

An Evaluation of the Children's Museum of Manhattan's
All the Way to K and Beyond!

Executive Summary

by

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Early childhood is a crucial period for the development of a variety of language skills, and research has revealed that these skills strongly predict subsequent academic and socio-emotional development. The importance of these skills has driven researchers to investigate the factors that may promote them. The results of multiple studies suggest that early language skills are impacted by both the quantity and quality of linguistic interactions between young children and their parents and caregivers.

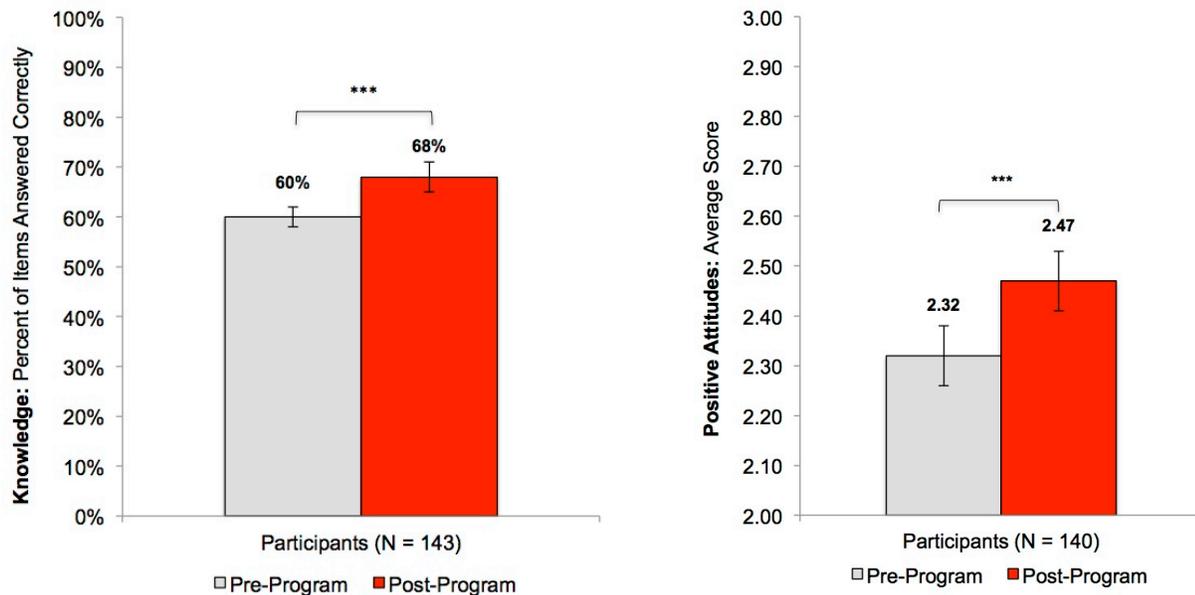
These findings have, in turn, spurred inquiries into the factors that may predict the quantity and quality of linguistic interactions. One factor is parents' socioeconomic status (SES), but for policymakers and practitioners seeking to enhance young children's early language development an understanding of factors more directly open to the influence of discrete, targeted programs would be more valuable. While the research literature on these malleable factors is relatively small, the available evidence suggests that parents' knowledge and beliefs about how children learn are related to parents' linguistic interactions with their children.

This research highlights the promise of a program like *All the Way to K and Beyond* (“*ATWTK*”), a citywide initiative developed by the Children’s Museum of Manhattan (“*CMOM*”) in collaboration with the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) and Department of Education (DOE) with funding from the Meringoff Family and W.K. Kellogg Foundations. The goal of the program is to empower parents, caregivers, and educators to foster language and literacy learning among their young children (ages 0-5 years).

To develop the program model, *CMOM* established a national advisory board of experts in child development, and engaged the Science of Learning Institute (SLI) of Johns Hopkins University in conducting a needs assessment study in New York City and Baltimore. The pilot *ATWTK* program that is the focus of this report was conducted at *CMOM* and across New York City from May to August 2017. It consisted of 12 family workshops, five professional development sessions, and three family festivals that together reached approximately 1200 participants. It engaged participants in conversation about how children acquire language skills through the use of art, music and storytelling activities that were designed to be easily replicable at home or in the classroom. Following the program they attended, participants received *ATWTK* printed materials, with colorful illustrations and prompts for starting everyday conversations at home, school and in the community.

The purpose of our evaluation was to assess the promise of the *ATWTK* program and materials. To this end, 182 attendees (63 parents and 119 early childhood educators) completed survey measures prior to and following their participation in the program. As can be seen in the figure below, **program participation was associated with improved knowledge of language and literacy development, as well as more positive attitudes among parents and educators about what they can do to promote it. The size of these increases was substantial, surpassing the threshold established by the U.S. Department of Education for a finding to be considered “substantively important.” Both parents and educators experienced these effects, and they were observed whether the participants’ primary language was either English or Spanish.**

Figure. Participant Increases in Knowledge (left) and Positive Attitudes (right)



Note: *** indicates that the difference in pre- and post-program scores was statistically significant ($p < .0001$).

The associations between program participation and improved knowledge and attitudes may be attributable to the quality of the instruction. On average, participants reported a high level of satisfaction with the program (3.5 out of 4 points), and reported using the materials “a couple of times each week” with the children or students. Participants’ comments also suggested that participants valued the program and used the materials frequently:

“My mother is a Spanish speaker and has not only been using the ATWTK activities daily with my 16-month old son (she hung the poster on the refrigerator), but she now feels confident speaking in her native language to him more often. I have seen an increase in his ability to speak and recognize more words in Spanish.”

- Mother and program participant

“The ATWTK content will be easy and fun to use with daily activities in my classroom. Before the program I only thought of building literacy skills through reading, but now I see how it is part of talking about math and other classroom activities. I like the poster and am going to hang it in my classroom as a reminder.”

- ACS Childcare Provider, South Bronx

Why are these results important? Lower socioeconomic status (SES) is linked to less frequent and lower quality linguistic interactions between young children and their adult caregivers. These interactions are associated with the development of early language skills, which, in turn, predict academic achievement at school entry.

From a policy perspective, the question is how to break or disrupt this chain of relationships. Studies indicate that parents’ knowledge of and attitudes toward child development is related to their linguistic interactions with children, and therefore that one promising lever for intervention is to improve parents’ and caregivers’ knowledge and attitudes. While they await replication, **our results indicate that ATWTK accomplished this.**