Two Spanish speaking mothers suggested giving children the opportunity to interact with other children in the program, since they believed children needed to develop friendships early in life. Four Spanish-speaking parents indicated that receiving visits from another adult who was not a family member allowed them to get a respite from the task of raising children all day long. It also gave their children an opportunity to interact with an adult outside the family. The parents viewed these interactions as a positive contribution to children’s socioemotional development.

Learning about child development

Parents reported that another benefit of participating in Book Babies was that they learned about raising young children. As Gabriela described:

“...vinieron hacia mí y digamos que es como que me abrieron otro mundo, muy desconocido para mí, yo era mamá primeriza. Mi primer bebé. Entonces me vinieron a enseñar, muchas cosas, no solamente acerca de mi bebé y de su desarrollo, pero también como padre. Le enseñan a uno muchas herramientas que uno puede ocupar para el futuro y de sus hijos y ayudarles en el camino.” [They came to me and well, is like they open to me a new world, unknown to me, I was a first-time mom, my first baby. So, they came to teach me, many things, not only about my child and his development, but also how to be a parent. They teach you many tools that you can use in the future about your children and how to help them along the way.]

Parents reported receiving messages related to child development both from home visits as well as phone texts. Phone messages were viewed by some of the parents as a valuable accountability tool and reminded parents to interact with their children. As expressed by a parent, *“I like the accountability with somebody. Are you doing this every day? Are you remembering to do this when you read to them and because that helps a lot because we don't always think about those things.”*

Parents also viewed Book Babies recommendations as part of their own “cultural models” (Gallimore & Goldenberg, 2001) and not well beyond their own beliefs and practices: *“Cómo ellos aprenden, cómo captan las cosas y como ustedes lo hacen tan, tan detallado y tan fácil de digerir. Que uno lo lee y dice Oh, pero qué fácil! Cómo no se me había ocurrido, eh? Es algo tan sencillo.”* [How they learn, how they capture things, and how you do it, so detailed and easy to understand. That you read it and you say, Oh, this is so easy! How could I not think about this before? It is something so easy.] At the same time, having another person with which to share ideas helped parents become more confident of their skills. As Diamond stated:

So I feel like Kenitra was very open with answering any questions that I had and also giving me certain tools that I could use in order to be successful to see his growth, because sometimes I wasn't quite sure. But the tools that I was using perhaps were a little bit too advanced or maybe not advanced, advanced enough for him. And so, I would see the progression within his language and within his word that he that he spoke. And so that was really rewarding.

Parents considered information about developmental milestones and reminders in text that provided information about practices that promoted children's development useful. As LaShonda expressed, *"So for me, just understanding where she was and what state she was and being able to build off of that as she got older was very beneficial for me. I really enjoyed it."*

2) What literacy practices do parents report engaging in at home with their children?

Parents reported that the books provided by Book Babies promoted children's literacy behaviors. Children engaged in reading behaviors when they played with other children and invited guests. Parents also reported that the books they had received promoted the routine of reading before going to bed.

Excitement with books and love for reading

Parents indicated that receiving new books produced great excitement in the children. As reported by Alejandra: *"Y es maravilloso cuando llega el libro que se abre por primera vez, es como descubrir un gran tesoro porque no sabemos lo que el libro trae por dentro."* [It is wonderful when one book arrives and it is opened for the first time, it is like discovering a great treasure because we do not know what the book brings inside]. A parent pointed out that the books given by Book Babies were the first toy for her daughter as an infant, and as a result the child had developed a great love for reading and books.

Parents viewed their children's interest in reading positively. They reported that the children exhibited the books they had in their library with pride and engaged with other children visiting their homes in literacy play behaviors. Parents also described children's frequent requests for parents to read more before bed or at other times of day. Parents of children who have already graduated from the program (2019) also indicated that their children continued reading the same books and remained interested in reading.

Furthermore, Lucinda highlighted how bonding increased as older siblings read to younger ones.

Con el varón hemos tenido la oportunidad de obtener libros gratis, que a él le gustan porque le gusta mucho la comedia.... La mayor, la más grande a ella le gustan las novelas y ha conseguido también libros así. Y también con los libros que le dan a mi hija. Pues porque como ellos se los leen a mi hija, ellos solos enseñan. Entonces de alguna manera ha servido para unirlos como hermanos, beneficiarse tanto el hecho de que los grandes lean y le enseñen a la más chiquita también. O sea, es un tiempo de beneficio

para ambos, tanto los grandes que practican la lectura como la chiquita que aprende de ellos y están teniendo un tiempo de familia, un tiempo de hermanos se están bonding ellos entre ellos mismos. [With the boy we had had opportunities to obtain free books that he likes, because he likes comedy a lot. The eldest likes novels y also has gotten these types of books in addition to the books my daughter receives. So, in some way this has helped to get them together as siblings, to benefit because the older siblings read and teach the youngest also. That is, it is a time that benefits both, for the older ones they practice reading and the youngest learns with them, and they are having a family time, a time of siblings bonding among themselves.]

Several parents reported on the benefit of receiving books for the whole family. Some indicated that they have always been very interested in books, so receiving them from Book Babies was a joy. The books received were responsive to the family member's ages and interests.

Newly Adopted Literacy Practices

Fourteen Spanish-speaking parents said that the Book Babies recommended practices were not common in their own upbringing. Yolanda, for example, said:

Para mí, yo siento que fue algo nuevo, porque nunca antes en mi familia, nunca lo había visto, ni conmigo lo hicieron. Entonces como que fue algo nuevo para mí, el que ella pudiera interactuar, verla mirar con atención los libros que le llamaban la atención y yo poder así que hacer algo nuevo para ella. Porque pues algo que pues en las familias de antes me imagino que no, no se acostumbraba mucho o al menos las Hispanas no lo hacíamos, pero ayuda bastante y ayuda mucho. Me gustó mucho la experiencia.” [For me, I feel that it was something new, something I had never seen in my family, and they did not do with me. So, it was something new to me, that she could interact with me, see her how she looked with special attention the books that would catch her attention, and then do something new for her. Because I imagine that in the families in the past this was not done or at least the Hispanic families did not do it, but it helps a lot. I loved the experience.]

However, despite being a new practice, the participant mothers believed that introducing books to the household was a positive addition to their home practices repertoire. As Lucía expressed:

Pero lo que sí es, eso de que mi hija está aprendiendo en el amor por la lectura, por los libros. Eso es lo que a mí me ha ayudado. A enseñarle a ella y ayudarle a hacer algo que yo no tuve. Que quizás mi esposo no tuvo. Que no tuve la oportunidad con mi hijo grande, o con mi hija mayor, y la chiquita sí. La chiquita le gustan los libros, nosotros jugamos con ella junto a los libros. [But what it is, is that my daughter is learning to love reading and books. This is what it has helped me. To teach her and to help her do something I did not have. That perhaps my husband did not have. That I did not have the opportunity with my older son and daughter, and the youngest yes. She likes books and we play with her with the books]

The support from Book Babies seemed to be important for parents to maintain the practice, as well as the fact that children were excited with the new books received and initiated many of the reading aloud opportunities.

For English-speaking parents, Book Babies reinforced the practices they already were doing with their children rather than teaching something new. In a sense it was a confirmation of their role as parents. At the same time, English-speaking parents also indicated that Book Babies changed their literacy behaviors at home. A few English-speaking parents reflected on the fact that they had not engaged with their older children in a routine reading aloud.

It is also evident that parents recognized that reading books created an occasion for conversation between parents and children, as described by Ramona:

Los libros me están enseñando también a mí a pasar el tiempo con mis niños a enseñarles, a aprender de ellos también. En el momento que recibimos libros y empecé a hablar con mi niña, fue también que atraje a mi otro hijo mayor a poder agarrar un libro. De hecho, cuando empezamos a obtener libros, mi hijo mayor le empezó a leer a mi, a mi niña chiquita.” [The books are also teaching how to spend time with my children, to teach them and learn from them. On the moment we received a book and begin talking to my child, I also brought my older son to take a book. In fact, when we started getting books, my oldest son began reading to my daughter.]

Parents reflected on how Book Babies visits allowed them to observe another adult using different practices to engage young children. Parents reported that they learned ways to read aloud.

Yo siento que me ayudó mucho en la manera de la expresión. Porque pues uno quizás lee así solo de corrido. Pero cuando uno los mira leer realmente un cuento que le pones, así como los sonidos de los animales o las expresiones que ellos tienen de tristeza, enojo, felicidad, entonces yo siento que eso en una parte la ha dado mucho a ella....En esa manera, en su concentración, siento que le ayudó bastante pues a ella.” [I feel that it helped me a lot in the expression. Because perhaps you read it through, but when you watch them read, you put the animal sounds and expressions of sadness, anger, happiness, so I think this has given her a lot...and in this way, I think it helped a lot her concentration.]

Another mother indicated: “*Cuando le leían el libro, lo disfrutábamos todos porque si hasta yo ponía atención cuando estaban leyendo los libros porque así también a mí me dan la idea de cómo leerle el libro a mis hijos.”* [When they read the book, we all enjoyed it because even I paid attention to how they were reading the book because this gave me an idea of how to read the book to my children.] For first time mothers seeing someone else talking to their babies was of great help to learn ways of interacting with their infants. For some immigrant mothers without a support system from their own country, it was a valuable model.

Children's literacy behaviors

Parents described observing the following behaviors in their children at home. It is not possible to know the frequency in which the children demonstrated these behaviors from the focus group data. However, it is important to note that the fact that parents reported these behaviors is significant, since it demonstrates that parents are paying close attention to the changes of literacy behaviors in their children (see Table 2).

Table 2. Parents reported children's reading and writing behaviors.

| READING | WRITING |
|---|------------------|
| Enjoy Reading/looking at books | Pretend to write |
| Reading to younger siblings | Write name |
| Choosing books to read | |
| Emergent Reading (using pictures) | |
| Beginning to decode three letter words | |
| Making connections between pictures and text | |
| Showing books to other children who come to visit | |
| Bringing books when going out | |
| Bringing books to adult to read | |

3) What challenges do parents encounter as they implement literacy practices?

Only four parents reflected on the challenges involved in maintaining a routine of reading books to their children. One of them indicated that children's interest in technology (i.e., iPad) made it difficult to engage the child in reading. Another parent that had a child who had already graduated from Book Babies indicated that with school homework, there was not much time left for reading for pleasure. Furthermore, the child was in a bilingual school and the mother felt unable to support her in reading in Spanish. Interestingly, despite these challenges, parents realized the importance of their role in supporting their children's reading. However, the children's lack of motivation and circumstances made it difficult to maintain a regular routine.

4) What were parents' views about Book Babies implementation?

Suggested changes

In general parents suggested few changes for the home visits. In fact, several parents recommended expanding the program, publicizing it more on social media, and making intentional efforts to implement Book Babies in underprivileged neighborhoods. Parents also requested more events allowing them to meet with other parents participating in Book Babies, such as going to the park. They also wanted the children to interact with other children of the same age. One mother recommended adding a library to hospital maternity wards, allowing parents to read to their newborns. Another parent requested more opportunities for children to color, use scissors and draw.

With regards to virtual visits, parents recommended creating times and spaces for parents to get together, even if they must be conducted online. Parents also suggested reading books aloud and having a camera so the children could follow along the book. One mother suggested using a camera when reading aloud, so that words did not appear upside down on the screen.

Parents also reflected on the frequency of home-visitors' visits to the homes (See Table 3).

Table 3. Parents responses to the question of whether they preferred the same, more, or less home visits.

| Frequency | Spanish-speaking | English-speaking |
|-----------|------------------|------------------|
| Same | 6 | 12 |
| More | 18 | 4 |
| Less | 0 | 0 |

As shown in Table 3, most Spanish-speaking parents would like to have more visits during the year, while English-speaking parents preferred about the same number.

Relationship with home visitor

A theme that emerged often in the parents' conversations was parents reporting having a positive and respectful relationship with their home visitor. This was not directly asked, but parents described their relationship in the following ways:

"Ustedes lo hicieron tan, tan cómodo, tan familiar, tan acogedor, que simplemente uno era parte de la dinámica" [You made it so comfortable, so familiar, so cozy, that I was part of the dynamic.]

"I think the number one thing for me is that our visitor, Kenitra, (home visitor) she was very respectful."

"And I feel like a lot of the home visits where a lot of certain programs, people aren't always as respectful as they could be or they're respectful to you as an other instead of being very inclusive of being like, you know, I'm providing a service for you or this is something I'm doing for you."

"It was an organization there and somebody who took the time away from their own family to come out to my house to see if I needed anything."

"A mi si me has ayudado demasiado, iyo te adoro! ...Hasta te voy a extrañar ya cuando no visites a mi hija." [You have helped me a lot, I love you!... I even will miss you when you stop visiting my daughter.]

Some parents reported that the relationship with the home visitor contributed to their motivation to stay engaged in the program.

5) What are parents' views of programs to support children and families' transition to PreK and kindergarten?

Parents recognized that the transition from the home-based Book Babies program to prekindergarten and Kindergarten can be bewildering. Parents of children who graduated from the program in 2018 reported greater confusion about how to navigate registration and selecting a school for their children than those currently enrolled in the program. Those parents whose children are still in the program or about to graduate seemed more confident that they would have the support from Book Babies to navigate this difficult transition. One mother reflected on a package she had recently received from Book Babies:

Saben que me impactó cuando nos dieron ahorita el paquete de fin de año que se graduaron que nos dieron unas tarjetas que decían detalladamente cómo organizábamos el inicio al Kinder. Guau! Yo dije pero ustedes son perfectas. Pero como me hacen esto todo detalladamente y van a hacer esto y esto y esto paso por paso. [You know what impacted me when we were given the end of the year package for those who graduated a set of cards the detailed how to organize for the beginning of kindergarten. Wow! I said you are perfect. See how they do all so detailed and explaining step by step.]

Those parents that had information and support navigating the transition to school appreciated the help.

FINDINGS SUMMARY

The current study aimed to understand parents' views of the implementation of Book Babies and its impact on their families' literacy practices and behaviors. In general parents viewed participation in Book Babies as greatly beneficial. Specifically, parents expressed that Book Babies gave them: a) the opportunity to learn English in a meaningful way, b) a sense of belonging to a community of parents and children, and c) an opportunity to learn about child development. In addition, the study found:

1. **Literacy practices parents report engaging with their children at home.** Parents reported that they engaged in new literacy behaviors or that they reaffirmed those literacy practices at home that are conducive to the language and literacy development of their children. For Spanish-speaking parents, many of the practices they learned were new to them, but they embraced them as positive practices. They also valued children's excitement about books. They also reported that a love of reading was visible not only in the target children but also among siblings and adults.
2. **Parents became reliable reporters of their children's literacy behaviors.** Parents could identify a variety of children's literacy behaviors such as enjoying reading books, reading books to siblings or younger children, reading books using pictures, beginning to decode words, bringing books along on outings and asking adults to read to them. Parents reported only few writing behaviors, such as pretending to write and writing his or her name.
3. **Challenges parents encounter in the implementation of the recommended practices.** Parents reported on few challenges in implementing the recommended practices at home.

Use of technology and increase in the amount of homework as the children transition into kindergarten were identified as the major obstacles for continuing to engage children in reading aloud.

4. **Parents' suggestions for changes in the Book Babies Implementation.** Parents' suggestions for changes in the program included organizing more events in which parents and children could come together with other families. Also, parents thought the program was so beneficial that they would like more families involved.
5. **Frequency of visits.** There were differences between the Spanish-speaking and the English-speaking parents regarding preferred frequency of visits. Spanish-speaking parents tended to want more visits while English-speaking parents wanted about the same number.
6. **Relationship between home-visitor and families' engagement in the program.** This was an unexpected finding. The relationship with the home-visitor seemed to be an important factor in maintaining families engaged and satisfied with the program.
7. **Transitions to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.** Parents agree that support was necessary to navigate the intricacies of the transition to pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten. Those parents that participated in the sessions with the Transition Coach appreciated the help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In general, participant parents demonstrated a positive view of the Book Babies program. Book giveaways, home visits and phone messages provide incentives for families to engage in language and literacy behaviors and continue engaged in the program for the five years. Therefore, a general recommendation is to continue the program as is. In addition, we have organized the recommendations in terms of the implementation of the program as well as in terms of the process of quality improvement.

Recommendations regarding the implementation of the program

1. Parents reported few children's behaviors related to writing. It is possible that parents do not view emergent writing as an important literacy behavior. Home visitors could help parents identify how to make explicit their own writing behaviors at home and encourage their young children to write. Previous studies have indicated that parents engage in writing related activities and these have an impact in children's writing development (Puranik, Phillips, Lonigan, & Gibson, 2018).
2. Some parents requested more home visits. If resources allow it, the program can provide an additional "per request" visits for those parents who would like more frequent visits. Previous research (De Bondt, Willenberg, & Bus, 2020) has indicated that provision of books paired with home visiting or contacts with program personnel makes a difference in the impact of the presence of books in the family literacy behaviors.
3. Create more opportunities for parents to interact with other parents, both online and face to face. Social relations between parents and children can be a source of information about resources and activities that promote children's well-being. They can also be a source of support for parents in the task of raising children (Gamoran, Turley, Turner & Fish, 2012). According to the parents in this study, one of the benefits of Book

Babies was that it built a sense of community or social capital. Parents recommended expanding the opportunities currently offered in Book Babies for parents to get together. As the pandemic decreases, it might be possible to create varied and frequent opportunities for families to get together and interact.

Recommendations regarding quality improvement

It would be important for the organization to work with a partner in the design of an overall plan for evaluation and quality improvement. An overall plan for evaluation can help determine the best methods to use to address the research questions of interest (i.e., qualitative and/or quantitative methods).

Findings from the current study have provided important information about parents' views and interpretation of Book Babies. However, an overall plan for several years of evaluation can address important research questions that can be used for long term quality improvement for the organization. This plan would also include an analysis of the value of current data collection efforts. In addition, it could include longitudinal data that can be used to understand the impact of specific changes or improvement that have been done during the years.

Partnerships with external evaluators can take different forms. Some organizations ask an external evaluator to design the evaluation plan and implement the data collection and analysis. Other partnerships (Cristina's personal preference) in true collaboration decide on the research questions of interest and distribute the data collection and analysis responsibilities.

An external partner evaluator can also ensure the reliability (consistency in the measures used) and validity (accuracy of what is intended to measure) of the data collected by working with the organization in the design of protocols and data collection methods. An example of the need for a partner with experience designing reliable and valid protocols for data collection comes from the current study. One limitation of the study was that the interviewers in the focus group sessions were also the home visitors. It is difficult to know if the presence of the home visitors as interviewers might have influenced the way parents responded to the questions regarding the benefits of Book Babies. In the future, it might be important that the interviewers are not the home visitors and preferably are external to the organization.

CONCLUSION

Consistent with other book provision programs described in the literature, parent reports suggest that Book Babies increases parent and child engagement in literacy practices and in turn promotes children's language and literacy development (De Bondt, Willenberg, & Bus, 2020). The current study explored parents' interpretations of Book Babies recommendations and implementation. Parents considered participation in Book Babies beneficial for them and their children. Some parents incorporated new literacy practices into their cultural repertoires. Although these practices were new for them, they were not in conflict with their cultural models and settings (Gallimore and Goldenberg, 2001), so they could be easily adopted. For other parents, Book Babies reaffirmed practices they were already engaged in.

The study also demonstrated that it is important to consider parents' beliefs and interpretations of Book Babies recommendations and intervention. Limiting observation to families' literacy practices might not provide a whole picture of the impact of the intervention on families' cultural models and settings. It demonstrated that a similar intervention can be interpreted in varied ways by different families and that parents might engage in a variety of literacies. The study also indicated that the relationship with the home visitor played a significant role in maintaining the families in the program for the five-year length.

In contrast to the studies reviewed in the meta-analysis described above (De Bondt, Willenberg, & Bus, 2020), in this study we analyzed the differences between the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking parents. It is important to make this distinction, as parents who use different languages might engage differently to the literature provided. Book Babies makes efforts to select culturally responsive children's literature and books in different languages. Some of the Spanish-speaking parents mentioned that reading books in English was useful to improve their English proficiency. However, it is not clear from the data collected how the use of culturally responsive literature might impact literacy behaviors in the home. Future studies should explore this factor more deeply, as previous research has suggested that culturally responsive literature is related to comprehension, story recall, and self-identity (Bell & Clark, 1998; Cartledge et al, 2016; Axelrod & Gillanders, 2015). Furthermore, knowledge gained from these studies can provide further guidance on the book selection.

The current study had several limitations. First, as previously mentioned, in some instances the interviewers were also the home visitors, which might have influenced the parents' responses. Furthermore, it is possible that parents that agreed to participate in the study were the ones most enthusiastic about Book Babies and considered the Book Babies intervention more congruent with their cultural models and settings. It would be important to also find ways to follow up with parents that decide to leave the program. This could provide important information for quality improvement for the program.

In closing, Book Babies seems to provide great benefit to families. Understanding parents' interpretations of the impact of Book Babies on their lives not only can serve for the program itself but also can provide important information to the field about the value of such interventions.

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