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AUTHOR	Gillespie, Marilyn K.
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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the needs of low-literate students participating in a Human Resources Administration/City University of New York (HRA/CUNY) program offering English-as-a-Second-Language and employment-related training to low-income Hispanic women receiving welfare. It identified participants in need of literacy instruction based on grade level completed, examined the impact of literacy level on participants' ability to achieve program goals of further job training or employment, and determined factors facilitating or constraining low-literate participants' ability to succeed in the program. Eight recommendations resulted: (1) more effective collection and reporting of basic demographic data; (2) development of a program-wide process for assessing basic literacy skills; (3) placement of low-literate learners in separate classes with specialized curricula; (4) six months of intensive language, literacy, and pre-employment training to meet stated program goals; (5) provision of literacy instruction in either Spanish or English, but with counseling in Spanish (when instruction is in English) and some oral/aural instruction in English (when instruction is in Spanish); (6) continued strong investment in staff development; (7) continued investigation of the immediate relevance of unpaid work experience for improved employment potential; and (8) exploration of ways to provide access to job training through less stringent language requirements. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

Meeting the Needs of Low-Literate JOBS Recipients in the HRA/CUNY BEGIN Language Program

Prepared for:

The City University of New York
Office of Academic Affairs
New York, New York

Marilyn K. Gillespie, Ed.D.
Senior Program Associate
The Center for Applied Linguistics
Washington, D.C.
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Executive Summary

The Center for Applied Linguistics was asked by the City University of New York (CUNY) to investigate the needs of low-literate students participating in the HRA/CUNY BEGIN Language Program. This JOBS program offers English as a Second Language and employment-related training to low-income Hispanic women receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Specifically CUNY asked us to:

1) identify participants in need of literacy instruction, based on grade level completed in school;

2) distinguish the impact of literacy level on participants' ability to achieve the program goals of obtaining a job or getting into job training;

3) determine factors which facilitate or constrain the ability of low-literate participants to succeed in the program.

Due to the lack of availability of key demographic and outcome data, we were not able to comment on the relationship between literacy level and employment or entry into job training. We would however, like to make the following recommendations primarily related to programmatic and curricular improvement.

Recommendation 1: HRA/CUNY should act soon to implement a more effective system for collecting and reporting basic demographic data as it relates to program completion, entry into job training or further education, and placement in jobs.

Recommendation 2: HRA/CUNY needs to develop a program-wide process for assessing the basic reading and writing skills of participants. Assessment of oral proficiency alone is insufficient to place participants within the program, make recommendations for referral elsewhere, or evaluate progress.

Recommendation 3: Low-literate learners should be placed in separate classes with a specialized curriculum tailored to their needs and a focus on the language and cultural aspects of occupational ESL.

Recommendation 4: To achieve the program goals, low-literate learners require an intensive language, literacy, and pre-occupational instructional training period of six months or more.

Recommendation 5: Successful basic literacy instruction can be undertaken in English or the native language. Where instruction is provided in English, personal and employment-readiness counseling in

the native language needs to be offered. Where native language literacy is provided, it should be accompanied by oral/aural instruction in English.

Recommendation 6: HRA/CUNY should continue its strong investment in staff development, including specialized training for teachers working with low-literate students.

Recommendation 7: HRA/CUNY should continue to investigate how best to assure that the unpaid work experience component provides participants with significant opportunities for language practice and on-the-job training that will improve their employment potential.

Recommendation 8: Standardized achievement tests in English act as a "ten foot wall" excluding BEGIN Language Program graduates from moving on to job training. HRA/CUNY should explore how to provide graduates with access to job training, either through developing alternative entry criteria or allowing students to remain in the program long enough to pass existing entry requirements.

The BEGIN Language Program serves among the most challenging of all adult learners within the JOBS caseload. HRA/CUNY should be commended for the high quality and dedication of its educational staff. While within the current economic climate the program can only do so much, we believe HRA/CUNY needs to reassess what it takes to prepare low-literate ESL learners for jobs. The recommendations above imply a larger investment in individual learners. We believe, however, they represent elements central to achieving successful educational and job training outcomes for this population.

Table of Contents

Background

THE FAMILY SUPPORT ACT OF 1988

In the fall of 1988, a sweeping new bill was passed designed to target those Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) recipients most at risk of long-term dependency on the welfare system. Under the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program of the Family Support Act of 1988, clients (most often single mothers) are provided with some combination of education, work experience, job training, and job search services in an effort to assist them to find and keep a job. Provisions for paid childcare and transportation reimbursements are also part of the program. States are given wide discretion in the implementation of their JOBS programs, although increasingly, as state resources have become more limited, states have faced hard choices with respect to whom to serve, the kinds and sequences of services, and on which groups to concentrate funds (American Public Welfare Association, 1990). In some states, requirements are met through voluntary participation. Others, however, mandate participation, sanctioning clients' monthly AFDC allotments if they fail to participate. States also vary in the extent to which they emphasize and invest in basic education and job training or focus on unpaid work experience and job search processes (Manpower Development Research Corporation, 1991).

In few states are the challenges of implementing a JOBS program greater than in New York. Nine percent of the entire AFDC caseload in the United States is from the state. New York ranks second in the number of welfare payments made to clients, disbursing 13% of all U.S. welfare payments (Lurie & Sanger, 1991). Drawing on previous experiences with the New York WIN program and on the experiences of the GAIN experiment in San Diego, the Human Resources Administration of New York organized a system of JOBS services called the BEGIN (Begin Employment Gain Independence Now) program. In this mandatory program, except for clients already in some kind of self-initiated training, eligible participants are required to participate in a job search. Those who complete a "Job Club" process without finding a job are assessed and placed in a compulsory unpaid work experience program (WEP) and concurrently enrolled in an Adult Basic Education (ABE), English as a Second Language (ESL) or General Educational Development (GED) program. In the case of those clients who speak very little English and are thus deemed able to derive only limited benefit from a work experience assignment, special arrangements for an initial language immersion training have been made. The HRA/CUNY BEGIN Language Program is one such specialized program.

THE HRA/CUNY BEGIN LANGUAGE PROGRAM: AN OVERVIEW

In the fall of 1989 the Human Resources Administration, Office of Employment Services (HRA) entered into an agreement with the Office of Academic Affairs of the City University of New York (CUNY) to provide services to JOBS participants most in need of English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. The City University of New York has a long history of working with the least educated adult learners in the city, operating ESL and literacy classes on 14 campuses in the five boroughs. Two sites are in operation under the HRA/CUNY agreement.

The Sites

The Manhattan site, administered by the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC), is located in the Voorhees building of Hunter College in midtown Manhattan. In addition to the BEGIN Language Program, the Manhattan area Spanish Job Club is also located at the site. Participants come to the site from around the city. During the 1989 to 1990 funding year, 626 participants began the program (CUNY, 1990). In the 1990 to 1991 funding year, the number of participants beginning the program was 685 (CUNY, 1991). The site is administered by a site coordinator. Over a dozen full and part time teachers, full time HRA caseworkers (Client Service Representatives), and an administrative assistant complete the staff.

The Bronx site is located on the campus of the Bronx Community College (BCC) and operated through the community college. Unlike the Manhattan site, the program is located within a larger context of academic services. The BEGIN Language Program is part of a continuing education program which has been in operation for over 20 years. ABE, ESL and pre-GED classes and Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) programs are offered in the continuing education building. A small library, a learning lab equipped with computers, and an ACCESS job counseling center are available at the site. The BEGIN Language Program is administered by the Director of Bronx Community College Continuing Education Program and a BEGIN site coordinator and staffed by teachers, Client Service Representatives and administrative assistants. In the 1990 to 1991 funding year, the number of participants beginning the program was 528 (CUNY, 1991). In expectation of a growth in the program, BCC has been renovating a number of additional classrooms to dedicate to the BEGIN Language Program.

The Participants

Although exact demographic data to describe the backgrounds of the participants are unavailable, both sites informally estimated that over 95% of their learners are women, many of whom have two or more small children at home. Nearly

all are Spanish speakers. The largest country of origin is the Dominican Republic. A smaller, but still substantial, number of participants are from Puerto Rico. Perhaps less than ten percent are from other Central and South American countries. A handful of Russian or Southeast Asian immigrants have been sent to the program. Site directors note that most of the women are in their late twenties, thirties or forties. Some are recent immigrants, but teachers and administrators report that a large percentage of participants have lived in the United States for many years. Most have held jobs, either in their home country or in the United States. Many, for example, report having worked in the garment industry in New York for as many as ten years before being laid off or leaving the workforce to care for their children.

The Placement Process

Before arriving at the BEGIN Language Program, participants are first screened by the Office of Employment Services, which determines which clients will be referred to BEGIN. Participants are then sent to BEGIN where they are tested by teachers at intake sessions, which are scheduled once every two weeks. Before June 1991, the primary tool used for placement (and assessment) was the John Test, an oral proficiency placement test administered through a one-to-one interview. After June, teachers began using a newly developed state-wide placement tool, the NYS Place Test (The University of the State of New York, 1991). Like the John Test, the NYS Place Test is designed to rate participants' oral proficiency in English. It should be emphasized that, although one or two questions on the NYS Place Test require participants to read a few letters of the alphabet, words and one short sentence, the test is not designed to measure literacy and can only give rudimentary information regarding whether a student can read in English. The BEGIN Language Program design calls for participants to be placed and assessed primarily based on their oral proficiency. Depending on their scores, they are placed in one of three (or sometimes four) instructional levels.

As will be discussed in more detail later, teachers soon found it necessary to devise additional informal assessment measures to assist them in placing participants and diagnosing their needs, particularly with respect to literacy. Teachers have experimented with a variety of assessment tools. At both sites participants are currently asked to fill out a Student Information Form which asks them to write their name, address, social security number and other information. This form serves as an early indicator to get a rough idea of learners' literacy level in English. Information is kept related to whether the participants could fill out the form without assistance. At the Manhattan site, the form is also available in Spanish for those who cannot complete it in English. At both sites, a writing sample is also taken. At the Manhattan site, additional assessment tools have also been used to identify the skills of low-literate learners, including task completion exercises, graduated reading samples, and the administration of a norm-referenced proficiency test in Spanish. The results of

these assessment processes are currently used, along with the NYS Place Test, to place participants in levels or recommend that they be referred elsewhere.

The Instructional Program

Once a student's level has been assessed and it is determined she is not exempt for other reasons (such as enrollment in another program or a medical disability), she is placed in an immersion class at one of the instructional levels. The eight week immersion component consists of 20 hours of ESL and work orientation instruction per week (for a total of 160 instructional hours). The curriculum is roughly organized into six broad theme areas which can be adjusted depending on the background and language skills of participants. Themes include Getting Acquainted; the World of Work; Family and Work; Health, Well-Being and Work; Working; and Looking Ahead (City University of New York, 1991). By January 1991 a list of basic competencies for learners at each level was also developed for use at both sites.

During the last two weeks of the immersion class, caseworkers assign participants to a work experience placement (WEP). Three categories of job placement exist: Office Services, Maintenance Services, and Human/Community Services. Office Services involves such tasks as working in a mail room, photocopying, answering phones, writing messages, greeting and directing visitors, data entry, typing, and assisting with inventory control. Maintenance Services include such tasks as dusting and polishing, sweeping and mopping floors, vacuuming, acting as a parking lot attendant, loading and unloading materials, and groundskeeping. Human/Community Services includes improving community appearance and safety (cleaning vacant lots, sweeping streets, removing graffiti), supporting cultural events, assisting elderly at homes and centers, assisting in cafeteria/food programs and other services. (See the Appendix for a description of job categories.) Although participants are asked about their job placement preferences at this point, often they are not given a choice of assignment.

At the end of the immersion component, participants begin the continuation component of the program. During this phase, which lasts five months, they attend their work experience placement for four hours a day, three days a week. For the remaining two days participants attend language classes four hours a day (for a total of 160 additional hours of instruction). In theory, the curriculum is designed to be responsive to the English language needs of the participants as they carry out their work assignments. As will be described later, however, often teachers visiting the sites have found participants may have limited opportunities to use English on the job. In addition, teachers working in the continuation component face other obstacles in tailoring a language program to support the work experience. Every two weeks a new group of students who have just completed the immersion phase may be added to the class and participants who have completed the continuation component may leave.

This constant turnover makes the planning of sequential lessons related to specific job needs problematic.

It is important to note here the high drop out and termination rates of the program. Participants are terminated if they miss more than twenty-five percent of the classes or the work experience program. If they are terminated, participants can get a six month postponement; then they must begin the program again. Penalties for dropping out are significant. If participants fail to complete the program and are not reassigned to another allowable program, their AFDC payments are sanctioned. According to the HRA/CUNY Annual Report (CUNY, 1991), during 1990-1991, an average of 49.7% of participants enrolled in the Manhattan site immersion component completed that phase of instruction. Completion rates for the continuation component ranged from 100% to 31%, with an average of 70%. At the Bronx site the completion rate for the immersion component was higher (69.6%). The drop out rate for the continuation component, however, was lower, with Bronx Community College termination rates during the continuation phase ranging from 48% to 14%, with an average of only 34%. Issues related to the reasons for high termination and dropout rates will be discussed later in this report.

For those who do complete the continuation component, several potential directions may be taken. Some may be referred by their Client Service Representative to the Spanish Job Club, where they receive one week of training related to job entry skills and interviewing before going to a network center where they make calls to try to get a job though agencies the JOB Club has accessed or through their individual efforts. Another potential referral is to a job training program, although, as will be seen, entry criteria preclude the participation of the majority of those completing the BEGIN Language Program. Participants may also enter other educational programs in their communities. In some cases participants are re-enrolled in the same BEGIN Language Program after unsuccessfully pursuing these other avenues. At each site it is the responsibility of the Client Service Representative to monitor the participants' exemption, enrollment, termination, work experience placement, and assignment after they complete the program.

The Study

DETERMINING THE NEEDS OF LOW LITERATE PARTICIPANTS

During the initial planning for the BEGIN Language Program, it was anticipated that students would come to the program with various levels of oral proficiency in English. However, the degree to which many of these learners might be non-literate or semi-literate in their native language was not anticipated as a variable of such significant impact. Over the first two years of program operation, staff at both sites have informally experimented with various strategies both to assess learners' literacy levels and to offer appropriate educational interventions, including developing a special track for less literate learners, extending the immersion component to sixteen weeks, arranging for individual tutoring and developing specialized native language literacy instruction. Each site has responded somewhat differently based on their perception of the extent of the problem, their beliefs about appropriate responses, and the time and availability of staff to add this unanticipated responsibility to other duties.

While both sites have developed interventions for low-literate participants, on a program-wide level there is as yet no consensus regarding whether or how such learners might best be served by the program. To address this need, the City University of New York's Office of Academic Affairs asked the Center for Applied Linguistics of Washington, DC to conduct an investigation of the relationship between literacy levels and students' ability to profit from the BEGIN Language Program's educational and training activities and to make programmatic and curricular recommendations aimed at better assisting this population to meet *the BEGIN Language Program's overall goal of gaining the skills necessary to enter job training or obtain a job.*

THE CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

The Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is a private, non-profit organization which, since 1959, has specialized in research and technical assistance in areas related to the education of linguistic minorities. Since 1980, CAL has played a key role in the provision of technical assistance to refugee programs for adults both in Southeast Asia and in the U.S. As part of their work, the Refugee Service Center assisted in the development of placement, assessment, and instructional tools for low-literate adult refugees. The BEST test, one of the few survival ESL literacy and language tests for low-literate learners grew out of that project. In addition, CAL operates the National Clearinghouse for Literacy Education for Limited-English-Proficient Adults, an adjunct ERIC clearinghouse. Its mission is to collect and disseminate the latest in research and state-of-the-art practices for issues related to ESL literacy. Currently CAL is also designing a series of video tapes of promising

practices in ESL literacy, funded by the Hewlett Foundation and is conducting a national survey of native language literacy programs under the auspices of the National (Research) Center for Adult Literacy at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, CAL has also undertaken various kinds of workplace literacy activities for United Auto Workers/General Motors, the Marriott Corporation, and others.

CAL was approached to conduct this study by Dr. Leslee Oppenheim, Director of Adult and Continuing Educational Services at CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs. Dr. Oppenheim developed the initial research questions and worked with CAL to refine the research design and facilitate the completion of the study. Dr. Marilyn Gillespie, Senior Program Associate at CAL served as the Principal Investigator for the project. She has been assisted at CAL by Vice President Allene Grognet, Workplace Literacy Specialist Peggy Seufert-Bosco, Publications Editor Fran Keenan, and Administrative Assistant Amy Fitch. In addition, other assistance in data collection was provided by CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs. CUNY staff member Greg Fallon was responsible for much of investigation of the availability of program-related statistics, as well as for analysis of the data collected in the teacher and administrator surveys and focus groups. A fluent speaker of Spanish, Mr. Fallon also assisted Dr. Gillespie in conducting the student focus groups. Later, when the data collection process proved problematic, CUNY also hired a small number of teachers to assist in the attempt to collect the required statistical data.

THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In collaboration with CUNY, the following specific implementing questions were identified:

1. Who are the students within the BEGIN Language Program in special need of basic literacy instruction?

What portion of the BEGIN population are identified as having attended grade school for three years or less? For six years or less?

What portion of the BEGIN population can be identified as less literate based on program assessment data and teacher observation and what are their characteristics?

2. What is the impact of literacy level on students' ability to achieve the BEGIN Language Program goals of obtaining a job or entering job training?

What are the program completion rates of less-literate learners as compared to the overall BEGIN population?

What are the job training placement rates for less-literate participants as compared with the overall program population?

How do job placement rates for less-literate participants compare to placement rates of more literate participants?

3. What do teachers, program administrators, participants and expert informants identify as factors which facilitate and constrain less-literate learners' ability to profit from the BEGIN Language Program?

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

After an initial visit to both sites which included interviews with site coordinators, teachers and limited classroom observation, the design for the study was finalized and a proposal submitted to CUNY. It was determined that both quantitative and qualitative information would be collected. Initially, it was planned to collect the following data:

Demographic Data - grade level completed in school and/or receipt of GED or high school diploma for a sample of 20% of those completing the BEGIN Language Program.

Program Outcome Data - percentage of sample completing the BEGIN Language Program, completing NYS post-test, entering training programs, entering other educational programs and/or obtaining employment, to be correlated with grade level completion in school.

Teacher and Administrator Surveys - questions asked respondents to describe and assess the literacy needs of learners in their classrooms, assessment and teaching methodologies and factors that facilitate and constrain low-iterate students' ability to succeed in the program. (A copy of the complete teacher survey is found in the Appendix.) A total of 16 teacher surveys and two site coordinator surveys were completed out of a population of 24 teachers and two site coordinators.

Student Focus Group Interviews - focus groups interviews in Spanish were conducted with two classes at the Bronx site and one class at the Manhattan site. Twenty-eight students, selected by teachers as representative of the student population, were interviewed. (The focus group interview questions are found in the Appendix.)

In addition, the following resources supported the research process:

Teacher Group Discussions - after the surveys were completed, meetings were held at each site to answer questions about the survey, to obtain additional comments not included in the survey and to ask teachers to reflect on their responses.

Program Documents - program documents used in the study include curriculum and assessment materials, informal teacher-written surveys and reports, annual program reports and HRA documents.

Literature Review and Phone Survey of Expert Informants - to obtain background information for the study, representatives from the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services, consulting groups conducting studies of the JOBS program, administrators of local JOBS programs in areas with high concentrations of linguistic minority adults and others were consulted. Documents obtained through this process are referenced at the end of this report. Copies can be made available to CUNY upon request.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR WHICH DATA COULD NOT BE OBTAINED: BASIC DEMOGRAPHIC AND PROGRAM OUTCOME DATA

Two out of three of the research questions addressed by the study relied primarily on the collection and analysis of basic statistical data. Research Question One attempts to identify the numbers of students in the BEGIN Language Program in special need of basic literacy instruction. Since no assessment of basic literacy had been consistently administered by the program, it was decided that grade level completed in school would be used to derive a general indication of literacy level. We hoped to obtain grade level completion data from a random sample of at least 20 percent of all students who had completed the program. Students would then be categorized into three groups: those who had completed three years or less of formal education, those who had completed between three years and six years, and those who completed more than six years of school. This information would then be correlated with data collected for Research Question Two, which dealt with issues related to the impact of literacy level on students' ability to achieve the outcomes set by the BEGIN Language Program. Specifically, we wanted to gather program completion rates, job training placement rates, and job placement rates in order to compare the results for those with less education with those for learners with more previous education. If possible, we also thought it would be interesting to compare the results of the NYS place test for each of the three groups.

As will be seen, however, we were unable to obtain the basic information we needed to answer Questions One and Two. Although additional staff was hired by CUNY to attempt to collect data by hand, sufficient grade level completion data and basic outcome data were not available, either by random sampling or by attempting to obtain information on the entire population of program completers. *The lack of availability of this information clearly compromises our ability to respond to the questions we were asked to answer and has changed the nature of this report.* Recommendations related to the implications of this issue for program accountability and improvement will be addressed later. In this section, however, we would like to describe in more detail the process by which we attempted to obtain the data.

The Statistical Data Collection Process

Early in the study, a meeting was held between CUNY staff, an HRA representative, and the Principal Investigator to obtain permission to collect the data and to discuss how it might collected. During the meeting it was suggested that the data we needed might be located in several places, including the computerized data collection system at the Office of Employment Services central office, the files kept by the Client Service Representatives, and files kept by the educational program staff.

Since it was unclear which information would be best obtained through the computerized data collection system at the OES central office and which would need to be obtained at the local sites, Mr. Greg Fallon was charged with the task of visiting the OES central office. Although OES staff were helpful in assisting with Mr. Fallon's investigation, it soon became clear that the needed information could not be collected through this office. Discussions with staff revealed that information from the **BEGIN Intake Referral (BIR)** (the main record of the educational training and employment background of each participant) is collected, but only in aggregated form. Information from the **Training Input Document (TID)** which would indicate if participants had entered a training program were just beginning to be collected during the Summer of 1991. Finally, information from a third document the **OES 3A** (which should track BEGIN program completion, training referral, job club referral, and job placement) was also not available through the central office. Although this information is computerized, Mr. Fallon was told that the correct component coding was not in use and data could thus not be accessed. In addition, much of the data from the language program was not reported to them.

The next step was to investigate obtaining the data from Client Service Representatives at the local site. The initial investigations between Mr. Fallon, Dr. Gillespie and the Client Service Representatives were not promising. At one site the grade level completed in school was able to be found for only one in three of the sample files. Nevertheless, it was decided to try to search through the site-based files by hand. Since this process would be time-consuming, CUNY hired teachers at each of the two sites to gather the information. This, too, however, yielded limited results. At the Bronx site, Mr. Fallon reported that data on one in five, or 56, students was collected. However only 26 of the files contained highest grade level completed in school and all the information desired was able to be obtained for only three students. At the Manhattan site teachers reported that 16% of the 20% sample could be identified, but complete data was only available for six participants.

Preliminary Observations

Clearly, despite our efforts, we were unable to discover data to indicate the impact of literacy on participants' ability to profit from the BEGIN Language Program. In fact, it appears that, other than pre and post scores on the NYS Place Test, there are little outcome data available for any participants, regardless of level. Because the data are insufficient to address these questions, we will not report on them in the Findings section. *We do, however, strongly recommend that HRA/CUNY institute a more careful system of record-keeping and data collection in the future. Without such records, it will be remain impossible to conduct studies of program effectiveness.* There are, however, a few preliminary observations relevant to further investigations which we can make based on information provided by teachers and other program-related documents.

First, surveys and interviews with teachers and administrators and teacher-produced data do suggest that many students may lack basic literacy. Fourteen of 16 teachers surveyed responded that low-literate students had been enrolled in their classes. Such students could be found in classes regardless of level. Although more teachers of Level One classes reported having low-literate students, teachers in Levels Three and Four also described often having two to three students in each class who were relatively proficient in English but who lacked basic literacy skills. In addition, teachers at the Manhattan site have collected some of their own data on student grade level completion by painstakingly going through their own records, two kinds of registration forms taken at different times, as well as program files during the summer of 1991. They report having been able to obtain data for 492 students. Their investigation indicated that 25% of students had completed five years of education or less and another 33% had completed between six and eight years of education (Earl-Castillo et al., 1991). Clearly the ability of teachers at the Manhattan site to obtain at least grade level completion data is encouraging; their processes for doing so should be further investigated.

Second, aggregated data on program completion is collected and reported in BEGIN Language Program Annual Reports. As mentioned earlier, fiscal year 1990-1991 figures reveal that at Bronx Community College 69.6% of those enrolled complete the immersion classes and approximately 34% of those enrolled in the continuation complete those classes. For the Manhattan site, the figures are approximately 50% and 70% respectively (CUNY, 1991). Clearly these rates further indicate the importance of obtaining more data related to which students complete the program and the factors that account for students either being terminated or dropping out. It might be useful, for example, to investigate not only whether literacy level makes a difference in completion rates, but also how low-literate students are impacted by such factors as intake strategies, termination processes, and childcare and how student perceptions of the benefits of the program affect retention.

Thirdly, although we do not know exactly how many BEGIN graduates participate in job training, there is some indication that the numbers may be quite low. In order to enter job training, students must meet entry requirements based on their score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), a standardized reading test. Program staff report that most training programs require the equivalent of a fifth grade reading level or higher. The site coordinator in Manhattan wrote:

> Last year, twenty-four of BEGIN's "best and brightest" students took a standardized reading test in English in order to get into a job training program. The required reading level was 4th grade, lower than what is usual for training programs. Of the twenty-four who took the test, only two passed.

The implications of this apparent lack of access to job training and questions related to the relationship between reading level and job success will be discussed later in this report.

Findings and Discussion

This section will look primarily at issues related to Research Question Three: factors which facilitate or get in the way of the ability of less literate students to profit from the educational services offered by the BEGIN Language Program. Eight key factors have been identified. The first two factors address issues related to the need for appropriate methods for assessing literacy levels of BEGIN participants and for determining which students should remain in the program and which might be better served elsewhere. The next four factors deal with various aspects related to designing an educational program appropriate for ESL literacy learners, including the length and intensity of instruction, the need for special approaches for low-literate learners, creating a climate for learning and the language of instruction. Another factor addresses issues related to building staff capacity in literacy instruction. Finally, the last factor deals with the impact of the work experience program on the educational process.

"ORAL PROFICIENCY IS ONLY HALF THE PICTURE" ASSESSING THE LITERACY LEVELS OF BEGIN PARTICIPANTS

A key factor in meeting the needs of low-literate participants has to do with the ability to effectively assess their reading and writing abilities. This section describes the history of the assessment process currently used at the sites, issues in the use of standardized tests, and why formal assessment of oral proficiency alone may not be sufficient for placement and evaluation purposes.

Teacher-Developed Assessment Tools

Early in the history of the BEGIN Language Program, teachers recognized that some assessment of participants' literacy skills was needed. The existing assessment tool, designed to measure only oral language proficiency was not enough. At the Manhattan site, the problem first became clear when teachers noticed some students who couldn't hold a pen or use printed materials during the intake process. Although less- literate participants seemed to be found more often within beginning level ESL classes, teachers of intermediate or higher level immersion classes also reported having a handful of students in each class who had difficulties with reading and writing. Of the 16 teachers responding to our survey, 14 indicated that they have had students in their classes whom they believed to have had sufficient difficulty with basic literacy to prevent them from benefiting from their classes. Often, teachers reported, these students were unable to understand basic lessons taught using the blackboard,

books, or handouts. Those that could get words or sentences down on paper did so slowly. Many were unaware of strategies for learning and classroom decorum and were embarrassed by their inability to keep up with the others.

At both sites work began to develop additional assessment tools which could be used during the intake process. Experimentation, adaptation, and improvement of these informal tools has been a continuing process and varies from one site to the other. At both sites the BEGIN Student Information Form began to double as a literacy assessment tool that allowed teachers to identify students who could write basic information such as their name, address, and birth date without assistance and those who could fill out more difficult information related to previous education and medical history. If the student cannot complete the form in English, she is given a parallel form in Spanish which allows teachers to identify native language literacy ability. Gradually, at both sites, a writing sample began to be taken and informally evaluated by the teachers as a means to help place students. At the Manhattan site, a special Native Language Literacy Skills Evaluation tests low-literate students in areas such as knowledge of the alphabet, ability to read simple sentences and paragraphs, ability to read a map, and the ability to do simple mathematical computations. This inventory is also used at the end of class to report progress. (All of the forms mentioned here can be found in the Appendix.)

In addition to these assessment tools, in the summer of 1991, permission was granted for teachers at the Manhattan site to administer the Spanish Test of Basic Skills (SABES) to participants who would volunteer to take it. The SABES is a norm-referenced multiple choice reading test designed to be used with school-aged populations. Scores are reported based on grade level equivalency. All together 160 students participated in the testing process. Although the sample was not representative of the entire population, results did provide teachers with some general indications that many students' literacy levels in their native language were very low. Of the 160 students taking the test, 23% scored below a 2.9 grade level, 34% scored from 3.0 to 5.9 grade level, and 33% scored from a 6.0 to a 8.9 grade level (Earl-Castillo et al., 1991).

Each of the two sites perceived the problems associated with low-literacy rates of students somewhat differently. At the Bronx site, strong emphasis is given to the use of English. Spanish language assessment tools receive less emphasis. Bronx staff perceived relatively fewer students to be in need of basic literacy instruction and those who did could sometimes be sent to the learning lab for individualized instruction with teacher aides. At the Manhattan site, greater emphasis is given to the use of the native language in assessment and instruction and a wider range of assessment measures are used. At this site, a relatively larger number of students are perceived to be in need of literacy instruction, and the topic is of great concern to teachers.

Teachers' Views of Assessment Tools

At both sites, survey results indicate wide differences of opinion with respect to which assessment tools are most effective. Most teachers did agree, however, that classroom observation was their most useful means of determining literacy level. Nine out of 16 (56%) teachers ranked observation of writing as either the best or second best indicator of literacy level; seven teachers (44%) rated observation of reading in the first or second place. Teachers were less likely to rely on informal placement tools used by the program. Four teachers (25%) gave the use of the student writing sample in Spanish a high rating. Another 25% highly rated the Native Language Literacy Skills Evaluation. Six (37%) teachers felt that some kind of standardized test in English would be helpful, and eight (50%) felt a standardized test in Spanish would be of value.

Issues in Standardized Assessment

While the program staff should be lauded for their efforts to come up with better assessment tools, the program could benefit from the further development of a systematic assessment process which could be used across sites. The issue of how to choose or develop appropriate processes, however, is complex and problematic. First, the appropriateness of various measures may differ depending on the purpose for their use. Policy-makers and funders may advocate that standardized tests be used for making broad comparisons among large groups of students. Such tests are often relatively easy to administer and cost effective, and they allow comparisons to made among programs. However, such tests may be less appropriate for gauging the progress if individual students. Moreover, within adult literacy there is much debate concerning the existing standardized tests available, even for native speakers of English (Sticht, 1990). Some tests, such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) are normed only for those who test above a 2.9 grade level, thus limiting its usefulness with most beginning students. Scores on such tests, including the TABE, are often reported in terms of grade level equivalency. In addition to the fact that labeling an adult according to a school grade level equivalency may be demeaning, the process is also somewhat inaccurate. A grade equivalent can only be a theoretical relationship between the test performers of adults who take the TABE and youth who take standardized tests appropriate for their age, which is not a real indication of how an adult might perform in "second grade" or "sixth grade" (D'Amico-Samuels, 1991). Such scores underestimate or do not capture the many literacy-related experiences and abilities possessed by adult learners.

In the case of ESL literacy learners, the issue of standardized testing becomes even more problematic. Unless such a test is given in the native language of the learner, ability to understand English may get in the way of successfully demonstrating literacy ability. Standardized tests in the native languages of learners are relatively unavailable, however. In Spanish, adult programs have used the SABES test and the

California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) to measure Spanish literacy. But these tests were designed for use by children and, unlike tests such as the TABE, are not normed for adults. Recently we became aware that Psychological Associates, authors of another popular standardized adult literacy test, the Adult Test of Basic Skills (ABLE), have now produced a Spanish version of the ABLE, normed for adults. This test may merit further investigation by CUNY. However, some of the same criticisms levied on the TABE have also been raised about these Spanish language tests: validity for low-literate students is questionable, the use of grade level equivalencies is often misunderstood, and the tests themselves do not capture adult knowledge.

Instead of measuring native language literacy, many other programs chose to use tests specially developed in English for less-literate second language speakers. One test frequently used by programs, for example, is the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). CASAS is a competency-based, life skills oriented test which is adult in content and focuses on everyday skills. However, the materials evaluated by this test correspond to a specific set of adult competencies developed and used in the California adult education system and may not correspond to the objectives and goals of other programs, such as the BEGIN Language Program curriculum. Another test, the Basic English Skills Test (BEST), produced by the Center for Applied Linguistics in 1984, includes both an oral interview and a separate applied literacy test. This test has high reliability and validity for students at the survival levels of English and is easy and relatively inexpensive to administer. Scaled scores on the BEST are linked to a series of ten Student Performance Levels (SPL's) ranking students from zero to ten (zero being no ability whatsoever and ten being equivalent to an educated native speaker of English). Designed to respond to the needs of recent arrivals from Southeast Asia, the test was field tested on a larger population in the United States. The test is not available, however, at the higher proficiency levels. The usefulness of these tests in the BEGIN Language Program situation will be discussed further in the Recommendations section.

Given the aforementioned issues, many experts are reaching the conclusion that standardized tests are inappropriate in many cases and should certainly not be relied upon as the only assessment tool or measure of student progress. As E. Metz points out:

> Standardized tests do not appear to be the answer as they are related to former failure, give a one-sided view of a multi-sided problem, and often do not measure anything which pertains to the goals of the learner (1989).

Increasingly researchers are realizing that no one assessment tool should bear the burden for measuring worth in adult education. In Testing and Assessment in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language, Thomas Sticht (1990) comments:

Because of the error in these type of standardized tests, rigid rules should not be established such as saying that all who score below a CASAS score of 225 or below an 8.9 grade level should be sent to basic skills education. Rather, there should always be multiple sources and types of information about people, including past histories of achievements, employment, informal samples of performance using basic skills, references, and other types of information that can help the decision-making process.

"WE CAN'T BE ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE" THE PLACEMENT AND REFERRAL PROCESS

Although teachers at both sites found coping with low-literate students in their ESL classes difficult, by the same token many were strongly concerned that if BEGIN did not provide basic literacy services, those students might have no access to education at all. The issue of which students should be served by the program and which should be referred elsewhere was an on-going concern. Several teachers, for example, commented that many students might be more appropriately served in Basic English in the Native Language (BENL) classes in their own communities. "Basic literacy belongs in the community, not in an institution. There they have the context and reasons to learn in their immediate area," said one teacher. "But nearly every one of these classes has a long waiting list." When asked if low-literate students should be referred to BENL programs even if there was a waiting list, only four teachers (25%) and one administrator agreed or strongly agreed. Five (31%) were undecided and seven (44%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. "I feel literacy students do not have adequate services and will relatively be excluded from the job market if they do not get these skills. Given the dearth of services, I feel BEGIN *should* provide the service," commented one teacher. "Why discriminate against low level students? Accept them but place them in a class with like students and a teacher who is specially trained to work with them," responded another. "We have a moral obligation to serve those most in need," wrote a third respondent.

Staff and students did, however, distinguish between those low-literate students who could profit from the program and those who could not. At both sites it was agreed that students who lack the most rudimentary skills, such as the ability to write their name and address, recognize the alphabet and decode simple sentences, should be referred to other programs since they require intensive, often one-on-one instruction and, as one teacher reflected, "We're not equipped to handle certain students in the time frame we are given." At both sites in recent months staff have been pleased to note that more of these non-literate learners seem to have be screened from the program before arriving at intake sessions, although there appeared to be no consistent policy in this regard.

Clearly, along with research in the assessment process, however, it would also be helpful for the program to develop a set of criteria for deciding which students to exempt or refer to other programs, which need to be enrolled in a separate literacy classroom, and which students may be able to cope with a Level One class but still require somewhat more intensive instruction in basic literacy. As mentioned earlier, one model which has attempted to develop tools to differentiate between levels of language and literacy proficiency is the Student Performance Levels (SPL's). Originally designed by ESL professionals in 1983 and field tested by seven Mainstream English Language Training (MELT) projects across the U.S. in 1984-85, the SPL's provide a common framework for describing oral communication and literacy proficiency levels among service providers and funding sources both within and across programs. (A description of the MELT levels is provided in the Appendix.) Under a system like this, for example, students at an SPL of 0 or 1 might be referred elsewhere, students with an SPL of 2 or 3 might be placed in the special literacy class and students with an SPL of 4 or 5 might receive special attention within a designated Level 1 class.

With some adaptation to meet the needs of the BEGIN Language Program, SPL's may provide some useful guidelines to allow the program to develop its own set of descriptors that distinguish between various levels of ESL literacy learners for purposes of screening and placement, particularly those at the lowest literacy levels. SPL's, or some other set of descriptors, may also provide a framework through which to begin to document, at least in a general way, the number of instructional hours required to achieve certain outcomes in language and literacy. This issue will be discussed further in the next section.

"EIGHT WEEKS IN NOT ENOUGH"
LENGTH OF INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

Of all the factors cited as constraining participants' ability to profit from the program, the length of instructional time stood out as the most critical factor to students, teachers, and program administrators alike. "Our funders just don't realize how long it takes to learn English," we heard over and over. This topic dominated our focus group discussions with learners. The biggest educational obstacle to getting jobs, learners told us again and again, is their inability to speak, read, and write in English. *Students felt particularly frustrated when they were taken out of language classes and placed in work experience where there was little opportunity to practice English on the job and/or when they had yet to acquire significant advances in English to allow them to be assigned to work that would involve learning substantive new skills. All but the most advanced students felt that they would be able to achieve the program goals better if the five month continuation phase were replaced with language classes alone. Teachers echoed some of the same concerns.* "Just at the point at

which the class is becoming cohesive as a group and 'gaining a rhythm' in learning, the group is disrupted." "If I had six months I could completely learn," one student told me with longing and frustration.

Increased instructional time was considered to be particularly important for less literate students. Many teachers felt even 16 weeks was not enough for someone with very limited literacy skills to make sufficient advancements. As the Bronx site administrator pointed out, it may require as long as four years or more for a beginning literacy student to advance to the pre-GED level. Adult educators lament the fact that the general public underestimates that time required for adult education. We take for granted that children remain in school for six years to achieve the "6th grade reading level," while we expect an adult to achieve the same results in a matter of months. When it comes to second language learning, the general public can be equally myopic. Although many Americans remember taking years of language training in high school to achieve minimal proficiency in a foreign language, this reality seems to be forgotten when considering the amount of time needed for an immigrant to achieve the same or better language skills. For learners who must learn both English as a Second Language and basic literacy, the task is daunting indeed!

"HOLDING EVERYONE BACK" THE NEED FOR A SPECIAL LITERACY CLASS

Another issue everyone at both sites agreed upon was the need to separate students who lacked the most basic literacy skills from those who already could read and write in their native language. When asked to describe how the needs of less-literate students could best be met, 14 of 16 teachers (87%) surveyed disagreed or strongly disagreed that students should continue to be placed in classes based on oral proficiency, regardless of literacy level. Teachers cited many ways less-literate students were unable to benefit from their instruction. Students became confused when the written word was used as a tool for oral language instruction. They were either unable to copy from the blackboard or were slower in copying material from the board than other students. They were unable to read basic texts, fill in worksheets or take written work home. Less literate students, teachers said, often lacked basic tools for language acquisition, such as an understanding of grammatical concepts, the idea of a sentence, and so on. Many had difficulty understanding classroom tasks and complex, multi-step instructions. Both teachers and students mentioned the fact that less-literate students in their classes felt shy, isolated, and often anxious because they could not keep up with the work of the classroom. Several students mentioned knowing of classmates who had dropped out rather than continue to face the embarrassment of being unable to understand in class.

Teachers at both sites have tried many strategies to cope with mixed level classes, including slowing the pace of instruction, providing simpler lessons and concrete examples, using pictures instead of text, breaking students into small groups or pairs, and trying to create a multi-level environment where students work on the same task but at different levels. In the Bronx site, teachers have also sometimes been able to send students to the lab for extra help. However, in spite of the fact that all of these are effective strategies for dealing with multi-level classes, the consensus among teachers was that the inability to provide low-level students with the individualized attention they needed distracted them from teaching others in the classroom.

Teachers' notions of how best to serve low-literate students has been in a process of evolution. Early in the program, after receiving some training from literacy specialists, teachers tried pulling less-literate learners out of class once a week. In the Spring of 1990 permission was given for a special class for less literate learners at the Manhattan site. The teachers who volunteered to teach the class conducted considerable informal research, both to get to know the needs of the literacy learners in the class (Earl-Castillo, 1990) and to learn effective teaching methods for this population. Among the techniques they used were language experience and group stories, problem-posing and phonics in context. After several weeks, the teacher became convinced that these students required more than eight weeks to achieve even minimal gains in their literacy levels. A petition to continue a class for 16 weeks was eventually granted by HRA. In fact, the class continued beyond 20 weeks. Then, the HRA policy changed and students were either sent to a conciliation process or to a continuation class. At the time of our first site visit, only three students remained in the class.

During the 1990-1991 fiscal year, it was agreed that, until further investigations could be undertaken, at both sites a special 16-week literacy class would be offered to those learners who might be labeled as semi-literate (able to recognize letters and numbers; get limited meaning from text; and write some words, phrases, and simple sentences). Students were placed in the class based primarily on their literacy levels, regardless of oral proficiency. Phone interviews with administrators at both sites indicated that staff were encouraged by this new development. The only significant drawback was the fact that, since insufficient numbers of literacy level students were identified at each intake, the class was forced to operate on an open-entry, open-exit structure. Teachers have been exploring ways to have students who have been in the class longer work with newcomers as a way to get around this problem, but indicate other potential intake processes should be explored.

"DIFFERENT VIEWS"
LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION

One issue of debate within the BEGIN Language Program has been around whether basic literacy classes should be offered in English or in Spanish. As we have seen, at the Bronx site the literacy class is held in English, while at the Manhattan site the literacy class takes place primarily in Spanish with separate oral/aural instruction in English. Clearly, among the BEGIN Language Program staff there is a lack of consensus. When we asked teachers and administrators whether Spanish should be the primary language of instruction in literacy classes, four teachers and coordinators (25%) strongly agreed, and seven teachers (44%) agreed. Six teachers (37%), however, strongly agreed or agreed that literacy classes should be taught in English. Several teachers admitted to not knowing enough about the issue to make an informed decision, and one teacher said, "I don't know enough about different views. We need materials and literature to educate us." Others acknowledged that the issue related to more than simply pedagogy alone. "We also know it's a political issue with native language literacy--especially when you are talking about women and Hispanics," said one teacher.

Teachers arguing for the use of English-only claim that native language literacy will only divert students from their primary task of learning sufficient English to get a job and function in their communities. Time learning in the native language is time taken away from the learning of English, which ultimately is of essential value for self-sufficiency in the United States. Around the United States the popularity of native language literacy for adults, however, is growing. In New York City, over a dozen programs offer services. Those advocating the use of the native language cite several rationales. Klaudia Rivera, describes a linguistic rationale called the Common Underlying Proficiency principle, popularized by Jim Cummins (1981):

> To the extent that instruction in the native language (L1) is effective in promoting proficiency in that language, transfer of this proficiency to a second language will occur, providing there is adequate exposure to the second language either in school or in the environment, and adequate motivation to learn it (Rivera, 1990).

Some point to the fact that basic literacy can be learned more efficiently in the native language, since students are not faced both with the task of understanding the meaning of the language and how to decode and write text at the same time. Word recognition, phonetic awareness, basic grammatical structures, directionality, the use of various reading strategies, all, they believe, will eventually transfer positively to English. One teacher writes:

Especially in our case, where Spanish literacy is a) more easily acquired because its rules are more consistent and b) it transfers so easily to English, it's hard for me to understand why people persist in thinking ESL literacy is more efficient.

In addition to linguistic rationales related to transfer to English, advocates point to the benefits of biliteracy for individuals and their communities in language maintenance and the promotion of cultural pride and diversity.

While there is some research to indicate that, among school-aged populations, native language literacy does facilitate second language acquisition, little research has been conducted regarding its value specifically for adult learners. While the Center for Applied Linguistics has always encouraged and promoted bilingualism, we feel, all other issues being equal, both native language literacy or ESL literacy could be appropriate in the BEGIN Language Program, depending on the interests of students and background of teachers. As will be described in the next section, we do believe, however, that, if instruction takes place in English, native language group counseling services need to be provided to students and coordinated with the ESL literacy teachers. If instruction takes place in the native language, a concurrent oral English instructional process needs to be provided. The Center for Applied Linguistics, under the auspices of the National Center for Literacy, is currently conducting a national study of native language literacy programs around the United States, in which we hope to further investigate the relative merits of English and native language instruction. (For more information on native language literacy see Rivera, 1990.)

"WHAT I REALLY WANT IS TO BE MORE INDEPENDENT" CREATING A LEARNING CLIMATE FOR LOW LITERATE BEGIN STUDENTS

Less-literate learners come to the classroom with many special needs. Many are unfamiliar with a classroom setting and have low self-esteem with regards to their ability to learn. Experts in basic literacy agree that it is essential that the classroom address issues of immediate concern to learners which allow them opportunities to experience successful applications of literacy early on. To make a commitment to literacy, learners need to have the opportunity to name their own goals for learning to read, write, and speak English. Those goals may sometimes be related to parenting, dealing with the clinic, with rent, with bureaucracies, with parent/teacher conferences, or simply with "being more independent" as well as with purely job-related goals. They need an opportunity to voice their fears about their ability to learn as adults and to realize they are not alone in their problems; to feel like they are learning together with others, on behalf of themselves and their families. While these skills may not relate directly to what is needed for the workplace, they may be prerequisites. The recent SCANS report, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor, for example, has found that far from being peripheral, skills such as the ability to learn how to learn,

self-confidence, and the ability to work with others as a team were central not only to the adult learning process but also to what is needed to function on a job. These variables may be particularly important when dealing with populations of JOBS program participants, who may not have elected to attend literacy classes and can be classified among the "hardest to reach" populations.

Creating a learner-centered environment for BEGIN students requires much of the literacy teacher. Materials often have to be designed especially for the interests and levels of learners, building on things students already know to introduce things they need to learn. (An excellent example of such a process was observed on one of the field visits to the Manhattan site. Literacy students had each been given a short newspaper article about medicinal plants. These Dominican women knew a great deal about this topic and a lively discussion followed the reading of the article. Then students were ready to choose words from the story and from their experience and learn to read and write them.) Clearly many of these basic principles of adult education are already understood and practiced by many BEGIN educators and are articulated in their curriculum materials.

While teachers can do much to address personal issues that allow students to get ready to learn, many teachers believe that BEGIN participants need additional kinds of counseling services. One of the concerns voiced by teachers and administrators in our survey was the fact that teachers too often had to take on the role of social workers without the appropriate training. Recently, some limited counseling services have been added to programs at both sites, however, most teachers felt more counseling should be available. They cited the realities of living in poverty in New York City—housing problems, domestic violence, substance abuse, difficulties with teenaged children—as significantly impacting students ability to benefit from the program. Wrote one coordinator:

> Many [students] are terribly depressed about the dismal futures they see for themselves—eternally low-paying, meaningless jobs, perennial poverty. Finally, most are grappling with making big changes in their self-concepts-changing from wife/mother, where home and family take precedence to career-woman where the job comes first is a big step. If the government really wants the students to get jobs, counseling should be an integral part of this program, to help in resolving these issues. I believe it's equally as important as ESL instruction.

Within job training programs many models for group counseling exist. In Texas, for example, Project ReFocus provides four weeks of initial group counseling activities in the native language to JOBS participants *before* placing them in an educational program. (Baird & Clymer, 1991). In this process students can decide whether to go directly to a job search or to make a commitment to the educational program, thus reducing drop-out rates and screening students who don't want to be in class out of

the educational component. New York has played a leadership role in designing the ACCESS program which provides group counseling and career development for JTPA participants and others. In this program, students begin to look at their own lives and the choices available to them. They take the Strong Campbell Inventory to assess their interests and discuss areas related to interviewing and decision-making. Specific recommendations for such services will be addressed later in this report.

"YO ADORO A Mi MAESTRA"
SUPPORTING STAFF DEVELOPMENT IN LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Although students participating in focus group interviews were universally frustrated and disillusioned with the length of instruction of the BEGIN Language Program and with the quality of the work experience program, when asked what they liked about the program many answered, as this participant did, "Yo adoro a mi maestra." The quality and dedication of their teachers was mentioned by many students as the one positive aspect of the program. After meeting with program staff on several occasions, we concur. Although our time for visiting classes was limited, discussions with teachers and site coordinators indicate a deep commitment to their students and to the program in spite of the many obstacles they face in delivering instruction. As we have seen, teachers have acted as curriculum developers, have responded to the need to develop assessment tools and, in some cases, have dedicated their free time to research that would help them to better understand the needs of their students. Most teachers and site coordinators responded enthusiastically to our requests as outside researchers and were eager to find out what could be done to improve their services to low literate students. Some teachers and both site coordinators went out of their way to provide us with additional materials we needed, often conducting research on their own to meet our needs.

Teachers and administrators cited the fact that the program is able to employ many full time teachers and that weekly staff development time is available as two factors in particular that facilitate their ability to improve instruction. During staff development time many kinds of literacy-related training have already been undertaken, including the development of individualized activities for low-literate students, orientations to the language lab, and workshops in native language literacy conducted by consultants. When asked what additional training they needed related to literacy, teachers had several suggestions including site visits to observe other literacy classes around the city, workshops on literacy, the acquisition of specific materials related to literacy and curriculum development suited to these learners.

While literacy-related training for all staff is important, two groups of teachers (those who teach the basic literacy classes and those who offer Level One classes in which low-literate students are enrolled) need to provided with additional opportunities

for training. In particular, these teachers might benefit from several intensive training sessions by a consultant well versed in basic reading and writing theory as it applies to adults. In addition, this group of teachers will need extra time to develop or adapt existing curriculum materials to suit the needs of the literacy classroom. They will also need to be given opportunities to work with any consultants hired to develop literacy assessment tools, both to help assure that the tools developed are appropriate to their classroom context and to learn how to use them.

PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY FOR LANGUAGE USE: A CHALLENGE FOR THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

Within the overall educational program offered BEGIN students, the component in which students spend the largest number of total contact hours is the work experience. The purpose of the work experience is to provide participants with opportunities to gain job experience and to practice job-related English-as-a-Second-Language and literacy. Students are assigned to the unpaid work experience three days a week over a five-month period. The remaining two days a week they are enrolled in continuation language classes.

During our initial visits to the BEGIN Language Program, the work experience was the component which evoked the greatest controversy on the part of students, teachers, and administrators. We understand that in the months since those visits efforts have been make to improve this component and plans are underway for further changes as HRA and CUNY learn how best to organize this activity. Some of these efforts will be mentioned later in this section. We would, however, like to summarize some of the key concerns we heard from teachers and students.

At the time of our visits, teachers had begun to visit the work sites on a regular basis to observe the kinds of activities in which students were engaged, the nature of interactions which were taking place with supervisors, and the kind of language being used at the worksite. This information, it was hoped, would allow teachers to better plan continuation class content which reinforced what was taking place on the job. Although some teachers reported finding positive placements for students, in many cases teachers were disappointed to find students performing routine tasks which involved limited interactions with supervisors and very little use of language. Among the jobs mentioned in this case were stuffing and labeling envelopes, and cleaning jobs in hospitals and lunch rooms. At times, instructions were given on the first day; then students were left to work on their own, with little opportunity to interact with co-workers other than their Spanish-speaking peers. Some supervisors reported not knowing how to encourage students in their language development. Others recounted a reluctance to train students in more complex tasks (such as using the computer or dictaphone) because they were not fluent enough in English.

Students, too. reported frustration with the work experience. One student echoed the feeling of many when she described the program as a "false illusion", offering but failing to deliver on the promise of learning a marketable skill. Many expressed the belief that what they needed most in order to get jobs was not so much work experience as further fluency in English. In fact, of the 28 students participating in our focus groups, 22 had previous work experience. They reported having worked as housekeepers, beauticians, office workers, hospital aides, factory workers, and child care workers. Many quit after they had one or more children. Others had been laid off. Many of the 28 reported having modest job aspirations, such as wanting to become day care workers, health care aides or enter homemaker training programs. In addition to their concern that the work experience was not meeting their real need to learn English, students described other obstacles to their participation. Many parents expressed concern that traveling long distances away from home to the work site meant they could not be available to their children should an emergency take place (not an infrequent occurrence in many of the neighborhoods in which these single mothers live). Others mentioned difficulty in finding reliable childcare. Personal health care issues were another concern.

While many of these external constraints may be outside the control of the program, in recent months, efforts have been made to create conditions for a better work experience. Greater attention has been given to removing inappropriate work sites and replacing them with worksites which offer greater opportunities to interact with supervisors and English-speaking co-workers. At the Bronx site, for example, new placements have been found within the community college system itself. Human service-related placements such as hospital aides and senior citizens caretaker positions, where there are more built-in opportunities for using language with clients are being chosen over jobs which might be more routine and involve less interaction with other English-speakers. Teachers are being asked to play a larger role in recommending the appropriateness of potential sites. Further efforts are being made to respond to individual student preferences with respect to the work site. In the classroom students and teachers are working to develop assertiveness strategies to help them to express their needs to their supervisors.

We are encouraged by such improvements and support HRA/CUNY in their continued efforts to provide better language learning opportunities for participants. One of the key areas where continued progress is needed is in the area of preparing the work experience supervisors for their roles as language facilitators. Workplace literacy experts at the Center for Applied Linguistics have found that, to be effective, one person on the job needs to be designated to act in the role of mentor to assure that language is used on the worksite. Most frequently a job supervisor plays such a role, but in some cases a co-worker can also provide this service. This individual must be willing to see his or her role in extending the language learning experience into the workplace and needs some training to learn how to do so. Such a mentor can play a key role in making sure the learner engages in small talk on the job, learns

to read and use print in the work environment, is included in lunch discussions and special activities, understands safety rules and benefits, and so on. HRA/CUNY can facilitate the effective use of language at the work experience in several ways. First, sites can be chosen based on their willingness to provide staff to play such a role. Second, specialized training sessions can be designed to familiarize the supervisor or designated language mentors with techniques for encouraging language and literacy use on the job. Third, HRA/CUNY can continue the practice of providing time for teachers to go to the job sites, with the aim of assisting the language coach and discovering appropriate topics for further classroom practice. Such training needs to be on-going, since at many worksites there may be a high turnover of supervisory-level staff, necessitating re-training of new staff.

For women to be willing to take the risk of leaving their families to go to a work assignment (often in an unfamiliar neighborhood) requires that they experience some sense of hope that their employment potential has been enhanced by the experience. Making sure that participants have some choice of work assignment and that the work experience provides significant opportunities for language use would, we believe, play a key role in improving the retention rates in this component.

Conclusions and Recommendations

EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT: QUICK FIX OR LONG-TERM SOLUTION?

Ultimately the goal of the BEGIN Language Program, and indeed all JOBS programs, is for participants to find jobs which will allow them to become self-sufficient in the long-term, no longer dependent on welfare. Two often competing assumptions are implied within this goal. For some, JOBS represents a means to reduce the cycle of poverty by making a substantial investment in the education of poor mothers. Others see the program for its potential for reducing welfare rolls, saving scarce tax dollars and decreasing the size of federal and state bureaucracies (American Public Welfare Association, 1990). JOBS programs have generally followed one of two basic routes: a low-cost option of facilitating job placement through activities such as the job search and a relatively higher cost option of providing participants with education and job training. The first option presumes that once an individual gets into the job world, he or she can "move up" through job experience. The second presumes certain basic skills are prerequisites to getting and keeping a good job.

Increasingly over the past three years states have faced challenges in implementing JOBS programs. Many states underestimated the cost of preparing participants to find a job that would increase their earning capacity enough to support their families, particularly in a climate of growing unemployment (Udesky, 1990). The cost and management of subsidized day care has also often exceeded expectations. States have found themselves struggling to comply with mandated participation rates; often attempting a balancing act between offering more comprehensive services to some while limiting services to others.

As yet, little data exists to confirm or deny the success of various models of JOBS programs. We still do not know if greater investments in education and training will lead to larger impacts and whether, in dollar terms, the additional gains justify the expanded outlays (Manpower Development Resource Corporation, 1991). Although there is a general understanding that jobs of the future will require increasingly higher threshold levels of literacy and technical skills, no definitive information currently exists on the relationship between education and employability.

Clearly general employability is enhanced by the ability to read and write and to speak English but other variables may also impact on empioyability. The U.S. Department of Labor's SCANS report for America 2000, for example, describes among the five basic workplace competencies they have found as needed for the job *resources* (understanding how to organize, plan and allocate time, money, staff, and space), *interpersonal skills* (working on teams, teaching others, serving customers,

and working effectively within a culturally diverse milieu), *information* (acquiring and evaluating facts and data), *systems* (understanding social, organizational and technological systems), and *technology* (selecting equipment and tools for the task at hand, applying technology to tasks, and maintaining and troubleshooting equipment) (SCANS, 1991). While many of these competencies are related to literacy, they imply that job readiness means more than just acquiring basic skills. For language minority students such competencies also imply cross-cultural training in relative values toward such things as time orientation, achievement and individualism (Grognet, 1992).

In addition, many factors extrinsic to the individual profoundly impact on hiring: the general economic system, the number of other applicants applying for jobs, and, in the case of limited-English speakers, the availability of translators on the job. Other factors intrinsic to the individual make a difference as well: the individual's first impression at the job site, the degree to which the individual is willing to take risks to attempt an unfamiliar job, the personality of the individual and the degree of personal motivation to take any job, no matter how desirable or undesirable.

Competing assumptions about the value of education for employability also play themselves out in the day-to-day operation of the BEGIN Language Program. "Is the goal of the program to help participants get any job as quickly as possible?" teachers ask. "Or is it to provide them with a real education that will make a difference in their lives?" Given the fact that teachers have so little information about which of their students actually find jobs or get into specific job training (and that those numbers may be relatively small), it is not surprising that they focus on the long-term educational goals of the program. "If we have broadened a student's ability to function using English and opened the student up to the potential she has in the larger society, we have succeeded *as teachers*," wrote one instructor. "We try our best to do more with less," wrote another.

The BEGIN Language Program has taken on serving among the most challenging of all adult learners, even within the JOBS caseload. Certainly no one would dispute that low literate, non-English speaking Hispanic mothers in New York City fall among the "hardest to reach" populations. And, while the program can only do so much, what the recommendations that follow suggest that, if we are to serve any of these clients well, we may need to make a more realistic assessment of what it takes. This may mean making hard choices related to, for example, serving fewer people with higher cost services—services that JOBS researchers suggest may, focus on more highly motivated clients with more attractive programs (Manpower Development Resource Corporation, 1991). The recommendations below, while they imply a larger investment, provide what we believe are elements central to effective education and job training for low-literate adult learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: CUNY should act soon to implement a more effective system for collecting and reporting basic demographic data as it related to program completion, entry into job training or further education, and placement in jobs.

Among the principal goals of this study were 1) the identification of low-literate participants based on education level and 2) the determination of the impact of literacy level on participants' ability to achieve the BEGIN Language Program goal of getting a job or getting into job training. The fact that it is not possible to obtain such data has serious implications both for program accountability and program improvement. Clearly, without such basic outcome data, it is difficult to judge program effectiveness as a whole. We are unable to judge whether low-literate students benefit more or less from the program than other students. We also are unable to ascertain which low-literate students are being "recycled" back into the program and with what results. The lack of such information may impede decision-making with respect to the best use of BEGIN Language Program resources. The paucity of outcome data may have other consequences as well. Teachers in our study reported their frustration at not knowing which or how many of their former students are successful in obtaining jobs, getting into other educational programs, or entering job training. The availability of such information could be of valuable assistance in helping teachers in curriculum planning and the counseling of students.

The BEGIN Language Program is not alone in its difficulty in tracking caseloads. Increasingly, programs around the country are reporting similar problems. Nevertheless, if we are to get solid data on the value of the JOBS program and where best to invest our economic resources in the future, such information is vital.

Recommendation 2: CUNY needs to develop a program-wide process for assessing the basic reading and writing skills of participants. Assessment of oral proficiency alone is insufficient to place participants within the program, make recommendations for referral elsewhere, or evaluate progress.

Currently the only formal assessment tool used by the BEGIN Language Program is the NYS Place Test. While this test is adequate to serve the purpose of program *placement* for oral proficiency, it does not replace the need for a systematic, program-wide process to assess the reading and writing abilities of students for

placement, diagnosis, and *evaluation* purposes. As was discussed in the Findings section, the use of standardized tests for low-literate second language students is problematic. Given the difficulties with existing tests, many programs have opted to develop a series of multiple, informal assessment measures appropriate to their own needs. At both sites, we found teachers had already begun such a task. Many of the tools which have already been developed, including the Student Information Form, the use of a writing sample, and the task-based inventory being used at the Manhattan site represent the beginnings of an effective placement process.

A continued investment to consult with some of the many experts in alternative assessment available in New York City might allow for the development of a more comprehensive system. Such a system should allow for the use of assessment to diagnose student needs *during* the educational process and to gain some indication of achievement at the end of the program. A consultant might be hired to develop a package of such tools as student portfolios, goals checklists, interview protocols, and task-based assessments. With CUNY's resources, this process might well result in a high-quality, innovative assessment system that might become a model for other JOBS programs around the country. To be effective, teachers will also need special training related to the nature and value of such assessment processes and how to use them at various stages of the educational program.

Linked to the assessment process should also be a set of general descriptors which would make it possible to determine which students to exempt or refer to other programs, which need to be enrolled in a separate literacy classroom, and which students may be able to cope with a Level One class but still require somewhat more intensive instruction in basic literacy. Clearly the program cannot be all things to all people. We concur with teachers that students who are unable to get down the most basic personal information and read simple sight words and sentences need specialized, intensive instruction the program may not be able to offer and they should be referred to other programs in their community.

Until such an assessment process can be developed, one possible alternative CUNY should consider is the use of the BEST test. We make this recommendation not because this test is a CAL product, but because it is currently the only valid and reliable instrument that assesses oral proficiency and reading and writing together for the lowest- level ESL learners. We feel the Student Performance Levels might provide useful tools through which discussions of students placement and referral could take place across programs. In any case, CUNY may want to examine the use of performance levels as a model for the development of their own process of determining student levels.

In developing an assessment process, care must also be taken that the assessment instruments are used for the purpose for which they were designed. We reiterate our concern that the NYS Place Test was designed solely for the purpose of

program placement, not as a general proficiency test. Although pre and post-test data from the NYS Place Test is collected and reported in ESL programs throughout the state, we believe the use of this test should be weighed carefully by programs in which pre and post-testing with a statistically reliable and valid proficiency test is required for program evaluation purposes.

Recommendation 3: Low-literate learners should be placed in separate classes with a specialized curriculum tailored to their needs and a focus on the language and cultural aspects of occupational ESL.

Another issue everyone at both sites agreed upon was the need to separate students who lack the most basic literacy skills from those who already can read and write in their native language. Teachers felt that not only were less-literate students in their classes unable to benefit from their instruction when they were mixed with more literate students, but that the low-level students distracted them from teaching others in the classroom. Specialized classes, such as those already being developed at both sites, need to be continued.

Less-literate learners come to the classroom with many special needs. Many are unfamiliar with a classroom setting and lack confidence in their ability to learn in a formal educational setting. Experts in basic literacy agree that it is essential that teacher address issues of immediate concern to learners, which allow them opportunities to experience successful applications of literacy early on. In order to do so, teachers need to develop means to assess not only what learners cannot do but ascertain things they are able to do so that learning tasks reinforce and build on existing skills. Learners may also lack basic numeracy skills. Teachers may need to move from work with real objects in the case of numeracy, to the representations of numbers on paper. Authentic materials related to job training used in the other level classes will often need to be adapted so they are not overly complex. Writing students produce themselves, either by writing or dictating their own words, is often effective in literacy work with low level learners. Themes introduced should focus on survival language and skills needed in everyday life. Since they often cannot work independently with text, students require a good deal of one to one assistance. Commercial materials to use with this population are limited, but growing. CUNY may want to consult the National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education in Washington, DC. The Literacy Assistance Center in New York also has a collection of resource materials.

It is also our belief that a more sustained focus on group counseling, in conjunction with the educational program, needs to be explored. This needs to take place early in the immersion cycle. Many models are available, including special initial group counseling designed to strengthen students' commitment to the job search

and/or further education. "Students lack such confidence in themselves," one ACCESS facilitator in the Bronx told me. "The system, the environment, and significant others are constantly telling them 'you can't do it.' Our job is to say to them, 'Yes, you can. You have the answer inside you.' After that students need to discuss time management, life skills, goal setting and basic career counseling." While teachers may be able to achieve some of the counseling-related program goals using English, many may require the use of the native language. We believe such accessibility to the insights of trained counselors who understand the life experiences of the participants, and can act as translators on occasion, is particularly important in the case of the Bronx site where fewer teachers speak Spanish. While encouraging students to speak English at the site is important, to some degree the "English-only" policy may constrain the ability of teachers to get to know certain student needs and abilities.

Such counciling should be integrated with the pre-occupational and cross-cultural training already provided by teachers to get students ready for jobs. Teachers should continue their efforts to focus on training related to working in a new culture, including such issues as time management, different customs for socializing on the job, the role of supervisors, and processes for calling in sick. To be effective, however, these same topics need to be addressed within the context of native-language counseling.

Recommendation 4: To achieve the program goals, low-literate learners require an intensive language, literacy and pre-occupational instructional training period of six months or more.

Of all the factors cited as constraining participants' ability to profit from the program, the length of instructional time stood out as the most critical factor. As many practitioners point out, however, it is very difficult to ascertain the number of hours of instructional time required for adult learners to achieve specified outcomes. Both program and learners variables must be considered before any rough estimate of the number of hours is established. For example, ESL professionals widely agree that learners with less formal education in their mother tongue, learners with no or limited literacy skills in any language, learners who are unable to attend classes regularly due to health, transportation, or childcare problems, and learners who are isolated from other English speakers will all require more contact hours.

In the face of significant underestimation of the instructional time needed for adult learners, however, increasingly adult educators are beginning to work toward the development of some general guidelines for the length of instructional time required for students to pass from one level to another. Using the SPL's, for example, the MELT project estimated the following number of hours might be required to move from one level to another (1985: 10).

Listening Comprehension and Oral Communication SPL GAIN	Range of Contact Hours
I to II	105 to 235
II to III	125 to 210
III to IV	120 to 210
IV to V	120 to 225
V to VI	120 to 225
VI to VII	120 to 225

If we assume, as many MELT designers do, that an SPL of 7 is necessary for a student to be able to participate effectively job training program with English being the medium of instruction,, then clearly we would have to plan 600-1000 or more hours of instruction for a low-literate, beginning ESL learner to become ready for job training in English. Such a view was echoed by Massachusetts educators, who met for several months to discuss appropriate instructional time for students to progress, using the Student Performance Levels as a guideline (Massachusetts Interagency Literacy Group: 1990). They concurred that to move from a beginning ESL level (SPL 0-4) to an intermediate level (SPL 5-6) requires from 450 to 700 instructional hours, depending on the level of the student. To move from an intermediate (SPL 5-6) to a more advanced level of SPL 7-10 might require an additional 300 to 450 hours.

Service Category	Class Size		Instructional Hours to Complete Category	Minimal Contact Hours	Hours of Instruction Per Week	
	Range	Optimal			Range	Optimal
Beginner ESL (SPL 0-4)	11-25	15	450-700	125-150	3-25	6-15
Intermediate ESL (SPL 5-6+)	11-25	15	300-450	100	3-25	6-15
Advanced ESL (SPL 7-10)	11-25	15	200-300	50	3-25	6-15
ABE (Grade Levels 0-5.9)	5-10	8	650-900	200	4-25	6-12
Pre-ASE (Grade Levels 6-8.9)	5-15	10	150-300	65	4-20	6-15
ASE (Grade Levels 9-12)	9-15	12	120-300	20	4-20	6-15

Massachusetts Interagency Literacy Group. (1990). Principles for effective literacy and basic skills programs. Quincy, MA: Massachusetts Department of Education, Division of Adult Education.

Clearly, longer instructional time is a higher cost option CUNY/HRA must weigh with many other considerations. However, we believe the program should give careful thought to the option of serving fewer students and allowing them to engage in intensive language instruction for a longer period of time than the 160 hours of intensive instruction currently available. An intensive instructional period of six months, for example, would provide students with 480 instructional hours, possibly enough to provide them, in some cases, with sufficient skills to access job training. Such an option might be important to consider given the apparent frustrations with the ability of the work experience program to provide opportunities to develop language and job skills and the concurrent difficulties of maintaining consistency within the continuation language phase of the program.

In lieu of a significantly longer instructional time for all students, CUNY might consider the option of offering a course of six months or longer for an experimental group of low-literate learners. Careful records could be kept to measure progress and outcomes. Records on student drop out rates should also be kept to ascertain whether

whether the availability of significant educational opportunity impacts on program retention. If this proves to be the case, enrolling fewer students who stay in the program longer may be a convincing alternative.

Recommendation 5: Successful basic literacy instruction can be undertaken in English or the native language. Where instruction is provided in English, personal and employment readiness counseling in the native language needs to be offered. Where native language literacy is provided, it should be accompanied by oral/aural instruction in English.

One issue of debate within the BEGIN Language Program has been around whether basic literacy classes should be offered in English or in Spanish. As we have seen, at the Bronx site the literacy class is held in English, while at the Manhattan site the literacy class takes place primarily in Spanish. While there is some research to indicate that, among school-aged populations, native language literacy does facilitate second language acquisition, little research has been conducted regarding its value specifically for adult learners. While the Center for Applied Linguistics has always encouraged and promoted bilingualism, we feel, all other issues being equal, both native language literacy or ESL literacy could be appropriate in the BEGIN Language Program.

In general, since motivation is a key factor in adult learning, and many non-linguistic factors affect language choice, we believe CUNY should consider offering learners a choice for the language in which they want to become literate first. (Choice of language may also depend on the staff resources and interests as well.) We do, however, believe that if instruction takes place in the native language, a concurrent oral English instructional program needs to be provided so that learners have the opportunity to learn job-related ESL at the same time. Conversely, as discussed in Recommendation 3, if instruction takes place in English, native language group counseling services need to be provided to students and coordinated with the ESL literacy teachers.

Recommendation 6: HRA/CUNY should continue its strong investment in staff development, including specialized training for teachers working with low-literate students.

Discussions with teachers and site coordinators indicate a deep commitment to their students and to the program in spite of the many obstacles they face in delivering instruction. As we have seen, teachers have acted as curriculum developers, have responded to the need to develop assessment tools and, in some cases, have dedicated their free time to research that would help them to better understand the

needs of their students. HRA/CUNY is to be commended for the quality of its teaching staff and for its investment in staff training, which was highly rated by most teachers. While literacy-related training for all staff needs to continue literacy teachers need to provided with additional opportunities for training. The teachers of these classes need to be permitted to receive additional training in theories and techniques of teaching reading and writing. These teachers may also benefit from visiting other literacy classes around the city to observe classes and interview teachers. Initially they may also require additional planning time to both to work with specialists to develop appropriate assessment materials and to develop specialized curriculum materials. Teachers may want to make use of the resource library of the Literacy Assistance Center as well as visit other literacy programs for ideas. The National Clearinghouse on Literacy Education for Limited-English-Proficient Adults (NCLE) can also provide useful resource materials.

Recommendation 7: HRA/CUNY should continue to investigate how best to assure that the unpaid work experience component provides participants with significant opportunities for language practice and on-the-job training that will improve their employment potential.

During our investigations for this study, the work experience component evoked the greatest controversy on the part of students, teachers, and administrators. Teachers and administrators expressed the concern that many students were not provided a choice of work placements and were placed in jobs where they performed routine tasks allowing for limited opportunities to learn new skills, to use English on the job or to interact with other employees. Students expressed similar concerns, reiterating the fact that many of them had years of work experience in the United States. What they believed they needed were further opportunities to gain fluency in spoken English and English literacy and specific job skills training. Students also expressed concern with finding childcare and with the relative risks of leaving their children to travel long distances to the worksite.

Given these realities, it seems clear that, to improve overall student retention in this component, the work experience needs at a minimum to provide significant opportunities for language practice and cross-cultural interaction. In recent months, HRA/CUNY has made efforts to create the conditions for better work experience placements. Greater attention has been given to responding to individual student preferences for jobs, to locating sites where supervisors are able to make a commitment to training and to eliminating those sites which may be inappropriate. Teachers are being asked to play a greater role in identification of appropriate kinds of sites and in working with students to help them learn how to express their needs to their supervisors.

We encourage HRA/CUNY to continue their efforts to improve the work experience. In particular, we recommend that further, on-going training be offered to those directly responsible for supervising BEGIN participants. One individual on the job needs to be designated as a mentor to assure that language is used on the worksite. This individual needs specialized training related to integrating language use into job related instructions, encouraging participants in the use of English-language small talk on the job, providing opportunities to read and use print in the work environment and issues related to cross-cultural training. We recommend that this group training be provided on a regular basis (perhaps monthly). Care needs to be taken to assure that when a supervisor leaves the job, his or her replacement also receives training. In addition, teachers need to continue to play a key role by visiting the work experience sites, working with supervisors, and designing curriculum to support the language use in the classroom.

HRA/CUNY also needs to consider the appropriate point at which to begin students in the work experience. We believe students need a threshold level of basic language and literacy skills to benefit from a work experience. As mentioned earlier, it may be most effective to allow low-literate students to remain in a prior intensive language and literacy program for a longer period of time so that by the time they reach the work experience they have sufficient background skills to allow them to take advantage of the on-the-job use of language and literacy. Without these basic language skills, participants chances of meeting the program goal of obtaining employment at the end of the work experience placement will be significantly limited.

Recommendation 8: Standardized achievement tests in English act as a "ten foot wall" excluding BEGIN Language Program graduates from moving on to job training. HRA/CUNY should explore how to provide graduates with access to job training, either through exploring alternative entry criteria or allowing students to remain in the program long enough to pass existing entry requirements.

Although we do not know exactly how many BEGIN graduates participate in job training, there is some indication that the numbers may be quite low. Site coordinators report that most JTPA or Board of Education job training programs, such as home attendant training, maintenance training, nurse assistant, general office training and others require that students take the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Most training programs require the equivalent of a 5th grade score or higher on this standardized test. Problems associated with the appropriateness of this test for native speakers have been discussed earlier. For non-native speakers of English such difficulties are compounded. Experts in second language acquisition agree that students' ability to read and understand text in which contextual cues have been reduced (such as text found in multiple choice items) lags behind their ability to speak,

understand, and use written language in the context of specific real life situations (Cummins, 1981). Thus, the results of such a test, when given to a non-native speaking adult, may not reflect his or her ability to read other kinds of work-related materials covering topics with which he or she has some previous background. Moreover, many researchers have begun to question the correlation between the ability to perform well on a standardized test and the ability to succeed with reading and writing tasks related to specific job training. Other variables such as previous understanding of the subject matter, commitment to the training process, particular skills possessed by the learner, and ability to work as a team may also be important.

Given these realities, it is easy to see how BEGIN Language Program participants might see a "ten foot wall" between them and access to training programs. Of course, access to job training is limited for every student in the city. Existing classes are often filled to capacity. Stories exist of hundreds of students lining up to get into a single nurse's training program in New York City. Nevertheless, given that access to job training is one of the primary objectives of the JOBS program, we feel that further investigations should be made into avenues through which BEGIN Language Program students might "graduate" into job training, either by working with programs to develop alternative entry requirements or by developing job training programs specifically oriented toward the needs of second language speakers. In addition, consideration should be given to ways to allow BEGIN Language students to remain enrolled in an intensive language component long enough to gain the language skills necessary to succeed in specific job training programs.

The BEGIN Language Program represents a groundbreaking effort to serve those within the population who are most in need of language and literacy services. HRA/CUNY should be commended for the high quality of its staff and its commitment to an effective curriculum. However, the results of this study indicate that, to be successful, the program needs to provide sufficient language, literacy, counseling and job training services to result in meaningful growth experiences. Too small an investment in each learner may only result in another "false illusion" for participants. While the above recommendations represent a larger investment in each learner, (difficult to make in the existing economic climate), we believe ultimately they are needed to make the program more effective in providing low-literate students with the skills they need to join the workforce.

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Appendices

Center for
Applied
Linguistics

Teacher Survey
Needs of ESL Literacy Learners at BEGIN

The City University of New York's Office of Academic Affairs has asked the Center for Applied Linguistics to conduct a study of the needs of BEGIN students whose difficulties with basic literacy prevent them from benefiting from ESL instruction. As those closest to these learners, your viewpoints are a vital part of that assessment. Please feel free to jot down additional comments or recommendations you feel would help us to understand the needs of this group of learners. Your individual responses will be kept confidential. You do not need to identify yourself if you do not chose to. Please enclosed your survey in an envelope and return it to your coordinator.

Thank you very much for your help.

1. How many months have you worked for the BEGIN Language Program?
   a. This is my first cycle
   b. About 4-6 months (1-2 cycles)
   c. 6 months to a year (2-6 cycles)
   d. Over a year (more than 6 cycles)

2. What levels do you currently teach?

   a. Level 1 Immersion
   b. Level 2 Immersion
   c. Level 3 Immersion
   d. Level 1 Continuation
   e. Level 2 Continuation
   f. Level 3 Continuation
   g. Literacy Class
   h. Other *(Please describe.)*

3. Have you ever had students in your classes you believe to have had sufficient difficulty with basic literacy to prevent them from benefiting from the program? *(Circle one.)* Yes No

4. If yes, please estimate the number of low-literate students in each class you have taught at BLP. *(Specify level and if immersion or continuation.)*

Name of Class	Number of Low-literate Students

1118 22nd Street N.W. Washington D.C. 20037

(202) 429-9292 Fax (202) 429-9766

5. Of these learners, what percentage fit into each of the categories below:

_____ a. Have no reading and writing ability whatsoever in English.

_____ b. Can copy most letters of the alphabet and single digit numbers. Need assistance writing own name and address.

_____ c. Recognize and write a limited number of sight words and some very basic personal information related to immediate needs.

_____ e. Read and understand some simplified materials. Attempt to read non-simplified materials (e.g. notice from gas company). Can perform basic writing tasks such as writing short personal notes or letters.

6. Please rank the methods which have been most helpful in determining your students literacy levels. *(Put a 1 next to the method which was most helpful, a 2 next to the second most helpful and so on.)*

a. Years of education listed on Intake Referral (BIR)
b. Student's English language BEGIN Intake Form
c. Student's BEGIN Spanish Language Intake Form
d. Results of BEGIN Native Language Literacy Skills Evaluation
e. Student writing sample in English
f. Student writing sample in Spanish
g. Classroom observation of reading skills
h. Classroom observation of writing skills
i. Other methods you use *(Please describe.)*

7. What, if any, additional assessment of your learners' literacy needs would be helpful?

a. No other assessment necessary
b. Standardized reading and writing test appropriate for ESL literacy learners
c. Standardized reading and writing test in Spanish
d. Teacher administered pre and post test geared to program competencies
e. Informal assessment portfolio recording teacher and learner observations, records of learner writing, etc.
f. Other *(Please specify.)*

8. In the **immersion phase**, how have low-literate learners been **limited** in their ability to succeed in your classroom?

9. In the **immersion phase**, how have you adjusted your curriculum to **facilitate** your low-literate students ability to succeed in your classes?

10. In the **continuation phase** what has **limited** your low-literate students' ability to succeed in both the classroom and/or the job site?

11. In the **continuation phase** how have you adjusted your curriculum to **facilitate** the success of your low-literate students' ability to succeed?

12. How would you define "success" for a student in the BEGIN program? Are your students successfully completing the BEGIN program?

13. What kind of additional training might help you to serve low-literate students better?

22. How do you believe the needs of low-literate students can best be met? *(Circle one number.)*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Continue to place students in classes based on oral proficiency, regardless of literacy level.	1	2	3	4	5
b. Continue to accept low-literate students but place them in a separate 8 week literacy class.	1	2	3	4	5
c. Continue to accept low-literate students as long as 16 week immersion classes can be offered.		1	2	3	4
d. Do not admit low-literate students unless classes of 16 weeks or more are available.	1	2	3	4	5
e. Admit only those low-literate students whose oral proficiency in English is high.	1	2	3	4	5
f. Low-literate students should not be admitted to BEGIN but referred to Basic English in the Native Language programes even if there is a waiting list.	1	2	3	4	5
g. Offer basic literacy classes using Spanish as the primary language of instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
h. Offer basic literacy classes using English as the primary language of instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
i. Devote more of the existing funds to personal and career counseling services for BEGIN learners.	1	2	3	4	5
j. Serve fewer low-literate students in the BEGIN program, providing more intensive language and job-related education.	1	2	3	4	5
k. Encourage more learners to go directly to a job search or Job Club **before** enrolling in BEGIN.	1	2	3	4	5
l. Work with employment training programs to provide greater access by less literate ESL students.	1	2	3	4	5

15. Please add comments and details for items in Question 14 for which you marked "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree".

16. Are there other factors you feel might improve low-literate students ability to succeed in the BEGIN program?

Would you be willing to participate in a telephone interview with a CAL staff member?

If yes, name _____ Phone_____

Best day to call_____ Best time____ _____

If you have further questions about the survey, please contact Dr. Marilyn Gillespie at the Center for Applied Linguistics, phone (202)429-9292.

Thanks again!

Student Focus Groups
Questions

1. Let's get better acquainted. Can you tell us about where you are from and perhaps a little about the last job you had or the work you do in your home?
   probe: did you need to - speak English
   read
   write

2. What kinds of things get in the way of your working now?

3. Can you tell me some ways you think this program has helped you become better prepared to get a job or get into job training?

4. Are there other things that might better help you to prepare to get a job?

5. Think about people you know - or maybe this is you yourself - that didn't have a chance to learn to read and write in their own country. Do you think this program is doing a good job preparing them for work in the United States?

6. How could this program better serve people who need help with reading and writing?

CUNY-HRA BEGIN Language Program
Student Information Form

I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

TODAY'S DATE

Name | Case Number

Address | Apt. | Social Security

City | State | Zip | Sex: ☐ Masculine ☐ Feminine

Telephone | Name and telephone of someone who can be called in case of emergency.

Date of Birth | Country of birth

Have you attended the **BEGIN Program** before? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Did you complete the program? ☐ Yes ☐ No

How long have you lived in the United States? _____

Do you take any medicines regularly? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please list them and specify for what medical condition they are for.

_____

_____

Have you attended Job Club before? ☐ Yes ☐ No

II. EDUCACION

Circle the highest grade completed in your country.

Primary	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Intermediate	7	8					
High School	9	10	11	12			

If you did not finish high school, do you have your GED ? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Prior Study of English

Name and Location of School | Dates

_____

_____

_____

Professional Studies and Training

Name and Location of the School or University | Course of Study | Dates

_____

_____

_____

Did anyone help you to fill out this form? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Thank you for filling out this form!
Welcome to the **BEGIN PROGRAM!**

Native Language Literacy Skills Evaluation

Participant's Name _____ Date _____

HIGHEST GRADE COMPLETED 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Teacher's Name(s) _____

John Test: Entry _____

Reading Level: Entry _____

	Level of Understanding							
	Nonexistant	Minimal	Fair	Satisfactory	Good	Very Good	Excellent	Comments
Knowledge of Alphabet								
Identify letters of own name								
Write alphabet as dictated								
Write alphabet from memory								
Locate own name in telephone book								
Reading								
Recognize own name and personal ID information								
Decode isolated words								
Decode simple sentences and paragraphs								
Interpret rent & utility bills								
Understand correspondence from HRA and other official letters								
Writing								
Copy isolated words								
Write simple sentences as dictated								
Compose simple sentences and paragraphs								
Fill out very basic forms								
Writing Conventions								
Use printed letters								
Use cursive letters								
Write legibly								
Separate between words								
Use standard spelling								

WRITING SAMPLE

Write a composition in English or Spanish on one of the following themes. Circle the number of the theme you choose.

1. Talk a little bit about your family.
2. Describe your most recent experience in school or work, and the career you would like to have in the future.
3. Describe a typical Sunday from the time you get up until you go to bed.
4. Choose your own topic.

MASTER FUNCTIONS CHECKLIST

Seventy-five percent of assigned tasks must be within cluster

OFFICE SERVICES

- Answer phones
- Write messages
- Make appointments
- Greet and direct visitors
- Give general information
- Keep simple records
- File
- Process routine papers
- Make copies and collate
- Set up meeting rooms
- Data enter
- Type
- Serve as messenger
- Assist in mailroom
- Pack and unpack supplies
- Check deliveries
- Receive, store and distribute supplies
- Assist with inventory control
- Operate postage meter
- Issue forms/supplies
- Post expenses
- Process vouchers
- Do simple bookkeeping

MAINTENANCE SERVICES

- Dust and polish
- Sweep and mop floors
- Wax and buff floors
- Empty wastebaskets
- Vacuum
- Wash windows, walls etc.
- Clean toilets, basins, fixtures
- Replace restroom supplies
- Clean venetian blinds
- Replace light bulbs and fuses
- Make minor repairs
- Operate elevator
- Remove refuse and debris
- Inspect grounds, doors, windows
- Report dangerous conditions
- Report defective equipment
- Fuel and service motor vehicles
- Act as parking lot attendant
- Maintain cleanliness of vehicles and garage
- Load and unload materials
- Maintain grounds, remove snow, leaves, refuse
- Perform simple gardening work
- Perform hospital housekeeping tasks

HUMAN/COMMUNITY SERVICES

- Improve community appearance and safety:
  - -clean vacant lots
  - -sweep streets
  - -do simple gardening
  - remove graffiti
- Support cultural events:
  - -sew costumes
  - -set up displays, exhibits
  - -distribute flyers
  - -collect fees/tickets
- Assist elderly at home/centers:
  - -shop
  - -clean house
  - -escort to clinics, centers etc.
  - -prepare meals
  - -provide emotional support
  - -provide simple bedside care
  - -assist socialization
- Assist in cafeterias/food programs:
  - -prepare food
  - -serve food
  - -set and clear tables
  - -clean kitchen
- Assist children:
  - -monitor play area
  - -monitor lunchroom
  - -assist teacher
  - -straighten up after activities
  - -help children with clothing
  - -read stories
  - -help in library
- General Services:
  - -patrol assigned areas
  - -provide information
  - -interpret
  - -improve community relations
  - -discourage loitering
  - -serve as park attendant

other tasks unique to worksite

_____ JOB TITLE: _____ _____/_____/_____ _____

Supervisor's Signature — Date — Participant's Signature

BEGIN LANGUAGE PROGRAM

WORKSITE VISIT REPORT FOR CONTINUATION TEACHERS

Worksite _____

Address _____

Supv. Name _____

Teacher's Name _____

1. How much English is spoken by the students at this worksite?

2. How much English is heard by the students?

3. What is the percentage of Spanish speakers at the worksite?

4. Are there any specific work activities which encourage the use of English?

4(a) If yes, please describe some of the activities.

4(b) How often are the students involved in these activities?

5. Are the students supervised on a regular basis?

6. Do the supervisors seem interested in helping the students improve their proficiency in English?

7. Have you noticed an improvement in the students' English comprehension and oral proficiency?

8. Is this worksite appropriate for beginning level English students? (If no, please explain why. If yes, please explain how the students can benefit from the experience)

FORM W4
REV. 12/88

MEMORANDUM

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION

DATE: August 28, 1991

TO: Edwin Cruz

FROM: Jim Welby JW

SUBJECT: STUDY OF LOW-LITERACY PARTICIPANTS IN BLP

The City University of New York's Office of Academic Affairs has asked the Center for Applied Linguistics to conduct a study to assess the needs of ESL low-literacy participants in the BEGIN Language Program.

The study will require the review of pertinent information, specifically our files containing the BEGIN Intake Referrals (BIRs), Job Notices (OES3As), and Component Enrollments (TIDs).

BLP supervisors and educational coordinators may make all records available to facilitate this study, according to Ms. Gail Levine of State Department of Social Services.

The field research for the study will be done by Mr. Gregory Fallon under the direction of the primary investigator for the project, Dr. Marilyn Gillespie.

May I ask that your clerical staff in Vorhees (BMCC) and Bronx Community be as cooperative as possible under the direction of the site supervisors.

The study will offer us helpful recommendations to meet the needs of this group.

JW:jw

cc: Marilyn Gillespie ✓
Gregory Fallon
Leslie Oppenheim
Cynthia Carrasquillo
Blanche Kellawon
Millie Perez
Miriam Ramos Ortiz
Ralph Frankenberg
File

Office of Refugee Resettlement (1985). Mainstream English languge training project (MELT) resource package. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Description of Language Proficiency Levels

	LITERACY	BEGINNING		INTERMEDIATE		ADVANCED		PROGRAM EXIT
		LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	
Proficiency: General	• Limited or no oral proficiency • No literacy proficiency in English • May lack literacy proficiency in first language	• Unable to function unassisted	• Limited functioning related to immediate needs	• Function satisfactorily in basic survival situations related to needs	• Function independently in most familiar situations	• Function effectively in familiar and unfamiliar social situations	• Meet routine social and work demands with confidence	• Meet social, academic, and vocational demands with confidence and success
Work	• Unable to function unassisted in any situation requiring reading or writing of English	• Can handle routine tasks that are easily demonstrated	• Can handle routine tasks that involve basic oral communication skills	• Can handle entry-level jobs that involve limited oral communication and in which tasks can be clarified orally or through demonstration	• Can handle tasks that involve oral communication skills on both a non-technical and technical level • Written directions and materials when simplified or clarified orally	• Handle situations that involve oral communication among fellow employees and with the public • Interpret technical written materials with clarification or assistance	• Meet most work demands with confidence • Interact effectively with the public • Follow written instructions in technical work manuals	• Mainstream into classes designed for native speakers of English
Listening	• Unable to understand conversation	• Can comprehend isolated words and phrases	• Can comprehend range of high frequency words used in context	• Can comprehend conversation containing some unfamiliar words in familiar contexts	• Can comprehend conversations containing some unfamiliar vocabulary • Clarify meaning	• Can comprehend conversations on unfamiliar topics and essential points of discussion in speech on topics in special fields of interest	• Can comprehend abstract topics in familiar contexts and descriptions and narrations of factual material	• Can comprehend narrations of factual material • Abstract topics in familiar and unfamiliar contexts • Conversations, discussions, and speeches on topics related to field of interest
Speaking	• Depend on gestures or own language to communicate	• Depend on gestures and own language to communicate	• Communicate survival needs using learned phrases and sentences	• Participate in basic conversations in routine social situations	• Participate in face-to-face oral conversations on topics beyond survival needs	• Participate in extended conversation on a variety of topics	• Participate in casual and extended conversation and in conversation on technical subjects with hesitancy • New and unfamiliar topics with hesitancy	• Participate in casual, formal and extended conversation on practical and academic topics
Reading	• Unable to read English	• Recognize letters and numbers	• Get limited meaning from print with successive rereading and checking	• Can read simplified material on familiar subjects and some authentic materials dealing with everyday matters	• Can read materials on familiar subjects • Can read authentic materials with limited success	• Can read authentic materials on everyday subjects and non-technical prose • Can read technical material with difficulty	• Can read authentic materials on familiar subjects and non-technical prose	• Can read standard materials such as newspapers, correspondence, technical material in field of interest, authentic materials and non-technical prose on most subjects
Writing	• Unable to write any English other than own name and address	• Produce own name and address	• Copy words and phrases and write sentences based on previously learned materials	• Can write short messages and notes within the scope of their limited language experience	• Can perform basic writing tasks in familiar contexts	• Can produce routine correspondence and paragraphs about previously discussed topics	• Can produce descriptions, essays, summaries	• Can respond to questions on forms and applications and write simple discourse of several paragraphs
Communicability: To English speakers used to dealing with non-native speakers	• Unable to make self understood	• Not able to make self understood	• Make basic needs understood when context supports interaction	• Make needs understood				
To English speakers not used to dealing with non-native speakers				• Have difficulty making needs understood	• Make self understood with some effort	• Make self understood both orally and in writing	• Make self understood	• Make self understood by general public in both oral and written