

Year 1 Evaluation Report
for "Starting Together"

**An Even Start Family Literacy Partnership
of
Western Suffolk BOCES and Long Island Head Start**

**Submitted June 26, 1999
by
Paul Jurmo
External Evaluator**

Learning Partnerships
14 Griffin Street
East Brunswick, NJ 08816-4806
732-254-2237

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	i
Background about the Evaluation	1
Objectives for the Evaluation	1
Evaluation Activities	1
Evaluation Questions	2
Findings from Year 1	2
<u>Question #1</u> : Who is the program trying to serve and what are the needs which the program is focusing on?	2
<u>Question #2</u> : Given those identified customers and their needs, what objectives is the program trying to achieve?	3
<u>Question #3</u> : What components have been put in place to get the program up and running at the sites?	4
<u>Question #4</u> : What program components have been “working” and what needs to be improved? What factors within the program and external to it are helping or hindering learners?	8
<u>Question #5</u> : What have been the results (e.g., outcomes, impacts, improvements, changes in skill and behavior and quality of life, etc.) which emerged for learners during this start-up period?	16
Conclusion	19

APPENDICES

- A. Schedule of site visits
- B. Starting Together/Even Start Collaboration Meetings and Staff Development
- C. Starting Together Program Designs (5/25/99)

Year 1 Evaluation Report for "Starting Together"

Executive Summary

Starting Together is a family literacy program conducted in three Long Island communities by a partnership of Western Suffolk BOCES and Long Island Head Start. From the fall of 1998 to mid-1999, the program has put in place an infrastructure to support learning activities and other services to simultaneously improve the basic skills and parenting skills of low-income parents and the school-readiness of their young children.

Collaborative planning and service delivery mechanisms have been established at three Head Start centers, teachers have been hired and trained, curricula have been designed to focus on the particular needs of the various target populations, learners have been recruited, facilities have been set up, and learning activities and other services have been implemented.

The result of these efforts has been positive: an infrastructure of facilities and qualified staff is now in place, more-specific objectives for learners have been clarified, and positive working relationships and commitment have been established.

Basic tenets of the family literacy model are being tested, and specific mechanisms for putting those principles into practice for the various client populations are being developed.

This evaluation report describes:

1. who the program is trying to serve and their needs;
2. objectives which the program is trying to achieve;
3. key components of the Starting Together model (i.e., building partnerships and learner involvement, designing and delivering an integrated curriculum, support services, staff development, and record keeping);
4. what so far is "working" and what needs to be improved (and what factors internal to the program and external to it are helping or hindering learners); and
5. the results to date in this start-up period.

This report is written in the spirit of "continuous improvement," to help stakeholders in this project to clarify how in Year 2 to best to build on the solid foundation they have developed in Year 1.

Background about the Evaluation

In mid-1998, the Starting Together multi-generational literacy program at Western Suffolk BOCES (WSB) contracted with adult education evaluation specialist, Dr. Paul Jurmo (hereafter referred to as "the evaluator") to conduct an evaluation of the first year of activities of the program. Data were gathered from the period of December 1998 (a few months into the program) through May 1999.

Objectives for the Evaluation

Through discussions between the evaluator and Starting Together staff in late 1998, the evaluator and Starting Together staff developed a plan for the first-year evaluation which was submitted to Starting Together in December 1998. It was agreed that the evaluation would help stakeholders at the program level understand (a) appropriate objectives to focus on in the program; (b) services which effectively help achieve those objectives, and (c) the infrastructure of supports which are required to enable those services to be provided. It was assumed that stakeholders would use this information when designing intergenerational basic educational programs in the future.

Evaluation Activities

In the period of December 1998 through mid-June 1999, the evaluator has:

- a. collected information through five site visits. In five site visits between early December 1998 and the end of May 1999, the evaluator conducted individual and group interviews with Starting Together staff (including program administrators and teachers), learners, and staff of the partner Head Start agencies. The evaluator also reviewed curriculum and assessment materials, observed classes in action, and observed the facilities at each of the three Head Start sites. (See Appendix A.)*
- b. participated in a meeting of all Even Start programs in the New York City metropolitan area on January 21, 1999.*
- c. prepared an interim report and submitted it to Starting Together staff for review in May 1999;*
- d. reviewed project documents, prepared draft of Year 1 Evaluation Report, and submitted to Starting Together staff in mid-June 1999.*
- e. received feedback on draft report from Starting Together, revised it, and submitted this version of the report on June 26, 1999.*

Evaluation Questions

The evaluator and Starting Together staff understood that the period of late 1998 through June 1999 would be seen as a start-up period. Partnerships were to be built at the program sites, instructors were to be hired and trained, curriculum and assessment tools would be assembled, initial assessment was to be conducted for participants, classes would be established, facilities were to be prepared, and a record-keeping system was to be set up. It was agreed that such a start-up period was necessary for any collaborative program involving multiple agencies and busy parents.

The first-year evaluation was to develop answers to these questions:

1. *Who is the program trying to serve and what are the needs which the program is focusing on?*
2. *Given those identified customers and their needs, what objectives is the program trying to achieve?*
3. *What components have been put in place to get the program up and running at the sites?*
4. *What program components have been "working" and what needs to be improved? What factors within the program and external to it are helping or hindering learners?*
5. *What have been the results (e.g., outcomes, impacts, improvements, changes in skill and behavior and quality of life, etc.) which emerged for learners during this start-up period?*

Findings from Year 1

Summarized below are answers to the above evaluation questions, based on the information collected from December 1998 through May 1999:

Question #1: Who is the program trying to serve and what are the needs which the program is focusing on?

The program is trying to fulfill several inter-related needs of parents and their young children, including:

a. Undereducated, low-income parents:

-- who . . .

- . . . lack a high school diploma,
- . . . are limited English proficient,
- . . . are young (teenagers), and/or
- . . . are disabled.

-- who need several types of services to enable them to manage their families and become more economically self-sufficient.

These services can help the parents to develop essential areas of knowledge and skills and develop support networks and linkages to new opportunities. The needed services include:

- basic skills education (including adult basic education, GED preparation, English as a Second Language) provided in a central classroom and at home;
 - access to higher levels of education and job-related training;
 - parenting-skills education (provided in a central classroom and at home);
 - childcare;
 - transportation;
 - other support services to handle obstacles they face.
- The children (0- 7 years old) of the above parents who need early-childhood educational and other services to provide a foundation for later success in school.

Question #2: Given those identified customers and their needs, what objectives is the program trying to achieve?

Given the above needs, the program is trying to accomplish these objectives:

Objective #1. *Improve the literacy, life-, and job-related skills of participating parents, to enable them to support their families (economically and otherwise), to enable them to become self-sufficient (i.e., to become families not in need of social services).*

Objective #2. *Help parents to understand child development and to strengthen parent-child relationships.*

Objective #3. *Provide children with learning opportunities to prepare for school.*

Objective #4. *Help families learn together so parents will become partners in their children's education.*

Question #3: What components have been put in place to get the program up and running at the sites?

To provide an infrastructure of supports for the services at each site, Starting Together staff have put in place several program components. These components are in keeping with guidelines for Even Start programs developed for the U.S. Department of Education. (See M. Christine Dwyer, Guide to Quality Even Start Family Literacy Programs, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, year?). The components stressed in Year 1 are:

Component a: Building partnerships and learner participation

Starting Together represents an effort to build strong partnerships among agencies at two levels: (1) between Western Suffolk BOCES and the Long Island Head Start agency which oversees local Head Start programs and (2) between Western Suffolk BOCES staff and staff and parents at the three Head Start sites (in Brentwood, Wyandanch, and Huntington). This is done to establish good working relationships among all the stakeholders to be involved in the program.

This has been accomplished through regular one-to-one communications between Western Suffolk BOCES staff and Head Start site representatives (especially through site visits by Starting Together staff and regular phone calls). Each site also has monthly staff meetings, and there is a cross-site advisory committee which allows for sharing of information across sites. (See Appendix B.)

Such collaboration and communications are seen as necessary for a number of reasons, including:

- *to ensure active participation by adequate numbers of learners who fall into the target population.*
- *to ensure that the parents at the site who will participate in the program . . .
 . . . understand the purposes and potential benefits, as well as the responsibilities which participation requires.
 . . . give input to Starting Together staff, to ensure that the program responds to their actual learning needs.*
- *to ensure that Head Start staff . . .
 . . . understand the purposes, benefits, and responsibilities which the*

program offers.

. . . adjust schedules, arrange facilities, provide security, and otherwise provide a learning environment supportive of the program goals.

- to establish an ongoing working relationship among all involved (especially Western Suffolk BOCES staff, Head Start staff, and participating parents) which allows key players to continually monitor and adjust the program.

Component b: Designing and delivering an integrated curriculum

Starting Together staff are providing a number of learning opportunities for parents and their children in keeping with good family literacy practice. These opportunities are “integrated” in several senses, including:

Integration of educational activities for parents and children

- Educational services for parents (provided either at the Head Start sites or in their homes) which include . . .

. . . basic education classes (either pre-GED classes for native English speakers or ESL classes for limited-English-proficient parents).

. . . parenting-related classes for parents (once-weekly PACT Time sessions, once-weekly parenting groups, and home visits) in which parents learn how to help their young children develop age-appropriate skills and knowledge which will prepare them to succeed in school. These parenting activities also help build nurturing relationships between children and their parents, between spouses, and among families participating in the classes together.

- Educational activities for children which include . . .

. . . the High Scope pre-school curriculum provided to all Head Start children;

. . . multi-age childcare for young siblings (ages 0 to 3) of the participating children;

. . . PACT Time classes in which children and parents participate together.

Integration of literacy, parenting, and other functional skills

- Learning activities are structured to help learners develop basic skills

"in context" by applying them to parenting, job-preparation, citizenship, or other problems of concern to them. This avoids seeing basic skills as something that has to be learned first before tackling practical life tasks. (Some ESL classes for parents, for example, have parents reading children's reading materials, to understand how to read to their children while developing their own English-language vocabulary.)

Integration of several basic skills at a time

Rather than teach "reading" at one time, "writing" another, and so forth, learners develop several inter-related skills at the same time. For example, a typical session might allow learners to practice reading, writing, math, problem-solving, listening and speaking, and other skills within the space of 90 minutes. At the same time, through group discussions and other activities, learners can develop background knowledge about particular topics of concern to them.

Starting Together is also putting a mobile computer lab in place, to allow learners to use educational software to develop reading, writing, math, and life skills while also becoming familiar with computer technology they need in the workplace and which their children will be using in school.

Integration of instructional with assessment activities

Starting Together staff have promoted the use of portfolios as one form of assessment used in the program. Learners sit with instructors to record observations after PACT Time classes. This encourages participants to be reflective learners and provides staff with documentation of learner progress in their basic skills and parenting skills. Assessment is thereby a learning process for the learner rather than something that is just done to them by instructors.

The program also uses several other forms of assessment, including the NYSPLACE ESL test, TABE, and TABE pre-GED exams. The program also uses the Brigance test to measure the children's development.

Through such portfolios and other assessment activities, Starting Together staff want to be able to continually assess learner needs and abilities, to guide instruction and clarify how it needs to be improved over time.

Integration of "home" and "school"

The traditional boundaries between "home" (the place you eat, sleep,

and are nurtured) and "school" (the place where you "learn things") are broken down in this program. Educational activities are geared toward helping parents and their children have healthy family lives while the home is seen as a place where much ongoing learning (for both children and their parents) can take place.

Component c: Support services

To remove barriers which commonly block parents from participating in family literacy services, Starting Together has arranged to provide transportation and childcare to participants who need them. Because some participants have other special needs (e.g., attaining legal resident status or U.S. citizenship, legal problems, health problems, disabilities), Starting Together also provides appropriate services (e.g., through social workers on staff) to assess participants and help them respond to those problems.

Component d.: Staff development

Starting Together recognizes the importance of having a well-prepared and well-supported staff to do the day-to-day work of running the Even Start activities at each site. Starting Together staff understand that the Even Start model is a complex mix of contextualized adult basic education, parenting education, early childhood education, and support services.

This requires staff who understand how the various pieces of the model interrelate and how to design learning and other activities tailored to the specific needs and interests of the participating families. (For example, one Starting Together site serves a Latino immigrant population with a special need for ESL services. Another site serves primarily African-American parents who dropped out of school and are motivated to earn a GED. Starting Together also provides services geared to teen parents at the central Western Suffolk BOCES facility at Wilson Tech.)

While the basic education and family education staff come to the program with experience in their respective fields, they need to go beyond those traditional professional boundaries, to understand and give input into how various services are carried out.

To provide opportunities for all levels and types of staff (e.g., basic skills instructors, family educators) to develop the expertise and collaborative relationships they need, Starting Together has supervisory staff who regularly interact with personnel at each site. Staff are also given opportunities to attend staff development workshops and regular cross-site advisory committee meetings. This training and the day-to-day collaborative nature of the project allows staff to be cross trained in areas outside their traditional disciplines.

Component e.: Record keeping

Starting Together has put in place a record keeping system which tracks the progress of each participating family. Each family's file has information about (a) adult education activities (including test scores for parents, a needs and interest assessment), (b) parenting classes, (c) PACT Time, (d) the family (with a log of contacts with the family, family intake form, and family contract), (e) home visit logs, (f) the children's needs (e.g., allergies, scores on the Brigance Development Screening test) and progress, (g) demographics and other matters of concern to the national Even Start Information Reporting System, and (h) non-current matters.

Question #4: What program components have been "working" and what needs to be improved? What factors within the program and external to it are helping or hindering learners?

Factors within the program:

Partnership building

The collaborative relationships which Starting Together hoped to generate at each site have generally worked out as hoped so far. As can be expected in the start-up phase of any collaborative project, some sites were initially more "ready" to collaborate than others. (For example, one site was initially not prepared to provide childcare for the children of participating parents, because that need couldn't be accurately identified until all families were recruited. Another site provided a classroom which contained a noisy refrigerator. Both problems were eventually taken care of, however.)

In general, as needs or obstacles have emerged, the partnership teams have attempted to deal with them promptly. Starting Together staff have helped to anticipate and deal with needs and problems by keeping in regular contact with the sites (via site visits, phone calls, advisory council meetings). In effect, Starting Together's administration is taking a "customer-oriented" approach to responding to client needs.

It appears that the staff of both Starting Together and the partner Head Start agencies are committed to effective partnerships. These strong working relationships and desire to serve participating families are significantly beyond the superficial relationships which agencies sometimes create in other multi-agency projects.

*WSB
Wester
Suffolk
Bucks*

It also appears that at each site there is a core of families who are committed to coming to classes regularly and making use of the opportunities which the program affords. These relations between staff and families are another form of partnership which, ultimately, is vital if learners are to develop the skills and knowledge being taught and expand their interests in learning.

The sites have parent meetings which allow learners to hear about and give input into special learning activities like visiting their children's kindergarten. Learners are also able to participate in advisory councils where they can give input into such matters as who gets hired as staff. Learners also informally serve the role of "recruiters," getting the word out to relatives and friends. (As one staff person said: "Word of mouth is our best recruitment tool.")

In terms of learner participation, the "numbers" at the three sites are acceptable, given the early stage of the project. At this writing, the Huntington site has twelve families; the Wyandanch site has eleven; and the Brentwood program has seven families. In addition to these site-based learners, there are an additional five families receiving strictly home-based services. All participating families meet the criteria (e.g., income level, educational background, age of children, geographic location) for participation in the program.

The attendance rates at each site, however, vary considerably, due to a combination of factors. These include parents' work schedules and their need to take care of sick children or other family duties. In some cases, however, learners appear to lack an awareness that regular attendance and self-study is vital for them to progress academically, or lack the discipline to get to class, work hard, do homework, and generally make the effort needed to move beyond where they are now academically, economically, and otherwise. (Not surprisingly, the family which showed the most gain in their ESL skills was also the one with the best attendance record.)

Starting Together's policy of keeping families in the program for up to four years is a good one, as it gives parents enough time on task with learning activities for them to "sink in." However, if learners' attendance is sporadic during those four years, they are not likely to get the benefit which a four-year program affords. Recognizing that regular attendance is necessary, Starting Together will deal with attendance issues by developing a stricter attendance policy which will be set forth in individual learning contracts. Staff see such a policy as a way to (a) ensure that learners get in the practice time they need to progress and (b) reinforce a sense of responsibility among learners.

But Starting Together also recognizes that parents are busy, with other responsibilities that make regular attendance in classes difficult. To help learners get in the practice time they need, the program might explore other learning options for busy parents. These include videos, computer-assisted instruction (e.g., simple

math and reading and writing programs for children, which parents can use with their children; both parents and children learn both basic skills and computer skills, while nurturing a love of learning within the family); hand-held learning devices (such as language translators for limited-English-speaking adults); reading materials (free subscriptions to magazines for parents and/or children); or educational games, etc. which learners can use at home. Learners aren't thus placed in an either-or situation, where they are either "going to class" or "not learning anything."

In addition to increasing the numbers of hours that learners put into practicing their skills outside the classroom, Starting Together intends to increase the number of classroom hours, as well. Staff are now trying to figure out the optimum time to start classes, when to hold them, and so forth, to maximize the learning that can occur among busy families.

Starting Together staff intend to keep participating families involved in learning activities over the summer (between June and September) when the Head Start centers are normally closed. This will be done by conducting home visits for interested families and by conducting ESL classes at the Brentwood site.

One area of "partnerships" that needs to be developed more is helping learners to connect with other adult education (especially career-training) opportunities in the community (especially those offered at little or no cost by Western Suffolk BOCES to Starting Together participants; these include gender equity, non-traditional careers, and introductory computer programs). Many adults in the ESL classes express an interest in improving their job situations, but for various reasons haven't taken advantage of technical classes offered by the BOCES.

Starting Together should also figure out how to serve the small but significant numbers of non-Spanish-speaking immigrant families in the target communities. These families (e.g., Haitians, Pakistanis, Indian) might want and benefit from ESL classes, but are reluctant to participate in classes composed primarily of speakers of languages other than their own.

Curriculum development

In the early months of the program, teachers had to adapt available adult education materials until the learning needs of participants could be more precisely assessed and the most appropriate text books ordered and delivered. One teacher was new to family literacy and not fully versed in the complexities of designing a family literacy curriculum. In the early months, the result sometimes was classes which seemed to stray from topic to topic without a coherent, systematic approach. These problems were dealt with when new textbooks became available and through on-the-job experience, supervision, and staff development activities in which teachers developed the expertise they would need.

see memo.
↑

During the 1998/99 project year (ST) has serviced a total of 88 families → some of these families have been referred to other programs

Starting Together recognizes that, while it is important to make classes “fun,” instructional activities also need to be well-organized and focused on getting learners to practice using skills and developing the knowledge they need. Learners will then feel a sense of progress, which ultimately is the key motivator to keep learners coming back to class. The “fun” aspect also pertains to the activities provided to the children; when parents see that their children have fun in and benefit from a pre-school class, the parents are likely to bring their children and then come over to participate in their own adult education class.

Starting Together staff recognize the need for ongoing curriculum development, to respond in creative ways to the various learning needs which pop up in classes while also being true to the integrated family literacy model. Starting Together is, through supervising and training of staff and team meetings, moving toward formalizing the curriculum more. This avoids a natural tendency for teachers to just respond to whatever learning needs happen to pop up. Staff are in the process of organizing the basic skills curriculum around common themes (e.g., work, nutrition, health-care, transportation, strengthening your marriage, finding affordable housing, lifelong learning, children’s education, immigration and citizenship issues, dealing with the legal system, safety, personal finances, etc.). These themes are of concern to parents and are in keeping with the family literacy thrust of Starting Together.

For each theme, there would be common skills taught (e.g., identifying problems at work or related to family health, writing notes to your co-workers or family members, finding telephone numbers to resolve work or health problems, basic bookkeeping for work or family tasks, etc.) One skill being focused on in particular is “self-assessment and planning,” which helps learners to be conscious about what they already can do, where they want to go, and the steps needed to move up the skill ladder and to successfully take on various life challenges (in their careers, in their families, etc.) This is being done through the Family Development Plans created through goal-setting activities conducted with family educators and teachers.

This multi-theme, multi-skill, self-reliance approach is also in keeping with the “Equipped for the Future” initiative being developed by the National Institute for Literacy. When taken together, these themes and skills can be viewed as helping learners to become self-sufficient, which is a primary goal of Starting Together. Starting Together staff could map out such a curriculum in a staff-development workshop in which themes and skills are mapped out on a grid, to clarify for all parties the range of objectives to focus learning activities on.

Staff currently use a similar thematic approach in the curricula used for PACT Time home visits. Prior to a visit, teachers identify relevant topics related to helping one’s children. Teachers then visit families’ homes to conduct lessons constructed

around those topics, using "literacy kits" developed by Starting Together staff. A teacher in one site is linking what is taught in PACT Time (e.g., the names for parts of the body) with what is covered in the ESL classes (i.e., teaching parents those same names of body parts, so they can teach them to their children).

At several sites, it appears that learners are especially interested in improving their job status. Various types of work-related adult basic skills curricula already exist which can be adapted for use in Even Start settings. Clearly, parents need to have good jobs if they are to provide their families with a stable home life and hope for the future. Similarly, many want to develop computer-related skills, to improve their job prospects and to satisfy a personal curiosity and to help their children. Both of these motivations are in keeping with the self-improvement-for-self-reliance goal of Starting Together and should become central to any new curricula that are developed.

The Starting Together staff and teachers are committed to providing high-quality, relevant, effective instruction. To develop both an appropriate curriculum and teachers' expertise, Starting Together might consider structuring staff development activities around a series of "teacher inquiry" projects. In such projects, teachers identify particular challenges they face (e.g., how to develop writing activities which are related to family themes while also preparing participants for the GED exam). Teachers then work with Starting Together staff to develop curricula which respond to those challenges. The result is both increased staff expertise and a "product" (e.g., curriculum materials) which current and future Starting Together teachers can use.

Starting Together staff are considering how best to incorporate self-study materials and technologies (e.g., parenting magazines, newspapers, videos, educational computer games which parents can use with their children) into the curriculum. Many learners find it hard to attend classes regularly, but might be willing and able to study at home. This would significantly expand the amount of "time on task" which learners devote to practicing their skills, while helping them to take more responsibility for their own learning. Currently Starting Together encourages learners to use "Take Home Activities" and then write about their use of those activities on a special report form.

Starting Together is also expanding the library of reading materials which it has made available for parents at each site. These materials include a daily newspaper, magazines, informational pamphlets, and other high-interest reading materials, to encourage learners' interest in reading and self-study.

Starting Together has had some learners recording their observations about PACT Time activities in a special portfolio. This portfolio is designed to help learners reflect on what they are doing in class. In the Wyandanch pre-GED class, one learner is keeping a personal journal which she shares with the teacher. In it

she records miscellaneous thoughts and questions, and the teacher responds, sometimes correcting spelling or grammar, sometimes commenting on the substance of the journal passages. These two forms of self-reflective writing should be further encouraged within Starting Together. Each learner might, for example, keep a journal or log to document what he or she is learning, day-to-day thoughts or questions about issues of importance to them, etc. These journals might be incorporated into the portfolios which each learner can maintain and which serve as a record of what learners are accomplishing in the program.

Because the use of learner portfolios as an assessment tool is still in its infancy within the program, it is not clear at present how effectively portfolio or other forms of assessment might be used or how these assessment activities can show needs and progress in ways that are useful to learners, teachers, and other audiences. This will be further developed in Year 2.

PACT Time seems to be a simple but effective way to reinforce in families' minds the notion that spending time with one's children is important and that reading to and with them and playing with them and serving as nurturing, learning-oriented role models are important. These are simple concepts which busy families tend to forget.

Staff development

Starting Together's staff provides most of the professional development in this program. Starting Together staff members do this in staff meetings and on-site visits, and by sending teachers to Even Start workshops in which staff from other Even Start programs also participate. Starting Together is also putting resource materials and videotapes in each site for staff to refer to, and staff are urged to use a national family literacy Web site. Some staff are also asking for training in the computer software used for administrative purposes.

Ongoing staff development is needed, to help teachers who might not have worked in family literacy or adult education settings before to be able to respond to the unique needs that such programs present. Here are some examples of challenges which instructors face:

- Many of the parent participants have never developed good study habits or the discipline needed to stay focused during classes. This makes it difficult for a teacher to maintain a sense of progress or cohesiveness in the classes. These same learners might also simply not understand that, for them to participate in the mainstream society and economy (with a decent job), they need to (a) have a higher level of education, (b) be aware of the world and options open to them, and (c) have the basic skills, social skills, and support networks to enable them to participate in the economy and society. Some learners (especially younger, recent school dropouts) appear to resist getting a broader education and see it

as a waste of time. ("You don't need social sciences or algebra for anything once you leave school.")

- Learners within a class might have several different levels of skill or particular basic skills problems (e.g., an immigrant learner might understand English fairly well but have trouble with pronunciation). Alternatively, within a single class there might be younger learners who have very specific, functional motives in mind (like getting a better job) and older ones who are motivated by a more academic goals (to "get my high school diploma after all these years").
- The same teacher might have to teach two very different populations in two different sites (e.g., immigrant, limited-English-proficient parents from Central America who need basic English skills in one site and native-born Americans who want to upgrade their basic skills, pass the GED exam, and learn basic computer skills in the other). This requires teachers to have considerable flexibility and versatility.

Starting Together recognizes that it is important to select teachers who are able to "connect" with learners on a personal level. This helps the instructor to better understand the learners' interests and needs, and helps learners feel at ease with the teacher. Ideally, the instructor will also come with some background in adult basic education/ESL and family literacy. Finding such people who are available to teach at the odd hours (e.g., part-time in mornings and/or evenings) required by this program is not easy. Starting Together knows that it is also vital for each site to have at least one staff member who is fluent in the mother tongue of the participants and makes sure that such staff are in place.

Teachers are also expected to do home visits to the learners' homes. This enables them to better understand the learners' needs, how they use literacy and English, and how to customize instruction to particular uses of literacy and English. Every family receives a monthly "integrated" visit, in which learning activities are carried out for both children and parents. Home-based families receive a weekly visit by family and adult educators.

Starting Together recognizes that training should be provided not only to the basic skills instructors but to all staff who are working in the various sites. This allows for cross-fertilization, so all staff know what the others are doing and it is clear how to coordinate the various components of the program.

Starting Together's administration hopes to expand the training given to its staff. This will include access to (a) "general" conferences on family literacy (in which participants can sample a number of workshops on a variety of family-literacy-related themes, and (b) more-focused training in the form of an intense series of workshops which all family literacy professionals are expected to go through to attain an informal or formal professional certificate.

As one teacher suggested, it is important for Starting Together to have a clear set of agreed-upon standards and policies, so that teachers know what is expected of them and how to go about it. It is, for example, difficult for an ESL instructor new to family literacy to know how to best integrate basic English instruction with parenting-related knowledge.

One way of helping instructors to understand how to link basic skills instruction to parenting education is through regular interaction between basic skills instructors and other staff (e.g., family educators). But this interaction can be difficult for part-time teachers who have to cover more than one site.

Teachers also need to have adequate, paid preparation time, to allow them to do the customized lesson planning, review of assessment evidence, and other tasks such a job requires. (This is built into the Starting Together model.)

Teachers might also benefit from training which expands their repertoire of instructional techniques. For example, rather than rely too heavily on having learners repeat words back to the teacher in an ESL class, teachers should know how to make classes more participatory (interactive, with more responsibility in the hands of learners) and multi-sensory in nature (e.g., rather than just repeat the name of a body part, a learner could search through a pile of pictures to find the picture which corresponds to a body part spoken or written by the teacher).

Support services

It appears that the childcare, transportation, and counseling services provided by Starting Together are in fact supporting learner participation, as hoped.

Record keeping

Starting Together's record-keeping system appears well organized and thorough. As with any such system, it is important for all parties (administrators, funders, and others) to be clear about why particular information is needed so that staff are not required to collect information which serves no useful purpose.

The questionnaire used in the federal evaluation should also be re-examined to ensure that the wording of some questions is not patronizing and insulting.

The collecting of information can also be made into a learning activity by helping parents understand why particular information is needed and involving them in the collecting and recording of information. (For example, parents can observe while the Brigance assessment is conducted with their children.)

Factors outside the program

As stated above, sometimes factors outside the program's control (e.g., the health of family members or learners, the need to work overtime) make it difficult for learners to participate fully in the program. Here are some other factors which can affect parents' ability to participate fully in the program:

Legal status: Some learners are in "limbo" in terms of their legal-resident status and therefore find it hard to focus on getting to class or having a clear direction for themselves.

Opportunities to use English: Many of the ESL learners live and work in near-Spanish-only environments, making it less likely that they will actually use and master what they are learning in class.

Learner support networks: Ideally all the institutions that participating parents come in touch with (e.g., their employers or unions, their children's schools, their religious institutions, other social service agencies) would encourage learners to come to class and use what they are learning to improve their lives and those of their families. However, for various reasons these institutions are often either not aware of or interested in what the learners are trying to accomplish. When these institutions fail to support the notion of family learning for self-improvement, a golden opportunity can be lost. (For example, if a local school realized that some of the immigrant parents of older children in the school were trying to learn English, they could make special efforts to reach out to those parents, inform them about what is happening in the school, and find ways to help those parents get involved in the school.) Starting Together has made links to some such elements of learner support networks, but one agency can only do so much. This will require a longer-term, community-wide lifelong learning effort that many organizations will have to take responsibility for.

Question #5: What have been the results (e.g., outcomes, impacts, improvements, changes in skill and behavior and quality of life, etc.) which emerged for learners during this start-up period?

The program is still in a start-up mode, and it is not reasonable to expect major leaps in parent or children's skills, knowledge, and behaviors at this point. (Some families have been participating in classes for only a few months.)

In Year 2, we should look for the following kind of evidence of learner interest and achievement, while also understanding that it is not realistic to expect major

leaps in learner abilities from a program with which learners can interact only a approximately six hours per week.

Possible indicators of learner progress to look for in year 2

1. Learners improve their basic skills as demonstrated via:
 - a. taking GED test.
 - b. passing GED test.
 - c. increasing scores on standardized tests (e.g., TABE, NYSPLACE).
 - d. learner portfolios.
 - e. individual or group interviews.
 - f. observation in classroom.

2. Learners improve their abilities to support their children's education through documentation of the following behaviors:
 - a. reading to their children,
 - b. interacting with their children.
 - c. involvement in their children's schooling.
 - d. increased amount and quality of reading materials in home.
 - e. productive disciplining of their children (e.g., setting reasonable expectations).
 - f. thoughtful TV viewing with their children.

3. Learners improve their self-esteem; interest in self-improvement; sense of self as learner; and being advocates for themselves, their families, and others as demonstrated via:
 - a. Self-assessment.
 - b. Observation of learners (pre- and post-).
 - c. Interviews to document behaviors for self-improvement.

4. Learner improve their job readiness and job status as demonstrated via:

. . . .interviews with participants.

5. Learners' children improve their readiness for school in these areas:
 - a. language skills (including reading and writing) appropriate for their age and home language;
 - b. art;
 - c. music;
 - d. social skills.

Despite it being too early to measure significant gains in the above areas, learners, staff, and others have cited a number of positive impacts which have resulted from

the program so far, as noted below:

- This start-up period has allowed staff to build the partnerships needed at the sites and also to better understand what to focus instruction on. For example, based on the time they have worked with their learners, teachers now have a clearer picture of the particular forms of English that their immigrant learners need to be better able to ask for help at work or ask questions of their children's schoolteachers.
- The classes are increasing the comfort level of learners who might otherwise be afraid to ask questions or speak up in various life situations which are important to them. Learners are also now getting a better understanding of how adult education can relate to helping their children succeed. Put another way, they are seeing the value of education for all family members: a better-educated parent can improve his/her own life while improving their children's ability to succeed in school.
- While attendance in classes in itself does not guarantee that a parent is learning anything, the very fact that a learner signs up and comes to class is, for some, a significant achievement. It suggests a willingness to take risks, try something new, invest time in improving oneself even. In some cases, the prospect of helping one's child succeed is the "hook" which pulls the parent into an adult education program which he/she might otherwise never have joined.
- One immigrant couple learned enough about the voting process and a local school budget issue that they voted for the first time in local school budget elections.
- Some immigrant learners are now speaking English to Head Start staff or are filling in forms in English.
- One learner has moved from a factory job to a job in a dentist's office.
- One learner is now using English to speak to her supervisor and co-workers in her job as a custodian.
- One couple won an award for family literacy student of the year.
- Of the five learners at the Brentwood ESL program who were given pre- and post-NYS PLACE Tests, all five showed some increase in scores.

These are examples of an incremental but significant changes being made in learners' lives. Teachers should encourage learners to document these examples in portfolios, to help the program know outcomes to focus on and to provide the program with important evidence to show to funders and other potential program supporters.

Conclusion

Starting Together has made a good "start" during the past year. Sites are up and running, partnerships have been built, curriculum and assessment tools are in place, staff are getting training and experience, and learners are starting to show results.

In Year 2 the program should continue to develop and provide relevant instruction and otherwise help parents make significant progress toward the goals of healthy families committed to lifelong learning, self-improvement, and self-reliance.

APPENDIX A

Schedule of Site Visits December 1998 - May 1999

Site Visit #1: December 9, 1998

Conducted group interview with eight staff members of WSB and partner agencies, to clarify purposes and focal points for evaluation.

Site Visit #2: December 22, 1998

- Met with WSB staff Karen Bowden and Patti Renahan, to review draft evaluation plan.
- Observed class at Brentwood site and conducted group interview with learners. Also observed learning activities being conducted for children of learners.

Site Visit #3: February 5, 1999

- Met with Starting Together advisory committee to go over purposes and procedures of evaluation.
- Met with WSB staff Karen Bowden and Patti Renahan, and Head Start representative Sheila Fleming.

Site Visit #4: February 11, 1999

- Observed class at Wyandanch site and talked with learners.
- Met with Judy Daniels, program manager at Wyandanch site.
- Met with Lynette McNeil and two case workers (Geraldine Addonizio and Carol Burnett) at Huntington site.
- Met with WSB instructor and Head Start staff at Brentwood site.
- Observed Brentwood class and reviewed instructional materials.

Site Visit #5: May 19-20, 1999

May 19:

- Met with Karen Bowden and Nancy Forbes at Western Suffolk BOCES
- Met with Karen Fagioli, family educator at Huntington and Wyandanch sites
- Talked with Ron Wheeler, instructor at Huntington and Wyandanch sites
- Met with Karen Bowden and Patti Renahan

May 20:

- Observed Wyandanch ABE/GED class and talked with learners as a group
- Met with staff from two Head Start programs (Wyandanch and Huntington)
- Met with Karen Bowden and Patti Renahan
- Reviewed project assessment documents and curriculum materials with Patti Renahan
- Met with Terry Murphy, instructor at Brentwood
- Observed ESL class at Brentwood
- Observed PACT Time session at Brentwood