

Ten reasons to choose Parent-Child Mother Goose (P-CMG)

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A Parent-Child Mother Goose (P-CMG) program combines songs, rhymes and stories shared between a group of parents and their children under four years of age, supported by two teachers and an assistant. The songs and rhymes involve everyone. The stories are told between the adults sometimes with children and sometimes while the children are cared for by the assistant. The emphasis is on shared communication and there are no props. The whole communal process provides understated, subtle nurturing of the interactions between those engaged. The teachers are observant, responsive to participants and highlight the children's responses to their parents. The pace is relaxed, slow and repetitive.

Reasons for choosing P-CMG are complexly inter-related. However, there are at least ten, which can be separately described. Each reason for choosing P-CMG offers both positive "experiences", and creates "opportunities" for enhancing development and promoting emotional health.

1: Culture

Experiences

P-CMG conveys culture, tradition and wisdom. Songs, rhymes and story-telling are universal. They are part of every culture. Traditionally, parents and elders passed on knowledge through use of songs, rhymes and story-telling. Together, they have been the means to convey knowledge to children and communities throughout history. In the past, messages were conveyed incidentally during joint activities. So P-CMG uses traditional processes which respect wisdom and affirm the importance of sharing information with children. P-CMG reflects members' cultural diversity and traditions, as well as the value of each individual's contribution to the group.

Opportunities

Today, many people today are isolated from their cultural roots, and often separated from their community of origin. They may be living in multi-cultural communities far away from their relations and childhood friends due to war, being refugees or having moved for greater opportunities. Others have lost knowledge of traditional culture as a result of

disadvantages or active restrictions by dominant groups. However, the traditional ways still “speak” to most people’s hearts. Even when P-CMG participants have not heard the stories, songs or rhymes of a particular tradition something of their tone, their format, metre and balance, speaks to most, but especially those who grew up in that culture. So P-CMG restores and invigorates cultural knowledge and practices.

2: Community

Experiences

P-CMG creates a sense of sharing and community. It builds friendships and links families in local neighbourhoods together. The experience of sharing in “a community of song and of story-telling” creates a warmth and energy between participants that is profound, especially as it involves multiple generations; parents, young children and supportive others. The P-CMG group becomes its own neighbourhood “friendship community”, with some members choosing to have regular contact outside the sessions.

Opportunities

Many young parents find themselves isolated, lacking a group of local friends and neighbours, and especially lacking opportunities for shared experiences with those at a similar stage in family life. They benefit from the chance to make new friends, to be in a supportive group and, through the teachers, to find out about the supports and resources of their community. Some parents find themselves isolated from their culture-of-origin. They enjoy being able to make contact with the wider community and, at the same time, share and contribute from their traditions. The sharing of songs and stories may be new to some participants but once they become comfortable with the process, their sense of shared community opportunities often pervades their family and cultural life from then on.

3: Enjoyment

Experiences

Participation in P-CMG is an enjoyable, warm, engaged shared experience that encourages fun for all. Children love learning with their parents, particularly when it involves playfulness and humour. P-CMG creates opportunities for sharing special times together, which promotes intimacy. The program time becomes a significant enjoyable feature in family life. Children regularly ask parents to repeat the increasingly familiar and newly introduced songs, rhymes and

stories outside P-CMG. Parents grow in confidence and are affirmed by responses to their increasing story-telling capacities.

Opportunities

Occasionally children find songs, singing and rhymes troubling. However, as they become familiar with the P-CMG routine they gradually relax, and become engaged in the activities with their parents. With persistence, they benefit greatly from new awareness, and understanding, of voice tones, rhythms, stresses and communicative interactions generally. Teachers are always flexible about participation and repeat features the children and families find most engaging. In the long run the participation opens opportunities that would not have been available otherwise in communication and social sharing.

4: Shared knowledge

Experiences

P-CMG gives parents and children a shared repertoire of songs, rhymes and stories which they can enjoy together. The activities become their special language, shared information and experiences that promote their connection with each other, and which they can share with their wider family. P-CMG creates a repertoire for everyday routines and activities. Family favourites are welcome additions to the P-CMG group sharing. Teachers and families search out suitable items for the needs and preferences of each group and of individuals.

Opportunities

Some parents' childhoods have been very stressful or involved extremely negative experiences. They may not have recollections of positive parenting to draw upon in their child rearing. P-CMG gives knowledge on which to base positive parenting interactions. The activities offer frameworks for cooperation, sharing time together, supporting routines, learning and enjoyment. All of which build experiences which increase mutual understanding and the use of parenting options, which encourage considerate ways of interaction and communication.

5: Communication and interaction

Experiences

P-CMG promotes positive, shared interactions between parents and children. Without props or equipment of any sort, parents and children enjoy directly shared, mutual experiences of and with each other. The reciprocity or “the dance of parent- child-parent-child” interaction is promoted, and which is profoundly rewarding for both parties. Being aware of and sensitive to each other’s responses to materials (whether familiar or new) and sharing each other’s enjoyment, becomes increasingly familiar. P-CMG provides a vocabulary of interaction that is warm, supportive, predictable, patterned, readily recognised, responsive, connected and communicative. (Joshi, 2006)

The emphasis is on direct oral interaction, but songs rhymes and stories naturally include gesture and bodily movement. Opportunities for children to express themselves through their bodies abound. Chants and rhythms invite jumping, stamping, change of pace etc.

Opportunities

All children and families benefit, but some have more need than others. Those who have difficulties develop a set of inner but mutual resources, able to be used flexibly when needed, as no props are required. Parents and children learn to observe each other’s responses – their preferences, their skills etc. The teachers support parents to notice children’s cues, to interpret what they might mean and to respond when children initiate interaction. Teachers help parents to increase children’s familiarity and ease with new materials.

P-CMG’s emphasis is on direct interpersonal communication. So P-CMG prefers to encourage people to use themselves (their voices, facial interactions, gestures and bodily movements) as the resources for communication, rather than visual aids. However, some people use communication supports always and of course, these continue to be used.

6: Children's skills

Experiences

P-CMG supports children’s development particularly in communication, knowledge, social-emotional skills, in sense of belonging and contributing, and in their sense of efficacy. Research evidence (both Canadian and Australian) has demonstrated acceleration in development associated with the PCMG (Spreckley et al 2010). In addition children’s

functional capacities are expanded, such as in being a member of a group, in remaining engaged and participating in activities, in initiating requests.

Opportunities

P-CMG provides routines based support which creates opportunities for learning. Domestic routines have been shown to be a most effective means for supporting learning in those children having difficulty, whatever their learning need (McWilliam, 2010). Social (awareness and interaction), emotional, communication and cognitive skills can all be developed through P-CMG. So P-CMG has been used frequently in early intervention, where procedures and routines need to be especially familiar.

7: Emotions

Experiences

P-CMG explores emotions through songs, rhymes and stories. One of the major tasks of early childhood is for children to learn about their emotions, to recognise and name emotional reactions in themselves and others, to learn emotional regulation and to learn about social interaction (Landy, et al, 2006). Parents want to assist their children's emotional and social growth, realising that having emotional well-being and social skills are likely to make for happy and successful lives (Siegel et al, 2004). P-CMG provides ready media for this learning.

Opportunities

Some parents are not aware of the importance of early childhood experiences as foundational to brain development. Songs, rhymes and stories provide a wide range of emotional experiences and opportunities for discussion of the benefit of this understanding for children. P-CMG helps parents to articulate emotional and social complexity to children. The program promotes emotional togetherness, "good enough parenting" and community sharing, naturally and almost incidentally. (Landy et al, 2006; Immigrant Experience, 2006).

8: Tools

Experiences

P-CMG gives parents a set of resources to use in parenting. Parents learn to use songs, rhymes and rhythms through simple modelled methods that replicate what early childhood educators might do to encourage children's engagement

during good and more difficult times. Group membership offers lots of opportunities for incidental learning and discussion of parenting techniques. Parents learn to use the resources to promote children's development of more mature reactions.

Opportunities

For parents concerned about managing their children's behaviour, P-CMG provides proactive techniques immediately at their fingertips. For example, parents can support children to wait, to transition to new activities and to anticipate changes through song and rhymes, chanting and stamping. These offer "good parenting" techniques, taught simply without any implied criticism of either parent or child. They just have another useful set of options at their disposal as needed. Often children learn to initiate a rhyme/ chant to support themselves through a task or transition they find challenging.

9: For everyone (mental health and intellectual disability)

Experiences

Songs, rhymes and stories can be soothing. Parents can calm children much more readily when they themselves are calm. P-CMG can be emotionally in tune with the needs of a group and particular individuals. Assistance can be provided to both parents and children simultaneously through these experiences to learn skills together. Through the songs, rhymes and stories parent-child interaction can be sensitively supported, without need for explanation. Early childhood teachers often use songs, rhymes, chants and stories to help children learn skills.

Opportunities

P-CMG can support any parent. Using songs, rhymes and stories to assist parenting can be of benefit to those with mental health and intellectual disabilities, for example. The repetitiveness of songs and rhymes can be a boon to parents with learning, emotional or memory difficulties. Likewise songs and rhymes can be chosen or created to support communication during difficult times of day. Chanting, stamping or singing reminds both parents and children of the social or emotional regulation skills they may need. Knowledge and self-organisation is gained readily when taught through repetitious group chorus and becomes an enjoyable aspect of daily routines.

10: Safe and effective

Experiences

P-CMG has a strong and growing evidence base (Landy et al, 2006). Studies have been conducted in both Canada and Australia showing the benefit of the program for parents and children. The strongest evidence is in children's communication and language development. However, there is also evidence of development of social, interaction and parenting skills through P-CMG (Joshi, 2006). In addition, there is evidence of the benefits of the P-CMG in the development of friendships, in neighbourhood networks, in use of supports and resources, and in group attendance figures.

Opportunities

A danger of well-intentioned but ill-informed intervention with parents and/ or children who are in some way fragile, is that the intervention may be unsettling or may even be harmful (Landy et al 2006). Both the experiential training model for practitioners and the strengths based nature of the program makes it accessible and able to be presented by individuals with a wide range of training and experience. Songs, rhymes and stories are both the attraction and the resources of the program. Sharing them creates intimacy and builds bonds of trust between teachers and participants. Many participants feel safe enough to share sensitive information with teachers and/ or the groups. The groups become safe spaces which provide opportunities to discuss concerns. In turn talking issues through helps normalise families' experiences, enabling participants to explore parenting ideas or accept referrals without feeling vulnerable or unsafe.

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