

**BABY BOUNCE: THE LITTLE BIG BOOK CLUB WAY TO BEGIN
LITERACY FOR CHILDREN 0-2 YEARS**

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This paper reports on some preliminary findings from a library-initiated program that was designed to encourage early literacy development in very young children, 0-2 year olds. The program, known as The Little Big Book Club was set up to encourage parents and caregivers to read aloud to babies. The paper describes the development of the program, analyses the program outcomes, with a particular focus on important predictors of early literacy development, and explores changes to family literacy practices after families were involved in the program.

Programs to encourage early book reading to babies have occurred in several initiatives in the UK and the US. In *Bookstart* in the UK, 90% of parents have been provided with a pack containing a book and literacy related information when their baby was 7-9 months old (Wade & Moore 1993). Evaluations at 6 months, 2 and 4 years later have highlighted *Bookstart's* value in promoting shared book reading, more active interaction with books and encouraging children's interest in and enthusiasm for books (Wade & Moore 1996). Research has confirmed the advantage of *Bookstart* children not only in literacy but also numeracy at school age (Wade & Moore 1998). A similar program, *Babies into Books*, also in the UK provided a book pack to babies at 7 months of age, however as well a book pack this program provided additional early literacy guidance for carers and their children (Hardman & Jones 1999). In the US there is a national approach to promoting early book reading in the *Born to read* program which involves public libraries and health providers across the US.

In Australia library-based literacy programs targeting very young children 0-2 years are a relatively new occurrence and there is little research evidence regarding their effectiveness. There is no national approach to library-based early literacy programs (Bundy 2004). The only large scale library-based 0-2 year old programs with a research and evaluation focus are the *Better Beginnings* program in Western Australia (Barrat-Pugh, Rohl, Oakley & Elderfield 2005) and the *Little Big Book Club* in South Australia.

The importance of the years before school has been well documented. The research into early literacy development points to several important predictors of literacy acquisition: the importance of oral language, phonemic awareness, and having a substantial oral language vocabulary. Australian research strongly supports the connections between children's oral language development and later academic success in literacy (Rivalland 2004). Linked to oral language development is phonemic awareness which is awareness of words, syllables, rhymes, alliteration and the individual sounds or phonemes in spoken language. Phonemic awareness strongly predicts future success in learning to read (Adams 1990). Regarding the importance of vocabulary, the impact of the first three years for children's vocabulary development and their future literacy learning has been clearly documented (Hart & Risley 1995). Variations have been found in the vocabulary development of young children in diverse communities and this vocabulary variation has an impact on their future trajectories (Biemiller 2001; Hart & Risley 1995, 2003). Concerning oral language, Dickinson and Tabors (2002) found that the scores that kindergarteners achieved on measures (receptive vocabulary, narrative production, and emergent literacy) were

highly predictive of their scores on reading comprehension and receptive vocabulary in fourth and seventh grade.

THE LITTLE BIG BOOK CLUB

This research examines the impact of a range of early literacy programs for 0-2 year old children initiated by public libraries in diverse geographic and socioeconomic communities in South Australia. The programs are linked to a state wide program known as The Little Big Book Club. The Little Big Book Club is a multi pronged partnership with the local newspaper, the state government and public libraries and is designed to encourage parents to read to their children. The Little Big Book Club received a four-year funding commitment from the state government. From February 2006, The program will provide every baby aged between 6-12 months (over 17,500 babies) with a free reading pack, containing: a reading book; a story-time DVD; a library bag; a fun, giraffe print growth chart; and information for parents, including reading lists and tips on reading aloud. The ongoing support and guidance for families is handled through the state's 139 public libraries.

This paper is organised around the following research questions:

- In what ways do literacy programs for 0-2 year old children respond to local communities in remote and urban areas?
- How do literacy programs for 0-2 year olds adapt to meet the developmental requirements of the age group?
- What was the impact of family literacy programs for 0-2 year old children with regard to phonemic awareness, vocabulary, and oral comprehension?
- Are there changes in family literacy practices as a result of the programs?
- In what ways do particular parent groups perceive the content, processes and attitudes espoused by the program?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

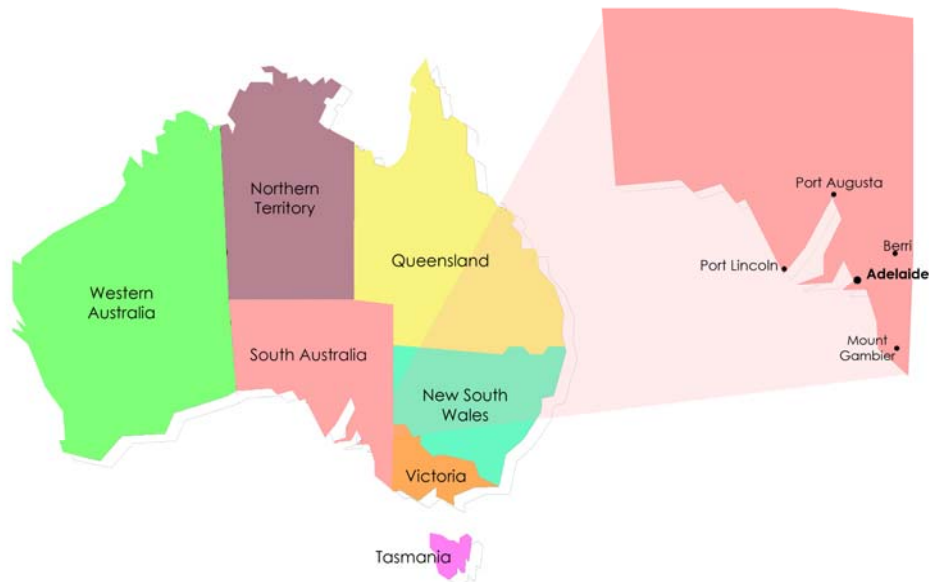
Within this sociocultural research design there are three ongoing research sites: site one is in a high income metropolitan area; site two is in a lower income metropolitan area with a diverse social and ethnic population; and site three contains geographically remote communities. Case studies are being compiled to explore how library staff create programs for 0-2 year old children and also how they respond to the needs of local communities. These case studies will continue throughout 2006 and into 2007.

To gather data on the impact of the program on 0-2 year old children an initial interview with 40 parents and caregivers provided information: on the impact of the program on their 0-2 year olds; on the changes to literacy practices at home; and how parents perceive the content, processes and attitudes espoused by the program. As the research continues more in-depth information will be collected from different focus families which will be selected by library staff to explore particular issues within the communities. For example, Indigenous families, families with fathers as the single parent, families where English is a second language, families with children with special needs, and families where the children live with their grandparents.

This paper will discuss the research questions and discuss some preliminary findings.

IN WHAT WAYS DO LITERACY PROGRAMS FOR 0-2 YEAR OLD CHILDREN RESPOND TO LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN REMOTE AND URBAN AREAS?

The three research sites, two metropolitan and one remote site will be described and then analysed. It is important to point out that many remote sites are over 10 hours drive from a city centre.



THE HILLS COMMUNITY

The Adelaide Hills community is largely a high socioeconomic area with parents predominantly from an 'anglo' heritage. The Hills is a close community and families like to shop, and seek social interaction in the hills, rather than coming into the metropolitan area and the suburbs. The program for 0-2 year olds became known as *Baby Bounce and Rhyme*. It began with 5 parents attending once a fortnight and quickly grew until recently there were thirty parents, and 33 babies 0-3 years of age. The parents sit on chairs in a circle with babies on their knees, babies hold maracas, bells or other musical instruments and the session is very fast paced, all join in together, with about half the songs sung by the librarian as leader and the other half sung along to a CD-ROM accompaniment.





At the *Baby Bounce* sessions the songs are mostly English based nursery rhymes. The 30 minute program begins with the 'Hello song' and ends with the 'Goodbye song' (both sung to the tune of 'London Bridge is falling down'), with the many rhymes organised into bounce songs, action songs, finger plays, body part songs, cumulative or subtractive songs and a lullaby, providing quite a structured program (see appendix). There are no didactic instructions to parents about why the rhymes are important or useful. The librarians model or demonstrate how to sing and interact with babies by using a toy teddy bear and a Raggedy Ann doll to represent a baby sitting on a lap. The rhymes are reproduced on large charts with large font size so the parents can read the words as many parents are unfamiliar with the words of all the songs. In one *Baby Bounce* session there could be up to 25-30 songs and rhymes clapped and bounced through. After the session the parents are encouraged to stay and read books aloud to their babies.

THE PARKS COMMUNITY

The Parks community is made up of middle to low income families, families newly arrived in Australia from China, Europe, and the Middle East, young families with one parent working, families with parents working and children being cared for by grandparents, families where mother works and father is the carer. The program for babies is mostly songs and rhymes and is very informal. There are several family groups with mother, father and child, or both grandparents and child. Several dads attend and more and more sessions have been requested by the parents because the children and the parents enjoyed the social interaction. Many of the parents did not know the words of the rhymes as English was their second language. When the parents were interviewed after the sessions all commented that they enjoyed the program. They wanted the session to last longer as the babies were engrossed and could have participated for 45 minutes. The parents and carers wanted the program to also include a book reading because they wanted their babies to enjoy and learn from books.

REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The remote communities in this study are all extremely diverse, ranging from towns in economic down turn to townships increasing in size because of a mineral resources boom. In some regional mining centres workers live in towns hundreds of kilometres away and workers are flown in to work four days on and four days off. Remote

communities also include Indigenous communities although Indigenous participation in library based programs for 0-2 year olds was not apparent perhaps because Indigenous parents valued an oral tradition rather than book collection resource which is how libraries are mostly viewed.

A representative from each library described some of the key features, issues and barriers in their communities.

Port Augusta - Diversity, social issues. Families from Baxter Detention Centre often stay in Port Augusta on release from Baxter. Fortnightly storytelling sessions with number of participants slowly increasing.

Whyalla - Dads are actively involved with their kids due to 12 hour shift patterns. Dads come to the library, choose books, go to supermarket, do sports with their kids. Whyalla has 2 libraries (Civic Library in the East, and Alex Ramsey Library in the West) with totally different clients at each.

Quorn - Kids raised in Quorn moved away, usually to city. Met their partners, got married and have had a couple of kids. Now many are moving back to Quorn to raise their families. Approx 6 young families have moved back to the area. Dads are fairly involved with their kids.

Coober Pedy - Low socio-economic area with 95% unemployment. Most of the population are step-families. From a class of 30 only 2 were living with both their natural parents. Lots of people are moving away and families breaking up. There are school attendance problems, kids just don't turn up. There are significant Indigenous issues.

Leigh Creek - Can be roughly arranged into 3 groups. The usual 'townies' who have high wages. Workers and then the kids who are bussed in from 2 Indigenous communities. The 'Town Dads' are quite involved with their kids.

Contrasting the three communities The Hills, The Parks and the remote communities reveals an ever increasing diversity and this includes diversity of opportunity in terms of accessing books and libraries. In addition the 'remote areas' appeared to be undergoing the most dynamic change and this is compounded with the tyranny of distance where travel between towns may be up to a 10 hour drive. The community known here as 'The Hills' was the most homogeneous and 'The Parks' had a range of different cultural groups, more diverse family structures and included a large number of grandparents.

HOW DO LITERACY PROGRAMS FOR 0-2 YEAR OLDS ADAPT TO MEET THE DEVELOPMENTAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE AGE GROUP?

The relatively new occurrence of library-based programs for 0-2 year olds has been a challenge to many library staff. Traditionally libraries have provided preschool based programs for 3-5 year olds where book reading, storytelling and craft activities are relatively common. Staff therefore felt anxious about engaging babies in book reading activities and some felt quite uncertain about having a large group of babies in the library.

The public libraries decided to provide training for library staff in a program titled *Building literacy before school training and development*. Library staff from over 139 libraries (a total of 240 library staff), attended training sessions on research into child development, babies and brain research, vocabulary, connecting with communities, phonemic awareness, letters and sounds, selecting books for different age groups,

storytelling and reading aloud. At the six regional training sessions library staff also shared techniques, tips, challenges and opportunities arising from their different communities.

The building literacy before school training and development was an outreach program that took place in the metropolitan area and in the major country districts. Taking the training to the communities, rather than having the more remote areas coming to the central metropolitan area, was innovative and implicitly reinforced the concept of outreach which underpinned the notion of libraries responding to their particular client bases.



The library staff examined topics important for early literacy and beginning to read, including the developmental characteristics of babies, oral language, phonemic awareness, letter identification, concepts about print and a love of books.

The physical developmental characteristics of the 0-2 year old groups highlighted the need for most babies to sit on parents' laps although some babies were becoming mobile, crawling and starting to walk. There was a clear need to keep the babies engaged so they didn't run off. The library staff understood that by six months babies have normal 20/20 vision and that by 4-6 months babies hear and respond to 'changes in tone of voice, are fascinated by toys that make sounds, enjoy music and rhythm, and look in an interested or apprehensive way for the source of all sorts of new sounds. The developmental fact that by 7-12 months babies turn and look at a face when called by name, made it easy to understand why games like: 'Round and round the garden' and 'Peek-a-boo' are engaging to babies. It is in this period that babies recognise the names of familiar objects and by about 2 years of age babies can have up to a 50 word vocabulary.

The library staff explored the research findings of Hart and Risley (1995) who compared the early language environments of children from 7-9 months until 3 years, and then correlated language exposure to literacy achievement test scores in 3rd grade. Children who heard the greatest amount of oral language vocabulary when they were young had the highest achievement in literacy, while children who heard the least amount of language had the lowest achievement in test scores.

The research evidence regarding early intellectual development, language, vision, hearing and movement led to the creation of library programs that were very fast paced, active programs where babies grasped musical instruments, interacted with and were stimulated by other babies, listened to music, songs and rhymes. The idea of engaging children with 'live language' which is different from television programs or CD-ROMS was discussed in the library training and development sessions.

As a result of training and development, the library programs for 0-2 year olds in many areas shifted from a predominantly book reading focus to a rhyme-action program. In the more remote communities the need for very innovative outreach programs to access the diverse parent groups became apparent. There were efforts being made to take early literacy sessions out into the community, to the local kindergartens, community centres, even the local pubs! The libraries were involving health and welfare agencies more and becoming social gathering places for many different groups in their areas. They were also making use of technology, by using the library as a hub for computers, electronic communication, computer games and encouraging the use of ebooks.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF PROGRAMS ON 0-2 YEAR OLD CHILDREN WITH REGARD TO PHONEMIC AWARENESS, VOCABULARY, ORAL COMPREHENSION?

The importance of providing early literacy activities with babies and toddlers was received as a 'new idea' to most library staff. From the training and development sessions they developed innovative programs that provided rich experiences in phonemic awareness, vocabulary and oral comprehension.

In the *Baby Bounce* sessions the babies and parents participated in 25 or so rhymes. Some had the baby bouncing along to every word in the rhyme which is important in phonemic awareness—hearing words and word spaces in spoken language. The babies were attending to: words, syllables, rhyme, alliteration and analysis of phonemes. Attention to syllables occurred in favourite rhymes such as 'Humpty Dumpty' and 'Hickory Dickory Dock'. This was also useful in identification of phonemes where 'Humpty Dumpty', simple nonsense words have only one change in the beginning phoneme, as is the case with 'Hickory Dickory'. The rhymes were accompanied by clapping and percussion instruments and this broke the words up into the syllables in a more effective way than would occur when narrative texts are read aloud.

In addition many rhymes have internal rhyme within a sentence, for example 'Twinkle twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are?' which also has rhyme at the end of each line. Awareness of alliteration occurred in words with similar beginning sounds, for example 'Jack and Jill went up the hill' 'A sailor went to sea, sea, sea'. In many rhymes words are repeated, as is 'Twinkle, twinkle little star' and 'Row row row your boat'. Research suggests that knowledge of the rhyme in traditional nursery rhymes is related to the development of more abstract phonological skills and emergent reading abilities (Maclean, Bryant & Bradley 1987). It is important to note that raps, chants, advertising jingles and pop songs can be used in the same way to explore rhyme.

Phonemic awareness became an important underpinning to the library based programs and even influenced the program names, for example, *Baby Bounce*, *Rhyme Time* and even *Pram Jam* taking account of phonemic awareness.

Vocabulary

The use of rare words in conversations has been found to be important for later literacy development. Research by Dickenson and Sprague (2001) reveals that when children have extended conversations two aspects were associated with positive end-of-kindergarten language assessments. These were, the teachers' 'use of rare words and their ability to limit how much they said and, hence, listen to what children were saying'. (p. 271). Hayes and Ahrens 1988 study of rare words in scientific articles, children's books, adult television shows and everyday conversations revealed a higher count of rare words in children's books than in everyday talk and television shows.

The vocabulary in the rhymes selected for the *Baby Bounce* programs included many rare words for example, the song 'Hush little baby' includes the words, mocking bird, looking glass and diamond ring. Body parts are learned in the action song 'Heads shoulders knees and toes' and numbers are learned in 'One, two three four five, once I caught a fish alive'.

The songs and actions promoted interaction and talk between parents and their babies. Rich discussions about topics or themes of interest to children plus attention to how language works and the sounds of language not only encourages awareness of phonemes but also vocabulary development and comprehension—all playing a part in early literacy development.

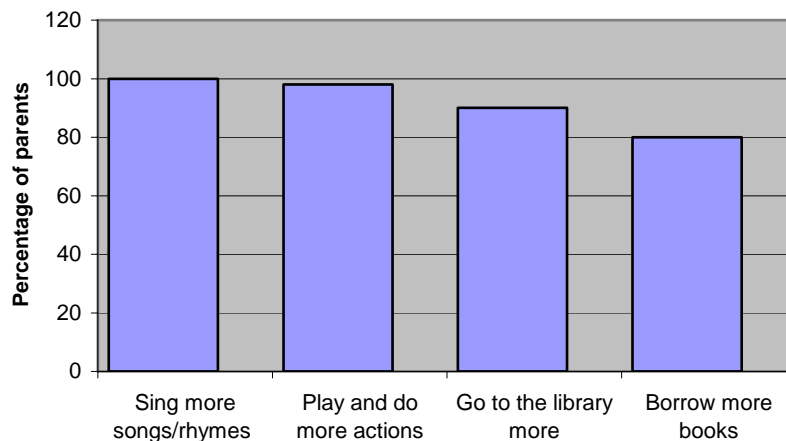
WHAT CHANGED IN FAMILY LITERACY PRACTICES AS A RESULT OF THE PROGRAMS?

The *Baby Bounce* programs were adapted in response to the developmental characteristics of the children. In addition the program changed from a book based program to a singing *Baby Bounce* program because as the sessions grew in popularity with 30 parents and 30+ babies the size of the group meant they were not able to see the pictures in a book.

The change from a predominantly book reading program to the *Baby Bounce and Rhyme* program has encouraged greater parent-child participation and interaction with babies. Parents commented that 'the music holds my baby's attention better than storytelling'. Singing and chanting up to 25 rhymes and songs seems to hold the babies attention and so do the actions such as lifting baby up, clapping hands, finger actions. The words of the songs on charts enables the parents to join in the singing, musical percussion instruments make lots of noise, and the occasional CD recording of the nursery rhymes makes the sessions varied.

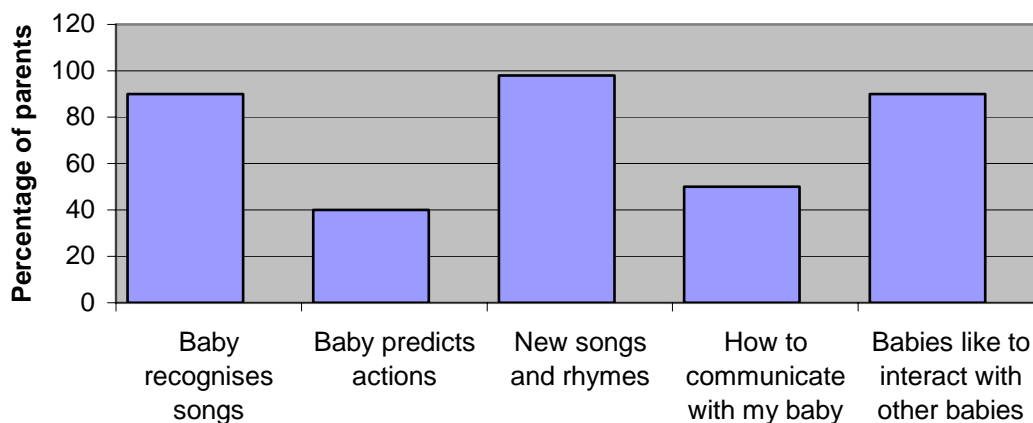
Most of the parents in the Hills and the Parks programs were interviewed and commented that now they sing more at home some saying 'We sing all the time', 'My baby knows all the rhymes now'. A spin off of the *Baby Bounce* program is book borrowing for babies which has increased and the need to purchase more books for the 0-2 year old group has increased. Libraries throughout South Australia are colour coding books suitable for babies and toddlers, to make selecting books easier for parents.

What changed at home



When asked what they had learned from the program, one parent commented ‘I have learned how to make babies smile’. Most parents said they enjoy learning the words of the rhymes and enjoyed the take home book with the words and rhymes explained. The fact that the baby anticipated the songs, rhymes and the actions at such an early age was noticed with amazement by several parents. Parents said that they now sing and play more with their babies at home and use songs as a distraction and for entertainment.

What parents learned



The parents at the Parks program who had English as a Second Language reported they sing more to their babies and they play more nursery rhyme CDs at home because the baby has learnt the tune and the rhythm from the library sessions. However they wanted more rhymes from other cultures included. They commented on the desire to purchase baby maracas and musical instruments so they can have sing-a-longs with their babies at home. These families also commented on the need for a book to be read at the session as reading books is very much what they expect at a library based program.

The diversity in the remote sites remains a challenge and here more than in other sites library staff have commented on the need for outreach programs in shopping centres, kindergartens—anywhere where people meet together. The challenge to involve

Indigenous parents remains and library staff comment that many families are ‘non-book’ families and therefore not interested in using the library. If oral narrative songs and chants are already popular in ‘non-book’ families, then how can the songs and stories be incorporated into action packed programs that extend children’s vocabularies, promote phonemic awareness and oral language comprehension?

DISCUSSION

There was overwhelming mutual enjoyment in the *Baby Bounce* programs. The programs encouraged ‘live’ language which is different to television and listening to recorded songs and chants. The programs were quick paced and had lots of actions, clapping, music created by the group, plus some CD recorded songs to add variety. There was no didactic teaching in the program just excellent modelling of how to interact and play with babies. This approach is in contrast to didactic instructional programs about what parents should and should not do and also in contrast to the ever increasing narrow skills based prior-to-school programs.

The issue of targeting communities where families are not ‘book families’ remains a sensitive issue. Many parents attending the *Baby Bounce* programs were already reading with their babies and singing traditional rhymes and sought out programs to encourage their baby’s love of books. Babies in these families have a head start, an advantage of up to five years of rich language interaction before entering formal schooling. The issue of ‘book’ and ‘non book’ families is reminiscent of Heath’s 1993 study of spoken language in families. It also echoes research by Hardman and Jones (1999) in the UK who discuss the importance of targeting priority areas, which while being difficult and sensitive, need to be addressed. Needless to say there are rich language rhymes and chants and popular songs from many different cultures that could be used in a similar way. Many cultures, especially Indigenous groups, have rich oral traditions of storytelling that could also be tapped into.

For library staff the *Baby Bounce* programs have lead to an increase in library use and membership. The library is a great place to socialise. For many of the parents the socialising with other parents and baby-to-baby socialising was the key to the program’s success. One mother commented ‘I had no idea there were so many other mothers like me out there in the nearby community’.

There is overwhelming evidence about the importance of the very early years for future literacy development. There are important equity issues regarding various diverse communities and a need for a national effort in Australia to encourage parents of 0-2 year old to engage in programs that provide rich language experiences. Singing and chanting is engaging as it requires attending to the rhythm, rhyme, melody, timing, words and meaning. As well the action songs require movement and coordination while also connecting emotionally with the music and words. In even in the simplest of songs, the whole brain and body are engaged. The singing of songs and use of actions are important early symbolic representations of meaning and many of the early songs and rhymes are repeated again and again in different forms in picture books and early literacy texts.

This research highlights a need for a national initiative to encourage early literacy initiatives for the 0-2 year old age group in all communities and in particular additional support for programs in more remote communities.

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Rhymes used in the Baby Bounce programs

Hello song

Bouncing songs

This old man
Hickory Dickory Dock
Humpty Dumpty
To market, to market
The bear went over the mountain
Are you sleeping?
Down by the station
London Bridge is falling down
This is the way the farmer rides
Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross

Body Part

Heads shoulders knees and toes
This little pig went to market
If you're happy and you know it

Finger plays

Incy wincy spider
Little Peter Rabbit
One, two, three, four, five once I caught a fish alive
Open shut them
Round and round the garden
Where is thumbkin?

Clapping rhymes

Miss Mary Mac, Mac Mac

Action songs

Grand old Duke of York
Here we go up, up, up
A sailor went to sea, sea, sea
The wheels on the bus
Twinkle, twinkle little star
Johnny works with one hammer

Songs

Three blind mice
Row, row, row your boat
Jack and Jill

Lullabies

Hush little baby

Cumulative and subtractive

Five little ducks
There were ten in the bed

FAMILY SURVEY QUESTIONS

NAME.....

Thank you for being involved in our program. Can you tell me....

1. What have you learned from being involved in the program?

2. What changes have you noticed in your baby/toddler after being involved in this program?

3. What have you changed at home?

4. In what ways can we improve or change our program?