

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS IN FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMING

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LITERACY HARVEST/FAMILY LITERACY FORUM

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FROM THE EDITORS

Claudia M. Ullman *Family Literacy Forum* National Even Start Association
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This joint issue of *Family Literacy Forum* and *Literacy Harvest* began the way most collaborations begin. We knew that working together would strengthen our final product. We knew that a joint effort would allow us to reach more readers and invite more practitioners to share their knowledge and experiences. We also knew that we wanted to explore ideas about communities and connections. When we began working on this issue, however, we did not know about proposed federal budget cuts that, as we write this letter, threaten both Even Start family literacy programming and programs funded by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. How timely and telling it is, then, that by bringing our communities together—the National Even Start Association and the Literacy Assistance Center—we can establish the visibility and vitality of the family literacy community.

So, with the serendipity that accompanies real-life experiences, the articles in this issue present a variety of ways to consider community, as well as program effectiveness. Sandra Moore's article on Georgia's innovative research-based family literacy initiative emphasizes the importance of community in the design and provision of quality family literacy programming. She demonstrates that connections among family literacy providers; between providers and school staff; and between educators and the broader community—government agencies, social service providers, even local retailers—can enhance the literacy skills of both parents and children.

Alecia D'Angelo asks us to expand our ideas about adult and early childhood education in family literacy programs to include learning contexts that support adolescents. Her article argues that teenagers have unique and considerable needs that often prevent them from completing their education. At the same time, opportunities for parental connections with middle schools and high schools are infrequent. With this in mind, she asks, how can we think about family, school, and learning communities as spanning a range of ages?

Azi Ellowitch makes the case that adult education can help individuals contribute to the well-being of both their families and their communities. Her case study of an adult learner, originally presented to a group of practitioners interested in developing their practice based on descriptions of their students and stu-

dent work, raises questions about narrowly constructed definitions of teaching and learning. Linda's story is a portrait of a family as a community of learners, parent and child together. Thomas G. Reio, Jr., Karen Wormley, and Mike A. Boyle also focus primarily on adult learners. Their article examines the role of workforce readiness in a Kentucky family literacy initiative. Providing more residents with workplace skills, they argue, develops a community's "human capital"—and thereby benefits not only program participants but the community at large.

The last two articles of this issue focus on funding, a particularly timely issue when more funding organizations are joining the family literacy community even as federal funding is threatened. Ann G. Bessell's article examines the impact of Florida's decision to provide one year of funding for new family literacy programs. One characteristic of programs that managed to survive beyond that first year was the ability to tap the resources of their communities to develop alternative funding sources. Derek E. Link and Drucie M. Weirauch rally Even Start practitioners and program staff to counter the U.S. Department of Education's reports on Even Start with reliable data from local and state-wide program evaluations. These authors challenge policymakers and practitioners from national, state, and local levels to form a community that can engage in balanced assessments and forge open dialogues. Both articles remind us that, as more educational initiatives incorporate family literacy, the need for communities of practitioners and funders to come together to understand their individual aims becomes greater.

The articles in this issue present us with different ways of thinking about connections within the family literacy community and beyond. While they differ in context, each article raises questions about what it means to be a member of a community. As you prepare for the program year ahead, think about your program and its participants and the connections that are made in your local learning community. Then consider the relationship of your program to the larger community of family literacy. What are the responsibilities and expectations that come with membership? How is your work promoting the well-being of the various communities to which you are linked?

AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION IS KEY

A Case Study on the Intersection of Adult Education and Family Literacy

Azi Ellowitch

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO SPEAK ABOUT HOW ADULT education influences the well-being of children and families at the fall 2004 Prospect Center for Education and Research conference, I immediately thought of Linda. A GED student at the Lehman College Adult Learning Center of the City University of New York, Linda is 32 years old and has a son who is 12. While the phenomenon of “teaching to the test” exerts increasing pressure on teachers and students at all age levels, Linda’s story reminds us how much deeper and more complicated it is for students to comprehend their world and express the complexities of their experience, and how such comprehension and expression can affect their children’s well-being. Linda’s story can help us understand how adult education providers, as well as adult students, might more broadly define our purpose.

Background

Entitled *In a Time of Siege: Standing up for the Well-Being of Children and Families*, the Prospect Center for Education’s 2004 conference brought together people of various walks of life who advocate for children, including teachers, parents, and social workers. I spoke as part of a panel of preschool professionals, parents, after-school practitioners, and adult educators. This article is based on that talk.

Prospect, which began as a school for students ages 5–14, operated from 1965 until 1991 in North Bennington, Vermont. During that time, teachers at the school developed descriptive review processes—ways of looking closely at children and children’s work that respect the students and the work they make. The school maintained archives of children’s

work that continue to be used for training and study. While originally developed in the context of the school itself, the *descriptive review* processes have increasingly attracted a wide range of educators, from preschool through adult and post-secondary levels. These processes have helped guide my work with Linda.

I had been collecting Linda’s work for some time, in part, because I had observed her mature as a reader, writer, and thinker. I also knew about Linda’s background and respected her thoughtfulness as a parent. To prepare for my panel remarks about how the work we do with adult students supports children and families, I interviewed Linda to better understand her perspective on her background, her learning, and the well-being of her son.

Linda’s Story

Linda first enrolled in the Lehman College Adult Learning Center in 1997, when she was 25 years old and her son was five. She attended briefly, and then returned to the program in 1999. Since then, she’s been in and out of classes, depending on her need to work and to take care of family problems. Over the years, her academic skills have improved. Her reading, which was on a middle school level when she began taking classes, is now on a high school level.

Difficult Beginnings

Linda is a single mother of Puerto Rican heritage. She left school in the middle of tenth grade, at the age of 15. This is typical of our student population at the Adult Learning Center. Other aspects of her story, however, are not typical. When I first met Linda in 1999, her mother, who suffered from chronic and

severe alcoholism, had recently become homeless. Linda brought her 14-year-old brother to live with her and her son, which was a painful and—in hindsight—futile attempt to rescue him. Another factor that sets Linda apart is that she has a non-traditional skill: She works as a carpenter.

Linda always had a hard time in school. She remembers her home as noisy. Between her mother's drinking and friends, loud music, and yelling, it was impossible for her to concentrate. Her teachers called her stupid; she said she "believed that for a very long time." Describing her family life growing up, Linda told me that her mother would disappear for days at a time:

My mother left us alone a lot. We were just by ourselves. We were just there by ourselves. I was about five or six. My sister was a year older than me. My brother Alberto was about two years younger. And we would be left alone. Sometimes my grandmother would come and take care of us. Or sometimes my cousins would come and stay with us.

While Linda's immediate family was clearly dysfunctional, she had a loving and supportive extended family and community. This is evident in a piece of writing from February 2004, in which Linda recalls a family gathering in which her favorite aunt announced that she was dying of AIDS:

As I walked inside Grandma's house, I saw the sad look in her eye. I gave her a really big hug and I told her that I love her very much. She answered me by the hug in return and a kiss on my cheek and held me close and said, I love you, too.

My favorite Aunt was sitting a few feet away and with the corner of my eye I saw her run by. I followed her around the room like I always did, and she turned and smiled at me, but I knew something was wrong. I still hugged her from behind and gave her a kiss. She hugged me back with a squeeze and kissed me on my forehead.

Even though there were extended family members involved in her life to provide support, Linda and her siblings were still afraid. I asked Linda when she began to overcome her fear, and she explained that getting a job helped her overcome her fear, "because now my mother could stay home and drink, instead of being in the street drinking."

Resilience

While Linda had low self-esteem in some aspects of her life, she could also demonstrate extreme confidence. The term *resilience*, used in the field of child welfare and explored in the work of Books and Goldstein (2004; 2001), seems to apply to Linda. She was motivated to take advantage of community-

sponsored activities that were available to her in the mid-1980s. Her junior high school had a relationship with the Bronx Zoo, which allowed her to work one summer and on weekends. She also went to see a counselor at the YMCA who enrolled her

Linda always had a hard time in school... Her teachers called her stupid; she said she "believed that for a very long time."

in an after-school class that taught her how to work with basic electricity, build lamps, patch walls, and put up sheet rock. (Sadly, these programs no longer exist.)

Linda began working at clothing stores on Fordham Road when she was 13 years old by falsifying working papers. She worked in a factory that packaged greeting cards and candy when she was 17 years old, but she hated factory work and returned to selling clothes.

At the age of 19 and three months pregnant, Linda went to the southern part of New Jersey for the weekend with her boyfriend—her first boyfriend and the father of her baby. During their stay, her boyfriend was arrested and locked up. Linda did not have the money to get home, so she stayed in South Jersey where she gave birth to her son. She didn't know anyone there, and for a while she lived in a shelter. Eventually, Linda got a job working in a five-and-dime store and found an apartment. When she discovered that her baby's caretaker was negligent, Linda decided to return to the Bronx.

Like many women in adult education programs, Linda returned to school when her son started school. There are a number of reasons why a young mother who had dropped out of school would decide to return. Some say, "Now it's time for me to do something for me." But very often, and I believe in Linda's case, they are motivated by the desire to support their children—as they were not supported—in school. Some, like Linda, also want their children to have a different home life than the one they experienced growing up.

Structural and Societal Issues

Returning to school is a positive step. Unfortunately, unforeseen problems often make a child's school experiences difficult in ways that are all too familiar to his or her parent. Structural issues in schools, which correspond to larger social issues involving race and class, affect families across genera-

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a learner, and a researcher.
But, most importantly, she
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with him, listening to him,
and talking to him.**

tions. Because the parents, usually young mothers, have been conditioned to blame themselves, they often don't realize that they will need to do more to support their children than get their high school diploma. In addition to struggling with a political economy that makes it difficult to support the financial, emotional, and academic needs of a family, parents often struggle with the school system. While educators understand that city schools often provide inadequate services to children and families, the children tend to blame themselves for failing, just as their parents did before them.

Talking to Linda recently, I found out that her first year in my pre-GED class was the hardest year of her son's schooling. Part of the difficulty stemmed from having her troubled teenage brother living with her. Part of it was a fiasco with the public school her son was attending. That year, Linda's son was kept back a grade. Why? Because when he was given the standardized test, Linda said, "he decided to play around. Instead of filling in the answers, he decided to connect the dots." He had problems in the school. He got into fights. He refused to follow rules. Why did this happen?

During the previous year, when Linda's son was in second grade, an announcement had circulated that District 10 in the Bronx was opening a brand new school in an adjacent neighborhood. The school would have new resources including computers. Linda conscientiously filled out an application for the new school and her son was accepted for third grade. The school turned out to be a disaster. Her son's teacher was cruel. The school was completely disorganized. Sometimes, when Linda went to pick up her son after school, the teachers and administrators didn't know where he was. As documented in Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities*, incidents like this are not unusual in poor neighborhoods. In addition to basic institutional incompetence, such as losing track of children, the principal was rude and condescending to parents. She had the nerve to reprimand Linda for talking with her hands, accusing Linda of

making threatening gestures. The second time Linda's son was in third grade, she transferred him to a school across the street from where they lived. The teacher there helped him, and the situation improved.

Supporting Learning

Linda's experience in returning to school has helped her support her son as a learner in a variety of ways. First, Linda has become a reader. I asked her if she remembered the first book she finished. She did: *Hiroshima* (Hersey, 1946). Referring to the book, Linda said, "I cared about what was going on. I didn't realize something like that happened in Japan. It opened my eyes and opened my mind to want to read more books." More recently, Linda read *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* by Maya Angelou (1993). She recalled finishing it in a week, marveling at her ability to read so quickly. Linda also said that she identified with some of the topics Angelou discussed in the book. I asked if she was surprised to see something in a book that reminded her of her own life:

I always thought it was only me that would go through those things. And when I read of other people going through stuff, I say, "Wow, you know, I'm not the only one." Not only that, but it's published, and it's in a book, and it's for sale and I can identify with it.

Linda told me that her son also "loves to read books," particularly books about wrestling that are filled with action.

When they're at home, Linda and her son talk about whatever she's studying in school. One time, after listening to a conversation Linda was having with friends, her son got into trouble in school. She recalled this when we read "The Boy Without a Flag" (Rodriguez, 1992), a story about a boy who gets into trouble at school for refusing to salute the flag out of respect for his father's pro-Puerto Rican and anti-American values. Linda wrote about how the story reminded her of the incident with her son:

Like when I first found out about Christopher Columbus. It wasn't the way they teach it in school, in public school, in regular school, it's not the same way. They told me that he was a slave owner, things like that. And then my son went to school and he said, "Columbus murdered my ancestors." He got in trouble for it, but he made his point.

We laughed about it the other night 'cause I brought it up. 'Cause I was writing about it. It was funny the way the teachers told him, "Don't say that, that Christopher Columbus was a murderer or an alcoholic, because the kids are not supposed to know that."

In addition, Linda has felt more confident about helping her son with his schoolwork. An important barometer of her confidence is that she's comfortable not always knowing the answer. Rather than feel embarrassed, Linda realizes that they can always "look it up." Engaging in research is new to Linda. She has become increasingly comfortable with the strategy since studying as an adult.

Linda supports her son as a reader, a learner, and a researcher. But, most importantly, she supports her son by communicating with him, listening to him, and talking to him. Before that could happen, Linda needed to believe that she had permission to express herself:

I try my best to support him in everything. Last night I was cooking. And he was like, "Mom, I'm done." "You're done with everything?" So I said, "Do you want to come here and help me?" So he started chopping up the onions with the masher. And he was telling me about what was happening in school today, because he always talks to me about his day. He told me about an incident that a boy had pushed him and that the boy called him a piece of crap and how hurt he felt. So I told him, you know, sometimes people talk like that, it's because they're feeling like that about themselves. So I started telling him about how good he's doing in school and not to let anybody bring him down. And I told him about me, when I was growing up, and he was like, oh, wow, so we just kept on talking.

Linda's understanding that her life experiences have value facilitates her ability to communicate with her son, which is an important aspect of their relationship: "When I'm in school, I feel good about myself. Before I wasn't able to talk about certain things, because I was ashamed and embarrassed. I feel more connected to myself.... It's from being in class, the writing and talking and hearing other people's experience." Linda does not want her son to make the same mistakes she made. She acknowledges the important role she plays in her son's development. She does not want him to experience life alone because she does not "want him to grow up angry."

Linda's recently wrote about herself as a 12-year-old. In the essay, she illustrated how her ability to express her feelings helps her connect with her 12-year-old son. The writing, which had evolved from a discussion about the types of activities and situations that encourage learning, then led us to a conversation about the extent to which making graffiti is one way for

children to become involved in creating and appreciating art. Linda said:

Art comes in many different forms, whether a child draws an image on the wall or on a piece of paper. Children are very creative when it comes to art. Thinking back to the mid-nineteen eighties, I was one of those kids that would go around with a spray can and love to tag my street-given name, Chuckles. I thought I was the coolest tagger in the Bronx, at least around my turf, where I would go around late at night with a couple of my guy friends and sometimes my older sister. From the train station at Kingsbridge to 134th Street between Brook and Willis Avenue, we ruled. We were art, from drawing sticks and bubbles to drawing images of the sun spitting out our tag names or trees in the middle of the passing train and our tag names in art form. There were times that the cops used to chase us or just take away the spray can and tell us to go home. Although I was very young, I thought that the bubble coat that I owned made me look older and tougher only because I was an angry child so that was my way of expressing myself. So, yes, graffiti is art. It kept me out of trouble.

“When I’m in school, I feel good about myself. Before I wasn’t able to talk about certain things, because I was ashamed and embarrassed. I feel more connected to myself.... It’s from being in class, the writing and talking and hearing other people’s experience.”

Linda understands that learning is a fluid process. In one conversation, she reflected on the awkwardness she initially felt when asked to write and talk about her personal experiences in class. Now, she supports new students through the process:

Sometimes the classmates would say, "That happened in the past. I don't want to talk about that now." I say, "Just go with the flow. Just write whatever you feel. You're here to learn. You're here to let go of stuff too. And move on." So I tell them, "Just go with the flow. Leave it here."

Conclusion

I have long believed that honest self-expression is the necessary first step in any formal writing, including the essay writing required by the GED test. Yet before interviewing Linda about the connections between her learning and her family, I didn't realize how crucial the ability to communicate is to the well-being of children and to the health of families.

Linda's story raises many questions. What is the ripple effect of our students' positive learning experiences? How many students like Linda are in programs where "reading the world" (Freire, 1970) and expressing their own deeply felt memories and perceptions has changed them both as lifelong learners and as parents? Educators know that family circumstances have a huge influence on children's development and performance in schools. Still, lawmakers and funders continue to emphasize the need for quantifiable outcomes for adult students, such as obtaining and retaining jobs and passing the examination for high school equivalency (GED). This trend is parallel to the recent phenomenon in early childhood education that encourages more testing and less play.

In fact, a large proportion of our students are highly motivated by the goal of passing the GED examination. We certainly honor their goal. Some need a high school equivalency to obtain a better job. For others it is a lifelong dream they want to fulfill. However, some view getting their GED as evidence of their intelligence, and this linear view of intelligence can unnecessarily limit a person's self-esteem. Unfortunately, passing the GED test is impossible for some. For others, it can take years.

We need to think about the power of literacy to support families and the connection literacy has to authentic communication. We also need to think about the ways in which family literacy encourages children's natural love of wonder and story. As we consider the connection between the imagination and intellectual development, we need to consider what adult education programs really offer.

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PARENTS AND THEIR ADOLESCENT CHILDREN IN FAMILY LITERACY

Expanding Services for Immigrant Families

Alecia D'Angelo

IN THE PAST 20 YEARS, FAMILY LITERACY HAS emerged as an instructional model designed to, among other things, support immigrant families as they adjust to life in the U.S. For the most part, the model has focused on serving young children and their parents, with an emphasis on early and emerging literacy development. By the time a child reaches age 10 or finishes elementary school, family literacy services are generally no longer available to the family. In fact, the primary source of federal funding for family literacy is Even Start (NGA, 2002), which almost exclusively serves families with children ages eight and younger. The federal four-component model—consisting of interactive literacy activities for parents and children, parent education, literacy education for parents, and age-appropriate education for children—specifically defines “age-appropriate education” in relation to elementary school learning (NGA, 2002).

However, immigrant families with adolescent children also stand to benefit from family literacy programming. According to the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL, 2003), 28 percent of Hispanic students ages 16–24 dropped out of school in 1999. In 2000, I was teaching middle school ESOL in Los Angeles and witnessed even more extreme drop-out rates. Ninety-eight percent of the students in the community where I taught had immigrated from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. More than 50 percent dropped out of school before they reached 11th grade. The obstacles to education were many but, regrettably, not unique: Schools were severely

under-resourced and therefore could not provide adequate instruction or adhere to a rigorous curriculum, most families were living in poverty, the community offered limited support services, and there were no adult literacy programs available. As a result, many of the parents I encountered said they felt powerless to deal with school and community issues.

By expanding family literacy services to include adolescents, programs can help to equalize opportunities and create a network of resources for families with children of all ages. These resources will not only help families adjust to life in the U.S. but will increase children’s academic and social success.

The Benefits of Family Literacy Programming

Family literacy programs have been successful at helping both parents and children make academic, economic, and social progress. A NCFL study showed that young children in family literacy programs have demonstrated higher test scores and better class grades than non-participating children (Hayes, 2001). A Goodling Institute study confirmed that young children in family literacy programs have shown increases in their cognitive abilities (Grinder, Kassab, Askov, & Abler, 2004). Parents in programs funded by the Barbara Bush Foundation reported increased self-esteem, success in adult education, and enhanced involvement in their children’s education (Sommerfield, 1995). However, because the majority of funding for family literacy focuses on the parents of young children, adolescents rarely benefit from the programming.

The Case for Including Families with Adolescent Children

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, minority students are, on average, four years behind their white counterparts academically by the time they reach eighth grade (Barton, 2004). Additionally, adolescents whose parents have had limited education have higher rates of absenteeism and disciplinary problems, as well as lower graduation rates, than do children of parents with more formal schooling (Hayes, 2001).

For immigrant teenagers who are struggling to adjust to a new culture, the difficulties of adolescence are often compounded. To begin with, the values and norms of their family may be quite different from those of their native-born peers (Berla, Henderson, & Kerewsky, 1991). Communication between parents and adolescents can be difficult under the best of circumstances; this gap widens when parents adhere to the social norms of their native country while children adopt those of the new culture (Mateau-Gelabert, 2002). In addition, immigrant adolescents often have more functional English skills than their parents and are therefore expected to act as translators for family members (Weinstein-Shr, 1995). According to Mateu-Gelabert (2002), this dynamic disrupts the balance of power of families; parental authority wanes when a child serves as “language broker.” In “Culture, Language, and Literacy: The Effects of Child Brokering on Language Minority Education” (Tse & McQuillan, 1996), adolescents who played this role reported experiencing stress and frustration with parents and other family members.

At the same time, parents are increasingly being called upon to make decisions and to advocate for their children in ways that may be new and unfamiliar, in a language that is new and unfamiliar. The No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to supply parents with complete information about testing and program options (NGA, 2002). However, parents often struggle to make sense of this information. In addition, many parents have difficulty understanding the structure of middle and high schools and the increasingly complex curricula their children are studying (Patrikakou, 2004).

Integrating adolescent children into family literacy programming is one way we can begin to address these issues. Family literacy programs can provide teenagers with an opportunity to talk with their parents as well as community members, and to meet other teens with similar experiences. Programs can also provide an outlet for the emotional and physical energy

For immigrant teenagers who are struggling to adjust to a new culture, the difficulties of adolescence are often compounded.

of adolescents by involving them in creative projects. When emotional needs are more fully satisfied, students can begin to improve academically.

Barton (2004) noted that the participation of parents in their children’s education was associated with higher student achievement. Family literacy programs not only help parents increase their English literacy levels; they can help parents understand the culture and structure of the U.S. school system. With this knowledge, parents can more effectively advocate for increased opportunities and better schools for their children. By providing opportunities for parents and children to share their experiences, family literacy programs can also help each generation to better understand and appreciate the other.

Envisioning Family Literacy to Include Adolescents

Creating programs tailored to families with adolescent children requires expanding the focus of family literacy to meet the unique needs of families and communities. Gail Weinstein (1998) noted, “[T]here is more to family and intergenerational literacy than children’s school achievement.” Adolescents, in particular, need opportunities to connect with older family members. According to Masche and Barber (2001), positive connections with parents can lead to higher self-esteem for adolescents. Pong, Hao, and Gardner (2002) reported that immigrant families that maintain connections with their ethnic communities raise children who are more likely to be successful in school. With this research in mind, family literacy programs might need to broaden their emphasis, using literacy skills instruction to foster a series of connections.

Well-planned interactive parent and child classes that include adolescents can help adults and teens learn more about each other’s lives. Role-playing, writing, and discussion activities can create a safe environment for communication, providing parents and teenagers with an opportunity to connect. Family literacy programs are also a place where parents can meet other parents, and teens can meet other teens. As program participants connect with each other, a support net-

work for families is likely to emerge. Parents can share their experiences raising adolescent children “and work collectively to reflect or act on challenges they are facing” (Weinstein, 1998, n.p.). Adolescents can meet other immigrant teens facing challenges similar to their own.

Along with fostering this series of connections, a well-orchestrated family literacy program can provide constructive avenues for adolescents to express their fears, frustrations, and struggles through creative outlets such as drama, music, dance, and art. By engaging adolescents in learning experiences they might not be exposed to in under-resourced middle and high schools, family literacy programs can help them develop critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills. These skills, along with increased parent involvement in formal and informal education, can help adolescents succeed academically and socially.

Role-playing, writing, and discussion activities can create a safe environment for communication, providing parents and teenagers with an opportunity to connect.

Drawing on the wisdom, knowledge, and experience of parents is an essential ingredient of any family literacy program. For programs with teens, it is especially important. Utilizing a parent’s expertise can help to build a relationship with an unresponsive or frustrated teen. As Weinstein (1998) pointed out, “When the goal is to strengthen families and communities, the literacy resources of elders come into focus, creating many ways of connecting children and adults” (n.p.).

Collaborative projects that draw on the strengths of both parents and children provide one way to encourage such connections. In describing a project-based approach in which parents and children learn a new technology together, Bers, New, and Boudreau (2004) built on Papert’s constructionist pedagogy: “[B]oth children and adults learn better when they are engaged in designing and building their own personally meaningful artifacts and then sharing them with others in a community” (p. 4). Collaborative projects can help parents to build esteem and strengthen leadership roles in the family. “Adults whose knowl-

edge and wisdom is valued can... be helped by their children without having their dignity or their parental role threatened” (Weinstein, 1998). Cooperative projects may also raise adolescents’ level of respect for, and willingness to communicate with, their parents.

Fostering an environment in which parents and children work together on a creative project requires, first, finding the strengths of each group. A survey is one way to determine the interests and expertise of both child and adult participants. Conversations, whether in a class, in small groups, or individually, are another option. A report on Luis Moll’s “Funds of Knowledge” project explained how teachers went into the homes of students to learn about the resources and talents that families could offer to their schools and communities (ERIC, Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1994).

Project facilitators should elicit the areas in which the knowledge and experience of adults can complement the skill areas of adolescents. Weinstein (1998) cited a program in which participants created family web pages. Parents provided the content on family history and cultural background, and then children took the lead, working with parents to create a web page using this content. Projects of this type also celebrate the cultures and experiences of individual families.

Discussing films such as *Raising Victor Vargas* and *Bend It Like Beckham*, both of which focus on teens struggling to live between two cultures, can also provide opportunities for parents and children to better understand the other’s experience. Program participants might discuss the perspectives of various characters or write dialogues about life in U.S. The films could also provide an opportunity for role-playing in which parents and adolescents switch roles and view situations from each other’s perspective.

Exemplary Programs

Two case studies of programs in New York City offer suggestions for how existing family literacy programs might accommodate adolescent children, and how programs might be created specifically with the needs of adolescents and their parents in mind. Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation’s Family Learning Program and LaGuardia Community College’s Center for Immigrant Education and Training, Immigrant Family Literacy Project have adapted to accommodate the needs of adult learners with adolescent children who wanted to participate in family literacy programming.

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation

In the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation's (NMIC) family literacy program, children ages 5–15 participate with their parents. The program consists of adult ESOL, parent education, and parent and child interactive literacy. Adolescents participate in the parent and child interactive literacy component and also act as English tutors. I visited the program in the summer of 2004 and discussed the program with the family literacy coordinator numerous times throughout the year.

During one of these discussions, NMIC's family literacy coordinator emphasized that cultural outings are a positive way to connect adolescents and their parents during parent and child interactive literacy time. Classes visited museums, parks, and public city events. On these outings, teachers gave

Adolescents in the program also reported that watching their parents working to learn English made them proud and interested in participating.

families an authentic task to accomplish together, such as viewing art and talking to community members. These activities exposed both adolescent children and their parents to new experiences; because many of the adolescents in this program viewed themselves as helpers for their younger siblings, these outings also helped the adolescents build their leadership skills as they took on the roles of group leaders and teacher's assistants.

One 13-year-old reported that an additional benefit of the program was that it gave him time to spend with his father. His father usually worked on Saturdays. When the family literacy program was in session, however, his father took days off to attend. NMIC's program coordinator reported that the benefits for families range from finding out about cultural institutions to enjoying structured activities. Another student reported that the program gave his family something to do together aside from watching TV. During the program, they interacted and communicated while working cooperatively, engaging in discussions, and learning together.

Adolescents in the program also reported that watching their parents working to learn English made them proud and

interested in participating. The program has capitalized on this enthusiasm by asking adolescents with fluent English literacy skills to act as tutors for younger children and for other parents in the program. One student reported that she liked helping her mom to learn.

LaGuardia Community College

During 2003, I worked with the faculty and staff at LaGuardia Community College's Center for Immigrant Education and Training to develop the Immigrant Family Literacy Project, a program that welcomes parents and their children ages 5–16. In this program, adolescents most often participate in family night activities, and parents of adolescents participate in specialized parent time instruction. For this article, I interviewed the current program coordinator and other staff members to learn about the ways in which the program has progressed.

According to the program coordinator, family night events have been a particular draw for adolescents. For these events, the program invites artists and community members to conduct hands-on workshops that encourage parents and children to work cooperatively to complete projects such as storytelling, puppet theatre, and painting. Both parents and children reported that they valued the time they spent together doing something fun. The workshops provided time for families to connect and talk openly—time that parents reported was often scarce at home.

One teacher reported that the biggest benefit for parents was the parent education component of the program. During parent time, the participants usually ended up discussing issues involving the New York City public school system, such as the ability to choose which high school their child attends, the significance of standardized tests, and school violence. The same teacher reported that she has had success with parents in both parent education and ESOL classes when she has used novels that address young adult issues such as dating, peer groups, and asserting independence. The novels served as a springboard for parents to discuss their own concerns about raising adolescents in the U.S. To help parents build confidence with English, one class read vignettes from the *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and then created stories from their own memories. During an organized family event, the parents shared their stories with their children. The children were proud and interested to hear the stories of their parents' lives. The teacher remarked that such activities helped parents to re-open the paths of communication with teens.

Participants usually ended up discussing issues involving the New York City public school system, such as the ability to choose which high school their child attends, the significance of standardized tests, and school violence.

Toward a Definition of Exemplary Practice

Teachers and parents might assume that teenagers are unwilling to spend time connecting with their family. In the examples above, however, all of the teenagers interviewed said they enjoyed their involvement in the family literacy program. They were especially motivated by the opportunities to participate in leadership and community service activities and the chances to engage in learning experiences that varied from those offered at school.

Building upon the ideas of Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation's Family Learning Program and LaGuardia Community College's Center for Immigrant Education and Training, Immigrant Family Literacy Project, we can begin to form a useful guide for family literacy programs working with adolescents. The following are some of the good practices suggested by these programs:

- Make learning creative and fun. Use project-based learning; visit museums and other cultural institutions; and integrate drama, visual arts, music, and dance into the curriculum.
- Create opportunities for parents and children to speak openly with each other and with their peers.
- Respond to the interests of both parents and their children.
- When planning lessons, build on the history of parents and on the talents and experiences of families.
- Create opportunities for children to learn from parents and parents to learn from children.
- Provide learning experiences for children that are different from the ones they experience in school.

- Provide time for schools and communities to learn about families.
- Create opportunities for adolescents to act as leaders and to acquire communication skills.
- Nurture the skills parents need to understand and navigate the U.S. school system.

The lack of services for adolescents and their families is a gaping hole in the fabric of family literacy programs. Family literacy programs that focus on building connections can provide numerous benefits to both families and the community. If we want family literacy programs to truly meet the needs of all members of a family, it's time we begin inviting adolescents to participate.

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COMMUNITIES CONNECTING FOR A COMMON CAUSE

Research-Based Family Literacy Instruction in Georgia

Sandra Moore

WHEN JOSÉ,¹ 55, DECIDED TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL for the dual purposes of learning how to read bedtime stories to his five-year-old grandson and how to write so that he could sign his own name to important documents, he looked no further than his neighborhood school. When Tarsha, a single mother, decided she no longer wanted to depend on the welfare system to meet the needs of her family, she looked no further than her neighborhood school for the classes she would need to obtain her GED. These journeys are not unique.

José is part of the fastest-growing population in this country. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 1990, Hispanics made up just nine percent of the U.S. population. During the 2000 census count, this number jumped to 12.5 percent. In Georgia, and in the Atlanta area in particular, the Hispanic population has grown by more than 400 percent since 1990 (Terraso, 2002). Like José, most of this immigrant population will require some formal training before they can fully acclimate to their new environment.

Tarsha's experience is also not an isolated one. Like many recipients of public assistance, she was both undereducated and, similar to generations before her, living in poverty. She was acutely aware of the impact that the welfare system had on her mother and her grandmother, and she did not want to belong to that system. Studies have shown that public assistance recipients like Tarsha benefit from intensive services, particularly specialized job training (Zedlewski, 2002).

Georgia's Reading Excellence Act

Both José and Tarsha made the decision to improve their lives at a time when Georgia was ready to make sweeping changes in the delivery of services to families. During 2001, the Georgia

Department of Education received \$48,086,734 to develop and implement Georgia's Reading Excellence Act (REA). This grant supported four activities:

- Professional development for pre-K and K-3 educators
- Family literacy
- Tutoring and after-school programs for students prekindergarten to third grade
- Transition programs for kindergarten students

In order to be eligible for a grant, school systems were required to serve a significant number of children and families who lived in poverty and needed additional literacy instruction to improve student achievement. Under REA, Georgia implemented 54 family literacy programs across the state. I was hired as the family literacy coordinator at the state level, and my specific responsibilities were to implement and monitor the programs. Each grantee was required to offer high-quality, comprehensive family literacy services based on the Even Start model.

The four components of the Even Start family literacy work cohesively and comprehensively to help families make changes regarding education and lifelong learning. REA-funded programs were required to offer adult education for a minimum of 12 hours per week, early childhood education for a minimum of 26 hours per week, parenting education for four hours per week, and parent and child interactive literacy activities for four hours per week.

During this two-year demonstration grant, REA schools were required to work with adults and their children, ages 0-8, using scientifically based reading research materials as the basis for instruction. The program was available to families of

¹ Participant names are pseudonyms.

To evaluate the role of teachers and families in supporting children's literacy development, the NELP found a set of 11 variables that qualify as predictors of literacy development.

K–3 children attending an REA school, as well as to families of children ages 0–4 and who lived in the local community. Some of the programs were school-based; others were community-based. In either instance, the principal of the school that was awarded the grant was responsible for the program. The teachers (adults as well as early childhood educators) were hired from outside the school and reported to the principal.

Under REA, family literacy was viewed as an early intervention strategy. The primary focus of the services was to enhance student achievement by supporting learning and helping families make economic progress.

Intentional Instruction: Relying on Research

Longitudinal evaluations have found that children enrolled in family literacy programs have higher high school graduation rates, higher rates of enrollment in college, fewer criminal arrests, and higher earnings than non-participants (Holloway, 2004). A longitudinal study of over 800 children in Chicago found that children who were involved in high-quality preschool programs had better language and mathematical skills than those who were not (Reynolds, 2000). Keeping in line with what research says will happen when communities offer high-quality family literacy services, the goals of Georgia's REA were to help adults enhance their academic skills in reading, writing, oral communication, and mathematics; to help children develop language skills and become interested in reading; and to prepare children for school.

To begin the initiative, we needed to get the word out about the specific foundational skills preschool children need to be successful in school. Then, we needed to offer parents of preschool-aged children training to help them support the development of these skills. We also needed to train staff members at many feeder daycare centers, where proper staff development had been nonexistent. Program coordinators in Georgia set out

to share this information with the parents and daycare providers who didn't have access to reading research information.

In an effort to introduce the research, we focused on the work of the National Early Literacy Panel (NELP), whose findings held that "certain skills and abilities have direct links to children's eventual success in early literacy development" (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004, p. 75). Created through the Family Partnership in Reading Project to provide a research synthesis on early literacy development and to evaluate the role of teachers and families in supporting children's literacy development, the NELP found a set of 11 variables that qualify as predictors of literacy development: alphabetic knowledge, print knowledge, environmental print, invented spelling, listening comprehension, oral language/vocabulary, phonemic awareness, phonological short-term memory, rapid naming, visual memory, and visual perceptual skills (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004, p.75).

We placed particular emphasis on the foundational skills parents need to help their children become successful readers: oral language development, phonological awareness, print awareness, and alphabetic knowledge. Oral language is identified as a precursor to and a vital part of ongoing literacy in preschool children. Alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness form the basis of early decoding and spelling, and

The primary focus of the services was to enhance student achievement by supporting learning and helping families make economic progress.

both show a major correlation with later reading and spelling achievement. Print knowledge also plays a key role in later literacy achievement (Strickland & Shanahan, 2004).

When parents learned about this research, they made immediate connections between the literacy predictors and some of the activities they were doing with their children in the course of their daily lives. Many of the parents noted that they sang songs such as "Pat-a-Cake, Pat-a-Cake" to their preschool children. The coordinators were trained to point out the relationship between rhyming, phonological awareness, and reading research. This use of the educational and research-

based terms pertaining to reading skills was intentional. Parents could readily see that what they were doing had substance. They could also see that they were using methods that were proven to be effective.

Coordinators were asked to be even more specific with parents about the importance of nursery rhymes. Marilyn Jager Adams (1990) suggests that “the roots of phonemic awareness and therefore success in reading can be found in traditional rhymes and word games such as ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’ and ‘Humpty Dumpty’” (p. 43). In one study, children aged three years and three months were asked to recite nursery rhymes every four months until they were four-and-a-half years old (Adams, 1990). The experimenters assessed the children’s progress in producing rhyme and alliteration and in recognizing letters and words. They found that “children’s early knowledge of nursery rhymes seemed to be specifically related to their development of the more abstract phonological knowledge... and of emergent reading abilities” (Adams, 1990, p. 42).

When program coordinators discovered that many parents did not know nursery rhymes, they started an immediate campaign to teach the rhymes so parents could share them with their children at home. One coordinator designed “Nursery Rhymes Jeopardy” as an interactive way of teaching parents nursery rhymes.

Parents were also taught the value of using everyday activities, such as shopping in the produce section of the grocery store, as a basis for conversation with their children. Parents learned about a study (Hart & Risley, 1995) that clearly emphasized the differences that talking to young children and using positive affirmations make when children start school. Children whose caregivers talk to them from a very early age start school with the oral language skills they will need to succeed in school.

Sharing research with program participants offered them a framework for examining the role of literacy in the lives of young children. Within this framework, participants could identify activities in which they were already engaging with their children, as well as activities that they could develop more fully in the future.

Program Supports

In addition to a clear and purposeful focus on literacy research, several other factors worked together to support the success of the REA programs and their participants.

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Family Literacy Coordinators

REA-funded family literacy programs had to hire a family literacy coordinator. Because this position required the individual to pool resources and collaborate with other agencies, the family literacy coordinator had to be a person whom the community valued and respected. In REA-funded programs, family literacy coordinators were required to conduct scientifically-based reading research workshops for parents and childcare providers. The coordinators hired were highly qualified: Most held at least a master’s degree, a vast majority had some kind of social service background, and many held a certification in education.

Extensive Staff Development

Training began well before the family literacy coordinators actually started work. As the state family literacy coordinator, I provided regional training during the summer before the programs officially began. Many of the site coordinators had no concept of family literacy and what implementation of a family literacy program entails. Coordinators received two handbooks on family literacy as well as the forms—such as enrollment, data collection, and assessment forms—they would need to implement the program. After the initial training, I conducted daylong regional meetings once a month as well as summer institutes and two full-day forums. These workshops, besides providing more detailed information on the four components of family literacy programming, also covered such topics as strategic planning, grant writing, how to make parents feel comfortable in the school environment, barriers families face, working with limited English proficiency adults and adults with disabilities, and building capacity in the community.

Ongoing Feedback

As REA's state family literacy coordinator, I tried to make myself available to local coordinators as much as possible. I returned phone calls and emails within 24 hours, so local coordinators felt that they had a reliable person to turn to for support.

Site Visits

I also visited each site at least twice a year. During the visit, I wrote a monitoring report, describing the positive aspects of the program as well as the areas that needed improvement. Each site received a numeric rating at the end of the visit.

Peer Mentoring and Bonding

It didn't take long for the coordinators in the different regions to figure out the importance of forming relationships with each other. In fact, coordinators started to hold informal regional meetings following the state's monthly meetings, where they shared ideas and worked through specific issues unique to their areas. This was particularly useful since the programs were spread throughout Georgia and each region came with its own set of problems and needs.

Alphabetic knowledge and phonological awareness form the basis of early decoding and spelling, and both show a major correlation with later reading and spelling achievement.

Book Studies

Over the course of six months, the 54 program coordinators participated in a series of books studies. Book assignments included *A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents* (1999) and *Children's Literacy Development: Making it Happen through School, Family, and Community Involvement* (2004) by Dr. Patricia Edwards, and *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* by Dr. Betty Hart and Dr. Todd Risley (1995).

Support from School Staff

The most successful programs were those that had a supportive administrator or principal. In addition, school staff had to buy into the program as well. Pre-implementation and implementation surveys conducted by MGT of America (2003) found

It didn't take long for the coordinators in the different regions to figure out the importance of forming relationships with each other.

that between the first and second years of the program, there was a 327 percent increase in the number of school staff members who agreed or strongly agreed that family literacy services increased over the school year. In addition, there was an 118 percent increase in the number of administrators who agreed or strongly agreed that family members became more involved in the family literacy program during the program year. Support from these administrators made a difference in whether or not the program was successful.

In-Depth Collaboration

Through a consortium of collaborators that included Head Start, the Office of School Readiness (Georgia's universal pre-K program), private day care providers, the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, Even Start, Family Connections, the Department of Family and Children Services, 4-H Clubs, churches, senior citizen homes, department stores, and grocery stores, the goals of the initiative were accomplished using structured, high-quality early intervention strategies for the children and basic skills instruction for the adults. Through the initiative, programs were able to provide homework assistance for parents and children, as well as interactive literacy activities that involved the parent and the child together. These strategies worked not only to enhance the performance of the school-aged children, but also to assist preschool children as they prepared to enter kindergarten.

Coordinators also made visits to feeder daycare programs to distribute books and manipulatives and to conduct workshops. In fact, coordinators conducted 352 reading workshops focused on scientifically based research for daycare providers and visited 1,502 daycare programs. Daycare programs also received 24,776 free books through the REA grant.

Collaboration supported the programs in other ways as well. When the coordinator from a small town in southern Georgia was unable to find a way to help her families get to and from the program, the local 4-H Club stepped in. Using the club's van, 4-H Club members provided families with trans-

portation. In other instances, churches provided space as well as transportation, and local taxi companies allowed programs to offer vouchers to students for transportation to the programs.

A range of supports and a clear vision linked to program implementation formed the foundation for Georgia’s REA program. What, then, can we learn from this major undertaking and its impact on participants?

Evaluation

The Georgia Department of Education was required by federal law to hire an outside evaluator. This outside evaluator, MGT of America, used existing data files, to the extent possible, to answer evaluation questions. MGT also designed a uniformed web-based statewide data collection system for use specifically with Georgia’s REA program.

The research conducted by MGT focused on three questions aimed at examining how Georgia’s family literacy services supported capacity building in homes, schools, and the larger community:

- To what extent is the family literacy program implemented throughout the participating schools? Ninety-five percent of school administrators agreed or strongly agreed that family literacy services increased over the school year.
- To what extent do family literacy services affect the home literacy environment? Eighty-six percent of the parents reported using take-home packets. Ninety-two percent of the parents reported that they were given ideas to use at home with their children.
- Do family literacy services improve the quality and coordination of community and other literacy resources? Thirty-four percent of the administrators agreed that there was better cooperation and coordination within the community after the grant was implemented. (MGT of America, 2004)

Data about the implementation process was collected from local school system grant coordinators, school administrators, literacy coaches, family literacy coordinators, and instructional staff through the statewide web-based data collection system. In addition, family literacy coordinators were required to complete an extensive end-of-year report, which was submitted electronically to the Georgia Department of Education. Site coordinators were required to respond to a series of activity and participation logs that were used to track implementation variables. To validate the self-reported data, MGT also conducted site visits to all of the schools. During

Table 1. Results from 2003 and 2004 Program Years

	2003	2004
Families served	2,752	3,718
Adults who:		
Passed either a part of or the entire GED test (*)	6%	16%
Showed gains in English language learning	14%	85%
Reported reading and talking more to their children	70%	89%
Preschool children who showed gains in language/ social and emotional/physical and motor areas	55%	88%
School-age children (K-3)		
Attendance rate	59%	95%
Grade promotion rate	76%	92%

* While these percentages may seem low, it is important to note that funded programs were working with in-need families with very low literacy skills. The numbers—273 in 2003 and 753 in 2004—perhaps more accurately reflect the improvements made.

these visits, MGT conducted interviews and focus groups. In addition, I visited each site at least three times a year to gather data. Results from the 2003 and 2004 program years can be found in Table 1.

4-H Club members provided families with transportation. In other instances, churches provided space as well as transportation, and local taxi companies allowed programs to offer vouchers to students.

Implications for the Future

When REA funding expired, many districts were unable to continue offering family literacy services. In the end, only 39 percent of the programs survived. The good news is that the 54 coordinators have not given up. Many are seeking other sources of funding so they can continue to collaborate with the community to offer family literacy services—services that have the power to change people’s lives. For instance, José did learn to write his name. He beamed proudly one day as he walked into the program and signed his name for the very first time.

The manager was so excited, she faxed me the sign-in ledger. José was even prouder when he read a book of nursery rhymes to his grandson for the first time during a parent and child interactive literacy activity. Tarsha did obtain her GED, enabling her to enroll in a specialized nursing training. She is well on her way to fulfilling her dream: to pursue an education and support her family.

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HUMAN CAPITAL AND FAMILY LITERACY

The Next Step Program

Thomas G. Reio, Jr., Karen L. Wormley, and Mike A. Boyle

OVER 90 MILLION ADULTS IN THE U.S. HAVE LOW levels of literacy (Kirsch, Jungeblut, Jenkins, & Kolstad, n.d.). Nearly 51 million Americans do not have their high school diploma or GED. Fifty-eight percent of these individuals are also not employed (OVAE, n.d.). At the same time, legislative action, such as Welfare-to-Work, School-to-Work, Job Training and Partnership, and Workforce Investment, along with major demographic shifts in the labor market and the continual expansion of the U.S. economy, have led to substantial changes in American business. As a result, many companies are finding themselves in need of employees who possess a variety of workplace skills, including the ability to read, write, use a computer, solve problems, think critically, participate in meetings, and write reports (Askov & Gordon, 1999; Seaman, Lynham, Ruona, & Chermack, 2004). Increasingly, prospective employers *require* GED-level educational attainment or more for an interview.

In Kentucky, nearly 340,000 adults ranging in age from 16 to 64 lack the minimal skills needed to function effectively in the marketplace, workplace, community, or home. Additionally, 656,000 Kentucky adults have low literacy levels that are likely to impede not only their own advancement but the development of the state's economy (Jennings & Whitley, 1997). In 1998, the Bullitt County (Kentucky) Adult Education Center implemented a new approach to adult basic education and family literacy, an approach that combines community resources while focusing on the literacy, and workplace skills that participants need to compete productively in the workforce: the Next Step® family literacy program.

Taking its framework from human capital theory—which makes explicit the link between workers' educational development on the one hand and community and workforce capacity on the other—the Next Step program focuses on helping participants obtain their GED and explore postsecondary educational options. By working closely with existing and prospective businesses, the program also addresses the often daunting needs of the local community to attract and retain businesses. Next Step works to build the educated and skilled workforce needed by today's market.

Human Capital Theory, Human Resource Development, and the Next Step Family Literacy Program

Shultz (1961) and Becker (1962) introduced human capital theory as a way to understand the relevance of *human beings* as a form of capital. Human capital theory supplies an economic formula for justifying an investment in workplace learning activities (Daley, Fisher, & Martin, 2000). According to the theory, as people become more efficient and productive through education and training, economic capital will become more efficient as well. Thus, human capital theory can help demonstrate that education and training offer a handsome return on investment for an organization, a local economy, or a nation (Hayes, Alagaraja, & Dooley, 2004). Ewert and Grace (2000) further noted that human capital theory provides an intellectual justification for education and training that support community activities to increase skills and abilities.

McLagan (1989) among others (such as Kuchinke, 2002; Weinberger, 1998; Werner & DeSimone, 2006) defined human resource development (HRD) as a set of systematic and planned activities designed by an organization to provide its members with the necessary skills to meet current and future job demands. Workplace education programs, designed and implemented by HRD professionals, focus on the literacy and basic skills training that workers need to gain new employment, retain their present jobs, advance in their careers, or increase productivity. Workplace learning may take place in an

Adult educators or human resource professionals often work with employers and employee groups to determine what reading, computation, speaking, and reasoning skills are needed.

organizational context, either formally or informally, but is not limited to the office or factory (Reio & Wiswell, 2000). Workplace learning also includes educational activities that take place in alternative settings, such as career and technical colleges and adult educational centers. The Next Step family literacy program, designed to increase individuals' skills and abilities and thereby influence local capacity, is such an alternative setting.

When developing a workplace education program, adult educators or human resource professionals often work with employers and employee groups to determine what reading, computation, speaking, and reasoning skills are needed to enhance the job performance of participants. A successful workplace education program requires strong partnerships between educators, employers, and employees (Askov & Gordon, 1999).

Seaman and colleagues (2004) argued that as adult literacy continues to emerge as a major challenge, organizations must become attuned to the emerging literacy trends. Undoubtedly, organizations can no longer ignore the challenge of adult literacy or the role they can play in helping to develop an educated workforce. The Next Step program illustrates what the market's need for literate workers can mean for local communities and programs.

Family Literacy in Kentucky: The Next Step

In 1998, the Next Step program originated with an innovative grant from the Cabinet for Workforce Development through the Department of Adult Education and Literacy. The original Next Step program goal was to target the 46.7 percent of households in Bullitt County without a high school diploma or GED, to focus on low-income families that were being left behind by increases in technology, to provide a family education support system, to provide family skills, and to build pathways to better career opportunities. Karther (2002) reported that fathers can have remarkable effects on children's literacy and concomitant school achievement. Unfortunately, males traditionally fail to participate in family literacy programs (Askov & Gordon, 1999). Therefore, another goal of Next Step has been to recruit and retain a greater percentage of males than other family literacy programs.

The Next Step family literacy program is offered to any Bullitt County family without a high school diploma or GED. Following an application process, an educational needs assessment, and an interview session with an educational specialist, families are accepted into the program. The families enrolled in the program are required to sign an educational learning contract in which they agree to accomplish 50 prescribed basic steps at the same time as they strive to meet their own personalized family goals. The four major goals of the Next Step program are to:

- Provide education and training
- Expose learners to technology
- Increase learner employability
- Improve learner life skills

The program is designed to achieve these goals as participants complete the 50 basic steps and reach their family and individual goals. Family goals, which are created and agreed upon by the entire family as consistent with best family literacy practice (Debruin-Parecki, Paris, & Siedenbug, 1997; Purton, 2000), may include developing a family budget, attending parent-teacher conferences, increasing computer skills, or decreasing debt. The program's steps are designed to meet the needs of the families while incorporating literacy, life, and workplace components into simple learning activities. Many of the steps, such as developing a budget, require participants to practice their computer skills—an important component of workforce literacy—at the same time as they work toward

Once a family has attended at least 12 hours of individual and family literacy activities, Next Step provides the family with a computer to use in the home.

meeting their family goals. Likewise, the step of filling out a job application reinforces aspects of workplace literacy while building written communication skills. Performing an Internet search is one of the initial steps in the program. This task exposes the family to the computer, typing, research, and the skills necessary to “weed out” pertinent information—an important aspect of literacy and comprehension (Jaffee, 2001).

Once a family has attended at least 12 hours of individual and family literacy activities, Next Step provides the family with a computer to use in the home. Families use the computers to perform school- or work-related tasks, to prepare for the GED, and to practice their computer skills. If they complete all 50 steps, families are allowed to keep the computers.

Throughout the course of the program, Next Step also offers achievement awards; families that complete the entire program receive a success award. The achievement awards focus on specific tasks associated with parent education, interactive literacy, and workforce development, such as:

- Completing the enrollment and assessment process
- Beginning computer training
- Setting individual goals such as earning a GED, increasing time management skills, or improving employability
- Receiving a computer for home use
- Developing an educational plan and family interactive literacy activities
- Completing family debt worksheets
- Creating a budget
- Completing a vocational interest inventory
- Completing a work history assignment
- Preparing a résumé
- Practicing interviewing skills
- Taking the pre-GED examination
- Passing the GED examination

The family success award—which represents the successful completion of all individual and family goals, GED attainment, and either parental employment or improved work skills—is presented to families at a graduation ceremony. The computer is officially granted to the families at this ceremony as a well-earned reward for their success in the program.

Supporting Families

To support participants as they set and mark incremental goals, the Next Step program fosters relationships between the participants, community resources, and key program staff. The Next Step program is based on a common model of family literacy programming that includes components focusing on early childhood education, adult education, parent education, and interactive literacy activities. Two additional and innovative aspects of Next Step, however, are geared to supporting families’ participation and development in the program.

Partnerships

In addition to reaching a population of learners who have not been served by traditional means, Next Step family literacy program directors have been able to foster partnerships with local businesses, as well as the community at large. One noteworthy partnership was established with the United Parcel Service (UPS). Coordinated by its human resources department, UPS has donated and helped to repair each of the computers awarded to the families in the Next Step program. Local churches have regularly supplied volunteer tutors to Next Step families, and health department representatives have offered classes on health and immunizations. Further, the Cooperative Extension Service, a Bullitt County community outreach program, has offered classes on nutrition, driving safety, auto upkeep, budgeting, and meal planning. The local police and fire departments have provided classes on safety and other community issues. Local businesses have offered workshops on building résumés and enhancing interview skills. To attract new interviewees, human resource representatives from prospective employers have met with program participants; some of these meetings have resulted in successful employment.

Arguably, the system of partnerships has advanced this family literacy program by sharing and developing community resources that local citizens can employ to meet their individual and family needs. Additionally, these advancements in literacy and workplace preparedness provide prospective employers and local businesses with a better-equipped and more literate workforce.

Family Advocates

Another unique aspect of Next Step is the use of family advocates who work directly with the families. While the instructors focus on the educational, literacy, and workplace needs of the learners, family advocates, who are available on a 24-hour basis, focus primarily on the critical needs of families. The main responsibilities of family advocates are to provide support and to help remove some of the logistical barriers that can get in the way of obtaining employment or becoming involved in a child's education. For instance, advocates may be called upon to provide transportation, help refer a family to an outside agency, or assist families in managing appointments with doctors and daycare. Sometimes, they simply provide an ear to a frustrated learner.

Outcomes

Does Next Step meet the short- and long-term educational goals of participants, such as basic skill enhancement and increased employability? To begin to address this question, we examined archival data, including attendance records; pre- and post TABE test scores; GED test scores; interview questionnaires that ascertained gender, age, and ethnicity; grant applications; retention documentation; hours of study; and step achievement evidence (primarily related to those activities outside of the educational realm). The participants included 105 adults (83 female and 22 male) enrolled in the Next Step program in 2003–2004. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 63, with a mean age of 32. One hundred and two were Caucasian, two were Hispanic, and one was African American. On average, there were two children per family. Nine families had children who qualified for free lunch in the Bullitt County public school system.

Since its initiation in 1998, the Next Step program has seen an increase in participation and retention (notably among male participants), as well as an increase in the number of individuals who have earned their GED. According to the data, in the 1998–1999 program year, Next Step had 48 active families. Nine of these families had a member who earned a GED. The program had a 15 percent male participation rate. Twenty-nine computers were placed in the homes of the enrolled families. In the 1999–2000 year, Next Step had 98 active families. Forty participants earned a GED. Male participation had risen to 23 percent. One hundred and twenty-six computers were placed in the homes of the participating families.

In terms of other outcomes, in the 2003–2004 year, initial TABE testing resulted in a mean language level of 6.9, a math

level of 5.9, and a reading level of 7.6. Of those participants who had been retested, the average grade level improvement was 1.6 in language and math and 1.0 in reading. Additionally, 99 individuals received their GED; 100 percent of students reached their employment goals—66 percent of whom listed job attainment or job skill improvement. Of particular note has been the Next Step's program's ability to increase the number of male participants. By 2004, the rate of male participation had increased to 28 percent.

Conclusion

Desjardins (2001) asserted that learning has a positive impact on the economic and social well-being of individuals as well as society. Though we are unable to calculate the precise cost-benefit ratio, evidence suggests the Next Step program has enhanced the skills and abilities of participants and has therefore enhanced the reservoir of skills existing in the community. According to human capital theory, the return on investment from Next Step will continue to grow, eventually setting the stage for further business investment by higher-paying industries. More research is needed to evaluate long-term goal attainment, such as postsecondary transition and career enhancement for those who have earned their GED. However, preliminary research demonstrates that the Next Step family literacy program has already made a positive impact on the economic and social well-being of individuals as well as society.

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THE IMPACT OF ONE-YEAR FUNDING ON SUSTAINABILITY FOR FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMS

Ann G. Bessell

RESEARCH HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT ADULTS who participate in family literacy programs show greater gains in literacy than adults in adult-focused programs (National Center for Family Literacy [NCFL], 1996). Research has also demonstrated that children who participate in family literacy programs demonstrate greater gains than children in child-focused programs (NCFL, 1996). However, designing one program that will appeal to multiple generations can be difficult. In addition to addressing the literacy needs of each age group, programs must develop an identity that is appealing to the targeted children as well as their parents. As a result, family literacy programs take many forms and have been implemented in a variety of settings, from homes to schools to community centers to work environments. Unfortunately, this breadth and depth of programming has come at a price.

Currently, there is a stranglehold on available dollars. In Florida, hundreds of programs compete for approximately six million dollars in available family literacy funding. The state's Governor's Family Literacy Initiative (GFLI) receives an aver-

age of 75 applications each year, awarding grants to only 20 percent of those programs (R. Campbell, Director, GFLI, personal communication, March 15, 2005).

The accountability system that determines how federal dollars flow through Florida's Department of Education and Workforce Development Fund to support adult education and family literacy services further complicates the funding predicament. This funding stream, which reimburses program costs based on student outcomes, is based only on adult literacy gains; there are no requirements for child literacy gains. As a result, it is likely that programs may emphasize adult programming rather than comprehensive family literacy services.

Because of the immense pressure for funding, and to encourage the creation of a greater number of programs, many funding agencies (including The Barbara Bush Foundation; Dollar General; Wal-Mart; state initiatives in Maine, Maryland, and Texas; and particular U.S. and state Department of Education grants) have adopted short-term funding patterns. The goal of this approach is to reach as many communities,

and engage as many families, as possible. This short-term funding trend may seem like a reasonable response to the dilemma of too few dollars to serve too many people. Unfortunately, we don't yet know the true impact of this trend on the life span of specific family literacy programs.

To better understand the effect of this funding pattern, I researched 60 family literacy programs that received one-year GFLI start-up grants. The following questions guided my investigation:

- What are the common characteristics of GFLI programs that were sustained past their initial funding period?
- What are project directors' perceptions of program outcomes and obstacles to program sustainability?
- What is the impact of one-year funding on the development of sustainable family literacy programs?

The difficulties project directors experienced in ensuring their programs' survival after the first year suggest that one-year funding may not be the most effective way to encourage the development of quality family literacy programming.

The lessons learned have implications for family literacy programs across the country; they also include recommendations for public and private funding agencies. The difficulties project directors experienced in ensuring their programs' survival after the first year suggest that one-year funding may not be the most effective way to encourage the development of quality family literacy programming.

The Governor's Family Literacy Initiative for Florida (GFLI)

The Governor's Family Literacy Initiative for Florida (GFLI) is a funding program supported by both private- and public-sector contributions. The GFLI was created to improve literacy by helping families understand the importance and relevance of providing children and adults alike with a print-rich environment in a home where education is valued. Programs funded by the GFLI are required to implement the four components of

family literacy—adult education, early childhood education, parenting education, and parent and child interactive literacy—adapted from the Kenan Trust Family Literacy Model (Seaman, Popp, & Darling, 1991).

Since 2000, the GFLI has worked with more than 9,000 adults and children in 25 Florida counties to improve their literacy skills. Now in its fifth year, the GFLI has funded 115 family literacy programs statewide with more than \$4.6 million in grants. The GFLI grant recipients consist of a diverse blend of community and school-based organizations, including public schools, charter schools, housing authorities, libraries, local education foundations, and faith-based organizations.

Participants in these programs are a diverse group. Their academic functioning at the time of enrollment varies from minimal literacy to GED-ready and beyond. Families come from a wide range of countries and speak a variety of languages. Approximately half speak Spanish, a third speak English, 10 percent speak Haitian Creole, and small groups of others speak Bengali, Chinese, Czech, Polish, or Portuguese. The largest groups of non-English speakers come from Mexico (30 percent), Central America and the Caribbean (30 percent), and South America (10 percent). A third (half Caucasian and half Black/African American) were born in the U.S. and speak English as their first language. Nearly two-thirds of the households consist of a couple with a child or children. About 20 percent include a single parent with a child or children. The remaining households consist of an extended family (three or more adults) or other combination.

Sustainability Study

In order to determine what characteristics contributed to a family literacy program's sustained success, I investigated the 60 projects that were awarded GFLI grants from 2000–2003. These programs all received one-year \$50,000 start-up grants. Grantees were expected to include all four components of family literacy in their programs, procure funding for future programming, and participate in evaluation activities. All 60 programs participated in a comprehensive, ongoing evaluation throughout their funding cycle. (For review, see Bessell, 2001, 2002, 2003.) I contacted project directors six to eight months after their one-year funding ended and asked them to complete a questionnaire as well as a telephone interview. I developed protocol instruments and field-tested them for clarity and content. Questions focused on sustainability issues including funding, participant demographics, strategies for recruitment and retention, and participant outcomes. Interviews lasted 30–45 minutes, and questionnaires

were either completed over the telephone or returned within one week of the telephone interview.

Fifty-eight of the 60 project directors completed the questionnaire and participated in the telephone interview, generating a response rate of 97 percent. Both programs that did not respond were from the 2000–2001 funding cycle. One program experienced numerous personnel changes; the other program moved on to serving families in other ways. In both cases, at the time of this follow-up, the programs no longer had individuals on staff with knowledge of their GFLI projects.

Characteristics of Sustained Programs Versus Discontinued Programs

Out of the 60 programs funded during the first three years of the GFLI initiative, 18 (30 percent) did not sustain any component of their family literacy project beyond their initial year of funding. Lack of funding, followed by multiple changes of key personnel, was the overwhelming reason. The other 42 programs (70 percent) sustained at least some portion of their project past the initial funding period and were still operational in 2004. Among these programs, 10 (17 percent) did not continue to provide the complete four-component model; they served either adults or children exclusively. Thirty-two programs (53 percent) continued to implement the complete four-component family literacy model. For the purpose of this study, only the 32 programs that continued the model are considered “sustained programs.”

Fundraising

Project directors from all of the programs reported that seeking funding sources, completing necessary paperwork, and keeping track of the implementation was immensely time-consuming and challenging. Although GFLI provided a single source of funding for the first year, in order to continue to operate, 28 of the 32 sustained programs had to utilize a combination of funding sources as well as draw on existing resources. Funding sources included state and local school funds (48 percent) and competitive grant awards (35 percent). Funds from private foundations, individual donations, and local businesses made up 26 percent. All programs reported that they looked for future funding earlier each year of the initiative in response to initiative requirements to do so. However, over half of the project directors from programs that were not sustained knew of only one potential funding source for their programs. When that money did not materialize, there was inadequate time to identify and apply for other funding opportunities.

Enrollment

The number of families served by programs during the first year of funding varied from project to project. Over one-third of the projects that were not sustained served between 70 and 250 families. Only a small portion of these families received the focused literacy programming that leads to sustainable outcomes. Instead, these programs produced “celebration” events for large groups to encourage families to enroll in the program. Typically, families attended only one event. Several projects that were not sustained served 10 or fewer families. These projects tended to have tremendous difficulties with recruitment and retention. Even the projects that served smaller groups by design did not necessarily provide the additional services or programming that typified the projects serving 20–30 families, yet the cost per family was at least double that of projects serving 20–30 families.

When that money did not materialize, there was inadequate time to identify and apply for other funding opportunities.

In contrast, sustained projects served an average of 27 families. Beginning in the 2002–2003 grant cycle, grantees were required to limit the number of families enrolled in their program to between 20 and 30. This requirement provided programs with guidelines for writing grant proposals and for developing realistic project goals that could incorporate the four-component model. GFLI also began providing technical assistance if a project appeared to be having difficulty attaining or maintaining its proposed enrollment level.

Recruitment and Retention

Once projects secured financial backing, recruitment and retention became the most important ingredients to program sustainability. Programs that are unable to attract and keep participants tend to have difficulty procuring additional funding. Sponsors want to know that their money and name will be associated with a successful project. Recruitment and retention strategies, therefore, had to be innovative, creative, and exciting. Many programs also included incentives. According to project directors, many potential funders asked to see program data of recruitment, retention, and the literacy gains of participants. In describing his experience with potential funders, one

Sustained projects initiated recruitment long before their programs were implemented, and retention was incorporated into each step of the project design.

project director said, "Funding agencies say, 'Show me the numbers.' That's why evaluation is so important. They ask, 'How do you know this is a good thing?'"

Sustained projects initiated recruitment long before their programs were implemented, and retention was incorporated into each step of the project design. According to program managers, "personal touches," such as face-to-face invitations for recruitment, created a sense of caring and community. While some strategies worked better than others, project directors of sustained programs agreed that it was important to use a variety of methods to personalize the mechanism. An overwhelming majority of sustained projects used multiple word-of-mouth invitations as their primary mechanism for recruiting participants. Sending flyers home with children to advertise the program was generally considered a secondary or back-up strategy. In contrast, projects that were not sustained reported using flyers as their primary recruitment strategy and using word-of-mouth to a lesser degree. One project director of a sustained program reflected:

There is a need to implement a more aggressive recruiting and retention program. We needed to make sure our information got to the families that would most benefit—families that don't speak English and families that are timid and cautious about coming forward.... I needed to find ways to show them I care about them and their children.

While recruitment was a challenge, retention was an even more daunting task. Project directors of sustained programs reported utilizing an average of 4.6 strategies, covering a wide range of techniques, to retain families. Providing a warm and caring environment was a common theme that ran throughout all of the strategies reported. Frequently cited strategies included:

- Offering rewards and incentives, and celebrating the accomplishments of participants
- Engaging in some form of face-to-face or person-to-person contact when a participant misses class, including follow-up phone calls and home visits

- Providing food, childcare, and transportation
- Offering meaningful, productive, creative, and varied activities at each meeting, including parent and child interactive time, workshops, field trips, instructional games, and opportunities for community involvement
- Listening to parent suggestions and adjusting curriculum accordingly, maintaining two-way communication, and making personal connections with participants
- Having children perform or be awarded for outstanding efforts
- Taking pictures of all events

Programs that did not sustain reported an average of 2.4 strategies that focused on:

- Offering rewards and incentives
- Following up with phone calls
- Providing food
- Having children perform

The major difference between projects that continued and those that did not, however, was not in the strategies cited but rather in the number, intensity, and consistency of those that were utilized. For example, when asked about retention strategies, project directors from programs that did not continue typically reported using rewards and incentives on a monthly basis and provided only one or two examples of rewards. In contrast, project directors from sustained programs described multiple occasions when rewards were given out throughout the month and provided at least six examples of rewards. The amount of personal contact also varied. Projects that did not continue cited one or two instances when they had used personal contacts to reach out to participants and did so only after a participant had missed at least two classes. Sustained projects reported a minimum of three instances when they had used personal contacts and did so the first time a participant missed class.

The average dropout rate for sustained programs was 32 percent. This reflects the difficulty even sustained projects faced in providing the duration of instruction necessary for sustainable outcomes. Projects that did not continue experienced greater difficulties with dropouts and tended to have less follow-up information than sustained projects concerning why participants failed to continue. (It should be noted that there is no official definition of what constitutes a dropout, so I chose to rigorously define a dropout as any participant who completed at least 12 hours of instruction, but did not have both pre- and

post-assessments recorded.) While 32 percent is considered an unacceptable dropout rate by GFLI, it falls far below the average dropout rates at the national level, which is 60–70 percent for adult education programs in general, including adult basic education and ESOL (Garcia & Hasson, 2004; Kerka, 1995).

Families who participate in GFLI-funded projects face many challenges in their lives. Invariably, these challenges have an impact on attendance, often resulting not only in inconsistent turnout but in high dropout rates as well. Most families dropped out the programs for either job-related reasons (48 percent) or because they moved out of the area (36 percent). These issues were obviously beyond the control of the family literacy projects themselves. To a lesser degree, additional reasons included lack of childcare, lack of transportation, and the need to attend to health issues of a family member.

Project Directors' Perceptions of Program Outcomes and Obstacles to Sustainability

Project directors were asked for their perceptions about their program and participants by indicating how much they disagreed or agreed with a series of statements using a 5-point Likert rating scale: 1 equaled strongly disagree and 5 equaled strongly agree. Table 1 provides mean scores for each item. Most responses were relatively positive, with mean scores above 4, suggesting a social desirability bias—that is, the tendency for the project directors to answer questions in a way they believe is socially desirable or will make themselves or their work appear as good as possible (Edwards, 1953, as cited

in Crano & Brewer, 2002). However, the responses of project directors from sustained programs averaged higher mean scores across all items than those of project directors from non-sustained projects.

The perceptions of project directors from sustained projects concerning student, parent, and family benefits were corroborated by their responses during their interviews. When these project directors were asked how participants benefited, 77 percent said adults read more to their children, 45 percent reported that families went to the library more often, and 35 percent responded that families voluntarily engaged in literacy activities together. At the same time, project directors also expressed concern that people in the community were not aware of the various family literacy projects, which had a negative impact on recruitment and impeded the search for funding opportunities.

Not surprisingly, project directors from programs that were not sustained had the lowest means for responses to the statements, “The start-up funds helped us continue the program even though funding ended after one year,” and “People in the community are aware of the literacy program in their schools.” Their responses to open-ended questions also tended to focus more on the difficulties and barriers with which they dealt than on accomplishments.

When asked to identify the most important achievement of their projects, an overwhelming proportion of respondents reported that it was the gains observed in both child and parent learning. For example, one project director stated, “... students made gains in reading and English proficiency. Parents also

Table 1: Project Directors' Perceptions of the Project
PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROJECT

Please tell me how much you agree with each statement. (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

LITERACY PROJECT	Not Sustained Programs	Sustained Programs
Students benefited academically from their participation in the project.	4.52	4.81
Students benefited socially from their participation in the project.	4.39	4.53
Parents benefited academically from their participation in the project.	3.91	4.44
Parents benefited socially from their participation in the project.	4.04	4.56
This project had a positive impact on intergenerational literacy activities.	4.30	4.59
I have seen an improvement in parent involvement as a result of this project.	3.70	4.38
The start-up funds helped us create the project even though funding ended after one year.	4.00	4.16
The start-up funds helped us continue the project even though funding ended after one year.	2.43	3.91
This project made a positive impact on the atmosphere at my site.	4.26	4.38
This project is a good example of school/business/community collaboration.	4.17	4.34
I would recommend this project to other schools/centers.	4.39	4.78
People in the community are aware of the literacy project in their schools.	3.17	3.81

made academic gains, some obtained their GED (high school equivalency diploma), and others improved their reading skills and/or learned to value reading and literacy.” To another project director, the gains made by the parents were the project’s greatest outcome:

The most important achievement made would have to be the educational gains the adults made in the program. The reason I find this to be the most important achievement is because we know that the more education a parent has, the better chance a child has of going beyond the education of his or parents.

Another director noted that the achievements were numerous for both adults and children:

Some of the parents started out interested in their own literacy skills or getting a GED, but after they got into it they realized how much they enjoyed the time spent with their kids and how much the kids were learning. On the other hand, there were folks who only enrolled because their child’s teacher told them to. They quickly figured out that our program was for them too... by far the best is the camaraderie and sense of belonging that is created among the families.

Strategies for Sustainability

The issues related to sustainability first and foremost revolved around funding sources and obtaining financial support, as well as the size of the program and recruitment and retention strategies. Related strategies used by sustained programs included:

- Increasing community awareness
- Building collaborative relationships with multiple potential funders and devoting adequate time to the task of seeking funds
- Engaging passionate quality instructors and staff and fostering reciprocal teamwork
- Providing a program that meets the unique needs and expectations of the families being served

Community Awareness

To ensure the survival of a program, project directors from sustained programs unanimously agreed that the issue of sustainability must be a priority from the beginning. Planning for a future begins with community awareness. It is difficult to approach potential funders if no one has ever heard of the project. All respondents reported that awareness of their projects in the community was a challenge; however, project directors from sustained programs took steps throughout the year to increase community awareness of their programs. Strategies

for increasing community awareness included bringing participants into the community for field trips and inviting merchants and service providers to literacy classes. Publicizing success stories—which not only encourages enrolled participants to continue, but can also generate interest and enthusiasm from potential participants—was cited as another strategy for raising community awareness. Project directors from programs that were not sustained did not appear to capitalize on field trips as opportunities to spread the word about their programs, nor did they invite community members to attend events. This is not to say they didn’t believe community awareness was important, but they were less successful in their efforts. Sixty-three percent of sustained programs were able to get local papers to publish articles about their program and special events compared to 20 percent of programs that were not sustained.

“Some of the parents started out interested in their own literacy skills or getting a GED, but after they got into it they realized how much they enjoyed the time spent with their kids and how much the kids were learning.”

Building Relationships with Potential Funders

As stated earlier, the quest for financial support must begin at the start of a project by building relationships with potential funders. The \$50,000 GFLI grants provided a single funding source for each project; however, this money was not likely to be replaced with another large, single grant. Therefore, diversification of funding had to include a variety of potential funders and not be limited to high-stakes grants from public and private entities.

Project directors from sustained projects found they needed to piece together several funding sources to replace the GFLI grant. These sources included not only district and state education dollars but also local education funds; school discretionary funds; PTAs; adult and community education centers; workforce funds; faith-based organizations; and foundations or initiatives, such as United Way, Scripps Howard Foundation, Families as Teachers, Private Charitable Trusts, 21st Century Schools, and the Front Porch Florida Initiative.

GFLI also encouraged programs to approach local businesses. During technical assistance sessions, GFLI representatives explained how soliciting a local gas station owner or a small neighborhood card shop might be as worthwhile as approaching a large national corporation known for big donations.

Successful partnerships included local branches of financial institutions, such as Bank of America, Washington Mutual, and Citifinancial; Sedano's, a small independent Hispanic-owned supermarket chain; individual Publix supermarkets; local car dealerships; and a gas station in a small rural town in northern Florida. Financial commitments ranged from small cash donations of \$500 to significantly larger grant awards of several thousand dollars. Programs also received in-kind contributions such as food and gasoline vouchers. Project

Project directors said that community merchants liked the idea of helping people who lived in the neighborhoods near their businesses.

directors said that community merchants liked the idea of helping people who lived in the neighborhoods near their businesses. These smaller funders were also able to make a commitment earlier in the year than larger funding organizations, many of which had complicated procedures for reviewing proposals that often took months.

Quality Instructors, Staff, and Administrators

While it may not appear that personnel issues would be directly linked to funding, inability to hire and retain qualified instructors and staff and in fostering positive relationships with administrators were cited as major threats to project sustainability. Working environments that are both positive and collaborative encourage stability among the teaching staff. In turn, teachers who feel their jobs are stable are better able to facilitate retention of program participants. As a result, project directors must make team-building a priority.

Project directors of non-sustained programs reported difficulties related to the instability of their workforce and the exclusion of staff members from the grant-writing process. These project directors had either inherited the projects after

the proposals were submitted or been hired after the grants were awarded. One project director was hired after the project was already underway. The project directors explained that they would like to have been involved from the beginning. They said they may have designed the projects differently, hired other people, or selected an alternate location. One respondent said:

I wasn't part of grant-writing, so when I came on board I needed time to understand it before I could implement it. Staff changed, new relationships needed building, and I don't think the principal liked me at all. I had a different approach in mind.... Mine would have made life much easier.

Project directors from sustained programs did not focus on these difficulties, although some did mention their existence. When asked to make recommendations for others, they did not talk about avoiding these pitfalls; instead, they discussed ways to improve the quality of program delivery by hiring instructors who have experience working with special and diverse populations instead of simply hiring a reading teacher or volunteer. When asked what they looked for in potential instructors, project directors from sustained programs said that in addition to previous teaching experience and certification in ESOL or bilingual skills, they looked for individuals who had sensitivity to cultural diversity, compassion, and commitment to the families and children in the project. In contrast, project directors from programs that did not continue were more apt to discuss the difficulties they experienced filling staff positions, the high rates of staff turnover, the staff's resistance to collaboration, and the acrimonious relationships between instructors and administrators.

One respondent whose program continued stated that she looked for "friendly, caring, passionate individuals who had experience in teaching in the areas of adult education, early childhood education, and parenting. Also, [beneficial were] individuals who were familiar with and sensitive to the customs and traditions of the population who attends the program." Along with a background in education and well-developed interpersonal communication skills, staff members must be enthusiastic, creative, and flexible. As another respondent stated, "... working with a transient population requires being flexible because there are very few constants in the family's life."

Unique Needs and Expectations of Families

There is no magic formula for creating a successful project. Programs must balance the unique needs of their community with some of the more universal strategies required for sustained success. Projects that learned about the community,

“Using conventional classroom instruction and times isn’t successful for our families. We learned that the hard way.”

learned about potential participants, and engaged those families in the planning process were the ones that continued to function past their initial year of funding.

Performing a needs assessment to determine how best to serve the participants in each project is an essential step. All GFLI-funded projects were required to have their adult participants complete an entry questionnaire. Data from many of the items on the questionnaire provided general information about participant characteristics, interests, expectations, and needs. In response to open-ended inquiries during my interviews, only the project directors from sustained projects spoke about using this information to make adjustments to their programs. Several reported having conducted an additional, more detailed needs assessment. These respondents felt strongly that when project personnel understand the needs of their families, they can better serve their participants. As one respondent stated:

Programs in our area need to be tailored to family work schedules and learning deficiencies in a one-to-one or small group format with flexibility of scheduling to achieve success. Using conventional classroom instruction and times isn’t successful for our families. We learned that the hard way.

When asked what advice they would give to others wishing to start a family literacy project, over one-third of the project directors from programs that were not sustained recommended that a detailed needs assessment be conducted to “know your audience and plan around them...listen to their concerns and worries” and to “find out what the people need and be flexible and make changes when needed.” These recommendations appeared to emerge from the difficulties they experienced in their own programs; however, the project directors did not indicate that they had actually made use of the available information gathered from the entry questionnaire.

Project directors from all projects—those that continued and those that did not—shared many common thoughts about the importance and power of family literacy. Although project directors whose programs did not continue experienced difficulties and frustration, they also said they were gratified by the

accomplishments they were able to achieve and the benefits their participants derived from the projects. All project directors agreed that family literacy is a critically needed instructional method for their communities. They spoke of how inter-generational activities helped to engender a culture where families valued education and achievement, identifying the establishment of this culture as the most important aspect of a family literacy curriculum. According to the project directors, the only way to empower adults is by offering them opportunities to better themselves through language classes, life skills instruction, and employability programs.

One project director from a sustained program offered this recommendation: “Be patient, these projects take time! Time for the parents to know you, time for academic growth, time to change unacceptable practices.” Another stated, “Establish a bond with the families, be flexible, listen to their concerns and worries, and be enthusiastic at all times—then the rewards will come.” In addition, children benefit when adults improve their skills. Given the opportunity, empowered parents will naturally become more involved in their children’s education. These empowered adults feel more comfortable helping their children with homework, talking to teachers, and participating in school activities.

Learning from Experience

Project directors from sustained projects gave the impression that their programs continued in spite of—rather than as a result of—the one-year funding policy. From building collaborative relationships with multiple funders, to establishing a presence in the community, to finding and maintaining a qualified and cohesive group of instructors, directors spent the first year learning what it takes to make a family literacy program work. Unfortunately, engaging in all of these activities and doing them well did not guarantee the continuation of a project.

Grantees in each round of funding were less likely to make the same mistakes as their predecessors: for example, planning for too many participants, waiting too long to start looking for future funding, failing to conduct a needs assessment. However, almost all project directors reported that securing financial support posed the greatest risk to sustainability. Despite these challenges, over half of the projects funded by GFLI with one-year grants were able to obtain additional funding and continue their projects; however, the constant uncertainty of not knowing if they would prevail financially added additional pressure and frustration to the already stressful aspects of getting a program up and running.

I asked project directors if they had any recommendations that would strengthen the Governor's Family Literacy Initiative and if they had thoughts about how to avoid some of the significant barriers to sustaining a project. Almost all project directors mentioned issues involving the procurement of funds. Typical comments included, "It takes the entire year to get the grant running smoothly. Then just when you've worked out all the issues—funding is over. Why not reward those who

At the end of the second year of funding, all but one project had plans to continue the following year.

are really successful?" and "Finding money for the next year was my biggest nightmare. Why not fund for more time?" Many project directors from sustained programs suggested that the GFLI institute a procedure or policy that would facilitate additional funding for projects that demonstrated their potential for success. One project director stated, "Why not reward all the hard work and reaching your benchmarks.... You could give a little more [money] the second year, not the whole \$50,000, just to help us keep things going, then phase out your support." This type of scaffolded approach, where the initial year of funding is the first rung of a multi-year process of technical assistance and financial support, resonated with the beliefs of the GFLI.

In response to these suggestions, the GFLI began a pilot sustainability grant program in 2004. Through a competitive process, sustainability grants, which provided an additional year of funding to exemplary projects, were awarded to 12 GFLI projects. Early data indicated that these projects learned what worked best for them from their past experiences. Initially, they were able to recruit participants and begin instructional components with greater ease and efficiency than projects receiving new start-up awards. They continued to meet their anticipated enrollment rates and actively pursued future funding early on. At the end of the second year of funding, all but one project had plans to continue the following year. Project directors from these projects are being interviewed this year to determine their actual success in sustaining their family literacy programs.

Of course, short-term funding grants can be useful; they can help fledgling programs get up and running, and they can weed out projects that lack potential. However, even programs that show great promise still need additional assistance past

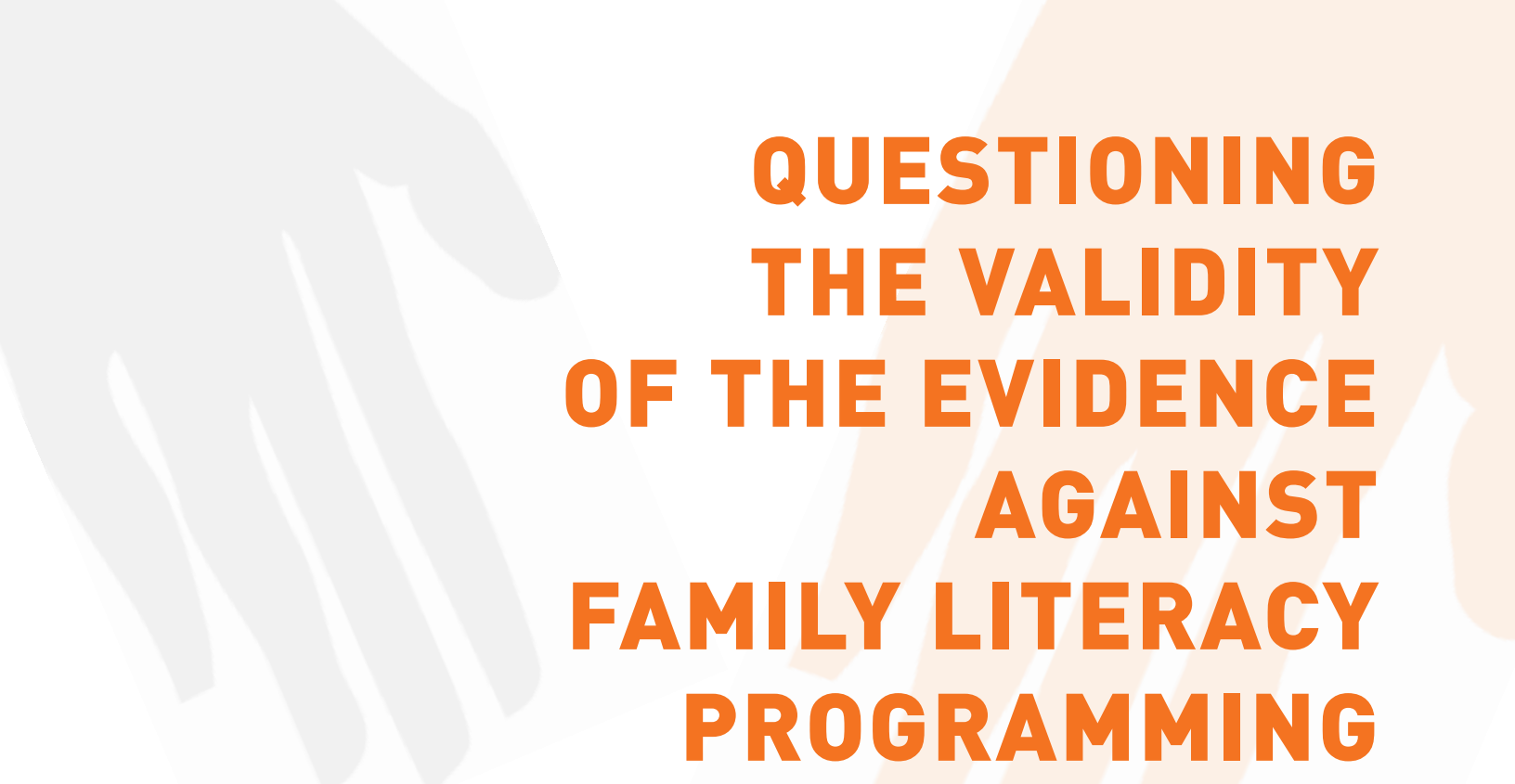
the first year. The suggestions that GFLI should consider achievement awards for exemplary programs to help fund a second year, make the grants renewable for an additional year if all objectives and benchmarks are met, or consider sustainability grants after the first year are slowly becoming a reality. This trend must continue if we want to give successful programs a chance to survive.

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QUESTIONING THE VALIDITY OF THE EVIDENCE AGAINST FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAMMING

A Critical Analysis of the National Even Start Evaluations

A substantially different version of this article was previously published on the National Even Start Association website at www.evenstart.org.

Derek E. Link and Drucie M. Weirauch

IN A FEBRUARY 8, 2005 SPEECH TO THE DETROIT Economic Club, President Bush singled out Even Start as an example of a well-intentioned program that is not working. The President said, “[Even Start] was created more than 16 years ago to build literacy in low-income families....The problem is that after three separate evaluations, it has become abundantly clear that the program is not succeeding. People are not becoming more literate. Families in Even Start have made no progress toward literacy—no more progress than a similar group of families outside the program” (White House, 2005).

The evaluations to which the President referred—and has used as a justification for eliminating Even Start from the federal budget—are based on a flawed evaluation design, one that neither follows the basic principles of evaluation and research nor adheres to the current federal statutory requirements. The significant disparity between the negative national findings and the more broadly based and consistently positive state findings further supports the unreliability of the results. Though evaluations of educational models can—and do—unearth valuable information to help programs improve their services, a close

examination of the Even Start evaluations demonstrates the dangers of basing policy decisions on skewed data that do not represent what is actually going on in the field.

About Even Start

The U.S. Department of Education’s Even Start Family Literacy Program was initiated in 1989 by William F. Goodling, a now-retired Republican Congressman from Pennsylvania, to address the literacy needs of the poorest families in the nation. Integrating four distinct components—adult education, early childhood education, parenting education, and parent and child interactive literacy—Even Start was founded on the ideas that literacy begins at home and that in order to break the cycle of poverty, literacy must be strengthened within the entire family, with parents recognizing and embracing their role as their child’s first and most important teacher.

Since 1989, Even Start has grown from a small pilot of 76 programs to over 1,200 programs serving approximately 50,000 families and 120,000 adults and children in 2005. Even Start programs, which are in operation in every state in the nation as

well as the territory of Puerto Rico, serve families with great needs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (n.d.), during the 2001–2002 program year, 84 percent of the adults in Even Start nationwide did not have a high school diploma; 41 percent of Even Start families had annual incomes under \$6,000; and only 16 percent of Even Start families were employed.

A closer look at the study demonstrates that evaluations were based on a flawed experimental design and outdated data, so that the data are neither reliable nor valid.

About the Evaluations

Based on a decade of national studies conducted by Abt Associates and Fu Associates for the U.S. Department of Education, the *Third National Evaluation: Program Impacts and Implications for Improvement, 2003* (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, hereafter referred to as the *Evaluation*) was intended to measure the effectiveness of Even Start and to provide information on program implementation. It included two complementary studies:

- The Even Start Performance Information Reporting System (ESPIRS), which provided annual data on the universe of Even Start projects
- The Experimental Design Study (EDS), which was a quasi-experimental study of the effectiveness of Even Start in 18 projects

Third National Even Start Evaluation: Follow-Up Findings from the Experimental Design Study, 2004 (Ricciuti, St. Pierre, Lee, Parsad, & Rimdzius, 2004, hereafter referred to as the *Follow-Up*) updated the findings from the *Evaluation* by comparing pre-test data from 1999 and 2000 with follow-up data collected for the same participants included in the *Evaluation* approximately nine months after the *Evaluation* report post-tests (2000 and 2001). The authors of the *Follow-Up* report asserted that the findings presented were consistent with, and led to the same conclusions as, the findings contained in the *Evaluation*.

According to the *Evaluation*, “Even Start children and adults made gains on literacy assessments, but not more than adults and children in the control group, two-thirds of whom

received no adult or early childhood education services.” This statement has led legislators to question the value of the Even Start program. A closer look at the study demonstrates that evaluations were based on a flawed experimental design and outdated data, so that the data are neither reliable nor valid. Thus, findings based on this data are at best questionable. As Horn (1992) noted, “It is easy to get no effect and make no significant difference” when designing and carrying out an educational evaluation (p. 31). This is especially true if the design is flawed.

Evaluation Definitions

Experimental design: A plan for evaluating a program that involves one group that participates (treatment group) and one that does not participate (control group)

Random assignment: The researchers randomly place participants into the treatment group or the control group

Sampling: The act or process of selecting a sample of programs from the universe of programs

Reliability: Data that is dependable

Validity: Containing premises from which the conclusions may be logically derived

Validity of the Evaluation Design

Sampling Issues

In order to be eligible to participate in the EDS, programs had to:

- Meet Even Start’s legislative requirements
- Have been in operation for at least two years prior to the study
- Plan to operate throughout the length of the study
- Serve at least 20 new families at the start of data collection
- Offer instructional service of moderate or high intensity
- Be willing to participate in a random assignment study

From a universe of over 1,000 Even Start programs, the study identified 115 eligible projects. Only 18 programs—1.5 percent of Even Start programs nationwide—volunteered to participate in the sample. Most projects were unwilling to participate. In the *Follow-Up*, researchers acknowledged one reason: “[T]he main deterrent to participating in the EDS was the requirement that projects allow research staff to assign the incoming families to be in Even Start or a control group” (p. 12). They also admitted that the refusal of 97 eligible projects to participate “does make us worry about the generalizability of the findings” (*Follow-Up*, p. 11).

The Programs Were Not Representative

The fact that the 18 projects were not randomly selected—but rather volunteered—further obscured the results of the study by creating a built-in *sampling error*. The researchers themselves identified this error on page 33 of the *Follow-Up* study: “[W]e cannot generalize to the Even Start population on a strict statistical basis.” In fact, the sample did not accurately represent the national Even Start family literacy program. In the *Evaluation*, researchers acknowledged that, nationally, the participants in Even Start programs were 55 percent urban and 46 percent Hispanic; however, the EDS programs were 83 percent urban and 75 percent Hispanic. In the *Evaluation*, the researchers conceded, “These data suggest that the findings from the EDS are most relevant to urban projects that serve large numbers of Hispanic/ESL families” (p. 154).

While the *Evaluation* based its results on 309 Even Start families and 154 control group families, by the time of the *Follow-Up* study, the data set was reduced to 239 Even Start families and 115 control families. To discredit a nationwide program that currently consists of an estimated 50,000 families based on data from 463 for the *Evaluation* (.009 percent) and 354 (.007 percent) for the *Follow-Up* is folly.

Quality Was Not a Concern

Because the *Evaluation* and the *Follow-Up* relied on programs that had volunteered—not those that were implementing scientific- and evidence-based research practices or effectively integrating the four components—the *Evaluation* did not, in fact, study the model as it was intended to operate. In the *Evaluation*, researchers conceded, “no examination of the quality of instructional services was done as a part of the selection process” (p. 26).

The *Evaluation* included tables that reveal substantial differences among the sites, such as the number of hours provided in each of the four components that make up the Even Start model. Projects that volunteered to participate in the *Evaluation* were selected through a process that assessed only the amount of services provided, not the quality of those services. Factors as simple as the qualifications of staff were not considered. In the *Evaluation*, researchers pointed out, “While the EDS sites represent functioning Even Start projects, they were not selected to be models of excellence” (p. 9). Since the purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Even Start model as opposed to services families obtain for themselves, it was critical that the programs included in the study actually

implemented the model as it was designed. However, integration of services—which is the cornerstone of the Even Start model and the focus of the study—was not a criterion for site selection. In addition, the *Follow-Up* study did not include an analysis of whether the level of services used to determine project eligibility for the *Evaluation* was sustained during the period between the *Evaluation* post-tests and the *Follow-Up* study.

Often, it takes a program several years to effectively implement a curriculum as complex as the Even Start model. Twenty-eight percent of the sites included in the *Evaluation* had been in operation for only two years. This fact may have further skewed the data. Without information about the quality of the services and the level of participation, it was misleading to suggest that, “No program impacts were found” (*Evaluation*, p. 11).

Control Group Contamination

In order for an experimental design to be valid, the treatment group and the control group in the sample must remain distinct. If they do not, changes in literacy achievement cannot be ascribed to the intervention, in this case Even Start. As Horn (1992) stated, “If you give two groups essentially the same materials, they will learn the same amounts from them—or your randomization is faulty” (p. 30).

When the *Evaluation* project was established, researchers randomly assigned some families to Even Start (the treatment group) and others to a control group. Control group participants agreed not participate in Even Start for at least one year, though they could receive similar services from other agencies.

Twenty-two percent of the control group participants joined Even Start *after* the *Evaluation* study post-test results were collected but *before* the *Follow-Up* results were collected, thus contaminating the results of the *Follow-Up*. The *Follow-Up* study even acknowledged that Even Start and control group parents and children may have been participating in “the same services” (p. 2). The researchers asserted that this contamination had no impact on the *Follow-Up* findings. They minimized the contamination of the control group in the *Follow-Up* report, stating, “... a *small* percentage of control parents reported that they joined Even Start after the posttest” (p. 16). We would argue that nearly one-quarter of the control group receiving Even Start services—that is, using the same materials in the same classes and receiving instruction from the same teachers—for as many as fourteen months after the *Evaluation* post-test is a significant percentage. Yet, despite the statistical principle that contamination of a control group “biases the study toward a

finding of no effect” (Beach, 2001, n.p.), the control group families that joined Even Start were included in the *Follow-Up* results.

Outdated Data

Neither the *Evaluation* nor the *Follow-Up* reflected improvements to Even Start programs after changes in federal law in 2000 and 2001; thus, neither study represented the programs as they exist in 2005. The *Evaluation* researchers acknowledged that, “The current evaluation, covering the years 1997–1998 through 2001, reflects the program as it existed prior to the 2000 reauthorization” (2003, p. 21).

2000 Even Start Reauthorization

The reauthorization to which the evaluators referred was the Learning Involves Families Together (LIFT) Act of 2000. LIFT included new and specific accountability mandates that require states to develop and implement performance indicators for Even Start participant outcomes.

Implementation of the LIFT requirements has raised the level of expected gains for adults and children. Indeed, current funding decisions are determined by program performance against the state-set performance indicator benchmarks. For the most part, performance indicators were not in place or implemented until 2002 or later. These indicators set expectations for participation and achievement, and specific timeframes for participants to reach established achievement levels. The following example of a performance indicator for California adults participating in ESOL classes demonstrates the specificity of these benchmarks:

Fifty percent of adult learners enrolled in ESOL classes who achieve a pretest scale score of 211 to 240 on the CASAS Reading Test will demonstrate a three-point posttest gain after a minimum of 100 hours of instruction. (California Department of Education, 2003)

Even Start’s reauthorization provided an explicit focus on quality—quality in instruction, in intensity of services, and in student participation. Programs are now required to provide instruction based on “scientifically-based reading research” (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Staff qualifications, which often include relevant degrees, are also higher than before LIFT. To make decisions on today’s Even Start based on the alleged performance of pre-LIFT Even Start simply ignores the many improvements that have been made. Still more program performance measures are in the works, according to the conclusions of the *Follow-Up*.

2002 Education Sciences Reform Act

Neither the *Evaluation* nor the *Follow-Up* adhered to the statutory requirements of the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, which President Bush signed into law on November 6. On signing the Act, President Bush said, “This Act will substantially strengthen the scientific basis for the Department of Education’s continuing efforts to help families, schools, and State and local governments with the education of America’s children” (White House, 2002). According to Bush’s statement, the act dictates that a “Scientifically Valid Education Evaluation” must include key components such as “an adequate description of the programs evaluated and, to the extent possible, [an examination of] the relationship between program implementation and program impacts” (White House, 2002). As noted above, neither the *Evaluation* nor the *Follow-Up* was concerned with the extent to which programs implemented the Even Start model. To be fair, researchers developed the design of the *Evaluation* prior to the passage of the Education Sciences Reform Act; however, the design, which was clearly faulty, was precisely what the act was written to prevent.

Neither the *Evaluation* nor the *Follow-Up* was concerned with the extent to which programs implemented the Even Start model.

Positive Results from Quasi-Experimental State Studies

Recent statewide and local evaluations have provided evidence of the effectiveness of Even Start. In fact, numerous states performed evaluations that demonstrated statistically significant gains in both adults and children. Unfortunately, few have had the resources or time to use an experimental model with a control and an intervention group. Two states, however, have made comparisons between Even Start children and non-Even Start children. Both of these studies developed a research design that avoided the ethical issue of denying families access to services in order to form a control group, as was the case with the EDS.

Pennsylvania

A study by the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy at Penn State University (Askov, Grinder, & Kassab,

Recent statewide and local evaluations have provided evidence of the effectiveness of Even Start.

2005) used a quasi-experimental design to test the following research questions:

- Does preschool children's participation in the family literacy program lead to gains in developmental skills, particularly literacy-related skills?
- Does parental participation in a particular component of family literacy affect child development scores?

Data were collected from families enrolled in Pennsylvania family literacy programs in the 2001–2002 program year.

Family literacy programs in Pennsylvania chose from among three criterion-referenced assessments to assess child development for children from birth to 5 years old. To assess children from birth to 3 years old, researchers used the Early Learning Accomplishment Profile (ELAP); for children ages 3–5, researchers used High/Scope Child Observation Record (COR) and the Learning Accomplishment Profile-Revised (LAP-R). Each of these instruments measures essentially the same developmental skills.

Only children who were enrolled in family literacy programs were included in the analysis. No children were denied access to the services; thus, the design did not have the compromised ethics of random assignment. Further, the study occurred in a natural setting. Variables included the age of a child at assessment, whether the child had participated in an educational program prior to enrollment in family literacy, and if the child had special needs. Other controls included the number of hours the parent participated in adult education, parenting education, and interactive literacy.

Two groups were included in the analysis. The intervention group included children who had a pre-test upon enrollment in a family literacy programs and a post-test after being in the program for at least 90 days. Post-test scores were compared to the pre-test scores of a comparable age group of children just new to family literacy, controlling for the variables above. According to the results, the children who had participated in family literacy for at least 90 days scored significantly higher on all domains on the COR and on most domains on

LAP-R and ELAP than those of comparable age who had just started the program.

The second question, regarding the impact of a parent's involvement in family literacy on the child's development, had interesting results. The intensity of participation for adults in adult education had a significant effect on most of the developmental skills for infants and toddlers as measured by the ELAP. This is an important area for further study, as infants and toddlers are a growing population in family literacy programs.

Colorado

The Colorado Even Start Follow Up Study (Anderson, 2003) reported on 15 Even Start families from one family literacy program. On average, the families had been out of the program for 3.5 years. One component of the study examined teacher reports of school-aged children. Researchers compared the educational achievements of children who had been enrolled in Even Start with children randomly selected from the class list by an Even Start staff member. Comparison children were not matched on demographic or risk factors.

According to teacher reports, 53 percent of the children who had participated in Even Start were reading above grade level, in contrast with only 28 percent of the comparison group. Further, of those who had participated on Even Start, 47 percent were reading at grade level and none below grade level. In contrast, of the comparison group, 44 percent were at grade level and a full 28 percent were reading below grade level.

The study also considered other important educational domains, such as speaking and listening, writing, overall academic performance, behavior, relations with other students, family support, and motivation to learn. In all of these areas, Even Start children outperformed the comparison group. Only in attendance did the comparison group outperform the Even Start children. It would seem that children who have participated in Even Start have an excellent chance of succeeding in school; such findings should help teachers begin to believe in their capabilities.

Colorado also considered data from the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), which is not used until the third grade. CSAP reading scores were available for only about 40 percent of the children; therefore, the number is insufficient to draw conclusions. However, it is worth noting that the reading scores of children who had participated in Even Start were better in several areas than those of the comparison group.

The Need for Truly National, Reliable Studies

Contrary to what President Bush announced in his speech to the Detroit Economic Club, Even Start participants have, in fact, demonstrated increased literacy. Unfortunately, the President based his assessment on the *Evaluation* and the *Follow-Up*, which, because their research design and implementation were flawed, did not accurately represent the results of the Even Start family literacy program.

Evaluations are, of course, an important tool for helping programs improve the services they offer. However, in order to be effective, evaluations must be based on data that is current, reliable, and representative of the program being evaluated.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Derek E. Link is a grant writer and evaluation consultant. As the owner of Link Consulting, he currently serves as the external evaluator for three Even Start projects. Derek has worked for 20 years as an elementary school teacher and as a site and district administrator. His involvement with Even Start began in 1993, when he was the director of a local program. He is also a charter member of the National Even Start Association Board of Directors.

Drucie M. Weirauch is an educator and researcher with over 15 years of experience working with adults. She has more than 10 years of experience in program development, coordination, administration, evaluation, and staff supervision. For the past five years, she has worked extensively in family literacy policy, evaluation, and research. She helped to develop family literacy performance standards, indicators of program quality, and a program self-assessment guide for the state of Pennsylvania. She is a doctoral candidate in curriculum and instruction, language and literacy at Penn State University. Her research focuses on an after-school family literacy project. She is also interested in the education of abused women and promoting self-efficacy for adult learners.

ACROSS MY DESK

Resources for Family Literacy Programs

Mary Haust

EVERY PRACTITIONER KNOWS THE COMPLEXITY of delivering high-quality family literacy services. Practitioners must not only be well versed in early childhood, adult, and parenting education, but must also understand the dynamics of family, community, and cultural practices and systems. Three publications that recently crossed my desk offer practical information to help practitioners solidify their grasp of the many strands that make up good family literacy practice.

Supporting Play, Birth through Eight by Dorothy Justus Sluss, Ph.D. (Thomson Delmar Learning, Canada, 2005), explores “play as pedagogy,” interpreting the term as it relates to children from infancy through primary school. Specifically, Sluss examines theories of play and current issues regarding play. She also provides lists of related resources and useful information on classroom design based on the developmental characteristics of children. The connections she makes between play and development—including how play supports learning in language, math, science, and the arts—are particularly illuminating.

Early Childhood Language Arts, third edition, by Mary Renck Jalongo (Pearson Education, 2003), is designed for early childhood instructors and students. This book is especially useful for preschool teachers who are charged with “making meaningful changes in program design.” Renck Jalongo makes comprehensive and easy-to-understand connections between language and other literacy behaviors. Each chapter provides a synthesis of research as well as suggestions for appropriate classroom activities and assessments. Renck Jalongo also provides helpful and practical suggestions to help teachers engage parents in extending children’s learning into the home. She offers useful information about language diversity; language, writing, and reading development in the early years; how family literacy can support children’s language; and the role of literature and media in the development of literacy.

Finally, *Family Literacy Handbook for the Oxford Picture Dictionaries*, developed by Jayme Adelson-Goldstein and Norma Shapiro with Pamela A. McMackin (Oxford University Press, 2005), is a sixty-page handbook that provides ideas, “how to’s,” and reproducible worksheets for family literacy programs that serve adults and children whose native language is not English.

Practitioners must not only be well versed in early childhood, adult, and parenting education, but must also understand the dynamics of family, community, and cultural practices and systems.

While the handbook was designed to support instruction in family literacy programs that use *Oxford Picture Dictionaries* with English language learners, the worksheets would also be useful for English-speaking adult basic education learners.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Haust served as an Even Start Coordinator for 11 years with the Binghamton City School District in New York. Currently, she is an educational consultant, working primarily with Hudson River Center for Program Development and RMC Research.

2005 NESAs Conference

The 11th Annual National Even Start Association Conference

Literacy Learning Across the Ages: Even Start Is Working

November 5–9, 2005

Washington, DC

For more information, visit the NESAs website at www.evenstart.org.

Anticipated Speakers:

- Congressman Patrick Kennedy
- Dr. Jean Feldman
- Rita Pierson
- M. Christine Dwyer

Professional Development Series

Keys to Quality: Program Leadership

NESAs has teamed with Harcourt Supplemental Publishers to develop *Keys to Quality: Program Leadership*, a three-day workshop specifically designed for program administrators to help state and local leaders implement high-quality Even Start family Literacy programs that meet or exceed statutory requirements. The Keys to Quality program specifically addresses the cornerstones of an effective Even Start family literacy program:

- Program leadership
- Early childhood education
- Adult literacy education
- Parenting education

The program will allow each participant to accomplish these goals:

- Understand the current Even Start statute
- Understand current research supporting the Core Body of Knowledge relating to Even Start family literacy
- Understand and implement the Key Values
- Respond to the literacy needs of adults living in poverty and their children
- Participate in continuing professional development at all levels of implementation

For more information on Keys to Quality: Program Leadership, or to discuss scheduling and training, call 1.800.977.3731.

Family Literacy Forum Call for Papers

Family Literacy Forum is a national, peer-reviewed journal published twice a year by the National Even Start Association. *Family Literacy Forum* is committed to bringing the voices, ideas, and experiences of individuals in the field to the forefront of discussions about the literacy development of families in home, community, and school-based settings.

Family Literacy Forum accepts manuscripts that focus on practice, theory, and research in family literacy education. We welcome manuscripts that discuss the following: practical

approaches related to working with families and literacy; personal essays, reflections or opinion pieces related to family literacy; research and evaluation related to family literacy program development; and issues of assessment and standards in the field.

Manuscripts for the next issue are due January 9, 2006.

For submission guidelines and other editorial correspondence, contact Claudia M. Ullman, Editor, One Gracie Terrace, New York, NY 10028, or at cullman2@nyc.rr.com.

Literacy Harvest Call for Papers

Literacy Harvest is the annual journal of the Literacy Assistance Center. Published since 1992, this peer-reviewed publication highlights research, trends, and exemplary practices in adult, family, and youth literacy education.

The theme of the fall 2006 issue of *Literacy Harvest* is Supporting Immigrants' Success. We solicit articles on the theory and practice of adult, family, or youth literacy education that supports first- and second-generation immigrants in meeting the goals that brought them to this country. Such articles might examine the role of research and continuous program development, raise issues and concerns about current research and practice in the field, or explore practical ideas for enhancing the literacy development of immigrant adults and families. Suggested topics include:

- Ways in which English literacy development helps adult immigrants to obtain meaningful work, participate in their children's education, maintain their health, or participate in democratic processes
- The role of such instructional frameworks as participatory education, project-based learning, or cooperative learning in fostering learning among non-native speakers of English
- Convergences and dissimilarities between literacy education for native and non-native speakers of English
- English literacy education for learners who have limited literacy in their native language

This list is not exhaustive. If you have an idea for an article that fits the theme but is not listed here, please contact the editor at publications@lacnyc.org.

Submission Guidelines

- Manuscripts should be between 1,000 and 5,000 words.
- Use a common font such as Times New Roman or Arial.
- Submit manuscripts as attachments, in MS Word or RTF format, to publications@lacnyc.org.
- Include a separate cover sheet with the manuscript title, authors' names, addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses.
- The names of the authors should not appear in the text.
- Follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition, for reference style guidelines.

Manuscripts are due March 1, 2006. We would appreciate your letting us know in advance that you are planning to submit an article by emailing publications@lacnyc.org or calling 212.803.3332.