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Head Start Bulletin

Enhancing Head Start Communication

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services * Administration for Children and Families
 Administration for Children, Youth and Families * Head Start Bureau

Fall 1996

Vol. I, Issue No. 60

Literacy and Head Start Quality

By Trellis Waxler, Program Specialist, Education Services Branch, Head Start Bureau

Research shows that exposing children to print, books, and reading aloud provides them with important concepts about print which prepare them to learn to read. As a result, the Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion has encouraged Head Start to place a greater emphasis on the emerging literacy concept to prepare children for reading, and thereby ensure their school readiness.

Through its efforts to enhance literacy acquisition as a vital component of Head Start quality, Head Start has supported several specific literacy initiatives designed to assist local Head Start programs in developing multifaceted literacy programs.

Special demonstration grants have been awarded to Head Start grantees for literacy enhancement efforts. These Family Service Centers (FSCs) include family literacy as a major component. Early findings show that Head Start grantees with FSCs have twice the rate of adult participation in GED programs as do grantees with no FSC programs.

Additionally, the Emergent Literacy Initiative has been established to design and implement strategies and approaches to support and strengthen the emergent literacy activities carried out by Head Start grantees. Under this demonstration, emergent literacy refers to activities that are conducted with young children during the period when they are beginning to become aware of print, to observe and experiment with reading and writing, and to understand the relationship between the written and spoken word. The current emergent literacy grantees are: University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho; Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois; and the Children's Literacy Initiative, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Head Start/Library of Congress Interagency Agreement was developed to demonstrate in

communities nationwide how libraries that serve young children can plan and work with Head Start grantees to enhance both learning and parent involvement in children's literacy and language development.

Head Start has also collaborated with Even Start since its inception, specifically with its adult literacy program. The Head Start Bureau has also developed a number of publications and materials for its grantees on recommended practices and resources designed to help programs develop and/or improve their family literacy programs.

Head Start programs have implemented a wide variety of activities to encourage the emergent literacy of the children they serve. These activities include:

- Integrated books into the daily curriculum and various learning center activities;
- Creating an appropriate environment for quiet reading for both children and parents;
- Displaying books in an attractive manner with props to attract children;
- Providing books that are culturally and developmentally appropriate;
- Making and using reading enhancements such as puppets and flannel boards;
- Encouraging parents to read to their children and provide family literacy activities;
- Training parents and staff to select appropriate books for their children;
- Increasing the storytelling skills of staff and parents. Soon to be available from Head Start is a video and materials for "Stories Keep Us Connected" which encourages parents to support their children's growth and learning through shared stories and experiences. Available in English and Spanish; and
- Encouraging staff and parents to become reading models for children.

Additionally, Head Start grantees have played a key role in the family literacy movement by:

- Increasing Head Start families' access to materials, activities, and services which are essential to family literacy development, such as obtaining library cards;
- Supporting parents in the role of being their child's first teacher by providing encouragement and direction to Head Start families in providing activities which stimulate and sustain their children's interest and potential for future independent success in literacy activities; and
- Assisting parents as adult learners to recognize and address their own literacy needs by creating environments which are positive, supportive, and offer the promise of

benefiting both them and their children.

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E. Dollie Wolverton, Chief, Education Services Branch, Head Start Bureau, was the lead on this issue of the Head Start Bulletin.

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Management Institute in Every Region and Central Office

By Frankie Hoover Gibson, Parent Involvement Program Specialist, Social Services and Parent Involvement Branch, Head Start Bureau

The challenges faced by local Head Start programs have multiplied in size, scope, and complexity in recent years. DHHS and local grantees must ensure that the managers of local Head Start programs have what they need to lead programs effectively in a changing world, such as knowledge, skills, management and leadership, and the support and infrastructure they need to manage effectively.

The Advisory Committee on Head Start Quality and Expansion recommended that all Head Start directors and management staff receive training in fiscal management, planning, supervision and staff support, parent involvement in all components, and other topics related to the overall administration of the program.

In its efforts to enhance training of staff, the Head Start Bureau has initiated three stages of a management training initiative.

The first stage, Phase I, was the National Head Start Management Institute in August 1991 in Washington, DC, which provided a baseline of skills and competencies required for quality management that grantee and delegate directors could examine their skills against.

Phase II offered management team conferences in each of the 12 Regions under the leadership and direction of Regional Offices and training and technical assistance contractors.

Over 1,000 Federal staff and local Head Start program management team members participated in Phase III Management Institutes from October 1995 through May 1996. A pilot, Training-of-Trainer session, and 12 Institutes were held in Chicago, San Francisco,

Dallas, Atlanta, Philadelphia, New York City, Kansas City, Denver, Boston, Seattle, and Washington, DC.

The training curriculum, "Mastering Change," builds upon the in-depth knowledge of management and leadership innovation that began in the prior phases of Head Start's management effort, and offers an opportunity for professional skills development by creating for teams a "new lens" to see how leadership can be more effective.

A focus of the following four main themes runs throughout the training:

1. Improving communication: strengthening the ability to ensure accurate, sensitive, two-way communication in group meetings, supervision sessions, and written exchanges;
2. Changing mental models: strengthening the ability to understand, articulate, and challenge the core beliefs that drive program operations;
3. Using systems thinking: strengthening the ability to recognize that a Head Start program is a living, dynamic, interconnected system; and
4. Setting a vision for the future: strengthening the capacity to look beyond today's problems, and considering possibilities for the future.

The general consensus from those who participated in the Institutes was that the experience was positive, valuable, and fun. One participant said that the curriculum was "engaging, rigorous, fast moving, provocative, and insightful."

For more information on the "Mastering Change" curriculum, contact your Regional Office Program Specialist or TASC liaison, your Regional TASC, or Frankie Hoover Gibson, Head Start Bureau, PO Box 1182, Washington, DC 20013.

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