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AUTHOR Guadalupe, Deana R.

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ABSTRACT

Project Comienzo, a bilingual pre-kindergarten program, was designed to help Spanish-speaking 3-year-old children flourish academically and socially, supported by the ratio of adults to children. The program served 17 students of limited English proficiency. A full-time bilingual teacher and a full-time educational assistant were used, and parents volunteered their time on a rotating basis. The project's main focus was to develop the children's socialization, motor, and cognitive skills. The classroom was divided into various learning and activity centers, which facilitated small-group, cooperative, and individual activities. The staff was involved in frequent meetings, group discussions, workshops, and training sessions. The parental involvement aspect enabled parents to tutor the children, which offered tremendous support to the teachers. Parents played a large role in their child's education, both inside and outside the classroom. An evaluation of the program indicated that all students in project Comienzo showed academic progress and greatly improved their English and Spanish language proficiency. Highly effective components of the program were the materials used and parental involvement. Least effective components were the too-long school day, and the need for the curriculum to focus more on gross and fine motor skills. (A copy of the class schedule and the parent questionnaire are appended.) (AA)

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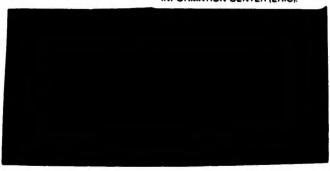


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Comienzo was a Title VII Special Populations project in its first year of operation in 1993-94. Project Comienzo served 17 students of limited English proficiency (LEP) and their parents. The bilingual pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) program was designed for Spanish-speaking three-year-olds who lacked proficiency in English and had weak Spanish oral language skills. The project functioned at P.S. 91 in Community School District (C.S.D.) 10 in the Bronx. The program was designed to help students flourish academically and socially, supported by the ratio of adults to children.

Project Comienzo's classroom was staffed by a full-time bilingual teacher and a full-time educational assistant. Parents volunteered their time on a rotating basis. The project's main focus was to develop the children's socialization, motor, and cognitive skills. The room was divided into various learning and activity centers which facilitated small group, cooperative, and individual activities. Computers with CD ROM were used in the classroom.

Staff were involved in frequent meetings, group discussions, workshops, and training sessions.

A parental involvement program enabled parents to tutor the children, offering tremendous support to the teachers. Parents played a large role in their child's education, both inside and outside the classroom.

Project Comienzo met its objectives for English and Spanish oral language, staff development, and parental involvement.

The conclusions, based on the findings of this final evaluation, lead to the following recommendations to the project:

- Find tests to measure English oral language proficiency, which are appropriate for three year olds.
- Investigate the length of the day to select that which is most appropriate for the population served.
- Develop a curriculum geared to the development of fine and gross motor skills in young children.

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This report has been prepared by their Bilingual, Multicultural, and Early

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Ms. Deana R. Guadalupe for collecting the data and writing the report.

Additional copies of this report are available from:

Dr. Tomi Deutsch-Berney
Office of Educational Research
Board of Education of the City of New York
100 Livingston Street, Room 732
Brooklyn, NY 11201
(718) 935-3790 FAX (7180 935-5490

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1993-94, Project Comienzo was in its first year of funding as a Title VII Special Populations Program.

PROJECT CONTEXT

The project operated at P.S. 91 in C.S.D. 10 in the Bronx. The student population was predominately Latino and African-American. Most students came from low-income families, as indicated by their eligibility for the free-lunch program. All demographic data in this final report are from 1992-1993, the last year for which such data were available.

At P.S. 91 in C.S.D. 10, the student population reflected the diversity of the surrounding community. Of the total school enrollment of 1,014 students, 67.8 percent were Latino, 26.0 percent were African-American, 4.8 percent were Asian-American, 1.0 percent were European-American, and 0.4 percent were Native American. Of these students, 47.5 percent were of limited English proficiency (LEP) and 88.4 percent were from low-income families as indicated by their eligibility to participate in the free-lunch program.

P.S. 91 was housed in an older building with a visually pleasing overall appearance. Students' art and written work decorated the inside of the classrooms and the bulletin boards in the hallways.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Project Comienzo served 17 Spanish-speaking 3 year-olds in pre-kindergarten.

Students were selected based on their performance on an orally-administered Pre-

Language Assessment Survey (Pre-LAS) in English and Spanish. In addition, a parent questionnaire was administered to select those students most in need. Also, the parents were carefully screened to determine their willingness to remain in the community for the length of the project, due to the high mobility rate in the area. Afterwards, eligible candidates were selected through open lottery.

In 1993-94, the project served a total of 17 students; male students numbered 8 (47 percent) and female 9 (50 percent). Most of the students (59 percent) were born in the Dominican Republic. (See Table 1.) All came from low-income families.

TABLE 1
Students' Countries of Origin

Country	Number of Students
Dominican Republic	10
Puerto Rico	5
Mexico	2
Total	17

Needs Assessment

Before initiating the project, P.S. 91 conducted a needs assessment of the targeted students and their families. The study showed that students who lacked proficiency in both English and Spanish needed a pre-kindergarten (pre-K) program in order to break the pattern of failure among LEP students who start school without the tools for success.

An exhaustive needs assessment for parents took place before the program began and is ongoing. There was a definite need for parents to get involved with their children's development and education. Therefore, parents have volunteered to remain in the classroom on a daily basis. The average parent volunteered twice a month.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Student Objectives

- At the end of each project year, 100 percent of the participating student will have improved their English language proficiency, as measured by an increase of one level on the Pre-LAS.
- At the end of each project year, 100 percent of the participating student will have improved their Spanish language proficiency, as measured by an increase of one level on the Pre-LAS.

Staff Development Objectives

• At the end of each project year, participating instructional staff will have improved their ability to use project content and methodology.

Parental Involvement Objectives

- By the end of year one, at least 75 percent of the parents will have taken part in four or more activities for parents.
- By the end of year one, at least 75 percent of the parents will report satisfaction with their levels of improvement with and understanding their child's education.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

During the 1993-93 school year, Project Comienzo provided instructional services to 17 pre-kindergarten children and their parents. The cornerstone of the

project was to prepare Spanish LEP students for a successful academic career at a very early age.

Project Comienzo provided children with learning experiences using a large variety of manipulatives, big books, and flash cards. The program included active and quiet instruction; indoor and outdoor activities; large groups, small groups, and individual teaching; activities designed for use of fine and gross motor skills; and opportunities for independent choice.

The room was divided into various learning and activity centers. They included: active play, art, blocks, discovery, dramatic play, manipulatives, music, sand and water play, and woodworking.

A five week summer session took place from July through August. During this period, students took weekly field trips and continued their oral language, cognitive, social, and motor development.

During the year, students took field trips to a Spanish restaurant, the circus, and Green Meadows Farm.

Materials, Methods and Techniques

Project Comienzo implemented the *Nuevo Amanecer*, a bilingual, multicultural, pre-school curriculum model. It is based on the concept that children learn best in a setting which respects and uses their culture and language, and that this culture and language should be the means through which children's knowledge is extended.

Teachers used both languages by introducing new concepts in Spanish and teaching words in English for familiar concepts. Two "circle time" activities are

implemented every day. During circle times teachers did not mix languages and used themes, stories, picture cards, and fingerplays. The goal is to help children verbalize their thoughts, encourage them to talk, and use questioning strategies.

The first circle time, conducted only in Spanish, focused on learning new concepts such as: actions, body parts, colors, family, food, senses, size, and weather.

The second circle time, conducted exclusively in English, focused on concepts children had already learned and introduced new vocabulary in English for familiar concepts.

Three Macintosh computers, equipped with CD ROM, were used in the classroom. All students used the computer as part of their learning experiences.

Capacity Building

Next year local tax-levy funds will provide for the creation of a second Pre-K classroom and will assume the costs of all project expenses except for two teachers. Local tax-levy funds will support two educational assistants and the family worker, purchase additional supplies and materials, and provide training for P.S. 91 bilingual instructional staff.

Staff Qualifications

<u>Title VII staff.</u> The project teacher, educational assistant, and family worker were funded by Title VII. For a description of degrees held and language proficiency (teaching or communicative*), see Table 2.

^{*}Teaching proficiency (TP) is defined as the ability to use LEP students' native language in teaching language arts or other academic subjects. Communicative proficiency (CP) is defined as a non-native speaker's basic ability to communicate and interact with students in their native language. NS = Native Speaker.

TABLE 2
Title VII Staff Qualifications

Position Title	Degree(s)	Language Proficiency
Teacher	M.S.	Spanish (NS)
Educational Assistant	High School	Spanish (NS)
Family Worker	High School	Spanish (NS)

The teacher of the project was responsible for planning and providing classroom instruction in a developmentally-appropriate, culturally-sensitive environment. The teacher planned trips and other enrichment activities, maintained student records, trained paraprofessionals, involved parents in classroom and home activities, and attended staff development activities.

The educational assistant's assisted teachers in all in- and out-of-school activities; worked with individuals, and small and large groups as needed; and attended pre-service and in-service staff development sessions.

The family assistant monitored student attendance and making home visits.

Other staff. Tax-levy funds paid the salaries of the project director, staff developer, and E.S.L. teacher. For degrees, certifications, and language proficiency, please see Table 3.

TABLE 3

Non-Title VII Staff Qualifications

Position Title	Degrees	Certification	Language Proficiency
Project Director	M.S., P.D.	TESL, School Administrator	Spanish (NS)
Staff Developer	M.S.	Early Childhood Education	
Teacher	B.A.	E.S.L. Common Branches	Spanish (TP)

Staff Development

Many staff development activities took place over the course of the school year. All staff participated in the training sessions which included scheduling and implementation of Project Comienzo, Pre-LAS assessment, and language development. Workshops included topics on E.S.L., fostering positive self-esteem, good nutrition, and the impact diverse cultures have on instruction. Interactive, small group discussions took place on developmental stages of children and language development.

Instructional Time Spent on Particular Tasks

See Appendix A for class schedule.

Length of time Participants Received Instruction

Since this was a Pre-K program for 3 year olds, this was the first time students received any formal education.

Activities to Improve Pre-Referral Evaluation Procedures for Exceptional Children

Teachers who felt students were in need of special education services held

parent-teacher conferences to discuss concerns, had child study meetings, and were referred to the Committee on Pre-School Education.

Gifted and talented students were identified by teacher judgement and evaluations.

Instructional Services for Students with Special Needs

Through teacher observation, and after parent-teacher conferences to discuss concerns, the child is evaluated by the School-Based Support Team (S.B.S.T.). All S.B.S.T. members are bilingual. If necessary, the child can be referred to the Committee on pre-school education.

One student had been evaluated by the S.B.S.T. and the Committee on preschool education. The students was classified as "hyperactive" and is fully integrated into the program. The project supports a model of inclusion, which fully integrates those students with special needs into the program.

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Adding to the program's success were the parents who were extremely involved and played an important role in the pre-school program. Parents alternated spending the day in the classroom and read stories, tutored small groups, prepared art materials, and helped children with their class duties. Parents were involved in organizing the library and toys, taking field trips, and planning holidays and celebrations.

The project sponsored a variety of parental involvement activities. Workshops and parent training sessions were provided for parents. Topics included: fostering positive self-esteem, good nutrition, the impact cultural diversity has on instruction, stages of child language development, parent expectations of their child, acquisition versus learning, and second language methods.

II. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION DESIGN

Applicability of Conclusions to All Persons Served by Project

Data were collected from all participating students for whom there were preand posttest scores. Instruments used to measure educational progress were not normed on students the same age as those involved in the program, although in other ways it seemed to be appropriate.

INSTRUMENTS OF MEASUREMENT

The Office of Educational Research (OER) compared pre- and posttest scores on the Pre-LAS to asses the Spanish oral language proficiency and English oral language proficiency of project students. Since the test is not normed for three-year-olds, OER will show improvement by an increase of *points*, as opposed to increased levels.

In order to assess the parental involvement objectives, OREA developed and used a Likert-type questionnaire (see Appendix B).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data Collection

To gather qualitative data, an OER evaluation consultant carried out on-site and telephone interviews of the project director several times during the school year and also observed two classes on each of two visits. The project evaluator collected the data and prepared the final evaluation report in accordance with the New York

State E.S.E.A. Title VII Bilingual Education Final Evaluation Report format, which was adapted from a checklist developed by the staff of the Evaluation Assistance Center (EAC) East in consultation with the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Language Affairs (OBEMLA).

Proper Administration of Instruments

Qualified personnel received training in testing procedures and administered the tests. Test administrators followed guidelines set forth in the manuals accompanying standardized tests.

Data Analysis

Accurate scoring and transcription of results. Scoring was accomplished by hand and analyzed in the Bilingual, Multicultural, and Early Childhood Evaluation Unit of OER. Data collectors, processors, and analysts were unbiased and had no vested interest in the success of the project.

Use of analyses and reporting procedures appropriate for obtained data. Since the Pre-LAS is not normed for three-year-olds, OER used the students' raw scores, measured in points, to assess the significance of students' achievement in English and Spanish.

III. FINDINGS

PARTICIPANTS' EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

Project Comienzo carried out all instructional activities specified in its original design.

Participants' Progress in English

Project Comienzo staff had ample opportunity to develop the students English language skills. One of the two circle times held each day was in English to promote oral language development in a group. The group worked with games, patterns, recipes, rhymes, riddles, and fingerplays. English was always the second circle time and focused on concepts the children had already learned and introduced new vocabulary for familiar concepts.

The program implemented *Nuevo Amanecer*, a bilingual, multicultural preschool curriculum. Children also used a wide variety of big books and flash cards to develop English language skills.

An OER consultant observed a class during independent activities constructed in English and Spanish. The class made playdough using flour, salt, and water. The class measured the ingredients together and they passed the dough around so every student had an opportunity to kneed the dough and feel the texture. The teacher passed out a dough ball to each child and they had a chance to roll it, pound it, and mold it. During the independent activity they made farm animals from the dough since they had recently been on a field trip to a farm.

The evaluation objective for English as a second language was:

 At the end of each project year, 100 percent of the participating student will have improved their English language proficiency, as measured by an increase of one level on the Pre-LAS.

Since the Pre-LAS was not normed for three year olds, OER measured this objective based on an increase of *points* on the Pre-LAS as opposed to increased *levels*. This method provided the preschoolers with a more accurate measure to show gains in English oral achievement.

There were complete Pre- and posttest scores on the Pre-LAS for 17 students. Students improved their Pre-LAS scores by an average of 33 points. Overall, all of the students showed gains in English language proficiency.

The project met its objective for improved English language proficiency.

Participants' Progress in Native Language Arts

Project Comienzo used the natural approach and the language experience approach to teach native language arts. Circle time activities were a main focus in developing Spanish skills as well as the use of big books, storytelling, and peer tutoring.

An OER evaluation consultant observed the first circle conducted in Spanish. The class reviewed parts of the body. The teacher held up picture cards and the students called out the name of the body part. The new lesson focused around learning the difference between sweet and sour. The teacher held up picture cards with various food and the students decided if it was sweet or sour. The parent volunteer passed out slices of lemon and marshmallows and the students tasted it to

see if it was sweet or sour. This lead to an independent activity. On a hand out, students had to circle the fruit that was sweet and color in the pictures.

The evaluation objective for Spanish language development was:

 At the end of each project year, 100 percent of the participating student will have improved their Spanish language proficiency, as measured by an increase of one level on the Pre-LAS.

There were complete Pre- and posttest scores on the Pre-LAS for 17 students. Students improved their Pre-LAS scores by an average of 36.29 points. All students showed gains in Spanish language proficiency.

The project met its objective for improved Spanish language proficiency.

Participants' Academic Achievements

The project did not propose any objective for content areas. All content areas were taught using manipulatives. Students engaged in whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one instructional activities.

OVERALL EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS ACHIEVED THROUGH PROJECT Mainstreaming

Since the program students were three years old, they will not have the opportunity to be mainstream until they start kindergarten.

Grade Retention

Since this is a Pre-K program for three year olds, grade retention does not apply. Next year the students will remain in the program and be grouped with other four-year-olds.

Dropout Prevention

One student left the program mid-year, and six who left at the end of the year.

The majority of students left the program because they moved; others felt their children were not ready for school.

Attendance

The project did not propose any objectives for attendance. The attendance rate of project students was 75.0 percent. While the schoolwide attendance rate was 88.2 percent, it would not be valid to compare the pre-K group with students in elementary grades.

Placement in Gifted and Talented Programs

The skills and talents of all students who are gifted and talented are cultivated and enhanced through project activities.

CASE HISTORY

J.F. entered the program in December. Since he entered late, he was very shy and withdrawn, but seemed eager to learn. Initially he was not very verbal, although he worked well within the classroom. When he started to exert himself, he started making friends and was eager to come to school. Eventually he developed good interpersonal skills with his peers. As he became more secure and comfortable, he adapted and learned the daily routines. He loved to work with puzzles and put them together with great dexterity. During the course of the year, he developed fine and gross motor skills, and his attention span improved greatly. He is presently able to express himself very well in both languages, and is able to speak in complete sentences.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

The project proposed the following objective for staff development:

• At the end of each project year, participating instructional staff will have improved their ability to use project content and methodology.

Staff improved their ability to use project content and methodology by attending regular training sessions, workshops, and meetings. Topics included the developmental stages of children, language development, fostering positive self-esteem, cultural differences and the impact on instruction, and Pre-LAS assessment.

The project met its objective for staff development.

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES

Project Comienzo did not propose any objectives for curriculum development.

However, project staff developed and adapted a large number of curriculum materials appropriate for three year olds.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT OBJECTIVES

The project proposed the following objectives for parental involvement:

- By the end of year one, at least 75 percent of the parents will have taken part in four or more activities for parents.
- By the end of year one, at least 75 percent of the parents will report satisfaction with their levels of improvement with and understanding their child's education.

Parents were extremely active in Project Comienzo. They volunteered their time in the classroom every day. They helped prepare materials; read stories to the class; organize class library, toys, and learning centers; planned holiday celebrations;

and helped children update family scrapbooks.

All parents were involved in four or more activities. A minimum of two parent workshops were held each semester. Parent training sessions included language development, children's developmental stages, parent expectations, second language materials, acquisition versus learning, and fostering children's positive self-esteem. Workshops and meetings were held on nutrition, community resources, and the transition to kindergarten.

OER provided a Likert-type evaluation questionnaires so that the parents of participating children could indicate their satisfaction with their levels of involvement with and understanding of their child's education. The project returned 15 of the 17 questionnaires, and all parents showed a high degree of satisfaction.

IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

Project Comienzo met its objectives for English and Spanish oral language, staff development, and parental involvement.

All students in Project Comienzo showed academic progress. All those who remained in Project Comienzo, will be grouped with other four year olds next year. Students greatly improved their English and Spanish language proficiency.

Staff attended numerous meetings and workshops to help them foster learning in the three year old population. Parent involvement in the program was high. Since all parents volunteered their time in the classroom, at meetings, workshops, and training sessions, the ratio of adults to children allowed the students to flourish academically and socially.

MOST AND LEAST EFFECTIVE COMPONENTS

Highly effective components of Project Comienzo were the vast amount of excellent materials and trips that provided parents and students with enriching experiences. Parental involvement provided tremendous support to the staff and children of the project.

Least effective components of the project was the length of the day was too long for children so young, since the attention span of three year olds is limited and their tolerance levels are low. Also, staff felt that the curriculum needed to be a address gross and fine motor skills more.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

- Find tests to measure English oral language proficiency, which are appropriate for three year olds.
- Investigate the length of the day to select that which is most appropriate for the population served.
- Develop a curriculum geared to the development of fine and gross motor skills in young children.

APPENDIX A

Class Schedule

The class adhered to the following regular, but flexible schedule:

Time	Activity
8:40	Morning arrival and breakfast
9:25	First Circle Time: Spanish
9:55	Independent activities: child directed, reinforcement activities
10:40	Snack
10:55	Outdoor play
11:40	Clean-Up
11:55	Lunch
12:40	Clean-Up
12:55	Nap
1:55	Wake-Up and transition period
2:05	Second Circle Time: English
2:25	Independent Activities

APPENDIX B

Likert Scales

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Parent Questionnaire Spring 1994

DIA

<u>Directions</u> :	Please write right.	the numbers that show how y	ou feel in the boxes on the	•
Are you sa	atisfied with th	ne degree of your involvement	in Project Comienzo?	
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Thank you very much for your assistance.

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