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A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF TENDER HEARTS

**Thesis submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University**

**In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
of Educational Specialist
School Psychology**

By

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Marshall University

August 2005

ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of the Tender Hearts program is examined, based on the perception of participants. Data collection is obtained by a questionnaire developed from the objectives of the program. Frequency analysis and descriptive statistics are utilized to examine the data. Overall, the participants demonstrate satisfaction with Tender Hearts. The study's limitations are discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to my parents for their support, love, and guidance throughout my educational career. Secondly, I wish to thank Dr. Stephen O'Keefe and Dr. Fred Krieg for the incredible educational experience they provided me. Thank you both for your time, patience, and understanding.

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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

Plato was one of Early childhood education's earliest proponents. He "advocated that a child's education starts well before age six" (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1990, p. 2). Since philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, many others have contributed to early childhood education. In 1837 Fredrick Froebel first introduced kindergarten in Germany. It was not until 1856 that the first kindergarten classroom was established in America. This first kindergarten classroom "was a small program, never enrolling more than six children and lasting only a few years, yet it had a great impact on the field of early childhood education" (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1990, p. 6). Kindergartens, nursery schools, and childcare settings were the first of many early childhood education programs. Educators quickly concluded that "early childhood development programs can produce lasting benefits for children and society" (Silverstein, Grossman, Koepsell, & Rivara, 2003, p. 29). Project Head Start has been a model example of an early childhood program.

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnston launched his first initiative to combat the "War on Poverty." Thus, Project Head Start was born. Silverstone, Grissmas and Koepsell (2003) explained, "Head Start is a federally funded preschool program for low-income families, it is often considered a national model of early educational intervention" (p.29). Head Start was designed to meet the emotional, social, health, nutritional, and psychological needs of low-income families. Since it was first launched, Project Head Start has undergone many modifications and has played a large role in focusing the attention of the Nation on the importance of early childhood development.

Not only has Head Start been a pilot for early childhood education, it has also provided the Nation with significant research as to what contributes to success in academia. For example, one of the most vital factors in children's school success has been parental involvement. As highlighted in the Policy Guidance for Title I (1996), "when schools work together with families to support learning, children are inclined to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. Three decades of research have shown that parental participation in school improves student learning"(p. 1). In 1987, Leik & Chalkey examined the impact of parental involvement with both children and parents enrolled in Head Start. Their findings showed increased self and social competence of children whose parents were involved in Head Start. Incidentally, they also discovered that parents showed increased esteem in their children's competence. Leike and Chalkey (1987) concluded, "there is good reason to believe that involving parents in Head Start as co-participants with their children, rather than simply home-based teachers, fosters the type of family environment that helps children most in the long run" (p. 37).

Lazar (1981) echoed this belief in the effectiveness of early childhood programs, when he stated, "I believe that the increased participation of parents provided the value change that led them to encourage and reward their children's learning activities" (p.305). Lazar also stated that "perhaps we can prevent loss in the future by bringing parents back into partnership in the educational enterprise" (p. 305). Parker and Lamb (1999) supported the views of Lazar when they stated, "the positive, long-term impact of early intervention programs on child development has been well documented. Parent involvement is believed to assume a central role in producing these beneficial child outcomes. Evidence from the literature shows that greater elementary school parents

involvement in children's learning positively affects the child's school performance, including greater cognitive development and higher academic achievement" (p. 420).

As research on parental involvement emerged, parental involvement programs were established. Parental involvement even reached the top ten National Educational Goals. As highlighted in the Policy Guidance of Title I (1996), "every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participate in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children," (p. 1).

As a result, several parental involvement programs evolved. Ready Set Go, Even Start, and Tender HEARTS (Helping Educate and Ready Tomorrow's Students) were among the first parent involvement programs to emerge in the United States. These programs have a list of common goals such as, "to bring school into the home, to inform parents of the importance of at-home learning experiences, to work with parents on the developmental stages of children-what to expect and when, to 'hook' families with community agencies for services, to loan educational materials and instruct parents on how to use them, and to provide parent training sessions" (Section V, 1). Tender HEARTS was developed specifically to increase parental involvement. Parental involvement, for the purpose of this study, will be defined as all experiences and activities available through the Tender HEARTS program as well as those attended once children reach kindergarten. These activities include, but are not limited to, PTA meetings, school conferences, IEP meetings and other activities offered through Tender HEARTS program.

Tender HEARTS is an early intervention preschool program funded by Title I in Mason, West Virginia. Participants of Tender HEARTS are selected on a first come first

serve basis. A specified number of children are enrolled each year. In order to participate in Tender HEARTS, families must live within a Title I district. Title I districts are defined based on SES status of the community.

The program is implemented by making bimonthly home visits, and holding a monthly group activity in each area. The curriculum adopted for this program is Creative Curriculum: Early Childhood. The project consists of providing the Tender HEARTS students with a book and packet of related learning activities that are to be left in homes between visits. The students are exposed to approximately eighteen books and activity packets. Tender HEARTS was first launched in 1997, thereby making the first participants now in the 6th grade. Although this program has serviced over 100 children, it has never been evaluated with respect to its impact on the children and families served by the program.

Program evaluation is a very important part of program implementation. Weiss (1972) commented, “in the past decade social programs at all levels have expanded enormously. Some are logical efforts some represent radical departures from the past, a plunge into uncharted waters. Decision makers want (and need) to know: How well is the program meeting the purposes for which it is established? Should it be continued, expanded, cut back, changed or abandoned?” (p.56). Program evaluation is particularly important with the implementation of early childhood programs. There is an enormous amount of time and effort contributed to the development of programs and especially more with implementation—we need to know if what we are doing is reaching the program’s goals and objectives and most critically we need to know if it is benefiting our children. There is a budgetary allotment of \$232,128.21 for Tender HEARTS to increase

parental involvement (Section VII Parental Involvement). A thorough program evaluation of this program could suggest Tender HEARTS is a more effective program—this may allow the program to secure more money to support the program. On the other hand, such an evaluation may show Tender HEARTS does not increase parental involvement—then the money could be utilized to establish a more effective parental involvement program.

Program evaluation can be both qualitative and quantitative. In the 1960's, “qualitative methods were given short shrift in evaluation. They were rarely if ever mentioned. At that time, the key issue was the black-box task of generating unbiased, precise estimates of the casual consequences of programs” (Weiss, 1972, p.54). Shortly thereafter, the richness of quantitative data was scrutinized. As Cook (1997) explained, “in the 1970's and 1980's, the dominance of quantitative methods came under intense attack in evaluation, as in all the other social sciences except economics (p.36).” The advocates of qualitative methods have fought hard attacking the assumptions and accomplishments of quantitative research and making a powerful case for the utility of what they prefer. Cook (1997) addressed this debate by concluding:

Qualitative methods are very useful for making explicit the theory behind a program; for understanding the context in which a program operates; for describing what is actually implemented in a program; for assessing the correspondence between what the program theory promised and what is actually implemented; for helping elucidate the processes that might have brought about program effects; for identifying some likely unintended consequence of the program (p.68).

Therefore, qualitative procedures serve as a transparent tool to examine the program from within. Qualitative research provides opulent information that quantitative alone cannot supply. Cook (1997) stated, “almost all quantitative researchers would acknowledge that these are central evaluation tasks and that qualitative methods are therefore totally legitimate” (p. 39). In sum, combining the two streams of research—qualitative and quantitative—can form a larger river of effective program evaluation. However, the proposed program evaluation of Tender HEARTS will incorporate only quantitative methods.

The purpose of the present study is to determine if Tender HEARTS increases parental involvement as it proposes. The hypothesis proposed is that Tender HEARTS increases parental involvement in the schools. Thus, parents who participated in Tender HEARTS were active in Parent Teacher Association (PTA), sponsoring activities, school volunteers, and attendance at parent/teacher conferences.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Participants

The entire population of parents who completed the Tender HEARTS program were selected for the evaluation, a total of 120.

Instrumentation

Parents of Tender HEARTS completed a survey. The survey consisted of twenty-five questions. Questions 1, 2, 13, and 14 were about homework; questions 3-10 were about participation in parent/teacher conferences and other activities at school; questions 11,12, 15-20 were about the parent's educational beliefs; questions 21-25 addressed parental satisfaction with Tender HEARTS.

Procedures

Each Tender HEARTS parent participant was mailed a survey along with a letter explaining the reason for research and were asked to complete the survey and mail it back in the self-addressed envelop within 12 days. The parent's were ensured confidentiality and asked to please answer the questions honestly and openly. One week from the date of the first letter mailed, a reminder notice was sent to parents.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

A total of 120 surveys were delivered by mail to parents who completed the Tender Hearts program in the years 1997 thru 2002. Fifty-two surveys were completed and analyzed. The data were subjected to frequency and descriptive statistical analysis. Out of the 1352 responses over 26 questions, 915 were valued as positive (see Table I). Questions 1, 2, 8, and 11-25, were rated with positive responses. Questions 3-7, 9, and 10 were rated with negative responses. Questions 1 and 2 related to the parents ability to help their children with homework. Questions 8 and 9 measured the parent's volunteer work at their child's school. Questions 10, 11, 12, and 15 through 20 examined the parent's perception about education (importance, knowledge, and value of education). Questions 13 and 14 measured the parent's ability to teach children at home utilizing household materials. Questions 21 through 25 all measured the Tender Hearts participant's satisfaction with the program. Specifically, these questions examined whether the parent felt Tender Hearts increased their knowledge, understanding, and value of education.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the data suggests Tender HEARTS was effective with educating and getting parents involved in their child's education. Research participants consistently rated their Tender Hearts participation as a positive and influential experience. Based upon the participants' survey responses, Tender Hearts provided opportunities to use household materials as teaching tools; parents felt more capable of utilizing these skills as well as helping children with their homework. Additionally, Tender HEARTS participants have attended parent-teacher conferences, participated in school activities, and are aware of how their children are doing both academically and behaviorally in school. Overall, Tender Hearts parents have a positive regard for the program and have expressed they are "happy" they participated. Parents believe Tender HEARTS had an impact on their involvement, understanding, and value of their child's education. On the contrary, Tender HEARTS was not as effective with getting parents involved with parent educational organizations like PTA, attendance at multiple parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering at their child's school.

There are several weaknesses to this study. First, this study is based on subjective consumer data and while it gives an idea of the consumer's perception it would be beneficial to have a pre-post measure. This initial data would allow for an objective examination of growth. Secondly, adding a qualitative piece would be useful. This informative piece would permit a detailed look at the program's strengths and weaknesses. Lastly, it would provide information to look at the different populations of Tender Hearts.

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Table I

Parent Survey Frequency Response by Item (n=52)

Question	Yes	No
1	51	1
2	50	2
3	42	10
4	31	21
5	27	25
6	36	16
7	31	21
8	46	6
9	30	22
10	48	4
11	51	1
12	51	1
13	48	4
14	48	4
15	51	1
16	51	1
17	48	4
18	48	4
19	51	1
20	49	3
21	44	8
22	47	5
23	45	7
24	43	9
25	46	6

Table II

Means and Standard Deviation of Parent Survey Questions (n=42)

Question	Mean	SD
1. I feel I am able to help my child with his/her homework.	1.02	.139
2. I have helped my child with his/her homework.	1.04	.194
3. I have attended a teacher parent conference this year.	1.19	.398
4. I have attended more than one parent teacher conference this year.	1.40	.495
5. I belong to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) at my child's school.	1.48	.505
6. I have been to a PTA meeting in my child's school this year.	1.31	.466
7. I have been to more than one PTS meeting at my child's school this year.	1.40	.495
8. I would like to volunteer at my child's school.	1.12	.045
9. I have volunteered at my child's school this year.	1.42	.499
10. I feel it is important for me to participate in activities at my child's school.	1.08	.269
11. I feel it is important for my child to be in school.	1.02	.139
12. I am aware of my child's attendance at school.	1.02	.139
13. I know how to use household materials to teach my child.	1.08	.269
14. I have used household materials to teach my child.	1.08	.269
15. I believe it is important for me to know how my child is doing in school.	1.02	.139
16. I believe it is important for me to be involved in my child's education.	1.02	.139
17. I believe I am involved in my child's education.	1.08	.269
18. I feel involved in my child's education.	1.08	.269
19. I know how my child is doing academically in school.	1.02	.139
20. I know how my child is doing behaviorally in school.	1.06	.235
21. I am more involved in my child's education since my participation in Tender HEARTS.	1.15	.364
22. I am happy I participated in Tender HEARTS.	1.10	.298
23. Tender HEARTS has increased my understanding of my child's education.	1.13	.345
24. Tender HEARTS has increased my involvement of my child's education.	1.17	.382
25. Tender HEARTS has made me value education more.	1.12	.323

Appendix A

**Tender HEARTS Program Evaluation
Parent Survey**

Thank You for agreeing to participate in the Evaluation of Mason County's program Tender HEARTS. Your feedback is extremely valuable and very much appreciated!!!!

Remember, all information is strictly confidential so please answer each question honestly and openly.

Please circle the answer which fits your idea the most.

1. I feel I am able to help my child with his/her homework.
YES or NO
2. I have helped my child with his/her homework.
YES or NO
3. I have attended a teacher parent conference this year.
YES or NO
4. I have attended more than one parent teacher conference this year.
YES or NO
5. I belong to the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) in my child's school.
YES or NO
6. I have been to a PTA meeting in my child's school this year.
YES or NO
7. I have been to more than one PTA meeting in my child's school this year.
YES or NO
8. I would like to volunteer at my child's school.
YES or NO
9. I have volunteered at my child's school this year.

YES or NO

10. I feel it is important for me to participate in activities at my child's school.

YES or NO

11. I feel it is important for my child to be in school.

YES or NO

12. I am aware of my child's attendance at school.

YES or NO

13. I know how to use household materials to teach my child.

YES or NO

14. I have used household materials to teach my child.

YES or NO

15. I believe it is important for me to know how my child is doing in school

YES or NO

16. I believe it is important for me to be involved in my child's education.

YES or NO

17. I believe I am involved in my child's education.

YES or NO

18. I feel involved in my child's education.

YES or NO

19. I know how my child is doing academically in school.

YES or NO

20. I know how my child is doing behaviorally in school.

YES or NO

21. I am more involved in my child's education since my participation in Tender HEARTS.

YES or NO

22. I am happy I participated in Tender HEARTS.

YES or NO

23. Tender HEARTS has increased my understanding of my child's education.

YES or NO

24. Tender HEARTS has increased my involvement of my child's education.

YES or NO

25. Tender HEARTS has made me value education more.
YES or NO