B.A.S.E. BabyWatching Comes to the United States: Challenges, Rewards, and Lessons Learned

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B.A.S.E.= BabyWatching Against Aggression and Anxiety for Sensitivity and Empathy

Background on B.A.S.E. BabyWatching

- Low-cost, anti-violence and anti-bullying program that aims to build empathetic and pro-social dispositions in young children (Britsch, 2007).
- Attachment-based intervention that is designed to have a mother or dad (or other significant caregiver) visit a target class for approximately 30 minutes on a weekly basis throughout the course of several months. Through the facilitation of a trained B.A.S.E. BabyWatching Group Leader, children observe and reflect upon the interaction between mother and baby; and also have the opportunity to compare and contrast what they would do, think, and feel in the Mom and Baby’s place.

Benefits of B.A.S.E. from the Perspectives of Major Stakeholders

Participating Students

- Loved to watch the baby play, grow, and learn new things; and felt “proud” about Baby L’s development.
- Learned how to take care of a baby; have to watch and listen to understand what the baby needs.
- Learned that it is also important to take care of yourself.
- Were happy for the chance every week to ask Mom questions about the baby.

Participating Teacher

- Most impressed with the authentic opportunities that this program provided students to practice the emotion-related vocabulary words that were part of their language arts curriculum.
- Did not have the impression that the program had an impact on how children interacted with one another. However, she was very pleasantly surprised to see how freely two extremely quiet girls shared their ideas and asked questions during the BabyWatching sessions.
- Expresses interest in receiving training to become a B.A.S.E. Group Leader.

BabyWatching Mother and Baby

- The BabyWatching Mom was thrilled to see how the children reacted / paid attention to the baby and his actions.
- Appreciated the one-on-one time with the baby which led her to become more observant about his development; sometimes she would get so engrossed with the interacting with the baby that she would forget that the children were there.
- Though she has always spent a lot of time with her children altogether, this experience led her to realize the importance of carving out individual one-on-one time for each child.

Parents of Participating Students

- Reported varying degrees to which their children talked about their BabyWatching experiences, but all pointed to evidence that the children valued the experience.
- One parent stated that his child would report what happened during the weekly sessions, and posed many questions about what she was like as an infant.
- Another parent reported that her child rarely spoke about the sessions, but he expressed looking forward to the sessions; religiously reminding his mother the day before a scheduled session that, "The baby is coming tomorrow to our class."

BBINY Observer

- Impressed with how children remained engaged from week to week.
- Appreciated opportunity to observe the unfolding of the program and its various nuances.
- Saw how more prolonged intervention could have an impact on decreasing aggression, increasing sensitivity and prosocial ways of resolving conflict.

BBINY Group Leader

- It was a humbling experience learning how to juggle the Mom, Baby, and students all at the same; and especially how to keep 6-year-old students focused on the interaction between Mom and Baby and scaffolding them to deeper levels of empathy.
- Was very heartened and appreciative of the mentoring and support from BabyWatching Mentor in England.

Context of the Pilot Project: School, Children, and Community

BBINY = B.A.S.E. BabyWatching in New York

- Launched as a collaborative effort between the Education and Nursing Departments at a public urban college in New York City.
- First program of its kind in the United States, having only taken place in Europe, Israel, Australia, and New Zealand until this year (Kellie-Smith & Perry, 2016).
- The BBINY Educator was trained in the B.A.S.E. procedure and facilitated the weekly sessions, while the BBINY Nurse took copious notes of the session.

Participating Class, School and Community

- A first grade class, with a total of 15 students, in a private nursery through 8th grade school located in Queens, New York. All children were of African heritage, with a majority of Afro-Caribbean descent (Jamaican, Trinidadian, Haitian, etc.).
- School places a high value on traditional academics, discipline, affirming children’s cultural backgrounds and infusing an appreciation for multiculturalism and global citizenship. Children primarily come from middle-class families with college-educated, working professional parents able to afford the yearly tuition of nearly $10,000 a year.
- School is located in a primarily Black suburban neighborhood (more than 80%), where over 85% of the homes are occupied and with less than a 5% poverty rate.

BabyWatching Mother, Infant and Family

- Temporarily a stay at home mom who holds an MBA (Master’s in Business Administration). Her husband works as a Technology Specialist. The couple have 4 children, ranging in ages of less than a year to 13-years-old.
- Baby L. blossomed from a 3-month-old infant, seemingly unaware of his audience to establishing eye contact, reaching, and gorging to the children.
- By the time program ended, Baby L. was 7-months old, with all sorts of new skills, including periodically looking behind him to see if mom was still there.

1 Such programs have and can be conducted for older children and adults, including senior citizens (see: http://www.britsch.de/666-1-BASE-BabyWatching-These-transaks.html).
2 There is a similar program called “Routes of Empathy” that originated in Canada and has been conducted in several parts of the United States. However, “Routes of Empathy” focuses on large-scale programs involving several classes and / or schools, taking a whole-school / whole community approach as opposed to B.A.S.E. which can be conducted with only one class within a school or community.

Lessons Learned

Finding a School

Given the simplicity and low-cost nature of the program, it was quite easy to initiate this program in a school once a teacher, administrator, and / or other stakeholder is interested.

Recruiting the BabyWatching Parent and Infant.

Recruiting caregivers can be very challenging when seeking to begin a program where parents utilize schools primarily for childcare, as opposed to an enrichment experience for their child/ren. As a result, recruitment might require more creative strategies and / or widespread efforts, going beyond the confines of the targeted school.

Compensating the Mom, Dad, and / or Caretaker.

Basic B.A.S.E. BabyWatching principles do not recommend compensating BabyWatching Moms, Dads, or other Caretakers for their participation. This helps to maintain the low-cost simplicity to the program. Our BabyWatching Mom did not have any children in the participating school, lived over 3 miles away, and had to bring her two preschool-aged children to the school. As a result, we provided her with a small stipend to cover transportation costs and childcare.

Conclusions

- It’s worth it!
- It’s valuable.
- It should be adaptable to diverse settings.
- Mentoring is important.

References