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ABSTRACT

This report examines the effectiveness of elementary school-based family literacy programs and describes the first year evaluation of a middle-school-based family literacy program in Baltimore, Maryland. In section one it reviews the literature on adult education and early childhood intervention and proposes a hypothesis of the broad pathways by which family literacy programs might impact adults and children. Four family literacy programs are used to illustrate the gains achieved by such programs. In section two, the report describes the evaluation of a middle-school-based family literacy program and identifies the challenges of implementing a family literacy program at this level of schooling. Based on classroom observations, interviews, and individual outcome measures, the evaluation revealed small but encouraging accomplishments. It found that adult participants had positive attitudes toward education, often did their own homework together with their children, and improved the use of literacy skills in their daily lives. In section three, the report discusses the need to clarify program labels and goals, develop successful collaborations, improved measures of adult literacy, the impact of evaluation on program staff, and the efficacy of middle schools as sites for family literacy programs. (Contains 47 references.) (MDM)

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CENTER ON FAMILIES,
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SMALL WINS

The Promises and Challenges of Family Literacy

Lori J. Connors

Report No. 22 / April 1994

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The Promises and Challenges of Family Literacy

Lori J. Connors

Johns Hopkins University

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CENTER ON FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, SCHOOLS & CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The nation's schools must do more to improve the education of all children, but schools cannot do this alone. More will be accomplished if families and communities work with children, with each other, and with schools to promote successful students.

The mission of this Center is to conduct research, evaluations, policy analyses, and dissemination to produce new and useful knowledge about how families, schools, and communities influence student motivation, learning, and development. A second important goal is to improve the connections between and among these major social institutions.

Two research programs guide the Center's work: the Program on the Early Years of Childhood, covering children aged 0-10 through the elementary grades; and the Program on the Years of Early and Late Adolescence, covering youngsters aged 11-19 through the middle and high school grades.

Research on family, school, and community connections must be conducted to understand more about all children and all families, not just those who are economically and educationally advantaged or already connected to school and community resources. The Center's projects pay particular attention to the diversity of family cultures and backgrounds and to the diversity in family, school, and community practices that support families in helping children succeed across the years of childhood and adolescence. Projects also examine policies at the federal, state, and local levels that produce effective partnerships.

A third program of Institutional Activities includes a wide range of dissemination projects to extend the Center's national leadership. The Center's work will yield new information, practices, and policies to promote partnerships among families, communities, and schools to benefit children's learning.

Abstract

This report builds on our previous work in evaluating an elementary school-based family literacy program. In section one of this report we review the literature on adult education and early childhood intervention, and we outline a hypothesis of the broad pathways by which family literacy programs might impact adults and children. Four family literacy programs, which included three components of service -- adult education, early childhood education, parenting -- are used to illustrate the "small wins" achieved by these programs. In section two we describe the first year evaluation of a middle-school-based family literacy program and identify the challenges of implementing a family literacy program at this level of schooling. The first-year evaluation revealed small but encouraging accomplishments: adult participants had positive attitudes toward education, often did their own homework together with their children, and improved the use of literacy skills in their daily lives. In section three we discuss five issues that need continued discussion and debate in the field as we continue to seek better ways of improving the educational and economic opportunities for adults and children in our country.

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Introduction

Since the 1960s and the introduction of the National Head Start program, efforts to improve outcomes for children in school also have focused on the parent's role in supporting young children's learning (Comer, 1980; Scott-Jones, 1992; Zigler & Styfco, 1993). A large body of literature supports the correlation between parents' education and children's development and suggests that parents with more education are better able to transfer their knowledge to their children (Hess & Holloway, 1979; Sticht, 1975; Sticht, 1992). However, knowledge of the specific nature of parental influence on children's cognitive skills is limited (Sticht, 1992).

Intervention programs for parents with low literacy skills have begun to proliferate in order to increase parents' literacy skills and to improve the learning environment of the home. Many family literacy or intergenerational programs are based on the expectation that parents' newly developing skills will transfer intergenerationally to their children. Two empirical questions reflected in this statement are: Do parent's literacy skills or job skills improve as a result of training? And if so, how much improvement is needed before a direct or indirect impact is seen on children's development? We will turn to the literature in search of answers to these difficult and complex questions. However, according to Sticht (1992), "A major problem is that the knowledge base on which to develop programs that aim to improve both adult's cognitive skills and such skills in the adult's children is very meager..." (p.4).

In section one of this report, we review selected evaluations of family literacy programs and describe the expected benefits for adults and children from participation in family literacy programs. In the second part of the report, we describe the evaluation of the Parent Academy (PA), a middle-school-based family literacy project. Although this is the first year of program operation, the results confirm and add to the results of research on families of younger students. They also point to the particular challenges of implementing a family literacy program in a middle school environment. In the third section of the report, we discuss themes and challenges to the field of family literacy as it continues to develop.

The Effectiveness Of Family Literacy Programs

Adult Education Programs

Reviews of adult basic education programs (Datta, 1992; Duffy, 1977· Duffy, 1992; Mikulecky, 1992) generally find that education and training programs have not made significant strides in improving the literacy skills or job opportunities of participants. The average gain in adults' reading skills across studies is slightly more than one grade level. Duffy (1992) reports that much of the gains that have been found can be attributed to the adult's re-entry into an educational setting. Many students lose a significant portion of their gains within weeks of leaving the program if the skills learned are not subsequently used in further academic work or employment (Reder, 1992).

Problems in observing measurable gains in adult literacy or job skills are exacerbated by the high dropout rates common to these programs. Dropout rates in adult literacy programs are typically in excess of 50 percent (Duffy, 1992). The U.S. Department of Education's 1992 study of federally supported adult education programs reported that 36 percent of all new clients who enroll leave before completing 12 hours of instruction and the median hours of instruction completed by those who persist is 43 hours (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Thus many adults are not staying in programs long enough to realize significant gains. It may take anywhere from 50 to 150 hours of instruction to improve more than one year or one grade level on adult literacy measures (Hayes, 1991; Mikulecky, 1992; Park, 1992).

Most adult learners will need to accumulate these hours in small doses given the competing demands on their time (Reder, 1992). For example, Askov, Maclay, & Bixler (1992) report that a computer-based instructional program for Chapter 1 parents showed gains of more than one year on informal reading tests for those who completed at least 20 hours of instruction. Askov et al.'s (1992) results suggest that narrowly defined instruction (i.e., vocabulary development) can improve adults' performance on tests designed to measure the specific skills taught in relatively short periods. The results *do not* suggest that 20 hours of instruction will significantly influence the reading or overall literacy skills of adults (Park, 1992).

Early Intervention Programs

Evaluations of early childhood interventions have also illuminated the difficulties in achieving long-term cognitive gains in children as a result of time-limited interventions. Although graduates of preschool programs initially show gains on intelligence tests, the impact often fades in the early years of elementary school. The effects of early intervention programs may be noted on more indirect indicators of healthy child development and learning potential. For example, graduates of quality preschool programs have been found to have lower rates of assignment to special education classes, less retention in grade (Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1978; Consortium for Longitudinal Studies, 1983), better social emotional characteristics (McKey, Condelli, Ganson, & Barrett, 1985); and better school adjustment and fewer absences from school (Copple, Cline, & Smith, 1987).

What we have learned from the history of evaluations of early childhood programs (e.g., Head Start) is that perhaps we have been judging these interventions -- both adult and child focused -- with too narrow a lens (Zigler & Styfco, 1993). Rather than using a singular indicator of success, such as achievement gains, for family literacy programs, we must take a broader look at the effects of participation on achievement and the related effects on specific attitudes, behaviors, and practices which support and sustain the school success of children. Intervention programs designed to improve family conditions and the development of young children are not likely to be successful unless they recognize "that parents' abilities to meet their children's emotional and intellectual needs are inextricably bound to their own mental health, social and educational resources" (Morisset, 1993, pg. 25). Further, we should not be surprised if gains in achievement dissipate in time after the program ends if the larger environments of the child, such as the family, community, and school settings, are not considered (Wasik & Karweit, 1994; Young & Marx, 1992; Zigler & Styfco, 1993).

The Intergenerational Transfer Hypothesis

Two critical questions for family literacy programs which expect adults to transfer knowledge to children are: What specifically do parents transfer? and How? In response to *what* is transferred, Duffy (1992) suggests that parents *indirectly* influence their children's learning through the "new attitudes and the new skills that the adult introduces into the house and into the pattern of family interaction" (p. 62). He elaborates three hypotheses of *how* parents' attitudes, skills, and interactions may influence their children. These are:

1) If parents' beliefs about the importance or value of education increase as they participate in educational activities, then parents will communicate a more positive attitude toward education to their children.

2) If parents learn more about parenting practices which support the expectations and types of interaction occurring in schools (e.g., using oral directions or more positive communication techniques) as a result of participation in educational and parenting activities, then parents will use these skills at home with their children more frequently.

3) If parents increase the use of reading, math and other literacy skills at home as a result of participation in educational activities, then their children will have greater

exposure to models of literacy behaviors and more direct parent-child teaching opportunities in the home.

These three "conditions" -- a positive attitude towards education, improved parenting practices, and more exposure to literacy activities (Duffy, 1992) -- should lead to better prepared and supported students in school. These expectations have in fact been the underlying goals of most intervention programs targeting disadvantaged families (Nickse, 1992) whether the primary emphasis was on increasing adults' literacy skills or young children's preparation for schooling. Family literacy programs attempt to take the principles (and promise) of adult education programs and early childhood programs, and combine them with parenting education, in order to improve the quality of life for all family members. Parenting education, comprehensively defined, includes information on parenting practices and children's development, as well as modeling of *how to* use this information to impact children's development.

The three components of service -- adult education, early childhood education, parenting education -- are meant to build on one another, producing a synergistic and integrated effect on adults and children. The premise is that deep and lasting change for families will occur only when parents have adequate literacy skills to enable them to support their families, economically and educationally, and when children's growth and development is sustained (Hayes, 1991). The National Center for Family Literacy (1993) recently reported that "family literacy programs work better than programs targeting adults or children alone -- keeping adult participants enrolled longer and providing greater educational gains for both parents and children" (pg. 8). The report suggests that these results are achieved because of the long-term, comprehensive, and learner-focused nature of family literacy programs. Although these results refer primarily to an evaluation of specific programs conducted by the National Center for Family Literacy and need to be confirmed by other researchers, the evidence is beginning to grow as to the effectiveness of family literacy programs.

Direct and Indirect Benefits of Family Literacy Programs

Although there is a burgeoning literature on family literacy programs, reviewers and others interested in the topic must carefully sift through the multiple meanings of "family literacy." The field may benefit from the diversity of definitions. However, in attempting to design programs to meet specific goals or to understand program effects, the imprecision in the use of the term -- family literacy -- can cause confusion (Nickse, 1990; Popp, 1991). The programs that are reviewed below were selected because they provided *direct service to both children and families* and offered the greatest opportunity to aid us in our understanding of "if and how" parents with low literacy skills transfer learning, directly or indirectly, to their children. Although they represent some of the most widely known and cited programs, most are in early stages of evaluation. The review is further hampered by a number of other methodological issues, such as small samples, attrition bias, and the lack of comparison groups, which limit the interpretation of the results reported. However, it is important to continually assess and revisit lessons learned from these programs' formative stages for new insights (Datta, 1992).

Parent and Child Education. Perhaps the most widely known family literacy program, Kentucky's Parent and Child Education (PACE) program, was piloted in 1986 and gradually implemented in 33 classrooms throughout Kentucky in 1990. This intensive model brought parents and preschool children to the school site (transportation was provided by the program) four days per week to receive adult basic skill instruction, preschool education, and parenting education (including parent-child together activities). Heberle (1992) reports that significant results were found in three areas: (1) parents' expectations of their children's future education improved, (2) parents' literacy levels improved -- 70% either received their GED or raised their academic skills by two or more grade levels -- and (3) children's learning skills improved.

The Kenan Trust Family Literacy Project. This project, operated by the National Center for Family Literacy, has replicated the PACE program in Kentucky and throughout the nation. Seaman (1992) and Darling & Hayes (1989) investigated the effects of the program on parents and children who had participated in one of fourteen programs from 1986-1991 (twelve were PACE projects). Children's attendance, test scores, and classroom teacher ratings were reviewed and parents and family literacy program teachers were interviewed. Project staff reported that parents' personal problems, such as lack of transportation, marital problems, or medical problems, significantly influenced the ability of some parents to persist and succeed in the program. Parents who persisted reported that they experienced changes as a result of participation in the program:

(1) as individuals -- many were proud of themselves for the first time and no longer afraid of challenges;

(2) as learners -- many now read more, used the library, and had hopes for their own further education;

(3) as parents -- many were able to help their children with homework, read more to their children, and used more positive discipline techniques;

(4) as workers -- many now had jobs or felt more comfortable looking for work, and many wanted to increase from part-time to full-time work; and

(5) as community members -- many attended school functions and were more active in church or other community organizations.

Teacher ratings of children whose parents participated in the program indicated that most were doing as well as or better than other students in their class and most were ranked in the upper half of the class.

National Even Start Project. The Even Start program, a discretionary grant program to states to provide family literacy services, began in 1989 based on the successes of the PACE and Kenan programs. From 76 funded programs in 1989, it has grown to 340 programs in 1992, serving 20,000 families of preschool and early elementary children. An extensive, national evaluation of the Even Start program is underway, including an in-depth study of ten projects funded in 1989. Three reports describing the implementation and effects of programs funded in 1989 and 1990 have been released (St. Pierre et al., 1993a; St. Pierre et al., 1993b; St. Pierre et al., 1991).

A report (St. Pierre et al., 1993a) on the projects operating in 1990-91 found that children (n=1211) participating in Even Start projects improved on tests of school readiness skills and language development at double the rate expected due to maturation. Adults in the programs (n= 550) made small but positive gains on pre-post measures of adult literacy. Further analyses revealed that parents who had received more hours of parenting education had children who gained more on measures of language development . However, the amount that the parents participated in adult education was not significantly related to their children's gains on the language development test (St. Pierre et al., 1993b; Swartz, St. Pierre & Beckford, 1993).

Project SELF HELP. This program was operated by a community organization in an elementary school in Baltimore from 1991-1993. Although less intensive in terms of service delivery hours than the programs cited above, services were delivered to families in adult education, preschool education, and parenting education (including parent-child together activities). In addition, elementary school aged children received homework help during the school year, and families participated in a summer reading program. In an evaluation of the first year of the program, Dolan (1992a) reported that teacher's ratings of elementary students whose parents (n=24) were in the program significantly improved from the 1st to the 4th quarter of the school year compared to a matched sample. Students in the summer reading program maintained previous gains in reading over the summer months, and parents' literacy improved on tests of basic skills and life skills.

In the second year's evaluation of Project SELF HELP, Connors (1993) found that gains in mean scores on all measures of literacy were achieved by adults in the program sample. The preschool children with parents in the program showed improvement from fall to spring on measures of literacy, and the early elementary children showed improvement in levels of attendance and tardiness. For elementary children participating with their families in the summer reading program, reading performance improved over the summer and higher report card grades were maintained from spring to the following fall.

Also, parents' attitudes toward education and involvement with their children's learning improved. Parents completing the program reported that they talked more often to their children about school at home, had higher expectations for their children's educational achievements, and provided more educational resources for their children. Observational data confirmed changes in parents' use of positive communication and discipline techniques.

While all of the above results speak primarily of immediate, relatively short term gains and must be interpreted with some caution, a pattern is emerging of both indirect and direct benefits for children and adults of participation in family literacy programs. Table 1 shows a matrix of the benefits expected according to the literature from participating in family literacy programs, with the results reported by the programs just described.

Working with small samples and poor measurement tools, and confronted with the complexities and vagaries of program implementation, researchers and others in the field are often disappointed and frustrated with the difficulty of seeing big changes in participants as a result of family literacy programs. While we must remain cognizant of methodological issues, the table shows that these programs are achieving small, but consistent and concrete, improvements in both adults' and children's learning and educationally supportive behaviors. There is, then, a growing knowledge base of *how* parents with low literacy skills improve their own skills and that of their children.

We must look at these positive indications realistically, and expect family literacy interventions to achieve *small wins*, a term used by Weick (1984) to describe a short-term, perhaps more realistic, change in participants' behavior. A small win may be relatively unimportant on its own, but a series of small wins can create major change in individuals, families, practice, and policy (Datta, 1992; Hayes, 1991; Nickse, 1990). Family literacy programs alone cannot be expected to eradicate the effects of poverty or transform lives beset by crime, poor health care, and welfare dependency (Datta, 1992; Scott-Jones, 1992; Zigler & Styfco, 1993). We must give this emerging configuration of intervention services the time and funding to develop quality programs, implement these programs broadly and well, and slowly and incrementally measure the immediate and short-term gains with well-designed studies using valid measurement instruments.

In the next section we describe our evaluation of the Parent Academy, a middle school-based family literacy program. Very little knowledge exists about how family literacy programs, which have primarily served families of young children, can be

TABLE 1

A Comparison of Expected Effects With Reported Results of Four Family Literacy Programs

Expected Effects	Pace's Reported Results	Kenan's Reported Results	Even Start's Reported Results	Self Help's Reported Results
Improved Attitude Towards Education	parents expectations of children's future education significantly improved	many parents more confidant in ability to learn, expected children to complete high school	parents increased expectations for child's school success and graduation from high school	many parents had higher expectations for children's future education
Improved Parenting Skills	parents gave their children more choices and increased independence more often	many parents more patient with children at home, talked to children instead of spanking	parents more patient and used less physical punishment, more positive communication with children	many parents improved their use of positive communication and discipline techniques with their children
Greater Literacy Models in the Home	parents increased reading at home, engaged in "school-like" activities with children, sang songs with children	many parents increased reading of newspapers and books, helped children with homework more often	parents provided more reading materials in the home	many parents provided place for homework, had library cards, provided more educational resources
Improved *Adult* Literacy —Including receiving a GED and obtaining jobs	70% received GED or raised academic levels by 2 or more grades	many passed the GED, entered community college, had full or part-time job	small positive gains on pre-post measures of literacy	math and life skill scores improved significantly
Improved Learning Skills in *Children*	significant improvement in children's learning skills	75% ranked in upper half and 35% ranked in top fourth of class according to teachers	improved on tests of school readiness and language development	teacher ratings of elementary students improved, reading skills maintained over the summer, preschool literacy skills improved

implemented with parents of adolescents. We report the results of the first year of the evaluation of this program in order to share with others the issues involved in extending family literacy efforts to the middle school environment.

A Middle School Open Its Doors to Parents

A wide variety of literacy providers -- from libraries and community colleges to schools and community-based organizations -- have experimented with family literacy projects aimed at parents of preschoolers and elementary school children. No national models exist, however, which target middle-school-aged children and their parents in an attempt to break the intergenerational cycle of poor school achievement. This section describes the evaluation of a middle-school-based family literacy program.

In the spring of 1992, a Baltimore middle school and the Southeast Community Organization's Learning Is For Tomorrow literacy program (LIFT) were awarded a Special Projects grant from the Maryland State Department of Education. The middle school's parent-community specialist and the Director of LIFT collaborated in designing the Parent Academy (PA). The author participated in the on-going development and evaluation of the project.

The Parent Academy, located in a public middle school in the inner city of Baltimore, served families of the middle school and surrounding school community. The project offered adult literacy services and parenting education to adults and homework help to students. The purpose was twofold: to strengthen the literacy and parenting skills of parents of at-risk students and to enhance the home academic life and school performance of their children. Classes began in November of 1992 and concluded in June of 1993. During the summer (1993), a drop-in tutoring session was made available to participants.

Specifically, the goals of the Parent Academy were to:

1) improve adult literacy skills and prepare parents for higher level adult basic education classes;

2) enhance parenting skills and levels of self-confidence as primary educators of their children;

3) increase parent involvement in their children's school and academic careers by providing non-threatening opportunities to interact positively with school staff; and

4) assist parents in viewing the school as a personal resource and a partner in their children's educational process.

Methodology

In this first year of program delivery, the evaluation focused primarily on program development and implementation. Data were collected from participant intakes, staff logs, classroom observations, participant and staff interviews, and minutes from the regular program development-evaluation meetings held with the project staff and the evaluator. Although effects on participants were assessed through pre-post literacy measures of adults, these results are tenuous given the early level of implementation.

Program Description

Start Up Activities. The first year of the Parent Academy focused on program development -- a process of designing the program, beginning implementation and practice, and identifying problems throughout the year.

Project staff included:

- Parent-Community Specialist -- employed full-time by the middle school, with primary responsibility to the project as liaison to the school and on-site supervisor of project staff.

- Director of LIFT -- employed full time as Director of the community-based literacy organization, with responsibility to the project as grant manager, coordinator of program implementation, liaison to the State Department of Education and the evaluator, and literacy consultant to project staff.

- Instructor -- responsible for program delivery to adults and children.

- Peer-Parent Liaison -- primarily responsible for participant recruitment and retention, assisted instructor in program delivery and record keeping.

Initial planning sessions were conducted with all staff concerning orientation and training of the instructor, accommodation of the program at the school site, and introduction of the program to school teachers and staff.

Several strategies were employed to promote acceptance of the PA among school staff. The director of LIFT gave a presentation to teachers and staff before the school year began. The presentation focused on the potential benefits of the PA as a support to teachers and as a contribution to the school's efforts to secure greater parent involvement in children's learning. The parent-community specialist continuously "advertised" the PA in the school bulletin, on the recorded messages for parents which were accessed by telephone daily, and at school staff meetings and in-services.

Informal conversations with individual teachers regarding the PA and its activities also occurred.

Recruitment. Parent recruitment began in the summer of 1992. The middle school faculty were asked to identify parents who might be recruited for the program. From a list of 12 parents, five participants agreed to participate and were scheduled for an initial intake interview and testing.

A number of methods were used to continue to recruit participants throughout the year -- referrals from LIFT, ads in the local community paper; and flyers to local stores, community groups, and families. The peer-parent liaison made contacts with a parent liaison at another school, discussed the program at other community organizations, presented information to the PTA, and conducted an open house. Current participants also recruited new members.

A brochure describing and promoting the Parent's Academy was developed in February, 1993 and distributed to families and community groups. The PA staff and participants designed the brochure, the middle school's graphic arts teacher developed the layout and graphics, and the principal underwrote the printing costs.

To support participants' sustained attendance the peer-parent liaison called any participant who missed two consecutive days of class. The call was made to see if the program staff could assist the participant in any way, in order to facilitate continued attendance. The parent-community specialist (located on site) and the peer-parent liaison (who often serves as a substitute teacher in the school) also made informal contacts with parents as opportunities arose during the regular school day. Approximately 40 bus tokens, funded by the school, were given to two participants to enable them to attend the program. Child care for parents with younger children was available, although few parents used this service.

Profile of Participants. Completed intakes were available for 16 adult participants. Twelve were female and four were male. They ranged in age from 16 to 56 years old. The highest grade completed by participants ranged from the sixth through the 12th grade, and two participants had a high school diploma or equivalent. Ten participants were single, two were divorced, two were separated, and two were married. Two of the 16 participants were African American, whereas the others identified their race as white.

Our group has come together to learn. They are learning not only school work, but parenting skills, every day life skills, computers, and crafts. Our first goal is to make everyone feel welcome. We have young and old coming together (to learn) and helping one another. It is the ultimate goal of many of our students to earn their GED. They come to us with the hope of improving their skills and going out into the work force. They are usually very committed to this goal. Sometimes outside influences are a problem; such as children's health problems, shortage of money, other family members' problems, and conflicts with spouses or mates that interfere with the time and energy needed to study. (excerpt from the peer-parent liaison's log)

Twelve of the participants had children, including one grandparent who was the primary caretaker for her grandson. The number of children per participant ranged from one to four. Six participants had children currently attending the middle school.

All except one of the participants were currently unemployed; most had worked before. Half of the families were on public assistance. Six participants had been in some form of adult education program before attending the PA. Although most participants had library cards, fewer than half reported using the card.

Of the nine parents for which the information was available, all reported helping their children with homework and seven of the nine parents provided their children with a specific place to study. Just two parents knew their children's homeroom teacher, although most knew the principal and assistant principals. Seven parents said they had attended a PTA meeting and five had volunteered at some time in any of their children's schools.

Skill levels. The *Wide Range Achievement Test* (WRAT) was used to assess beginning skills levels of adults in reading and spelling. Pre-test WRAT scores were available for 13 participants. On the reading subtest, raw scores ranged from 21 to 95. The mean reading level was the sixth grade, first month (raw score 60, scale score 6.1). On the spelling subtest, raw scores ranged from 12 to 77. The mean spelling level was fifth grade, second month (raw score 41, scale score 5.2).

Program Delivery and Curriculum. Classes began in November, 1992 and concluded in June, 1993. Classes were held on Monday through Wednesday for two hours in the late afternoon in the parent-community specialist's room at the school. A total of 85 classes (170 hours of instruction) were conducted.

> The group works together very hard on things like math or grammar. They help each other with answers. They share ideas on many things. If one person has trouble with a math problem, they sometimes stop what they are working on and give suggestions. It was wonderful to see their faces light up when a skill that they had trouble with finally became clear. They wanted to extend math time on many days. (excerpt from the peer-parent liaison's log)

The curriculum evolved from the needs and interests of the participants and covered the following topic areas: reading, math, writing, parenting, and life skills. The total number of lessons devoted to each curriculum area and examples of the types of activities are noted below:

CURRICULUM AREA	*TOTAL NUMBER OF LESSONS	EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITIES
Reading	59	language experience stories, grammar, spelling, reading newspaper articles, parenting books
Math	64	subtraction, long division, multiplication, decimals, fractions
Writing	36	responses to a question prompt, personal opinion, letter writing, poems, language experience stories
Parenting	58	smoking, AIDS and other sexuality issues, influence of peers, dealing with angry and defiant behavior, racism
Life Skills	38	current events, race and ethnic issues, coupon shopping, driver's license, computers

* The total number of lessons add up to more than 85 because more than one lesson was conducted during each class session.

The curriculum was learner-centered -- it evolved from the expressed personal and child-related needs and interests of the learners. For example, parents often read an article from the newspaper and then identified spelling words, wrote a related story or discussed the issue in the parenting lesson. The instructor used both personal issues of the participants (e.g. parenting concerns) and social/political issues (e.g. the Waco, Texas incident) to make the lessons more meaningful and relevant.

In another example, the instructor presented a lesson on contraceptives and discussed the issue of distribution of contraceptives in schools. Participants shared their own experiences and concerns. One participant suggested that parents conduct a poll of students regarding their concerns about sexuality; and ask teachers what they are teaching kids about sexuality. Another example integrated writing and parenting in an assignment to "Compare the way your parents explained sex to you with how you intend to explain (or have explained) sex to your child."

Training in the use of computers began in February, 1993. Approximately eight computer sessions were held. Participants focused on becoming familiar with the keyboard and computer functions, word processing skills, and writing activities with their children.

Parenting and Parent-Child Activities.

> Some participants need help with parenting problems and this is a very important area of discussion in class. Some are unsure of how to handle a certain parenting situation when it occurs. Some are upset by their children's reactions of anger or defiance. Parents are particularly concerned with their children's possible drug use, smoking, truancy, disrespect, and general distrust of adults. Many of our parents have children with medical problems. When parents have problems at home they usually don't have anyone to turn to. Some are in one-parent families. (excerpt from the peer-parent liaison's log)

Although participants' needs for parenting information and support were successfully woven throughout the daily lessons, it proved more difficult to attract middle school students to attend the program in order to conduct regular, on-site parent-child activities, as intended. Also, because not all participants had middle-school-aged children, appropriate activities had to be designed for multiple age groups. Some parents preferred to use their time at the PA as a break from the demands of parenting and others had difficulties in arranging transportation or child care in order for their younger children to be present. For these reasons, focused parent-child activities were held on specific occasions, although some children occasionally accompanied their parent to the program on a drop-in basis.

The first parent-child together activity was held in December, 1992 to make holiday bows for the school. Before the session, parents discussed among themselves how they felt about having their child with them in class and how to resolve any areas of concern that might arise during the activity. Parents also practiced bow-making so they would feel comfortable with their own abilities. Four parents and seven children attended this session. Parents and children made the bows for the school and then discussed holiday traditions and family plans for Christmas. They then had a snack together and listened to Christmas music. This activity was successful in helping both parents and children to see the PA as a friendly, positive experience within the school environment.

A second activity, joint parent-child writing using the school's computers, was designed to encourage parent-child communication through a medium that was appealing to the children. Initially the instructor gave parents and children a question to respond to on the computer; parent and child took turns responding on the word processor. In other activities, the parent or child generated the computer dialogue or they wrote a poem together.

The first parent-child computer activity occurred in March, 1993 in the school's computer room. Some of the gap in time between the bow making activity and this session occurred because of the delay in obtaining access to the computers. Once access was gained, the instructors also allowed time for the parents to become familiar with the computers without their children present.

Thereafter, parent-child together time on computer was scheduled to occur every other Tuesday. The peer-parent liaison reported in her attendance log that four children attended in March and three children attended in April. Two classroom observations in March confirmed that two to three middle school students were present on these days. For both observations, the adults had a language arts and math lesson while the children observed or did their homework, occasionally joining in the lesson. For the second half of the session, parents and children went to the computer room together and worked on the shared writing activity.

In May, 1993, parents and children went on a field trip together to Washington, DC to visit Senator Mikulski's office and to observe a Senate session in conjunction with a classroom lesson. Four parents and one child attended. This was the first experience riding on a train for three of the participants.

Data Collection

Classroom observations. Two observations of the program were conducted by the evaluator in March, 1993 in order to assess progress in implementation and to identify areas which required further training and development.

The greatest strength of the program is the obvious ease and warmth among instructors and participants. The atmosphere is open, accepting, and allows participants to feel comfortable in asking questions and identifying areas of uncertainty. Group members were observed helping each other with particular problems related to the lesson. Group members also seemed to show a general regard for the well-being of each other.

Use of classroom time and curriculum content required further attention. The evaluator suggested that the peer-parent liaison take a more active instructional role in order to allow participants more opportunity to work on individual goals. While continuing to maintain a learner-driven curriculum, classroom activities could integrate more effectively discussion topics, class work, and homework; including how the computer time can reinforce and supplement class work.

Program development-evaluation meetings. Five meetings to discuss program implementation and evaluation issues were held with all staff present, including the evaluator. Minutes were taken and distributed to all staff. Among the issues discussed at the meetings were the role of the instructor and peer-parent liaison, retention strategies, curriculum development, data collection methods, and parenting adolescents.

In a review of the meeting notes, recurrent themes and issues in program development and implementation were identified. For example, one of the first issues to be discussed was whether to enroll only parents of the middle school or to allow any community member interested in the project to enroll. Given the school's belief that they are a resource to the overall community, it was decided that any interested participant could enroll. While the group made this decision to be in concert with the school's philosophy, the resulting range of participants' personal/parenting issues presented challenges to the development of the parent-child component.

A second recurrent theme of discussion centered on the balance of curriculum activities -- between formal skill development and addressing personal issues. How to respond to participants' current and immediate personal needs and concerns while meeting participants' long range goals for completing the GED required the instructor to be flexible within the goals of the program. At times the instructor had to abandon his planned lessons in order to respond to participants' concerns. We continued to refine and revise the curriculum to ensure that it was meeting both the long- and short-term goals of the participants.

Other concerns of the parents of middle school children, such as drug use and defiant behavior, were also discussed. Project staff had to be realistic in terms of the level of family needs versus the capacity of the project to meet these needs. Continual efforts to identify other sources of support for families within the school and community were addressed.

Results of Program Implementation

Staff interviews. All staff were interviewed at the end of the program year regarding implementation, school-community relations, and evaluation issues. They identified the accomplishments of the first year of implementation and areas needing continued program development.

Implementation. All staff agreed that the adult literacy component of the project had been successfully implemented this year. However, a number of improvements were suggested for next year -- increase the focus on individualized, learner-centered instruction; better integrate computer activities into the curriculum, and further develop the parenting and parent-child components. Training to support these project goals will also be developed and offered to staff.

School-Community Relations. The parent-community specialist was particularly pleased with the acceptance and support of the school's faculty for the program. She specifically sought to inform staff about the project in order to facilitate the acceptance of the program in the school community. Her goal for next year will be to develop greater involvement of school support staff (e.g. nurse, social worker) in the project. The instructors felt accepted by the majority of the school staff, except for some initial resistance by the computer teacher. They plan to continue to develop relationships with other school staff and to help project participants make contact with appropriate school and community resources.

Evaluation. All agreed that the program implementation-evaluation meetings helped all staff "catch up" and reflect on the various project components and different staff roles. These meetings offered the only non-interrupted time for the school-based staff to meet. The meetings also helped to sensitize and reduce the "fear" of evaluation for staff who had not had previous experience with research or formal evaluation activities.

Program Outcomes

Attendance. Patterns of daily attendance ranged from no attenders to 10 attenders for a given session. Average daily attendance for the eight months of the school year program was three. A total of 85 two-hour sessions were held, for a total of 170 hours of possible instruction time. Enrollment was open, so that participants could begin the program at any time during the year, as well as stop attending and then return at a later date during the school year.

Retention. The Maryland State Department of Education counts any participant that attends at least 12 hours during the program year as "served" by the program. Of the 21 participants who initially enrolled in the Parent Academy, 13 participants were served, according to this definition. This resulted in a 61% retention rate. In a review of the peer-parent liaison's log, it was noted that participants stopped attending or had irregular attendance for a number of reasons, including finding a job, having medical problems, and having difficulty with child care or transportation. Two participants who had stopped attending the school-year program returned to the summer program.

Instructional Hours. The total number of instructional hours per participant ranged from four hours to 112 hours. About one third (n=8) of the participants attended between 1 and 11 hours; about one fifth (n= 3) of the participants attended between 12 and 24 hours; one third (n= 7) of the participants attended between 25-63 hours; and about one fifth (n=3) participants attended for more than 64 hours.

Skill Growth. The *Maryland Adult Performance Program* (MAPP) measures functional literacy in reading/life skills and the *California Competency Assessment System* (CASAS) measures functional literacy in math. These tests were required by the funders, and are commonly used in adult education programs to assess the literacy of adults functioning at the pre-GED, or below sixth grade levels.

Seven participants had complete pre- and post-test MAPP scores available. Positive gains were made by four participants, ranging from 1 to 35 points; and negative changes were noted for three participants, ranging from 8 to 10 points. CASAS scores for these seven participants showed positive gains for six participants, ranging from 1 to 13 points. For one participant, scores decreased by 12 points.

The developers of the CASAS report that educationally significant gains are not expected to occur with less than 70-100 hours of instruction (St. Pierre et al., 1993b). Further, three-to-four point gains per year is the average expected on these tests for adults in literacy programs, that are functioning at the lower skill levels. Due to content validity and other methodological issues with these (and other) adult literacy measures, negative results are not uncommon (Park, 1992). In the relatively short time period of this program it is common to see widely fluctuating patterns of gains due to participants' learning disabilities, test anxiety, and life experiences.

No clear association between hours of attendance and gains on the CASAS or MAPP were found for our participants. This is consistent with results found in other evaluations of adult education programs (Duffy, 1992). Adults with low literacy levels usually require more than 100-150 hours of instruction in order to realize significant gains in skill levels on the instruments currently available (Mikulecky, 1992; Park, 1992).

Participants' Reports of Change. Six participants were interviewed at the end of the program year. The following summarizes their reports of changes they experienced as a result of participation in the PA.

1. *How has the Parent Academy helped you in ...?*

(a) Learning/literacy -- Participants reported that they believed they had improved in math, grammar, writing, and spelling. Some participants also mentioned that this was their first exposure to computers. Participants gave examples of how their new literacy skills helped them in their daily lives -- writing grocery lists, balancing a checkbook, helping with their children's math homework.

(b) Parenting -- Of the five participants interviewed that were parents, two mentioned that it helped to reduce their sense of isolation when they had the opportunity to talk to other parents about common parenting issues. The other participants reported that the group discussions helped to reinforce their confidence in their own parenting skills.

(c) Friendship, advice, or support -- All participants were particularly positive and pleased about the opportunities they had in class to talk and share with others. Participants repeatedly mentioned the openness of the instructors and their ability to create a warm and supportive classroom environment. Two participants identified specific instances where another class member had given them information they needed. One participant said that attending the Parent Academy had helped her to recover from a depression she was experiencing.

2. *As a result of being in the Parent Academy have you changed any of your ...?*

(a) Personal habits -- "I keep the house cleaner." "I spend more time reading to my children." "My spelling is better when I write." "I'm almost able to balance my checkbook."

(b) Family practices -- Two participants reported that they were able to help their children with their homework more often.

(c) School involvement -- Two parents mentioned their increased access to their children's middle school teachers, which gave them the opportunity for informal "check-in" sessions. One parent became employed as a lunchroom aide in the middle school through the efforts of the parent-community specialist. Another attended a workshop as a parent representative of the middle school.

Summary

The parent and staff interviews, classroom observations, staff logs, and literacy skills measures suggest that the PA was beginning to reach some of the goals for participants. Some participants had begun to improve their adult literacy skills in preparation for higher level basic education classes (Goal 1). Some participants had improved their parenting skills and self-confidence as their children's primary educator (Goal 2). Parents viewed the school and school-related staff as positive, supportive and available as a personal resource for their own and their children's needs (Goals 3 and 4).

These are small, but concrete and important accomplishments given the complexity of implementing a family literacy program at the middle-school level, and considering the stage of program development of the PA. Much of the evidence is anecdotal concerning the impact on participants' personal lives and parenting skills, and although the scores and changes on the adult literacy measures vary widely, we do see an emerging pattern of indirect and direct benefits of participation for the adult participants. Participants who persisted had positive attitudes toward education and were visible educational role models to their children; parents often did their own homework together with their children. Adults improved the use of literacy skills in their daily lives, e.g., balancing a checkbook, improving writing skills, passing the written test for a driver's license.

There were a few firsts for our students. The first time some of them ever did a crossword puzzle. The first time someone wrote a poem to her child. Another student wanted to learn percentages so she would know how much she could save at a sale (usually she had to ask the clerk). The lessons on the computer gave them a feeling that they would one day be able to get a job in someplace other than a fast food restaurant. The parents that have children in the middle school had the added help of staying in touch with teachers and other school events. (excerpt from the peer-parent liaison's log)

Given that direct services to children were minimal, no conclusions can be drawn about the impact on the children of participants. The challenges of integrating adolescents into a program which supports their needs for autonomy and captures their widely fluctuating interests at this age remain to be addressed. The joint dialogue program on the computer needs further development, but holds promise as a method to increase both parent-child communication and the computer literacy skills of parents and children.

The issues of school-community collaboration and the effects on project staff of participation in program evaluation have not been widely addressed in the family literacy literature. However, given the necessity for collaboration in delivering comprehensive family services and the oft-required evaluation component of typical funding sources for family literacy, it is critical to take a close look at how these factors impact program implementation. These issues are discussed, along with selected other issues pertinent to the field of family literacy, in the next section of this report.

Forging New Paths in Family Literacy

Family literacy programs are an emerging educational intervention. Because of our concern with both the low levels of literacy in the general adult population (Kirsch et al., 1993) and the low levels of academic attainment of our nation's school children, great hope is pinned on the ability of these programs to break these downward cycles. We should be cautious in this line of thinking for a number of reasons. First, the research base on the effectiveness of educational interventions for low literate adults is limited. Reviews indicate that adult education programs are often ineffectual in making significant strides in moving adults with very low literacy skills towards greater educational or job opportunities. Second, our understanding of the process of transmission of knowledge and behaviors from adult to child, and child to adult, is primarily based on correlational data. Much work remains to be done to identify specific pathways of transmission and to investigate causal relationships. Third, our ability to design, implement, and evaluate family literacy programs is hampered by this limited knowledge base, and often crippled by inadequate funding, staff training, and evaluation methodology.

Only when family literacy programs are viewed realistically, as one piece of a comprehensive, national system to support families in their schools, neighborhoods and communities, will we be able to nurture the development and growth of these programs. Further, we need to recognize that small, broadly defined accomplishments are valuable gains on the road to seeking long term change. The number of family literacy programs increases yearly, although many terminate after one year because of funding instability. The growing discussion in the literature of appropriate program goals and philosophy, implementation issues, and outcomes for adults and children belie the many unanswered questions and needed debate in the field.

In the final section of this report we discuss how the evaluation of the Parent Academy was impacted by some of these unanswered questions. We have selected some key themes, informed by our work in evaluating both Project SELF HELP and the Parent Academy, which build and extend the discussion of issues pertinent to family literacy (Connors, 1993; Dolan, 1992a).

ISSUE: The Need to Clarify Program Labels and Expected Results

There is broad consensus that family literacy programs for parents of young children must include at least three components of service -- adult education, parenting, and preschool education. The questions, and the challenge, for family literacy programs serving parents of school-age children are whether to provide direct services to children and what the nature of the service to children should be. As described earlier in the paper, Project SELF HELP, serving elementary school children, was able to provide services to children in half-day pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs, after-school homework help to elementary children, and a summer reading program to all children. These services were effective in supporting the development and school learning of the children, while providing opportunities for adult literacy and parent-child activities.

The Parent Academy had greater difficulty in the first year of program delivery in achieving a similar service delivery mix for the participants because of (1) the broad range of ages of the children of parent participants, including some who attended different schools from the program site; (2) the mix of parent and non-parent participants; and (3) the resistance of some of the middle-school-age children to extending their time at school in a classroom environment. The decision by the PA staff to allow enrollment of any interested community member reflected their commitment to the school as a community resource, but required compromises in the design and implementation of the program. This is an issue faced by many community-based providers, including schools, who cannot, or choose not to, limit their enrollment to narrowly defined parameters.

Nickse (1990) recognized the need for carefully defining the focus of interventions grouped under the broad rubric of family literacy. She offered a typology which classified family literacy programs based on the target of service (e.g., adult and/or child) and identified appropriate research questions related to each type of program. This typology is very useful, and although she recommends that programs use the typology to determine program goals and set realistic expectations for program outcomes, we may now need to develop a greater range of terms and standardized definitions associated with the target of services.

As the field has grown and developed, the broad, inclusive use of the label "family literacy" needs to be replaced by more precise terms which accurately identify, implicitly or explicitly, the goals of the program. Because the label "family literacy" has been applied to such a wide range of adult or child literacy programs that differ in service delivery, program goals, and program philosophy, confusion continues to exist (Nickse, 1990; Popp, 1991). It is important for the field to consider the variation within the population of parents with "low-literacy" skills: the potential participants include individuals functioning with few or no literacy skills, at basic skill levels, at pre-GED levels, and even those refreshing their high school skills in preparation for further education or job opportunities. Individuals functioning at the lowest skill levels are often the hardest to recruit and retain in many adult and family literacy programs (Hypki, 1994).

This is not to say that all programs *should be* family literacy programs (implying an impact on adults, children, and parent-child relations). The needs of our society for a range of literacy services are well founded, as is the need to improve the effectiveness of traditional adult educational programs. However, it is still an empirical question as to whether family literacy interventions can and do have a significant impact on adult literacy, student achievement, *and* parent-child relations and family life (Hayes, 1991; Nickse, 1990). Further, if family-focused interventions are measured against the same "yardstick" as family literacy interventions, we have lost an opportunity to determine the unique contributions of the components of different interventions. At this time it seems prudent to focus efforts on identifying changes in adult literacy and parenting knowledge and beliefs as a result of participation in *family-focused* interventions. Concurrently, we should continue to explore the potential additional impact on participants in *family literacy* programs related to changes in parent-child relations, child outcomes, and family functioning when these programs provide direct attention to these areas.

ISSUE: The Need to *Work At* Developing Successful Collaborations

Funding sources for family programs are increasingly requiring their recipients to collaborate with existing community agencies in the delivery of services. Collaborative efforts between established community resources hope to avoid duplication of services, reduce costs, share expertise, and provide a more holistic service delivery system for families (Dolan, 1992b; Sugarman, 1991). Schools and community literacy organizations are natural collaborators for delivering family literacy interventions: schools rarely have the adult literacy expertise and community organizations may need other sites to serve their clients.

The Parent Academy staff attempted to develop collaborative relationships with the school-based project staff, the literacy organization staff, and the faculty of the middle school. The experiences of the PA in working towards a successful collaboration suggest a number of steps for building these relationships.

- **First, planning together.** To build awareness of each other's needs and interests, the director of the literacy organization met with the parent-community specialist to prepare the grant and develop the program. Both were involved in hiring the instructor and the parent-peer liaison.

- **Second, sharing responsibilities.** Both the director of LIFT and the school's parent-community specialist took responsibility for program development based on their respective areas of expertise. The literacy director was responsible for grant management, curriculum development and staff training, and the parent-community specialist was responsible for securing space and resources at the school, establishing relationships between program staff and school staff, and identifying school and community resources for both referral of participants to the program and as resources to participants on-going personal and family needs.

- **Third, developing visibility.** Throughout the year activities were conducted to increase the visibility and awareness of the PA for both the school staff and the literacy organization staff. For example, the parent-community specialist made presentations to the school's faculty, both separately and jointly with the literacy director; included brief articles on the PA in the school's daily faculty newsletter; and made presentations to local parent and community groups and the Board of Education. Similarly, the director of LIFT invited PA staff to training activities at the community organization and made presentations to the community organization staff about the PA program in order to increase awareness and encourage appropriate referrals.

Melding two different cultures -- a school culture and a community organization culture, each with different organizational structures, areas of expertise, and histories of purpose -- is never easy, and takes time to develop into a relationship of trust and respect. Two of the significant challenges that the PA had to deal with related to time and the use of school resources.

Lack of time. School staff often have fairly structured schedules and limited flexible time compared to community organization staff. However, community organization staff are often overburdened by multiple responsibilities, limiting the amount of time available to devote to the development of a particular program. Due to these problems, the director of LIFT had difficulty in scheduling training time with the PA instructor and meeting time with the parent-community specialist.

The need to implement a program almost immediately upon receipt of a grant severely limits the program development phase of many projects. More critically for school-community collaborations, time for planning is most needed in the summer and early fall, precisely the time when school staff may be unavailable or overburdened with other preparations for their school responsibilities. Because no models existed for this middle-school based family literacy project, and given the comprehensiveness of its goals, the evaluation had to be sensitive to the stage of program development in documenting formative issues and evaluating program outcomes.

Use of school resources. The parent-community specialist was successful in securing the support of the school principal and other school staff. The school provided the space and some classroom resources for the program. However, one program component required the use of the school's computers for both adult computer literacy skills and for the parent-child computer activities. PA staff initially had some difficulty in securing the cooperation of the school's computer teacher for the use of her room and computers after school. The teacher's reluctance appeared to be primarily related to concerns about the care of the computers, and once she felt comfortable with the PA instructor, access became easier.

Schools are increasingly called upon to open their doors to the community by providing space for after-school or evening programs or to integrate community programs in their buildings. The potential advantages for schools include extending the visibility of the school's programs and goals to the community and greater efficiency in the use of a public space. However, schools are often faced with limited resources and see their primary purpose as one of meeting the needs of children. Greater sensitivity among collaborators and the "host" school and a longer timeline to develop trust among those involved or affected by the collaboration may be needed to resolve these issues. Dolan (1992b), in a review of various models of integrated services in schools, suggests other *lessons learned* from successful collaborations, including securing the support of the principal and providing training and staff development.

ISSUE: The Need for Better Measures of Adult Literacy

Three elements suggested in the literature -- hours of instruction, content of instruction, and measures of literacy -- appear to have affected the impact of participation in the PA on adult literacy skills. Although the discussion of these issues will be presented separately for purposes of clarity, they are very much interrelated in practice. Here we attempt to integrate the findings of the PA evaluation with other results reported in the literature in order to pose new questions.

Hours of instruction. Simply put, it may take a lot of time to raise the literacy of adults with very low beginning skills to levels which would make a significant impact on their educational or economic prospects (Park, 1992). Educational theorists and researchers have devoted little attention to cognitive development in adults. Most often, models and expectations of learning to read in children, for example, have been the basis for instruction and indices of growth in adults (Duffy, 1992). Cognitive development proceeds in different ways in children beyond the early years, and we still have limited knowledge of how new learning takes place in adults.

One relatively consistent finding from evaluations of family literacy programs is that they are more effective than adult education programs in retaining adults for longer periods of time (Heberle, 1992; National Center for Family Literacy, 1993; Nickse, 1990; Seaman, 1992). Obviously, the better programs are at retaining students, the greater chance that participants will receive increased hours of instruction and achieve significant gains in the targeted outcomes. The retention rates typically reported for adult literacy programs are between 30-50% (Nickse, 1990; Paratore, in press), whereas family literacy programs (e.g., Kenan, Even Start) have reported rates of retention ranging from 50% to 85%. The Parent Academy achieved a 61% retention rate which might be expected given it delivered services with perhaps more "holding power" than a typical adult education program, but less than those provided by a family literacy program. That is, participants in programs which deliver services to children often report that on some days they attend because their children insist they do (Heberle, 1992).

A challenge to determining retention rates, and hence number of hours of instruction, can be described as "when does the clock stop ticking?" Although a significant proportion of participants in family literacy programs prematurely leave the program (e.g. using the figures above, anywhere from 15-40%); some participants will temporarily drop out of a program due to a personal or family crises, but then return once their lives stabilize (Connors, 1993). This pattern was also noted in the evaluation of the PA. One participant stopped attending for two months during the middle of the program and then returned to finish the year. Two other participants stopped attending in mid-year, but then returned during the summer program. The sample size is too small to make any definitive conclusions, but parents in either family-focused or family literacy programs often have multiple and competing needs, and may require more than one program year to make significant gains on adult literacy measures (Connors, 1993; Reder, 1992).

Content of instruction. As the National Center for Family Literacy (1993) suggests, one of the reasons family literacy programs are more effective than adult education programs in retaining participants is the focus on learner-centered instruction. Learner-centered instruction means that programs place great emphasis on determining the needs of the learner and responding to these needs through the curriculum. Programs which embrace a learner-centered philosophy also emphasize improvement in participants' self-esteem and self-confidence as critical to the realization and maintenance of gains in literacy skills (Hypki, 1994). This often results in fairly unstructured but, at its best, individualized educational experiences for learners.

> The parents have also learned how to share and express their feelings. For example, at the beginning of the year one student found it hard to make eye contact with either of the instructors. Now she is happy to give her opinion and offers advice during discussion time. (excerpt from the peer-parent liaison's log)

Learner-centered instruction may not readily result in gains on standardized measures of adult literacy, which often measure isolated, out-of-context skills rather than what was actually taught (Park, 1992). We do not have good measures for indicating the small wins expressed in the excerpt above -- learning to share feelings, making eye contact with "authority" figures, and feeling confident in one's ability to share ideas.

Program staff are often faced with the competing pressures of responding to participants' needs in order to keep them coming to the program, and realizing significant gains on standardized measures in order to keep the program funded. While it is possible to integrate activities that meet the personal and academic needs of learners, it takes great skill and training on the part of the instructor to achieve this balance successfully. A significant proportion of program development time was spent in the PA evaluation in assisting the instructor in this task. The PA instructor described the challenge quite well in his end-of-year evaluation of the program:

The parents who attended the PA bonded as a "family." The joys and disappointments, hopes and fears, laughter and tears were all shared in this setting. The small size of the group and the flexibility of the curriculum met the needs of these participants. On some days the class was a collection of individual tutoring sessions; some days, the class was a free-wheeling discussion of drugs and street violence; on other days the class was an academic setting with direct instruction on grammar, math, or writing skills. Because attendance was not always predictable, the instructor and parent-peer liaison had to be sensitive to the needs of the class at the moment. Planning in the traditional sense was not possible. The instructor and peer-parent liaison needed to rely on a repertory of teaching methods and have a supply of back-up learning materials (such as newspaper articles, puzzles, and life-skill oriented topics).

In addition, learner-centered instruction considers the context and the learner's intended use of literacy skills. Recent research from the cognitive sciences suggests that adults use both their knowledge of a specific skill (e.g., decoding) and their understanding of the subject matter to read a text (Duffy, 1992). Further, adults use different skills in reading-to-learn for school-related tasks and reading-to-do for work or home-related tasks (Mikulecky, 1982; Sticht, 1975). In the anecdotal reports of participants and staff of the PA, we see examples of positive change in participants' uses of literacy skills in their personal, daily tasks. For example, participants reported that they were better able to complete tasks such as balancing a checkbook, using percentages to determine the value of sale items when making purchases, and using reading skills to pass the written portion of a driver's test.

These are significant gains for participants because they impact their personal experiences with literacy and may represent "first steps" in the process of gaining deeper understanding and skill expression. But they are not necessarily captured on the literacy measures used to assess gains in adults. Duffy (1992) states, "Instruction will be most effective if it focuses on the particular tasks the individual will have to perform outside instruction, and if there is a bridge linking the new skills and knowledge to what the learner already knows" (p. 80). Given that family-focused and family literacy programs are attempting to assist participants in meeting their adult education goals while developing greater personal and family competencies, the content of instruction and the types of measures used to evaluate gains may need to be expanded or revised to reflect the broader focus of curriculum content.

Measures of literacy. Evaluations of adult education programs, including family literacy programs, are severely hampered by the lack of congruence between what is taught, what is measured by the test used, and what is valuable or needed by the participants once they leave the program. The isolated skills measured on the available literacy tests are often not the primary focus of instruction in adult literacy classes which are intent on meeting the life-skills needs (including self-confidence and self-esteem) of participants. The wide variability in adult reading performance, often influenced by the presence of learning disabilities and low self-confidence, exacerbates the problem of seeing significant progress in relatively short time periods (Park, 1992; Venezky, 1992).

Recent reports from the Even Start evaluation give other insights on the relationship between number of hours of instruction and amount of gain on a standardized measure of adult literacy. St. Pierre et al. (1993b) report that adults in Even Start programs make small gains on the CASAS and the amount of gain increases for those who participate in adult education more than 70 hours. More importantly, however, adults who enter with CASAS scores below 200 (which indicates difficulty with basic skills) make the greatest gains compared to adults with higher pre-test scores. Further, the authors state, "Changes in posttest scores are much more sensitive to the starting point of the adult than they are to the number of hours of adult education instruction" (p. 9-6).

The authors make a provocative statement in interpreting their findings:

> The implication of this finding is that programs such as Even Start will have the greatest overall impact by recruiting very low-literate adults and providing them with modest amount of instruction (about 50 hours). Providing additional instruction to these same adults results in diminishing returns, as measured by the CASAS. (p. 9-6)

We cannot test this hypothesis with the PA sample because the number of PA participants for whom pre-and-post test data are available is too small (n=7), and their pre-test scores on the CASAS were in a slightly higher range (e.g. 204-219). Even in the Even Start sample, just 13% of the participants entered with pre-test scores at 200 or below. Further, regression effects probably played a part in the association of gains with number of hours of instruction for adults with the lowest skills levels (Park, 1992).

This statement presupposes that the CASAS is a valid and adequate determinate of the effectiveness of adult literacy instruction. Most adult literacy practitioners and researchers would say that it, and most other currently available measures of literacy, are not appropriate measures for measuring the growth of adults' literacy skills. The CASAS, and others such as the TABE and ABLE, have problems with content and internal validity (Park, 1992). Nevertheless, St. Pierre et al.'s findings point to two critical issues that need continued investigation. First, the finding underscores the need to develop improved measures of literacy which sensitively and appropriately assess what is "gained" in literacy programs. Second, should family literacy programs target their services to a specific segment of families with very low literacy levels? We need more research that explores this question and others related to "matching" level of service delivery with level of participants' need (Connors, 1993).

ISSUE: The Need to Consider the Impact of Evaluation on Program Staff

The methodological difficulties of evaluating family literacy programs are widely discussed in the literature (Connors, 1993; Datta, 1992; Dolan, 1992a; Hayes, 1991; Orasanu, 1992; Park, 1992). One area which has not received sufficient attention is the nature of the relationship between program staff and researchers in conducting the evaluation. Researchers have expertise in evaluation methodology and are very eager to learn about and understand family literacy programs and their impact on participants. Program staff have expertise in implementing the program and responding to participants needs, although they also are interested in understanding the impact of the program on participants. Practitioners and researchers need to recognize and reconcile their differing outlooks and areas of expertise while working together to improve specific programs and the general field.

For researchers, the critical tasks are to develop an appropriate evaluation design and methodology that reflects: (1) the best of what the evaluation field currently has to offer, (2) the stage of program maturity, and (3) the philosophical and practical needs of project staff. Project staff must be willing to share their needs, insights, and concerns about specific aspects of program implementation or participant outcomes with the researcher in shaping the evaluation. At the most basic level, researchers and project staff face the challenge of building a relationship which allows the evaluation to be integrated into, and become a part of, the processes of program implementation (Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center, 1990; Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center, 1992).

Program development and evaluation meetings. In the Parent Academy evaluation, regular program development and evaluation meetings were held with the researcher and all project staff as a method of achieving this goal. The purposes of the meetings were to identify on-going program development needs, continually reassess and refine the evaluation, and to document project staffs' insights on changes and areas of growth of participants.

According to project staff, the meetings forced them to take time out from their busy schedules to come together as a group to reflect on the implementation of the project. Through meeting discussions, project staff had to make decisions which clarified program goals and staff roles. According to one staff member, "It was important that you (the evaluator) were present at the meetings because it said to me that you saw your role as more than an outside evaluator and data collector. Your involvement helped to improve the program, revise the original goals and objectives, and keep us on track." Equally important, project staff reported that they "felt supported and that their concerns were valued" and that they "had time to understand and reduce their fear of evaluation" (excerpts from staff interviews, 1993).

For the researcher, meetings and other opportunities to discuss and document the on-going process of program implementation resulted in unique glimpses into the contextual meaning of the program at the individual and organizational levels (Connors, 1993). The researcher came to know on a deeper level, for example, the complexities of recruiting and retaining program participants, delivering instruction to a diverse group of learners, and developing a collaborative relationship among the program, the school, and the community organization. This information would not have come to light if the evaluation had relied only on quantitative or standardized measures.

ISSUE: Middle Schools as Sites for Family Literacy Programs

As middle schools continue to improve their efforts to involve families, they will almost certainly be called on by parents and community members to open their doors for a variety of programs to serve their students' families and others in the community. When parents lack the literacy skills they need to be effective supporters of their children's education, or when parents have negative views of education because of their own previous failures, schools suffer in the form of less family involvement, less well prepared students, and less support for the school's educational goals for children. While involving families of adolescents presents particular challenges because of the changing needs of both students and families, adolescents continue to need the active support and involvement of their families (Epstein & Connors, 1992).

This program meets the needs of parents in the middle school's community to improve their academic skills and parenting/life skills. The PA became an important part of their weekly schedule and became a safe, caring place for the parents to share their innermost concerns about a wide range of subjects. The PA has been an excellent use of school facilities in a non-traditional way. Parents now view the school as a resource for themselves and their families not only during the 8-2:30 school day, but also after school dismissal. (excerpt from the instructor's log)

Can middle schools, with large buildings, many staff, more specialized and complex curriculums, and students drawn from a broader segment of the community, be effective hosts of or collaborators with family literacy programs? Based on our experiences with the Parent Academy, we would say *yes*-- if the design and expectations of the program reflect the special needs, interests, and concerns of this population. For the middle school involved in this project, collaborating with a community agency to provide literacy services for parents and community members resulted in:

- a responsive new practice to involve family and community members in the school, many of whom were previously categorized as the "hard-to-reach" parents;
- additional resources for the school in the form of the expertise of the community agency, as well as the hiring of a parent from the middle school as the project's parent-peer liaison;
- greater contact between parents of middle school children attending the program and the middle school children's teachers, as well as the involvement of two parents in new ways (e.g., as a paid lunch room aide and a parent representative on a school committee);
- increased visibility and awareness of the school as a community resource; and
- more positive views of the school by parents, and increased use of the school and school staff as a resource for their own and their children's needs.

Some of the particular challenges faced by this middle school family literacy program could apply to any school embarking on this type of intervention. All of the issues discussed above will need to be considered by schools, and would benefit from the help of adult literacy practitioners. For example, we discussed earlier the need to recognize issues related to time and the use of school resources in any collaboration between a school and a community organization.

Securing the active involvement of students with their parents in the program requires creativity, sensitivity, and persistence. The Parent Academy appears to have tapped a promising mechanism for involving middle school students -- the computer. Most middle school students are learning about computers in school, and many are drawn to the interactive nature of some computer applications. The medium of the computer may also serve as a "buffer" between parents and adolescents who are caught in negative communication patterns. Students can also play an active and prominent role in modeling for their parents particular uses of the computer, and in leading or shaping the interaction that occurs between them in the parent-child interactive sessions.

Summary: As the Field Grows, So Do the Questions

As parents will attest, for each stage of their children's development there are new questions and challenges to resolve. This section of the report has identified some of these "next stage" issues for research and development in the field of family literacy. Through our work in the field, and the experiences of others reported in the literature, we identify five areas where there is a need for continued discussion and debate.

Can we clarify program labels and expectations? Clarifying program labels -- for example, to include family literacy programs and family-focused programs -- would encourage greater recognition of the diversity of the field and help to define realistic expectations of various service delivery options.

Can we develop successful school-community collaborative relationships? Collaborative relationships often start with good intentions, but need patience and nurturing to develop into successful, working partnerships. We suggested three steps -- planning together, sharing responsibilities, and developing visibility -- and identified two issues -- time and use of resources -- that need to be considered in creating successful collaborations between schools and community organizations to provide family literacy programs.

Can we develop better methods of instruction and measures of adult literacy? We know vastly more about children's development of cognitive skills and successful methods of instruction than we do about adults' needs in these areas. New evidence from family literacy program evaluations suggest that learner-centered instruction, rather than the more traditional drill and memory of out-of-context skills; is more effective in keeping adults in programs longer. But adults in literacy programs often have the goal of completing their graduate equivalency exam, a test which requires knowledge of basic skills. Further complicating the issue is the fact that many believe the standardized instruments that measure the growth of adults' literacy skills do not adequately capture what is taught or what is needed by adults once they leave the program.

Can we integrate evaluation into on-going program development and staff training? Funders require most family literacy programs to conduct an evaluation. Policy makers want evidence of the benefits of programs they are expected to support. Researchers hope to gain greater understanding of the effects of family literacy programs. Practitioners often need outside funding to serve the needs of their clients. When researchers and program staff come together, they do so with different skills, different tasks to accomplish, and often, little awareness of the complexities of each other's roles.

Program evaluations must recognize these issues, and include as part of the evaluation design mechanisms to develop awareness, build trust, and share responsibilities. Rather than seeing evaluation as separate from the program, program staff and researchers can participate jointly in program development, implementation, and outcome assessment. We have described how in the evaluation of the Parent Academy, regular program development and evaluation meetings served to meet these goals.

Can middle schools offer family literacy services? Family literacy programs may be an effective tool for supporting and involving some of the "hardest-to-reach" families within schools. This new and responsive practice can reap rewards for middle schools, such as greater contact between parents and teachers, greater visibility of the school in the community, and greater use of the school as a family and community resource. The challenge will be to engage adolescents in active, meaningful, and positive ways with their parents.

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