

**Family Fun Time Activities: Family Involvement in the Early Stages of Learning**

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SOCL 345: Social Research and Program Evaluation

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November 22, 2023

### **Abstract**

In a study conducted at Longwood University, families within the Head Start program received family fun time activities. The purpose of these activities is to provide children with easy and fun ways to learn basic concepts including numbers, letters, and shapes. Furthermore, the purpose of this study was to observe whether these activities enhanced family involvement. Data for this study was collected using mixed methods in which participants were given surveys containing open-ended and closed-ended questions that were sent out to the families partaking in the family fun time activities. In our research we used a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative findings to collect our data.

## **Introduction**

Head Start is an educational program for families of lower socioeconomic status that provides young children with early learning and preparation for higher education. Students within the Head Start program are given family fun time activities with the purposes of developing basic learning skills. Students at Longwood University conducted a study that encourages families to enhance family involvement. The purpose of this study is to promote bonding within family involvement in early childhood learning.

Multiple sources have found that parental involvement in the early stages of childhood learning are crucial for childhood development as well as an increase in academic success later in life (Bettencourt, 2020; El Nokali et al., 2010). More specifically, it is important to provide families of diverse backgrounds and of lower socioeconomic statuses with resources pertaining to education and family involvement (Grayson, 2023). However, little research has been conducted to determine the effectiveness of family fun time activities on family interaction and involvement. The purpose of this research is to determine the effectiveness of these activities for families.

## **Literature Review**

The research question for this particular review is: does participation in family fun time activities affect family involvement? Moreover, the hypothesis for this research is that if families are more involved during family activities, learning centers will implement more family activities. Multiple sources of literature support the framework and practice of family and parent involvement with childhood learning (Bettencourt, 2020; El Nokali et al., 2010). In research conducted by both Bettencourt (2020) and El Nokali et al. (2010) it found that parental

involvement holds a considerably high influence on childhood learning and development. These studies found that at-home activities such as reading with children and completing assignments produce high academic success and social skills. Furthermore, the literature also suggests that parental involvement within families of diverse backgrounds and or of lower socioeconomic status creates more positive academic outcomes (Grayson, 2013; Walker & Berthelsen, 2019).

Two of the literatures specifically mention the program Head Start. Head Start is a federally funded program that helps families of lower socioeconomic statuses provide meaningful education to their young children. The purpose of this program is to give young children education and social experience before entering elementary school. Furthermore, this program encourages parents to get involved with their children's academic success through at-home activities to promote learning and for parents to engage with their children's learning. This allows parents to build relationships, connections, and spend quality time together while educating their children (Bettencourt, 2020; Ma et al., 2016).

Considering methodology, the found literature uses a longitudinal study (Jensen & Minke, 2017; Walker & Berthelsen, 2019). Furthermore, many studies also used surveys in order to collect data. In the study conducted by McDowell et al. (2018) 26 students and their parents were studied to see if family involvement outside the classroom had higher rates in their academic success. The research was measured by using an academic scale such as agree, agree strongly, ect. to report back to see if parent involvement helped each child with their academic success. (McDowell et al., 2018). The use of surveys and scales was also used in a study conducted by El Nokali et al., (2010). Both sources effectively used questionnaires in order to collect data. In almost all of the found literature, the methodology consisted of a mixed method-

qualitative surveys and quantitative recording methods (McDowell et al., 2018; El Nokali et al., 2010).

Lastly, in an article found by Burns et al., (2019), it was shown that parental engagement through physical and social activities with young children should be used as a theoretical framework for advancing education. This can be shown in reaching goals outside of the classroom with parents that will help reach these educational goals such as doing homework (Burns et al., 2019). These activities can be incorporated in fun activities such as coloring letters of the alphabet or practicing counting numbers (Burns et al., 2019). This not only is a fun activity for the parent and child to be involved in but it educates the child (Burns et al., 2019). Overall, the literature shows that parent involvement is very beneficial to early childhood education. In these eight sources the research tells the reader how important it is to be engaged in a child's education.

## **Data and Methodology**

### **Instrument**

A survey questionnaire was created by 10 members of the Social Research and Program Evaluation Team at Longwood University. The survey consisted of 14 questions, 11 closed ended questions and three open-ended questions. The first question on the survey asked respondents for informed consent. Any respondents who answered “no” to the informed consent were not able to see any other questions. The survey included questions that measured family involvement, family enjoyment, evaluation of SMART objectives, and demographics. The survey was sent online through the Qualtrics program. Head Start teachers emailed links to the survey to guardians, and children brought home books with a QR code attached.

### **Sample**

The non-probability sample for this study was based on 17 children (ages three to five) who attend Head Start in rural Virginia. Head Start is a federally subsidized preschool for families with economic need. The activity that children and guardians will participate in is called the Sensory Writing Bag. This activity will interact with children and guardians by having the child copy letters, numbers, and animals on the bag. After completing the activity the children were sent home a book that attached a QR code to encourage families to take the online survey. Teachers sent a reminder email to the guardians to complete any outstanding surveys. This resulted in 4 questionnaires being completed. Overall, there was a 4% response rate. Therefore, data from previous years (2019 and 2022) on Family Fun Time activities were added to the analysis. This resulted in 66 completed surveys to be used in analysis (four from 2023, 20 from 2022, and 42 from 2019).

### **Quantitative Analysis**

Quantitative analysis of completed surveys is based on the close-ended questions. For this study, the dependent variable is family involvement. The item from the questionnaire that was used to operationalize this was, “On a scale from 0 to 10, how much did this activity encourage your family to work together?” (0=not at all, 10=a great amount). The independent variable for this study is “Did your family complete the activity?” This question will measure “yes”, “no” or “partially” responses for participation. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze these variables.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative analysis of the completed surveys (from 2019, 2022, and 2023) was based on open-ended questions from survey responses. Qualitative analysis of the completed survey was based on open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were, “What did you enjoy about this

activity?”, “What are your suggestions for improving this activity?”, and “Typically, what activity do you do with your child?” To answer the research question “does participation in family fun time activities affect family involvement?”, inductive open coding was used to determine reoccurring themes in the respondents’ response.

## **Findings**

### **Qualitative Findings**

Family fun time activities are composed of three main themes: families feel more involved with their child’s learning, the children are able to complete interactive and hands-on activities, and children are given entertaining methods and activities of early learning.

### **Family Involvement**

Out of a sample of 36, 12 respondents mentioned that the family fun time activity was beneficial because it created quality time for both children and guardians. For example, respondents 19\_03, 19\_08, and 19\_09 stated that the activity “had us spend more time together.” This allowed families to cut time out of their busy day to complete a fun educational activity with their child. Another survey says from respondents 19\_17, 22\_09, and 22\_10 that family fun time activities provided “Working/completing them together.” Furthermore a respondent voiced that “family was able to bond.” This shows that family fun time activities allowed families to indulge in more quality time spent as a family.

### **Interactive Learning**

The second theme found in family fun time activities is interactive learning. Six respondents acknowledged that they found family fun time activities encourage interactive learning with their child and guardian. Respondents 19\_07 and 19\_12 stated that the activities were “hands on” and “super interactive.” Furthermore, respondents also noted that the activity

allowed children to create something. Respondent 22\_06 stated their child enjoyed “making things with her hands” and respondent 22\_02 stated that their child “liked learning how to cut, glue, and trace.” Overall, the family fun time activity allowed children to learn in an environment that encouraged hands-on and interactive learning.

### **Entertainment**

In a majority of respondents' answers, it was found that the family fun time activity provided entertainment for children. In fact, 26 of the 36 respondents stated that the family fun time activity they took part in was “fun.” Respondents 19\_13 and 19\_15 mentioned that their children “had fun” doing the activities. Respondent 19\_04 mentioned how after the activity, their child “had so much fun he did not want to stop playing.” Not only do these activities encourage early learning within children, but they also provide a source of excitement and enjoyment. Respondent 19\_05 stated “we can learn and have fun at the same time.” These activities positively encourage children to learn through fun and exciting activities that will expand their knowledge for the future.

In short, family fun time activities consist of three main themes: family involvement, interactive learning, and entertainment. These activities allow families and children to not only learn in an interactive setting, but it is also a source of entertainment for children and it allows families to spend more time together.

### **Quantitative Findings**

The dependent variable is family involvement. The independent variable is completion of the activity. Respondents recorded this through survey responses that stated, “Did your family complete this activity?.” Respondents would then answer “yes,” “partially,” or “no.” The



hypothesis is: if family members participate in family fun time activities, then family involvement will increase.

The mean score for family involvement is 7.2 while the standard deviation score for family involvement is 2.8.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Family Involvement

Involvement	
Mean	7.2
Standard Deviation	2.8

*Note.* N=66

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of family involvement. The respondent recorded a mean of 7.2 for involvement while also scoring a standard deviation of 2.8 for involvement. Only one respondent completed the survey.

Figure 1

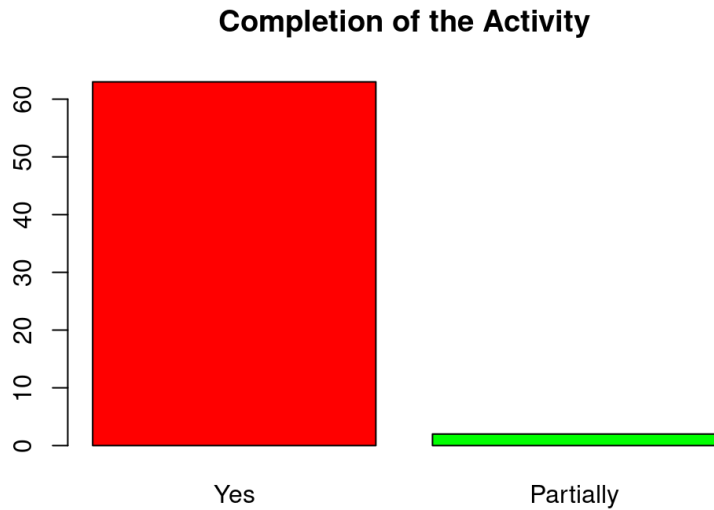


Figure 1 illustrates the amount of participants that completed the family fun time activity. Around 60% of individuals answered that they completed the activity in full, while less than 10% stated that they partially completed the activity.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Completion of the Activity

Completion	Mean	Standard Deviation
Yes	7.3	2.6
Partially	6.5	0.7

Table 2 shows the amount of respondents who completed the activity based on survey responses. Participants who answered “yes” in the survey scored a mean of 7.3 and a standard

deviation of 2.6 while those who answered “partially” scored a mean of 6.5 and a standard deviation of 0.7.

The original hypothesis stated that if family members participate in family fun time activities, then family involvement will increase. However, there is not a large enough sample of data to help show this.

### **Conclusion**

Families within the Head Start program were given family fun time activities and then asked to complete a survey to indicate the effectiveness of these activities on family involvement. It was found through the surveys that these activities do appear to be beneficial in family quality and involvement in a child’s early learning stages. However, there are implications for further research through a larger collection of data and survey responses. Family fun time activities have the capacity to be one of the most effective methods to accomplish family involvement within child learning. In order to effectively assist families of lower socioeconomic backgrounds, more time and effort must be put into education and the role that parents play in their child’s learning. In Bettencourt, 2020 & El Nokali et al., 2010, it discusses how successful children are if parents play a role in their education.

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