

2010 Report on Mobile Waterford Project

Mobile Waterford is directed at the funding area of early child development. It seeks to reduce the large number of Latino children entering kindergarten who do not have adequate English skills to begin school. Waterford is an interactive curriculum that provides children with pre-reading activities in English and stays at a child's working level until mastery has been achieved, thus providing the learning opportunities of a skilled tutor. A large van has been up-fitted with 8 computer stations and travels to the neighborhoods of children each day where they spend 20 minutes on their own computer. In addition, the program has brought 32 computers into the preschool and Head Start classrooms serving the Santa Barbara school district kindergarten classes, so that all children in need of the program have the potential to receive it.

The long term goal of Mobile Waterford is to reduce the number of entering kindergarten children with inadequate English skills by 90%. This will enable these children to begin school on an equal footing with other children and perform effectively in the learning tasks of school immediately. Ultimately, this will result in fewer children with discipline problems and allow teachers to focus more on the learning process with the entire class. It will greatly reduce attendance and drop-out problems and restore more of the badly needed general funds that underwrite programs for all children. It is also hoped that by keeping children in school and developing skills that will serve them in later life, fewer early adolescent youth will become involved in gangs and other forms of delinquency.

At the end of the first year we undertook an initial evaluation of the impact of Mobile Waterford on the children's English language and early reading skills utilizing a standard test of these skills that was administered when children first entered kindergarten. The only viable control group for this evaluation consisted of all kindergarten children for the 2007-2008 year who had been enrolled in the Head Start program at Coronel, Los Ninos, or Story Teller the previous year. The test scores obtained at entry to kindergarten in September, 2007 for this group were compared to the test scores obtained in June, 2008 for those Mobile Waterford Children attending those same three Spanish Head Start programs. The virtue of making this comparison is that we can be reasonably assured that children receiving the Mobile Waterford intervention come from similar neighborhoods and family backgrounds and had the same preschool experience prior to entering kindergarten as the comparison group. Children receiving Mobile Waterford had scores that were almost three times higher than the control group (24.5 vs 8.7).

In the second year of the program we did three things. First, we continued to send the van into the community to serve children not attending preschool. Second, we placed computers in the Spanish speaking Head Start classrooms. This opened up more time slots for children not attending preschool to be served at van stops near their homes. All this was put in place by late November of 2008. Third, after finding that almost half of all children attending district preschools entered kindergarten in the fall of 2008 unable to pass the ADEPT test of basic English competence, we placed computers loaded with the Waterford program in all the school district's preschool classrooms, including both half-day and full-day programs. This was achieved by late January of

2009. Throughout that spring our staff provided consultation to preschool teachers in the use of Waterford, including the process of getting children logged on with a regular daily schedule. Usage of the program was monitored in all classrooms and when it appeared some children were lagging in usage, teachers were consulted about what was needed to get these children back on schedule. Often this involved technical problems with the equipment.

In June of 2009 we again tested children in the Spanish Head Start programs to determine whether there was any loss in effect due to the transition from the van to the classroom. In fact, however, the Oral J scores were slightly higher in 2009 compared to those of 2008, leading us to the conclusion that this transfer was working and giving us hope that a full year of implementation in the district preschool classrooms would yield even better results.

In the fall of 2009 parent surveys were conducted with parents of entering kindergarten children. Data from these surveys were combined with ADEPT test scores for the same children in September to give us an estimate of the number of children entering kindergarten classes without adequate English skills. Of the 800 children entering regular kindergarten classes this year there were 205 who could not pass the basic level of English competence required for school entry. This figure stands in contrast to the 335 children who entered kindergarten two years earlier with inadequate skills in English. This represents a 36% reduction in the English literacy problem existing prior to the beginning of the Mobile Waterford project, even though the classroom Waterford computers were available for only half the school year for most classrooms.

For the 2010-2011 school year we plan to continue monitoring Waterford usage in preschool classrooms and consult with teachers about children who do not regularly use it or are not making adequate progress with the program (as determined by progress reports in children's computer files). We will also plan to continue the neighborhood van program and keep word of its availability circulating in the community. This will require the continued employment of our two credentialed staff members.

We will also continue to evaluate progress in reducing the English literacy problem in Santa Barbara classrooms. This will be done by continuing the parent surveys and combining that data with the fall ADEPT scores to estimate the percentage of children not meeting the basic criterion for English competency. By the fall of 2010 we hope to see this number reduced to no more than 160 children. This would represent a reduction in the original problem of greater than 50% in just three years. Once the classroom operation of Waterford becomes firmly established on a full-year basis and the van operation continues at its current trajectory we are hopeful of reaching the long-term goal of a 90% reduction in the kindergarten English literacy deficit. We will continue to evaluate this progress through the yearly parent survey and ADEPT test administration to entering kindergarten children.

Source:

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March 9, 2010