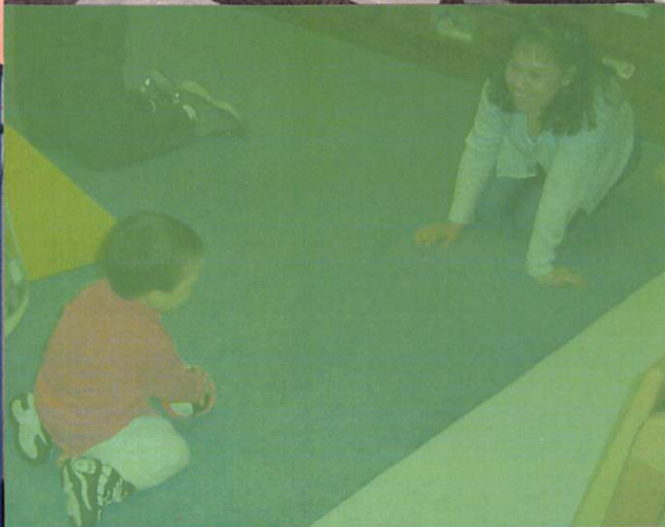
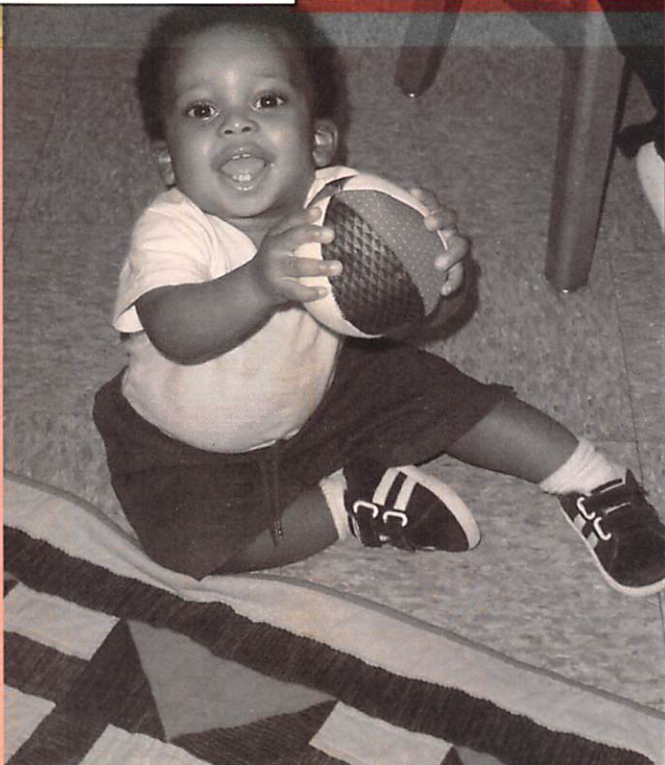


A Summary Review Of Learning Basket Programs 1997-2005

**Prepared for ICA-USA
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A Summary Review of Learning Basket Programs 1997 – 2005

Contents:

Introduction

Research Foundations For The Model

Program History and Design

Learning Basket Model

Materials

Training Program

Evaluation Design

Review of the Learning Basketk Approach 1997-2005

Review of Implementation

Review of Evaluation

Rev iew of Reported Outcomes

Overall Summary of Outcomes That Have Emerged in the Reports

Recommendations

Introduction

This report has been developed to summarize, review, and assess the work of the *Learning Basket*® program of ICA-USA over the last seven years. This report employs a mixed-method approach (Stufflebeam, 2001). It is a responsive evaluation, since it is a response to clients' needs. It is also written as an improvement and accountability report intended to detect areas for improvement in the context of holding the program accountable to its own goals and mission. This report begins with a brief description of the underlying research base of the *Learning Basket* Approach. This is followed by a short history and

description of the program. There is then a discussion of indicators of strengths and challenges for three major aspects of the program: 1. implementation (program delivery), 2. ongoing evaluation, and 3. reported outcomes. Finally there is an overall summary and a set of recommendations for further work and research. Materials used in the preparation of this report included, but were not limited to, written reports available from *Learning Basket* staff, materials available on the *Learning Basket* website, and materials provided by *Learning Basket* staff when requested by the writer of this report.

Research Foundations For The Model

According to materials provided by *Learning Basket* staff, The *Learning Basket* Approach is based on four main concepts derived from child development research of the past 70 years.

1. Parents and Caregivers are the babies' first teachers and can come to see themselves and their children as eager and enthusiastic learners.

Parents are the first influence in the life of the young child and are often unaware of their critical teaching role. The family is still the first and strongest influence in the life of the young infant, whether the primary caregiver is working or not. Early learning takes place in the context of relationships, and it is interactions between the parent or primary caregiver and the

child that are most powerful. "Strengthened parent-child relationships and enhanced home environments promote positive outcomes for all young children across a broad range of functional domains" (Sameroff & Fiese, 2000).

Parents are the first adults to introduce the child to developmental tasks through

communication appropriate for his/her level of understanding and development (Neuman, Copple & Bredekamp, 2000) “Parents are recognized as a child’s first teachers. Brain development research points out that children are always learning, whether in school settings or not, and that a positive relationship with parents can contribute to better development for children. Research has revealed that early parent-child interactions are the most important aspect of a child’s emotional and cognitive development” (Patel, 2002).

2. Children learn through play (and multi-sensory interaction).

For more than 70 years classical research has confirmed that play nurtures a young child’s thinking skills. Parten (1932), Vygotsky (1930-35/ 1978), Piaget (1967) and Smilansky (1968) have described how in play a young child assimilates information and is guided in accommodating to the rules and patterns of society. The child develops basic thought processing skills that move from thinking in the concrete to the ability to think in the abstract.

In addition to nurturing thinking skills in play, a child develops intelligences across multiple domains. Each of these domains has its own “operating rules” and sequence of development (Gardner, 1999). This development is intrinsically dependent

The effectiveness of intervening in the interaction process as a learning context has been well documented (Sameroff & McGuigan, 2004). This model also has achieved a fit with current theory and practice about learning and brain development in very young children. Recent advances in neurological imaging have enabled scientists to document the positive effects of rich interactive contexts on early brain development.

upon interaction with adults and other children. Bruner & Bornstein (1989) pointed out that play that enhances learning provides an abundance of first-hand experiences, the opportunity for interaction with a supportive caregiver, and time for exploring multiple ways of combining objects and completing tasks. Playful activity can also include fantasy play that constructs make-believe worlds. (Bettleheim, 1976; Jenkinson, 1988). This dimension of play enhances creativity by nurturing the imagination. Play is an effective medium of learning because it requires involvement and intense focus.

3. The first three years are extremely important in a child's cognitive, social, emotional and imaginal development.

The first three years of life are critical – and can often be neglected by parents faced with the immediacies of survival or sustenance-based economic conditions or ignorance of the critical developmental issues involved with their infant.

Researchers and early childhood professionals agree that the first three years of a child's life are critical to all aspects of development and that individual attention from caring adults can dramatically influence and nurture a child's intellectual, emotional, social, sensory, and physical development. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)

Another important aspect of learning in the first three years of life is emergent literacy, which implies a developmental continuum along which a young child's literacy is acquired. "Literacy develops not only as a

result of direct instruction, but also as part of a stimulating and responsive environment" (Arzubiaga, Rueda, & Lilia, 2002). Early or emerging literacy is defined as the literacy learning that begins at birth and is encouraged through participation with adults in meaningful activities. (Neuman, Copple, & Bredekamp, 2000). Components of early literacy include phonemic awareness, concepts of print and story, reading styles, and literacy as social or cultural practice (Purcell-Gates, 2001). "Research clearly shows that good emergent literacy skills are likely to enhance children's school experiences and help them get started on the path to reading success" (Senechal & LeFevre, 2002).

4. Simple objects can be teaching and learning tools (or media) when used interactively.

Families and caregivers of young children often lack information about practical means for cultivating children's learning and literacy. In a multi-site evaluation by SRI International conducted with 667 low income families in 3 metropolitan areas, those families who were engaged in a

program teaching parents to teach their children through stories, songs, and interactive play and learning games were found by the end of the project to be more likely to read aloud to their child, tell stories, say nursery rhymes, and sing to their child. Parents also reported they were

happier taking care of their child than before they participated in the program.

Parents as leaders

Additionally, consistent with one of ICA's founding values, the *Learning Basket* Approach is designed to support the development of parents as leaders and as confident learners. Parent leadership is linked to the capacity of individuals to step up when faced with a need to improve the lives of young children and their families. Poverty, homelessness, immaturity, or inexperience (i.e. adolescent parents), inability to access needed services due to lack of literacy, education, or skills in the dominant language, lack of pre-natal care,

(Wagner & Spiker, 2001)

recent immigration, cultural barriers, isolation, unemployment, mental health issues related to family violence, stress, long term illness and addictive behaviors all are factors that diminish the parents' abilities or confidence in providing a rich and nurturing learning environment for the young infant (McLeod & Shanahan, 1993). It is particularly difficult to develop parent leaders in communities of marginalized individuals, though many would say that that is where they are needed most.

Program History and Design

A. The *Learning Basket* Model

Based on an understanding of the research base described above and motivated by intention to develop an early childhood program that continued ICA's traditions with young children, the *Learning Basket* Approach was initially developed over a three year time period beginning in 1996. This early work by staff of ICA-USA was done with support from ICA-USA. The Church of Latter Day Saints, through their Proliteracy Worldwide program, supported

the development of the booklet for parents entitled Parents Are Teachers.

The Learning Basket was initially conceived and developed as an 8-12 session parent group program involving infant and toddlers with one or more adult caretakers. The actual basket, filled with handcrafted and other objects, becomes the organizing experience for the interactive play of parents and children as materials and experiences are presented to the parents in

the group. At each meeting a parent leads a conversation based on the Parents Are Teachers manual. All of the published drawings and discussion questions are constructed in a manner that elicit open-ended responses and promote the expression of the group members' life experiences in relation to the topic. They also are asked to introduce one of the objects from the *Learning Basket* with the assistance of the Play to Learn book. The staff person serves as a guide and supports the parent's role as leader. The sessions are intended to initiate habits and practices of

positive interaction between parents and children.

This model has since been tailored for use by those who do home visits with parents and young children to support development and by center-based care staff, who have incorporated the objects and activities into their daily activities. Additional materials have been developed to meet the needs of programs as they implement the work.

B. Materials (The following 5 descriptions of materials are taken from dissemination and marketing materials of the Learning Basket program.)

The following materials have been developed to support implementation of the model:

1. *The Learning Basket* is an enclosed basket with 18 categories of objects that are appropriate for interactive play with infants and toddlers. The basket contains handmade items such as diversity dolls and colored crocheted balls and purchased items such as a magnifying glass and measuring cups. All objects have been selected because they are safe, can be easily obtained at relatively low cost, and can be packed away in a basket or simple container to be accessible to parents and caregivers. The objects in the *Learning Basket* are made and supplied to the project and participating programs by volunteers. They are also made in quantity by women's fair trade cooperatives. The making of the basket provides a practical means of

linking community resources to community needs.

2. The Play to Learn activity book provides age graded appropriate multicultural activity suggestions for Parents and Children Together (PACT) interactive play based on the objects in the basket. The Play to Learn activity book provides activities that nurture learning through multiple intelligences across four major learning domains. A special emphasis is put on language development and pre-math and pre-reading skills as well as the development of self-confidence, self-image, and imagination. This book was especially designed for parents and caregivers. The book was also designed for use in Healthy Families, Even Start, Early Head

Start, Migrant Head Start and teen parenting programs.

The book contains over 150 developmentally appropriate interactive activities for adults to do with infants and toddlers. These activities are simply stated in language appropriate for readers with an eighth grade reading level. Multicultural pictures illustrate each activity and icons communicate what a child can learn in each. The icons express learning arenas across four major domains: the Cognitive, Social, Personal and Imaginal. The assumption that young children can develop multiple intelligences is foundational to this approach.

3. The *Parents are Teachers* literacy manual provides parenting education and support through multicultural line drawings that stimulate conversation, critical thinking and problem solving while enhancing vocabulary. The manual has been developed in collaboration with Proliteracy Worldwide. This manual is used in an 8-11 week

series of parent education meetings in which a parent facilitator teaches a lesson. After a series of several meetings, parents take on the parent facilitator role during these groups.

4. The *Lessons of Danielle and Carlos* is a series of 13 presentations conveying critical information about the role of play in the development of language and learning. The lessons contain role plays, reflective conversations and interactive activities which are also used in the context of the parent support groups.

5. The *Home Visitation Manual* was written in collaboration with the Howard Area Community Center Infant and Toddler program in Chicago. The manual is user-friendly, containing over 100 pages of age-appropriate activities, which were developed by the seasoned home visitors who partner with parents to develop their child's optimal potential.

C. Training Programs

To build a corps of practitioners who can deliver the program, a series of training components have been developed. The Practitioners' and Trainers' Courses are integral to the *Learning Basket* Approach.

The Practitioner Training Course: This is a three-day course offering that equips participants to design and implement successfully a program using the *Learning Basket* approach. Three-hour modules include training in classroom implementation, parent groups, or home

visitation. The training program emphasizes partnering with parents, developing children's skills through interactive play, and nurturing adult literacy through life skills education. This training program is offered in English and Spanish.

Trainers' Course: In the five-day Trainers' Course, graduates of the Practitioners' Course become qualified to lead Practitioners' Courses to train others in

Learning Basket methods. The training program is offered in English.

D. Design of the Evaluation Process

In the fall of 1999 and spring of 2000, ICA staff developed an evaluation system consistent with the intended outcomes of the *Learning Basket* program. ICA staff were assisted by donated time and expertise of several professionals with extensive experience in either early care and education or evaluation or both.

To reflect the ICA values of participation and reflection, this system was designed as a Reflective Participatory Observation and Evaluation system. A series of reflective activities was established that would provide participants at all levels (from parents to practitioners to administrators) a chance to pause and think about their experiences and interactions. For participants in the courses, these reflective activities were embedded in the activities of the coursework. In this way, they would not be add-ons, but a means of making

reflective practice part of what was done and learned during the sessions. For trainers or course leaders, these activities were included in what would be expected in facilitating the course, or as reflective practice as part of leadership behavior. At the same time, these activities, when documented consistently, were designed to yield information that could track the impact of the program and indicate needed adjustments in the program delivery. (As such, the evaluation process also serves as a source of information for continuous process and program improvement.)

The following table describes the evaluation instruments that were developed and have since been used in *Learning Basket* sessions.

Instrumentation for Learning Basket Evaluation

Instrument (form or questionnaire)	Who Fills It Out?	When Is It Filled Out?	Who Is It About?	What Outcome Does It Address?
<u>Today's Play</u> (Practitioner observations)	Practitioner	Immediately after play session	Parent and Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent and quality of parent-child interactive play
<u>Today's Play</u> (Parent observations)	Parent	During the week at home	Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent's awareness of value of play in child's development and what child learns in play
<u>Reflective Moments</u> (This is the reflective evaluation piece that has been most consistently used.)	Parent	At end of each group session	Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent's awareness of value of play and intention to play • Parent's confidence as a learner and leader • Parent's understanding of appropriate interactions with child
<u>Reflective Moments: Learning From Parents And Children Playing Together</u>	Practitioner	After home session	Parent and Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is going well • What is the child learning • What is the parent learning
<u>Reflective Moments: Practitioner's Session Evaluation</u>	Practitioner	After group session	Practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is going well in sessions • What are my strengths • What needs to be done differently • What is a challenge for me •

The piece of this evaluation that has been most consistently used over the past six years is a reflective questionnaire called *Reflective Moments*. The content of *Reflective Moments* was intended to capture the influence that *Learning Basket* parenting sessions might be having on the parent/child dyad and on the interactions

that are occurring within that dyadic learning context. Recently, interventions aimed at affecting the learning potential of very young children have focused on parent behaviors. Evidence has mounted that changing parent behaviors is what will influence the child's learning potential. In many ways, the variable of interest is no

longer the parent or the child alone, but the interactive dyad. A model of understanding early learning and development called the 'transactional' model (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003) has greatly influenced the way in which interventions are designed and assessed. The belief is that affecting parent-child interactions will create the conditions for increased learning and development of the child. (A note on the difficulties of measuring change and development in young children can be found in Appendix A.)

This questionnaire is given to participating parents toward the end of a session. They are asked to spend a few moments thinking

about what they have experienced and about what their child has done, and then to respond in writing to a few questions. These questions are designed to both inform the program and to assist parents in reviewing and reflecting on the session. The questions address how they felt, what they did with confidence, what they liked, what they learned, what they could use at home, and what they would like to change. Each question addresses an aspect of the research-based concepts that are foundational to the design of the *Learning Basket* Approach. Each question also reflects a particular method of retrieving information that can be used in questionnaires.



Conceptual and Methodological Base of the *Reflective Moments* Questionnaire

Question	Concept Addressed	Methodology Used
<i>Today I did</i>	Interactive participation	Descriptive Self-report
<i>Today I spoke up</i>	Finding voice	Descriptive Self-report
<i>I offered my opinion</i>	Finding voice	Descriptive Self-report
<i>I mostly felt</i>	Affective involvement	Evaluative Self-report
<i>What was difficult</i>	Perceive challenges, needs	Evaluative Self-report
<i>What I did with confidence</i>	Confidence as a learner	Evaluative Self-report
<i>Something I learned</i>	Parental change	Retrospective Pre-post
<i>Something I will use at home</i>	Parental change	Create Follow-up Set
<i>Something I liked</i>	Role of pleasurable interactions	Evaluative Self-report
<i>Something in the session to change</i>	Continuous improvement	Evaluative Self-report

Questionnaires can yield meaningful and valid results if constructed in an informed, purposeful way. The *Reflective Moments* questionnaire was designed to yield valid information in a format that was conceptually accessible to participants and would not impose a burden of paperwork. The first group of questions requires the responders simply to describe some aspects of their participation. Then there is a group of questions that require evaluation of feelings or participation. Finally two

questions have specific purposes. The question that asks what I will use at home is designed to create a mental 'set' to do some of the activities at home and to require thinking about how that might happen. The question that asks what I learned is a type that requires the respondents to compare what they know when they arrive with what they know at the end of the session. This is a form of pre-post question that avoids some of the pitfalls of typical pre-post testing (such as providing a 'set' or

expectation with the pre-session questionnaire) and has been found to be quite valid and reliable as a way to measure

change over a short time (Pratt, McGuigan, & Katzev, 2000).

Review of the Learning Basket Approach, 1997-2005

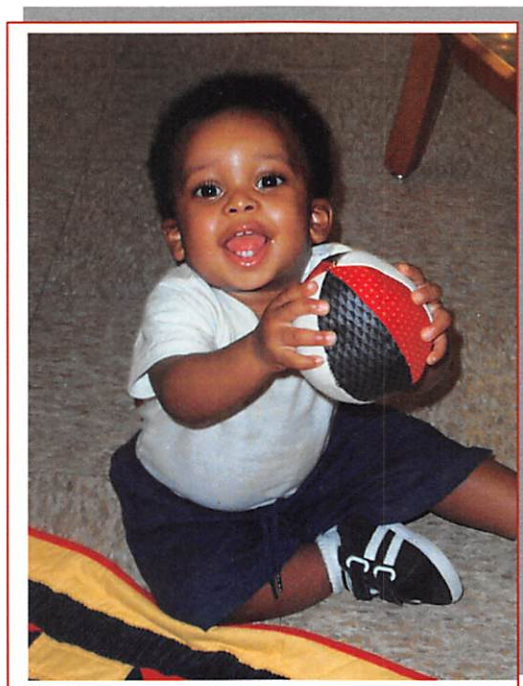
1. Review of Implementation

The strength of a program can be measured, to some extent, simply by the strength of its implementation. It is the market test. If it is in demand and if that demand remains steady or increases over time, that result is an indication that it meets the needs of those who are using it. Typically, in the field of early care and education, a product that is in demand is consistent with recommended practice and compatible with actual practice. Adopters recognize the match between what they value and need

and what is available in the materials and procedures of a marketed program.

The record of *Learning Basket* implementation is displayed in the following table. The extent of this table bears witness to the extent of demand for the *Learning Basket* program.

Numbers come from sign-in sheets, practitioner reports, and evaluation data collected. A key for many of the abbreviations follows the table.



Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
Migrant Early Head Start	Utah	LDS Practitioner and Trainer Course Grads	NA	Spanish	Not known	1998 (Jul-Sep ?)	Parent Groups	None Rcvd	Latter Day Saints (LDS)	This was a joint first test with materials in Spanish
Practitioners crse (1 st ed) Brigham City	Utah	ICA staff	17	English/Spanish	6 X 3 day	1998 (Sep)	Training		LDS	Follow-up & continuation to LDS Migrant Program
Trainers & Consultants courses Salt Lake City	Utah	ICA staff	21	English	4 days	1998 (Sep)	Training		LDS	Trainers and Group Facilitation Methods combined
Village to Region	Paraguay	LDS Practitioner and Trainer Course Grads	NA	Spanish	Multi-cycles	1998	Parent groups	None Rcvd	LDS/Gov of Paraguay	LDS volunteer in peace corps started
Urban LDS Congregation	Haiti	LDS Practitioner and Trainer Course Grads	NA	French Creole	Not known	1999	Parent groups	None Rcvd	LDS	ICA established pattern of translation
Rural LDS Congregation	Haiti	LDS Practitioner and Trainer Course Grads	NA	French Creole	Not known	1999	Parent groups	None Rcvd	LDS	After first test LDS set their own programs
Orphanage	Romania	LDS Practitioner and Trainer Course Grads	NA	Romanian	One on one	1999	Adlt/Child play time	None Rcvd	LDS	Last LDS program due to retirements
Save the Children	Albania	ICA Staff and translator	NA	Albanian	NA	1999	Book distribution	None Clctd	Save the Children	Program limited due to staff turnover.

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
Howard Area Community Centerr	Chicago	ICA staff	12	English/Spanish	11	1998 (Oct-Dec)	Parent groups	TP	LDS Seabury	Program started before Reflective Moments (RM) had been developed
Howard Area Community Ctr	Chicago	ICA staff	8	English/Spanish	8	1998 (Mar-May) 1999	Home visit		Seabury	Home visit Manual Created and tested
Howard Area Community Ctr	Chicago	Grads of practitioners courses	Class room	English/Spanish	Class Room	2000 2001 2002, 2003 2004, 2005 2006 – Present	Class room sessions with Inf - toddlers		Healthy Family Head Start	Regular one on one play sessions with children by staff
1st Practitioners crse (estab)	Chic ago	ICA staff	12	English/Spanish	6 3 day	2000 (Mar)	Training			Establishing a Chicago base and inaugural trainers courses and network
<u>Trainer course (estab)</u>	Chic ago	ICA staff (5 trainer experts Utilized)	10	English	10 5 day	2000 (Mar)	Training			
2nd Practitioners course	Chic ago	ICA staff	12	English/Spanish	6 3 day	2001 (Mar)	Training			Building a Chicago base and Expanding the network
<u>Trainer course</u>	Chic ago	ICA staff	9	English	10 5 day	2001 (Mar)	Training			
Norwegian American Hospital (NAH)	Chicago	ICA staff and trainers	10	Spanish/English	8	2000 (Sept-Dec)	Parent groups		Seabury	Hospital Day Care Center
Norwegian American Hospital (NAH)	v	Learning Basket trainers	10	Spanish/English	8	2001 (Feb-Mar)	Parent groups		Seabury	

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
Logan Square Community Ctr	v	Learning Basket trainers	10	Spanish	8	2001 (Apr-Jun)	Parents Groups		Seabury	Community Center
Sacred Heart School	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainers	16	Spanish/English	6 Sessns	2000	Parent groups	RM	Sacred Heart Sch	2 cycles of 12 sessions per year
Sacred Heart School	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainers	15	Spanish/English	12 ses X 2	2001	Parent groups	Non Rcvd	Sacred Heart Sch	On going parent toddler play sessns
Sacred Heart School	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainers	18	Spanish/English	12 ses X 2	2002	Parent groups	Non Rcvd	Sacred Heart Sch	On going parent toddler play sessns
Sacred Heart School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainer & Parents	18-20	Spanish/English	12 ses X 2	2003	Parent groups	Non Rcvd	Sacred Heart Sch	On going parent toddler play sessns
Sacred Heart School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainer & Parents	18-20	Spanish/English	12 ses X 2	2004	Parent groups	Non Rcvd	Sacred Heart Sch	On going parent toddler play sessns
Sacred Heart School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainer & Parents	18-20	Spanish/English	12 ses X 2	2005 2006 to present	Parent groups	Non Rcvd	Sacred Heart Sch	On going parent toddler play sessns
*Maryville Academy	Chicago	ICA staff	19	English	16	2001 (Sep-May)	Parent groups	RM	Sec Of St Grant	School year literacy initiative
*Maryville Academy	Chicago	ICA staff	18	English	16	2002 (Feb- April)	Parent groups	RM	Sec Of St Grant	Collaboration with library, settlement
*Maryville Academy	Chicago	ICA staff	16	English	16	2003	Parent groups	RM	Sec Of St Grant	house: IL Secretary of State
*Maryville Academy	Chicago	ICA staff	14	English	16	2004 (Feb-Jun)	Parent groups	RM	Sec Of St Grant	“ “
*Maryville Academy	Chicago	ICA staff	15	English	16	2005	Parent groups	RM	Sec Of St Grant	“ “
*Maryville Academy	Chicago	ICA staff & Learning Basket trainers	11	English	16	2006 (Feb-current)	Parent groups	RM	Sec Of St Grant	Two added SOS sites anticipated in 2006-7
3rd Trainers course	Chicago	ICA staff	2	English	10 5 day	2002 (Feb)	Training			Prepare trainers for Bucerias

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
Bucerias	Mexico	Parent promoter course grads	18	Spanish	4	2002 (Mar)	Parent groups	RM	Individual donors	Initial Practitioner's Course seeded on-going local collaborative initiative
Bucerias	Mexico	Parent promoter course grads	23	Spanish	8	2003 (Oct-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	SNCarus Fund	
Bucerias	Mexico	Parent promoter course grads	14	Spanish	8	2004 (Jan-Mar)	Parent groups	RM	SNCarus Fund	
Bucerias	Mexico	Parent promoter course grads	8	Spanish	8 (5)	2004 (Apr-Jun)	Parent groups	RM	SNCarus Fund	
Bucerias	Mexico	Parent promoter course grads	10	Spanish	8	2005 (Jan-Mar)	Parent groups	RM	SNCarus Fund	
Bucerias	Mexico	Parent promoter course grads	13	Spanish	8 (5)	2005 (Jan-Jun)	Parent groups	RM	SNCarus Fund	
Practitioners Course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	10 AS	English	6 3 day	2002 (Sep17-19)		Pfe/Lbtf	Fees	Brentano , CRLC Merryville Mdn teen Ctr, HACC, Day Care Actn Cou., St. Augustine Col.,
Brenneman Elementary School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainers & Parents	12	English/Spanish	8	2002 (Oct-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	Polk Bros Foundn	
Brenneman Elementary School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainers & Parents	5	English/Spanish	8	2003 (Mar-May)	Parent groups	RM	Polk Bros Foundn	
Brentano Elementary School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainers & Parents	12	Spanish	8	2003 (Oct-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	Polk Bros Foundn	
Brentano Elementary School	Chicago	Learning Basket trainers & Parents	10	Spanish	8	2004 (Mar-May)	Parent groups	RM	Polk Bros Foundn	

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
CRCL - Carole Robertson Cntr for Learning) 2929 W 19th	Chicago	ICA staff & Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	11	Spanish/English	13	2003 (July –Nov)	Parent groups	RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children
CRCL - Carole Robertson Cntr for Learning) 2929 W 19th	Chicago	ICA staff & Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	14	English/Spanish	25	2002 Jan-April Also classroom one on ones with teacher and child	Parent groups	TP	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children
CRCL - Carole Robertson Cntr for Learning) 2929 W 19th	Chicago	ICA staff & Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	14	English/Spanish	25	2003 (Aug-Sep) Also Classroom 1 on 1	Parent groups	TP	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 2929 W. 19 th	Chicago	Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	10	English/Spanish	9 (8+1 intro)	2004 (Apr-Jun) Also Classroom 1 on 1	Parent groups	TP/ RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 3701 W Ogden	Chicago	Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	10	English/Spanish	9 (8+1 intro)	2004 (Sep- Oct) Also Classroom 1 on 1	Parent groups	TP/ RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 2929 W 19 th	Chicago	Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	10 9 8	English/Spanish	9 (8+1 intro)	2005 (Feb-Apr) 2005 (Jun-Aug) 2005 (Sep-Nov)	Parent groups	TP/ RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children Three sessions per year
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 3701 W Ogden	Chicago	Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	10 8 8	English/Spanish	9 (8+1 intro)	2005 (Feb-Apr) 2005 (Jun-Aug) 2005 (Sep-Nov)	Parent groups	TP/ RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children Three sessions per year
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning	Chicago	Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	10 8 7	English/Spanish	9 (8+1 intro)	2006 (Feb-Apr) 2006 (Jun-Aug) 2006 (Sep-Nov)	Parent groups	TP/ RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children Three sessions per year

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 3701 W Ogden	Chicago	Pract Course grads, Program Director, & Team Practitioners	9 9 8	English/ Spanish	9 (8+1 intro)	2005 (Feb-Apr) 2005 (Jun-Aug) 2005 (Sep-Nov)	Parent groups	TP/ RM	CRLC	Day care Agency for Children Three sessions per year
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 2929 W 19 th	Chicago	Team practitioners	25 1/Wk	English/ Spanish	1/wk 1/mo	2003, 2004, 2005 2006	Parent groups	TP/ DP	CRLC	Integrated with regular curriculum on weekly and monthly basis
CRCL - Carol Robertson Cntr for Learning 3701 W Ogden	Chicago	Team practitioners	25 1/wk	English/ Spanish	1/wk 1/mo	2005, 2006; CRLC opened second site late 2004	Parent groups	TP/ DP	CRLC	Integrated with regular curriculum on weekly and monthly basis
Project Hope	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	10	English/ Spanish	8	2002	Parent groups	RM	Donnally Fam Fnd	Continues on its own with Grads
Chinese Community Center, Seattle		ICA staff	16	Chinese / English	8	2002	Parent groups	None Rcvd	Small grant	Confirmed pattern of Materials translation
Practitioners Crse, Yakima	WA	ICA staff	7	Spanish	6 3 day	2003 (Jan)	Training	Pfe	ELCA & Donors	Casa Hogar
Casa Hogar, Yakima, WA	WA	Practitioner Course grads	No data	Spanish	No data	2003 2004, 2005 2006 to present	Parent groups & home vis	None Rcvd	ELCA Lutheran	No data on parents groups or home visists
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	11 AS	English	6 3 day	2003 (Feb 26-28)	Training	Pfe/ Lbtf	Fees	CRLC, HACC
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	14 AS	English	6 3 day	2003 (Nov 18-20)	Training M	Pfe/ Lbtf	Fees	CRLC, HACC, Family Network, Nuestra Familia, Stockton School

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
*Stockton School	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainers	20	Spanish / English	20	2003-2004	Parent groups	RM	IL State Brd of Ed	Parent literacy focus
*Stockton School	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainers	10	Spanish / English	20	2004-2005	Parent groups	RM	IL State Brd of Ed	" "
Stockton School	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	11	Spanish / English	3	2004 (Feb-Mar)	Parent groups	TP	IL State Brd of Ed	" "
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	10 AS	English	6 3 day	2004 (Mar24-26)	Training	Pfe/Lbtf RM	Fees	CRLC, HACC, Stockton
Practitioners Crse, Modoc	CA	ICA staff	15	English/Spanish	6 3day	2003 (Oct)	Training		Children First	County Child and Day Care Agencies
Modoc County, Tulelake	CA	Practitioner course Grads	23	Spanish	1 on 1	2004	Home Visits	TP/	First 5 Prop 10	California Tobacco settlement Money
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	14 AS	English	6 3 day	2004 (Jul 27-29)	Training	Pfe/Lbtf	Fees	HACC, CRLC, El Valore,
The Enterprising Kitchen	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	22	English	13	2004	Parenting skills	RM	Enterprising Kitchen	Job skills Program.
Palo Verde Library	Phnx AZ	ICA staff and grad librarians	12	Spanish English	11	2004 (Sep-Dec)	Parent Groups	RM	AZ CAP Money	AZ Child Abuse Prevention money
Palo Verde Library	Phnx AZ	ICA staff and grad librarians	12	Spanish English	11	2005 (Feb-May)	Parent groups	RM	AZ CAP Money	" "
Ocotillo Library	Phnx AZ	ICA staff and grad librarians	9	Spanish English	11	2004 (Sep-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	AZ CAP Money	" "
Ocotillo Library	Phnx	ICA staff grad librarians	8-9	Spanish English	11	2005 (Sep-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	AZ CAP Money	" "

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
Pactitioners Crse, San Luis Valley	CO	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	13	English/Spanish	6 3day	2003 (Oct) In Monte Vista church of Christ	Training	Pfe/Lbtf	Fees/Grant	Schools and Govt
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	10 AS	English	6 3 day	2004 (Mar24-26)	Training	Pfe/Lbtf RM	Fees	CRLC, HACC, Stockton
San Luis Valley	Colorado	grads of Pract. courses	Data in-complete	English	Data Incomplete	2003	Parent groups and classroom application	RM	Seabury Fndtn	Marsh Elementary School and various child care entities with inconsistent implementation
San Luis Valley	Colorado	grads of Pract. courses		English	" "	2004		RM	Seabury Fndtn	
San Luis Valley	Colorado	grads of Pract. courses		English	" "	2005		RM	St of CO. Early Childhood Council	
San Luis Valley	Colorado	grads of Pract. courses		English	' "	2006 to present		RM	Early Childhood Council	Peer Support system emerging
Practitioners Crse, San Luis Valley	Colorado	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	13	English/Spanish	6 3day	2004 (Sep 23-25) Monte Vista church of Christ	Training	Pfe/Lbtf	Fees/Grant	San Luis Valley Early Childhood council
Practitioners Crse San Luis Valley	Colorado	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	12	English	6 3 day	2006 (Apr 6-8)	Training	Pfe/Lbtf Lbtj	Fees/Grant	Even Start, Ninos delNorte, Chldns grdn Tiny Hands,
Practitioners Crs, Roseville	Minn	ICA Staff	7	English/Spanish	6 3day	2004 (Apr 22-24)	Training	Pfe/Lbtf	Roseville UMC	Church Mission preschool
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	11 AS	English	6 3 day	2004 (Nov 16-18)	Training	Pfe/Lbtf	Fees	CRLC, HACC, Family Network
Practitioners Crse, Phoenix	Phnx AZ	ICA Staff	15	English/Spanish	6 3 day	2005 (Mar14-17)	Training		Grant	State Literacy, License Plate \$

Learning Basket Program Implementation

PROGRAM	Location	Facilitators	#	Languages	# of sessions	Date	Type of sessions	Data	Funder/Sponsor	Notes
Pendegas Sch Dis Desert Horizon Ctr.	Phnx AZ	ICA Staff	8	Spanish	12	2005 (Mar-Apr)	Parent groups	RM	ELOA	ELOA = Early Learning Opportunities Act
Pendegas Sch Dis Villa De Paz Ctr.	Phnx AZ	ICA Staff	8	Spanish	12	2005 (Sep-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	ELOA	" "
Fowler Sch Dis. Fowler Elem.	Phnx AZ	ICA Staff	21	Spanish	12	2005 (Aug- Oct)	Parent groups	RM	ELOA	" "
Cartwright Sch. District Cartwright Elm	Phnx AZ	ICA Staff	7	Spanish	12	2005 (Sep-Dec)	Parent groups	RM	ELOA	" "
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	7 AS	English	6 3 day	2005 (Apr 25-27)	Training	Pfe/ Lbtf Lbtj	Fees	HACC, Laguna NM, ICA, Crystal Hearts Rising
<u>Trainers course</u>	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	5	English	10 s 5 day	2005 (July)	Training			
Practitioners course	Chicago	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	14 AS	English	6 3 day	2005 (Jul 6-8)	Training	Pfe/ Lbtf	Fees	HACC, CRLC, Harmony-Hope and Healing
Practitioners course	v	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	11 AS	English	6 3 day	2005 (Dec 6-8)	Training	Pfe/ Lbtf Lbtj	Fees	HACC, Family Focus, CRLC, Mary Crane
Water Elementary School	v	ICA staff and Learning Basket trainer	12	Spanish/ English	16	2006 (Feb-Current)	Parent groups	RM	ISBE – IL St Board of Ed	Year long program

KEY:

** This program takes place in a school year session – it overlaps years. Ex. Stockton 2003/2004 Oct. –Dec and Jan-May of 2003-2004

RM = *Reflective Moments* –primarily for parents own reflection on themselves;

TP = Today's Play: Parent or adult care giver observations and reflections of play time each day.

DP = Development Profile - Evaluation of progress for new plan of activities for each child.

ISBE = Illinois State Board of Education;

ELOA = Early Learning Opportunity Act (Arizona);

Pfe = Participant Final Evaluation;

Lbtf = *Learning Basket* Trainers Feedback

AS = Attendance Sheet

Lbtj = *Learning Basket* Trainers Journey Faculty self evaluation

Pfe = Participant final Evaluation

Lbtf = *Learning Basket* Trainer's Feedback

AS = Attendance Sheet

Lbtj = *Learning Basket* Trainer's Journey Faculty self evaluation

CRC is using Learning Basket as a curriculum: parent groups,
curriculum, and link to assessment



Strengths and Challenges of Implementation

The implementation record provides several indicators of strength and suggests some likely challenges.

Strengths

- Several large sites (for example, Howard Area Community Center and Carole Robertson Center) have embraced the *Learning Basket*, incorporated it into their daily care and education routines, and have done further work to tailor it to their needs.
- Most sites that used the program once, continued. It apparently meets some program need in a satisfactory way, engages staff and parents, and engenders positive responses and commitment.
- *The Learning Basket* program has demonstrated the flexibility to be used in a variety of settings and modes. For example, there is enough simplicity to be used as a weekly outreach program (Phoenix), and enough depth to be used as a curriculum (Carole Robertson Center).
- Though most implementation has been in Chicago, the success of the program in other geographic areas (California, Arizona, Colorado, and Bucarias in Mexico) attests to a broad applicability in situations

where parents are marginalized, economically struggling, or struggling with social or language barriers.

Challenges

- The extent of implementation has probably taxed the available ICA staff to deliver, monitor, and assess the work. Every implementation involves initial contact and negotiation, initial and sometimes ongoing training, inventory management (baskets and books), financial management, relationship building and maintenance. Additionally, in some cases, new materials have (necessarily) been developed to support implementation in a particular setting. In seizing many opportunities to deliver the program, staff have probably overextended. That always creates a concern for maintaining quality and integrity of program delivery.
- There is no way to monitor fidelity of implementation. That is, there is not enough staff time or systematic means of ensuring that the program is delivered as developed and intended. It is typical that, over time, there will be some program *drift*.

Sometimes this is fruitful, as programs meld to their participants and delivering organizations. Sometimes this is troubling, as

programs deviate from intended processes and activities. In this case, there is no way to know when it is happening or if it is undesirable.

2. Review of Evaluation

The evaluation system was previously described. However, there is no program for which multiple instruments have been used, summarized and reported. To implement the entire system would require a commitment from a program to more data collection than they seem to be willing to do. This is understandable, given that early care and education programs are typically struggling to find and retain well-trained staff, and that many of those staff find it difficult to keep up with routine paperwork.

An early independent report (relating to the Howard Area Community Center) was commissioned by ICA for the purpose of initially documenting the feasibility and potential effectiveness of the program. Consistent data collection began in earnest with the initiation of the program in Bucerias (Mexico), the funding of programs

by the Illinois State Board of Education, and the initiation of the program at the Carol Robertson Center.

In the meantime, with mentoring from the same evaluator who had led the development of the evaluation system, a data entry system had been initiated. Staff were coached in using data management software, and in organizing and coding data for entry and summary. Over the last several years, the collection of *Reflective Moments* has become more routine practice. Some of that is related to the need to report to current grantors, such as the Arizona license plate special fund to prevent child abuse, and the Illinois State Board of Education, and the requirements in those grants for evaluation.

Evaluation reports have been generated for seven programs. The following table describes those reports.

Learning Basket Evaluation Reports

Program/site	Date	What questions were addressed?	What data were collected?	How were data analyzed?	How was report supported?
Howard Area Community Center, Chicago	1999	Parent Attitude, Knowledge, Behavior	Narratives, survey done 3 times	Descriptive summaries	Commissioned by ICA
Brenneman Public School and Brentano Public School, Chicago	2004	5 outcomes specified by funders	Pre-session interviews Observations Other unspecified	Not identified	Polk Foundation funding to ICA
Modoc, California (Early Head Start using CA' First 5' special tax funds)	2004	Parent outcomes: awareness of value of play, ability to engage their child in play	Today's Play	Content analysis using database summaries of text data	Pro bono
Stockton Public School, Chicago	2003-2005	Outcomes specified by funder	Some use of <i>Reflective Moments</i> Other unspecified	Not identified	Illinois State Board of Education grant to ICA
Phoenix Public Library (2 branches) Funded by AZ child abuse prevention funds	2005	Does <i>Learning Basket</i> engage parenting practices that might prevent later child abuse? (Supportive networks will do the same, and will be built through participaton.)	<i>Reflective Moments</i>	Content analysis using database summaries of text data	Pro bono

Learning Basket Evaluation Reports

Program/site	Date	What questions were addressed?	What data were collected?	How were data analyzed?	How was report supported?
San Luis Valley, Colorado	2005-2006	What are barriers to implementation in dispersed rural geographic area?	Specially constructed interview protocol	Content analysis using text data	Commissioned by San Luis Valley Early Childhood Council
Bucerias, Nayarit, Mexico	2002-2005	What affects implementation in international setting? What are parent outcomes of Learning Basket participation?	<i>Reflective Moments</i>	Content analysis using database summaries of text data Descriptive summaries	Commissioned by ICA with special funding

Strengths and Challenges of Evaluation Work to Date

Strengths

- Staff demonstrated the foresight to develop a thorough and professional evaluation system as the work was developing. Development of the
- early childhood programs. This work included the logic of the evaluation system, the instruments, and, over time, systems for data collection, entry, and management.
- The importance of reporting evaluation information is strongly recognized and has been diligently pursued.
- reflective evaluation system was done with pro bono support from a trained and experienced evaluator of
- Data coding, database entry, and data management systems have been developed. This is essential to handle large amounts of comparable data from multiple sources. The Bucerias report could not have been generated without this attention to data management.

- Several reports exist that systematically analyze available data.
- The report from the implementation in Bucerias, Mexico, contains enough implementation and data description with a large enough sample to provide findings with a reasonable assumption of validity (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

Challenges

- Consistent with the impression that staff have over-extended in program delivery, there is evidence of inadequate resource capacity to carry out extensive and thorough evaluation.
- A corollary of the above challenge is that large amounts of data have either not been entered into a database or have been entered but not summarized, analyzed systematically and reported. This

includes all data from training courses.

- Instrumentation used in evaluation reports has not been consistent. (For example, reports from Brenneman and Brentano public schools used interviews and observations that were not used anywhere else.) This means that data cannot be compared across sites or that data are not collected in numbers large enough to allow inferential statistical analysis (Cohen, 1986).
- Some reports lack descriptions of methodology and instrumentation.

3. Review of Reported Outcomes

What follows is a meta-evaluation of all evaluation reports generated to date by or for *The Learning Basket* program. This is a summary of outcomes described in all reports. The reports are reviewed in chronological order. Each report is given a short contextual description, followed by a

summary of questions or outcomes addressed and a listing of outcomes that can be found in each report. A short commentary then appears on the strengths and challenges of the reports. Following that is a commentary on the reported outcomes.

Complete copies of these reports are attached to this summary report. The information below necessarily condenses some of the reported information to make it accessible to overall review.

Howard Area

Community Center, Chicago (1999)

Description: This was a process evaluation with informal data collection and review and small sample size (n=12-15 parents). A survey was designed and administered at three time points. (Findings seem hard to decipher in tables and text.)

Questions or outcomes addressed:

- This was done to 'gather impressions' as to outcomes for families and the program itself.
- A survey was developed to address attitude, knowledge, and behavior toward play.

Findings:

- Impressions were that parents and children were engaged with the materials.
- Survey responses (n=12-15) were generally positive and showed small gains over time in topics addressed.

Brenneman Public School and

Brentano Public School, Chicago (2002-2004)

Description: This program was part of an effort to develop Full Service Schools. ICA staff prepared an evaluation report for funders (Polk Brothers Foundation). Methodology and instrumentation were not defined, other than informal impressions and observations of staff, with occasional reference to *Reflective Moments* questionnaires. Objectives of funders were specified in this program and addressed as outcomes.

Questions or outcomes addressed:

- Parents participate in schools.
- Parents understand the role of play in nurturing the learning potential of their children.
- Parents nurture emergent literacy.
- Parents demonstrate leadership.
- Program is sustainable by parents and school personnel.

Findings:

- Other than the habit of weekly participation in sessions, parents did not seem to increase participation in school.
- At the end of the program, parents demonstrated awareness of the

importance of play in the learning potential of their children.

- At the end of the program, parents demonstrated the ability to engage their children in pre-literacy activities.
- Most parents took leadership role during a session, and one parent at each school became a practitioner.
- Both schools lacked the required infrastructure to link this program to their ongoing programs and did not commit themselves to developing the needed resources.

Modoc, California: Early Head Start

Description: This report was prepared pro bono by a trained and experienced evaluator. Instrumentation (**Today's Play**) and methodology are described; text data are analyzed using basic content analysis methods.

Questions or outcomes addressed:

- Would Learning Basket be helpful with a geographically dispersed, seasonally employed, bilingual population in demonstrating the value of play in child development and the parent role in that play?

Findings: (taken verbatim from the report)

- A wide range of materials were used.

- Parents recognized and enjoyed their children's discovery play (although they might not have called it 'inventive').
- Parents could intuitively discern the important features of developmentally appropriate play.
(findings, cont.)
- Activities that their children were enjoying, although they did not have the specific labels for these features.

- Parents recognized the sources of their children's frustrations.
- Parents could identify specific areas of learning that were influenced in the play activities, and recognize words or icons that represented those areas.
- Parents were able to identify their own learning in the experience, though some confused it with the learning of their child, and some identified their learning in terms of specific activities.

Stockton Public School, Chicago (2003-2004)

Description: ICA staff prepared this report for funders. The program differed slightly from the norm in that it involved 12 parents over 16 sessions rather than the usual 8-12 sessions.

Instrumentation is specified as parents' comments in guided conversations, interviews and their written comments on the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets and **Today's Play** journal sheets.

In addition this evaluation is based on observation notes made by the *Learning Basket* facilitators who guided the sessions. Methods of data organization and analysis are not specified.

Questions or outcomes addressed

- Increase the parents' knowledge in the following arenas:

Child growth and development including pre-natal development, prenatal and postnatal care; childbirth and child care; parenting skills; family structure; family relationships.

- Increase parents' understanding of the practical means of preventing child abuse.
- Engage in purposeful interactive play that will help prevent child abuse by strengthening emotional bonds and at the same time help nurture the development of emergent literacy.

- Increase parents' knowledge of various resources and opportunities within the surrounding neighborhood that will enhance their parenting.
- Increase the skills of the program staff of the Stockton Parent-Child Center through appropriate training.

Findings

At the end of the program:

- Parents demonstrated knowledge of age appropriate behavior of children in play, described the role of nutrition in play, described risk factors in childbirth and benefits of breastfeeding, could describe the learning taking place in play

activities, could express the joys and frustrations of their family relationships. The parents and children demonstrated the ability to engage with objects and activities that would deepen pre-literacy skills.

- Parents demonstrated ability to calm their children and attend to the child's needs.

- Parents demonstrated knowledge of how to apply to the public magnet schools, and two enrolled in ESL classes.
- Two staff and one parent attended the *Learning Basket* Practitioner's Course.

Phoenix Public Library (2 branches)

Description: This report was prepared pro bono by a trained and experienced evaluator. Instrumentation and methodology are described. The funds for this program implementation (special Arizona license plate funds) intended to support the prevention of child abuse.

Questions addressed:

- Did *Learning Basket* support parenting practices that might prevent later abuse of children?

These include:

1. Responding to their children with appropriate discipline
2. Appropriate developmental expectations.

- Did *Learning Basket* participation enable supportive networks that will help parents with the tasks of parenting?

Findings

- Parents expressed that they had learned the importance of parental attention and parental patience to

healthy development of their children.

- They learned the importance of play to the development of young children.
- Their responses suggest that they gained some understanding of how to be patient, pay attention, and play with their children.
- They learned the importance of positive engagement with their very young children, including the importance of talking and reading from a very early age.
- They learned the importance of positive engagement with their very young children, including the

importance of talking and reading from a very early age.

- They also expressed a pleasure in the companionship and shared parenting experiences of the sessions.



San Luis Valley, Colorado (2005-06)

Description: This report was commissioned and completed by a trained and experienced evaluator as follow-up to a Practitioners' Course delivered at this site 15 months prior. It is not a report that evaluates the effectiveness of the *Learning Basket*. A follow-up course was designed based on the findings of this report.

Questions or outcomes addressed:

- Understanding the barriers to implementation in this geographically dispersed region.
- Understanding what would support full implementation by those who had attended the Practitioner's Course.

found it hard to know exactly how to implement *The Learning Basket* in their centers if they were the only ones who had been trained.

- Follow-up that addressed specific areas of concern would be helpful, including peer coaching, mentor scaffolding of skills, and regular contact with support.

Findings

- Isolation of care providers made it difficult to implement in group settings. Those who had been trained

Bucerias, Nayarit, Mexico (2002-2005)

Description: This report was commissioned and completed by a trained and experienced evaluator. Instrumentation and methodology are described. The project in Bucerias is different in two respects from other projects represented in evaluation reports. First, it is an internationally implemented project, and, second, it was carried out in neighborhoods (homes) rather than in an institutional setting.

Questions addressed

Questions relating to international implementation:

- What supports implementation of Learning Basket Approach in international settings?
- Are there features of this implementation that seem to be salient for international implementation?
- Do the data from this site indicate that the Learning Basket Approach can be successful across cultural and economic circumstances?

Questions related to participant outcomes that were targeted for this implementation:

- Does participation in the series of *Learning Basket* parenting sessions foster parent/child interactions of a type that are known to increase children's learning capacity?
- Does participation in the series of *Learning Basket* parenting sessions foster confidence in parents that they are capable of influencing the learning potential of their children?

Findings related to international implementation:

- It is important to have local contacts.
- Immediate and continuous feedback, contact, support, and monitoring of funds is important.
- It is important to stay alert to local politics.
- *Learning Basket* engaged women who live in greater poverty than most parents in US programs and have a different role in their families and culture from most women in programs in the U.S.

Findings related to participant outcomes that were targeted for this implementation

Data from *Reflective Moments* were summarized across a large sample and condensed into the following table. This table illustrates the major topics that were reportedly done with confidence, were learned, were liked, and what was intended to be used at home.

<i>Reflective Moments</i> Summary: Most Frequently Mentioned Topics				
Parenting Sessions	I did with confidence?	What I learned?	What I will use?	What I liked?
2002 (Practitioners Course) 46 records 19 individuals 5 sessions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer questions • Talk • Give opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give time and attention • Be patient • Brain development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more time • Be more patient • Play with objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-play, drama • Participation
2003 (1) 45 records 23 individuals 5 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Listening • Playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing • Be patient • Pay attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient • Pay attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking • Everyone participated
2004 (1) 29 records 9 individuals 5 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Participating • Speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Importance of relationships • Paying attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything • Play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything • The way they taught
2004 (2) 38 records 7 individuals 7 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Speak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Talking to child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Using the objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything
2004 (3) 29 records 6 individuals 5 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with objects • Parents are important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Talking to my child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objects • Participating • Teaching each other
2005 (1) 41 records 10 individuals 9 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making materials • Paying attention (I) • Give opinion (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making/using objects • How to play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toys • Playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being together • Community
2005 (2) 45 records 14 individuals 6 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Give an opinion (I) • Participating (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more time and attention • Play • Better ways to be with child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objects in the basket • Give more time • Be more patient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing in the group • Things explained well • Participation
* Records are from four sessions only (I) =Individual repeatedly made this response				

Strengths And Challenges Of The Reports

Overall, the reports indicate some strengths and present some challenges in terms of evaluation in the *Learning Basket* programs.

Strengths

- A record of evaluation work over six years exists.
- Reviewing the reports leaves the impression that rigor improved over time. The capacity to manage large data sets also looks like it improved over time.
- These reports suggest that data collection has been diligent in terms of *Reflective Moments*. There seems to be a large number of *Reflective Moments* records that could be analyzed across programs as well as within programs.
- Findings reported in some of the reports cannot be validated due to unknown method of data organization and analysis.
- Because implementations seem to be focused on different goals and outcomes (which is a program strength), questions or outcomes addressed are not consistent, with a few notable exceptions such as parents' recognizing the value of play. However, because these conclusions have been arrived at in different ways, the conclusions cannot be aggregated.

Challenges

- Terms such as 'increased' or 'enhanced' appear without reference to valid baseline data.

A note on analysis

None of the reports above present findings based on inferential statistical tests. Several reasons appear to influence this.

1. Inferential statistical tests require sufficient numbers to meet the assumptions of the tests. No individual *Learning Basket* program would provide sufficient sample size. There might be sufficient sample size if data could be aggregated across programs (Cohen, 1986).
2. Because this evaluation system was designed to be embedded into the program and involved reflective practice, data that are collected are text data. Qualitative analysis of text data can yield valid and reliable information if the analysis is done systematically and according to recognized methodologies, such as content analysis (Weber, 1990). These could be distilled to numerical data, but very rigorous text analysis would have to be employed in order to derive the numbers (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This kind of text analysis is quite doable, and in fact is what was done with the Bucerias data. But even Bucerias by itself, though it yielded valid text analysis,

would still not be enough to yield valid quantitative results. Aggregation of all available data would probably build enough sample size to submit to quantitative analysis.

Overall Summary of Outcomes That Have Emerged In The Reports

Strengths

The findings listed from the reports above should be interpreted with caution, given the inconsistent and informal ways in which most data were reviewed and analyzed. Many positive findings, however, do appear in these reports. Lack of rigor does not mean that findings are not real, or that they are not the result of participation in *Learning Basket*. They might well be so. However, lack of rigor means that they cannot validly or reliably be attributed to *Learning Basket* participation. Nonetheless, some findings stand out as very interesting.

1. A notable outcome of implementation is the development of local sustainability of the program. In several cases, local entities have taken on the *Learning Basket* for continuing use. This has been the case in several institutional settings, such as Howard Area Community Center and Carol Robertson Center, and in an area in Colorado where an overarching council is supporting long-term use of the program, and in the program in Bucerias, which is delivered in neighborhood homes. The variety of settings in which *Learning Basket* can achieve sustainability attests to its broad appeal, and its flexibility. It is important to note that, in all these cases, there is a strong administrative structure or person who supports the ongoing viability of the program through the allowance of time, training, or supportive motivation.
2. When all the findings related to special purposes of particular funders are removed, one theme remains in these reports: parents have learned the value of play and have learned how to play. This determination would be expected as a main effect since that is a main emphasis of the program, AND that the evaluation instruments are designed to detect that behavior. However, its repeated appearance as a finding indicates that the program does what it intends to do and the evaluation detects that.
3. Overall, recurring themes other than 'play' emerged, though not as strongly. The importance of 'reading' in Bucerias, the emergence of individual leaders who become practitioners in almost all of the sites, the value expressed by many participants of being

part of a group of parents who shared their stories, and the importance of a supportive infrastructure for program continuation all recurred enough times to merit attention.

Recommendations

1. Recommended practice would suggest that it is time to conduct a review of the program model, materials, and evaluation design and instruments. This should be done not with intent of major overhaul, but of continuous improvement, and with a panel of informed and interested partners.
2. All comparable data should be entered into a database and subjected to systematic analysis.
3. Several small studies could be designed and carried out to detect the influence over time of *Learning Basket* participation on parent behaviors, child development, and community development. (There are statistical models that could be applied to this work to look at system change.) These studies would be labor-intensive and would require a committed program partner and sufficient resources for data collection, management, analysis and reporting.
4. The work of the Carol Robertson Center should be examined in some detail. Though no data have been reported, infant-toddler caregivers at this center have been disciplined about collecting Today's Play and have used the Developmental Profile (a worksheet in the Practitioners' Course) to plan their curriculum. In addition, they have used an infant-toddler assessment scale (The Ounce Scale) that has been linked to the *Learning Basket* program. These data might yield some comparison between assessment results and use of the basket as documented in Today's Play. Again, this would require a commitment of sufficient resources.

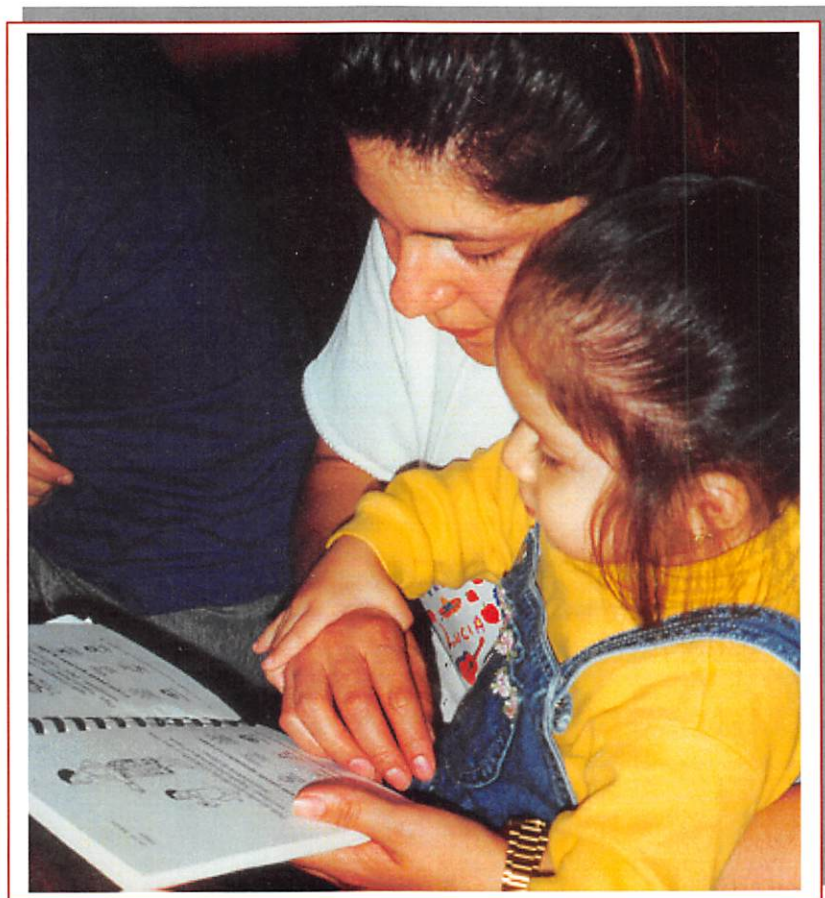
In general, this review of the *Learning Basket* program has found a program that was developed on a sound research base in its field and has maintained integrity to that base.

With a small staff, the program has been introduced to sites in Chicago and elsewhere when opportunity and interested parties were available. External funding has been captured in some cases, and some of the work appears to have been done on a fee-for-service basis. Many early adopters found the program to be something that was helpful and accessible to their internal staff in their work with parents and young children and either continued delivering the program and/or expanded and tailored the program to fit their work.

Program staff have clearly struggled with documenting their work through evaluation activities. Led by the knowledge of the importance of evaluation, educator-writers developed a reflective evaluation system early in the program, but staff have not been able to bring sufficient time or expertise to the task. Great potential exists for deep analysis of the work, if interest and resources become available.

The central message of the program, that play is a medium for supporting a child's learning and development, has reportedly permeated the consciousness of those who participate in parent sessions. The concrete objects have provided an organizing focus for parents and care providers around which to learn how to play. The intent of the program to build parent leadership has been manifested in parent participants who have gone on to become practitioners and lead or co-lead ensuing courses.

This review has found a program that stands poised for continued review and improvement, and worthy of continued implementation if those conditions are met.



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Learning Basket Evaluation Reports

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Howard Area Community Center, Chicago (1999)

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Modoc Early Head Start, California (2004)

Stockton Public Schools, Chicago (2003-2005)

Phoenix Public Library, Arizona (2005)

San Luis Valley, Colorado (2005-2006)

Bucerias, Nayarit, Mexico (2002-2005)

**LASTING IMPRESSIONS
Of the
LEARNING BASKET PROJECT**

**A Process Evaluation
Of a
Collaboration Between
The Institute of Cultural Affairs
The Howard Area Community Center's Family Support Project
Latter Day Saints Charities
The Seabury Foundation
And the Participating Mothers and Child**

**Nick Wechsler, MA, Infant Specialist
Chicago, Illinois
January 2000**

During the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, Chicago like most of the nation was awash with social change. The great energies that were realized and mobilized in individuals, in organizations, and in communities were expressed in diverse efforts to make change for the betterment of society. The social movements of those times defined themselves as movements for power. They infused many people with the potential of empowerment, the feeling that one could join together with others to make a difference in their own lives and in the lives of others.

During those times two different communities in Chicago emerged into two separate organizations: The Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) and the Howard Area Community Center. Although unrelated in their histories, they share remarkable similarities in their beliefs, missions and methodologies. The project described in this report is one of a collaboration between these two Chicago institutions which took place in 1998-1999. For each organization, more than 30 years after setting their roots in Chicago neighborhoods, their coming together in the Learning Basket Project represents a partnership driven by the kindred spirit which drives each organization's work.

A look at each organization's mission statements reveals uncanny kinships (emphasis added to highlight similarities).

The Institute of Cultural Affairs:

*The Mission of ICA is to promote global **human development**, through participation and **community building**. The ICA in Chicago intends to be catalyst of ongoing **human development** through **participative approaches to individuals**, community and organizational **learning, leadership, and change**.*

The Howard Area Community Center's Infant and Toddler Program: The Family Support Project (FSP):

*The program's mission is dedicated to providing **support, education, and community building** for low- income and at-risk families in the Rogers park area. It is the belief of this program, its staff, and advisors, that the **beginning years of life, from pregnancy through the preschool years are crucial in the development of young minds and hearts**.*

Their approach to working with their community constituents is similar as well (emphasis added). ICA:

The learning approach that was used with parents and children in the Learning Basket sessions is based on the theory of Imaginal Education. The approach rests on the following understandings:

- 1. a person can learn any concept if it is presented **within the context of one's life experience**.*
- 2. people who are living in **economic poverty** have the potential to solve **their own problems** if **encouraged to think reflectively**.*
- 3. we think first in images; images govern behavior; images are created by messages; images can be changed; changed images create changed behaviors.*
- 4. **trust filled relationships and a safe learning environment** are critical for expanding the learning potential of those who have not done well in traditional school settings*
- 5. we learn differently and this difference in learning styles requires different teaching strategies*
- 6. we have the potential of developing multiple intelligences*
- 7. a **whole-person approach to learning** (emphasizing the cognitive, personal, social, and imaginal arenas) is essential to **whole-person development at any age***
- 8. **stimulation of the brain at an early age creates the maximum potential/or developing intelligence***

9. *parents have the greatest potential to influence their children's learning*
10. *learning for all is enhanced when every participant in a group setting is considered a learner and a teacher.*

FSP:

Regular, on-going home visiting is the core of the program and where most of the support learning, and skill development takes place.

The visits focus on areas of parenting, positive parent-child Interaction, knowledge about normal child development, and maternal and child health.

Parents learn appropriate, positive ways to interact with their children. The home visits are complimented with weekly center-based small group sessions.

The purpose is to encourage friendships among the parents and a special emphasis is placed on the positive parent-child interaction.

The FSP is a one of a statewide and national network of Healthy Families America programs.

These are child and family support programs designed to promote the healthy development of children. Additionally they are designed to prevent family difficulties including child abuse and neglect. It also has a specialized Family Violence Prevention service.

The ICA is part of a global network spanning 32 countries. They serve as a resource for anyone, anywhere, from governments to corporations to community centers, seeking to find the will for change. The intent of this project was to enhance the ongoing FSP program through building internal leadership, introducing concepts around the importance of play, provide the practical means of stimulating play and learning, and provide incentives to attend and participate in group meetings. They planned to provide meeting structures guided by a series of lesson plans, test the Learning Basket approach within an inner city population, build a working collaboration with the staff of the FSP, and link the FSP to additional resources.

Collaboration is a challenging process. It often takes longer, is more complex, and at times more demanding. It is often more costly, not just economically, than a single entity doing what it knows best. However when done effectively, collaboration has the potential of increasing the abilities and impact of the participating collaborators while enhancing the outcomes for all. A successful collaboration depends on a "super glue" to keep the collaborators' commitment and participation intact. These two organization's mutuality of history, purpose, mission, and practice served such a purpose in this collaboration. Despite the extra meetings, challenges, and tasks both the staffs from ICA and FSP had to endure, their common work was kept on track by a single shared vision: building on families' own histories, strengths, knowledge, and experiences as a way to help to build families' futures.

The work depended on the staff from the FSP being willing and committed to adding another demanding period of program and self development to their already taxed work life. It depended on the staff of the ICA bringing the Learning Basket project to the FSP with full recognition and respect of the program and work life they had entered into. It took grace and patience. Both the FSP and ICA added this ingredient to their "super glue."

The Learning Basket as a Parallel Program Model

ICA's Imaginal Education approach creates the opportunity for everyone involved to play and learn together. The approach maximizes one's own learning by supporting the learner as a

teacher. A core characteristic of this theory when placed into action, is to utilize each of the experiences provided as a trigger for self exploration, discovery, expansion, reflection, and mastery. ICA refers to this as a whole person approach.

This is easily recognized in the manner in which materials and experiences are presented to the mothers in the bi-weekly group. Each meeting a parent is asked to lead a conversation based on the manual *Parents Are Teachers*. They also are asked to introduce one of the objects from the Learning Basket with the assistance of the book *Play to Learn Learn to Play*. All of the published drawings and discussion questions are constructed in a manner that elicits open ended responses and promotes the expression of the group members life experiences in relation to the topic. Indeed, as each person responds for themselves, each person has their own "correct" interpretation. It is the shared knowledge of how each sees the same picture or has experienced the same situation or feelings which leads the discussion to what they dream for themselves and for their children.

The basket itself plays a central role in the Learning Basket Project. It is a beautiful woven basket, filled with hand-crafted and other objects which become the organizing experience for the mothers and good old tune for the children. The beauty and playful enjoyment found in each object spark both children and parents into play. These objects have been made available through an additional dimension of the project. The women of the Relief Societies of the Later-day Saints Churches in the Chicago area donated their handwork experience in providing a basket for each participant and became essential collaborators in this project.

Often the designated parent will arrive early to "practice" with either an ICA or FSP staff person. The "practice" provides an opportunity for the mother to become more familiar with the ideas and materials, and to explore and play with the concepts and toys. The staff person serves as a guide; supporting the parent's role as leader, guiding their experimentation, and promoting a sense of security and competence in the parent. The parent leader is invited to explore how she wants to present the material and objects prior to the group meeting through conversation and role playing with the staff. When she makes her presentation during the group meeting, her exploration continues as she finds ways to express herself and demonstrate her knowledge and skills to others. Her own sense of identity as a leader and teacher is developed as she leads the group and experiences a growing sense of mastery of the concepts, toys, and her role.

A parallel developmental trajectory is seen in observing how children are introduced to new objects from the Learning Basket and how they play. Playing is a child's natural work. Learning is their primary job. For children, playing is learning. Children are born with the ability to learn and play, but in order for the process to be initiated and nourished they need an available, responsive parent who is informed and in tune with their-child's growth.

Marilyn Segal of Nova University states that there are three essential roots for play: secure attachment, stimulating environment, and nurturing and interactive caregivers. In the same manner that staff provide these elements to the parents as they prepare to lead, parents provide the three roots for their child's playing and learning.

J. Ronald Lally of the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development describes an emotional and cognitive developmental trajectory _in a child's first three years of life. He describes these tasks as developing security and trust in the first six months, developing a sense of exploration between six and fifteen months, and developing a sense of identity from fifteen to thirty six months.

This same developmental model can be applied to the process a child goes through at any age when they encounter a new object, relationship, or experience. The essential starting point of a sense of trust and security allows the child to explore through repeated practice and experimentation with the new situation. Exploration leads to creating their own ideas as to what the new thing is all about. Mastery follows a lot of experimentation with the new object, relationship, or experience. This developmental process parallels that of the parent as learner and leader.

The FSP staff also are learners and leaders. Introduced to the Learning Basket they add another dimension and focused area to their work, promoting play and learning with the families in their program. They encounter new theories, strategies, and methodologies for working with parents. . They too depend on a developing sense of security and trust with the staff from ICA, the collaborative project, and the content and process of the Learning Basket. Like the parents and children they use their growing sense of security (ie, this is worth it and it will work out) as an impetus for their own professional exploration. As they add to and lead the process, as they integrate the ideology of the learning basket into their role as group leader and home visitor, they establish their own new sense of identity.

As they implement the Learning Basket, ICA staff gains more knowledge, understanding and security with their new⁷ curriculum and program design. They get to learn how the Learning Basket works with young urban mothers. Their own exploration and experimentation takes place as they engage with the FSP staff and families with materials and process. And ultimately the ICA develops a sounder identity of the Learning Basket as they evaluate what works best and what makes it work best.

The collaboration in this project is strengthened by the fact that all involved are playing and learning together, all are developing in a parallel process. Most importantly, the process is entirely dependent on the inter relationship of all of the contributors; children, parents, FSP staff, and ICA staff alike.

The Learning Basket Group

The Howard Area Community Center lives in a dynamically integrated community. There are large numbers of Hispanic and African American families. There are also many families from all over the globe, particularly Europe, the Caribbean, and Asia. The common denominator for all of the races and cultures which utilize the center is poverty. They also share all of the obstacles, barriers, limitations and challenges that come with being poor. All of the families have voluntarily enrolled in the Family Support Project and have accepted the offer of weekly home visits complimented with Parent Groups.

Since the single most essential aspect of the Learning Basket project is comfortable and free self expression, two groups were established. Spanish speaking mothers attended a Friday afternoon group and English speaking mothers attended a Thursday evening group. Children were welcome in the sessions, but the major focus of the learning was on the mothers. They had requested that childcare be provided. When children were in the room, it was possible to see their responses to the objects in the Learning Basket and to learn from both mother and child's relationship to play.

Each of the first five weeks followed the same overall structure for what usually were 90 minute sessions:

The introductory game led by a FSP staff member. After the first several sessions, it was decided to spend some time reflecting with the parents how they were using the Learning Basket at home with their children. This would often become the introductory game.

The conversation led by a mother.

The presentation on learning through play led by an ICA staff

The introduction of the Learning Basket objects led by a mother

The reflection led by an ICA staff.

Evaluator's Inquiry

At the outset, it was agreed that the ICA staff would keep a weekly narrative account as documentation of the Learning Basket group meetings. This document would become the source for reviewing and understanding the content and process of the group meetings.

It was also agreed that as a team, the staff of the FSP would develop a list of questions they thought were important in better understanding parents and their children's relationship to play. These questions would serve as the foundation of the survey questionnaire specifically developed for this project.

The survey was further constructed by the evaluator. It was designed to explore three critical individual characteristics that have a direct effect on parent's playtime with their children. These are the parent's attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors related to their playtime with their children. The final survey consisted of 10 questions designed to explore each of the areas. They were presented as a statement followed by a range of agreement (1 Don't agree at all.... 5 Completely agree). Eighteen of the questions were written as true statements and the remaining twelve were false statements.

Either an English or Spanish version of the questionnaire was completed at three different points. A survey was administered prior to the first session in February 1999. It is considered the 'Pre' survey. An "end" survey was administered after the last meeting in April, 1999. Six months later, in October 1999, a "post" survey was administered. The variation of attendance at the three sessions that the questionnaire was administered accounts for the variation in the sample (N) at Pre, End, and Post.

In March 1999, the same survey was administered to a group of parents that utilize the Howard Area Community Center's free dental clinic. This was intended to test the instrument with a population that shares many similarities such as race, culture, education, income, and life experiences as those in the group. The single distinction is that no parent in this group attended any aspect of the FSP. They utilized other services of the center. In addition to testing the instrument, this offered a view as to the similarities and differences in parental attitude, knowledge, and behaviors of those families who are engaged in a program designed to promote parent-child relationships and child development, and those who are not. The responses to the negatively framed questions were reversed to align the survey. If a respondent didn't agree at all with a negative statement, it was scored as completely agreeing with a positive restatement.

Average scores were calculated for each question. The measure of change from one administration of the survey, to another for each question, was calculated.

Responses were then divided into the grouping of questions that explored the three areas of inquiry: attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. The individual and overall responses were recorded, and the change from each time the survey was administered was noted. Again an average was calculated.

In June 1999, the staffs from the ICA and FSP met with the evaluator for a debriefing. The notes from that meeting further informed our understanding the process and impact of this project. Denver Developmental Screening Tests are routinely administered as a standing program component of the FSP. They are administered by home visitors and are used for early

identification and referral for assessment of potential developmental delays. In January 2000, the evaluator reviewed a subset of the children whose mothers participated in the groups.

Discussion

This report, like the Learning Basket project itself, attempts to look at several parallel outcomes.

The Learning Basket project is designed to introduce discussion and series of activities intended to promote playtime for children and their parents. These discussions and activities are viewed as a contributing factor in stimulating early brain development and fostering the child's healthy growth and development in emotional, cognitive and physical areas.

The Learning Basket project is intended to build program services delivered to families, while building the internal capacity of the Family Support Project staff. The project is an enhancement to their overall program. Although the Learning Basket groups operate for only six sessions over twelve weeks, the opportunities for the project to have a positive impact on FSP program participants are increased if the Imaginal Education theories, and specifically its approach to promoting play for fun and learning, are effectively instilled in the program and staff, and become a consistent and ongoing part of their work with families.

This report study is a process evaluation and at most offers an impression as to outcomes for the families and the program itself. The data gathered from the group narratives, debriefing with staff, and from the survey, while informative are not represented as research based outcome data. The informal nature of the study and the small sample size add to the scientific limitations of evaluating outcomes in this study.

Lasting Impression: The Families

Each mother's individual decision to voluntarily participate in the FSP suggests a desire to gain support and education in order to contribute to their child's growth and development. The parents' self awareness concerning child development and their desire to engage with the FSP indicates a readiness to benefit from the project. Other factors which contribute to their chances for benefiting are their previous experiences in this and other support programs, what they have learned from their families, and what they have already experienced as a parent.

Most of the group members had previously been involved in the FSP program and were at different stages of establishing helpful relationships with staff. The longer their program participation the more exposure they would have previously had to activities and discussions related to child development. Likewise the more children they had, the more time and experiences they will have previously had playing and learning with their children. Most group participants had either one or two children, but some parents had three, four, or five children.

The Learning Basket Pre surveys were compared to the surveys completed by the mothers who were never enrolled in the FSP but were contacted through the dental clinic. This comparison indicates that FSP participants started the learning basket project with higher overall scores and higher scores in each area of inquiry, than the other mothers.

Interestingly, both groups scored lowest in their responses to questions exploring their attitudes about play, and both groups had their highest scores in the area of behaviors concerning play with their children. It is noteworthy that the greatest differences in the two set of scores was in the area of attitude, while the smallest difference was in behavior.

**Comparison of Program and Non Program Participants
Aggregated and Averaged In Each Area of Inquiry**

Difference	Combined Average Score	Combined Average Score	
	Non FSP sample	FSP sample	
Questions related to ATTITUDE #s 1.2.4.6.8.10.11,1 3-20,26	In a scale of 1 -5 2.61	In a scale of 1 -5 3.53	>.92
Questions related to KNOWLEDGE #s 3.7,9,14.15.16,17 ,19.21,23	In a scale of 1-5 3.2	In a scale of 1 -5 3.85	>.65
Questions related to BEHAVIOR #s 5, 12, 18, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	In a scale of 1 - 5 3.69	In a scale of 1-5 4.06	>.37

Participant Attendance

ICA group facilitators report that over the course of the six sessions a total of 28 different mothers attended the combined groups. They report that attendance was inconsistent. This is a trait not uncommon with many family support programs. Voluntary attendance often competes with many challenges for the mother's attention.

Attendance obviously is a key factor in the project having a chance to impact the participant. As critical are how deeply the ideas and methods of the project have settled into the ongoing consciousness and interactions between participant and FSP staff in all aspects of their work together. But most important is how the ideas and activities reside in the hearts, minds, and hands of the mothers at home with their families.

At week three's meeting, a mother popped in for just a few minutes, but she was eager to share how she had used the objects with her 1 year old son. She talked about each activity mentioned in the book about the rattle. She said, " Devon is so smart, he can do all of these." She asked if she could introduce how to use the basket animals before she left the meeting.

The variation of attendance at the three sessions in which the questionnaire was administrated accounts for the variation in the sample (N) at Pre, End, and Post.

Facilitators categorized each mother's attendance as: once or twice, sometimes, or always. They report:

	6 women attended once or twice
	15 women attended
sometimes	
	7 women attend always.

These attendance reports indicate that 79% of the enrolled parents attended at least half of all of the Learning Basket group meetings. The FSP Program Director indicates that although these numbers are not much different than other group services, the Learning Basket Groups appeared more cohesive.

Attitudes about Playing with Their Children

Attitude has a powerful influence on the playtime experiences that parents and children share. It provides the spirit. For young children play is primarily a social activity. Parents provide the most influential social relationships children have. Playtime first depends on how parents feel and what experiences, bias, and expectations they bring to playtime. It then depends on what kind of synchrony they have together, if they are in tune or out of tune while playing. Their attitude drives their ability.

During week five, a new program participant attended her first group's meeting. She arrived very late with her son. She said:

"I can't stand this little boy!" He insisted on staying with her throughout the session. She seemed to hear what was going on in the session and mellowed in her way of relating to him.

As the meetings continued and the discussions progressed, more and more parents expressed their attitudes which influence how they play with their children.

When Harriet arrived she chimed in responding to the question of feelings and extending her insight to the effect that responding to a child's feelings has on her entire life.

It is important for boys to play -with dolls. They will be caring for people. It is practice for them.

It's important for girls to play with cars. They will be driving cars.

I love to play with my baby. My baby loves to play with me, especially at night.

In a role play, the group enjoyed giving the "Bad Mom's" advice and responded with confidence to questions about the Stage 4 child. Hilary had some difference of opinion with the group about the "Bad Mom's" play behavior and dared to express her opinion. They were able to relate the role plays to long term consequences in a child's social behavior.

A mother mentioned that if a child doesn't mind you now, he won't mind you later.

Another mentioned that a child without a mother or father doesn't know who they are. 'A parent is important to a kid. ' She spoke of a "father figure"' and a "mother figure '. In the conversation we spoke of the possibility of friends and relative playing these roles.

At the debriefing, staff shared several of their observations. The group talked about why it is important to sit and play with children.

They used to think that just providing a toy is enough. Now they know it is good and even fun to play with their kids.

The parents were comfortable taking risks with each other. The group was a safe place. I certainly saw this in watching their eagerness to lead groups, but also in their wanting to learn how to use the toys differently.

The parents began to learn that it is ok to play with their children differently. Before they never could tolerate throwing blocks. Now it's ok.

Throughout the project, there were many clear indicators of the parent's positive attitudes. Their decision to initially volunteer for the program's services was based on their positive and hopeful attitudes. Their attendance and extent of participation are positive indicators as well. Most dramatic were the investments they made in the group process, with the activities, through home visiting, and in consistently playing with the Learning Basket objects with their children. This motivation was 100 % based on their ATTITUDE, positive attitude.

The instrument administered had 10 questions which were designed to survey the parent's attitudes about play. Throughout all three administrations of the survey, this section had the lowest average score. The Pre survey administered at the start of the first session resulted in a combined (all 10 questions) average score of 3.53. Only responses of 4 or 5 were considered, positive responses.

The End score showed an increase of .3 posted an average score of 3.83. Only the Post survey which had an increase of .37 scoring 4.2 had a combined average that was considered positive.

From Pre (3.53) to Post (4.2), this area had a considerable increase of .67. This was the largest gain in any of the three areas.

Items Concerning ATTITUDE about play
Pre, End, and Post

Item Number »	Pre	End	Change from Pre	Post	Change from End	Change from Pre
1	3.85	2.75	<1.1	1.53	<1.22	<2.63
2	3.38	2.67	<.71	4.73	>2.06	>1.35
4	4.69	4.25	<.44	4.67	>.42	<.02
6	3.85	4.42	>.57	4.6	>.18	>.75
8	3.38	4.17	>.79	4.67	>.5	>1.29
10	3.61	4.75	> 2.47	4.53	<.22	>.92
11	3.08	3.42	>.34	4.53	>1.11	>1.45
13	2	3.42	>1.42	4.2	>.78	>2.2
20	3.15	3.5	>.35	4.47	> .97	>1.32
26	4.33	4.92	>.59	4.07	<.85	<.26
Average	3.53	3.83	>.3	4.2	>.37	>.67

NOTE: 7 of me 10 (70%)
in this category- gained in
score from Pre to Post

Knowledge

Knowledge informs the process of change. The Learning Basket begins with one's own life experience and builds knowledge based on the group's ideas, discussions, and experiences. The understanding they develop is advanced by ongoing support and consistently being introduced to new challenges, new ideas and topics of discussion, and new objects to explore.

For learning to flourish, the participants must be involved and engaged. The Imaginal Education theory and whole person approach is accomplished by a group process 'based on learning from the

learners as well as teaching the learners. The group members sense of responsibility and ownership for

the Learning Basket Groups, and their addition of the Learning Basket into their home life, creates a

rich and fertile environment in which knowledge can grow.

The reports offered a view of the group members developing observational powers, and their abilities

to analyze situations and problem solve . They also illustrated members growing comfort with understanding developmental concepts and age appropriate expectations. These two parental traits

serve as life saving buffers from harm for children that too often are hurt by the hand of a frustrated

and angry person who can not understand and accept a child's developmental expectations.

The one parent who has five children reported during session three about their playtime between meetings:

She shared with us what she had used in the basket objects with her kids in the following ways:

- *her 5 month old baby responded to the rattle by looking in the direction of the noise*
- *her 7, 4, 2, and 1 year old all used it like a tambourine*
- *the older kids used the scarf, the rattle, and the colored balls to play with one another and the 2 and 4 year old seemed to enjoy playing catch together.*

Earlier she said that the 1 year old frequently hit the baby; the toys seemed to provide an alternative.

During the six weeks of groups, many parents spoke about what they were learning.

Before I read this book, I thought it was silly to play with my children.

Now I know that it is important to play. It gives me a way to relate to my child.

My two year old child, when left alone to play with the colored balls threw them around. It worked better to play with her.

The facilitators wrote about how they came to recognize the parents growth spurt in the area of acquired knowledge.

In the part of the meeting that focused on the icons in the activity book, the mothers many times responded with learned pat phrases: "five senses", "order and sequence", "developmental toy'....but they seemed to understand the meaning of these phrases.

FSP Staff recalled how much fun it was when parents and children started to experiment with the different objects and use the toys in different ways. Both really seemed to enjoy letting the objects turn into surprising instruments of their imagination. Both ICA and FSP staff universally expressed admiration for the seriousness with which the mothers

prepared and became involved. They had great motivation to learn.

The survey had 10 questions which were designed to survey the parents knowledge about play.

The

Pre survey administered at the start of the first session resulted in a combined (all 10 questions) average score of 3.85. The End score showed an increase of .643 with the score averaging 4.28.

At

the Post survey, the combined average score increased again, this time by decreased by .4, scoring an

average of 4.28.

From Pre (3.85) to Post (4.28), this area had strong increase of .4

Items Concerning KNOWLEDGE About Play
Comparison, Pre, End Surveys

Item Number	Pre	End	Change from Pre	Post	Change from Post	Change from Pre
3	4.69	4.33	<.36	4.6	>.27	<.09
7	4.38	3.92	<.47	4.7	>.75	>.29
9	3.92	4.5	>.58	4.7	>.17	>.75
14	4.38	4.92	>.54	4.7	<.25	>.29
15	3.76	4.33	>.57	4.7	>.4	>.97
16	2.69	3.33	>.64	4.3	>.94	>1.58
17	4.33	3.42	<.91	1.6	<1.82	<2.73
19	2.77	4.25	>1.48	4.4	>.15	>1.63
21	3.31	5	>1.69	4.1	<-.93	>.76
23	4.23	4.83	>.6	4.8	<.03	>.57
Average	3.85	4.28	>.43	4.3	>.03	>.4

NOTE: 8 of the 10 (80%) items
in this category gained in score from
Pre to Post

Behavior: Participation in Groups and Participation at Home

The Imaginal Education approach used in the Learning Basket Project is based on free and open communication around feelings, ideas, and experiences with play. The design and methodology of the project is derived from the ICA mission itself. It intends to be a catalyst of ongoing human development through participative approaches to individuals learning, leading, and changing. This is an instance where the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts. The more expansive the group participation, the greater the strength of the group process.

Each of the Learning Basket Group plans includes two discussions and activities designed to be parent led. The Narrative reports that 9 different women led either all or part of the parent led activities.

By all reports, this was one of the more dramatic and compelling outcomes of the project. Women practiced at home, came early to practice, and generally demonstrated strength and courage with their peers. They became comfortable enough with the ideas in the chapter to lead a responsive discussion that engaged many of the mothers in attendance. They not only had internalized concepts regarding relationships, play, and learning, but their leadership demonstrated they had successfully internalized the method of leading participatory group discussions.

At one session a mother led the conversation focused on creating a safe environment.

There was a great deal of participation which seemed to flow very naturally.

At another meeting. The presentation was given by the moms, although this was not our plan.

We began asking about the icons in the personal arena. They gave extended answers that included the importance of having a positive self image; the awareness of one's own body; the identity of person related to a family; and the importance of being aware of one's own feelings.

FSP staff were especially taken with the willingness parents demonstrated in leading discussions. They were moved by the self confidence they watched develop in group leaders. By the time the six sessions were over, they were discussing how to include program participants in leadership roles in the future.

When staff gathered for a debriefing with the evaluator, all six in attendance independently cited parent's participation as leaders as one of the most positive surprises coming out of the project. It was apparent that they had embraced the value of this strategy of working with families.

I was really impressed with the poise that several of the mothers developed in leading their peers in conversation and in making presentations to the group, even when strangers were visiting.

I loved seeing the involvement and courage the participants had to lead a Learning Basket Group.

The participants seemed to enjoy leading discussions and for the most part had planned everything out. Some even had notes!

Several staff suggested, when asked what would make the program stronger in the future, continued and increased parent involvement as leaders.

Like most hardy conversations, the group's responses to the pictures, trigger questions, objects and group interactions, naturally led to expanded discussing about feelings, experiences, questions and beliefs. The discussions were not just about play or learning, but about life.

The mother leading the discussion on nutrition was extremely engaging. It led to an extended conversation on breastfeeding.

One week, as one mother who was noticeably scared presented the objects, another decided to tease her. In spite of this as she presented the diversity dolls a very rich conversation about racism broke out. The moms mentioned that racism is learned and it is important for children to know children of all different races. They agreed the dolls would help.

The mothers were also excited about their role in the group meetings. They really enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity. They expressed great pride.

A mother says:

It makes me feel good to volunteer, it's not difficult, not boring. It's not just coming out of the house just for me and my daughter, its a way to support the group. I learned to stand up and learned how to lead the group.

Another says;

You loose fear by getting in front. I've lost timidity

During the period the groups were being held, home visitors began to bring discussions and playtime into their ongoing home visits. The FSP Program Director reports that the staff recognized this enhancement of their work as a natural extension of the Learning Basket Project, although not one planned when the project itself was planned. The continuity in services delivered at home and those conducted in group served to reinforce the messages and experiences the mothers were exposed to stemming from the Learning Basket.

At each group meeting parents would be asked to talk about their time playing with their children between meetings. The repetition of the process created an expectation that parents would be playing with the Learning Basket objects with their children. Furthermore it became part of the group process that parents would report and reflect on their activities with their children. The repeated expectations and subsequent behaviors began to create a pattern of both play and discussion. The more frequent and satisfying playtime becomes for parents and their children away from the group meetings and home visits, the more established it becomes in the families daily lifestyle. Eventually it becomes natural and integral to the child's learning and growing, as well as the parents learning and growing.

As the sessions continued, the mothers became more outspoken both about their questions, experiences, and understanding related to playtime with their children.

*How do you let a child experiment with play? My little boy makes a mess in the kitchen.
He likes to get into everything.*

The most difficult thing is to create time for play during the day.

It is important to take time with kids. Have patience, Let them have time, and find your own ways.

I've learned how to take time with him. Before I took all the time for me.

At one meeting, the group brainstormed together a list of "What We can Do To help A Child Play"

- 1) Create ways for a child to play with you during your work.*
- 2) Create opportunities to show the child how to use toys.*
- 3) Make sure the child can reach the toys.*
- 4) Boys can learn from dolls: girls can learn from trucks*
- 5) Always tell the child he is important.*

At the debriefing, staff shared their observations concerning how family's playtime was being influenced and gradually being transformed.

The mothers seemed to be more accepting of the importance of play. They look excited when they see their children playing.

During a visit, even when all of the child's other toys are cleaned up and put away, the learning basket was out.

Parents were able to make the jump from using toys in the basket to things at home that they can turn into a toy.

Parents also talked about the importance of what they learned.

I never imagined there were so many possibilities for toys. Now I know how to look at toys.

Now I see everything as something I can play with, even simple objects.

My son was premature. He was behind. I learned how to use toys to help him learn.

I've learned the many ways to use simple things for learning.

As a mother I've learned a great deal.

From the narrative reports, in all but three of the possible eight meetings, several parents discussed what objects their children played with, how they played with them, and how they enjoyed them. Of the 18 different objects available in the Learning Basic, 14 were mentioned as being played with between weeks. All of them by several mothers.

This type of participation on the part of the mothers can build lasting patterns of positive communication and behaviors with their children. The parents emotional and attentive availability for their child, the sense of being in tune, establishes the environment for secure emotional relationships. These relationships bring stimulation which promotes brain development and they bring experiences which teach about relationships. Over time, the relationships bring opportunity and activities which promote communicative, cognitive, and physical development.

The indication that parents are actively engaged in playtime with their children would be expected to have a positive effect on promoting language development.

Staff of the FSP conduct Denver Developmental Screening Tests (DDST) as part of their ongoing program services. The DDST looks at four different developmental domains; personal/social, fine motor, language, and large motor. The screening is scored to identify if children are able to demonstrate abilities to accomplish various developmental challenges within appropriate age ranges. The DDST is administered in the child's primary language.

Eighteen different DDSTs were submitted for review. Eight of these were of four different children at two different times. A review of the DDSTs does provide one stark impression. Among the eighteen reviewed, 14 different individual items resulted in a cautionary score. That is, the screened child was unable to accomplish a task that at least 75% of children the same age are able to complete. Of the 14 items indicating caution, 10 of the cautionary items are found in the language domain. This suggests that language is the single most challenging area of development for this small group.

This is not surprising. It is common in prevention programs such as the FSP that language is an area of concern. In part this is due to the emotional and participatory availability of the parent for the child.

Parents who enter prevention programs often have so many relationship and life stressors that their availability is sometimes compromised. Language development is contingent on consistent experiences that build successful communication and language with the primary care provider. These broadly include being engaged with each other, providing contingent responses to each other, and talking with each other.

An additional factor that might slow down language acquisition is this small sample represents a large number of children who are bilingual. In the first three years of life, it is not uncommon for some children who are hearing two languages to lag a bit behind mono lingual children. This is especially true around the initial emergence of language. Bilingual children generally demonstrate proficiency of their primary language within developmental expectations in the second three years of their lives.

The continuation of playtime activities shared between parents and children, especially if it includes an emphasis on their communication and shared language, enhances the opportunity for children's language to grow and develop.

The survey's 10 questions related to playtime behaviors scored highest at all three times of administration. This suggests that the mothers who participated in the Learning Basket Project came motivated and already involved with their children in a positive manner. The Post average score of 4.24 was a slight decrease of .29 from the score at End. This suggests a slight decrease of playtime behaviors and experiences.

Scores for behavior had the least change from Pre (4.06) to Post (4.24), an increase of .18.

Items concerning BEHAVIOR toward play
Comparison, Pre, End Surveys

Item Number	Pre	End	Change From Pre	Post	Change From End	Change From Pre
5	4.69	3.92	<.77	4.53	>.61	<.16
12	2.07	2.42	<-.35	1.67	<.75	> .4
18	4.00	4.83	>.83	4.67	<.16	>.67
22	4.38	4.92	>.54	4.8	<.12	>.42
24	4.38	4.58	>.20	4.6	>.02	>.22
25	3.31	4.92	>.58	4.73	<.19	>1.42
27	4.25	4.83	<.91	3.2	<1.63	<1.05
28	4.54	4.92	>.38	4.53	<.39	> .01
29	4.38	5.00	>.62	4.8	<.02	>.42
30	4.61	5.00	>.39	4.87	<-.13	>.26
Average	4.06	4.53	>.47	4.24	<.29	>.18

NOTE: 8 of the 10 (80%) items
in this category gained in score from
Pre to Post

POSITIVE RESPONSES: Score of 4 or 5

Item Number	Pre N=13	End N=12	Post N=15
1	7	7	
2	8	5	15
3	11	10	15
4	13	9	15
5	13	10	15
6	10	12	15
7	11	9	15
8	8	10	15
9	9	12	15
10	9	12	15
11	5	8	15
12	2	4	1
13	2	7	13
14	11	12	15
15	9	10	15
16	3	6	14
17	11	7	1
18	10	12	15
19	4	10	15
20	7	7	15
21	6	12	12
22	10	12	15

23	10	12	15
24	10	11	15
25	7	12	15
26	10	12	15
27	9	12	8
28	12	12	15
29	11	12	15
30	11	12	15
Total Pos. response of more than 50% of N	24	27	26
% Pos. response of more than 50% of N	80%	90%	87%

ICA/HACC, FSP: Parent - Child Play Questionnaire

For each- question, write the number that most closely states your opinion about each question.

1. Don't agree at all 2. Somewhat disagree 3. Don't know 4. Somewhat agree 5. Completely agree

1. ___ Adults know better than a baby how to play.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

2. ___ Because babies can't talk, it is not important to talk with them while playing.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

3. ___ Children explore toys with all five- of their senses: seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

4. ___ Play helps a child learn how to socialize with people.

1 2 3 4

5

T:

5. ___ One of a parent's jobs is making sure the child can easily reach, and work with the toys they are playing with.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

6. ___ Toys should be used in only one way in order for a child to learn from it.

1 2 3 4

5

T:

7. ___ A child can understand words and directions before they can speak.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

8. ___ Certain toys are better for boys than for girls.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

9. ___ Babies and children benefit from hearing books read to them, even when they don't understand the words.

1 2 3 4 5

T

10. ___ Playing helps, a child learn how to solve problems.

1 2 3 4 5

T

11. ___ Playing, even as an infant, helps a child learn to read.

1 2 3 4 5

T

12. ___ Children are always ready to play.

1 2 3 4 5

T

13. ___ Most toys have a right and wrong way for play.

1 2 3 4 5

T

H. ___ For the first six months of life, babies usually just explore toys by holding, looking at, banging, shaking, and mouthing.

1 2 3 4 5

T

15. ___ Babies aren't able to let parents know what toys and games they like until they can talk.

1 2 3 4 5

T

16. ___ Children are usually around two years old when they begin to play with dolls as if they were people.

1 2 3 4 5

T

17. ___ Babies and toddlers play in the same way.

1 2 3 4 5

T

18. ___ Play happens only at playtime.

1 2 3 4 5

T

19. ___ There are many safe objects around the house and in the kitchen, that are fun and educational for children to play with, even though they are not toys.

1 2 3 4 5

T

20. ___ A child's feelings of fear or failure, at playing could keep them from playing.

1 2 3 4 5

T

21. ___ In order for children to learn, they have to use toys in the right way.

1 2 3 4 5

T

22. ___ Parents, are able to understand when their child wants to stop playing a certain way,

or with a certain *toy* even before the infant can sneak.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

23. ____ By watching a child at play, a parent can become, aware of what a child knows.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

24. ____ Learning new games and playing together is easier when parents and children sit face to face.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

25. ____ Children aren't able to let their parents know how they like to be played with, or what toys they like, until they can speak.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

26. ____ If parents have fun playing with their children, it is easier for children to have fun playing.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

27. ____ Before teaching a child a new game or how to play with a new toy, a parent has to get and keep their child's interest.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

28. ____ Often children learn how to do new things and play with new toys by watching their parents do it.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

29. ____ Parents help children learn" by letting children practice with new ways of playing.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

30. ____ Praising both a child's effort and success at play is important.

1 2 3 4 5

T:

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Finally, in writing this report, I was inspired by the personal courage and determination I came to witness in the lives of the participating mothers. They epitomized motherhood, challenging and giving of themselves, in the best interests of their babies.

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Outcome-Based Evaluation of the *Learning Basket* ®Programs in Brennemann and Brentano Public Schools in Chicago

Introduction:

As a means of encouraging pre-literacy and welcoming potentially isolated families into the school environment, four pilot series of *Learning Basket* sessions were offered to parents of infants and toddlers in two public schools in Chicago. The *Learning Basket* is a learning system for infants and toddlers and their caregivers which helps to nurture literacy with both young children and adults. The system includes a handwoven basket containing learning objects, an activity book and a literacy manual. These materials are combined with presentations on child development and parenting issues using an interactive teaching strategy and offered to parents in a series of group sessions.

The series of 8 sessions were offered to parents at Brennemann School in the Uptown Neighborhood during the Fall of 2002 and another series of 8 sessions was offered in the Spring of 2003. The same series was offered to parents at Brentano School in Logan Square during both the Fall of 2003 and the Spring of 2004. The series of sessions was facilitated by *Learning Basket* Facilitators and Parent Mentors trained by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), a national not-for-profit organization. The series of sessions in both schools were funded by the Polk Bros Foundation as part of their mandate to develop Full Service Schools.

Projected Program Outcomes:

1. The parents who participate in this program will attend other programs being offered by the schools, thereby increasing their involvement in the program offerings of the school. In doing so they will become more involved in the education of their children.
2. Parents will come to understand the learning potential of their young children under three years old and they will understand the role of play in nurturing this learning potential.
3. Parents will actively encourage learning with their infants and toddlers by engaging them in play activities appropriate to nurturing emergent literacy.
4. Parents will demonstrate leadership capacities within the parenting sessions, and will increase their capacity to express their thoughts and enter into dialogue with their peers.
5. The program will be able to be sustained by parents and school personnel and will be linked structurally with the State Pre-K program in each school.

Results:

Outcome #1: The parents who participate in this program will attend other programs being offered by the schools.

Pre-sessions Behavior

At both Brennemann and Brentano Schools the parents who were recruited to participate in the series of *Learning Basket* sessions were those who were already involved in many activities in the schools. The Community Development Liaisons from community organizations collaborating with each of the schools had been asked to recruit the most difficult-to-reach families. But because these Liaisons were in a transitional mode, this recruitment did not happen. At Brennemann the Liaison from The Organization of the Northeast (ONE) helped to set up the program, but then left for graduate school, and she was not replaced. At Brentano the Liaison from the Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) was shouldering the responsibility of two staff members and was unable to devote special attention to recruitment of the *Learning Basket* program.

Post-sessions Behavior

As a result of the *Learning Basket* sessions in both schools, the parents who participated formed a weekly habit of spending at least two hours at the school for the period of 3 months in which the *Learning Basket* sessions were offered. At Brentano this meeting rhythm helped inaugurate the use of the Parent Activity Center, which had recently been established in a refurbished field house. At Brennemann the sessions were held in the Teachers' Lounge, which also doubled as the Teachers' Lunch Room. The multiple use of this space seemed to create tension for teachers as well as parents.

Other than establishing this weekly pattern of meeting on the school premises, the *Learning Basket* sessions did not increase the participation of the parents in other activities offered by the school.

Recommendations for the Future

As a result of the experience at both Brentano and Brennemann Schools, we recommend that an agreement be made between ICA and the community

development agency that collaborates with the school. This agreement needs to include funded time for the Community Development Liaison to work with Parent Mentors to actively recruit the most difficult-to-reach and most isolated parents who have siblings who are infants and toddlers.

Outcome #2: Parents will come to understand the learning potential of their young children under three years old and they will understand the role of play in nurturing this learning potential.

Pre-sessions Knowledge and Behavior

In the Brennemann School group of parents who participated in the Fall session, 40% of the participants understood the value of play in nurturing the learning potential of their young children. In the Spring session, the percentage of participating parents who expressed this knowledge was 30%. At Brentano School, 20% of the groups of parents participating in the Fall sessions and 30% of those participating in the Spring series of sessions held this understanding. These figures are based on the results of pre-session interviews and on observation notes made by the Learning Basket facilitators watching parents interacting with their children during a formal play time.

Post-sessions Results:

Based on pre and post-sessions interviews, the notes that parents made on the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets and observations of the *Learning Basket* Session Facilitators of parent-child interaction during formal and informal play times, the following conclusions can be drawn. At Brennemann School, as a result of participating in the series of 8 *Learning Basket* sessions in the Fall, 80% of the parents demonstrated an awareness of the importance of play in nurturing a young child's learning potential. The percentage of parents demonstrating this understanding in the Spring group at Brennemann was 90%. At Brentano School, 80% of parents demonstrated knowledge of the importance of play in learning after the series of 8 sessions held in the Fall; and 90% demonstrated that awareness as a result of participating in the series of 8 sessions in the Spring.

Outcome #3: Parents will actively encourage learning with their infants and toddlers by engaging them in play activities appropriate to nurturing emergent literacy.

Pre-Sessions Behavior

Based on pre-sessions interviews and observation notes made by *Learning Basket* facilitators watching parents interacting in play with their young

children, 30% of the parents enrolled in the *Learning Basket* sessions offered in the Fall at Brennemann School were able to creatively engage their children in skill-building activities that nurtured emergent literacy. When asked to name activities that might nurture literacy with infants and toddlers, only 30% of the parents talked about activities other than reading to their children. These parents mentioned the importance of knowing the difference between left and right and the importance of talking with your child as an intelligent person. At the same school in the Spring, only 20% demonstrated the awareness that one nurtures the development of literacy in playful activities with infants and toddlers. In Brentano, the pre-sessions results were similar. In the group of parents enrolled in the Fall sessions, 20% demonstrated an awareness of activities that nurture literacy with infants and toddlers; while in the Spring 30% demonstrated this awareness.

Post-Sessions Results

At Brennemann School, as a result of participating in a series of 8 *Learning Basket* sessions, 90% of the parents who attended 6 to 8 sessions demonstrated the ability to play with their young children in ways that strengthened their eye-hand coordination, their left-right orientation, their ability to recognize patterns, to sort and describe quantities, and to recognize and use language. At the end of the Spring series of sessions, 90% of the parents who attended 6 to 8 sessions did the same.

At Brentano School, where all of the parents participating in both the Fall and Spring sessions spoke to their children in Spanish, there were similar results. Ninety per cent of the participants in the Fall session who attended 6 to 8 sessions demonstrated the ability to engage their young children in purposeful play. They were able to describe what their children were learning as they engaged in play activities. In guided conversations they related how the abilities to sort objects and to recognize patterns, as well as to recognize and use language would lead to the ability to do math and to read. In the Spring series of sessions at Brentano, 90% of the parents who participated in 6 to 8 sessions were able to do the same.

Outcome #4: Parents will demonstrate leadership capacities within the parenting sessions, and will increase their capacity to express their thoughts and enter into dialogue with their peers.

Pre-sessions Behavior

Through interviews and guided conversations, *Learning Basket* facilitators learned that none of the parents enrolled in the Fall sessions at

Brennemann School had ever led a parents' group. The same was true of the parents participating in the Spring series of sessions at Brennemann and in the Fall and Spring series at Brentano.

Post-sessions Behavior

After 4 *Learning Basket* sessions during the Fall and Spring *Learning Basket* sessions at Brennemann, parents were asked to volunteer to lead games, guide conversations and to present the *Learning Basket* objects using the *Play to Learn* activity book. Eighty per cent of the group volunteered for these roles in both the Fall and Spring series. One of the parents volunteered to dedicate three days of her time to participate in the *Learning Basket* Practitioners' Course, and afterward helped a *Learning Basket* facilitator guide all of the sessions in the Spring series.

At Brentano School, two of the Parent Mentors attended the *Learning Basket* Practitioners' Course before helping to launch the *Learning Basket* series in the Fall. One of these Parent Mentors was re-assigned by the school to help out with another program; but the other parent helped to guide each session. For the first 4 sessions, this Parent Mentor played a minor role; but in sessions 5-8 she assumed responsibility for leading games, orchestrating role plays, guiding conversations and presenting learning objects using the *Play to Learn* activity book. She also engaged the other parents in volunteering to assume responsibility for helping to guide the sessions. Ninety per cent of the parents volunteered to help guide the sessions. Two parents volunteered to make handwork objects from the *Learning Basket* for other members of the group.

Before launching the Spring sessions at Brentano an additional parent took the *Learning Basket* Practitioners' Course. She teamed with the parent who had been trained but later reassigned to lead the Spring series of sessions. The two Parent Mentors were coached in program preparation by a *Learning Basket* facilitator. Ninety per cent of the participating parents volunteered to help guide the sessions.

Outcome #5: The program will be able to be sustained by parents and school personnel and will be linked structurally with the State Pre-K program in each school.

Pre and Post-sessions Modes of Operation

Prior to hosting the *Learning Basket* sessions, at both Brennemann and Brentano Schools, the administrations of each school had hosted programs designed to enrich the schools as Community Learning Centers. Both administrations welcomed the *Learning Basket* sessions as an additional

resource being offered by a collaborating organization. But both schools lacked the infrastructure to be able to actively link this offering to the on-going program of the school.

At Brennaman the woman assigned by the Principal to be the Parent Coordinator resisted taking a responsibility in addition to her on-going responsibilities of checking attendance and coordinating bus schedules. She was willing to set out coffee, but was un-willing to attend the *Learning Basket* sessions and to engage in learning with the parents.

At Brentano the Parent Mentor program provided small stipends to Parent Mentors who helped guide the *Learning Basket* sessions. This structure and incentive helped provide stability and consistency to the delivery of the sessions. But the Community Development Liaison, who volunteered to help link the *Learning Basket* program to the State Pre-K program was not able to give time and energy to this effort. Because of time and staffing constraints the State Pre-K teachers at Brentano were unable to attend the *Learning Basket* Practitioners' Course.

Recommendations

Based on the experience in both Brennemann and Brentano Schools, we have found that the following elements are necessary to enable the program to be sustainable within the public school structure:

1. A supervised and funded Parent Mentor program. This program enables parents to grow in their leadership abilities, and provides a means by which parents can receive a small stipend in exchange for the time and talent that they invest in leading the program.
2. An active Parent Coordinator who has a mandate to reach out to hard-to-reach parents through personal contact and encouragement. Funds to support the time and effort that is necessary to reach out to isolated parents.
3. An introduction of the *Learning Basket* program materials and learning philosophy to the State Pre-K teachers in the host school.
- 4 .Scholarships for Parent Mentors to attend the *Learning Basket* Practitioners' Course.
5. Multi-year funding that makes possible the adoption of the *Learning Basket* program as an effective means of nurturing literacy and learning of infants and toddlers and their parents, while linking those parents to the school community.

Evaluation of the Use of the *Learning Basket* in Modoc County

Background

In October of 2003, at the request of the Early Head Start program in Modoc County, California, two staff from the Institute of Cultural Affairs provided training to Early Head Start staff on the *Learning Basket* approach. The *Learning Basket* approach has been designed to support playful interactions between parents and their infants or toddlers, as well as to support literacy development and leadership skills in parents who might not otherwise have access to these supports. It is fully available in both Spanish and English.

Modoc Early Head Start employs 8.25 FTE family support workers in Tulelake and Alturas, and serves approximately 90 families, about 10% of whom are pregnant women. The population of Modoc County is largely rural, and family support staff deliver home visits across a wide geographic area. From the Tulelake office, approximately 40 families are served, and about 90% of these are Hispanic. From the Alturas office, about 50 families are served, and approximately 30% of these are Hispanic, or use Spanish as home language. Across both sites most families are two parent families. Most families across both sites work at seasonal agricultural jobs, domestic jobs, and/or part time service work.

From January through May of 2004, staff of the Modoc Early Head Start implemented the Learning Basket approach with the families they serve. The *Learning Baskets* and supporting materials were carried to home visits by family support staff who had been trained in the *Learning Basket* approach the previous October. Each family was asked to complete (with or without the assistance of their family support worker) a form called 'Today's Play' at the end of each session. This was a short form designed to capture the activities that had been accomplished at the visit. In addition, it provided an

opportunity for the parent (with support from the Early Head Start staff, if appropriate) to reflect on their child's play and on their role in it.

The 'Today's Play' reflection forms were returned to the Modoc Early Head Start office and forwarded to the offices of the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Chicago. The contents of these forms were entered into a database and forwarded to an evaluator for review. The results reported here are taken exclusively from the information on these forms.

Participants and Sessions

From January through May, **59 individual sessions of Learning Basket approach were held**. Four were held in January, 12 in February, 23 in March, 10 in April, and 5 in May. This pattern probably reflects the seasonal work pattern of the families served. Ages of participating children ranged from 8 months to 27 months.

The number of sessions for individual children varied from 1 to 6. **A total of 28 children and their parents were served**, and 17 of these children participated in one session only. Of the remaining children, one participated in 6 sessions, 2 participated in 5 sessions, 5 participated in 4 sessions, 3 participated in 2 sessions. This distribution is represented in the table below.

Number of sessions In which child participated	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number of children	17	3	0	5	2	1

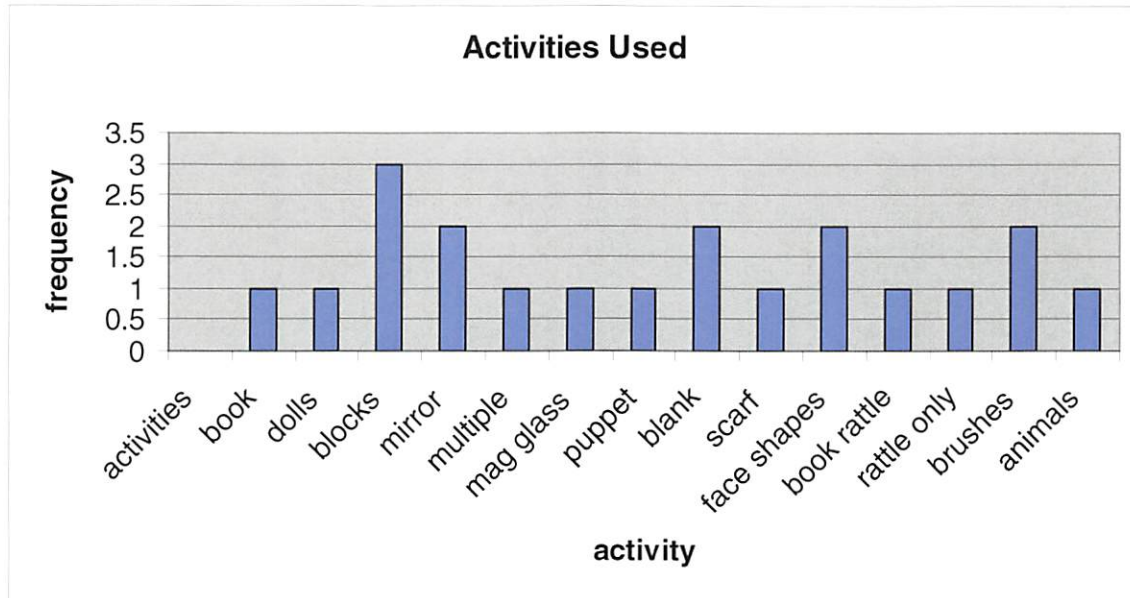
There is not clear information concerning why the number of children participating in one session only is large. It could be accounted for by their mobility and distance from the centers, frequency of visits, other matters such as health or nutrition that seemed more urgent to deal with on home visits, or a need for training follow up and support with the staff, who had been trained 3-4 months prior to initial implementation. There could be

other local influences that might be detected by a follow up conversation with staff and/or administration.

Today's Play

The form called 'Today's Play' was collected for these 59 visits. This form asks 5 questions designed to re-engage the parent with the events of the session, and to reflect on what they and their child might have learned through this play. It is assumed that this form is filled out frequently with the support of Early Head Start family support staff, and responses might reflect their supportive suggestions or help with recalling the events of the session.

The first question asked which activities were done. The chart below reflects the activities that were listed. The choices ranged over many of the available materials and activities. The blocks were used most frequently (3 times), followed by the mirror, blanket, face shapes, and brushes, each of which was listed 2 times. These probably reflect the young ages of most participants, and a more thorough exploration of the data could reveal those relationships. **From these data, however, perhaps the most interesting interpretation is that there were materials that appealed across the families and children, and that most of the materials were used by someone.**



The question relating to activities that were invented appears to have been challenging for these parents. Frequently it was left blank, or indicated something that was already suggested in the Play to Learn book. This could reflect some confusion (for both parents and family support staff) about what ‘invented’ refers to. In general, responses here reflected explorations by the child, such as ‘grabbing’, ‘putting the blocks inside the cart’. **These behaviors suggest that the children are using the materials in age-appropriate exploration and discovery play, and that families and staff support these behaviors, but might not recognize them as ‘inventive.’**

The responses to ‘my child liked it when’ are a collection of statements about playful activities or interactions or about specific materials that the child liked. A notable number of these statements reflected the parents’ awareness of the child’s joy at making things happen. For example:

she really liked throwing the balls into the air

he liked looking in the mirror and smiling at himself

he grabbed the rattle (or maraca) and made noise and laughed

Another interesting feature of a number of these statements was that they reflected the parents' awareness of the child's joy at successfully doing something that the parent had modeled. For example:

I taught him to put the block in the boat and then he did it himself.

We show how to put the block in the bottle then later he does it on his own.

In general, these responses indicate parents appreciation of their child's joy at discovery, making things happen, or successfully imitating a model. These are all features of early play that are recognized as important for health social, emotional, and cognitive development, and these materials appear to be supporting parents' awareness of these features of play, even in a very concrete way.

The responses to 'my child doesn't like it when' referred frequently to situations that were frustrating (the tower fell down) or when things were taken away or put away. An interesting pattern emerged of some children not liking certain textures or noises, or being fearful of 'the puppets'. **In general, these responses indicated recognition of the sources of frustration being demonstrated by their child.**

In response to 'this time my child learned' most parents circled icons from the 'Play to Learn' book, though, for a few sessions, these were left blank. Wherever there were icons circled, there were multiple icons circled.. Those circled most frequently related to recognizing language. Some parents (or family support staff?) might have misunderstood the instructions for this question, as a number of parents indicated a whole domain, or developmental topic, such as social or cognitive. **It is clear from the responses, however, that parents could identify areas of development that had been touched by the activities of the session.**

The responses to 'something I learned or enjoyed in this session' fall generally into two categories. The first relates to statements that refer to a specific activity or material and seem to respond more the 'enjoy' part of the question. Some of these referred to things that the child enjoyed. For example:

Looking at herself in the mirror

He blows on the hand

Others referred to specific activities that the child had done, and that the parent had enjoyed:

Her looking at the book

He is interested in small things: dots

That she plays very well with the ball

The second category is more abstract, and seems to indicate a reflection on the whole experience:

That children learn everything that you teach them

There are different kinds of toys that the baby can use to learn

My son likes that I dedicate time to him

In reviewing these comments, it is difficult to know if they are spontaneous comments from the parents or have been suggested or prompted by the family support staff. To some extent it doesn't matter. Even if they are suggested, that can be viewed as a proper role of the support staff, and these are, then, excellent examples of staff scaffolding parents' learning regarding their child's play, and their role in it.

Summary

Between January and late May, 28 children and families who were enrolled in the Modoc, California, Early Head Start program, participated in 59 separate sessions of the Learning Basket approach. Each family completed (with or without support from the Early Head Start staff) a reflective form called 'Today's Play'. The responses on these forms indicate:

- that a wide range of materials were used
- that parents recognized and enjoyed their children's discovery play (although they might not have called it 'inventive')

- that parents could intuitively discern the important features of developmentally appropriate play activities that their children were enjoying, although they did not have the specific labels for these features
- that parents recognized the sources of their children's frustrations
- that parents could identify specific areas of learning that were influenced in these activities, and recognize words or icons that represented those areas
- that parents were able to identify their own learning in the experience, though some confused it with the learning of their child, and some identified their learning in terms of specific activities.

Cautions

Because there were differences in the number of sessions per participants, and presumably for staff as well, it is difficult to make any claims about the effect of the program. Decisions were also made to limit the paper burden on staff, parents, and program, which resulted in a small but reasonable amount of feedback. The extent to which staff supported parents in making their responses to the 'Today's Play' questions apparently varied, so it is not always clear what is the exact source of the response. A more detailed examination of the responses along with some interviews of staff could tease out some of these issues, if this is decided to be of interest either to the Early Head Start program or the Learning Basket staff. For those few participants for whom there were multiple sessions, some further exploration of those data could also yield more illumination regarding the effect of the program.

In general, the data available at this time indicate that the Learning Basket approach contributed to parents' awareness of the value of play for their child's development and of their role in play.

Helen Bair Heal, Ph.D.

Evaluator

July 30, 2004

**Outcome Evaluation on the Effect of the Series of Learning Basket Parenting
Sessions Offered at the Stockton Parent Child Center,
Autumn 2003 through Spring, 2004**

Introduction:

During the Autumn of 2003 and Winter and Spring of 2004, the Institute of Cultural Affairs facilitated a series of 16 parenting sessions with parents of infants and toddlers at the Stockton Parent-Child Center in the Uptown neighborhood of Chicago. These sessions used the *Learning Basket*® materials and teaching approach and engaged a core group of 12 parents in interactive learning sessions over a 6 month period. The data collection instruments for this outcome-based evaluation process were embedded in the delivery of the program and they included parents' comments in guided conversations, interviews and their written comments on the *Reflective Moments* feedback sheets and *Today's Play* journal sheets. In addition this evaluation is based on observation notes made by the *Learning Basket* facilitators who guided the sessions. This program was funded by the Illinois State Board of Education.

Program Goals:

The parenting program was designed around the following goals:

1. To increase the parents' knowledge in the following arenas:
 - 1) Child Growth and Development including pre-natal development
 - 2) Prenatal and postnatal care
 - 3) Childbirth and child care
 - 4) Parenting Skills
 - 5) Family Structure
 - 6) Family Relationships
 - 7) The Practical Means of Preventing Child Abuse
2. To engage in purposeful interactive play that will help prevent child abuse by strengthening emotional bonds and at the same time help nurture the development of emergent literacy.
3. To increase parents' knowledge of various resources and opportunities within the surrounding neighborhood that will enhance their parenting.
4. To increase the skills of the program staff of the Stockton Parent-Child Center through appropriate training.

Evaluation Narrative

Goal 1.1: To Increase Parents' Knowledge of Child Growth and Development

Pre-Session Knowledge and Behavior

Ninety-five per cent of parents attending the sessions focused on Child Growth and Development demonstrated a partial knowledge of the stages of development of a child. This was demonstrated by filling out a chart noting what a child could do in each of the developmental stages. The parents' strongest competency was in describing physical development. The parents were most deficient in describing cognitive development.

Post-Session Results:

In the parents' comments in the *Reflective Moments* feed-back sheets 85% of the parents increased their understanding of age-appropriate behavior of children in play. This increase was also obvious in the notations that they made in the *Today's Play* parents' journal sheets. Eighty-five percent of the participants demonstrated a knowledge of age-appropriate expectations during the designated play time in each session and in casual interactions with their children. Only two of the twelve participants continued to demand that their children perform tasks for which they were physically and mentally unprepared. One of these participants was sporadic in her attendance of the sessions. The other was able to describe age-appropriate expectations and demonstrate it during play time, but she failed to demonstrate it in daily interactions with her child.

Goal 1.2: To Increase Parents' Knowledge of Pre-Natal and Post-Natal Care

Pre-Session Knowledge and Behavior

In guided conversations focused on the subjects of pre-natal and post-natal care, parents demonstrated an awareness of the negative effects of alcohol and smoking on the development of the baby. However, 95% of the group was unaware of the importance of eating a balanced diet, and particularly the importance of calcium and folic acid in the development of the fetus.

Post-Session Results

As a result of participating in the sessions focused on pre and post-natal nutrition 95% of the participants could describe the role of nutrition in the development of the baby and

the role that calcium and folic acid play in the development of the baby and the well-being of the mother. They demonstrated this awareness in guided conversations on the role of nutrition at each stage of pregnancy and through role plays in which they described the importance of nutrition to their neighbors. Despite the awareness that they articulated about the role of nutrition in pregnancy, only one of the participating parents regularly chose a nutritious snack (fruit) during the sessions. Others chose cookies and coffee. Two mothers regularly fed their toddlers candy and cookies rather than fruit during the session breaks.

Goal 1.3: To Increase Parents' Knowledge of Child Birth and Child Care

Pre-Session Knowledge and Behavior

In interviews at the beginning of the sessions on childbirth and child care, 90% of the parents vividly recalled details of their own birthing experience, however they were unaware of emergency procedures employed to facilitate difficult births. They agreed that breast-feeding was important immediately after birth, but could not describe the specific benefits of breastfeeding to both baby and mother.

Post Session Results

As a result of participating in the sessions, 50% of the participants could describe two birthing situations that would require extraordinary procedures. They demonstrated this ability in small team presentations to the rest of the group. In a guided conversation focused on the pros and cons of breast-feeding, 95% of the participants could describe the specific benefits to both baby and mother. The negative aspects of breast-feeding were described as pain and inconvenience.

Goal 1.4: To Increase Parents' Knowledge of Parenting Skills to Nurture Learning

Pre-Session Knowledge and Behavior

At the beginning of the series of sessions 95% of the parents demonstrated the awareness that their children were active learners. They did this by describing learning activities that their children participated in daily. However, in practice, only 9% of the parents demonstrated an awareness of how to actively nurture learning through play. At the beginning of the series, 91% of the parents used toys and books to occupy and entertain their young children and to release time for parents to engage in what they were interested in (planning parties, doing crafts, engaging in adult conversation).

Post Session Results

All parents who participated in 10 of 16 sessions demonstrated the ability to use the activities described in the *Play to Learn* activity book appropriately with their children. In addition, 85% of those attending 10 of 16 sessions could describe 20 of the 25 multiple intelligences that form the developmental framework of the activity book. In the *Today's Play* parent journal sheets, 95% of the parents could describe what their children were learning as they participated in Play Time. Eighty-five percent of the participants demonstrated the ability to engage their children in play during casual interactive moments before and after the sessions and during break times. Two of the parents consistently ignored their children's needs outside of the formal Play Time.

Goal 1.5. and 1.6: To Increase Parents Knowledge of Family Structure and Family Relationships

Pre and Post-Session Demographics

Eighty-five per cent of the parents participating in this series of sessions came from two-parent families. Ten per cent have a grandparent or relative living in the home. Ten percent of the families have other children living in Mexico. Ninety-five percent practiced some customs rooted in their cultural heritage in their daily lives in the United States. Ninety-five percent of the families were dependent on only one income. In narratives all of the participants described their family relationships as amiable.

Post Session Results

In guided conversations, participants shared details of their family structure and experiences from their own childhoods. Eighty-five percent of the group openly shared stories and opinions around family patterns and their own family cultures in group conversations. After the first 3 sessions, 85% of the group demonstrated a pride in their humble up-bringing in economic poverty in the way that they described in these conversations the experience of their family of origin. All of the participants described the experience of loneliness in being isolated from extended family and the patterns that rehearsed their cultural values. Eighty-five percent of the participants expressed deep concern over the cultural definition of male and female roles that relegate the upbringing of children to the woman. This concern was voiced in a conversation following a role-play on role definition.

Goal 1.7: To Help Prevent Child Abuse while Nurturing Literacy

Pre-session Behavior

In observations of parent-child interactions by the Learning Basket Session Facilitators, 92% of the participants related to their young children passively. In guided conversations, they expressed the awareness that reading books to their children was

important, but under observation their reading was unanimated and did not actively involve the children. In playing with the objects of the *Learning Basket*, these same parents exhibited very short (less than 5 minutes') attention focused on their children's play. The parents did not talk with their children as they played with them. Consequently the children of all but 1 participant looked to the *Learning Basket Facilitators* and other children for attention and interaction. Ninety-five per cent of the children who ranged in age from 18 months through 3 years expressed themselves with limited vocabulary, and depended primarily on gestures to communicate their needs. In interaction with English-speaking teachers, the children demonstrated a comprehension of English. In interaction with their parents, they demonstrated a comprehension of Spanish. When the children spoke, they spoke Spanish.

Post-session Results

At the end of the series of *Learning Basket* sessions 100% of the parents could sustain interactive play with their children for 15 minutes. They requested that that portion of time in each session be devoted to play with the *Learning Basket* objects. Ninety-two per cent of the parents demonstrated the ability to re-direct their children's negative behavior through listening and looking for their needs, meeting those needs, and explaining their actions. In sessions devoted to finding ways to care for themselves in order to relieve tension in their homes, 80% of the parents could make a list of 5 actions or more that would be ways of caring for themselves. Ninety-two per cent of the children demonstrated the ability to play with very simple objects in repeated actions that deepened their pre-literacy skills. In addition, the children demonstrated an awareness of what was being demonstrated in the role plays for the parents, and on their own initiative regularly gathered with their parents for this portion of the lesson. The children also demonstrated an increased ability to play with one another, and using their imaginations, to invent play activity. They demonstrated confidence in drawing adults into their play. This ability for a two year old demonstrates advanced capacity across the 4 learning domains of Cognitive, Social, Personal and Imaginal. These domains form the framework for the *Learning Basket* approach.

Goals 2: To Help Prevent Child Abuse

Pre-Session Knowledge and Behavior

In guided conversations, all of the parents spoke of the importance of attending to the needs of their children. However, in observation, 95% of the parents neglected the needs of their young children in small, but important ways. For example, they would often leave the children bundled in coats and scarves in a very warm room, as the mothers first attended to their own need to drink coffee. Another practice was to pile their coats on a table designated for children's play. Another practice was to insist that a young child of 2 stop crying on demand.

Post-Session Results

Eighty-five percent of the parents who attended at least 10 of 16 sessions, demonstrated attentiveness to their children's needs and an ability to effectively calm their children's distress or anger. Two of the children consistently used screaming as a way of gaining attention. This behavior can indicate an inconsistency on the part of caregivers in anticipating and responding effectively to the child's needs. One of the parents of these children actively demonstrated trying to employ creative strategies for guiding the child's behavior. The other parent, in spite of actively participating in the learning sessions focused on guiding behavior, consistently resorted to demanding that the child calm himself. This behavior on the part of the parent indicates that additional modes of intervention such as directly calling her behavior into question be employed in the future. The need to establish a relationship of trust with this parent over the course of the 16 sessions discouraged the facilitators' intervening directly. However, they consulted with the program staff members who maintain the relationship, recommending that they intervene with a parent consultation.

Goal 3: To Increase Parents' Knowledge of Community Resources

Pre-Session Knowledge

Because the Parent-Child Center is designed to introduce parents to the resources of the neighborhood and the broader metropolitan community, 100% of the parents participated in trips to the neighborhood branch of the Public Library, and they were aware of the library as a valuable resource. They were also aware of the services of the neighborhood clinics, the location of parks and playgrounds, and classes available to them at the Community College located in the neighborhood.

Post-Session Knowledge and Behavior

As a result of a guided conversation which focused on the continuing education for themselves and their children, 100% of the parents who attended this session learned about the competitive application process for being accepted into the public magnet school kindergartens. Two of the parents enrolled for ESL classes at the Community College.

Goal 4: To Increase the Skills of Program Staff:

Pre-Session Behavior

The staff of the Parent-Child Center participates regularly in staff development designed to up-date their knowledge and skills in adult learning and child development.

Post-Session Behavior

One staff member and one parent participated in the three-day *Learning Basket* Practitioners' Course conducted by ICA. Both staff-member and parent engaged enthusiastically and competently with practitioners from child care agencies across the city. The training enhanced their understanding of the theory and learning strategy which forms the backbone of the *Learning Basket* approach.

Learning Basket at the Phoenix Library

Submitted to:

The Institute of Cultural Affairs

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Introduction

In the fall of 2004 and winter of 2005, a Learning Basket program was implemented at two branches, Palo Verde and Ocatillo, of the Phoenix Public Library. The funds which supported this program implementation are intended to support the prevention of child abuse. They are to be used to address those parenting practices which might prevent later abuse of children. This includes supporting parents in responding to their children with appropriate discipline, appropriate developmental expectations. In addition, it is anticipated that supportive networks will help parents with the tasks of parenting. These targeted outcomes are consistent with those of the Learning Basket program, and it was felt that the Learning Basket could be an effective way of addressing these goals. The Learning Basket is available in Spanish and English and this rendered it particularly appropriate for library outreach to the parent population in Phoenix for whom Spanish is their home or only language. These Learning Basket sessions were delivered with materials and facilitators using Spanish as the primary language.

Information was gathered regarding the effect of this participation on the parents through a questionnaire called “Reflective Moments”. The Learning Basket program has used this over 5 years in many implementation sites. It is designed to support the development of a reflective habit among parents while at the same time gathering information for the program for internal program improvement and internal and external reporting of the impact of the program on participants. Learning Basket has several other sources of data

collection, but, for this program, only the “Reflective Moments” process was used. This decision reflects a desire to gather some information from participants, while at the same time not overwhelming them with paper and pencil tasks. This was considered particularly important for a population for whom working with writing tasks might not be comfortable and where more intensive data collection could drive some participants away from the program. Therefore, the information reported here is derived from a short reflective time at the end of each session, during which parents are asked to respond to a short set of questions about their experience in the Learning Basket session. These were done in Spanish, and were translated into English for incorporation into this report. In reporting these data, each participant is given a site code and a letter code; no information is summarized by name. The information is reported by site (branch), followed by a general summary.

Palo Verde

Attendance: See attached table

(This is reported as attendance, although it is more accurate to say that it is reflective of the number of completed questionnaires that were received.)

A total of 44 parents participated across the fall and winter sessions. Of these, 10 participated for at least 6 sessions, and are indicated in the table with shaded attendance records. There were three parents who participated regularly across both fall and winter sessions: G for 8 sessions, N for 12 sessions, and H for 9 sessions.

The attendance pattern in general reflects the influence of holidays, and generally unpredictable schedules of parenting, but suggest persistence on the part of some parents

who showed up irregularly but demonstrated a pattern of returning. These patterns also suggest a core set of parents in attendance with new parents turning up and possibly returning very irregularly. In total, records indicate 136 person/sessions.

Reflective Moments

Two questions on the Reflective Moments questionnaire are particularly germane to the issue of supporting optimal development in the target population of this funding: families who might need support to prevent them from neglecting or abusing their children. These questions are: ‘what is something that I learned today?’ and ‘what is something that I will use with my child?’. The first question relates to the acquisition of new understandings regarding how children develop and how family members can support that, and the second relates to what they see as possible to do at home.

What Is Something That I Learned

Responses to the first question tended to cluster around the three general topics of attention, patience, and play.

Repeatedly, participants related that they had learned that children need attention in the form of time. Sometimes it was just a general statement that they learned that “ I have to pay more attention to my child” or that they “ learned how to spend more time with my child” or “it’s easy to give them more time.” Several times it was expressed as ‘making my child a priority’.

Having patience was a dominant theme for two of the sessions, and it appears that it was the topic of those sessions. Participants reports that they had learned ‘children need more patience’ but also expressed this in terms of needing to listen to their child, talk to their child more, and having more communication with their baby.

In terms of play, it was expressed sometimes in terms of having learned 'to play more with my child' and also frequently in terms of having learned 'how to play games,' and especially 'how to read to my child.' There were also a notable number of responses that related to learning that it was important to play, that babies learn through play and that it is OK to play with babies.

There were some slight difference between the fall and spring sessions in these responses, and these suggest that sessions were tailored or responsive to the participants who happened to be there on specific days. For example, responses in one winter session were mainly about brain development in the baby, and about the mind and health of the young child. Though some differences did appear, it is more striking that responses refer consistently to the several main topics mentioned above.

What I Will Use With My Child

Responses to this question tended to be more concrete than to the above question. That is, they referred more frequently to specific activities, such as playing games, using the scarf, playing with the balls, and singing or listening to music. The most prevalent activity that participants mentioned as something they will use at home was reading. This was expressed as 'read more', 'reading more books', 'reading to her', 'books', and 'to read to my daughter with joy'.

Even with a preponderance of these responses relating to specific games, materials, or activities, many still said that they would use more patience, more talk, more time, or more kindness with their children.

What I Liked

Although this question was not a focus of this report, it is noteworthy that many of these responses suggest that participants liked learning about their child, liked having the time to be with their child with other children and parents around, and liked the companionship of other parents and hearing other parents.

Ocatillo

Attendance: see attached table

At Ocatillo, a total of 29 persons attended over the fall and winter programs. Of these, nine attended more than six sessions. These attendance records are shaded on the accompanying table. One participant, L, attended all but one session, and another participant, S, attended 12 sessions. The attendance pattern is similar to Palo Verde in that many participants seem to have irregular attendance patterns, but different in that there seemed to be a larger percentage who came a greater number of times. In total, the data from Ocatillo represent 144 person/sessions. This represents a greater amount of participation from a small number of participants.

Reflective Moments

Participants at Ocatillo were asked to take a few moments to reflect on their experience in the session, just as the participants at Palo Verde were asked to do. These reflections were recorded on the 'Reflective Moments' questionnaire.

What Is Something That I Learned

Overall, this group's responses were dominated by reflecting on the importance of paying attention to what the child is doing, saying, and learning, and then responding positively.

In general, participant responses to this question at Ocatillo seem lengthier and more verbal than those at Palo Verde. They reflect the same general themes as those at Palo Verde (attention, patience, and play) but are expressed in somewhat deeper ways. For example, when reflecting that it is important to give attention to a child, there are many responses that simply refer to 'more attention', but there are also expressions such as 'and all these other things are not as important', or 'I have to have more nurturing time with my daughter', or 'to pay attention consistently', and also 'to pay attention and watch for signs of too much stimulation'. The importance of patience is sometimes stated as the need to watch the child's behavior and be more positive in responding, or the need to be more patient in teaching a child.

There seems to be a focus in these responses on the importance of play and on the importance of understanding development. Many responses indicate learning that 'it is important to play', and that 'the first three years are important' to the child, and that many 'things that appear simple and normal' are important to the child's development. Again, the importance of talking and reading to a very young child is mentioned frequently as something that has been learned.

What I Will Use With My Child

In reflecting on this question, participants mentioned categories of behavior such as patience, positive conversations, asking questions, having nurturing and positive time and observing their children. However, as at Palo Verde, most responses to this question tended to be more concrete than those to the above question. Specific activities such as singing and games are mentioned after just about every session. Specific materials such

as bubbles, balls, sock or glove puppets and especially things that might already be in the home, such as measuring cups, are listed as things that will be used for play.

Books are mentioned repeatedly. Reading or using books is mentioned by at least one participant in each session as something that will be used at home, and in most sessions this is mentioned by several or all participants. Several expressed that they will read, and it will be OK if the child does not want to listen to the whole book, and it is OK if it is hard for the child to be quiet.

What I Liked

Again, it is worth noting here that a significant number of participants expressed that they liked being with other parents. They liked the companionship, 'being with other women,' and 'learning that I am not the only one who gets impatient with my children'.

Summary

In the fall of 2004 and winter of 2005, a total of 73 individual parents attended Learning Basket sessions provided at the Ocatillo and Palo Verde branches of the Phoenix public library. Of those parents, 19 attended at least six sessions. At the end of each session, each parent was asked to reflect on his or her experience in the session, and to record their reflections on a questionnaire called 'Reflective Moments'. These responses suggest the impact of these sessions on the parents who attended.

Overall, parents expressed that they had learned the importance of parental attention and parental patience to healthy development of their children. In addition, they learned the importance of play to the development of young children. This indicates that they had learned what is important. When asked what they had learned that they would use at

home, they mentioned specific games, materials, and approaches to play. Here their responses suggest that they gained some understanding of how to be patient, pay attention, and play with their children.

These sessions were funded as a means to contribute to the prevention of child abuse, and as a way to reach out to parents who might otherwise not be served by the library system.

To support comfort and openness, Learning Basket does not collect extensive demographic information from participants, so it is not known specifically from what population these participants are drawn. The number of participants (all but two of whom wrote their responses in Spanish), is an indication of the extent to which the target population was engaged. The responses consistently suggest that the participants learned a great deal about nurturing interactions with their infants and toddlers. They learned the importance of positive engagement with their very young children, including the importance of talking and reading from a very early age. They also expressed a pleasure in the companionship and shared parenting experiences of the sessions. It is not possible from these data to know fully how these Learning Basket sessions have contributed to long term change in parenting practice in these participants, but the written results submitted by participants do suggest a deeper awareness of appropriate interactions and a growing awareness of what is developmentally appropriate to do with and expect from very young children.

Learning Basket Attendance: Ocatillo

Subject	10/5	10/12	10/19	10/26	11/02	11/9	11/16	11/23	11/30	12/7	2/1	2/8	2/15	2/22	3/1	3/8	3/22	3/29	4/12
A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X			X	X		
B	X													X					
C	X	X									X								
D	X		X		X	X	X		X	X									
F	X														X				
G	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X
N		X																	
E	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		
H	X		X	X		X	X					X						X	X
I		X	X												X				
J		X	X		X		X							X					
K		X			X										X				
L		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
M		X																	
O		X								X									
P			X	X															
Q			X	X	X	X	X			X									
R			X	X	X														
S				X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X			X
T				X			X			X	X		X				X		
U		X																	
V			X																
W					X								X					X	
X							X	X											
Y									X										
Z	X																		
Aa												X		X	X	X		X	X
Bb																		X	X
Cc																		X	X
29																			
Totals	9	12	12	9	10	8	11	4	7	9	6	5	7	7	6	4	4	7	7

Learning Basket Attendance: Palo Verde

Subject	10/05	10/12	10/19	10/26	11/02	11/09	11/16	11/23	12/07	1/13	1/20	1/24	1/27	2/03	2/10	2/17	2/24	3/03	3/10
A	X			X	X														
B	X	X	X	X		X										X		X	
C	X			X	X	X		X	X										
D	X	X	X																
F		X		X	X			X				X							
G		X			X		X					X	X				X	X	X
N				X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X				X	X	X
E								X	X										
H									X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X
I			X	X															
J			X			X													
K						X	X	X											
L						X		X											
M			X	X															
O																			
P	X							X											
Q																			
R					X			X								X			
S						X													
T						X													
U				X															
V		X																	
W					X	X							X				X		X
X	X																		
Y	X																		
Z	X																		
Aa	X																		
Bb	X										X								

Cc			X																
Subject	10/05	10/12	10/19	10/26	11/02	11/09	11/16	11/23	12/07	1/13	1/20	1/24	1/27	2/03	2/10	2/17	2/24	3/03	3/10
Dd										X	X		X		X		X	X	X
Gg										X	X			X	X		X	X	X
Ii										X									
Jj																			
Ff											X		X		X		X	X	X
Ee											X								
Hh												X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Kk													X						
Ll													X	X					
Mm														X	X	X	X	X	X
Oo														X	X				X
Pp														X		X			
Qq																X			
Ss																X	X	X	X
44																			
Total	10	5	6	8	7	9	3	8	4	4	6	5	8	7	7	8	10	10	11

**Learning Basket in the San Luis Valley of Colorado
2003-2005**

An evaluation report submitted by

P. Helen Heal, PhD

To the Early Childhood Council of San Luis Valley

January 20, 2006

INTRODUCTION

The San Luis Valley lies in south central Colorado, at an average elevation of 7600 feet. This roughly 150-mile-long by 45-mile-wide wishbone-shaped area, running north to south, is considered to be the world's largest alpine valley and the world's largest alpine agricultural area. It is a semi-arid desert valley floor ringed by the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains to the east and the San Juan Mountains to the west. Much of its population is related to seasonal agricultural work, which is mostly potato farming. Small towns, ranging in population from several hundred to several thousand to the eight thousand of Alamosa, are strung out for 45 miles from east to west along US highway 160, and 150 miles from north to south along US highway 285. The nearest population center (Pueblo, Colorado) is a city of 100,000 that is 120 miles to the northeast. The San Luis Valley is a quintessential rural area, with all the challenges that these areas present for employment opportunities, transportation, communication, social and professional isolation, and education.

Among professional organizations dedicated to the early care and education of young children in the valley is the Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley. This council is the result of an initiative in the state of Colorado called the Consolidated Child Care Pilots. The Colorado General Assembly established pilot programs in 1997 to 'meet needs for full-day full-year quality early childhood services as a partner to welfare reform'. The Early Childhood Council of the San Luis Valley is funded by the state of Colorado as one of the seventeen original pilot communities. State funds support professional staff and some direct services, with the local junior college as the fiscal agent. The council's role in the valley includes consolidating funding to create seamless services, supporting collaboration among service providers and supporting the success of low-income children and their working families. They also directly provide services such as helping families find child care and helping child care providers obtain and maintain child care licenses and meet licensing standards. The council also provides training opportunities for child care professionals in the valley, which helps achieve and maintain high quality care for the children.

In 2003, Learning Basket was asked by the council to provide training in the valley. The Learning Basket approach had been successfully implemented internationally and across the country in family groups to support parents in developmentally appropriate interactions with their children, in group settings such as center-based or home-based care, and on home visits. Because Learning Basket addresses basic developmental needs of young children and focuses on learning through interactions with adults, the council deemed that the Learning Basket approach and its availability in both Spanish and English would be appropriate for the varied needs of childcare professionals in the valley.

The first 3-day practitioner's training course was implemented in fall of 2003. Thirteen participants attended, representing 3 child-care centers, 1 elementary school, 1 home day care, and 1 local college faculty. A second practitioner's course was implemented in September of 2004, and was attended by 14 participants representing 6 child care centers, 2 elementary schools, 2 home child care, Even Start, and the council. There was some overlap in the centers represented in the 2003 and 2004 practitioner course. The course consisted of background information, introduction to the materials, role-play and practice. Each participant left with a full set of materials, and had had practice with their use.

Following these courses, it was expected that participants would be able to implement the Learning Basket approach in their early care and education settings. Continuing contact with participants by council staff have indicated less than expected implementation of the Learning Basket approach. Some of is attributable to the high turnover that is endemic to early education, but there was an interest in understanding what the barriers had been and what would support full implementation. To explore these questions, the council funded an evaluation. An evaluation process was designed by an evaluator who is familiar with the valley and the Learning Basket, but remains external to the council and the implementation of the Learning Basket.

METHODOLOGY

To retrieve information that would be accurate and in-depth across a small number of participants, an interview protocol was designed. The questions were intended to explore the barriers to implementation and to tease out possible supports to future

implementation, and to elicit objective responses as much as possible. A sample of participants was selected that would reflect a variety of early care and education positions in the community. A total of nine interviews were conducted during the week of December 12, 2005. Administrators, teachers, and home visitors were interviewed. (Specific positions are not given to protect anonymity.) A member of the council and a Learning Basket staff person conducted the interviews. The council member asked the interview questions and the Learning Basket person did the note taking. It was not logistically possible for an independent interviewer to conduct the interviews, but maintaining objective fidelity to the interview protocol was meant to increase accuracy and to inhibit acquiescence bias (the likelihood that interviewees will say what they think the interviewers want to hear) in responses.

RESULTS

The results of the interviews are described below. The questions are listed in the order in which they were asked, and a description of responses is given for each question. In compiling this information, some responses were omitted to eliminate information that could identify any one of the participants.

Evaluator's comments or recommendations follow some of the questions and follow the questions as a whole. These comments or recommendations are enclosed in shaded boxes.

1. What training (courses, workshops) have you participated in over the last two years?

Interviewees' responses indicated that the number of professional training events that they had attended ranged from 2 to 10. As would be expected from the range of professional positions represented, these were not all on the same topics. There were two trainings that most participants had attended, but other than all having been to the Learning Basket course, they had been learning many different things in their professional development.

2a. Thinking about the Learning Basket Practitioner's course, what do you remembered about the training?

All interviewees could respond with specific information or activities that they remembered from the training, even though it was one or two years ago.

They particularly remembered the interactive nature of the course, that it was fun, that they learned a lot, that they learned how to use the basket, and left with many new ideas. There is some indication that participants who have the least access to any training remember the most from their Learning Basket course and remembered how much they learned that they did not know before, such as the importance of talking to babies. One respondent commented that *'people who are generally quiet, like me, knew what was going on'*.

In general, it appears that this course provided new information and insights to all levels of participants, and that much is learned.

2b. Following the training, how do you remember feeling?

The interviewees remember many positive feelings such as being excited, pleased satisfied, eager to implement, and hopeful to bring these things to parents. Beyond this, the respondents indicated a mix of eagerness to implement and concern about ability to do so. They remember feeling enthusiasm for using the materials and the information, but some, especially the teachers and home visitors, were concerned about how they could actually accomplish the Learning Basket approach in their settings.

3. What did you think you would be able to implement as you returned to your work?

The interviewees' responses here indicated a range of settings to which they would return. Several hoped to use the Learning Basket in parent meetings or to connect with parents, especially those who speak Spanish. Several hoped to use it to support those whom they mentor. In these situations, one especially hoped to help caregivers understand *'the use of objects and the multiple use of objects'* with infants and toddlers. One mentioned intending to use the Learning Basket to expand home visits, and those

who worked in centers hoped to be able to use the toys and the papers (Play to Learn) in their daily activities.

It seems, then, that participants left the training with much new information, having learned a great deal through the interactive nature of the training, and with the intention of using what they had learned in their varied settings.

4. What have you been able to implement?

These results appeared notably different for those who used the materials in parent meetings or groups than they did for those who were implementing the approach in early care and education settings for the children. Implementation in the parent group settings appears to have happened with more regularity than the child-care homes or centers. Two staff from one program report: *'our parent activities have focused on Learning Basket. We have done three programs and average about 7 parents per 8-week program. Needier more unstable parents have had erratic attendance, but do come. We have made 12 baskets using materials given by other organizations and local quilt guild. We did the role plays and had fun.'*

[In a report to the Seabury Foundation (November 2005), who have partially funded the Learning Basket program in the valley, Learning Basket staff wrote the following about these parent meetings:

During these meetings parents were introduced to the importance of purposeful play in the development of a young child's potential to learn. In addition, through the literacy components of the sessions, parents were encouraged to voice their experiences and reflections and to engage in group conversations that deepened their capacity for reflective thinking and problem solving.

As a result of engaging in these meetings parents have been more active in their engagement in the life of the school. Those attending the sessions have attended other parent functions; have volunteered for responsibilities and have showed an active interest in their children's learning through participation in parent conferences. One father has volunteered to be on the School Improvement Team, and another parent has volunteered lead this team in recruiting other parents.

The *Learning Basket* work has catalyzed support beyond the school community by engaging a local quilt guild to make 12 stimulation quilts as well as blocks and crocheted animals to be

distributed as parts of the *Learning Baskets* which needy families earn through their participation in the parenting sessions.]

The implementation in child-care homes and/or centers appears to be more inconsistent and seems to be more challenging to implement than in parent meetings. Several of these practitioners report starting it and then not maintaining it or report that *'we have used it on and off.'* Some had trouble keeping the babies engaged. On the other hand, it also appears that the Learning Basket approach has sparked some good practice in general, such as *'I communicate with the children, especially about emotions. I let them handle the books more, and I have a box of toys for each age group.'*

Some centers have also used the materials in their contacts with parents, but not in parent meetings. Two reported that they had made take-home bags or packs for parents. At one center, *'we made take home packs for parents. We did 36 packets with activities and materials for a single age'*. Another reports that *'I use it on home visits. I work with the parent and child together and sometimes siblings get involved as well.'*

It appears that the Learning Basket approach has had an influence in the preparation of early care practitioners through the local junior college. (Those who attended the training and were interested were able to receive college credit for the training through Trinidad State Junior College.) In addition, two who were interviewed related their experiences of making baskets in their courses at the junior college and *'Then we use some of the activities and write our observations'*.

Recommendation

One observation from these results is that it seems harder for participants in the Learning Basket training in the San Luis Valley to learn how to implement it in a group care setting than to implement in parent groups. Consideration might be given to more time in the training or in some kind of specific follow up regarding implementing the activities for group settings.

5. What has helped you accomplish what you have accomplished?

These responses again varied with the role of the interviewee. Some mentioned their own internal resources, such as confidence and motivation, as key in their

accomplishments with the Learning Basket. In particular, those who work with parents or other staff mentioned some things that are based on their motivation, such as *'listening to teachers about what they need. Responding to parents who are leading full lives....no time for meetings. My own motivation, asking the question' how do we make this work'.* Or *'My own desire to want to make a difference', and 'I am motivated to get the parents involved'.* In addition, the Learning Basket approach was seen as a way to meet state expectations, such as *'In Colorado preschool programs there is an expectation that we are involving parents, providing support and this is a meaningful way to do this.....(it gives) more depth than meetings that are just presentations for parents, e.g. school nurse talking about nutrition.'*

Some mentioned the support that they derived from the materials, such as the documentation sheets, the books, and the parent curriculum. And several mentioned the adaptability of the approach and materials, so that they could be adapted to the needs of specific settings.

Having time to plan the work with parents was mentioned by one interviewee as being extremely helpful. The idea that sharing with other adults built confidence and lent support to their efforts was mentioned, as well, although not frequently. (Responses to other questions indicate that this did not happen very often.)

6. What has been a challenge?

These responses fell into several categories: time, other staff not knowing how to do it, not fully understanding how to engage the children in play, and change in the workplace.

The issue of inadequate time to reflect, plan and document one's work is unfortunately endemic to early care and education. These concerns were heard here, as well. Interviewees reported that *'I did all of the planning for the bags at home at night'* or *'I had to take Today's Play sheets home in order to do them'* or that *'finding time within the schedule'* was difficult. These are not unique to early care and education settings in the valley, and led one administrator to say that it had been a challenge to convince the teachers that this was *'not creating more work....just being accountable for what they are doing'*. One interviewee expressed a frustration with not having enough time by saying

'I am always thinking I could use this or that but I have so much stuff already, I need to sort it out'.

It also appears that some practitioners had trouble understanding how to engage infants and toddlers in play. It is not possible to tell from these interviews whether this related specifically to the materials and approach of the Learning Basket, or whether this is a concern in general. Several interviewees commented that *'babies can get bored in half an hour'* and that a challenge was *'getting the children interested (we did it with 2-3 kids in a group). Might work best with kids who are not mobile – they might benefit most.'*

Since, regrettably, this is a concern in the field it might not be something that Learning Basket could be expected to remedy. It might however be considered in the practitioner's course or in a follow-up day. If more intense consideration is given to implementing in groups, playful engagement of young children in learning would likely be addressed within that topic.

Several staff mentioned that they felt isolated if they were the only one in their center who had been trained. They found it hard to explain it to others, and *'when we have the basket out, the other staff don't know how to use it'.*

This might be particularly related to the rural and dispersed nature of these centers. They are small and far from one another, and there might not be many opportunities for peer learning or interaction, or a chance to see others do the work.

Change in the workplace and everyday stressors played their part in creating challenges to implementation, as they do everywhere. These include high turnover, moving a program to a new building, trying to find space for meetings, and dealing with the stresses of family loss or illness. These situations are frequently exacerbated in settings characterized by low employment pools, social isolation, and professional isolation as well.

Basket in parent groups and to some extent in home visits. It might feel that the implementation would be considered more of a success if there had been some measurable targets that had been met, both in terms of number of meetings and number of parents attending. It was interesting to read that Learning Basket had a role in increasing parent participation in education activities in general.

Given the geographic and demographic realities in the valley, however, it might be interesting and satisfying to set some realistic and well-planned target numbers for parent groups for the valley and count successes in relation to the extent to which those targets are met. Because actual attendance is difficult to predict, given the full lives of the parents in the valley, it might be helpful to target both number of groups and number of participants.

It seems apparent that those trying to implement the Learning Basket approach in early care and education group settings are struggling to make it happen. The last question in the interview asked respondents to suggest some ways in which they could have been, or could be, helped in implementing the Learning Basket approach. These suggestions will be described, and further recommendations for future action will be given.

8. What would have helped you or what would help you now to implement the ideas, skills, and practices from the Learning Basket training?

In general these responses fell into several categories; follow-up, working with peers who also have been trained, and now knowing some specific things that could be supported. It is notable that the first two categories are somewhat general, but the third is a specific list of practices with which they would now like support.

The responses regarding follow-up suggest that two kinds of follow-up would be helpful. The first kind would be a structured day to review and refresh the information, such as a *'refresher day to touch up'*. This *'needed to be more immediate'*, but might still be useful. The second kind is more of a coaching approach, and would involve some way of maintaining regular contact for support and information. These responses included:

'Someone checking in on a regular basis'

'Someone coming by would help'

'Coaching follow through would have been helpful'

'Having someone to talk to was a great help'

It would be reasonable to consider initiating both kinds of follow-up, and to consider them for both administrators and caregivers, with some separate content for each, perhaps in small groups. Coaching or consultations that are done on a regular basis would benefit from a specific structure centering on some need or identified problem, so that they are productive and action oriented. It would also be important, given the need expressed, to assure practitioners that they can be in touch regarding specific issues that need to be addressed quickly.

The value of having a colleague nearby who could assist, brainstorm, reflect and be a source of support was mentioned in responses to several questions. Here, it was quite specific:

'A one day course for administrators so that they can give support having a solid foundation of what the program is'

'If more centers were doing it we could use and watch each other; anyone would be able to use it'

'Having another staff person trained'

'Having a trained partner; I struggled to orient fellow staff members'

If there are any opportunities, given the distances in the valley, to implement any of the above follow-up in a peer situation, that might enhance the effectiveness of that follow-up. At any rate, given the geographical isolation of some of the homes and centers, it might be worthwhile to set up a 'buddy' system for those who have been trained and to monitor and support that system with structured time together, even if it is on a conference call, or internet communication if available.

The following list provides a set of specific issues that were identified by interviewees as ways in which they could be helped now to fully initiate or continue to implement the Learning Basket approach. The list represents quite a variety of needs, and again reflects the variety of settings in which the Learning Basket approach is being implemented in the valley.

'Learning to integrate it with what we are already doing'

'Some one to help make and find materials'

'Ways to help extend parent learning with Learning Basket'

'Scheduling time to do paper work'

'Children who were not interested: knowing how to change the activity'

'Spanish speaking staff – to overcome language barrier with mostly bilingual parents'

'Finding a separate place and time'

'Coordination with Head Start'

The above list provides a set of topics with which to begin any follow-up training or contact, whether with practitioners or administrators. These issues are not unique to the valley; they are common to much training that is given to early care and education practitioners. Practitioners do, however, require concrete and continuing support and scaffolding to overcome these challenges. That support could be provided by a peer, an administrator, or a council member, and succeeds when it is tailored to the particular situation of the practitioner. For example, learning to integrate Learning Basket with what is already going on would require some very specific problem solving relating to integration at a particular site and some continuing support to assure that practitioners could indeed perform that integration independently on a continuing basis. A particular challenge in the valley is organizing such support in the face of the extraordinary distances and travel time required, but that might also be why it would be important.

SUMMARY

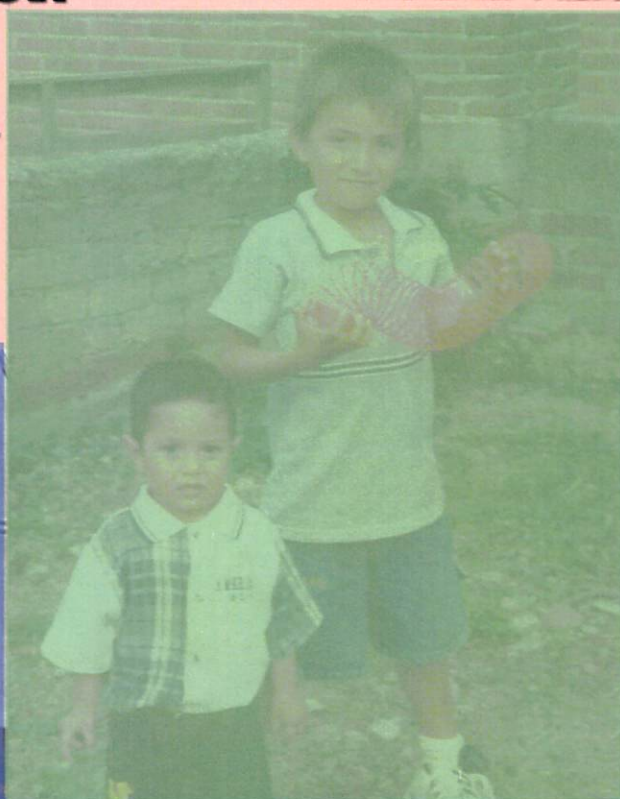
The San Luis Valley presents some unique challenges to the delivery of quality early care and education and parent support. The Learning Basket approach was initiated in the fall of 2003 as a means of supporting that quality care. There have indeed been some successes, and most are related to working with parents, either in parent meetings or in parent outreach. The interviews reviewed here suggest that the Learning Basket course was an effective training experience, but that some of the participants struggled with incorporating the materials and activities into their work. Some specific barriers emerged, and some specific remedies were suggested. These are respectfully submitted to those who might be able to carry them out.



Implementation of the
Learning Basket Approach
in Bucerias, Nayarit, Mexico
2002-2005

Review And Evaluation

Submitted to ICA-USA
By
P Helen Heal, PhD
April, 2006



Implementation of the Learning Basket© Approach in Bucerias, Nayarit, Mexico
2002 – 2005

Table of Contents

Community Context: Bucerias 2

The *Learning Basket* Approach 2

Evaluation Question 3

Entering the Community: 2001 4

Preparing the Path 5

Beginning the Implementation: 2002 6

Methodology for Reviewing “*Reflective Moments*” 9

Reflective Moments 2002: Practitioners Course 11

Staying in the Community: 2002, 2003 12

Re-entering the Community: 2003 14

Reflective Moments: 2003 15

Continuing: 2004 17

Reflective Moments 2004: Program 1 (n=29 records, 9 individuals) 18

Reflective Moments 2004: Program 2 (n=38 records, 9 individuals) 19

Reflective Moments 2004: Program 3 (n=29 records, 6 individuals) 19

Continuing: 2005 21

Reflective Moments 2005: Program 1 (n=41 records, 10 individuals) 22

Reflective Moments 2005: Program 2 (n=45 records, 14 individuals) 23

Some General Observations 24

Addressing The Evaluation Questions 26

Questions relating to international implementation: 26

Questions relating to participant outcomes that were targeted for this implementation: 28

Further Questions and Research 32

Community Context: Bucerias

The following report addresses the implementation and impact of the delivery of the ICA *Learning Basket Approach*® in the neighborhoods of a mid-sized community in west central Mexico, in the state of Nayarit. This community for many years was an unremarkable community of farmers, workers, and families. Recent nearby tourist development has created quickly expanding access to service work, transportation, and technology. The community has become a point of access for many into an expanding economy, including those newly arrived from more heavily indigenous populations and quite remote locations. This community represents previously unconnected communities that are entering a more globally driven economy. Families are facing new economic expectations for themselves and their children at the same time that educational levels and literacy rates are low among parents.

The Learning Basket Approach

Families and caregivers of young children, especially those in marginalized economic and/or cultural circumstances, often lack information about practical means for cultivating children's learning and literacy. The *Learning Basket Approach* was designed to address this gap.

The *Learning Basket Approach* is based on four main concepts:

1. Parents and Caregivers are babies' first teachers and can come to see themselves and their children as eager and enthusiastic learners.
2. Children learn through play.
3. The first three years are extremely important in a child's cognitive and emotional development.
4. Simple objects can be a teaching and a learning tool when used interactively.

The *Learning Basket Approach* uses practical tools, including an actual container (*Learning Basket*) holding 18 objects (such as a yarn ball or doll) and a *Play to Learn* activity book containing over 150 activities for parents and children to do together using the items in the basket. A *Parents are Teachers* literacy manual provides parenting education through multicultural line drawings that stimulate conversation, critical thinking and problem solving while enhancing vocabulary. These three tools, used together to support and equip parents/caregivers, nurture learning and brain development with infants and toddlers through purposeful play. This learning approach is introduced to a community or program by practitioners who have been trained through a *Practitioners' Course*, which introduces the essential materials and concepts through a series of modules. The course is intended to equip local participants to assume leadership and provide *Learning Basket*

group sessions for local parents, fellow teachers, or any other group who can benefit from the contents of the approach. A more detailed description of the approach can be found at www.ica-usa.

Evaluation Questions

Implementation of the *Learning Basket* Approach in the community described above provides the opportunity to explore several important questions for future work of the *Learning Basket* Project. The preparation of this report was guided by the following questions:

Questions relating to international implementation:

1. What supports implementation of *Learning Basket* Approach in international settings?
2. Are there features of this implementation that are salient for international implementation?
3. Do the data from this site indicate that the *Learning Basket* Approach can be successful across cultural and economic circumstances?

Questions relating to participant outcomes that were targeted for this implementation:

1. Does participation in the series of *Learning Basket* parenting sessions foster parent-child interactions of a type that are known to increase children's learning capacity?
2. Does participation in the series of *Learning Basket* parenting sessions foster confidence of parents that they are capable of influencing the learning potential of their children?



Entering the Community: 2001

The *Learning Basket* Approach was introduced into the community of Bucerias in Mexico through a network of already existing relationships. These relationships, developed over the previous 10-12 years, connected a small residential community of former ICA staff and friends about 30 kilometers north of Bucerias with several influential local citizens. One of these citizens arranged a demonstration of The *Learning Basket* Approach at the local health clinic in the spring of 2001, on a day when mothers and babies would be coming to the clinic and when the local representative of the Mexican Department of Infant and Family Care would be present. One bilingual *Learning Basket* staff from Chicago gave the demonstration, introduced and assisted by an ICA friend who had held a high government administrative post in the region. An additional *Learning Basket* friend who was also a member of the local ICA community attended as well. This demonstration attracted a number of mothers with their infants and toddlers, as well as the Doctora who directs the clinic.

Immediately following the demonstration, the local citizens wanted to develop a plan and timeline to bring the *Learning Basket* Project to their community. This timeline stretched over the next year and included some preliminary work in the fall and plans for a Practitioners' Course the following spring (2002). It was important in this planning to consider time needed for production and transport of materials, securing bilingual trainers who could travel to Mexico, gathering information about the community, developing funding sources, and coordinating with important local events and holidays.



Preparing the Path

For the implementation in Mexico, it was decided that the approach would target the following goal and objectives of the program at large:

Goal: Use parent-child interaction as a means of simultaneously enhancing the learning potential and literacy of infants, toddlers and their parents.

This is accomplished by meeting the following objectives:

1. Teach parent practices that nurture children's learning potential.
2. Assist non-literate parents to feel confident that they can teach their children.
3. Use a parent's interest in her child and concern for being a good parent to motivate learning.
4. Build upon and enhance existing skills in both adults and the children.

Developing Local Practitioners

Using program materials and an informal review of information gathered in this interviewing process, staff designed a weeklong Practitioners' Course. The intent of the training was two-fold:

1. To introduce the participants, who were parents, grandmothers and aunts of infants and toddlers, to the immense learning potential of young children and how they might support that potential by using the *Learning Basket*.
2. To support some of the participants to take on the role of Promoter of *Learning Basket* sessions with their neighbors.

Local contacts also committed to making or otherwise providing the contents for 10 *Learning Baskets* and engaging their friends and family members in the effort. These baskets would become demonstration baskets for the future health promoters, who could use them to help other parents make their own baskets. Friends of ICA who were familiar with the community in Mexico committed to raising funds for materials and for the fees and transportation for a team of trainers. Local ICA friends offered housing for training staff and setup.

In consultation with local contacts (a local civic leader and lead health promoter at the health clinic), specific dates and time were set for the Practitioners' Course, which would be held one week in March, 2002. There would be 5 two-hour sessions conducted Monday through Friday from 4:30 until 6:30. delivered entirely in Spanish. This was a different model than previous delivery of the Practitioners'

Course, but was designed with local circumstances in mind: weather, work routines in the community, and family routines such as mealtime and school schedules for older children.

A team was then assembled to deliver the course. Some of the team supported their own travel, program funds supported ICA staff, and donors funded materials and other travel and expenses. Local friends of ICA provided on-site housing. The full team included one bilingual ICA staff, two bilingual *Learning Basket* trainers and nurses from Chicago, and two ICA friends from Champaign, IL. In addition, two university students joined the team. Both had strong relationships to members of the ICA community nearby: one was a Mexican citizen doing graduate study in early childhood education in the USA at the time, and the other was a local citizen who had just finished studying in the USA. The local civic leader and a health professional, the representative of the Department of Infants and Families, served as a link to the community by joining the team daily and providing their home as a place for nightly debriefings.

Lessons Learned

What was in place or put in place that supported the initial phases of implementation?

- ICA staff and friends provided support with time, housing and money.
- Locally residing ICA friends connected to area influential citizens.
- Content, schedule, and materials were tailored to local circumstances.
- Local friends were recruited to provide participants, venues and materials.



Beginning the Implementation: 2002

The Practitioners' Course was delivered from March 11 through March 15, 2002. The class provided a group of local women with the practices and materials of the *Learning Basket* Approach and, hopefully, would yield several group leaders (practitioners) in their own neighborhoods. In this way, the expectation was that the *Learning Basket* could become embedded in the local community of parents.

A group of area women attended and brought their children with them to the training. Several walked long distances with their infants and/or toddlers. Each day the ICA friends who accompanied the training team organized activities for the children, ranging in age from 5 months to 12 years old. Each day the group of children grew larger, from 5 children on Monday to almost 30 on Friday.

The major message of the daily sessions in the Practitioners' Course was that giving children attention through the medium of play nurtures their development as learners, and that parents can do this in simple ways with simple materials.

Participation is displayed in the following chart.

<i>Learning Basket Practitioners' Course</i> Bucerias, Mexico 2002						
		11-Mar	12-Mar	13-Mar	14-Mar	15-Mar
Participants (n=19)	Total sessions				No Data	
A	2	X		X		
B	2		X	X		
C	2	X		X		
D	4	X	X	X		X
E	4	X	X	X		X
F	2	X	X			
G	3	X	X	X		
H	3	X	X	X		
I	4	X	X	X		X
J	4	X	X	X		X
K	4	X	X	X		X
L	1					X
M	1					X
N	3	X	X			X
O	3	X	X	X		
P	1			X		
Q	1		X			
R	1		X			
S	1	X				
Total	46	13	13	12		8

As the chart indicates, a total of 19 women attended across the 5 days. Almost one third of these (6) came once and did not return. This was described by a local contact as typical of something new in the community and indicates curiosity but not immediate commitment. There were five women who came four days and four who came three days. By the last day, a core group had emerged, and all who attended four days were present at the last session. *Because there is no data for one of the days, it is not known if there were more in those categories or if some women came each of the five days.

A ceremony of closure on the last day of the training was held, attended by the local supporters and the Mayor's wife and entourage. This ritual was intended to give strength to local commitment for the program. However, at the staff debriefing following the ceremony, local supporters mentioned that several participants were not clear about the political implications of the attendance of the Mayor's wife. Because the Mayor's wife did attend, some participants asked how this program was related to the politics of the community.

From the above description of events, several lessons emerge.

Lessons Learned

What was in place or put in place that supported this phase of implementation?

- Accommodating all participants, even when it was possible that many would not turn out to be practitioners.
- Providing child care as a demonstration of the importance of a.) caring for children and b.) full attention of parents to the content of the course.
- Accepting that erratic attendance could produce a core group.

What were some challenges in this phase of the implementation?

- Political context in the community can intrude unintentionally on the participants' willingness to commit to the approach.
- Many participants came to one or two session and did not return.

Methodology for Reviewing *Reflective Moments*

Instrumentation

As part of the implementation, participants were required to fill out a short questionnaire called *Reflective Moments*. This questionnaire had been designed as part of a more comprehensive evaluation system for The *Learning Basket* Approach and had been collected in most other programs where the *Learning Basket* had been implemented. (A copy of the *Reflective Moments* recording sheet, as well as a description of the evaluation system is available in [Appendix A](#).) This simple questionnaire asks a set of questions that target intended outcomes of the *Learning Basket* Approach. These questions include probes for how the participants felt, what they learned, what they will use, when they felt confident, and what they liked. There were also some questions inserted that could give information back to the program about what might need to be changed or done differently. These last questions have not proved consistently fruitful and are currently undergoing some redesign.

Reflective Moments was designed to serve several purposes:

- First, it was intended to provide a model for reflection to the participants. Reflective practice in parenting has been associated with a habit of continually thinking about what is being done and thinking about what might be improved.
- Second, this reflection was also intended to provide information back to the program about what was happening to the participants and the extent to which participants were hearing and assimilating the information and messages of the sessions. The interest here was in finding the extent to which parent attitudes and/or behaviors might be changing in a direction more supportive of children's learning and brain development.

Rationale

In recent years, interventions aimed at affecting the learning potential of very young children have focused on parent behaviors. Evidence has mounted that changing parent behaviors is what will influence the child's learning potential. Lately, the variable of interest is no longer the parent or the child alone, but the interactive dyad. A model of understanding early learning and development called the "transactional" model (Sameroff & MacKenzie, 2003) has greatly influenced the way in which interventions are designed and assessed. The effectiveness of intervening in the interaction process as a learning context has been well documented. This model also has achieved a fit with current theory and practice about learning and

brain development in very young children. Recent advances in neurological imaging have enabled scientists to document the positive effects of rich interactive contexts on early brain development.

Reflective Moments was designed to capture the influence that *Learning Basket* parenting sessions might be having on the parent-child dyad and on the interactions occurring within that dyadic learning context. The belief is that affecting these interactions will create the conditions for increased learning and development of the child.

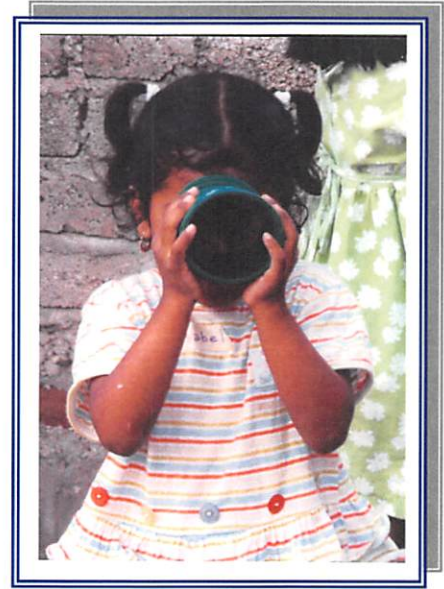
(See [Appendix B](#) for a commentary regarding the challenges of direct measurement of child change as an effect of intervention.)

Analysis

The *Learning Basket* implementation in Bucerias from 2002-2005 yielded **273 individual records, or *Reflective Moments*, from 87 individuals over 42 sessions**. These numbers represent 273 individual session attendances. Of the 87 individuals, 22 attended only once, which reduced the number of useful records to 251. These records form the bulk of the data available for analysis and subsequent interpretation in this report.

An initial visual inspection of the results of all 273 records indicated that three questions were consistently yielding responses that were neither informative nor discriminating of any characteristics of participants. First, the question regarding “what was difficult” was producing a response that was overwhelmingly “nothing”. This could indicate a response bias toward not wanting to mention anything that might indicate negative views of the program or practitioners. This is a common response bias where there is a perceived power differential between the respondent and the persons administering a questionnaire. A second question that did not yield any useful information asked about “how I felt today”. Participants could choose from a number of feeling states, and most chose several or all of those. This provided no information to discriminate between different responses. Finally, when asked “what would you like to change,” most again responded with “nothing”. There also seemed to be some confusion about the meaning of this question. Some took it to mean “what would you change about the course” and some took it to mean “what would you like to change about the way you are as a parent”. An additional question, “today in the group I talked” failed to yield information that discriminated participants. Most responded with “frequently” or “sometimes” all the time. This question is included in the analysis in only one situation.

All responses were entered into a database (FileMakerPro©). Some responses were left in Spanish, but a bilingual ICA staff translated most of the data into English as they were entered into the database. They could then be sorted and grouped by date and by participant for each question. Responses could then be compared across and between dates and participants. Using 251 records, 42 sessions, and 65 repeating participants, the numbers did not allow for valid or credible inferential statistical analysis of differences between or within dates or participants. All responses were assembled as text data and analyzed by simple visual inspection and content analysis.



Reflective Moments 2002: Practitioners' Course

Reflective Moments were filled out and collected at four of the five sessions of the Practitioners' Course in Bucerias in March of 2002. Responses to each question were organized in the database and then further sorted into two groups. One group (A) contains the responses for those who had attended only once or twice (10 participants) and the other (B) for those who had attended 3 or 4 times. (Because information was not collected for one of the sessions, these could represent participants who attended 4 or 5 times as well.) The purpose of sorting into these two groups was to see if there are differences between those who came and did not become engaged with the program and those who came and became practitioners.

One difference is in the extent to which they report that they spoke up in the sessions.

When responding to the question today in the group I talked, those who did not return responded “*frequently*” at more than double the rate of those who became practitioners. Out of 11 responses to that question among Group A (the one or two time attendees), 6 (54%) were “*frequently*”. In the other group, 6 out of 26 responses (23%) were “*frequently*”. This might indicate that those who did not come back felt that they had nothing to learn or that those who stayed were willing to listen and interested in listening. Listening might be as good an indicator as speaking to determine who will become engaged with the program and continue as a neighborhood practitioner.

Responses:

- When asked what they did with confidence, the first Group (A) left that response blank 5 times out of 14 possibilities, while Group B left only one of those responses blank out of 32 possibilities. Group B mentioned “*answering the questions*”, “*talking*”, “*giving an opinion*” most frequently.
- In general, the responses of all participants indicate that the intended lessons were transmitted in these sessions. In response to what I learned, several answered that they learned “*about brain development*”, but the most frequent responses indicated that they learned “*how to be patient*” and about the “*importance of giving time and attention*” to a young child.
- When asked what they will use, the most frequent response (9) was giving their child “*more time*”. They also mentioned “*being more patient*” and “*playing with objects*”.
- In responding to “what I liked” those who attended more frequently seemed particularly engaged with the role-play. Thirteen out of 32 possible responses directly mentioned “*the role-play or drama*”. For the other group, only 2 out of 14 possible responses referred to the role-play or drama.

Lessons Learned 2002

- Many participants will come one time only when a new program is introduced into a community.
- Participants especially enjoy and remember the role-play activities and retain the lessons that those role-plays reinforce.
- Those who see themselves as good listeners are as important (possibly more important) than those who see themselves as talkers.

Staying in the Community: 2002, 2003

Following the Practitioners’ Course, no immediate implementation occurred by those women who had attended. ICA staff and *Learning Basket* friends in the ICA community in Mexico were engaged in other work and concerns, but after a year with no implementation, it was decided to actively pursue the reasons behind the inactivity and to uncover what needed to be done to support the continuation of the program in Mexico. Several informal but intentional conversations were held by *Learning Basket* friends in Mexico with the local civic leaders who helped initiate the Practitioners’ Course and several women who had attended the course and shown serious interest in taking the approach to their neighborhoods. After some

apparently incomplete understandings and issues of personal dynamics were addressed, it seemed that the *Learning Basket* Approach could be implemented in this community.

Local Practitioners

The original core group of four women who attended the most sessions at the Practitioner's Course were contacted, then recruited to begin sessions in their neighborhoods.

The women included:

1. A woman, who is a health professional, has served as the local contact with the health clinic, and is known and respected in the community.
2. A young woman who has a small beauty shop in her living room. She is married, having small children.
3. An older woman with two helpful daughters who participated in preparation of the materials.
4. A young woman of very modest means with 2 small children. She is related to the health professional.

These four were involved in initial implementation in 2003 and some of 2004 as volunteers. The local ICA contact distributed the (donated) funds to these volunteers for materials. As time went by, the model changed, due to uncertainties about how the money was being used. Two women have continued the work in 2005 and 2006 and are paid the equivalent of \$10 USD per session as well as getting the money up front to buy materials.

Local Materials

During 2002 and 2003, one of the issues to be negotiated was the acquisition of the baskets. Each mother who attended the last, or celebration, session and had been attending regularly would receive a basket. As the program was implemented, in most programs, the mothers made everything for the basket that could be sewn. Participating parents brought sewing machines to the sessions and the work was done in the group sessions. The practitioners made all the additional purchases locally, including plastic baskets. Practitioners' expenses included gas for shopping, snacks, and all sewing materials and purchased materials for baskets. The local volunteer ICA contact has kept informal records of expenses and has calculated that total local expenses per participant (who received a basket) were about \$55 USD. Play to Learn and Parents Are Teachers books have been purchased through donated funds, carried to Mexico by ICA friends, and were not included in this calculation. This calculation also does not include start-up materials or initial training team expenses, which were probably \$5000-7000 USD, not including donated housing.

Lessons Learned 2002

- Immediate follow up with participants and local practitioners is needed to begin the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions in a community.
- It is helpful to have a local ICA contact to support ongoing implementation by managing funds for materials, keeping records, and meeting with local practitioners to schedule and plan ongoing sessions.

Re-entering the Community: 2003

Sessions began again in the fall of 2003. As the participation chart indicates, they took on something of a scattered nature. Over 5 sessions, 22 individual women attended. Of these, three (3) attended all 5 sessions. Three (3) others attended 3 or 4 sessions. Sixteen (16) attended once or twice

<p><i>Learning Basket Participation</i> <i>Bucerias, Mexico 2003</i></p>						
Participants (n= 22)	Totals	23-Oct	25-Oct	10-Nov	24-Nov	8-Dec
AA	5	X	X	X	X	X
BB	1	X				
C	3	X	X			X
CC	1	X				
DD	1	X				
EE	1		X			
F	2	X	X			
FF	1	X				
GG	1	X				
HH	1	X				
II	1			X		
JJ	1			X		
K	1		X			
KK	1			X		
LL	1			X		
T	5	X	X	X	X	X
U	3	X		X	X	
V	4	X		X	X	X
W	2			X	X	
X	2				X	X
Y	5	X	X	X	X	X
Z	2	X	X			
Total	45					
Total	45	14	8	10	7	6

Reflective Moments: 2003

Reflective Moments were completed at the end of each session. They were then entered into the same database as previously described. Because participation indicated such radically different attendance patterns, two groups of records were formed. Those who had attended three, four or five times were combined into Group A (n=6), and those who attended once or twice were combined into Group B (n=16).

The responses included:

- When responding to what I learned today, the second group (B) seemed to respond more frequently in ways that were somewhat global. There were several responses that mentioned social aspects of the sessions, such as *“being with my friends”* and *“being with others and enjoying the company”*. Only two responses specifically mentioned objects in the basket, such as the colored balls and the blocks. *“Play”* was mentioned only once.
- The group of participants who came more often (A) mentioned *“play”* specifically 5 times, as well as mentioning *“encouraging the baby”* and *“stimulating the baby”* and *“talking to the baby”*, which were not mentioned at all in the other group. Both groups seemed to have heard the message to *“be patient”* and *“pay attention”*.
- When asked, “what will you use at home” eight of the infrequent attendees mentioned *“objects in the basket.”* In Group A, one parent referred only to objects over five weeks of responding, while others mentioned *“patience”*, *“attention”*, *“more time”* and *“talking”*.
- Both groups liked conversations, *“talking,”* games, *“that everyone participated,”* talking about the children, talking and chatting with the facilitators. They especially liked *“explanations that we could understand”*, and this was mentioned frequently in both groups.
- What was done with confidence seemed to be expressed with individual variation. One parent who attended four times responded with a specific object each time. Another who attended five times responded with *“playing”* or *“reading”* each time. Out of a total of 45 responses, *“reading”* was the most frequently expressed activity that was done with confidence and was mentioned eight times by 5 different participants. *“Listening”* was the response five times, *“playing”* four times, *“talking”* four times, and *“giving my opinion”* three times.

Lessons Learned 2003

- Reinstating a program after 18 months brings many who are curious to the program and a few who will commit to all the sessions.
- Responses on “*Reflective Moments*” questionnaires seemed to vary more by individual than by frequency of attendance.
- The messages most heard had to do with exercising “patience” or giving a child more “attention”. The importance of play was learned but not expressed to a great extent.
- Confidence in “reading” seemed to be important to these participants.



Continuing: 2004

In early 2004, three series of parent sessions were scheduled.

Learning Basket Participation Bucerias, Mexico 2004																		
Participants (n=22)		5-Jan	12-Jan	19-Jan	26-Jan	2-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	3-Mar	10-Mar	24-Mar	31-Mar	5-May	12-May	19-May	9-Jun	23-Jun
AAA	4	X	X	X	X	X												
BBB	3			X	X	X												
CCC	4	X		X	X	X												
DDD	4			X	X	X												
EEE	3	X	X			X												
FFF	4	X		X	X	X												
GGG	1	X																
HHH	1			X														
MM	5	X	X	X	X	X												
Total	29																	
OO	3						X	X	X									
TT	4						X	X		X	X							
UU	6						X	X	X	X		X	X					
WW	6							X	X	X	X	X	X					
XX	7						X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
YY	5						X	X		X	X		X					
ZZ	7						X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
Total	38																	
NN	5													X	X	X	X	X
PP	5													X	X	X	X	X
QQ	5													X	X	X	X	X
RR	5													X	X	X	X	X
SS	4													X	X		X	X
VV	5													X	X	X	X	X
Total	29																	
Totals	96	6	3	7	6	7	6	7	5	6	5	4	5	6	6	5	6	6
		5-Jan	12-Jan	19-Jan	26-Jan	2-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	3-Mar	10-Mar	24-Mar	31-Mar	5-May	12-May	19-May	9-Jun	23-Jun

These three programs ran almost continuously from early January through June. The only break in the program sessions was in April and allowed for Holy Week, or Semana Santa, which is a major family and holiday time in Mexico. The first program included 5 sessions in January and early February. The second program ran for eight sessions from mid-February to late March, and the third program consisted of 5 sessions in May and June. (This scheduling took into account weather and local holidays. It is hard for participants to attend during either the rainy season, which runs from July to November, or during the very hot summer months of July and August.)

Participation at these 2004 sessions was far more stable than during the re-entry program of the previous fall of 2003. In 2004, the first program had 9 participants overall and only 2 of these came just one time. By the second program, there were 7 participants and the fewest number of sessions attended by any one participant was 3 out of a possible 7. The third program demonstrated strong stability in membership, with 6 participants who all came each of 5 times except for one who missed only a single session.

Reflective Moments 2004 Program 1 (n=29 records, 9 individuals)

In general, these responses are shorter and appear not as thoughtful as those from most of the other programs. This could reflect the importance and/or time given to them by the practitioner leading these sessions, or it could have been a group for whom reading and/or writing was difficult or not important.

Responses:

- Nine (9) out of 29 responses regarding what was done with confidence said “*reading*”. *Participating* and *speaking* accounted for 7 more responses.
- “Something I learned” included “*how to play*” 6 times, “*children learn in relationships*” 5 times, as well as “*paying attention*”, “*spending more time with my children*” and “*the development of the brain*”.
- In response to “what I will use at home” 9 said “*everything*”. Of the remaining responses, 5 included “*play*”, and several others mentioned *using particular objects* from the basket.
- When asked what they liked, most said “*everything*”, but one repeatedly responded with “*the instructors*” or “*the way they taught*”.

Reflective Moments 2004 Program 2 (n=38 records, 7 individuals)

This group overall seems more focused on the values of play and using the objects than previous groups. Again, this could reflect an emphasis given by the particular practitioner leading the sessions or some characteristic of the participants.

Responses:

- When responding to what they did with confidence, 11 responses were “play”. No other response appeared that number of times. An additional 7 responses related to “speaking” and “giving opinions” combined. For one participant, the response was “telling my experiences” for each session, and for another participant, the responses for each session were about “getting others to know her and know her name.”
- Responses to “what I learned” again strongly focused on “play” (7), with the additional strong appearance of “talking” (8) to my child. Most other responses scattered here, and included some that related to learning to “talk to my classmates”.
- The responses to “what I will use” again overwhelmingly targeted “play” (11) and “using the objects” (17). (For these responses only, some of these are duplicated count.)
- When asked what they liked, most said “everything”, but several specific references to the Parents Are Teachers readings and discussions appeared.

Reflective Moments 2004 Program 3 (n=29 records, 6 individuals)

Responses in this group seem to vary by individual more than by topic, and there seems a greater awareness of and response to process. This again might be because this was a small group with very stable attendance over a short time span.

Responses:

- One feature of these responses is that there were quite a few for what I did with difficulty, which is not the case for most of the other groups. In some interesting cases the responses for what I did with confidence are remarkably similar to those for what was done with difficulty. For example, for 4 of these participants, there are 9 instances where what was difficult (e.g. answering the question or reading) is what was done with confidence. There is either some misunderstanding of the questions, or, possibly (since it is a focus of the approach), there is an understanding that what is difficult can be overcome and done with confidence.

- In answering what I learned, the responses for these sessions seem to reflect a shift from more concrete responses (“*playing with the balls*”) in the early session to a more abstract concept in the last session (“*that parents are important to children*”). Because this is consistent among these participants, it looks like this was done as a group activity with facilitative leadership. This is a very acceptable and instructive way of doing these reflections but is more likely to carry meaning in a small stable group, such as this one was.
- When these participants were asked to record what I will use at home, 8 responded with “*play*”, 4 with “*talk*”, and the rest mentioned particular *objects* from the basket. Again, because there is such consistency, there is the appearance of a group process with facilitative leadership.
- In contrast to the previous 2004 programs, this group was quite verbal about what they liked, and their responses remained individualized over time. When asked to record what I liked, one participant focused on the “*objects*” and “*playing and learning*” exclusively. Another repeatedly mentioned “*participating*”. Another repeatedly mentioned the mutual respect among leaders and participants, such as “*that we taught each other without negative comments*”. In general among all participants, “*how things were explained*” was important and something they liked.

Lessons Learned 2004

- Intensity of the intervention (stable participation over several sessions close together in time) seems to produce more thoughtful and engaged participation and possibly deeper impacts.
- Participants can strongly engage with a particular theme.
- There might be a stronger focus on a certain theme in programs where attendance is more stable and closer together in time.
- There might be a stronger focus on certain themes because of the emphasis of a particular practitioner, the characteristics of the participants, or both.
- Developing and using reading skills (and the use of the Parents Are Teachers books) might be an important outcome of the sessions for some participants and could be an area where participant change is occurring.
- Individual impact can vary, and some individuals are reporting particular learning that looks important to them, such as “*telling my story*” (being heard), or that “*instruction is inclusive*” (feeling respected).
- A smaller more stable group with facilitative leadership seems more likely to interact as a supportive group and to be more engaged with the underlying processes that build confidence and skills.

Continuing: 2005

Following the next rainy season and winter holiday season, new sessions began in January 2005. Two programs were done in 2005. The first program consisted of nine sessions from early January to early February. These sessions were held once a week for two weeks and then twice a week until the last session in February. The second consisted of seven sessions from late April to early June. Participation is displayed below.

Learning Basket Participation Bucerias, Mexico 2005																
Participants (n=24)	Totals	Jan3	Jan13	Jan8	Jan20	Jan25	Jan27	Feb1	Feb3	Feb8	Ap22	A029	My13	My20	My29	Jn10
III	6		X		X	X		X	X	X						
JJJ	7		X	X		X	X	X	X	X						
KKK	7	X	X	X	X	X	X	X								
LLL	5	X		X	X	X	X									
MMM	4			X	X	X	X									
NNN	4				X	X	X		X							
OOO	4			X	X		X		X							
PP	1				X											
QQ	1		X													
TT	2							X		X						
Total	41															
RRR	4										X		X	X	X	
SSS	2													X		X
UUU	2											X	X			
VVV	3										X	X	X			
WWW	3												X		X	X
XXX	3										X	X				X
YYY	3												X	X		X
ZZZ	4												X	X	X	X
4A	4										X	X	X	X		
4B	3											X	X			X
4C	5										X	X	X	X		X
4D	2										X	X				
4E	4										X	X	X			X
4F	3											X	X	X		
Total	45															
Total	86	2	4	5	7	6	6	4	4	3	7	9	11	7	3	8

The first group consisted of 10 individuals who participated during the 9 sessions. Three of these 10 participated only once or twice. Three attended four times, and four attended 5, 6, or 7 times. Of the 10 total, then, 7 attended 4 or more times. No one attended every session.

The second group consisted of 14 individuals who participated during 6 sessions. In this group, 3 attended only 2 times and 6 attended 3 times. Of the 14 total participants, 11 attended at least half the sessions. No one attended all the sessions, and only one person attended 5 times.

Reflective Moments 2005 Program 1 (n=41 records, 10 individuals)

These responses in general reflect variation based on the individual. There also seems in this group to be an engagement with sewing and making play objects to use with their children.

Responses:

- When asked what they did with confidence, one participant mostly responded with “*pay attention*” and another with “*give an opinion*” or “*participating*”. Three participants responded almost entirely with *activities related to making materials*. Another said “*sharing my ideas*” for several sessions.
- In response to what was difficult, the most common response was “nothing”. Several did mention that “*participating*” and “*arriving on time*” were difficult, as was *learning new words*.
- Responding to what I learned, 12 responses mentioned “*how to play*”, and 17 mentioned *making and/or using specific objects* from the basket. Several also mentioned “*sewing*”.
- When responding to I will use, 40 of the 41 responses related to the objects in the basket. One responded “*toys and playing of all types*”.
- The responses to “what I liked” indicate that this group solidified through their work together. Eighteen (18) responses related to *enjoying the social activities, being with friends, “the sense of community in the group”*. The only individual who did not give a response of this nature was an individual who came only once.

Reflective Moments 2005: Program 2 (n=45 records, 14 individuals)

These responses seem to be distinguished again by individual variation. In addition, they seem to be more reflective and thorough than the previous group.

Responses:

- When asked what they did with confidence, one responded every time with “*give an opinion*”; another responded each time with “*reading, talking, telling*”, and another with “*participating*”. Here again, *reading* seems to be important; 5 individuals mentioned it.
- Responses to What I Learned were lengthy and more conceptual than usual. These participants mentioned “*play*” 6 times, while they talked about “*giving more time and attention*” 10 times. There were additional responses that related to “*better ways to be with my child*”.
- When responding to what I will use, almost half of these responses (19) again referred to the objects, but many (10) said they would “*give more time*”, “*be more patient*”.
- In response to what I liked, there was a mixture in this group. Some (6) responses referred to the “*connectedness and sharing in the group*”, some (5) referred to “*things were explained well*”, and some referred to “*participation*” in general. Others scattered across a number of other topics, such as “*learning about the development of young children.*”

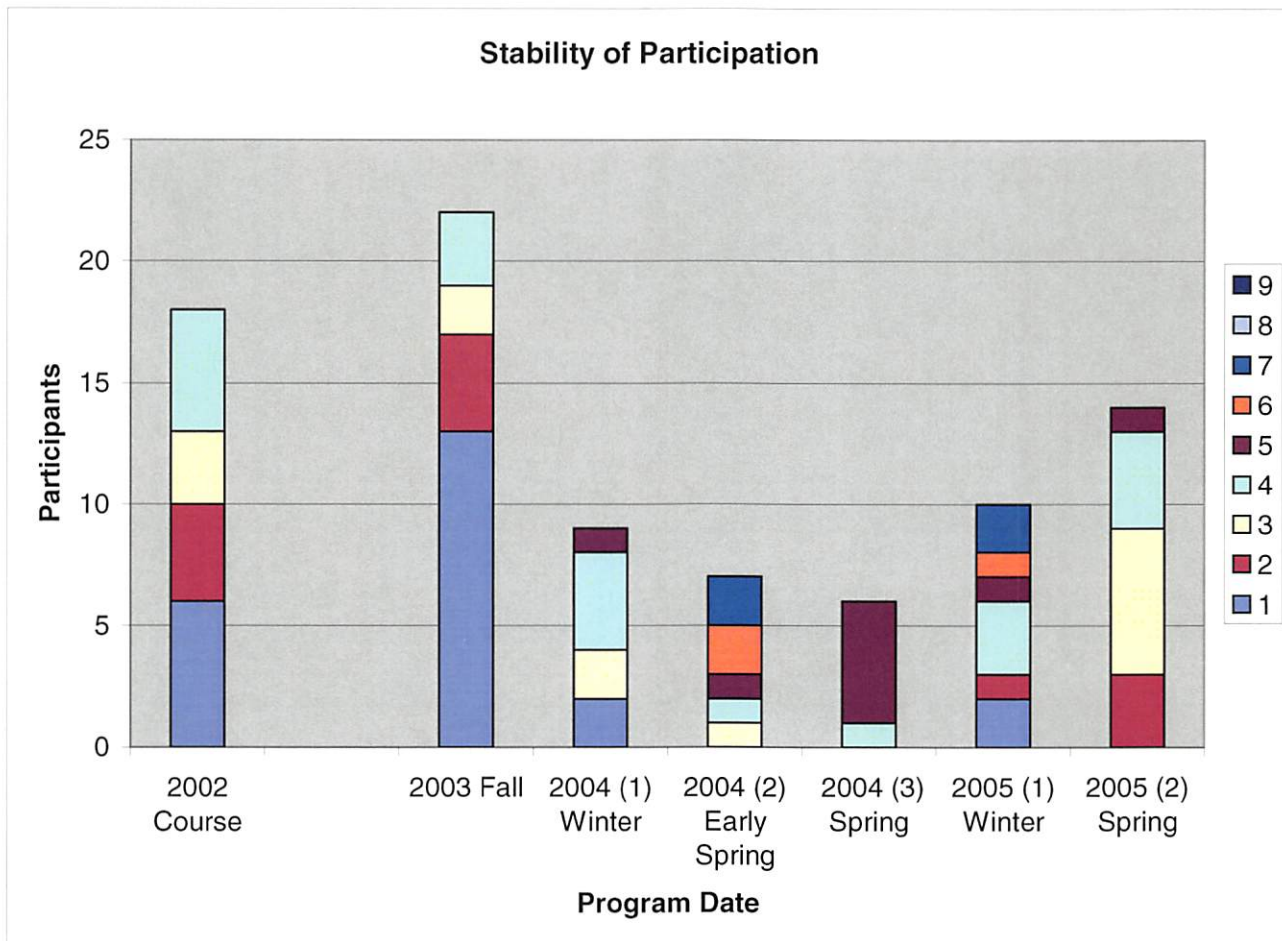
Lessons Learned 2005

- Focus on a common project (sewing objects for the baskets) provided a way to bring participants together and build social connections.
- Reading continues to be an activity that is notable to participants as they report doing it “*confidently*”.
- Some participants relate to the objects and others to the ideas of “*giving more time*” or “*being patient*”.

In summary, over four years and seven programs of implementation, participants reflected a variety of topics that they did with confidence, learned, will use at home, and liked. Nonetheless, there is consistency in the topics that were most frequently mentioned over the four years of implementation.

Some General Observations

This chart displays the stability of participation in the *Learning Basket* program in Bucerias from 2002-2005. The key on the right refers to the number of times that participants attended. For example, the blue that is the bottom color on four of the columns indicates the number of individuals who attended once.



♦ The pattern of blue suggests that, as noted earlier, when the *Learning Basket* Approach was introduced into the community, many came who did not return. Each reintroduction (winter of 2004 and winter of 2005) again brought some who were just curious or for some reason unable to commit to more intense attendance. Following these reintroduction sessions, attendance was more stable in subsequent programs in those same years.

♦ These patterns also can be used to examine the impact of intensity of delivery of the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions in Bucerias. Individuals who attended more frequently, and whose sessions were closer together in time can be said to have received more intense intervention. The patterns above indicate that the group that met in the spring of 2004 received the program with the greatest intensity. Their group also

met over a short time span. This is the group that was focused on “play” throughout most of their *Reflective Moments* responses and was notable for participants giving individual responses regarding what they liked.

♦ The group with the next most intense service delivery is the group from spring 2005. Even though there was more variation in the participation, most women were there for at least half the sessions, and there were none who did not come for at least two times. The responses of this group also displayed the tendency toward responses that varied between individuals but were consistent within individuals.

♦ The group that met in winter 2005 does not illustrate great intensity, but their responses indicate that these participants appreciated the socialization and mutual support that was present in the group. This group spent a great deal of their time making the objects for their baskets and expressed a joy in the work that was done together.

⚙ One caution in this interpretation is that we do not know who the practitioners were that led these groups. It is likely that the implementation became more complex (for example, more attentive to individual needs) or more focused on intended messages as practitioners became more practiced in leading groups.

Lessons Learned

- Participation patterns show a clear tendency to solidify as a program is repeated in a community.
- It is possible that greater intensity of program delivery allows a more concentrated focus, and, at the same time, more attention to individual experiences.
- It would be helpful to record who led sessions to see the emphasis of various practitioners. Names could be coded to protect identity.

Addressing The Evaluation Questions

This report was designed to address a set of evaluation questions of interest to the staff, organization, and funders who implement and support the work of ICA through the *Learning Basket* program. Many implications of the summaries and analyses presented above have been summarized as “Lessons Learned”. These do not necessarily respond directly to the questions of interest but could be useful as tools for continuous improvement and readjustment of the program. Some also are “lessons” of what participants have revealed of themselves or their participation.

The evaluation questions to be addressed directly were presented early in this report. They are repeated here and will be addressed in order.

The first set of questions that were to be addressed by this report related to international implementation of the *Learning Basket* Project. The consistent collection of *Reflective Moments* through the 2002 –2005 implementation enabled an examination of the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions in an international setting over an extended period of time. In addition, the availability of ICA staff living and visiting in the area, as well as local connections, enabled the collection of background and context information through on-site interviews. This allowed questions to be addressed about how international implementation could be put in place and provided information that could be useful for future work of the *Learning Basket* Project.

Questions Relating to International Implementation:

What supports implementation of the *Learning Basket* Approach in international settings?

In this setting it was important to have local contacts, ICA friends living near the target community, and *Learning Basket* friends who supported the initial implementation with time and funds. The local contact who arranged the original demonstration was critical. Following that, the support as well as interest of a local health professional, who arranged the Practitioners’ Course and continued as a practitioner herself, has kept the program going. Finally, a local ICA contact who manages funds, arranges the delivery of books, and maintains ongoing contact with the local practitioners is vital.

Are there features of this implementation that seem to be salient for international implementation?

An important lesson here is to be alert to local politics and to local interpersonal dynamics. For example, the visit by the Mayor's wife and entourage was intended by *Learning Basket* staff to lend credibility and importance to the initiation of the work, but it left some participants concerned that the work had the backing of a particular political party. The importance of immediate follow-up with local contacts was learned in Bucerias as well. The training team left Mexico immediately after the training, and there was no implementation of the *Learning Basket* program for almost another 18 months. It required several visits and conversations to uncover the interpersonal dynamics that were the barrier to moving forward. These had to be addressed with some delicacy and were accomplished through the good relationship between one of the local ICA community and one of the local contacts.

Another issue that has emerged is the purchase and production of materials for the baskets. Funds were not monitored closely at first and resulted in the discontinuation of two practitioners from the program. The local ICA contact recommends that local practitioners do the purchasing because they know where to get things, but funds for this part of the process needs to be managed carefully.

Do the data from this site indicate that *Learning Basket* Approach can be successful across cultural and economic circumstances?

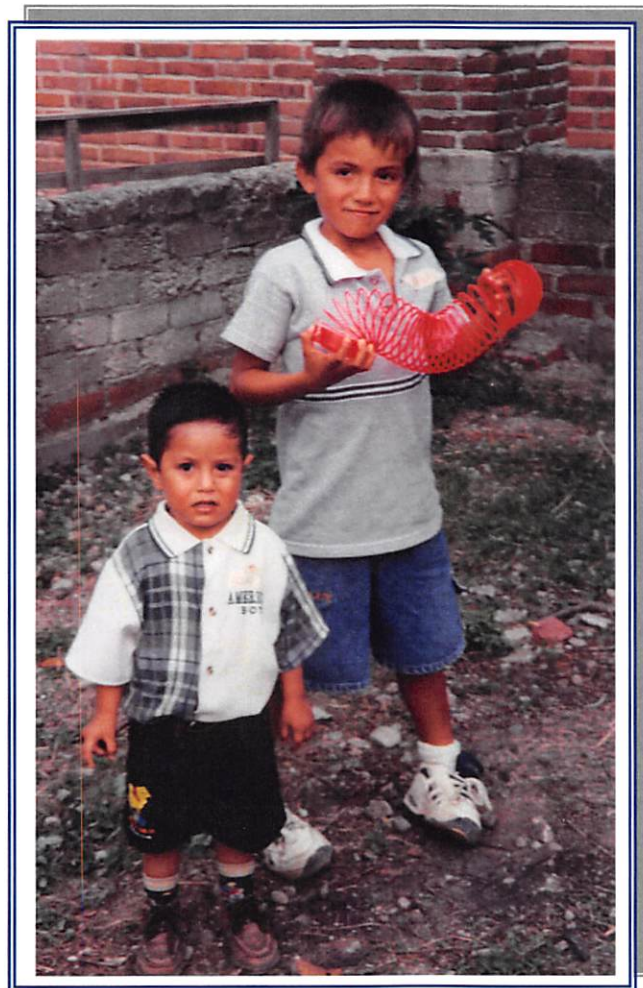
The data indicate that the program can be successfully implemented in an international setting that presents cultural and economic circumstances different from those in which most of the *Learning Basket* implementation has been done over the last seven years. With one or two notable exceptions, *Learning Basket* has been delivered in the United States. The settings of implementation have varied greatly, from Chicago to rural Colorado. The circumstances existing in Bucerias include a greater level of poverty (many homes have dirt floors, for example) and a different role for women, most of whom spend their day in simple household routines and childcare. Additionally, this program was implemented in homes in neighborhoods (barrios) and not in an institutional setting. Given all these conditions, the level of participation and enduring attraction of *Learning Basket* sessions over four years testify to the applicability of the program across cultures and economies.

Questions Relating to Participant Outcomes Targeted for this Implementation:

- Does participation in the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions foster parent-child interactions of a type that are known to increase children's learning capacity?
- Does participation in the *Learning Basket* foster confidence in parents that they are capable of influencing the learning potential of their children?

These questions will be addressed together, because the data relating to them were collected, summarized and analyzed together, and are conceptually hard to separate.

To examine these questions, a table was developed to summarize the topics and ideas that were most frequently mentioned in the text data that were analyzed. This table will be found below, and provides an overview of what the participants in all the sessions found to be memorable and salient.



Reflective Moments Summary

Most Frequently Mentioned Topics

Parenting Sessions	I did with confidence?	What I learned?	What I will use?	What I liked?
2002 (Practitioners Course) 46 records 19 individuals 5 sessions*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answer questions • Talk • Give opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give time and attention • Be patient • Brain development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more time • Be more patient • Play with objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role-play, drama • Participation
2003 (1) 45 records 23 individuals 5 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Listening • Playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Playing • Be patient • Pay attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be patient • Pay attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking • Everyone participated
2004 (1) 29 records 9 individuals 5 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Participating • Speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Importance of relationships • Paying attention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything • Play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything • The way they taught
2004 (2) 38 records 7 individuals 7 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Speak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Talking to child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Using the objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything
2004 (3) 29 records 6 individuals 5 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play with objects • Parents are important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play • Talking to my child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objects • Participating • Teaching each other
2005 (1) 41 records 10 individuals 9 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making materials • Paying attention (I) • Give opinion (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making/using objects • How to play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toys • Playing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being together • Community
2005 (2) 45 records 14 individuals 6 sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Give an opinion (I) • Participating (I) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give more time and attention • Play • Better ways to be with child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objects in the basket • Give more time • Be more patient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing in the group • Things explained well • Participation
* Records are from four sessions only	(I) =Individual repeatedly made this response			

One of the main objectives of the *Learning Basket* Approach is to instill confidence in parents that they can be competent teachers of their children and to enable parents (especially female parents) to give voice to their ideas. Reading through the summary of what I did with confidence in the summary table finds

that “participating”, “speaking” and “giving an opinion” have been consistently recorded. Perhaps a surprise here is the extent to which “reading” is noted as something which has been done with confidence. This could indicate the confidence in their reading skills that is imparted by reading the Parent Are Teachers books, or just a general level of satisfaction with being able to read the simple texts that are used in the program, and that reading is part of the session. Building confidence in their own reading is likely to result in an ability and willingness to read to and with their children.

The *Learning Basket* curriculum was intentionally developed to instill research-based and recommended practice in fostering parent-child dyadic interaction. A presentation of the bases for the curriculum will not be repeated here. Descriptions of the research and conceptual foundations of the approach can be found in *Learning Basket* materials, and on their website (www.ica-usa.org). Here it is sufficient to note that play is the foundation of the curriculum, and play is the dyadic context in which adults talk to children, expose them to pre-literacy features of the language, pose challenges, and delight in solving problems.

Overall, what is learned and what participants think will be used reflect major activities and emphases of the *Learning Basket* sessions. Patience and more time with children are the messages of role-plays in the curriculum, and interactive “play” is what is practiced, talked about, and practiced again in the sessions. It is the major intended outcome of the curriculum. Zero to Three, a highly respected professional and parent organization for infant and toddler research and family support, has the following on its website:

In spite of all the recent hype about “making your baby smarter,” scientists have not discovered any special tricks for enhancing the natural wiring phase in children’s brain development. Normal, loving, responsive care giving seems to provide babies with the ideal environment for encouraging their own exploration, which is always the best route to learning.

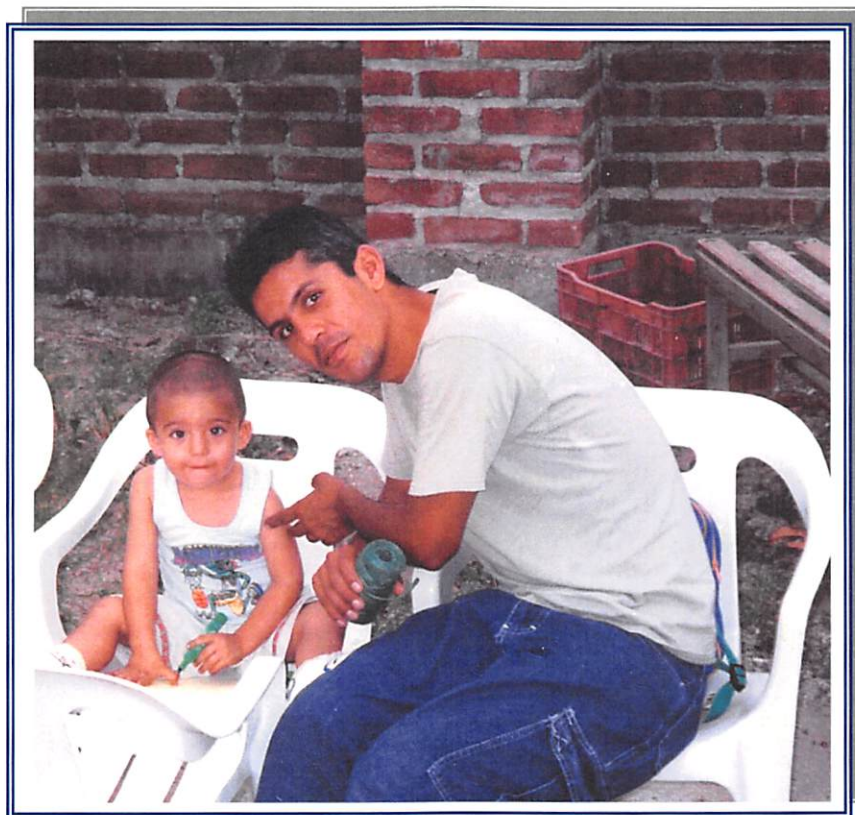
The one form of stimulation that has been proven to make a difference is language: Because language is fundamental to most of the rest of cognitive development, this simple action--talking and listening to your child--is one of the best ways to make the most of his or her critical brain-building years.

In fostering “play”, the *Learning Basket* Approach is fostering early brain development and early learning in the context of the parent-child interactive dyad. The summary table above indicates that “play” is consistently an outcome of participation in the *Learning Basket* parenting sessions, at least on a short term.

As has been noted previously, some participants connect to the objects and concrete features of the curriculum and others connect more to ideas, such as “more time with my child”. This might be a way in which the curriculum reaches adults of different learning levels, abilities, or interests.

All the data are from single reflections of participants as they were finishing a session. There is no direct information on long-term effects of participation in the program. However, because there is such consistency in the responses, another way of interpreting what is displayed in the summary table is as the saturation of these ideas into community neighborhoods over four years and 87 individual parents.

In conclusion, we can say that the summary table supports the claim that *Learning Basket*, when implemented in an international setting over a period of time and with multiple participants, fosters the kind of parent-child interactions that are known to be related to children’s learning capacity. It also supports the claim that such an implementation fosters the confidence of parents in their capacity to facilitate their child’s learning.



Further Questions and Research

In spite of the encouraging data reported here, there are some unanswered questions.

Some have to do with implementation. These include:

1. What are differences between practitioners and how does that affect the nature and quality of implementation? Does experience affect emphasis and effectiveness?
2. Do practitioners need refreshment and retooling after a period of implementing the program?
3. Are there ways to maintain stable participation?
4. Are there differences in outcome between programs that run five sessions and those that run eight?

Some have to do with participant outcomes. These include:

1. How could procedures be put into place to measure the short-term and long-term effects on children's development? (an appendix to this report addresses some of the concerns relating to measuring child change and child outcomes.)
2. How could long-term effects on parents' interaction patterns or family play patterns be tracked? What resources would be needed to do this?
3. Are there measurable community effects? How could they be defined and measures?
4. What are the long-term effects on a community of repeated implementation?

The promising results in this report suggest that there would be ways to collect valid data for addressing these questions. Complex interventions, such as *Learning Basket*, require intricate and possibly long-term research and evaluation programs for claims of effectiveness, but the effort here indicates both willingness and capacity to carry it out. Perhaps more importantly, the results here suggest an encouraging base for continued meaningful program delivery.

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Karen Snyder

Appendix A

Commentary Regarding the Measurement of Child Change

Issues to consider in measuring child change as an outcome of the Learning Basket intervention:

Special care must be taken in measuring child outcomes. Child development outcomes in the early years are notoriously difficult to measure. The measurement of change is always problematic, but in the case of young children, it is further confounded by the natural maturation that is rapidly occurring. Because of this maturation, it is difficult to claim that any particular intervention has led to change in development, because some change would be expected without any intervention.

There are various devices available to address this problem. For example, there are indices that look at rate of change, rather than absolute change, and explore whether that rate has changed with an intervention.

In recent years, the variable of interest has shifted somewhat from the child alone to the dyad of the child and adult. This is related to increased understanding that change in the adult is related, through the dyadic interaction as a learning context, to higher probabilities that the child will experience optimal development.

If measuring child outcomes are a high priority for funders or a sponsoring organization, there are some ways to do this.

Some possibilities to consider will include:

1. A few well-selected case studies could yield some very interesting results regarding the impact of the Learning Basket approach on families.
2. Where programs are using additional assessment instruments, such as the Ages and Stages questionnaire, those instruments could be used for further information regarding children.
3. Comparison groups of children not receiving Learning Basket approach interventions, could be examined, but with great caution, since it is extremely difficult to hold all other things equal in the lives of children.
4. Expectations for development can be derived from the research literature in the field, and the performance of children in Learning Basket programs can be measured against these expectations. For example, children whose development is recorded on an Ages and Stages Questionnaire could have their development recorded as they enter the program and again after about 12 weeks of participation in the Learning Basket program. (Less than 12 weeks would strain the potential for documentable change.) The extent to which that development approaches or matches what is typical (normal) for those two ages could be compared, and a change in the match could be used as an indication of the effect of the program.

All of these issues suggest the need for great care and determination of resources needed to conduct various kinds of studies that will provide various kinds of results, but will be recognized as valid indicators of the impact of this intervention on child change.

P Helen Heal
September 27, 20