

## **BRIEF REPORT**

### **The Fingergym Fine Motor Skills School Readiness Program Field Trials**

Eleven experienced teachers and teacher aides from the Brisbane area were invited to participate in a four to eight week trial program of the program in two forms – the full program and a reduced quicker version. The trial was not intended to be a clinical trial of improvements noted in student's fine motor skills, as benefits from practicing fine motor and other related skills have been reported elsewhere in the manuals. Rather, the purpose of the trials was to receive feedback on the perceived value and feasibility of the program and any additions or changes to make it easier and more appealing to both children and teachers..

Sixty-four percent of the teachers/aides in the trial program reported having 16 or more years of classroom experience, and 36% reported having 11–15 years of classroom experience. This group represented teachers/aides from Preschool, Year 1, Year 3, and Special Needs classrooms. The average classroom size contained 25.3 students. Along with typically developing children, teachers/aides reported that children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), intellectual impairment (II), developmental disabilities (DD), Speech/Language disorders, learning disabilities (LD), attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder (ADD/ADHD), English as a second language (ESL) and unspecified special needs were also enrolled in their classrooms. Teachers/aides also indicated that collectively, 3% of the children in their classroom received occupational therapy services.

Every teacher/aide reported positive and enthusiastic comments about the programs, and all indicated that they would, budget permitting, purchase the programs and would unequivocally recommend it to other teachers/educators. Some of the comments about the program included statements such as, "They [children] loved it- looking forward to every Tuesday afternoon. I would love to incorporate this into our routine next year!" Others said, "Saw improvements in a short time", "Good routine for II /special needs students" and, "children enjoyed the activities and it put a focus on writing". Another indicated, "It is an effective, positive program that shows children that we all improve with practice. That is important to learn!"

Children participating in the trial programs were reported to have, "Loved it! Asked when next session was, laughed during activities, and saw it as a "fun" activity not a learning activity." Another teacher indicated, "Children loved it, very much so" and another said that the children in her classroom, "Asked to keep doing the program after we had finished".

Seventy-three percent of the teachers/aides reported that the introductory, theory based chapters were helpful, and that organizing the activities by categories was also a positive feature of the program.

For those teachers who reported setting goals for the participants, Strong Hands Activities, found in the Strengthening Activities section, Touch and Tell Activities- Arm, Finger, and Hand Awareness found in the Sensory Activities section, Hands at Work- Fine Motor Planning from the Fine Motor Coordination Activities section, Let's Doodle- Pre-writing and Pencil Control Skills in the Pencil To Paper Activities

section, and Cutting Skills activities were the most important in terms of goal setting. While all activities categories were selected in terms of their worth and importance, the Fine Motor Coordination activities were frequently selected by teachers/aides (28%) as being the most useful in their classrooms.

Of the five teachers/aides who commented on the level of explanation provided for the activities, all indicated they were clearly explained, while seven who commented also indicated that suggestions for how to grade activities was helpful. One teacher indicated, "Especially useful when I tried activities with whole class- because *everybody* wanted to do *Fingergym!*"

Seven teachers/aides responded to questions reflecting on, based on activities provided in the manual, their ability to develop their own activities, the worth and quality of the supplies lists, and the explanation for the set up of *Fingergym*. All indicated that they were pleased with the information provided in the manual. In terms of developing new activities, one teacher/aide responded by saying, "I have done a few which seemed to work quite well." When asked, from the explanations provided in the manual, do you feel that you could set up a similar program, one teacher responded by saying, "using such a great program I could."

Overwhelmingly, teachers/aides shared with us that both they and the children "loved" the *Fingeryngle* CD, saying such things as, "Fantastic- we loved it!" and "Children loved it!" Of the seven teachers/aides participating in the *Fingergym* trials, 86% reported using the 3 minute track, and 14% the 5 minute track. All reported that children were attentive during the silences, and while it was most difficult for preschoolers, they were able to clean up and move on to the next station, as the music directed them to.

Although several teachers/aides reported that a 4-week trial was not long enough to see clear improvements in fine motor as well as behavior function, these teachers/aides still felt the program was good, and results would be noted in a longer time period. Of those reporting improvement, the most significant were in Fine Motor Coordination and Pre-writing and Pencil Control skills. In the behavioural domain, improvement in self-confidence, independence and initiative were observed in children participating in the program

When asked what teachers/aides liked best about the program, most responded that the CD was the feature they most liked. Other comments included, "tasks were well categorized, "children's eagerness to participate," "book well set out and helpful," and "it is a positive program that identifies problems that some children have and sets out how to solve them in a happy and respectful way," Finally, "The children have enjoyed the program. As a teacher aide the structure was excellent. I always felt I knew exactly what I was doing. "

A final comment a teacher shared about the program was, "Congratulations! The program is sensational. I would like to be able to start the year with this program."

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