

**Similar, Yet Different:
Case Studies of Three Even Start Programs in Pennsylvania**

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the organizational practices of three Even Start programs in Pennsylvania. The research was undertaken by personnel at the Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy and the Adult Education Program at the Pennsylvania State University in collaboration with Even Start program administrators, staff, and participants, as part of the annual statewide evaluation of family literacy programs.¹ The study examined the following research questions:

1. What are the practices of the three Even Start programs? For example:
 - a. What are the recruitment and retention processes?
 - b. What are the modes of instruction?
 - c. How does the staff plan and make decisions about the program?
 - d. How are participants involved in program planning, implementation, and evaluation?
 - e. How does each organization evaluate itself and engage in program improvement?
2. How do the organizations relate and respond to their institutional environments?
 - a. How do the organizations relate and respond to their historical contexts?
 - b. How do the organizations relate and respond to their physical and social environments?
 - c. How do the organizations relate and respond to state and federal policies and legislation?

Our goal was not to evaluate the programs according to pre-determined criteria, but rather to have the organizations *describe what they do*. The term “practices” refers not only to classroom activities, but also to larger administrative and curricular decisions that affect the program participants, the teaching and administrative staff, the types of programs provided, the types and quality of instruction, forms of assessment and evaluation, relationships with collaborators and other community-based organizations.

Organizational practices may be examined at varying levels of analysis, for example, the individual, organizational, or societal levels. This study focuses primarily on the organizational level. Further, we were chiefly interested in repeatable patterns of behavior rather than idiosyncratic behaviors or the effects of instruction on individual learners. Finally, the three organizations are treated as active agents, not passive subjects who are acted upon by external forces. As such, the organizations respond in particular ways to a constellation of constraints, opportunities, challenges, and resources. These actions and responses are the subject of this report.

¹ The author wishes to thank the program staff and participants and Penn State colleagues who devoted their time to participating in the case studies. Ian Baptiste (the initial Principal Investigator) and Even Start and Penn State staff members were instrumental in framing the research focus, questions, and methods. The research questions and last two paragraphs of page 1 were adapted from case study documents which were written by Ian Baptiste and revised by other team members. Beth Grinder, Peggy Grumm, Helen Guisler, Kate McCorkle, Kimberly Shelley, Barbara Van Horn, and Drucie Weirauch provided valuable suggestions on earlier drafts of this report.

Program Descriptions

Allegheny

The Allegheny Intermediate Unit Even Start Program, located in Pittsburgh's Monongahela (Mon) Valley, was started in 1991. The Even Start program is housed with other social service providers in a multi-story brick building located in Homestead, an urban, poor and working-class, residential neighborhood on a hill above the river. Along the river, an old steel mill has been redeveloped into restaurants and retail space, a reminder of the steel industry which has indelibly shaped Pittsburgh's economic and social life. The Steelers banners adorning some of the houses in the neighborhood reveal another important aspect of local culture.

This center-based program has responded to the competition among adult education programs in Pittsburgh by developing a niche for teen mothers. However, this will change in during the 2006-2007 fiscal year, when the program switches from federal Even Start funding to the state Act 143 funding. The program offers classes four days per week. Currently, the majority of participants are teenage mothers, adjudicated teens, and teens living in a shelter. The program recently began a family literacy initiative with incarcerated fathers. Most, but not all, participants are African-American, and their most common goal is to obtain their GED diploma.

A student's story, written for a class assignment, poignantly illustrates the kinds of life experiences many of the teen parents bring with them to the program:

[When I was four months old] my mother passed away from a drug over dose. She left me in custody of my sister. However, two days later, children Youth and Family Services (CYF), and two police cars came to get me, because my brother told them I was not getting fed and always left by myself, so they took me to Children's Hospital to get a physical and I was placed in a foster home. Two hours later, I went to this house with a strange lady named Mrs. M___; weeks later I discovered that the boy that was living at the house with me was my biological brother. When I [was] 14, I went to my first placement. It was ___ Shelter; I was there for a month and five other placements after that, I was placed at Independent Living. When I turn[ed] 16 years old, I became pregnant with my first son. I was again moved to a facility called ___, where I stayed for five months, however I became scared and ran away many times even after I had my son.

The mothers we talked to emphasized feeling "comfortable" in the program because they do not have to worry about their child and can look in on him/her at any time. They also feel comfortable because they have close relationships with staff. The provision of child care and early childhood education at the same site is very important to the participants, both logistically and emotionally, in giving them peace of mind that their child is in a safe environment. This peace of mind enables them to focus on studying.

Several teachers have worked with the program for more than ten years or since its inception. The staff enjoys working with both parents and children and regards the program as holistic, as this teacher stated:

One of the things I like best about this particular program is they have a very holistic approach to education by helping parents get involved more with their children's education. I think it's one of the most remarkable programs I've ever worked on. I think that's probably why I've been here for 13 years....To me it's very comprehensive and excellent program involving parents with their children and letting them know they're their very first teachers and showing that.

A key informant described the program as caring, respectful, and sensitive. The program is innovative because it provides the “complete package” for teen mothers: childcare, adult education, parent education, and interactive literacy. The program has also reached out to agencies providing services to teen parents and “worked with them to develop services that these students really need.” Another person observed the program works with the *whole family*. Finally, it provides advocacy for individual students, for instance, enabling them to stay in school to earn a high school diploma.

The coordinator has strengthened the program by closing two sites, focusing on teenage parents, and establishing new collaborations with teen-serving agencies. The new project with incarcerated fathers is also a change from the past. Finally, Even Start now shares classes with Move Up (an adult education program for new welfare recipients implemented by Department of Public Welfare and the Bureau of ABLE), which has changed child care, PACT (Parent and Child Together Time), and the integration of PACT and early childhood education with adult education.²

Juniata

The Juniata County Even Start Program in Mifflintown serves approximately 30 families throughout the sparsely populated, rural county (population of 22,281 in 2000). Even Start is located in the Juniata County Learning Center, a one-story, modular building with fluorescent lights and numerous windows which houses various educational and social service programs. The building is situated in an industrial park, within one-quarter mile of a four-lane highway.

Although the program is center-based, some families also receive home-based services. Some participants live as far as 29 miles away. The parents are predominantly women and a few men in their 20s to 40s, typically with two to four children. The program also serves some Spanish-speaking immigrant families. Approximately equal proportions of participants are married, partnered, or single parents. Given the lack of living-wage jobs in the county, many families receive some kind of public assistance in order to meet their basic needs. Participants' academic abilities vary widely, from beginning readers to GED recipients who are working toward other goals.

The mothers who participated in the focus group indicated they keep returning to the program for multiple reasons: “to get out of the house” and have something to do in the day; to see their children and themselves improving “in whatever you need;” and “to hear something different [i.e., not putting their kids down], to learn more.” Another mother noted she now brings

² Program staff and participants used the term PACT to describe interactive literacy activities (ILA). Although the latter term is increasingly used in research and practice, we follow research participants' usage in this report.

an issue up if something is wrong (e.g., being charged incorrectly in a store), whereas before, “I was afraid and I would just go home.” Participants gave the following examples of changes in their lives:

[My life is] more structured, I think. I know what I'm doing more.

I have a plan and I can set goals.

[My life is] more organized....Not as stressful....When you are not organized, it becomes stressful. You don't know what you're doing and you don't get anything done because you go from one thing to the next and try to get too much going at one time and never finish anything.

Most staff members have worked in the program for at least three years and some have worked in the Intermediate Unit for as long as 16 years. They were attracted to program because of it focuses on parents *and* children:

I like the inclusion of the parents and children. I always worked with only the adult ed side but people will come in for an intake and regular ABE/GED classes wouldn't work. They have children and they wouldn't be able to make the time.

What really attracted me to this job was the children and literacy. My most favorite thing in the whole world is reading books to children in an enjoyable way and I have been doing that for over 20 years.

When it began in 1999, the program was located in the basement of the Head Start building and early childhood classes were held in an adjacent child care center. For the next three years the program was located in a church basement, a “dark,” “inconvenient” place where “you had to move things” each weekend. The program moved to the Learning Center in 2003. The new location enabled the program to enroll more families (currently 29). The other notable changes in the program include a rise in the number of Spanish-speaking ESL families, increased collaboration with other agencies, and greater consistency as a team.

Research participants identified several innovative aspects of the program, including the coordinator's leadership in establishing a collaborative environment, the program's extensive collaboration with other educational and social service agencies, the creative integration of program components, and implementation of “core messages” regarding parenting and education, which is discussed later in the report.

York

The York Even Start program, which began in 1993, recently moved from the Sylvia Newcombe Center, which housed the Parent Community Center, Penn State Talent Search Program, Office of Special Programs (ELL), a food and clothing bank, and a satellite of the Martin Memorial Library. The main branch was located within walking distance. The Even Start program is currently located in an elementary school on the outskirts of York. The residential neighborhood, located near York College, is lined with modest, brick houses and duplexes with porches. There is not much traffic, but all the surrounding streets are lined with parked cars.

Guests entering the school are asked to sign in and wear a badge. The Even Start office consists of a receptionist desk, an area where parents clock in with a time card, and a small library of parenting books and children's books and videos, which was donated by the public library. The Even Start library includes, among other items, a James Garbarino book on boys and violence, a James Dobson book, an Ophelia Project (girls' development) book, and Spanish translations of English books such as *What to Expect When You're Expecting*.

Participants are primarily women who are immigrants from Latin America (including Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico, among others), Asia, and Southeast Asia. Most parents joined the program because of their children. For instance, many expressed a desire to negotiate relationships with and help their children, since they speak English more fluently than the parents do, are becoming acculturated, and are learning more advanced subjects in school.

The mothers and father in the focus groups attributed many personal changes in their lives to the Even Start program, such as losing timidity, gaining courage, and being able to respond to people in English, *defenderse* (defend themselves), and help their children with school. Participants described the program as one that meets their multi-faceted needs. They keep coming because both they and their children are learning and progressing. The teachers' demeanor or "way of being" also motivates students to continue in the program.

Most teachers have been with the program between 5 and 13 years. They enjoy working with both parents and children, working with Latino/a students, and believe that Even Start helps prevent problems and prepare children for school:

I just thought that it [position with Even Start] was a great opportunity because coming from public school and daycare you don't get to work much with the parent and the child.

I love the program because it's preventative of problems....What I realized about Even Start right away is that it is beautiful because it's before the problems, you know....It is just beautiful to be here and to give children like they say – by the time our children reach kindergarten, they can compete with any suburban you know school district child....I have seen firsthand what disasters happen for families that don't have a program like this versus a family that does and it's just beautiful to see the difference. You know, this program is like a mission to all of us. We just think it is so important and so preventative.

The program is innovative in that "we are constantly trying to make changes and improve the program." Indeed, the program has been involved in several SEQUAL (Statewide Educational Quality for Family Literacy) program improvement projects and constantly uses data to improve and meet performance standards, as discussed later in the report. Additionally, a key informant noted the program reaches out to people of different nationalities and ethnicities and tries to offer "what each family needs to get to the next level."

Notable program changes include increased enrollment—the program has become more well-known and participants tell their family and friends about it—and improved organization

and leadership. After several years of high turnover among coordinators, the program now has an “effective,” “efficient” leader who knows the program “from the ground up.”

Methods

Data collection for the case studies took place between June 2005 and August 2006. Funding was provided by the Bureau of Adult, Basic, and Literacy Education in the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Goodling Institute. The case study was planned and implemented by three Even Start program coordinators or directors, four Penn State personnel affiliated with the Goodling Institute (Dr. Beth Grinder, Peggy Grumm, Barbara Van Horn, and Drucie Weirauch), one professor affiliated with the Adult Education Program (Dr. Ian Baptiste), and one professor affiliated with both the Goodling Institute and the Adult Education Program (Dr. Esther Prins, Principal Investigator).³ The Institutional Review Board at Penn State approved the study and all research participants granted their consent.

During monthly conference calls, program and university personnel discussed the case studies, refined the research questions and data collection instruments, and provided updates on changes and recent developments in each program. The perspectives of program personnel informed the design and implementation of the case studies. As well, the calls allowed the program staff, as well as university personnel, to discover important commonalities and differences among the programs. Dr. Prins took extensive, typewritten notes during conference calls.

Even Start teachers and participants were very involved in collecting data. All of the staff members were women and all but one of the parents who participated in focus groups were women. The staff integrated data collection into instruction in the following ways:

- Parents in the Juniata program created a county map showing their respective communities and the location of employers, shopping, and other important sites, and discussed how the characteristics of their community affected them and the program.
- Parents in the York program wrote their reflections on the program’s move to a new location, both before and after the move. They also responded in writing to specific questions about the program.
- Parents in the Allegheny program wrote essays about community characteristics and other aspects of their lives pertinent to the case study.

The other data sources included:

- Written comments by the York staff regarding the move, as well as a timeline of events related to the move.
- Fieldnotes of site visits and classroom observations: Four university personnel visited the sites, observed class sessions in each component, and recorded their observations in detailed, descriptive fieldnotes.⁴

³ The project began with Dr. Baptiste as Principal Investigator. Dr. Prins assumed this role in spring 2006.

⁴ We conducted 2 site visits in Allegheny (2 observations each of adult education and PACT; 1 observation each of parent education and early childhood education); 4 site visits in Juniata (4 observations each of morning PACT

- Focus groups with staff and parents: Teachers and parents from each site participated in one focus group. The parents in York were grouped into Spanish speakers (led by Dr. Prins) and English speakers (led by Dr. Grinder).
- Interviews with program directors or coordinators: Each director or coordinator was interviewed once. Both the program coordinator from Juniata and the Family Services Director from the Intermediate Unit were interviewed.
- Interviews with one program partner from each site.
- A half-day retreat with the coordinators, directors, and Penn State research team to discuss the preliminary findings, reflect on the case study process, and identify next steps.
- Program documents, such as curriculum planning worksheets, parent surveys, and special events flyers.
- Typewritten notes of conference call discussions.

The interview and focus group guides and additional data collection instruments are included in Appendix A. All of the interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim by a professional.⁵ The excerpts included here have been edited only for clarity and readability.

Findings

What are the practices of the three Even Start programs?

Recruitment

Each program relies on referrals and word-of-mouth to recruit participants. The other recruitment strategies vary according to the program's population and its relationship to the community. In addition, distinct factors complicate recruitment in each site.

Allegheny

The staff recruits participants mainly through close collaboration with local high schools (particularly Project ELECT, a program for pregnant teenage students), a shelter program for adjudicated teens, and agency referrals. The director explained how participants learn about Even Start:

The welfare departments are, you know, aware of us and we work with the Family Centers and different agencies. I mean, we don't put signs up or anything and a lot of it is word of mouth, too. A lot of students, you know, say, 'I'm in this program and I have a friend that needs the same thing,' and they do it that way.

and early childhood education; 3 observations of closing PACT; and 2 observations of adult/parent education); and 4 site visits in York (2 observations each of preschool early childhood education and toddler early childhood education; 1 observation each of infant-toddler early childhood education, GED, beginning ESL, intermediate ESL, preschool PACT, and toddler PACT). One of the site visits to Juniata was conducted as part of the official local evaluation.

⁵ Two partner interviews were not recorded. One partner interview and the research team retreat were recorded but not transcribed. In these cases, the researcher(s) took extensive notes.

These recruitment strategies, however, will shift dramatically when Even Start switches to Act 143 funding, as staff will no longer be able to enroll current high school students.

In addition, since the implementation of Move Up, the family literacy program has had to “compete with itself” to recruit participants. This competition will increase when the program’s funding changes:

I am trying to get business for [three] Move Up [classes]; I’m trying to get students for Act 143—and they are the same students....And nobody selects family literacy. Nobody is going to say, ‘I want a program where I’m going to work on the family literacy component.’ They are either going to get the GED and throw a little family literacy in the mix. They are not going to go through the whole kit ‘n caboodle. They just don’t elect to do that. If you have two programs out there, they will go with the one that is going to get the GED or whatever the Welfare program says and go and get it. So you are competing against yourself. I’ve got to fill those programs, too, and you can’t dual enroll. If you could dual enroll that would be fine. But if you can’t then you are losing a lot of people. [With the shift to Act 143] I’m losing all my high school students and I’m losing my dual enrolled Move Up people. So I’ve lost probably 50% of my enrollment here.

Department of Public Welfare employees have also been referring clients to Move Up who would otherwise enroll in Even Start, thus reducing participation in Even Start.⁶

This example illustrates the unintended consequences of state-level policies: The implementation of Move Up affects how other adult education and family literacy programs operate, in this case, making it more difficult for the Allegheny program to recruit students and meet enrollment performance standards.

Juniata

The Juniata staff works closely with other educational and social service agencies, including Children, Youth, and Family Services, Parent Child Home Program, probation, SPOC (Single Point of Contact), Career Link, Project ELECT, and Head Start. As such, the Even Start program receives many referrals and also shares families with several of these programs. The coordinator related how she established relationships with these agencies when she assumed her position three years ago:

I got on the Head Start Policy Council and that helped me tremendously to get to know community resources and people in the area....I served on there for two-and-a-half years and I really think that helped me to get to know some of the people....I go to the SPOC DST [Single Point of Contact Direct Service Team] welfare meetings and the council of agencies is a great place for recruitment because of all the agency representatives. The new Success by 6 is being headed by United Way and that is another great referral. Just getting involved in the community. I used to work at the shelters as a case manager so I have a real good relationship with especially the Director. She is a huge resource down

⁶ Since the completion of the study, the Bureau of ABLE changed the policy to allow Act 143 programs to dual-enroll Move Up students.

here for recruitment because she manages a lot of the programs down here. Again, I can't say enough about being on the policy council. That really helped.

Currently, the coordinator serves on the Children, Youth, and Family Services board and some of their staff serves on the Even Start advisory board. "Once they make a referral there is a lot of feedback going on between the two of us to get this parent fully engaged in coming."

Because participants are geographically dispersed in a county with low population density, the program cannot rely on word-of-mouth alone:

[Word-of-mouth] is the best recruitment, but sometimes the way the area is around here, they live so far away that they don't necessarily have a neighbor who can refer [them], so you really do need the agencies here.

Participation in the Library and Family Literacy Summer Reading Program has helped increase the program's visibility in the county:

I think people actually are seeking us out now sometimes because they will tell us that so and so told them about the program and thought it would be very good for them. It seems like now the name is out there and what we do. The county has become familiar with what we are.

York

The program receives referrals and the library has also helped advertise Even Start in its main location and outlying branches. However, the program has such a long waiting list—approximately 60 families—that it does not actively recruit participants:

We have flyers and brochures posted at a lot of different agencies. We have programs that will refer students to us on a regular basis, but we are to the point where we have such a huge waiting list. People are on the waiting list for six months to a year, so to go out and recruit someone and then say, 'You're going to have to wait'— We don't really actively recruit.

The enrollment limit is determined primarily by the number of children in the early childhood classroom. In other words, "We can't get the classes so big that the teachers can't handle the number of children." When the children's classes are full, the program has to "cut it off and not bring in anyone off of the waiting list."

Most focus group participants learned about the program from a relative or friend, and in a few cases, a professional such as a pastor or teacher, indicating that recruitment occurs primarily through immigrants' kin and friendship networks.

A key informant believes the program is a very "well-kept secret" in that people who haven't been recruited or don't know someone in the program aren't likely to hear about it. Additionally, this person believes the school district doesn't support or adequately recognize the program. Finally, s/he believes the program will have a harder time recruiting families in its new location, since the neighborhood is situated on the outskirts of York and is populated largely by

college students. In the previous location, many families with young children lived in the neighborhood. However, the coordinator noted that the new neighborhood, which is primarily African American, may present opportunities to recruit new families.

Retention

All three programs employ numerous strategies to help participants stay in the program, including providing van transportation to and from the site (Juniata), supplying bus passes (Allegheny, York), offering incentives based on attendance, assessment gains, and/or reading books to children (Allegheny, Juniata), and meeting students' non-academic needs (i.e., case management). Additional retention strategies are described below.

Meeting students' non-academic needs

Each program also helps participants stay in the program by addressing their non-academic needs (case management), for example, by referring them to other agencies, providing emotional support, advocating for them in institutions such as school, and helping them cope with personal problems. In each program, the coordinator is not a hands-off administrator, but is intimately aware of the problems parents and children face and mobilizes information and resources to help them address those needs.

The Juniata program refers to case management as its "fifth component." A staff member described case management in this way:

A lot of it is kind of helping them to problem solve and daily routines. Really helping to empower the parent and help provide self-esteem and self-competency. The referral helps, but it is really getting a facilitator with that family, like how can we solve it and what can we do next.

Another Juniata staff person explained how case management helps families:

First of all, making sure that the family is aware of and connected to appropriate other agencies in the community. If it is a D&A [drug and alcohol addiction] issue, for example, connect them with a D&A counseling agency. If there is domestic violence, then connect with the domestic violence agency. I think [the coordinator] has some particular skills when it comes to case management whereby she can even herself offer kind of a counseling perspective to families with respect to what their needs are and helping them to understand and accept some situations that they are facing and ways that our program and other programs can be of help to them.

Similarly, an Allegheny teacher described a recent incident:

[This morning] one of our students was all worked up because she was going to have to get gas [turned on for her home]. Sometimes before you can even begin working on the lessons, you have to be a case manager. We got emergency phone numbers, crisis phone numbers and she got her daughter into the classroom and then she went over and one of the early childhood teachers went over and called the gas company and energy crisis and trying to get assistance. A lot of times they come in— [Another staff member adds:] And

there is no way they are going to focus on their work. We have to kind of do a little bit of that before we can even get involved in their parenting.

A York Even Start brochure mentions workshops on immigrant and housing rights. Likewise, the York parents gave several examples of ways staff have helped them with non-academic issues. In one case, a teacher suggested a woman's daughter might need speech therapy and then located a specialist with the mother's consent. The mother commented, "For now my daughter is in therapy; she has improved a lot and I feel very good because [the staff person] is helping me." Another woman noted the program brought an optometrist to give children eye exams, adding that she didn't know her daughter needed glasses. A woman shared:

When I first joined Even Start, I had problems with my husband. We were fighting a lot and I went to [the coordinator] crying and she helped me. She took me to a place that people can help me and they can help you in your life....Any needs that you need, she is willing to help. She might not take you there but she will give you the information, the phone number, places that you can call and get help.

This mother's statement summarizes the tone of the discussion: "[The coordinator] doesn't make you feel like you are alone."

Allegheny

An Allegheny staff member emphasized the importance of providing support for participants, adding that the staff members "show that we are really very interested in them:"

I think we show a real interest in their children....Like for example, I know all their names. I know their kids' names. You know, you talk to them. You tell them they look nice during the day. You complement them on, you know, their grooming, how their children look. You talk to them about their careers. You know, you go over their lessons with them. I think part of it is just to say, 'You are working well. You're doing a good job,' you know, not putting them down at all and just being as encouraging as possible. You can give them incentives and things, even get them a gift certificates or something, but, you know, we tr[ie]d doing a lot of that stuff. If your attendance was this we gave you this and it really, I don't think it worked nearly as well as just your basic praise kind of thing that you would do normally in the course of a school day or work environment. I personally think that has worked better.

Simple actions such as knowing each person's name demonstrate recognition, making participants feel valued. In addition, the program has a party when a student passes the GED. Finally,

We buy them things. We'll give them certificates if they go up a couple levels in you know, reading or something. Like maybe I'll give them a gift certificate for \$10 to Wal-Mart or something like that....We always give them parties and celebrations for their achievements and things like that that, you know, they really seem to enjoy.

York

By contrast, the York staff discovered that incentives created unanticipated problems:

We used to do attendance incentives where every month the top three people with the best attendance would get a prize. We found it would cause a lot of problems. The students were getting angry with each other and they were coming to school when their children were sick, which we didn't want them to do. It was, 'Well, she won first place and she wasn't really here that day. Someone clocked in for her.' It was a problem, so I said we are not doing that anymore.

Instead, the program has implemented a new attendance policy, which has increased retention and helped reduce tardiness and absence. Parents sign a “statement of understanding” and if they exceed five unexcused absences, they are put on a waiting list. Students are given a 15 minute grace period after class begins. The third time they are late, they are sent home for the day.

York parents also noted the coordinator

sees that when you are kind of down and you don't want to come back, she tries not to let you be. She will call you. She will send you a letter if she can't reach you on the phone. She will make sure that she tries her best to keep you in the program and that's one of the things that I admire from her.

Parents stated they stay in the program because they see their children learning and they are learning as well.

Juniata

Through an assigned SEQUAL project, the Juniata staff learned what facilitated and hindered student retention. A staff person remarked, “Quite honestly, the number one thing that students themselves said keeps them coming back to class was [the coordinator], meaning basically their relationship with the staff.” This finding underscores the importance of establishing caring, trust-based relationships between educators and learners. Juniata staff also developed new intake procedures as part of the SEQUAL project, based on the belief that “retention really begins at the intake.” The staff identified this strategy by examining how they receive referrals (i.e., by phone). The coordinator explained:

The first thing I do is a home visit and I think that it helps comfort level on the student's part and my part. We do that initial home visit to explain the program and put a face with a name—that's important—and then invite the families for a visit. I'll either pick them up or make sure that I am here and available when they come in....When they come in for the visit, we spend some time in the early childhood room. Comfort level for parents, toys to play with to get them to see what is going on and what will happen with the children. We think that the intake is the home visit, the visit to the classroom and then deciding if you would like to be part of the program. It takes a couple visits here. We started that a couple years [ago] and this year it became a retention strategy.

She elaborated:

It is a comfort level that is successful for the students but it is also comfort level for staff. For the parent, it is really hard to make that call and come in here. At least they can put one face and give us a call....I want to make sure they get to meet the staff or at least see the building, and then come back when there is class time.

This non-threatening, multi-step intake process demonstrates regard for parents' comfort and recognition that parents may feel hesitant attending a program and interacting with unfamiliar professionals and program participants in an unfamiliar setting.

Instruction

This section begins with snapshots of an adult and parent education class, an ESL class, a PACT activity, and an early childhood class. These particular classes were chosen to provide a glimpse of instructional practices at each site; the selection was also based on the quality and depth of fieldnotes. The fieldnotes were taken by Esther Prins, Beth Grinder, Peggy Grumm, and Drucie Weirauch. Next, the report identifies common themes among the programs and describes typical instructional practices in each program for adult and parent education, PACT, and early childhood education.

Ethnographic descriptions of instructional practices

Snapshot of an adult and parent education class in Juniata

After the morning PACT time ends at 9:45, nine parents enter the adult education classroom and sit down at three tables arranged in a U, facing a small blackboard. Three windows brighten the room. The room includes a TV, a tan loveseat facing a low coffee table arranged with parenting magazines, bookcases and cabinets, a sandwich board listing the day's schedule, bulletin boards, a small blackboard, 7 new-looking computers along the walls, a round table with drinks and snacks, and a desk. A "welcome" sign greets those who enter the room. Messages on posters state, "Books are treasures waiting to be discovered" and "Be yourself." A handwritten sign reads, "Did you know? Parent who promote learning at home are more likely to have children who are successful in school. Children do better in school if parents set and maintain limits." A sign-in sheet with stickers records students' attendance. A cabinet or bookshelf along the front right wall holds fiction and non-fiction books, commercially produced workbooks, dictionaries, and students' binders, which include their journals and individual work. Some objects are labeled with the English and Spanish word, such as *door* and *puerta*. A sheet of newsprint states, "We Value Your Ideas;" someone had written "Village Acres" (an organic farm located in Juniata County) under the "Adult Field Trips" heading and "Hokes Farm" under the "Field Trips with Children" heading.

After everyone sits down, the adult and parent education teacher (Mary, a pseudonym) asks me to introduce myself (Esther) to the students and then they introduce themselves to me. This is the second time most of us have met. The eight women and one man, the husband of a participant, are White and in their 20s to 40s, with one to five children. Mary tells the parents they can write in their journal about the morning PACT time and how it went. Another teacher, Jill, sits in a chair near the table. The parents get their notebooks from a bookshelf and some

began writing in their journals. As they write, some of the parents have side conversations. A woman tells another, “I have a cousin who’s pregnant with triplets.” One of the beginning readers in the class tells Mary she passed her drivers’ license exam—even though “my dad kept telling me I wouldn’t be able to get it”—and then continues talking to a nearby student about getting her license. In response to a student’s question, Mary tells the class the journal doesn’t have to be a certain length. Students write for a few more minutes.

After calling students to attention, Mary says, “I’m going to tell you the last literacy tip” and then asks a student if she can explain I Spy, the previous literacy tip covered in class. The student answers, “No. We haven’t been playing it.” Mary reviews how to play I Spy and models it with the class. She then reviews the literacy tips covered in previous weeks, including “junk mail (using flyers and advertisements to develop children’s literacy skills) and “preview a book.” Mary asks if they remember how to preview a book; the students indicate they don’t recall. Mary gives several examples: look at the cover, ask “What do you think it’s going to be about?” and look at the pictures and the title. She explains the fourth tip, “mealtime conversation,” is important for literacy development.

The fifth literacy tip is “open-ended questions.” Mary says she will read the book from the morning PACT time—*Who’s Gonna Tuck Me in Tonight*, about a lamb who wants to be tucked in by its mother—and ask open-ended questions about it. She asks, “Who sleeps with a stuffed animal?” A young woman, Stephanie, says she sleeps with a pink teddy bear. “Who will tuck Wooly in?” Another student answers, “A goose.” “How do you think he feels?” Stephanie responds, “Sad. Scared.” Mary explains why that was an open-ended question. She continues asking questions about the story (why, what do you think...). Stephanie answers all but two of the questions; most responses are one-word or one-sentence answers. The exchange ends as follows: “Now a question you can ask is, ‘Who tucks you in at night?’” “Nobody,” Stephanie says. “Pretend you’re a child,” Mary responds. “My mom.”

Mary reviews what an open-ended question is and explains that these questions often start with *W*. Stephanie suggests *why*, *what*, and *who*, and Mary writes these on the board. Mary suggests several other open-ended questions, such as “Tell me about the picture” and “What would happen if...”, and gives a few examples. She tells students, “Extend their [your children’s] thinking a little bit and let them use their brains.” She offers her personal copy of the storybook for parents to borrow and a bag of popsicle puppets with characters from the book which parents can check out to use at home. She gives parents big, paper question marks with a magnet on the back, which they can put on their refrigerators to remind them to ask open-ended questions. Some students joke that they have no room on their refrigerators.

Several students go to the other side of the room to pick out a book to read their children at home. At 10:15, the students take a break; some leave the room and others stay to talk with each other and eat snacks. A woman tells Mary, “The kids and I made supper together last night. Can I put that on here?” (referring to a sheet where parents record parent-child literacy activities). Mary and the student spend a few minutes writing on the sheet of paper. A new student, a young woman, goes into another room to take a standardized assessment test. Meanwhile, the teachers discuss what each student will do during the instruction time. The new student returns and Jill discusses the results of the test with her. Jill tells her she’s strong in math

and asks how she would like to proceed. She would like to do “two [subjects] at one time so I can go back and forth.” Jill asks, “Do you have a preference of what you’d like to work on next?” They discuss how to proceed.

At 10:25, the parents return to the room and begin working on individual learning activities. Of the three students working on computers (lined up in a row, facing the wall), two use math software to work on multiplication ($4 \times 8 = ?$) or other math problems. A young woman uses the computer to write and edit the program newsletter, which includes material from magazines or articles she writes. This issue includes tips for sledding, advice about healthy food, “chore dice,” and cards with conversation starters. We talk about her and her mother’s interest in organic food. (At 11:10, the coordinator tells her the early childhood teachers want her to get her two children.) The other students work quietly by themselves at the tables, mainly completing worksheets from their notebooks, or sit on a loveseat perusing children’s books. The male student focuses on his worksheets. A shy woman, a new reader, seated on the loveseat reads a book; Mary occasionally helps her decipher a word. She spends the rest of the time looking at children’s books. Stephanie declares, “I hate math.” After finishing her math worksheets, she says, “Woohoo! I’m done! I ain’t doin’ no more.”

Both Mary and Jill help students individually and answer their questions. Students occasionally ask the teachers to check their work. Jill tries to fix a computer so a student can do her work. The coordinator comes in and helps the beginning reader with math, telling her, “That’s good the way you showed your work.” When one of the students finishes her work, Mary asks, “For the last few minutes do you want to go to a parenting website? Do you have anything you need to work on?” The student asks for work to take home with her, then pulls out her GED practice test and notes she needs to work on percentages. Mary gets the practice test answer sheet. The student responds, “Oh no!” In a reassuring tone of voice, Mary says, “It’s okay.” They discuss the results of the practice test: 15 out of 25 problems in the math section were correct.

As students work, they talk quietly to others around them. Two women discuss what time one of their husbands leaves for work and his recent health problems. One woman tells another they switched her child care schedule. Two women talk about jobs; one asks the other if she’s looking for a job. She responds, “Not for the present. My husband and I talked about it. He said, ‘If you get a job, you’ll have to pay the sitter for everything you make.’” A woman tells me about problems she’s having with her adult nephew and complains that although he’s single, he receives more food stamps than she does for a family of three. Mary asks her, “Where are you looking for a job? Any prospects?” “No,” she answers. “Well, at least you have a license.” I add that a license can open up more options for her. Later, she discovers another parent is the sister of her former high school classmate.

Mary tells the class they have five minutes until closing PACT. She tells the GED practice test student she can take the GED book home and gives her the book. The beginning reader checks out four children’s books with tapes and the program’s tape recorder. The father checks out *Green Eggs and Ham* (the program will celebrate Dr. Seuss’s upcoming birthday).

At about 11:30 the students sit back down at the tables. Mary asks, “Any questions on what you’ll do with your questions mark questions?” The students don’t respond. “Sounds like nothing. What kinds of questions will you ask?” Mary asks. Stephanie answers, “Open-ended.” Mary announces that the early childhood teacher will do an ABC activity in PACT time and adds, “She’ll want to ask you to participate and be sure that you do that. It’s important for kids to know what the ABCs are,” especially when they go to school. The coordinator reminds parents not to bring snacks into PACT because then the children will want snacks again, too. The parents whose children are absent stay in the room, while others go out the door to PACT.

Snapshot of two ESL classes in York

Beginning ESL class

Upon arriving at the York Even Start program, all parents and children enter the main office to clock in with a time card before going to their respective classrooms. The eleven students in the beginning ESL classroom are primarily Latina, with a few Asian women, in their early 20s to 40s. The teacher, a White, middle-aged woman, stands in front of the room by the blackboard, while the students sit behind three long tables, all facing the board. The room contains common classroom objects: a TV, a radio, bookcases displaying adult and children’s books and games, a desk, and a rack with pamphlets with titles like, “How to teach your child word meanings,” “How to manage your child for good behavior,” “How to teach your child at home,” and “How to help your children learn by looking and listening.” A U.S. flag hangs above the clock and a Mexican flag hangs below.

The teacher is explaining the long and short *i* sounds and asks students to look in the dictionary for words with the short *i* sound. When a student suggests a word, the teacher asks her to write it on the board in a column under the short *i* sound. Students suggest “imagination,” “international,” and “inability.” For each word, the teacher provides some explanation or example—for instance, *international* trade is when countries exchange goods—or asks students a question, such as, “Remember what a prefix is? What does ‘in’ mean? It means ‘not.’ When a student suggests “inaccessible,” the teacher says, “That’s another difficult one. Let’s try for some easier ones.” Students find other words in the dictionary: “illegal” (followed by some laughter when the teacher asks for an example of something illegal), “income tax,” and “injury.” Pointing to each word with a wooden pointer, the teacher pronounces the word; then the students read the word aloud together. Then the teacher gives the meaning and students guess the corresponding word, identifying each correctly.

The class follows the same steps for the long *i* words. There is some confusion about the difference in pronunciation between “island” and “Iceland,” so the teacher clarifies the distinction: “Some of you are from an island. What’s it called?” A student answers, “Puerto Rico.” “What’s another example of an island?” the teacher asks. “Acapulco.” “No, it’s attached to land. What’s a U.S. state that’s an island?” (the teacher uses a globe at this point). A woman ventures, “Hawaii, no?” The teacher affirms this is correct. When students suggest a short *i* word, the teacher corrects them. Another student writes “Iceland” and “isolation” on the board. The teacher comments, “If children are misbehaving, we give them a time-out and put them on a chair, in isolation.” [She gave this as an example of what isolation means.] Students offer other words, including “issue,” “ice cream,” “idea,” and “iron” (the pronunciation, which sounds like “idol,” causes some confusion). The teacher writes “ire” and “ira” on the board, explaining that

they both come from the same Latin root and that ire means anger, which is “ira” in Spanish. “If you want to use a higher-level university word, you can say ‘ire’ for anger,” she tells the students.

They follow the same routine of choral recitation and matching the word and definition. During the exercise, a student’s cell phone rings, with a hip hop ring tone. The teacher ignores the phone. When they finish, she matches students in pairs to write a sentence for a word on the board; she assigns one word to each pair. One student works by herself in a notebook and borrows a dictionary from another student. The other students work quietly with each other. The teacher goes around to each pair to read their sentence and give them guidance, affirmation, and further explanation. One sentence reads, “The airport is an international place because people arrive from different countries.” With students who used *illegally* in their sentence, the teacher explains the difference between *illegal* and *illegally*, which she translates to “ilegalmente.” She comments that a lot of Americans use these words incorrectly. The observer leaves before the students finish the exercise.

Intermediate ESL class

Seven Latina women and their teacher (a White woman) are sitting around a rectangular table in a school classroom with high ceilings and many windows. Items displayed around the room include the alphabet, a map of the United States, a poster of the presidents up to Clinton, books to translate into English, and three computers (one of which is turned on). A rack holds books and magazines such as Newsweek, Central PA Parent (a newspaper listing things happening in the area), Helping Your Child (a U.S. Dept. of Education Publication), and Better Homes and Gardens. Children’s books are arranged on low shelves. The blackboard displays the five words related to the program’s current theme, history: President, invention, history, coins, and money. These words guide the learning activities in adult education, parent education, PACT, and early childhood education; the words are not yet posted in the toddler or preschool rooms.

When the observer enters at 9:55, the students are going through a one-page document on the Eiffel Tower. Each woman reads one paragraph. After the first student reads, the teacher comments that Gustave Eiffel was famous for his iron work, which included the framework for the Statue of Liberty. As another student reads, the teacher corrects her pronunciation of “structure” and then summarizes the text, stating that people were skeptical the tower could be built in two years. A similar pattern—correcting mispronunciation and summarizing the text—follows as each subsequent student reads. When they finish reading, all the students begin to work independently and answer the questions on the back of the sheet about the text. The teacher also answers the questions on her sheet. After the teacher completes her answers, she goes around the room discussing the answers with individual students and talking about the correct answers. In some cases, she tells the student if their answer is right or wrong. When everyone is finished, the teacher says, “Let’s go over this together.”

The group goes through each question and talks aloud about the answers. Sometimes the teacher expands on sentences, for example, “I thought it would be more metal.” On occasion she answers the question before the students do. Each student then reads aloud one True and False question; some provide the answer right after reading the question, while others pause to allow the teacher to say the answer. The teacher explains that sometimes the answers, especially for

True-False questions, are subtle, or not easily seen in the text. Two students briefly discuss whether Gustave Eiffel was an artist or not, based on the text.

For the next questions, the teacher emphasizes, the students the need to follow the instructions: to underline the text showing how much of his own money Gustave Eiffel spent to build the tower. After the students complete the worksheet (10:15), the teacher asks if there are any questions. Seeing there are no questions, she says, “No, we are not going to take a field trip,” and everyone laughs. The students and teacher have an informal discussion about traveling to Europe specifically, Rome. At 10:18, the students take a break and then return to the classroom.

Snapshot of PACT in Allegheny

After the adult education class and a focus group end shortly after 11am, six women in their teens and early 20s and one in her 30s enter the early childhood room. Four of the women are Black, including one Haitian, one is White, and one is Asian. There are six children in the room: two babies, three toddlers, and a 3-year-old. The teachers are four women (three White and one African-American) in their 30s to 50s. The AmeriCorps volunteer is a 20-something, African-American woman.

The small room is crowded with several low tables surrounded by child-sized chairs, high chairs against one wall, low bookcases and play equipment, a play kitchen, a refrigerator and kitchen area, storage cubicles, at least five cribs, and two rocking chairs. There is little room to walk around.

A teenage mother (Chimena, a pseudonym) is holding her baby daughter in one arm and holding a small book in another, singing, “This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands. This is the way we wash our hands...all day long.” One of the teachers begins singing, “Clap your hand if you like story time.” The other instructors and most of the mothers join in with the singing and clapping. They add other verses: “Stomp your feet if you like story time” and “Nod your head...” Chimena sits in a rocking chair with her baby and reads a sing-a-long book (the one she was singing to her daughter) to the group. The other mothers are gathered around her, each holding her son or daughter on her lap. She leads the group through all the verses: “This is the way we brush our teeth,” “get a drink,” and “take a bath.” The others sing along. In between verses, there is some light-hearted banter and conversation between the students and teachers.

A teacher introduces another song that everyone seems to know, since most join in. The tune is “There was a farmer had a dog.” Using the names of the children in the room, they sing, “There was a mother had a child and ___ was her name, oh...” spelling the child’s name. Everyone sings quite loudly and many of the women smile and laugh. Chimena spontaneously introduces a new verse: “There was a teacher had some kids and ___ was her name, oh...” After some laughter, people sing the song, naming each of the teacher’s children. The teacher sings another verse: “The mother of the family was Miss [coordinator]...” Everyone laughs. Chimena begins, “The director of Even Start was—” Addressing the local evaluator, a teacher says, “Help us with your name.” The evaluator spells his name and they continue singing.

The teacher asks, “Does anyone have a favorite song? They begin singing, “Row, row, row your boat,” followed by “Pattycake,” and “I’ve been working on the railroad.” During these last songs, the coordinator talks to a young woman seated at a table, while the student’s 3 year-old daughter plays with a puzzle. The young woman does not join in some of the songs.

A teacher announces it’s lunch time. The women get up and begin getting food out of the refrigerator or their bags. Three of the mothers put their children in high chairs against the wall. Chimena puts her daughter in a round, stationary activity seat. The children drink formula from their bottles or eat cereal or a cookie or biscuit. Some of the parents also eat cereal from a plastic packaged container. During lunch, a student talks with a staff person about Valentine’s Day. The volunteer asks how her Valentine’s Day was. The student comments, “I’m practicing abstinence. I shoulda did that a long time ago.” “We learn from our mistakes,” the instructor responds. At one point during this conversation, the student jokes with the instructor that she’s pregnant again. The instructor does a double-take and makes a comment to the effect that she’d better not be pregnant again; with a twinkle in her eye, the student says she’s just kidding. The instructors stay in the room during lunch and talk with the parents and each other. When we leave the room at 11:35, the mothers and children are still eating lunch.

We return at 1pm, when the children take a daily nap. A children’s video plays softly on a small TV on top of the refrigerator. The lights are off and most of the shades are drawn. The mothers and some of the teachers hold the children as they go to sleep and then put them down in cribs. A teacher sings a song to the boy in her lap as she gives him a bottle, while a 3 year-old girl sits on a mat on the floor with a book in her hand, looking at the video. Once the children fall asleep, the mothers go next door to their classroom.

Snapshot of early childhood education in Juniata

Both PACT and the first part of early childhood classes are held in the same room. The classroom is filled with three child-sized and one adult-sized table, bookcases filled with books and games, a couple of desks, and storage cabinets. A whiteboard lists the name of each child (20 or more) with two numbers next to their name. The numbers correspond to bins with activity bags for specific developmental levels. This month’s activities relate to colors and shapes. A world map is placed next to the whiteboard. A poster says, “S is for smile” and depicts the alphabet and a picture corresponding to each letter. A sign at the front of the room reads, “TEAM: Together Everyone Achieves More.” A colorful semi-circular carpet is placed against one wall; children’s names are affixed to felt mats on the carpet.

The morning PACT time features, among other activities, the book, *Mary Wore Her Red Dress*. After “singing” the book and asking children to fill in the missing colors for each verse, the teacher, Donna, asks the children to review the colors of the clothes in the book and the colors of their clothing, and asks other questions about the book. The teachers then place on a table four red plastic containers with the children’s names on them. Donna shows the children small M&M’s in a clear plastic bag and explains they’re not supposed to eat the M&M’s “until Donna says so.” She repeats they cannot eat the M&M’s until they have put them on the paper and counted them.

The children and their mothers get up from the story time carpet, find their box, and bring it to the table. The parents and two teachers leave to go to the adult education classroom, leaving seven children (six girls and one boy) and three teachers in the early childhood education room. The children are of varied ages, but appear younger than school age. The children continue the M&M activity as part of their early childhood class. The older children place their candy on a grid and the younger children place the M&M's in boxes. Donna gives directions to the children sitting at the table, telling them to open their box, find the bag and the paper, close the box, and leave the bag on the table. She praises the children for following the directions. Then she tells them to open their bag and take out their paper. The children pull out the paper and unfold it to lay on the table in front of them. As the children work one of the children struggles and Donna asks if she can help the child, waiting for her to say yes. Donna continues with instructions: Place the M&M's one at a time and put them on the colors. Teachers help the children with the placement of their candy. For instance, Donna says, "Each has its own little house" and asks questions like, "Does that one go with the green?"

The older children count when they are done placing the candy on the chart. One child counts to 8 aloud and other children begin counting each color. Donna tells the children, "Now you are going to eat them, but we need to listen to how. Eat the color you have the most of." The teachers assist the children, using words like "the biggest line," "most," "many," and "biggest amount." Next Donna instructs them to eat: the orange M&M's (or the yellow if they have no orange ones), the ones that are "2+2," the least amount, the one that has five, and so on. Donna asks, "Can you count what you have left?" and the teachers help the children count. The children talk about the candy before they eat it.

When the children have finished Donna instructs them to fold their paper, put it back in the bag, put it in their box, put it in the bag, and line up. A teacher puts a "worm" on the floor. Each circle of the worm has shapes and words. Donna asks the children to step on a specific shape and helps the children who are confused. She reminds them they need to walk quietly in the hall and tells them they will go to the rest room and then get their coats on to go into the gym room. The children walk down the hall; some stop in the rest room first and others get their coats on. The children work on zipping their own coats. In some cases, the teachers start the zipper and then allow the child to zip the coat. The children proceed to the enclosed, unheated play area adjoining the building for gym time.

Common themes among programs

The three programs share several important commonalities, which are described below.

Integration of parent education

Each program integrates parent education into adult education classes rather than having stand-alone parent education classes. The York coordinator explained why they stopped having separate parenting classes:

We did a survey with the students because we ourselves had been noticing that attendance on parenting days was not what it was on adult ed days. The parents were saying, "I don't need parenting." ... [A person from the Bureau of ABLE] wound up coming to the program and doing a training for us on integrating the components. We

decided that that was what we were going to do, so right now we don't have separate parenting classes. We integrate it into the adult ed curriculum and we have planning sessions where we have two week themes and we plan how we are going to incorporate that into adult ed, parenting, PACT, early childhood. And then we also select five vocabulary words that all the students and children are working on during those two weeks. And that has worked out really well because they still get parenting but it is part of the overall adult ed and it is tied together. So they are learning about the same kinds of things that their children are and they have common vocabulary. So that has worked really well. We had positive responses about that.

Although integration of components is considered an exemplary practice, it also makes it difficult, if not impossible, to report accurately the number of parent education hours, as the state requires (see below).

Individualized instruction

For a variety of reasons, each program employs individualized instruction—a common practice in adult basic education—in which parents work at their own pace on materials and activities geared toward their skill level and goals.⁷ The programs less frequently incorporate group-based instruction.

The Allegheny program individualizes instruction due to open enrollment policies, high student turnover, and students' varying academic abilities and goals. Taking advantage of the program's open enrollment policy, new students frequently join the class. One teacher noted, "Real planning is difficult because every day is different from the others so you couldn't really set a lesson plan for Monday or Tuesday." Consequently, each adult has

their own portfolio based on their initial assessment and their needs. So it is very individualized instruction, actually. The dynamics change and it's interesting. It is basically at their own performance level that we really take the curriculum.

In the Juniata program, students can only attend classes a few days a week because the two vans cannot cover the entire county every day. In addition, parents' goals and academic abilities vary widely. Thus, teachers must be flexible and adapt instruction to accommodate students' abilities, attendance patterns, and open enrollment policies. For example, parents in Juniata have folders with specific worksheets and assignments and parents in Allegheny work independently on math, language, and other topics when they arrive each morning. By contrast, the York program has larger class sizes and multiple levels and is therefore able to plan more structured, whole-group activities, as well as individualized ones.

Comfortable interactions with teachers

Students in each program noted they had comfortable interactions with teachers and other staff persons. They described staff as flexible, caring, willing to help, available, and encouraging. In York, ESL parents noted that staff members "*nos orientan*" and give them *consejos*, that is,

⁷ Beder, H., & Medina, P. (2002). *Classroom dynamics in adult literacy education: NCSALL Research Brief*. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy.

orient and give them advice or counsel. During a focus group, the York GED students described their teacher in the following way:

When're you're thinking that you can't do the math or you can't do the English, she sits down beside you and talks to you. And she helps us a lot. She's very patient. She's a very willing teacher. When we have the vacations last year, she would give all us the phone numbers and directions and she will told us to meet somewhere so we could have conference with her. Even though nobody was going to pay for that. ...And she would always gave us her telephone number in case we needed help with the math, social studies, science. So we were allowed to call her anytime if we needed help. ...She makes sure that when we go out and get our GED, we are very well prepared. And she is the one that pushes us. "You can do it. Don't give up. You can do it. Don't give up." That's always in my mind.

These teacher practices exemplify the kinds of support staff give parents in their programs.

Allegheny parents described the staff as being flexible, giving them time, making them feel comfortable, and pushing and yet encouraging them. Previous program evaluations also note remarkable encouragement and support by staff. Allegheny parents refer to the teachers as their grandmothers and describe the program as a family. The following quotes illustrate how teachers' caring demeanor affects students:

When my daughter was three months, she stopped breathing on me, but I had to stop coming because I was scared about her breathing. And they [teachers] were like, 'That's okay, take care of her.' Then if you want to come back to school, they ask all the time, 'Where is her baby at and when is she coming back?' They just love kids and we love them because they are helping us. On the days I don't bring my daughter [the staff asks], 'Where is she at? Where's the baby? Oh, you're not bringing the kids.' We love them. I think for real, we're a family here. We're all helping each other out. Not just the classroom. It's the whole package. [later in focus group] I sit there and I'll give up and they'll still push you. Like, 'Come on [name omitted], don't give up.' I'm like, 'I'm so tired and I feel like I'm not going nowhere,' and they'll just encourage you more....They're pushing you, but they're pushing you so they can help you. That is the most comfortable part, too. My mom, she pushes me a little bit too much and I'm like, just leave me alone. I know what I'm doing. But it's fun here.

In an essay, another student wrote:

Without the assistance and support of this wonderful staff, I would most likely still be in fear of gaining knowledge. Now I have not given up the possibility of furthering my education. These women have all been an inspiration to me.

Juniata parents described how teachers have helped them work toward their goals:

*Explaining [class material] with details. Letting me take the books home for your spare time at home. Giving you the right materials to start with.
And if you have a problem they'll sit with you and like [student] said they will show you how to do a problem and sometimes they sit with you a couple of times until they are sure that you get the hang of what you are doing.
And when you are doing it, they'll ask if you understand and if you do not, then they'll explain a little bit more.
They took me up when I went to take my test.*

Importance of social interaction

Parents also underscored the importance of getting out of the house and meeting new people. The Even Start programs provide a type of support group for parents, echoing prior research on social interaction among women in adult education.⁸ In this case, women enjoyed socializing and exchanging advice with the other parents and playing with the other children, as illustrated by this exchange among mothers in Allegheny:

*We all eat in the same room at lunchtime with the kids.
We get to know each other at that time because we don't get to really talk when we're working, so we go in the room and talk and get to meet each other.
What I loved about it when I first got here is that we have children but not the same age group. We have children and we give each other advice. [Interviewer: So you're like the mother hen?] Yeah. Sometimes I go home and say, Oh my, I'm here for a reason. If I can contribute and use what I have, that's perfect. We all need advice on so many things. [comment by older student]
Everybody here tries to make everybody feel comfortable.
We talk about our lives and what we are feeling and anything that is bothering us.*

Women in York and Juniata emphasized they didn't want to be "stuck in the house." Additionally, they believe it's important to spend time apart from their children and focus on own needs. For instance, several York parents stated:

I really want to study but sometimes I'm tired because I have a lot of stuff, but here this is learning and I don't think about the house or anything. I just think about only me and the studying... [I]t is good to get out of the house. That really helps me. I don't want to always think of the house and cleaning up and everything.

This is relaxation. This is thinking about me, myself, I. You've already raised their kids and they are married and they have their own children. What are you going to do about yourself that you couldn't do when you were younger? This is my time. This is my time and I want this and I want it so bad because I want to be somebody in the future.

⁸ See e.g. Horsman, J. (1990). *Something in my mind besides the everyday: Women and literacy*. Toronto: Women's Press. Prins, E. (forthcoming, November 2006). Relieving isolation, avoiding vices: The social purposes of participation in a Salvadoran literacy program. *Adult Education Quarterly*. Stromquist, N. (1997). *Literacy for citizenship: Gender and grassroots dynamics in Brazil*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Without my neighbor, I would not have come here and would have been stuck in the house.

A woman in Juniata described her class as “peaceful,” explaining:

You get to work at your own pace and get to work on what you want. It’s quiet. It gives you a little bit of time away from your kids. You are here with them, but you get to be without them for a little bit other than at home.

The other mothers elaborated, explaining why having time apart from their children in the adult education class was important:

...for sanity.

These are the only people— Before I got my job, I just stayed and home and didn’t go anywhere. Being in the house all day, I hardly met anybody.

Same with me. I know a lot of people, but—

They would have to come there.

[We’ve] probably [met] a lot [of new people through the program] because when they have special events, you meet other people and other parents who are in other classes. Everybody comes on different days and stuff.

Later, the facilitator asked, “There are a lot of ways you can spend your time every day, so what makes you decide to keep coming back here?” Mothers responded:

To get out of the house.

[later in focus group] Where we live there is not a whole lot of excitement and not much comes our way.

...But if you have a little bit of time to do this and sit around and not look at the walls...

[Talking about getting out of the house, what difference does that make to you?...Why is that important to you?]

Meeting more people, for one. I think I’m more outgoing now than I was before. Meeting people, talking with them, interacting with them. And their children.

Not the same old routine. All the same things day after day. It is different here. You get to see new faces.

And the kids love seeing the other kids. Her kid is younger than [my daughter] and some are older and they can pick up things.

In short, the friendships parents establish make participation rewarding, help disrupt the “same old routine” of daily tasks, and provide a strong impetus to remain in the program, which in turn aids retention.

Negotiation of interpersonal dynamics

In distinct ways, educators in each program must negotiate complex classroom dynamics generated by the similarities and differences in students’ identities. The following examples show that learners are not a homogeneous group, and that when teachers respond productively to

differences among students, they can create new opportunities for parents to learn about themselves and each other.

In Allegheny, friction may arise between students from different communities (see historical context section). As one staff member explained, it's a "territorial thing." For instance, students will say, "You're from this area," or, "This person's from another area." The parents attending classes in late 2005 were "rougher," "confrontational," and displayed "teenage behavior," making it very difficult for staff and students alike. Women's hairstyles and skin color (e.g., lighter or darker skin tones among African-American women) also shape how students perceive and relate to each other.

Staff responded to this difficult situation by discussing with students respect and attitudes toward other people:

We really talk to them a lot and try to, you know, monitor the situation, [we] ma[d]e a little more rules and regulations.... We would go over certain rules and we made sure we went over the guidelines. You know, no bad language, to respect people, and we actually threw two people out. So that helped. You know, we just said we couldn't keep them anymore. They were the two in the adjudicated program and they are a little [harder] to handle than some of the other ones.

These steps helped improve the relationships among students in the classroom. Although tensions exist, the program also enables students from different neighborhoods and races to intermix in class. As noted previously, parents share advice with each other and often establish new friendships.

In Juniata, a difficult situation arose during a discussion, prompted by the case study, about community characteristics and how they influence students' lives. An "unexpected but frank" discussion during a class session revealed the need for education regarding cultural diversity. One participant criticized teen parents, which hurt the feelings of another parent, and some parents also expressed negative attitudes regarding race and ethnicity and outsiders (immigrants) coming into the community. For instance, "Some of the beliefs in this county [are] that there are no jobs and the jobs that are here, the Hispanics take the jobs. No one talked about well, would you work for that income?" Staff members were very upset about this incident:

I think they were afraid because they didn't want anybody's feelings hurt. It was especially the teenage pregnancy because the student came to us afterward and was upset about that. We had to talk through that and just the attitude that they didn't want anybody's feelings hurt. It is so important to teach your children different beliefs, so we are trying. You can't change things but it is an awareness, at least.

Staff followed up with students individually and in class, both commending them for feeling safe enough to express their ideas, but also emphasizing the need to respect differences and to be "aware of what you say and how it is perceived by another person." All of the students involved have remained in the program: "We were concerned, but the fact that everybody was able to talk about it the next day and came back shows it was a strength and, I think, feeling safe."

In collaboration with a program partner, the staff decided to plan a unit on cultural sensitivity and diversity, in which parents researched their ancestry and cultural heritage and prepared a meal with various ethnic foods. For example, they researched the ethnic origins of their surnames and located their ancestors' countries of origin on a map. Staff members used an unexpected, stressful situation to identify a need and provide cultural education.

In York, the staff have found that nationality-based differences among students can create friction or "flare-ups," such as when a student from one Latin American country made a negative comment about another Latin American country. The coordinator also noted that students from different cultures "have different opinions on what is appropriate behavior and what is appropriate in the classroom," as the following example illustrates:

Well, some of the Puerto Ricans and Dominicans tend to be really boisterous and outgoing people. They speak what is on their mind. A lot of our Mexican families are quieter and they [are] more reserved in the classroom. We also have families from Vietnam and Bangladesh and they are extremely reserved and quiet, and they did have an instance where [an Asian] student who always used to sit in the front of the classroom for a week or so has been sitting in the back of the classroom. When the teacher talked to her about it, she was afraid of some of our students from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic because they were very loud and they would yell at each other and they didn't mean anything by it. It was just their personality. When they wanted to get a point across, they would yell very loudly and she was not only highly offended by that, but she also said that she was afraid of these students. The teacher tried to talk to the class about different cultures and this is what is appropriate for this culture and try to make them understand that in a classroom here in this setting, it might be offensive to other people if you act that way. She tried to help them to understand the cultures in the classroom. I think they had a big discussion about the different cultures: This may be acceptable to you but it may be offensive to someone else. This is why, because it is common in their culture and they didn't mean to offend you by it. They do things differently. [Interviewer: How did the students respond to that?] They seemed fine. The student who had the problem is comfortable now. She is back sitting with the other students in the classroom. It seems to have worked out. But when you deal with a lot of different cultures it will come up. I've never had a student say that they were afraid so that really concerned us, that she was afraid. There are different perspectives on things. They learn a lot about each other through that exercise and through that happening. They are a very tight and close knit class and they get along in class.

In both cases, teachers responded by talking to students individually and also explaining and discussing in class issues such as cultural differences in communication styles.

Decontextualized and life-contextualized materials

Based on the available data, decontextualized (school-only) materials such as commercially-produced workbooks, worksheets, and texts appear to be more common than life-contextualized (authentic) materials. Materials are considered authentic if (a) they are based on learners' interests and experiences, as they define and articulate them, and (b) they serve a real

purpose outside the classroom.⁹ Further observation could help confirm or disconfirm the prevalence of commercially-produced materials.

The use of authentic materials is important because research shows that, regardless of students' literacy levels and amount of time they attend class, those who "participate in classes that include authentic, or learner-contextualized, materials and activities are more likely to say they had started new literacy practices or had increased the amount of time spent engaging in literacy activities outside of school" (Jacobsen, Degener, & Purcell-Gates, 2003, p. ix).

The following examples of authentic materials were observed:

- discussion of how to use sales flyers to teach literacy and numeracy
- writing for personal expression in journals or essays
- writing letters to legislators about Even Start funding (authentic if the letters were sent)
- filling out job applications (authentic if parents were looking for or planned to look for work, and the employer required a paper application)
- reading for pleasure
- a newsletter written by parents
- newspapers (could be authentic if the topic was relevant to learners' lives and served a real-life purpose besides developing comprehension, spelling, grammar, or other school-based skills).

The use of such materials should be emphasized and encouraged.

Emphasis on schooled literacy and meeting school expectations

Each of the programs prepares parents and children for the expectations of schools and emphasizes schooled literacy, meaning "the reading and writing skills and conventions associated with schooling that can be tested through formal mechanisms."¹⁰ By contrast, children and adults also use literacy for purposes other than schooling or the development of cognitive skills, for example, singing, writing personal letters and cards, telling stories, reading sacred texts, reading for pleasure, managing finances, or accomplishing tasks required to manage a household. Parents in each program, for example, wrote letters to legislators advocating for Even Start funding. While parents undoubtedly developed literacy skills in writing the letters, the civic purpose primarily reflects students' roles as citizens.

The following definition of literacy, given by a teacher in an adult education class, illustrates the concept of schooled literacy: "literacy is reading or writing you do to help your child prepare for school." Similarly, a program coordinator stated:

We give them the skills to [be their child's first teacher] and to be able to get their children ready to go to kindergarten. Or if they already have children in school that they

⁹ Jacobson, E., Degener, S., & Purcell-Gates, V. (2003). *Creating authentic materials and activities for the adult literacy classroom*. Cambridge, MA: NCSALL. For example, activities such as writing a check are authentic only if learners have a checking account or plan to open one.

¹⁰ Street, B. V. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy development, ethnography, and education*. London/New York: Longman. (p. 108).

will be able to help their children with their school work or feel comfortable approaching the school or talking with their child's teacher. We try to do a lot of things that are school-related things so that parents are familiar with that....We actually have parent-teacher conferences here with them with our teachers so that they are familiar with that concept of having to talk to the teacher in English if their English is a second language or the kinds of questions to ask and different things like that.

A teacher related how she prepares children to meet the expectations of teachers. Children in her classroom

have listening positions. They have a position they have to walk in the hallway....I teach them how to sit with their feet on the floor and their hands on the desk and to look attentive, even to look attentive. Then they have [a] raise their hand position....[W]hen you get to a kindergarten or a first grade room, the teacher expects that.... [S]ubconsciously she expects the child to be able to sit in a room, you know, and so I teach like even little things that you wouldn't think, like walking in the hallway. They keep their hands behind their backs, that kind of thing.

These examples suggest that Even Start programs socialize parents and children into practices and routines that teachers and other school authority figures consciously or unconsciously expect and, as such, prepare children and parents for the demands of schooling. The extent to which schools and literacy programs should emphasize schooled literacy and/or build on the other types of literacy and knowledge that children and adults display outside of school, and the extent to which educators should help parents and children (particularly low-income and minority families) comply with and/or challenge the expectations and rules of educational institutions are areas of great interest and debate in the research literature.¹¹

Use of writing for multiple purposes

The Allegheny and Juniata programs in particular use writing both for instruction and other purposes. Writing is a core component of instructional practice in adult education at Allegheny. Drawing on the expertise of an AmeriCorps volunteer, the program uses daily writing (e.g., essays) to develop learners' technical writing ability, to facilitate personal expression, and to explore topics relevant to their lives, such as HIV/AIDS, their personal goals, and what they have learned from past mistakes. Staff also use the writing to identify curricular topics, speakers, and students needs:

We find out a lot through the writing assignments....They may not be so assertive verbally but in their writing we can find out a lot. It does bring about discussion. If we see that there is a real interest or a direction we could take, we let them lead us in a very tactful way and we pick up on it.

¹¹ See for example Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press. Heath, S. B. (1983). *Ways with words: Language, life and work in communities and classrooms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Paratore, J. R. (2001). *Opening doors, opening opportunities: Family literacy in an urban community*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. Rogers, R. (2003). *A Critical Discourse Analysis of family literacy practices: Power in and out of print*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. Valdés, G. (1996). *Con respeto: Bridging the distances between culturally diverse families and schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

The program also incorporated into student writing questions pertaining to the case study, such as their community's history.

Writing, primarily in the form of journals, accomplishes several purposes in the Juniata program. Journals are used for instruction, assessment, eliciting participants' input, soliciting feedback from parents and children, program planning, building trust, and enabling parents to share privately their concerns and requests. A teacher described several uses for the journals:

The parents are very open to tell us if they like something or they don't because they don't have to say it to anybody. They can write it in private and they are very open to do it, which is okay. If they don't like something, they usually write it down. On the other hand, when they really like something, they'll put that in, too. They also use it as a way to tell me something that they wonder if I have it and they could use it because they are working [with] their child on something in particular. They also use it for behavior: "I see when you are in school we don't have any problems. What are you doing? What can I do at home? I'm having trouble with this at home – any suggestions?" It is a private way for them. It is great for them because they are doing all this writing. It serves a lot of purpose[s].

In one instance, a parent wrote in her journal "that she didn't know if she wanted to live anymore....She needed quick action." Her journal alerted staff to a serious problem, enabling them to talk to her and help her.

PACT

The instructional practices observed during PACT included helping, giving praise or encouragement, asking questions, providing direct instruction, modeling, rehearsing, and guiding, among others. Questions raised by the observations include the optimal level of guidance teachers and aides should provide for parents and children during PACT and the extent to which staff explain to parents the developmental purpose of an activity (e.g., how it aids literacy development or other skills and abilities).

Allegheny

PACT is structured differently in this program because it serves mainly teenage mothers with babies. The PACT sessions observed for the case studies featured a great deal of singing and storytelling. For example, a parent had chosen a book and then other parents and teachers spontaneously started singing new songs. The program uses results from the ELAP (Early Learning Accomplishment Profile) to plan the curriculum, which is developmentally based. They also use the Parents as Teachers and Color Me Healthy (nutrition) curricula.

A teacher explained that

PACT time has to vary also according to the age of the child and how many [children are present]. Sometimes we do individual where we work with one mother and child at a time, individually on the child's assessment, and sometimes we do group activities. That varies according to the age of the child so we have to have several things in mind.

Several teen mothers described PACT in this way:

All the parents will go over there with their children, probably play games, draw, read books. But knowing me, my daughter's only 5 months. I sit there and train her how to crawl. Like teach her how to do stuff. Teach her how to grab stuff....

Being around the other kids—

My daughter learns so fast.

It helps kids learn faster.

[later in focus group] *It's fun. We'll sit there and have fun with the kids. And my daughter, she's just the laughing type and she sits there and see[s] everybody and she'll try to mock them. She'll just try and it's so cute because she's right there. Do you know what I'm saying? We're all together, family, children, everybody. It's just comfortable.*

Juniata

This program features a monthly theme (e.g., shapes and colors) and children's book which are integrated into PACT activities. The coordinator noted that often PACT “can be a difficult time for parents and children together. Sometimes parents don't feel as comfortable or the child does not want to do the activity.” To address this issue, staff recently restructured PACT to make parents more comfortable and give them more guidance. In the morning PACT time, parents and children choose an activity geared toward a specific developmental level (each child's name and a corresponding number are written on the board each day). After parents and children finish the activity and respond to “mail” (a brief note) from the early childhood teacher, they are free to choose other activities in the room. As the coordinator noted,

They like the structure. It is so noticeable to me because I am not always in there that the parents and child both know what is expected of them when they come into the classroom—such routine that the parents do not wonder, ‘What should I do with my child?’ The child learns what the routine is and then the parent can help guide them through it. I think it is a comfort level and success preparing the child.

The morning PACT closes with story time, when children sit (with their mother, or in some cases, their mother and father) on the felt mat corresponding to their name. For instance, during one story time, two teachers read and acted out *Who's Gonna Tuck Me In Tonight* with props, followed by questions about which characters the early childhood teacher had played.

The closing PACT times observed for the case study featured songs and stories that reinforced the monthly theme, such as colors and shapes or letter recognition. In both PACT times, as well as in ECE, children and parents engaged in familiar rituals and routines such as the “clean-up song,” bells marking the end of a particular activity, or responding to mail.

York

The York program integrates a monthly theme such as “travel and discovery” into every component, including PACT. PACT activities for toddler and pre-school children include songs, planned activities (e.g., gluing, coloring), worksheets, letter books, storybooks, and the like. For example, during a toddler PACT, the mothers and children colored a log cabin and glued on a

door, window, and penny. For the theme of travel and discovery, PACT activities included a scavenger hunt, deciding what to pack in a suitcase for a trip, a magic bus, plane, or train ride, and dramatic play.

Because many of the parents speak Spanish with their children at home and during the program, staff discussed how they should handle this in PACT. They decided that parents should

use PACT time as their time during the day to practice speaking English with their children.... For most of them, all they speak at home is Spanish so the children are going to hear Spanish at home and they can speak with them in Spanish at home, but while they are here it should be a time for them to practice speaking English with their child. Their children aren't judging them and don't care if they don't speak English correctly.

Although one teacher felt parents should be able to speak to babies in Spanish, the staff eventually “came to kind of a compromise where they can, if they feel that they want to say [something] in Spanish, then they need to echo it in English.” This decision reflects the staff’s belief that children should both be fluent in their native language and in English, as the latter will help them “be ready for the school system” and obtain employment in the future.

Early childhood education

Allegheny

Because the children in the Allegheny program are so young, early childhood education for toddlers consists mostly of child-directed free play, while teachers care for the babies. The teachers described this component of their program:

We have such a variety of ages that some days we will be doing a lot of art work and another day we will be back on the mat with a bunch of babies rolling around on the floor.... We have snack time and we do parades and singing. We kind of individualize it to the age of the children that we have that day.

The mothers emphasized that knowing their children are next door gives them peace of mind, in contrast to their experience in high schools with off-site child care:

You feel so comfortable to be able to have the kids and have your work. And then, you know, you just go next door with the children and then come back and study. It is relaxing. We don't have to be worried—“Oh my God, my kids are not here.” I miss my daughter and you just give a call on the microphone and it's so cool. Yes, it's really neat.

It's the time I spend, 2 hours with myself and 2 hours with my daughter.... That means a lot for me, just knowing your kids are safe.

In any other schools, you have to go all the way out [off campus].... I can't trust day cares because my daughter don't talk. I want to know what happened. Being that she's right here, they'll come and call me if she's crying and [tell me,] ‘She needs this.’... When I was in high school, I had, like, three periods where I was free. And I was like, I

want to see my baby and I had no car. My mom didn't let me use it.... [With this program] she's right here. You just open up, tell one of [the teachers], 'I'm gonna go check on my baby and see if she is okay.'

For these teen mothers, the importance of having trustworthy, safe, high-quality child care next door to the adult education class cannot be overstated.

Juniata

Following the morning PACT, the early childhood schedule includes a learning activity, playground, bathroom and hand washing, snack, quiet literary time, child-directed play, work time, and clean-up, followed by closing PACT. All of the activities relate to the monthly book and theme (e.g., shapes and colors). For example, observed teacher-directed activities included gluing paper cut-out animals to the corresponding shadow on a piece of paper, cutting out shapes, and tracing lines. After the teacher-directed activities and before going to the restroom, children line up on the "letter worm" described in the early childhood vignette. Then they go to the indoor or outdoor play area, which may include free play and/or planned activities such as an obstacle course. Following snack, children are asked individually where they want to play and what they want to play with (e.g., computers, penguin game, writing table), and then move from one center to another. The teachers circulate through the centers, playing with the children and asking them questions about their play, for example, "Is your baby hungry? What are you feeding her?" The teachers frequently praise children for their work and efforts.

When the bell rings at 11:25, children clean up, find their letter on the carpet, and get a treat for cleaning up. As in PACT, there are familiar routines such as the bells marking transition times, forming quiet lines, finding the letter matching one's name on the letter worm and carpet, a familiar schedule, and following instructions for activities. In addition to aiding literacy development, many of these routines prepare children for the expectations of teachers in school.

York

Early childhood classes in York are provided for infants (0-23 months), toddlers (2 and 3 year-olds), and pre-school children (4 and 5 year-olds). The curriculum features two-week themes and related vocabulary words. An early childhood teacher explained the toddlers in her classroom first play with toys "for fine motor skills. And while they're playing, of course, we're trying to teach them colors and counting, whatever. They may think they're still playing but we're teaching them." During "circle time," they discuss colors, shapes and calendar, weather, and so forth. This is followed by free play, snack, lunch, and other activities such as reading stories, art, or videos. The schedule posted during an observation included manipulative play at centers, circle time (related to theme), free play, story time, fine motor activities, and "general toys."

The teacher in the four and five year-old classroom explained she tries "to teach at a kindergarten level rather than preK" because she wants the children to be "in the gifted and talented program when they enter in kindergarten." In a typical day, children play at centers (e.g., blocks, transportation, science, art, dramatic play) during "child choice." After the bell rings, they sing the "clean up song":

So even clean up time I use as a learning time because they have to group all the blue toys and they have to match them to a blue. All the yellows go with yellow. All the reds go with red. Everything goes back in a certain place, and I have everything labeled in the classroom like blocks so they are seeing informational text with all the things that they are playing with.

The children then sit at a table in their “listening positions” and work on letter recognition and letter sounds. The other activities may include “calendar time,” review drills, science activities, a “motivational topic” relating to the theme, library time, the 100 Book Challenge, teacher-directed free play, and story time. The schedule posted during an observation included free play, 100 Book Challenge, group time, centers, book time, and circle time.

Observations suggest that the toddlers, in particular, are primarily engaged in self-directed free play where children choose from a variety of activities on child-level shelves. Activities guided by teachers occur less often in the classroom, allowing children freedom to explore. Although the level of teacher guidance during child-directed activities varies, teachers engage children throughout the observations. During the observations of the four and five year-old classroom, children were often asked recall (closed-ended) questions as children practiced vocabulary skills. As in other program, rituals such as ringing a bell, singing a clean-up song, lining up, and learning to walk in the hallway were part of the program’s routines.

Program planning

The staff in each program described their organization’s decision-making processes as inclusive in that most decisions were made through discussions with the director or coordinator and teachers. Some decisions were made primarily by the coordinator or director.

Allegheny

The program has weekly planning meetings in which staff members discuss their concerns, make curricular decisions, talk about the children and families in the program, and consider how best to support and reach them. For instance, “If we are getting a new student, we talk about how old the child is and what they might need.” In one case, staff discussed how to help parent who had a child with ADHD to put him in Head Start and to attend classes herself. These meetings serve as a type of staff development.

Curricular planning is complicated in part by fluctuating program attendance:

Like we’ve said, we don’t know who is coming so we plan for all week so that we can pull something out and have something interesting.

Real planning is difficult because every day is different from the others so you couldn’t really set a lesson plan for Monday or Tuesday.

I’ve planned great lessons, but then nobody shows up.

The open enrollment policy, coupled with students’ absences, makes advance planning more difficult. Furthermore, staff noted that since the implementation of Move Up classes, they are less able to integrate PACT and early childhood education with adult education. The reason is that “not all of our parents are in Move Up and not all Move Up [students] have kids.”

A staff member characterized their decision-making processes as inclusive:

Everybody's involved. The key is open communication. Everybody meets and makes the decision as a group. Everybody has about the same amount of input. That is the key because we all decide as a group how we want to do something. I think it's helped keep everybody together. Nobody feels like they're on the outside or nobody's valuing their opinion. The AmeriCorps volunteers are involved, too. I think that's why it's worked as well as it has, because everybody's involved in making the decision. (summary based on researcher's notes)

Juniata

The recent implementation of “core messages” has changed how staff members plan the curriculum for each component. A teacher explained that several years before, “we would have a theme of weather or pumpkins and it just wasn't working out...They [the adults] knew what pumpkins were.” Based on a session at a family literacy conference the coordinator and adult education teacher attended, the staff

developed two or three core messages that we really felt were inherent in the program as to why we were doing what we were doing. And last year we didn't share the information with the parents because we felt that we were very new at this and we wanted to see how it worked....[T]his year at the beginning of the year, we gave four or five different core messages that the staff had come up with as far as what Even Start was about and shared them with the parents. In the fall, we had the parents actually choose two that they wanted their program to center around. Then we did it again because we had a lot of new families that had not had a chance to participate in it and we had them then select two different ones. We always pick one that we feel should always be there and that is where the parent is the child first and most important teacher. Every lesson we do is planned around one or more of these core messages and two of the three the parents had chosen.

Last year parents chose the following core messages from the list the staff had generated: “When parents gain the skills to help them become their child's first and most important teacher;” “Parent's education level and learning experiences are related to children's literacy skills and development;” and, “Parents are the family decision makers and have the ability to make good and important decisions.” The coordinator would also like to ask families what additional information would help them reach their goals related to a specific core message.

The early childhood teacher and the adult education teacher are the “hub” of planning:

That means that we are the core. We are the center. [The early childhood teacher] will say, “I'd like to do this,” and I think “Okay, I can do this in parenting because it coincides with that,” and then she will share with the rest, because the girls are part-time and that makes a difference....I will share with [the other adult and parent education teacher] because she is part-time. I will say, “Now this is how it is going to work.” We very rarely have a chance to sit down as a whole group and talk about it.

The teachers usually plan six months of curriculum, which is based on “where she [adult education teacher] sees her parents need to go and where I [early childhood teacher] see the children need to go and we get the core messages out and ‘how are we going to do this together?’” Then, they work out specific details once a month. Thus, planning at Juniata is oriented toward communicating the core messages (i.e., the fundamental ideas guiding the program) in each component.

York

Staff members meet monthly to brainstorm ideas, solve specific problems, and plan the curriculum. They incorporate one theme (e.g., dinosaurs, outer space) and five related vocabulary words in each component for a two-week period, an approach that helps parents and children have a “common vocabulary.” A teacher explained how they plan the curriculum:

[T]oday [in our staff meeting] we all got a piece of blank paper that represents all the components in our program...[The director will] say, ‘Okay, let’s think about this theme and what are some activities that we could do for early childhood education? Which one could we do in PACT? Which one could we do in parenting? Home visits?’ And we all contribute, everybody does. It doesn’t matter whether you’re an adult educator or...a child educator. Everyone has input into the different types of themes as well as activities. And then we decide on the 5 vocabulary words that represent that theme. And those are the words that... the adult educators and the [early childhood] educators work on using for the children.

The staff also choose a theme or unit if they “see a need.” For example, “we’ve noticed that people are not putting their children in car seats and so we will educate about car safety with the children and parents.”

Decisions about key matters are often made in the following way:

Usually we all talk and we make a decision after talking with the case manager first, and the two of us will talk about it and then if we think it is a pretty good idea I’ll usually bring it up with the staff at staff meetings. Sometimes...we will talk about it with them but it is something that we’re going to do, like with integrating the curriculum. We did discuss it but it was something that we were going to do. The case manager is kind of my right hand person who I bounce ideas and stuff off of and then we would present it to the staff.

In other instances, staff members discuss an idea or issue together and devise new plans: “At staff meetings, we always come up with questions and comments and they will come up with things that they think should be done or changed.” For instance, the staff decided to turn the children’s graduation ceremony into a family carnival and held an “exchange day” where families exchange unwanted items from home.

Program improvement and evaluation

Each of the programs has participated in one or more SEQUAL cohorts and demonstrated that apart from SEQUAL, they continuously make changes in the program to respond to new problems and issues.

Allegheny

Being involved in SEQUAL has helped the staff use data to analyze how the program operates and to identify which changes need to occur. As a result of SEQUAL, the director noted,

I spend a lot more time analyzing the data. I know how many students I have....I check it out. My data person send me reports on how we are doing and then I can look and say, 'Hey, we need more PACT hours. We need more this.' So that has been very helpful.... The SEQUAL process has...helped in, I think, really...understanding what we need to do for the program on a...data level.

For instance, being involved in SEQUAL enabled the program to meet the performance standard for retention. The staff “worked through the data and figured out ways that we were counting things and if we weren’t counting something that we should have counted, and so that really helped.” The staff also devised a system to identify (with a post-it note on a folder) which assessments and tests each participant has taken. Additionally, they use a form to show pre-GED students how they scored on various assessments. As the director noted, “That has helped and it gives the students and us direction. That way you can see the educational level that they’ve gone up, which has been helpful.”

The staff found it difficult to say how they would strengthen or improve the program, since the switch to Act 143 funding will fundamentally change how the program operates. Although final decisions have not been made, the staff may shift from four days a week to two days and offer Fridays as an optional day.

Juniata

The implementation of core messages (statements which convey the program’s core purposes) and changing the way PACT is structured are two important improvements. The staff is also considering starting a parent council similar to the one in Mifflin County. Additionally, the program has been very involved in SEQUAL. As previously mentioned, the staff developed new intake procedures as result of a SEQUAL project on retention. Through that project they also learned what keeps students coming, and prevents them from coming, to the program. The director noted, “Quite honestly, the number one thing that students themselves said keeps them coming back to class was Penny, meaning basically their relationship with the staff.” This finding was “enlightening and an affirmation of things that we knew. The thing that was found to be making things most difficult to come was transportation.”

Indeed, staff members believe increased funding for transportation would enable them to improve the program, as it would “alleviate the staff time so they could be in the classroom more to help with those other things” and enable more families to attend.

York

The York Even Start staff continuously makes adjustments to the program based on feedback, observations, and data. As the director stated, “We’ve been around for a long time but we are constantly trying to make changes and improve the program. We are not doing things the same day to day that we did 15 years ago. We’re not doing things the same today that we did a year ago.” A program partner echoed these comments, noting the director is always looking for ways to do things differently and to be more creative, despite funding cuts. Previously mentioned examples of program improvement include changing the attendance and tardiness policies and integrating parenting education into the other components, which in turn increased retention.

Typically, the staff does a SEQUAL project and an additional program improvement project. For the latter,

we try to pick an area that we didn’t meet the year before or we barely met it. We try to improve on that. This year we are focusing on the move [to a new location], which was trying to make it as smooth an adjustment as possible. We also didn’t meet the educational improvement on the BEST test last year [missed the target by 1 point]. We are focusing on that, also. This is the first year we can select what we want to focus on.

The staff has found that sometimes changing “little stuff”

made all the difference in the world. When we started using the time clock in the office [parents and children clock in every day], that has just made it so much easier to track their attendance and who is not there on what day and why. We can write when they call in and say that they are not coming in, we can write right on their card why they are not there and it is easy to look back and see that.

Staff members made the following suggestions for improving the program: having fewer (school) holidays and time off; hiring a new case manager; having a baby room or day care; and having a playground and grassy play area closer to the school. The parents wanted to have more parking spaces and add more hours of instruction.

Inclusion of participants in program planning, implementation, and evaluation

Here, inclusion refers to the extent to which participants play leadership roles that transcend their role as students or recipients of educational and social services. That is, in what ways are participants able to exercise power and influence the programmatic decisions that affect them? Historically, “learners have not been included to any large extent in any of the conversations about the purposes or goals of [adult education] programs, the curriculum, or the basis for evaluation.”¹² The concept of inclusion or participation, then, is based on the

¹² Fingeret, A. (1989). The social and historical context of participatory literacy education. In A. Fingeret & P. Jurmo (Eds.), *Participatory literacy education. New Directions for Continuing Education No. 42* (pp. 5-15). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass (p. 9). See also Campbell, P., & Burnaby, B. (Eds.). (2001). *Participatory practices in adult education*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. Prins, E. (2005). The challenges of fostering community participation: A case study of a community-based organization in rural California. *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 36(2), 15-34.

assumption that adults have a right to participate in creating, implementing, and evaluating programs that are intended to serve their interests (Fingeret, 1989).

In two of the three programs, inclusion is primarily ad hoc and informal, compared to a more systematic approach. The latter entails using specific mechanisms (e.g., surveys) to regularly elicit parents' ideas, opinions, and feedback about programmatic matters (e.g., curriculum, their needs, schedule, teaching methods, program goals) and providing regular opportunities for parents to influence decisions, such as having a parent representative on a board. The former approach entails soliciting parents' opinions and including them in decision making as needed and without the use of systematized methods.

Allegheny

Staff members provided the following examples of ways they respond to students' interests and involve them in decision making:

- Students “take turns reading” and select topics for class writing assignments.
- Teachers “find out a lot through the writing assignments....If we see that there is a real interest or a direction we could take, we let them lead us in a very tactful way and we pick up on it.” In addition, “we may not get requests for a topic but they may say something that send out red flags. Then we kind of try to get a speaker to come in to speak on that area.”
- The staff emphasized, “We always listen when they have suggestions” and “try to incorporate what [students'] interests are.”
- Students decide which subject(s) they want to work on during individualized instruction.
- Parents help plan special events (e.g., graduation party) and PACT activities. For instance, a parent led one of the PACT activities we observed and parents spontaneously began singing new songs.
- Parents complete an evaluation form after each PACT activity. A previous annual program evaluation seems to indicate that the PACT evaluation form asks only closed-ended questions. If this is the case, then open-ended questions would help elicit the reasons for parents' ratings as well as their suggestions.

Staff also stated that students make choices “on a daily basis....The other choice is [whether] they are going to do their work or not do their work. That's a big choice—even to show up.” The examples above suggest that aside from the PACT evaluation form, participant inclusion tends to be informal and ad hoc.

One of the researchers asked how the program was involving students in making decisions about programmatic changes in response to the shift to Act 143 funding. The personnel felt they needed to identify the available options and alternatives themselves (e.g., switching to two days per week and having an optional day) before presenting the information to students.

When asked for examples of how participants are able to influence program activities, parents responded:

There's the writing....

It is for you to choose the topic most of the time, too—what you want to write on.

This is really good here that you get to express your feelings. They have you write something about your life and then you write it. Sometimes it gets emotional a little bit but I think it is really good.

Juniata

In this program, parents' input is solicited in systematic, formalized ways. Personnel described the following examples and forms of inclusion:

- After several weeks in the program, new parents complete a survey which asks them to “describe how they felt when they came in,” for example, “Was it well organized? Did you like it?”
- Teachers use a parent interest survey (a topic check list and open-ended suggestions) to plan the parent and adult education curriculum.
- Parents complete a bi-monthly survey with open-ended questions regarding the program (e.g., “What was your favorite class activity this month? What was your least favorite? Do you think you have made progress toward your goals? How about your child?”). The survey includes open-ended questions soliciting parents' suggestions.
- Last year parents selected from a list the 3 core messages they considered most important. (An annual program evaluation recommended that parents also be invited to “help develop core goals for the established core messages.”)
- Parents can write field trip suggestions for children and adults on a large sheet in the adult education classroom (parents had written a few suggestions).
- Parents also provide honest feedback in their journals about “what they liked and didn't like.” This is a private, safe, confidential way to share their thoughts about the program and other matters.
- A young mother has taken leadership by creating, designing, and editing a newsletter for other parents. Several parents also volunteer in the early childhood classrooms, and some have been classroom aides.

Two parents have attended advisory board meeting (a group of program collaborators who meet to share information), but they didn't “seem all that comfortable.” Thus, personnel are exploring the formation of a parent council, similar to the one in Mifflin County Even Start, which is part of the same Intermediate Unit. If a parent council is formed, “then they could make the decision if they wanted to come to the advisory board and if they wanted to send a representative.” The coordinator noted, “I think we need [the parent council] here to really get the driving force of the parents to guide things. We ask them things but we would rather have more of a structured thing for their input.”

The mothers stated that the staff sometimes “ask our opinion on where we want to go” on field trips. One parent said she has “made some suggestions, like in the activity bags, certain activities were inappropriate for younger children so they were going to try to revise it.” They also mentioned they could list suggestions on the parent interest survey.

Juniata Even Start is part of the PEP (Parent Education Profile) pilot study, in which staff members observe and document parent-child interactions and rate on a 5-point scale the parent's support for her child's literacy development on various measures. A staff person explained how they decided whether or not to tell parents about the study:

We made a conscious decision as part of the pilot to not really even let parents know that we are using the tool until we became more familiar with it and comfortable with its use, which is kind of unusual for us. [Interviewer: What was the rationale for that decision?] Obviously, the PEP is an assessment tool and we are assessing parenting, which I think is a tricky area. As part of the pilot project we were given in training the option and really the suggestion and that is how you become familiar with the tool and it is really not appropriate to share with parents that you are doing it. And that is the route we took.

Another person explained staff members need to be trained to use the PEP "before we would even introduce it to the parents," adding, "I'm assuming next year they will know." As noted above, the decision not to tell parents about the pilot study seems "unusual" for the program, particularly in light of the numerous examples of inclusion and leadership noted here.

York

Teachers described parents' role in decision making as follows:

They express what they want to learn and they do come to us with a lot of their needs as a family.

Not...the themes so much....

[later in focus group] *The way that they get their needs across to us is in an informal way, but we have so much communication going on in the classroom....We're responsive to the parents and will make adjustments to what they ask for.*

Yeah, a good example of that in my classroom is that they recently asked for more independent study and help time. So I incorporated that immediately and they are happy....

Staff members also cited the following examples of inclusion:

- The program expanded from 2 to 5 days of classes in response to feedback from parents.
- Parents responded to a one-time survey regarding "all the different parts of the program," which led to the incorporation of parenting education into the other components.
- The staff frequently and informally asks parents about their interests. For example, "every home visit that the case worker does she asks them if they have any issues, either at home or with the school, too....And [she] will come back and give the teachers feedback, if it is something that she feels like they need to know."
- In addition, "A lot of times the students will come either to [the director] or the case manager if there is something that they feel needs to be addressed and they will talk to us." Staff members "try as much as we can to get the students to get things done for themselves," for example, "to speak for themselves and voice their concerns either to their child's teacher or to their teacher if something would come up."

- The program conducted a focus group with parents as part of a previous SEQUAL project.

In short, staff members seek to respond to parents' needs and interests based on frequent, informal communication. Aside from the previous focus group and survey, there do not appear to be regular, formal mechanisms to gauge parents' interests, elicit their ideas, and involve them in decision making.

When asked about their opportunities to make decisions in the program (e.g., selecting themes, scheduling, program goals), parents stated they hadn't made decisions, however, "you can tell the teacher [and] give your opinion about everything." Another added, "It's the opportunity that they give you." A third parent stated, "Yes, it's the trust. I believe that the teacher, well, her role says it: She's the one who makes decisions." They explained that if a parent wants to learn how to fill out a job application, for example, the teacher "helps you and the class is dedicated to that."

How do the organizations relate and respond to their institutional environments?

Historical context

The Allegheny Even Start program provides the clearest example of how local history influences program operation and interpersonal dynamics among participants. A staff member explained that in the early 1900s, Andrew Carnegie and other prominent steel mill owners built towns for workers along the Monongahela River, in part to weaken the unions and control labor. For example, Carnegie built housing for management in Munhall, but housed steel workers in Homestead, where they had no "municipal control over either the plant or its potential tax revenues."¹³ The Even Start program, in fact, is located in Homestead, across the street from Munhall. The creation of mill towns served to divide mill workers, preventing them from improving collective working conditions. A long-term consequence, as the director noted, is the persistence of sharply demarcated communities in the Mon Valley:

Years ago when they first built up the steel mills, they were fractured communities all along the Mon River....I think Pittsburgh is the way [it] is probably because of that. There [are] these very tight communities.

This history affects the Even Start program in that students identify strongly with their community, rarely venturing far from it. The mix of students and their respective communities therefore influences classroom dynamics at any given time:

[Last year] we had some terrible fights with these girls because the girls from [Town A] were coming and the one girl was really pretty and they were really on this girl. She was from [Town A] and the others were from [Town B]. And so sometimes it is like this

¹³ Muller, E. K. (2001). Industrial suburbs and the growth of metropolitan Pittsburgh, 1870–1920. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 27(1), 58-73. Available online at <http://www.ideallibrary.com>. See also P. Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880–1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh, 1992); and M. Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (New York, 1910).

territorial thing of where they live. The other thing...is the Waterfront complex [a former steel mill near the program site which has been redeveloped into a cultural, retail, and tourist center]. I mean, there were some kids who hadn't even been down here let alone go to downtown Pittsburgh, which will take them 20 minutes. You know, they are so tied to their neighborhood.

A staff member explained their limited geographic mobility in this way:

I think they feel very secure in that neighborhood. They know it. I think that the lives of a lot of our students have not been broad. They have lived in that community or they have lived up and down the river in communities. They maybe have lived in Duquesne and Clairton and, you know, they've done like all the Mon Valley communities....Like they've moved, but they've moved just up and down the river. So I don't think they really have a broad perspective of what is out there and what is available to them. I think they feel pretty secure in that environment. They know it. There [are] groups that they gravitate to, friends in their community and stuff like that, so they tend to not think about going outside of it.

This description of Allegheny Even Start participants' lives is consistent with scholarly analyses of poor and working-class individuals' bounded social networks and limited geographic mobility, factors which limit their access to valuable resources such as well-paying jobs and information about education and employment.¹⁴ Indeed, in their essays students described their respective communities as riddled with drugs, crime, and violence, but also, in some cases, as having valuable, if underutilized, resources. As well, gentrification and population loss due to urban planning and redevelopment have negatively affected parents' neighborhoods.

Patterns of industrialization and suburbanization in the late 1800s and early 1900s continue to affect Pittsburgh-area communities and the Even Start program. Because Even Start participants identify so strongly with their respective communities, the classroom dynamics shift depending on who enrolls. The demarcated boundaries, coupled with the composition of participants' social networks, also structure where participants go and with whom they interact.

Physical and social environs

In each case, the program's geographic location shapes its organizational practices.

Allegheny

The Allegheny program's urban location mediates the effects of funding changes. Specifically, staff noted that when the program switches to Act 143 and can no longer serve teen parents who are in school, it will face a lot more competition for adult education students. As the director stated, in a city like Pittsburgh "you have umpteen other programs competing for the same clientele." That is, numerous agencies already offer adult education and compete with each other to recruit students, whereas teen parents, particularly those still enrolled in school, are not adequately served. In short, the staff believe that the saturation of adult education providers in

¹⁴ Stanton-Salazar, R. (2001). *Manufacturing hope and despair: The school and kin support networks of U.S.-Mexican youth*. New York: Teachers College Press.

this metropolitan setting, coupled with the change in program funding, will make it more difficult to recruit participants.

Participants and staff alike described the program location as convenient and accessible. A mother, for instance, wrote that her child was enrolled in Head Start across the hall. The location also facilitates collaboration with other service providers and enables participants to access their services. In addition to Even Start, the building houses the municipal government office, the state legislature's office, the traffic ticket office, and a substance abuse and mental health program, among others.

Juniata

Instructional practices, the use of staff time, program design, and intensity of participation are structured by the geography of the county (long and narrow), coupled with the lack of public and private transportation and geographic dispersion of participants. The rural county lacks public transportation and many participants don't have cars. Those that do "might not have gas money that week or their car breaks down and they might be gone for a month." One mother "pays \$10 every time she is brought in, and they don't have the money. They are taking money out of other places."

Part-time instructors drive two vans across the county (30 to 35 miles one-way) to pick up participants, which reduces teachers' time in the classroom and limits the number of days parents and children can attend classes. In turn, this means that the curriculum has to be individualized. Teachers described how the county's geography and lack of transportation affect their program:

The transportation of getting everyone here is an extreme challenge. It makes such an impact. We spend a lot of our time discussing who we are going to get and how are we going to do this....

They have no down time. None. Zero....

It is hard because it takes us out of the classroom. And like, we only have two vans and the county is so long that it's hard to get everybody in on certain days. Gas-wise and travel, it's hard.

And the vans, none of them are new. They break down and it is a major disaster.

TRANSPORTATION I would put all in capitals. It is a tremendous challenge.

We can't have the parents here as often as we would like because of that either.

That makes an impact on instruction, too. And [another teacher] and I always thought 'These GED people never have a math lesson,' but they come sporadically. You don't have a consistent class where you can do it and that is why it is all individualized. It is frustrating because that is the way we want to do it and the way it could be really beneficial to everybody.

The coordinator explained how these issues affect participants who live furthest from the site:

The [parents who live] at each end of the county, we can only get them one day a week and it really— Well, they are not as much a part of the group when they come and that is

not anybody's fault. But you know yourself if you go to something three days a week and then only go one day a week or every two weeks, you don't feel quite as involved.

In addition to providing van transportation, staff members “try to get them in other programs that do home visits” such as the Parent-Child Home Program. In addition, “Head Start will help with home base and pick those children up and bring them into the center.”

The program's new location—a building housing numerous educational and service providers—also demonstrates how the physical and social environment shapes practice. The location has enabled the program to enroll more families. A staff member explained, “The learning center has helped a lot, too. A lot of children and family programs are centralized here.” Personnel also noted the location—specifically, proximity to agencies and professionals serving families—facilitates inter-agency collaboration. For example, ESL classes are held in the building, which has helped Even Start better serve its immigrant families. Finally, the building gives the program “access to more resources” such as computers, which in turn “increases learning.”

York

The physical and social environment has influenced the York program in several ways. First, much of the housing surrounding the school where Even Start is now located is owned by a local college and inhabited by college students. Consequently, the neighborhood school's enrollment had been declining, which in turn created space (empty classrooms) for the Even Start program. Had the enrollment not declined, the school would have had no room for Even Start. The availability of space at the school, coupled with the cost of renovating or repairing the previous building influenced the district's decision to move the Even Start program to another neighborhood. In other words, the ownership of local real estate and demographic composition of the neighborhood created an opening for Even Start at the school.

Although the move has presented many challenges, teachers' written comments indicate the new location could enhance Even Start's relationship with the school and school district:

The school district can see what we can do and I think eventually being in the school will help the relationship with the school district because we are right in the school with the teachers, the principal, and I'm hoping in the long run that will help. That has always been a struggle with the school district from day one. I think it is a positive sign that they found room for us so that we can all be together [in one building].

Additionally, personnel think the location will benefit participants:

...Now that we are here I really do like it and I think it is good to be in a school setting. It makes you feel more part of the school district and it is good for the parents and kids so they can see how a school works. They do the announcements every morning. They take the kids out at recess. They pass the teachers and children in the hall. That helps them to get familiar with being in a school and I think it will help the kids make an easier transition going into kindergarten because they are in a school setting here.

A key informant, however, worried that the school location would be less accessible to low- and middle-income York families (i.e., the neighborhood is populated largely by college students and the school building is locked after school hours), provide less overall space, and hinder collaboration with other organizations located in the previous building. For example, the library can no longer send a librarian to the Even Start program, although they did donate a library on parenting and family-related topics to Even Start. Further, there is no grassy, outdoor play area for children, which limits their physical activity.

Response to policies and legislation

Funding cuts

Each program has experienced the negative effects of greatly reduced federal and state funding, including a great deal of stress and uncertainty for staff and cuts to the Summer Reading Program. However, as discussed below, staff members have responded with resourcefulness and creativity.

Reporting guidelines and component integration

Program coordinators and directors noted that Even Start encourages programs to *integrate* components, yet state guidelines mandate that programs report *separate* hours for each component. Each of the case study programs follows best practice by weaving parenting topics into PACT and adult education. As a result, these programs and others like them have to *estimate* how many parent education hours they've provided, making it difficult to report data accurately. This example reveals how reporting policies (to report data for each component separately and accurately) and recommendations for best practice (to integrate components) may work at cross purposes.

Accountability for factors beyond programs' control

Program personnel noted that Even Start encourages programs to reach the "hardest to serve," meaning families living in poverty and facing related challenges such as unemployment, low academic skills, and so forth. The case study programs serve precisely these families. At the same time, this makes it very difficult to meet the statewide program performance standards. Specifically, staff members gave examples of ways they were held responsible for factors they can do little to influence or control, such as participants' school-age children reading on grade level or being promoted to the next grade. One person commented on being held responsible for the school performance of children whose parents were only enrolled in the Even Start program for a short period of time:

You can't really be responsible for how those children do in school because the parent has left the program. Like I have another [student] that left in December and so, you know, that is half of a school year and I don't really have anything to do with that mother or that child....She was in the program for 4 months. So I mean...I think some of these standards are unrealistic...because of the length of time that people are actually in the program.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Bureau of ABLE program performance standards for school-age children include the following measures: (1) **Attendance:** "85% of children in families that have reached enrolled status, attending kindergarten or

Participants may not stay in the program long because of their life circumstances, such as abusive or otherwise unsupportive partners. In other words, many of the forces contributing to dropout are beyond the program's control.

Allegheny

As previously stated, the Allegheny program will switch from Even Start to Act 143 funding as a result of reductions in federal funding. This change will have the following consequences, among others:

- The program will lose its niche of serving teen parents, including those who are still in high school.
- The program will have to reinvent itself and establish new collaborations, as it will no longer be able to rely on its long-time relationship with area high schools and agencies serving teen parents.
- The program will be unable to dual enroll participants because under Act 143 guidelines, the family literacy program has to be primary provider of adult education classes.
- The program will not be fully center-based program because participants won't be able to meet the enrollment requirements (number of hours) required by Act 143.
- As mentioned earlier, the implementation of the Move Up program for new welfare recipients will complicate recruitment efforts once the program switches to Act 143. There are 17 Move Up classes in Allegheny County, including three through this program. The program will have to recruit both Move Up and family literacy students, even though they are similar populations, making it very difficult to meet enrollment targets for both programs.

The staff has responded to the upcoming changes in several ways. First, they are considering how to reconfigure the program structure (e.g., number of days classes are offered) to meet the new requirements. The program may also expand its family literacy services for incarcerated fathers. Second, the staff has worked to prepare as many students as possible to take the GED by the end of June. For example, teachers gave students the pre-GED test more often so they could gauge their progress toward the GED. These steps have helped students understand they have a time limit and need to have a plan to achieve their educational and life goals.

Juniata

The Juniata program has responded to tenuous funding in the following ways. First, staff meeting more of the program performance standards has helped stabilize the program's funding:

higher, will have a maximum of three unexcused absences as reported by the End of the School Year Progress Report" (Bureau of ABLE Policy Guidance, <http://www.able.state.pa.us/able/lib/able/pm.c110.flperfstds.pdf>, p. 4); (2) **end of school year progress report**: "60% of children in Kindergarten or higher and who are in families that have reached enrolled status" will have an end of school year progress report completed by the child's primary teacher (p. 8); (3) **reading on grade level**: "60% of children, attending kindergarten or higher who are in families that have reached enrolled status and were assessed by their teacher (i.e. the teacher did not mark "Unable to assess") on the End of the School Year Progress Report, will demonstrate proficient or advanced performance in reading as reported by the End of the School Year Progress Report" (p. 12); and (4) **promotion**: "90% of children in families that have reached enrolled status, attending kindergarten to third grade, will be promoted to the next grade level as reported by the End of the School Year Progress Report" (p. 13).

Just since we moved to this learning center, we've been able to meet more of our standards and I think that keeps your funding at a little better levels. And we've been able to hire some additional early childhood aides because we have the numbers here to do that....I do think the other part of this has been a staff that doesn't keep changing. That goes along with meeting your standards and also with trust from the families.

The program's strong collaborations with other social service agencies enable it to

provide a number of the components, particularly early childhood and parenting services, to our families that we wouldn't otherwise be able to provide....We do a lot of joint programming with those programs. For example, we have evening activities for families and we financially share the cost burden with other programs. For example, there might be an evening program where you would have a Parent Child Home Program and Family Literacy, all coming together and all three programs sharing the cost of that activity, for example. We do a lot of collaboration in that way.

The program had to eliminate one position, but because a teacher is retiring, no one will lose their job. However, that means the program will have one less full-time staff person. The administrators have

been very up front of staff in terms of letting them know exactly what the situation is. We have a very pretty clear and adamant in the sense that we don't like to keep staff in the dark about anything, so they have been informed all the way along the line of exactly how much money we've lost and what that would mean. I've worked with the coordinators of the different sites to do brainstorming about how to best approach the funding cuts and we've just been very open with staff in terms of what the consequences are going to be. The budget is the budget. There is not much that you can do about it. What we have done is radically cut back on operating expenses. The priority has been to save as many staff as possible because obviously that is where the quality of the program comes from.

York

Reduced funding

Teachers described how funding uncertainty creates job insecurity:

We get worried about when they talk about funding, like recently we had \$200 million [in federal Even Start funding] that was cut to \$99 million. That's a real worry for us.

You know, we understand because we are a strong program that we're in pretty good shape but—

We're fighting for our jobs every year.

Several times a year, actually.

Because every year we're writing letters and writing letters [to legislators].

There's a certain like stress of like, 'Well, I'd better make sure our testing—' Wow, you feel very—

Uneasy.

Yeah, as if you're going to lose your home.

Reduced funding has made staff members more resourceful and creative; in some cases, they also have to use their personal resources:

I've printed out from the Internet.

Exchanging stuff from one to another.

We share a lot of materials. I think we are being a little more creative with our things.

We have to be. We've become more resourceful than ever because of that. And as an example, in my case, the students take home the books and even when they leave, they don't bring them back even though we ask them to. So I wind up taking the rest of the materials that I have and make copies of them. And that is the best way I can make use of the materials that I have, which is very time consuming but it's also good in the sense that the students can write in them, so it works out.

Now and then...when we're going to make something on paper plates, I just go out and buy the paper plates, you know....

The students are that way, too. They are very willing to bring things from home, mostly, you know, food and snacks. They love to cook and share their culture.

Since Summer Reading Program funds were cut, "the library is going to try to come up with the funds from within their budget. I don't know how they are going to do it but they are going to try to maintain it anyway." This is another example of how program collaborators help mitigate the negative consequences of reduced funding.

"The move"

The York Even Start program's move from the Sylvia Newcombe Center in downtown York to a school near the city limits was a great concern for staff and students alike. The decision to relocate Even Start was made by school district administrators; as such, neither Even Start staff nor the principal at the receiving school had a say in the matter. According to one key informant, the decision to relocate Even Start exemplifies the program's long-term relationship with the school district. That is, the district does not adequately recognize or publicize the exceptional quality of its Even Start program, even as the district is on the verge of being taken over by the state.

Staff members' written reflections on the upcoming move revealed the following concerns, among others: limited parking; the momentum children and adults would lose by missing classes during the move; the loss of building amenities (e.g., kitchen, privacy, playground); students' ability to reach the new site; and personal concerns (e.g., stressful for staff, move will aggravate health problems, longer commute). They also identified potential benefits of the new location, including the increased safety and security of the school building, the neighborhood location (e.g., new recruitment opportunities, safer neighborhood), and the closer connection to the school (e.g., closer relationship with district, use of janitorial staff).

Parents also wrote about the upcoming move. They expressed concerns about the increased distance to the program site and concomitant transportation problems (e.g., scheduling complications, increased spending on gas money, extra time to get to the site), parking problems (especially in the winter), missing classes and spending time away from classmates, and the lack

of a playground. However, they also anticipated some benefits, including better security and safer neighborhood, proximity to their homes, and a better area and building.

Although the staff described the move as a time of stress and uncertainty, they took many steps to prepare families for the move, as described in the following account:

We weren't given very much notice of the move—not very much notice at all. It was kind of back and forth: We were moving in three weeks and then we weren't moving; it was on hold and then they came back and [said,] “Oh, yes, you are still moving.” So everything happened very, very quickly, so we had to let the students know that we were moving and that it was going to be soon....Our biggest concern was that we were going to lose families because our new location isn't really close to our old location and we had quite a few walkers who came, as well as a good number of drivers, and at this new location there is no parking [only on-street parking]....So we basically came over with the Superintendent and saw the area that they were going to give us....We were in the dark for a lot of the time and we had to initially tell [the families], “We're moving but we're not sure when.” We tried to give them as much information as we could. We tried to work with them on an individual basis, giving them maps and directions to the new site. “Do you know where this is? How can we help to ensure that you will come?” ...One of the teachers went to [a student's] home and rode the bus route to and from her house with her because...that was the only way her husband would let her come, because he was afraid she would get lost and confused because she had never used the bus system before. We encouraged her to go the extra mile to ensure that they would be able to get here and we thankfully have bus passes for...the local transit authority....The bus stops right on the corner here where the school is....As quick a transition as it was and in the middle of winter and everything, we just lost one family and the staff were great....There are a lot of positives with the move [e.g., classrooms on one floor, nutritious snacks]. The parking can be a problem but we're just making the best of it. The first day of class, we took the adults outside and walked them around to make sure they understood the street cleaning signs: You can't park here on the first Tuesday of the month and on the first Monday you can't park here, just to make sure they know. We went over that a lot of the streets around here are one way streets....We did walk around the neighborhood, too. I know I would watch out the window to see where they were parking and they would come and ask us, and I know I did go with a number of students out to their car and ride with them to show them this is where you can park. So just to try to help them, take the extra step and do that. With this snow out here, we were allowed to park in the playground...so another staff member [and I] stood out here the last three days directing them where to park just to make sure that they were comfortable with coming and doing that. Kind of it adds more work but I think once we have been here and they get adjusted that it will be fine.

Because of helpful actions like these, the program retained all but one family in the new location. Indeed, parents' written comments and verbal responses during a focus group revealed that most feel comfortable in the new building. Parents like the quality and size of the classrooms and space, the school location (e.g., children learn the rules of school), increased security and

safety, and provision of lunch for children. Their primary concerns were the limited on-street parking and increased transportation costs (especially for gas) due to traveling a greater distance.

Conclusions and Implications

Upon reading the preliminary findings, the program coordinators and directors and research team emphasized that the three programs are *similar, yet different*: They are located in distinct urban or rural communities, are designed differently, and serve families who differ in age, race/ethnicity, nationality, and life circumstances. However, the programs face many similar challenges and share important commonalities. For example, each program:

- successfully implements an integrated, four-component model including adult education, parent education, interactive literacy (PACT), and early childhood education;
- has been actively involved in program improvement through SEQUAL and their own initiative;
- serves the families who are often hardest to reach;
- provides extensive case management to help meet families' social and economic needs outside the classroom;
- has built a sense of community and support network, both among families and among families and staff, which has helped families stay in the program; and
- has a dedicated, consistent staff who are committed to the families and the program.

This section discusses in further detail specific findings and implications. To recruit participants, programs rely primarily on word-of-mouth and referrals from other agencies. Programs have found that as they become more established and gain a reputation, recruitment becomes easier. This suggests that well-established, mutually beneficial relationships with other agencies can assist family literacy programs in meeting recruitment goals. Complicating factors include competition from the Move Up program and a geographically dispersed, rural population.

To increase student retention, the programs use strategies such as providing transportation and child care, offering incentives, meeting students' non-academic needs, and devising intake procedures which increase parents' comfort in the program. Incentives, however, may cause unanticipated problems such as interpersonal conflicts. In addition to the provision of transportation and child care, the quality of participants' relationships with staff members and each other help create a sense of community which enhances learners' well-being in myriad ways and aids retention. The more practitioners foster trusting relationships among learners and staff, the more likely learners are to develop a sense of belonging and membership in the program.

In each program, parent education is integrated into the other components and adult education instruction tends to be individualized. When programs integrate parent education, however, it is more difficult to report hours accurately. Reporting mechanisms should enable programs *both* to follow best practice (i.e., integrate components) *and* to report hours accurately. Currently, the requirement to report separate hours for parent and adult education appears to undermine best practice.

A primary reason for individualized instruction is continuous enrollment policies. Moving toward managed enrollment or some variation could help increase retention, create more cohesion among learners, and enable teachers to use more group-based instructional methods.

As in Beder and Medina's (2001) study, class composition influences how students relate to each other. Teachers often have to negotiate complex situations based on differences among students, in this case, differences based on neighborhood affiliation, culture, nationality, and citizenship or immigration status, among others. Teachers must attend not only to content knowledge, but also conflict resolution and the ways that similarities and differences among learners shape their behavior and interactions with fellow participants.

Although each program used some types of authentic materials, commercially produced materials such as workbooks appeared to be more common. The use of commercially produced materials is related to the emphasis on schooled literacy, that is, the types of reading and writing associated with schooling. This emphasis is consistent with the goals of Even Start, which seeks to prepare children for school. By incorporating literacy materials that (a) children and adults encounter in their everyday lives outside the classroom, (b) have a real-life purpose, and (c) relate to problems and issues participants have identified, programs engage their interest, help them develop literacy and numeracy skills, and present curricular topics as problems to be discussed and analyzed critically. As well, this approach validates and builds on the multiple literacies and knowledge children and adults practice and display at home and in their respective communities.

PACT and early childhood education in each program are literacy-rich, follow a thematic, developmental approach, and vary based on the age of children. The amount of guidance that teachers give children and parents in early childhood education and PACT, respectively, differs from one program to the next. Questions for further exploration include the consequences of varying types and amount of guidance for children and parents, and how teachers can best balance teacher-guided and child-initiated activities. Finally, rituals and routines such as singing the "clean-up song" provide a sense of familiarity and order, while also socializing children (and parents) into the types of practices and habits that will be expected in school and the workplace.

Program planning occurs primarily through regular staff meetings. Staff members characterized the decision-making process as inclusive and collaborative in that usually a decision was made after considerable discussion. Planning meetings should be viewed as a form of staff development which enables teachers and other staff members to share vital information, to build cohesion, and to deliberate about the complex issues and problems they, the program, and participants face.

The staff in each program strives to improve the program, both through SEQUAL and through their independent efforts. In particular, SEQUAL has enabled coordinators and staff to use data to understand what is happening in their programs, to identify specific issues, to make appropriate changes, and to observe the results. This iterative cycle aptly describes action research. The high degree of involvement in program improvement suggests that staff view their programs as a work in progress, not as a static entity.

The degree to which parents influence programmatic and curricular matters and are involved in making decisions varies among the programs, ranging from an ad hoc, informal approach to a systematic approach with multiple, regular mechanisms to elicit parents' suggestions, ideas, and feedback and incorporate them into the program. Increasing parents' control over the decisions that affect them (e.g., curricular topics, scheduling, programmatic goals, instructional methods and materials, evaluation and assessment procedures) helps to ensure that educational programs serve their interests, while also developing parents' leadership and civic capacities and increasing their individual and collective efficacy to solve problems in their daily lives, family literacy program, and community.¹⁶ As well, family literacy programs could consider how to involve parents in deliberating about and solving programmatic issues, such as creating an attendance and tardiness policy in collaboration with staff.

Each program is profoundly shaped by its historical, physical, and social environment. For instance, the interpersonal dynamics among students in one program reflected the industrial development of the Pittsburgh area and the establishment of socially isolated mill towns by steel barons in the 19th and 20th centuries. The physical and social factors which structure organizational practices include urban density (i.e., increased competition among adult education providers), geographic features (low population density, shape of county), infrastructure (lack of public transportation), program location (proximity to other service providers, proximity to participants' homes), demographic composition of the neighborhood, and relationship with the school district.

Organizational practices also represent specific responses to policies and legislation. In response to severe cuts in federal Even Start funding, program staff have become more resourceful and in some cases, used their own resources to provide materials. Other consequences include job insecurity, stress, increased workload due to staff reductions, and the switch of federal to state (Act 143) funding for one program, a change which will dramatically alter who the program serves, how it operates, and its relationships with other human and social service institutions. A key informant suggested that Even Start programs can best advocate for their interests by ensuring that the Bureau of ABLE and local institutions (e.g., school districts) highlight successful programs. Furthermore, Even Start "needs to hire lobbyists and band together" and keep up the momentum, for example, by sending letters and making phone calls throughout the year. Legislators have to hear people "constantly preaching" about Even Start.

As previously noted, state and federal policies may complicate reporting procedures for programs which integrate components. In some instances, practitioners felt policies hold programs accountable for factors largely beyond their control. These findings are emblematic of the movement toward increasing accountability, measurement, and standardization for educational and social programs. Although this shift ensures that programs compare themselves to and seek to comply with state and federal standards, it also has unintended consequences.

The York program's move to another location illustrates how the program type (in this case, a program operated by a school district) affects organizational practices. Although staff

¹⁶ For further reading on participation and inclusion, see: Prins, E. (2005). The challenges of fostering community participation: A case study of a community-based organization in rural California. *Community Development: Journal of the Community Development Society*, 36(2), 15-34.

members had no say in the decision to move, they took numerous steps to prepare parents for the move and to ensure a smooth transition. This example underscores the importance of examining how family literacy programs relate to other institutions in their respective locations.

Value of the Case Study Approach

The program directors and coordinators concurred that being involved in the case study provided a chance to step back, reflect, and look at their respective programs from a different perspective. They enjoyed the opportunity to talk to and meet coordinators or directors located in other parts of the state and to learn about how they design their programs, the challenges they face, and similar matters. Consequently, the personnel involved in the case study have expressed a desire to continue exchanging information about their programs, for example, discussing how to solve particular problems, exchanging advice, and reflecting on their work. The research team and program personnel are exploring how the group might continue to meet, and how such meetings might help personnel enrich their respective programs.

Although many family literacy staff persons discuss programmatic issues in SEQUAL, this case study suggests that staff would benefit from opportunities to meet and exchange advice with people from other parts of the state. This would enable them to examine and respond in new ways to programmatic challenges, as well as to build a vital support network.

Importance of Qualitative Data in Evaluation and Reporting

Despite the similarities among the programs, personnel noted it is almost impossible to compare programs, precisely because they serve such different families, are uniquely organized, and have distinctive strengths and challenges. Similarly, program staff and the research team observed that the quantitative reporting measures do not capture a great deal of what happens in family literacy programs, such as the practices and outcomes described in this report. For instance, last year one of the programs helped 14 mothers stay in school and obtain their high school diploma; another mother attended Even Start classes and received her high school diploma because the program made a special agreement with the school district. However, the staff (to their knowledge) had no way to report these commendable achievements through e-data or other mechanisms. Likewise, reporting changes in standardized test scores for a small number of participants is not statistically meaningful, yet it may determine whether or not a program reaches a specific standard, which in turn affects its ranking and funding. Further, qualitative data which attest to the quality and effectiveness of a program do not appear to influence state rankings. Although the local evaluators write a report about each program, this contextual information does not necessarily influence whether or not a program meets a particular standard.

Our view regarding the value of qualitative data derived from case studies concurs with that of Michael Patton, an expert in qualitative program evaluation, whom we quote here at length:

The evidence is that local sites that are part of national programs show considerable variation in implementation and outcomes. These variations are not such that they can be fully captured and measured along standardized scales; they are differences in kind....To understand these differences a holistic evaluation picture of each unique site is needed. The use of standardized measures can seriously distort what is actually occurring in a

*program....Uniform, quantitative measures applied across all programs would be unlikely to capture and represent...critical differences. While quantitative approaches tend to produce uniformity of measures, which has the advantage of facilitating direct comparisons among programs, qualitative methods permit documentation of program differences, idiosyncrasies, and uniqueness. If decision makers and information users want to understand variations in program implementation and outcomes, qualitative case studies of local programs can provide such detailed information.*¹⁷

The personnel and research team urge state administrators to consider regularly incorporating qualitative, contextual data into evaluation and reporting. This case study demonstrates how practitioners and program participants can be involved in documenting what they do and what difference it makes in their program and in their lives and communities. Practitioners can use many of the methods used in this study (e.g., student writing, focus groups, mapping, written staff reflections, historical timelines) in their respective programs. The participatory evaluation literature, for example, contains myriad examples of creative methods that educational and community programs have used for precisely these purposes.¹⁸

In conclusion, the case studies of three Even Start programs reveal important similarities and differences in their organizational practices. These practices are inextricably linked to, and must be interpreted in light of, the contextual factors outlined here, including local history, geographic location, infrastructure, policies and legislation at the local, state, and federal level, relationships among local institutions, and characteristics of program participants.

¹⁷ Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage. (pp. 102, 104).

¹⁸ See for example Arevalo, M., Guijt, I., & Saladores, K. 1998. *PLA Notes 31: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation*. IIED. Available from: http://www.iied.org/sarl/pla_notes/pla_backissues/31.html. Association for the Study and Development of Community. *Principles for Evaluating Comprehensive Community Initiatives*. <http://www.capablecommunity.com/pubs/NFCVP062001.pdf>. Chambers, Robert. 1997. *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications. Estrella, M., & Gaventa, J. (1998). *Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation*. Brighton, UK: Institute for Development Studies. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/wp/wp70.pdf>. Fetterman, D. M., Kaftarian, S. J., & Wandersman, A. (Eds.) (1996). *Empowerment Evaluation: Knowledge and Tools for Self-Assessment and Accountability*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Jackson, E. T., & Kassam, Y. (Eds.). 1998. *Knowledge Shared: Participatory Evaluation in Development Cooperation*. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre. O'Sullivan, R. G. (2004). *Practicing Evaluation: A Collaborative Approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Pretty, Jules Pretty, et al. *Participatory Learning and Action, a Trainer's Guide*. Sabo, Kim (Ed.). 2003. *Youth Participatory Evaluation: A Field in the Making*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Whitmore, Elizabeth (Ed.). 1998. *Understanding and Practicing Participatory Evaluation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers. World Neighbors. (2000). *Lessons from the Field: Gender and Decision Making: Kenya Case Study*. Available from: http://www.wn.org/wnstore/PDFs/Gender_&Decision_Making.pdf.

Appendix A: Interview and Focus Group Guides

Parent Focus Group Guide

- 1) preliminaries (introduction of self, study, & focus group)
- 2) background information about participants
 - a) Name & town
 - b) How did you learn about this Even Start program?
 - c) What led you to enroll in the program?
 - i) Probe: What made you decide to enroll at that time in your life?
 - d) What is one thing you've accomplished in Even Start that you're very proud of?
 - i) Probes: What makes that important to you?
- 3) Your involvement in Adult Education, Parenting Education, and PACT time
 - a) Imagine that you're telling a friend about a typical day in one of your classes (ESL, GED, parenting education, PACT). What would you tell her?
 - i) PROBES:
 - (1) Where is it held?
 - (2) What does the teacher do?
 - (3) What do you do?
 - (4) What kinds of materials do you use?
 - (5) What language(s) are used in class?
 - (6) How do students interact with each other [e.g., individual work, group work, teams, etc.]?
 - b) Thinking back on your time in the Even Start program, how have staff helped you work toward your goals?
- 4) Your views on the Early Childhood sessions
 - a) Imagine that you're telling a friend about a typical day in your child's early childhood class. What would you tell her?
 - i) PROBES:
 - (1) Where are the sessions held?
 - (2) What do the teachers do?
 - (3) What does your child do?
 - (4) What kinds of materials does s/he use?
 - (5) How does your child feel about being in the program? [e.g., what's her/his mood like at the end of the class? What does s/he say about the class, classmates, teacher, etc.?)
 - b) How do you know that your child is making progress?
 - i) PROBE: How do staff let you know about your child and his/her progress?
- 5) Program assessment and suggestions for program improvement
 - a) Think back on your experiences in the Even Start program.
 - i) What has kept you coming back to the program?

- (1) PROBES: curriculum, staff, friends, place to be with child, program, meeting goals, place to go, etc.
 - ii) What kinds of challenges have encountered, and how have you tried to overcome them?
 - (1) PROBES: costs, transportation, child or elder care, other support services, personal, the program itself [students, schedule, place, community support, government agency restrictions]
 - iii) Can you give an example of a program activity, class topic, or something else in the program that was based on your interests or suggestions? [Alternative: Give an example of a change the program made as a result of parents' suggestions.]
 - iv) What kinds of decisions have you helped make in the Even Start program? [Alternative: How have you been involved in making decisions about (provide examples)?]
 - (1) PROBES: program goals, curriculum, lesson materials, topics for program or lessons, schedule, social events, planning, assessment & evaluation indicators & tools, etc.
 - b) Suppose you were in charge of this family literacy program and could make one change that would make the program better. What would you do?
- 6) The environment of your Even Start program
- a) How would you compare the old Even Start location & the new one? [other sites: describe current]
 - i) *building & classrooms* (accessibility, size, amenities, staff, resources, shared space)
 - ii) *neighborhood environment* (parks, buildings, housing projects, public spaces, shopping, and environmental issues like air, water, litter)
 - iii) *who lives in the neighborhood*
 - b) How has the move to the new location affected you personally? [omit for other sites]
- 7) closing question
- a) Of all the things we discussed today, what's the most important to you? [round robin]
 - b) Have we missed anything?

Program Coordinators Interview Guide

- 1) Background information about yourself
 - a) What initially attracted you to working in Even Start?
 - b) How long have you been involved in Even Start?
 - c) How long have you been director of this program?
- 2) History and overview of the Even Start program
 - a) How did this Even Start program begin?
 - i) PROBES: how and when it started and who was involved
 - b) What would you say are the mission and goals of your Even Start program?
 - c) What changes have you seen in the program since you've been here? [e.g., location, student composition, curriculum and instruction, legislative, administrative, fiscal, etc]).

- i) How have these changes affected your day-to-day operation?
 - d) What would you say is particularly innovative about your program? (e.g., mission, goals, and objectives; program design, implementation, evaluation, administrative or fiscal decisions, recruitment and retention, teaching, assessment, collaboration)
 - e) What would you say is particularly challenging for your program?
 - f) How has this program tried to remain financially viable?
 - i) PROBES: current partners; in-kind, other grants
 - g) Who are your most important partners and how do they support your program? (e.g., schools, congregations, community leaders, CBOs, and NGOs, hospitals and other health care providers, the police, other local, state and federal government agencies)
 - i) How does your program sustain/maintain these relationships?
- 3) Student composition, recruitment and retention
- a) How would you describe the participants in your program? (Who are they and what are their life circumstances?)
 - i) PROBES: age, gender, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, occupations, neighborhood, household income, level of education, and other issues [addiction, abuse], etc.
 - ii) How have the differences or similarities among students influenced your program? (e.g., interpersonal dynamics in the classroom)
 - (1) How have you & the staff responded to these situations/differences?
 - iii) How do you recruit families to the program?
 - (1) What has helped participants to stay in the program?
 - iv) What kinds of incentives are there for parents and children? (e.g., rewards for doing things you want them to do)
 - (1) Disincentives? (consequences for things you don't want them to do)
- 4) Program planning, implementation and evaluation
- a) Think about a component of your program that you recently added or changed in a significant way. Walk me through how you went about planning, implementing, and evaluating it.
 - i) Who was involved in making key decisions? How were they involved?
 - ii) What difficulties/challenges did you encounter?
 - iii) How do you respond to differing views and opinions about what to do or how to do it?
 - iv) What were the key factors that you had to consider in planning X?
 - v) PROBES: How parents were involved, obtained feedback, adjusted based on feedback, involved other collaborators.
 - b) Can you describe a time where an event or activity you planned didn't work out the way you anticipated?
 - i) What happened? How did you respond? What were the results? What did you learn from this?
 - c) Describe a recent self-investigation (SEQUAL) conducted by your program.
 - i) Who was involved?
 - ii) How did you decide what to investigate?
 - iii) What did you do?
 - iv) What were the results – anticipated and unanticipated?

- v) How were the results used?
- d) How are staff rewarded or recognized for their work? (e.g., monetary incentives)
 - i) Are there any disincentives for staff? (i.e., consequences for doing or not doing something)
- 5) Response to local, state and federal legislation
 - a) How does local, state, and federal legislation (policies) affect how your program operates?
 - i) Give an example of how this legislation helps your organization do its work.
 - ii) Give an example of how legislation makes your organization's work more difficult.
 - (1) What has your program done to address or circumvent these demands?
- 6) The environment of the Even Start program
 - a) How would you describe your program's *neighborhood*? [York: compare neighborhoods]
 - i) parks, buildings, housing projects, public spaces, shopping, safety, and environmental issues like air, water, litter
 - ii) Who lives in the surrounding area/neighborhood?
 - (1) age, gender, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, employment status, occupation, household income, etc.)
 - iii) Where do most students and staff live in relation to the program site?
 - iv) How has the neighborhood changed since Even Start began?
 - v) How have you responded to changes in the neighborhood?
- 7) Program improvement
 - a) What recommendations do you have for improving your own program?
 - i) PROBES: program goals, curriculum, lesson materials, topics for program or lessons, schedule, social events, planning, assessment & evaluation indicators & tools, etc.

Anything you'd like to add? Questions?

Teacher and Aide Interview Guide

- 1) preliminaries (introduction of self, study, & focus group)
- 2) Background information
 - a) Name
 - b) current & past positions in this Even Start program
 - c) length of time in this Even Start program and current position
 - d) What attracted you to this work and this organization? (What led to your initial involvement in Even Start?)
- 3) History of the organization
 - a) What can you tell me about how this Even Start program started?
 - b) What changes have you seen in the program since you began working here?

- i) PROBES: how and when it started and who was involved; changes made over time [location, student composition, curriculum and instruction, legislative, administrative, fiscal, etc]).
- 4) Instruction
 - a) Imagine that you're telling a friend about a typical day in your classroom. What would you tell her? (*adult education, parenting education early childhood education, interactive literacy*).
 - i) What do you do?
 - ii) What kinds of curriculum and materials do you use? (e.g., workbooks, examples of print people encounter in daily lives)
 - iii) What do students do?
 - iv) What types of activities do you have?
 - v) How do you and the participants interact with each other (e.g., individual work, group work, teams, etc.)?
 - vi) What language(s) are used?
 - 5) Tell me about a typical home visit.
 - a) What do you do?
 - b) What do parents and children do?
 - c) What types of activities do you have?
 - d) How do you and the participants interact with each other (e.g., individual work, group work, teams, etc.)?
 - 6) How do you monitor the progress of adult participants?
 - a) How do you tell adult participants about their progress?
 - b) How do you monitor the progress of child participants?
 - c) How do you tell parents about their child's progress?
 - 7) Program planning, implementation and evaluation (15)
 - a) Think back on a component of the Even Start program that you were responsible for planning. Tell me about how you went about planning, implementing, and evaluating it. [OR: recent change in the program & how it was planned]
 - i) Who was involved and how?
 - ii) How do you deal with differing views about what to do or how to do it?
 - iii) What difficulties did you encounter?
 - iv) PROBES: Who made the key decisions about how to design and implement the program, how you involved parents, obtained feedback, adjusted based on feedback, involved other collaborators.
 - 8) Can you describe a time where an event or activity you planned didn't work out the way you anticipated?
 - a) What happened? How did you respond? What were the results? What did you learn from this?
 - b) What kinds of decisions have parents helped make about your Even Start program? (specific examples, e.g., curriculum, topics, program goals, program improvement)

- i) Give an example of a change the program made as a result of parents' suggestions or interests.
- 9) Overall assessment and suggestions for program improvement
- a) What do you find particularly rewarding about your Even Start program as a whole?
 - b) What do you find rewarding about the classes you teach? What keeps you coming back? (PROBES: staff, friends, parents and families, curricula, partners)
 - c) What challenges have you had as a teacher and how have you tried to overcome them?
 - i) PROBES: student issues [costs, transportation, child or elder care, support services, personal problems]; classes; other aspects [governmental support, community support, data, evaluation]).
 - d) What aspects of your work would you like to change? What suggestions do you have for changing them?
 - i) PROBES: program goals, curriculum, lesson materials, topics for program or lessons, schedule, social events, planning, assessment & evaluation indicators & tools, etc.
- 10) closing questions
- a) Of all the things we discussed today, what's the most important to you? [round robin]
 - b) Have we missed anything?

Extra questions

- 11) The environment of your organization
- a) How would you describe your program's *neighborhood*?
 - i) parks, buildings, housing projects, public spaces, shopping, safety, and environmental issues like air, water, litter
 - b) Who lives in the surrounding area/neighborhood?
 - i) age, gender, race/ethnicity, language, nationality, employment status, occupation, household income, etc.)
 - c) Where do most students and staff live in relation to the program site?
 - d) How has the neighborhood changed since Even Start began?
 - e) How have you responded to changes in the neighborhood?

Program Partner Interview Guide

- 1) Background information about yourself
- a) What is your role in the organization?
 - b) How long has your organization been involved with the ___ Even Start program?
- 2) Collaboration with Even Start
- a) How does your organization support (collaborate with) the ___ Even Start program? (ask for specifics—the services they provide for Even Start)
 - i) How does the ___ Even Start program support (collaborate with) your organization? (ask for specifics—the services Even Start provides for them)
 - b) How does your organization benefit from working with Even Start? (specific examples)

- i) How does the ___ Even Start program benefit from working with your organization? (specific examples)
 - ii) How do the family literacy participants benefit from this collaboration? (specific examples)
 - c) How do you organization and Even Start try to sustain a good working relationship?
 - d) How is the way that your organizations currently work together different from the way you worked together in the past? (e.g., changes in goals, way of working together, communication, agreements)
 - e) From your perspective, what has been the greatest success of this partnership? (specific examples)
 - i) What has been the most challenging aspect of this partnership? (specific examples)
- 3) Observations of Even Start Program
- a) What three adjectives would you use to describe the ___ Even Start program? (probe on why those descriptors)
 - b) How would you say people in the community (local residents) view the Even Start program? (i.e., what is the program's reputation)
 - c) What would you say is particularly innovative about the ___ Even Start program? (e.g., mission, goals, and objectives; program design, implementation, evaluation, administrative or fiscal decisions, recruitment and retention, teaching, assessment, collaboration)
 - d) What would you say is particularly challenging for the ___ Even Start program?
 - e) What changes have you seen in the ___ Even Start program since you've been working with them? (e.g., location, student composition, curriculum and instruction, legislative, administrative, fiscal)
 - (1) How have these changes affected their day-to-day operations?
 - f) What recommendations do you have for improving the ___ Even Start program?
- 4) Is there anything you'd like to add? Questions?