

EVEN START FAMILY LITERACY PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS  
OF PARENTING EDUCATION, AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT IN FAMILY  
LITERACY PROGRAMS

A Dissertation

by

CHIA-YIN CHEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2005

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

Even Start Family Literacy Program Participants' Perceptions of Parenting Education, an  
Integral Component in Family Literacy Programs. (August 2005)

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Parenting education, combined with adult basic education and early childhood education, makes the Even Start program a unified family literacy program which helps to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy. Research studies have shown that the Even Start program has positive effects on its participants. Even though some of the effects are not explicitly tied to parenting education, they are closely related to parenting education. This study investigated the effectiveness of parenting education as perceived by its participants. The purposes of this study were to identify Even Start program participants' perceptions of parenting education, to explore issues related to parenting education, and to identify the impact of parenting education as perceived by the program participants.

The interviewed parents considered parenting education an important component of the Even Start family literacy program. Findings in this study revealed how the participants used what they had learned in the parenting classes, incorporating their improved literacy skills to facilitate the growth of the whole family. According to the study participants, parenting classes provided a safe and comfortable environment for the parents to learn or validate their parenting practices, to identify themselves with each

other, to build up a network of support system, and to practice their literacy skills in a context related to their everyday life. Since their participation in the parenting education, the study participants reported attainment of new insights about being a good parent, better communication with their children and other family members, improved education experience for their children, prolonged parenting values and practices, and improved family relationships. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecology model to look at the family literacy program, parenting education appeared to be the linkage between all components.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the Even Start families and to those who devote themselves in serving the Even Start families.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this document would not have been possible without the assistance and encouragement of my professors, friends, and loved ones.

My sincere and heartfelt thanks go to my committee chairs, Dr. Rafael Lara-Alecio and Dr. Don Seaman, whose mentoring and support over the years have been a true blessing. I would also like to thank Dr. Cathleen Loving and Dr. Yvonna Lincoln for their thoughtful consideration and suggestions.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Families create and sustain environments which ultimately affect the development of the individuals within them. When changes occur for the individual family member, they often occur for the entire family as well. For example, when adults decide to enter literacy programs, they change not only the schedule of their own lives but also their roles and the expectations of them within the family (Wagner & Clayton, 1999). Such changes may subsequently affect family practices by other family members. We know from developmental studies and educational research that the family environment is important in the value attached to literacy, learning, and the ability of individuals within the family to be academically successful (Downey, 2002; Farrer, 2000; Hayes, 1996; Heath, 1983; National Center for Family Literacy, 1994a, 1994b; Puchner, 1995). Family literacy programs are those that recognize the influences of the family on the literacy development of family members and try to have a positive effect on those families. The focus of this study—the Even Start family literacy program—is a model of family literacy programs.

The Even Start family literacy program was authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 1965), as amended by

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This dissertation follows the style and format of the *American Educational Research Journal*.

the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and School Improvement Amendments of 1989, Part B of chapter 1 of Title 1 (P.L. 100-297). According to the law, the Even Start program was created to “help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the Nation’s low-income families by integrating early childhood education, adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program...” (P.L. 103-382, Sec. 1201).

Since 1989, federal funds have helped hundreds of family literacy programs across the United States. From school year 1989-1990 to 2001-2002, grants awarded to Even Start programs increased from 14.8 million to 250 million dollars, and the number of Even Start programs increased from 76 to 1,125 with the approximate number of families served increased from 2,500 to more than 30,000 (Appendix A and B). Additionally, hundreds of other family literacy projects exist which are not federally funded. Many of the latter were designed by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL). The NCFL claims that family literacy initiatives are a solution to “how the intergenerational cycles of undereducation and poverty may be broken” (NCFL, 1994a, p.1). Even Start has been reauthorized and amended several times, most recently through the Literacy Involves Families Together Act of 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) and the No Child Let Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Puchner (1995) stated that literacy is tied to parenting behaviors—how family members see, use, and treat written, oral, and symbolic material. He assumed that parenting has an impact on children’s learning and development. Parenting styles and

practices reflect a parent's warmth/responsiveness and control which includes discipline, setting limits, and communicating expectations for competent behaviors. Parents also hold knowledge and beliefs about child development in general, their own children, and the parenting role. Parents also serve as managers of environments for their children and family when they structure the social and physical environment (Kagan, 1995; NCFL, 1994a).

Research examining the relationship between parenting and school success indicates that children's success in school is related to their active involvement in book reading at home (a parenting practice with child) (Ebener, 1995; Gadsden, 1994; NCFL, 1994a; Paratore, 1993), parents' expectations of their child's educational attainment (a parent belief) (Ebener, 1995; Gadsden, 1994; Karther, 1995; Powell & D'Amgelo, 2000; Powell, 1996; St. Pierre & Lazyer, 1996), and the predictability and routines of the home setting (parent as manager of environment) (Kagan, 1995).

It is assumed that increased knowledge about topics such as child development and parenting skills will result in positive changes in parental attitudes toward and behavior with their children, and that those changes, in turn, will improve outcomes for their children. Gadsden (1994) suggested that children have a decided advantage when they are read to and when reading materials are available. He supported the idea that the level and nature of the interaction between parents and children in home settings is a critical factor for children's literacy development.

Paratore's (1993) work examined the effects of a family literacy program on the at-home literacy behaviors of a group of primarily Latino, immigrant families. Her work

demonstrated far improved attendance rates and far decreased attrition rates for the family program participants in contrast to well-documented rates in traditional adult education programs. Additionally, she reported that the parents in the program easily learned techniques for sharing books with their children, and that the adults reported routinely implementing the strategies at home.

Ebener (1995) examined the supportive practices provided by low-income families of at-risk children to support their academically successful children. He found the common characteristics in these academically successful children's homes are that parents instill the importance of education in their children, parents assume the role of the teacher, and parents act as a crucial link to connect school and home. The common characteristics pointed out by Ebener are issues addressed in parenting education.

In Mikulecky and Lloyd's (NCFL, 1994b) study, they also reported increased parent-child shared book reading. Mikulecky and Lloyd completed pre-and-post-interviews with adults following participation in an intergenerational family literacy program. Among other findings, they reported that after completing approximately five months in the program, the frequency of parent-child shared book reading increased by 70%, parents took their children to the library twice as often, and children's frequency of free reading increased by 80%. In addition, there is consistent research documentation that supports the finding that participation in family literacy programs positively affects parent-child at-home literacy interactions (Farrer, 2000; Karther, 1995; NCFL, 1994c; Paratore, 1993).

Heath (1983) found that in the homes of “mainstream” families, parents supported their children’s literacy development by asking questions, engaging them in conversations about events, and reading bedtime stories. What seemed to be an important contributor to the children’s literacy development was parents’ availability to interact with their children in a way that approximated approaches used in school contexts. Family literacy programs serve the population that very likely did not receive much formal education. It is through the services provided in the programs that parents not only improve their own literacy skills, but also receive information about how to help their children succeed at school.

Evaluations carried out in developing countries have also shown that when programs involve one or more of such components as supplemental nutrition intake, home visits, preschool, and/or health care, programs can lead to higher likelihood of school enrollment (perhaps from parents’ perceptions of intellectual ability of children), improved cognitive ability, better school achievement, better school readiness, better language ability, better physical growth, and improved home stimulation (Myers, 1992).

Literacy is tied to parenting behavior; significant changes in literacy, parenting behavior, and family dynamics appear when there is a commitment to long-term, intensive work with parents (Puchner, 1995). Additionally, both duration and number of contacts are important in yielding more pervasive, sustained effects (Hayes, 1996; Pamulapati, 2003; Powell & D’Angelo, 2000; Powell, 1996; St. Pierre & Layzer, 1996). It appears that guided opportunities for discussion among low-income parents facilitate

change in their parenting attitudes and behavior (Gadsden, 1994; Powell, 1996; St. Pierre & Lazyer, 1996).

An overriding value reflected in the parent narratives is the way in which Even Start has furthered cooperative and reciprocal home and school connections. Parents became as interested in helping themselves as in helping their children through the program. Kopacsi and Koopmans (1992) analyzed parent's involvement following the five major types of parental involvement practices identified by Epstein and Becker (1987). The types of practices include home conditions for learning, school-to-home communication, parent involvement at school, and parent involvement in learning activities and homework, and governance, decision-making roles for parents.

Research by Kopacsi and Koopmans (1992) has shown that there is a significant difference in favor of the Even Start sample of rates of participation in activities and trips. Although the Even Start parents may be more lacking in the educational skills needed to help their children with learning activities, they may be benefiting from the program in ways that are preliminary to changing parent/child learning behaviors.

It seems plausible that a positive home/school connection is happening since the Even Start parents who do not have a high school education report visiting the school and talking with their child's teacher more frequently than a similar cohort of non-Even Start parents at the same educational level. The issues seem to highlight the importance and complexity of developing effective strategies that can translate values which are supportive of parent involvement and positive home/school relationships into behaviors that enhance children's learning. However, while there is evidence that parenting

education can produce positive changes in parental attitudes and behavior, there is little evidence of the link between changes in parents' attitudes and the actual development of their children (St. Pierre, & Layzer, 1996).

Powell (1996) and St. Pierre & Layzer (1996) pointed out that evidence suggests that parenting education or improvements in parents' circumstances, by themselves, will not result in improved child outcomes. Efforts to improve outcomes for adults and children must be directly targeted for both groups, individually and collectively. In addition, what kinds of parenting education are most effective is clouded by the variety of approaches and the confounding effects of differences in target populations, treatment intensity, and the background and training of providers as well as the additive effects of other program components that may accompany parenting education. Olds and Kitzman (1993) reviewed 13 randomized trials of home visiting programs. Six studies showed small, positive program effects on children's cognitive or social-emotional development, and only two of them was the change associated with parental change. It is pointed out that parenting education will not, by itself, result in improved child outcomes.

#### Statement of the Problem

Puchner (1995) stated that family literacy programs can only work with the inclusion of both parents and children because literacy is tied to parenting behaviors. Serving both parents and children together is what makes the Even Start family literacy program different from other literacy programs such as Head Start, an early childhood education program, or Adult Basic Education. Parenting education, combined with adult literacy or adult basic education and early childhood education, makes Even Start

program a unified family literacy program to help break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy.

The goals of parenting education in Even Start family literacy program are to: (a) strengthen parents' support of their young children's literacy development and early school success, (b) provide support for literacy in the family, (c) hold appropriate expectations of the child's learning and development, (d) actively embrace the parenting role, and (e) form and maintain connections to community and other resources for meeting individual and family needs (Puchner, 1995).

These goals have been documented and examined in various research studies (Downey, 2002; Ebener, 1995; Farrer, 2000; Gadsden, 1994; Kagan, 1995; Karther, 1995; NCFL, 1994a; Pamulapati, 2003; Paratore, 1993; Powell & D'Angelo, 2000; Powell, 1996; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Sheldon, 2002; St. Pierre & Lazyer, 1996). Research studies (Gadsden, 1994; Karther, 1995; Kopacsi & Koopmans, 1992; NCFL, 1994b; Paratore, 1993) have also shown positive effects on Even Start family literacy participants in the areas such as parent-child interaction, school attendance rate, number of reading materials at home, and time that parents and child read together. However, only a few studies have been conducted with a focus on the parenting education component in the Even Start family literacy program. Further research is therefore needed to explore this area, to understand the participants' perceptions of parenting education, and the changes in the family perceived by the participants as a result of participation in parenting education.

### Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the Even Start family literacy program participants' perceptions of parenting education. The secondary purposes included exploring issues related to parenting education, and identifying the impact of parenting education as perceived by the Even Start family literacy program participants.

### Research Questions

Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the Even Start family literacy program participants' perceptions of parenting education?
2. What are the changes in their lives as a result of participation in parenting education as perceived by Even Start participants?
3. What impact does parenting education have on their lives as perceived by Even Start participants?

### Assumptions and Limitations

For the purpose of this study, the following assumptions were made:

1. The instrument used in this study measures the existing perceptions of parents regarding the component of parenting education in the Even Start family literacy program.
2. The interpretation of the impact of the parenting education will be accurately reflected by those who participated in the study.

The limitations of this study were:

1. This study only measured the perceptions of parents participating in an Even Start family literacy program within an Independent School District in a large city in southern Texas in 2002-2003.
2. Only parents who volunteered to participate were interviewed.
3. The presence of a parent educator who is a staff member of the Even Start program might have prevented the study participants from expressing their views more freely during the interview.
4. The researcher does not speak Spanish like the majority of the study participants. Study participants who do not speak English were interviewed through a bilingual parent educator who served as interpreter. It is possible that some key information was lost during the translation process. In addition, the researcher might not catch certain clues that were lost during the translation and may attribute to richer information.

### Significance of the Study

Parenting education is the focal point of family literacy programs and makes family literacy programs different from other literacy efforts. The majority of Even Start programs provide parent support, parent involvement opportunities, and formal parenting education classes. Yet, very little research delineating family literacy parenting education practices was found in the review of the literature. The significance of this study was to describe the contribution of the parenting education component to the Even Start family literacy programs participants' lives and to the overall impact of

family literacy programs. This study identified parental perceptions in the area of parenting education, the integral component of Even Start family literacy program, and the information collected from this study may serve as a guide to policy makers in making decisions regarding family literacy programs.

#### Definition of Terms

The following definitions are included to clarify the terminology used in the study:

*Literacy:* An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential (National Literacy Act, 1991). The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 expanded this definition to include the ability to function in the family.

*Impact:* A noticeable effect (Skuzza, 1997).

*Parent:* Persons having a child and receiving services from Even Start family literacy program.

*Parenting Education:* A component in Even Start program focusing on parenting skills, nutrition, fitness, and technology.

*Parent Involvement:* A practice of any activity that empowers parents and families to participate in the educational process either at home or in a program setting (Skuzza, 1997).

*Perception*: A sensation produced by that which is perceived, i.e. the power to understand with quickness and certainty that which is not apparent to the senses (Skuza, 1997).

*Even Start Staff*: All employees at the Even Start family literacy program where the study was conducted.

*Dahlia ISD Even Start*: A family literacy program whose fiscal agent is Dahlia Independent School District in southern Texas. Dahlia is a pseudonym.

*Dahlia ISD*: One of the five largest school districts in Texas with its western sector having the highest concentration of illiteracy in southern Texas.

*Home Observation Measurement of the Environment (H.O.M.E.)*: An instrument used to assess parenting skills of the participants.

### Contents of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into five major chapters. Chapter I contains an introduction, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, operational definitions, assumptions and limitations, and a significance statement. Chapter II is the review of the literature. Chapter III contains the methodology and procedures that were followed in acquiring the data. Chapter IV discusses the analysis of the data collected in the study. Chapter V includes the researcher's conclusions and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

“Family literacy programs work to create positive relationships by recognizing that the adult literacy needs of parents are critically important for their own self-esteem and ability to support their families, that children are dependent on their families for support in meeting the expectations of schooling and society, and that communities need their citizens to be fully functioning and literate to contribute productively to the vitality of community life” (Connors-Tadros, 1996, p.2). Family literacy programs, as the name suggests, serve the whole family, not just an individual in the family. Among the components in family literacy programs, parenting education serves as an integral part to bring all the components together as in the Even Start family literacy program.

This chapter’s literature review presents (a) the Even Start family literacy program, (b) studies on Even Start family literacy programs, (c) parenting education, (d) studies on parenting education, (e) studies on the parenting education as a component in the Even Start family literacy program, and (f) need for parenting education.

#### Even Start Family Literacy Program

The Even Start family literacy program was authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and School Improvement Amendments of 1989, Part B of chapter 1 of Title 1 (P.L. 100-297). According to the law, the Even Start program was created to “help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the Nation’s low-

income families by integrating early childhood education, adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program...” (P.L. 103-382, Sec. 1201). The implementation of local programs began in 1989. The Even Start program is intended to: “...improve the educational opportunities of the Nation’s children and adults by integrating early childhood education and adult education for parents into a unified program... The program shall be implemented through cooperative projects that build on existing community resources to create a new range of services” (P.L. 100-297, Sec. 1051).

The education legislation passed in 1994--the Improving America’s School Act which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, and the School to Work Opportunities Act--made the following substantive changes in Even Start: (a) targeting on those most in need was strengthened and services were extended to teen parents when they were among those most in need, (b) continuity and retention were strengthened by requiring projects to serve at least a three year age range and provide services over the summer months, (c) the focus on family services was strengthened by allowing projects to involve ineligible family members in appropriate family literacy activities, and (d) linkages between schools and communities were improved by requiring stronger collaboration (partnerships) in the application and implementation process. More recently, in 1996, Congress sought to further strengthen Even Start by passing an amendment requiring instructional services to be intensive.

Since 1989, federal funds have helped to fund hundreds of family literacy programs across the United States. From school year 1989-1990 to 2001-2002, grants awarded to Even Start programs increased from 14.8 million to 250 million dollars, and the number of Even Start programs increased from 76 to 1,124 with the approximate number of families served increased from 2,500 to more than 30,000 (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Additionally, hundreds of other family literacy projects exist which are not federally funded. Many of the latter were designed by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL). The NCFL has claimed that family literacy initiatives are a solution to “how the intergenerational cycles of undereducation and poverty may be broken” (NCFL, 1994a, p.1). Much variation in program design and population served exists among Even Start family literacy programs because the Even Start legislation specifically calls for projects to build on existing community resources and to be responsive to local needs.

The premise of the Even Start family literacy program is that combining adult literacy or adult basic education, parenting education, and early childhood education into a unified family literacy program offers promise for helping to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and low literacy in the nation. The basic model of the Even Start family literacy program includes:

1. serving the most-in-need families,
2. three core services (adult, parenting, and early childhood education),
3. support services (services to parents and children together, and home-based services),

4. integration of educational activities across the three core areas,
5. coordination of service delivery with other local programs,
6. local evaluations, and
7. participation in the national evaluation ((National Center for Family Literacy, 1994a).

Examples of support services are transportation, child care, nutrition assistance, health care, meals, special care for a disabled family member, referrals for mental health and counseling, services to battered women, child protective services, employment, and screening or treatment for chemical dependency (National Center for Family Literacy, 1994a). Programs are encouraged to obtain support services from existing providers within their community to avoid duplication of services.

Federal Regulations mandate that each Even Start program include the following:

1. a method to recruit and identify families most in need,
2. a process for screening parents to enable them to fully participate in the program,
3. a method to accommodate the parents' work schedules and other responsibilities so that they can participate in the program,
4. high quality adult education and early childhood education programs,
5. specialized staff training for all Even Start staff,
6. services through home visits,
7. a year-round program offering some services during the summer,

8. coordination with other programs and agencies such as Head Start and programs under the Adult Education Act,
9. a program serving families most in need, and
10. provisions for an independent evaluation of the program (Federal Register, 1994).

Programs are funded in 4-year cycles with increasing local contributions from the local community. Even Start programs must provide 10% matching funds the first year, 20% the second year, 30% the third year, and 40% the fourth year. Programs may reapply for another 4-year cycle funding after the fourth year at which time the matching requirement becomes 50% of the project's budget. Minimum awards for each program are \$75,000 as required by federal regulations (Federal Register, 1994).

#### *Components of Even Start Family Literacy Program*

Even Start programs include four components: parent literacy training, early childhood education, parenting education, and interactive literacy activities between parents and their children, also known as parents and child interactive literacy activities (PACILA). Parent literacy training focuses on special educational needs of undereducated adults. Some parents may work on basic literacy skills whereas others are preparing for the General Education Development (GED) which is an equivalent to high school diploma. The goal is to help parents gain the confidence in their ability to learn, acquire additional skills in different content areas, master general problem-solving techniques and apply what they have acquired to their lives.

Early childhood education focuses on the development of social skills in the young child as well as pre-reading and language development skills. Children are engaged in active exploration, personal discovery, organization and reorganization of their physical environment. They also actively interact with their peers and adults. Children initiate, plan, and evaluate their own learning with the guidance of the early childhood teacher to ensure their continuing social, emotional, and cognitive growth and development.

Parenting education addresses the specific needs and interests identified by the parents. With the guidance of the parenting education instructor, parents discuss their role in their children's learning and development and address topics such as child development, discipline, and parents as teachers. Group discussions about parents' concerns and issues enable parents to exchange their experiences and provide support for each other.

Parent and child interactive literacy activities (PACILA) provide activities encouraging interactions between parents and children. During PACILA, parents have opportunities to apply what they have previously learned and discussed in the parenting education session and to modify their approaches to best facilitating interactions with their children. With the demonstration and feedback from the teacher, parents can explore how to effectively interact, motivate, encourage, and support their children. Parents are also to practice the activities with their children at home.

Home visits are incorporated into the services provided by the Even Start program. Parents receive regular home visits from the parent educator who provides

home-based instruction and activities involving the parents and their children. Home visits are to reinforce the information delivered through regular classes; i.e. parent literacy training, early childhood education, parenting education, and parent and child interactive literacy activities.

#### *Purposes and Objectives of Even Start Family Literacy Program*

It is the purpose of the Even Start program to: (a) establish instructional programs that promote adult literacy, (b) train parents to support the educational growth of their young children, and prepare children for success in regular school programs, (c) provide special training to enable staff to develop necessary skills for implementing successful programs for parents and their children, (d) integrate home-based visits into the instructional program, (e) improve communication among parents, children, schools, and the community, and (f) coordinate the resources of the entire community in support of family literacy (Federal Register, 1994). Program objectives include helping parents become full partners in their children's education, helping children reach their full potential as learners, providing literacy training for parents, assisting families with parenting strategies in child growth and development and educational process for children birth through seven years, and coordinating efforts that build on existing community resources.

#### *Studies on Even Start Family Literacy Program*

Past studies on the Even Start family literacy program including the national Even Start evaluations, have shown that the program made positive impact on both

children's and adult's lives. In some studies children demonstrated improvement in such areas as school-readiness, transition from kindergarten to public school, and vocabulary development (Anderson, 2000; Gamse, Conger, Elson & McCarthy, 1997; Meehan, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Riedinger, 1997). Several research studies also indicated that adults improved their literacy skills and parenting behaviors due to their participation in the program (Anderson, 2000; Becker, 1996; Connors-Tadros, 1996; Farrer, 2000; Karther, 1995; Meehan, Walsh, Swisher, Spring & Lewis, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 2003; Pamulapati, 2003).

*Even Start Program and Its Participants—Children and Adult*

The national Even Start evaluation which ran from 1990 through April of 1994, showed the effectiveness of Even Start programs on both child and parent literacy through the following findings: (a) more Even Start adults obtained GED certificates than did the adults in the control group, (b) Even Start children's learning gains resulted from their own and their parents' participation in Even Start services, (c) Even Start children showed greater gains on measures of school readiness compared to the control group, (d) Even Start children made a significant difference in learning gains attained on a vocabulary test due to the amount of early childhood education received, and (e) the amount of parenting education received by parents also attributed to the gains made by the children on the vocabulary test (St. Pierre, Swartz, Murray, & Deck, 1996).

Findings from the third national Even Start evaluation which ran from 1997 through 2000 included (a) Even Start children and parents made small gains on literacy assessments compared to national norms when they left the program, and (b) the extent

to which parents and children participated in literacy services is related to child outcomes. The evaluation also showed that Even Start served a very disadvantaged population. Comparing to Head Start, Even Start families had substantially lower annual household income.

Brizius and Foster (1993) report that all of the available evaluations of the National Center for Family Literacy indicate that family literacy programs (a) increase the developmental skills of preschool children to prepare them for academic and social success in school, (b) improve the parenting skills of adult participants, (c) raise the educational level of parents of preschool children through instruction in basic skills, (d) enable parents to become familiar with and comfortable in the school setting and provide a role model for the child showing parental interests in education, (e) improve the relationship of parent and child through planned, structured interaction, and (f) help parents gain the motivation, skills, and knowledge needed to become employed or to pursue further education and training.

In a program evaluation conducted by Meehan et al. (1999), the researchers collected data on sixteen families enrolled in an Even Start program over a period of two years. Through program records, interviews, observations and assessment records from both adults and children, positive effects of Even Start program on the following areas were found: (a) adults' reading and mathematics literacy as measured by Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) Reading and Mathematics Literacy, (b) parenting outcomes as measured by the Home Screening Questionnaire for 3-to 6-year-old children, and (c) children's auditory comprehension, expressive communication and

total language development as measured by the Preschool Language Scale-Third Edition (PLS-3).

Studies validating the findings from the national Even Start evaluation were also conducted by other researchers such as Anderson (2000), Connors-Tadros (1996), Gamse et al. (1997), Meehan (1999), Riedinger (1997), and Roth & Myers-Jenning (1995). Anderson (2000) evaluated 11 Even Start programs in Colorado over a period of three years. The study showed improvements in the following areas: parents' participation, adult literacy skills and employment status, and child's readiness for school. The evaluation report indicated that (a) family participation has increased over the preceding three years, (b) 35% of parents passed the GED, (c) 84% of Even Start teen parents enrolled in high school stayed in school, (d) the percentage of Even Start parents moving from English as a Second Language classes to adult basic education classes increased over the preceding three years, (e) 95% of Even Start infants and toddlers and 85% of preschoolers were functioning at age-appropriate levels, and (f) the percentage of parents who improved their employment status increased as well.

Farrer (2000) studied the impact of Even Start program in its participants' lives. Her study indicated that intergenerational approach can be successful in improving both children's and parents' educational development. Farrer found that after participating in the Even Start program, parents showed improvements in (a) the length of time spent reading with their children, (b) involvement in their children's schooling, and (c) academic skills and reading habits. Parents in Farrer's (2000) study reported that because of the parenting education, they spent more time playing and reading with their

children, change their disciplinary techniques, and know better how to teach their children at home.

Kopacsi and Koopmans (1992) studied parent involvement in early childhood education. They administered three different surveys in the study; one to the parents (both Even Start and non-Even Start parents), one to the teachers of these two groups of parents, and one to the Even Start staff. The surveys focused on attitudes and practices of parents' and teachers' involvement as well as program implementation. The researchers found that Even Start parents reported a better understanding of children's problems and improved communication between parents and children than the non-Even Start group.

#### *Even Start Program and Child's Literacy Development*

Meehan (1999) studied the effect of Even Start program on children's vocabulary. The study focused on thirty-two children enrolled in the Monongalia County Even Start program, with an average age of four years and four months. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III) was administered to the children on the basis of pretest-posttest with an interval of seven months. The study showed that the children outperformed in their vocabulary growth as would have been expected of them as measured by the PPVT-III.

Even Start also made an impact on school children's performance. In a study assessing the impact of Even Start on children's early school performance three years after their participation in the program, 128 students were studied about three years after participating in the Even Start services (Gamse et al., 1997). A majority of the students

were in the first and second grade and the measures used to assess students' performance were school grades, achievement test data, school attendance, special education placement, Title I placement, participation in transitional classrooms, summer school programs, bilingual education, and grade retention history. Even though only little difference was found between the control and experimental groups, the authors indicated that the differences between the control and Even Start children were observed much later in children's school performance using a wide range of measures.

Even Start family literacy also provides support for children's transitions. Riedinger (1997) stated the main components of the Even Start program were well positioned to support children's transitions to kindergarten because their transitions are influenced by their home environment, the pre-kindergarten programs they attend, and the degree of continuity between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten environments. And the main components of the Even Start program—early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education—directly influence children's home environments and pre-kindergarten experiences by providing parenting education instruction, facilitating and supervising joint parent-child activities, enrolling parents in their own literacy or adult basic education activities, and enrolling children in quality pre-kindergarten programs.

In a study conducted by Riedinger (1997), the Even Start staff identified four successful approaches in smoothing children's transitions into public schools: (a) emphasizing families' strengths rather than the weakness, (b) establishing and maintaining long-term trusting relationships with families, (c) empowering families by

helping them to identify and address their needs rather than telling them what they need and providing them with prescribed services, and (d) being flexible in the provision of services so that families in different circumstances can participate in the program. These approaches enable families to feel important, respected, supported and hopeful.

#### *Even Start Program and Adult's Literacy Development*

Meehan, Walsh, Spring, Swisher and Lewis (2000) evaluated an Even Start program in West Virginia with focuses on adult education and parenting components. Thirteen adults were administered with Adult Basic Learning Examination (ABLE), and 32 were tested using Parent Index (PI). The ABLE tests cover the basic areas of reading, mathematics, and language arts. The PI measures three constructs: parenting locus of control, internal locus of control, and self-esteem. Results from this study indicated that the Even Start program had some impact on participants' reading comprehension, problem solving skills and large impact on participants' mathematics skills. The study did not show any impact on the adults' parenting efficacy. However, small impacts were found on parental responsibility, parental control and parent's self-esteem.

In a study conducted by Connors-Tadros (1996), the author reported that Even Start parents significantly improved their literacy skills as measured by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS) functional reading survey. Program effects on children were not assessed, mainly due to the wide age range of children served and the inconsistent attendance of the children. However, the study showed that the children of parents in the Even Start program were much more likely than their peers to be exposed at home and in the community to literacy related

activities, including visiting the library with their parent, checking out books, and spending more time in literacy related parent-child activities.

The effectiveness of Even Start programs was documented not only through quantitative studies which employed surveys and/or conventional assessment instruments, but also through qualitative studies by Roth and Myers-Jennings (1995) and Pamulapati (2003). Roth and Myers-Jennings (1995) used a case study to evaluate the effectiveness of the Even Start family literacy program. The researchers conducted a series of interviews with 11 adult participants over a four-year period of time. As indicated by the results, for the participants, making the effort to comply with classes distracted them from a previous existence which was isolated and directionless, and they also found occasion to draw comfort and guidance from others.

Pamulapati (2003) conducted a both quantitative and qualitative study to investigate the similarities and differences between Hispanic and non-Hispanic Even Start participants. Pamulapati reported that both Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents increased knowledge of child development due to their participation in the Even Start program, and their parenting confidence and support increased over time. The qualitative interviews also revealed that the most important changes attributed to Even Start participation by both Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents were changes in literacy and life skills, personal changes such as increased self-esteem, changes in parenting behaviors, changes in their children, and relationship changes with friends and family.

Pamulapati (2003) indicated that participating in the Even Start helped immigrant families establish social networks, share their experiences with other immigrants and

gain support. In her study, both Hispanic and non-Hispanic parents reported increased communication and better relationships with partners. The communication skills parents gained in the parenting classes were transferred to the home environment and thus had a positive effect on other relationship.

### Parenting Education

Parenting education is not new; it has been linked with early childhood education, adult education and family support programs for decades. Landerholm (1984) traced parenting education in the United States to the late 1800s and early 1900s where children were taught in kindergartens in the mornings and social workers worked with the child's family in the afternoons. In the 1920s, the first magazine to address parenting issues, *Children: The Magazine for parents*, was published (Seckinger & Day, 1986). During the 1960s, it was thought that the home environment, such as lack of toys in the home or lack of exposure to formal language, might be the cause of school failure (Landerholm, 1984). Programs like Head Start were implemented during this era to help low-income children be successful when they reached public school age. The program staff found that it was important to work with the parents as well as the children; therefore, the Head Start programs recently added a home visit component as well as a parent participation requirement.

Parenting education is linked to adult education programs as well. As early as the 1920s educators recognized that parenting education was an important part of adult education (Seckinger & Day, 1986). According to Ponzetti and Bodine (1993), and Ponzetti and Dulin (1997), adult education needs to be connected to daily life for which

parenting is an important and continual part for those with children. Family support programs have also been linked to parenting education. According to Powell (1986), family support programs that are community based and focus on developing support systems for families, take a broad approach to parenting education by focusing on the entire family.

In the United State, parenting education has been expected to have a profound effect on the lives of children, families, and society at large. The prime objective of parenting education programs for adults has been to teach parents a repertoire of behaviors and skills that would foster the children's cognitive development and to promote the kind of attitudes that would likely assist them in helping their children (Shimoni & Ferguson, 1990). Stanberry and Stanberry (1994), based on their study on 56 individuals from five parenting education programs, indicated that parenting programs that help parents to gain control of their lives will help them to feel more competent as parents, and as they feel more competent in their parental role, their interaction with children will enrich family life. Various studies conducted to investigate the effectiveness of parenting education programs are presented as follows.

#### Studies on Parenting Education

Because parenting education has been linked to early childhood education as well as adult education, there have been numerous studies on parenting education as a single program or one that is provided with early childhood education and/or adult education. Overall, research indicated that parenting education has positive effects on both adult's and children's lives. The findings from the studies on the parenting education programs

include (a) a correlation between parental involvement and children's academic achievement (Anastasi, 1988; Downey, 2002; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Rich, 1988; Riley, 1994; Zimmerman, 1993), (b) increased parental knowledge toward childrearing and child development (Borger, 1994; Gomby, Larson, Lewit, & Behrman, 1993; Minow, 1994), (c) change of attitudes toward school (Bond, 1996; Downey, 2002; First & Way, 1995; Norris & Williams, 1997; Renard, 1994), and (d) improved confidence (Craig & Borger, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994).

### *Parenting Education and Child Performance*

In a psychological study, Anastasi (1988) found that parent's concern with the child's educational achievement emerged as an important correlate of subsequent classroom and test performance, as did other variables reflecting parental concern with the child's general welfare. Most parents care about their child(ren)'s educational performance even though they might not share their interests with the teachers. Some parents, especially for low-income families, do not have means and ways to express their interests in their child(ren)'s education, nor are they equipped to help with their child(ren)'s education. Henderson (1987), Downey (2002) and Reese & Gallimore (2000) observed that many parents are vitally interested in their child(ren)'s education, but do not understand or have the tools to express their interests. A parenting education program provides means and ways for the parents to be more involved in their child(ren)'s education.

Minnesota's Early Learning and Development (MELD) program is an example of linking parenting education and early childhood education. MELD aimed to reach

parents through local community support groups that are established within a large framework of parent and family education. A major evaluation criteria of MELD is that parents become more competent in handling the stress of the early transition to parenthood and the evolving dynamics of family life. Research carried out by Waski (1990) about MELD program found that parent networking, small group discussion teams, and home visits have been effective in addressing the individual needs of different parent populations. Of special significance in the Minnesota program were the positive results observed through directed attention to prenatal care. Healthier newborns and healthier mothers have resulted from this specific focus (cited in Swick, Anderson, Seaman, Lennov, Martin, & Sheng, 1993).

Studies of individual families conducted by the U.S. Department of Education during the past 30 years strongly suggest that what parents do at home is more important to student success than parent income or education (Riley, 1994). In a California guidance study, detailed investigation of home conditions and parent-child relationships indicated that large upward and downward shifts in IQ were associated with the cultural and emotional climate in which the child was reared (Anastasi, 1988). Zimmerman (1993) concluded that because parents are children's primary teachers, there is a high correlation between parent involvement and children's academic achievement.

Powell (1991) pointed out some specific parental characteristics that foster children's school readiness abilities. Those characteristics include: (a) a view of human development, (b) understanding the child's abilities and interests, (c) promoting verbal problem-solving, (d) literacy experiences within family interactions, (e) provision of

reading and writing materials and visiting libraries and museums, (f) encouraging children's active play with a variety of objects, (g) reading to children that actively involves the child, and (h) a responsive parenting style. It is true that parents with limited education and experience may not exhibit some of these characteristics, particularly speaking, literacy experiences, reading and verbal problem-solving. However, these experiences have direct implications for children's school learning.

Child-rearing style may account for different school outcomes as well. The type of child-rearing used by parents has been linked to educational achievement (Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Maccoby & Martine, 1983; Scheldon, 2002; Reese & Gallimore, 2000). Regardless of ethnicity, social class, or family structure, parents who are accepting, firm and democratic (authoritative) have children with higher grades in school than those parents who are authoritarian or permissive.

Research examining the long-term effects of parenting education programs on children is promising. Studies have found that participation in home-visiting or other high intensity parenting education programs do positively impact parents' attitudes and behavior and children's health and development (Gomby et al., 1993; Minow, 1994; Seitz & Apfel, 1994). A successful pilot parenting education program implemented by the Chicago Public School System focused on staff and teachers working together to enhance the education of the total child and to enable parents to better understand their child's needs, growth, and development (Borger, 1994) The author reports that 62% of the participating teachers perceived a great increase in child development and 90% of the

participating parents reported that they were pleased with their child's interest in learning and increased achievement.

The Home Oriented Preschool Program (HOPE), operated by the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, served the parents of three to five year old children in a rural four-county area in West Virginia (Gotts, 1989). The program offered daily television lessons focusing on education in the home as well as a mobile classroom. The author reported that a longitudinal study revealed favorable effects on school-family relations that were still apparent 12 to 14 years after it ended. HOPE parents reported gaining the knowledge necessary to become advocates for their children, to push the school into offering a quality education, and to assist their children with school work.

In the literature that describes the role of parenting education and parental involvement in relation to student classroom performance, Rich (1988) reported that major studies over the past 20 years show that parents are the significant educators of their children and that the most sophisticated school can not do the job alone. Parents need understanding of the importance of their role in their children's academic success (Borger, 1994). Borger also suggested that parents need to make education a priority and to understand that the priority level which they assign to school is reflected in their children's level of involvement in the learning process.

In Ohio, the Training Ohio's Parents for Success (TOPS) program aims to increase parent involvement in the education of their children and increase the linkage between home and school. The program provides all school districts with materials for parent training at all levels including parent involvement, adult learning, and self-

esteem. In the evaluation of the program, parents reported learning new ideas on how to improve the way one listens and talks to their child, techniques to instill self-confidence within their children, new problem solving methods to increase the trust and respect between members of their family, how to become more involved in their child's education to improve his or her performance, and how to create and maintain a good relationship between them, their child and the school.

Parental involvement is optimized when parents are given guidance and support in understanding child development and learning (Fitton & Gredler, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Bezruczko, & Hagemann, 1996). Fostering strong home-school connections assists in the development of these skills and contributes to a smooth transition for all children, which is particularly important for children from low-income and minority families, since most schools in North America operate within a traditional middle-class framework (Olmstead, 1991). That is, schools may represent discrepant beliefs or understandings from those held by such families. Thus, home-school connections may ease the transition for families.

#### *Parenting Education and Parent Attitude/Perception*

In a study conducted by First & Way (1995), participants in parenting education programs reported the curriculum motivated them to begin to question their perception of fundamental parenting issues such as problem solving, communication, and discipline patterns. The authors concurred that these changes model the concept of transformative learning, which literature on parenting education uses to explain educational experiences that encourage participants to view current issues from a new point of references and

examine actions they can use to change their lives in essential ways. How parents view themselves is reflected in all of their actions, especially in their acceptance of the parenting role and how they interact with school personnel (Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Sheldon, 2002).

Project Real (Reaching Early Aids Learning), involving parenting education in early childhood education, was implemented in a rural, Mississippi Delta Public School District in Northeastern Arkansas (Boals, 1995). Through personal interviews at the completion of the program, participants exhibited a higher understanding of the type of learning environment needed for their children. The parents also expressed the realization of the importance of reading to their children and the need for involvement in school activities.

Ruth Nickse (1990) stated that attitude toward education and aspirations of the parent, in addition to conversations in the home, reading materials, and cultural activities, contribute more directly to early reading achievement and account for more variance than socioeconomic status. Additionally, according to Powell (1991) and Powell and D'Angelo (2000), parental behaviors and attitudes are inextricably interwoven in routine, daily exchanges between parent and child.

In the development of the Missouri Parents as Teachers Program, it was revealed through extensive home visits and interviews that parents were clearly interested in learning how and what their children gain from instructional activities in the school setting (Renard, 1994). The study indicated that parents envisioned the ideal parent-educator as one who has the ability to communicate, has experience with child rearing

practices and the ability to establish rapport with all socioeconomic groups. It is in this context that educators and policy makers should design long-term parent education programs in alignment with the expressed needs of parents (Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Strom, 1985).

In 1989, several Memphis elementary schools began a parent workshop series entitled Learning Is Homegrown (Bond, 1996). The 1996 evaluation report of this program revealed that parents perceived changes that took place as a result of their participation in the workshops such as the number of hours their child spent completing homework and the amount of time the parent spent checking homework. The author reported that after participation parents perceived their children performing well in school and viewed the school staff as productive.

It was discovered in a survey of 5000 parents of kindergarten through fifth grade children attending 11 different schools in Boston, Massachusetts, that substantive parent involvement in their children's education appears to have a significant relationship to the parent's attitude toward schools. The Parent Attitude Toward School Effectiveness (PATSE) survey revealed that parents who believe that the school has high expectations of their children and frequently involves parents in monitoring their children's progress have children who perform at higher levels in the classroom (Melnick & Fiene, 1990). The authors are careful to identify that while the study does show a causal relationship, the findings suggest that increased parental involvement not only contributes to positive school perceptions but also indicates that involved parents report a significant improvement in their children's academic progress.

In regard to the impact of parenting education programs on attitudes toward parenting, Norris & Williams (1997) investigated future parent attitude changes as an outcome in an undergraduate sample who were taking a semester-long course in parenting education. The results indicated that the sample exhibited evidence of significant change in selected attitudes toward children and parenting after participation in a parenting education class (Norris and Williams, 1997).

Swick and others (1993) evaluated Target 2000, a South Carolina parenting education program that involves parent and literacy training as well as social services for children and parents. The intention of the program is to increase parents' effectiveness as the primary teachers of their preschool children. Twenty one school districts participated in the study. It was found that 99% of parents (n=109) who participated in home visits found them to be helpful while 97% (n=146) found the group meetings to be helpful. The parents in the study also reported that in-home learning activities and group meetings were very helpful to the parents in better preparing their children for school. Three major benefits of participating in the program as perceived by the parents were: (a) improved relationship with his/her child, (b) ways to better prepare the child for school, and (c) better understanding about child's development.

The research on parent attitudes toward parenting education and program involvement appears to indicate that parents desire to involve themselves in the education of their children (Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Rich, 1988; Rockwell, Andre & Hawley, 1996; Strom, 1985). For example, parents expressed interest in learning how to assist their children to succeed in the classroom (Callister, 1995; Craig

& Borger, 1995; Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; First & Way, 1995; Henderson, 1987). Overall, the parents indicated a strong interest in what goes on in school and a willingness to help. The parents in the studies cited seemed to be (a) searching for ways to help their children in school, (b) waiting for someone to provide them with the information about their children, and (c) looking for ways to help with school work that would increase their children's success in school (Renard, 1994; Rockwell et al., 1996).

### *Parenting Education and Parent Confidence*

Parenting education has positive effects not only on children's educational performance but also on parents' confidence. Henderson and Berla (1994) reported that through parenting education programs, families develop an increased confidence in the school. The teachers they worked with had higher opinions of them as parents and higher expectations for their children. As a result parents developed more confidence not only about helping their children learn at home but also about themselves as parents.

Craig and Borger (1995) conducted a study on Family Life Early Education Project (FLEEP) to investigate the effect of parenting education on parents' confidence and parenting behaviors. FLEEP operated from September 1993 through August 1994 within the Chicago public school system; the project sought to assist parents in acquiring skills that foster their young children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development, thus increasing their readiness for school. Craig and Borger (1995) reported that the program evaluation revealed that 66% of the participants viewed themselves as better parents, 80% felt they knew more about discipline strategies, and 75% reported increased confidence in the role of their child's first teacher and as a result

of having participated in the program. Parents also reported that they felt better equipped to provide a more suitable learning environment and age appropriate activities for their children.

A national study of eighth grade students and their parents revealed that structured parenting education and involvement programs in students' academic lives is indeed a powerful influence on students' achievement across all academic areas (Riley, 1994). Parents expressed that they benefited as well; they developed a greater appreciation of their role in their children's education, an improved self worth, strong social networks, and even the desire to continue their own education.

Even though research studies have shown positive effects of parenting education on children's academic performance, parents' knowledge of child development, and parents' attitudes toward parenting, there are also studies that do not support parenting education. For example, in Spring's (1998) study on the effect of parenting education on knowledge of parenting skills and attitude change, she found that the parenting education program was not effective in increasing the amount of parenting skills knowledge acquired by the sample population nor did it contribute to a difference in attitudes toward children in the sample population of incarcerated mothers.

It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of the parenting program. As Carter and Kahn (1996) pointed out, it is difficult to measure outcomes in the field of parenting education because it is hard to prove that something did not happen (prevention) or, even more difficult, to measure the degree of the strengthened skills and competencies; e.g.,

how does one measure the growth of self-esteem or empowerment? And to whom does the effectiveness of parenting education matter?

#### Studies on Parenting Education in Even Start Family Literacy Program

As pointed out by Puchner (1995), the goals of parenting education in Even Start family literacy program are to (a) strengthen parents' support of their young children's literacy development and early school success, (b) provide support for literacy in the family, (c) hold appropriate expectations of the child's learning and development, (d) actively embrace the parenting role, and (e) form and maintain connections to community and other resources for meeting individual and family needs. Regardless of changing family circumstances, the home remains the major source of a child's linguistic, social, emotional, moral, and intellectual developmental skills. And because parents are their children's primary teachers, there is a high correlation between parent involvement and their children's academic success (Zimmerman, 1993).

The results of the National Evaluation on the Even Start family literacy program showed that the extent to which parents took part in parenting education is significantly related to gains in children's vocabulary over and above gains in vocabulary that resulted from children's participation in early childhood programs. The National Evaluation also indicated that the amount or intensity of service is directly related to the strength of effects for both adults and children. Adults and children with high levels of participation in Even Start's core services gained significantly more on the outcome measures than did adults and children with low level of participation.

In a study on the effects of Even Start on family literacy, it was found that children of parents in the Even Start program were more likely to be exposed at home and in the community to literacy related activities, including visiting the library with their parent(s), checking out books, and spending more time in literacy-related parent-child activities (Connors-Tadros, 1996). Children may also be experiencing more appropriate discipline techniques and less harsh interactions with their parents (Connor-Tadros, 1996; Pamulapati, 2003). In another study on the effects of Even Start on family literacy, Farrer (2000) found that because of the parenting education, parents (a) spent more time playing and reading with their children, (b) changed their disciplinary techniques, and (c) know better how to teach their children at home.

Brent (2002) studied the effect of participating in Parenting and Readiness Center on Even Start parents' perceptions of self-efficiency, parent involvement, and parent and teacher perceptions of child outcomes. The overall findings suggest that parents who perceive themselves as effective are more involved in their children's education at the pre-school level. The participants in this study perceived themselves as effective due to the participation in the parenting education component which provided parents with guidance and support in understanding child development and learning. It also equipped parents with skills, information, and ideas about how to help with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.

In a study conducted by Meehan et al. (2000), the researchers examined the outcomes of the adult and parenting education components in an Even Start program. Thirty-two adults were tested using the Parent Index (PI) that measures three constructs:

parenting locus of control, internal locus of control, and self-esteem. Results from this study did not show any impact on the adults' parenting efficacy. However, small impacts were found on parental responsibility, parental control and parent's self-esteem.

Pamulapati (2003) also indicated that Even Start participants in her study reported significant changes in their interactions with their children which they attributed to their involvement in parenting classes and improvement in academic and literacy skills. The changes included reading to their children everyday, adopting disciplinary strategies that included less physical or verbal disapproval and increased communication. The communication skills parents gained in the parenting classes were also transferred to the home environment and thus improved their communication and relationships with their partners.

In Logue's (2000) study on brain development, she also addressed the necessity of parenting education in Even Start programs. She discussed how brain development occurs through interplay between nature and nurture. Negative experiences and the absence of appropriate stimulation are more likely to have serious and sustained effects during infancy than at later ages. The implications she identified for Even Start programs are (a) using parenting education as the vehicle for strengthening parent-child attachment, (b) using parenting education as the vehicle for developing children's literacy skills, and (c) providing opportunities for staff training and development in order to provide and maintain high-quality services.

### Need for Parenting Education

Thompson and Hupp (1992) listed inadequate home learning environment and ineffective parenting as two major factors that threaten the integrity of children and families. Swick and others (1993) also cited ineffective parenting as the most serious risk facing families in the early childhood years. According to Epstein and Dauber (1991), learning sound teaching principles and techniques can help parents understand how to assist their own children at home, how to monitor student work ideas and progress in different subjects, and how to discuss work at home. Without any type of assistance, the knowledge of parents and their actions to help their children are heavily dependent on their social class or education. There is no doubt about the need of parenting education, especially for the population Even Start family literacy program serves.

Rockwell et al. (1996) reported that parents often feel vulnerable and anxious about situations involving contact with school personnel and decisions about their children. He also observed that when confronted with traditional authority figures of the school, parents may feel powerless, incompetent and angry. Earlier research indicates that parents often feel that schools have a sterile atmosphere and school staff are indifferent to them (Aronson, 1996). Rockwell et al. (1996) and Schulze (1992) state that in many instances parents avoid involvement with school due to this perception accorded the parent by the school staff, from a supervisor attitude, as expressed verbally or nonverbally by the school staff, or from a feeling of making little difference in the formal educational process.

Interviews in Maine revealed that parents, especially of low socioeconomic levels, have had little contact with schools (Dodd, 1996). The parents interviewed stated that they often misunderstood what was happening in the schools and had concerns that they were unable to resolve, yet they wanted their children to be successful in the classroom. McGee (1996) stated that recent research reveals clearly that the majority of parents, regardless of culture and socioeconomic status, love their children and want them to lead quality lives. He continued by stating that program design is imperative, that providers should do their homework, and to rethink program initiatives as parental needs arise. Parents are the resource that assists in shaping parenting education programs to meet the needs of their children.

In some instances an attitude remains among non-middle class families that they are treated differently, that communication from the school is mostly negative, that their families are perceived as deficient, and that the focus of school efforts are only on family problems (Rockwell et al., 1996). Tangri & Leitch (1982) indicated that family perceptions of teacher attitudes toward them is a major source of conflict. Often educators report that parents do not have the desire to involve themselves in school activities.

Dauber & Epstein (1993) reported in a survey of over 2000 elementary and middle school parents that they feel differently. The authors continue by adding that the study revealed that not only do parents want to be involved, they want increased information from teachers detailing methods of assisting their children at home. American families face enormous challenges and for programs and policies to impact

children, there is a need to focus on family needs and family development which can be done through parenting education programs.

The need for parenting program was also indicated in Epstein's (1995a) study. In Epstein's study, parents express the desire for a program in which they can learn skills from teachers and other parents to support the educational development of their children. Parents can help children learn at home when they are provided with skills, information, and ideas about how to help with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning (Epstein, 1995a; Epstein, 1995b).

In a 1988 survey of parents, Don Davis of the Institute for Responsive Education, examined the relationship between hard-to-reach parents and schools. The study revealed that parents perceived themselves as reachable and had a strong desire to become involved but felt that schools were not trying to involve them, were not knowledgeable of effective strategies, or were not sensitive enough to overcome barriers (Rockwell et al., 1996). Even Start family literacy programs, by locating in the schools where the participants' children attend, serve as a bridge between the family and the school while providing educational services (ESL, ABE and parenting class) to the adults.

Dryfoos (1994) pointed out that a parenting education program can be more attractive to the parents when services are provided in a familiar, convenient, and comfortable setting. The interaction between parent and child can make a difference in how the child receives from and responds to the world. When parents can learn to interact with their children in healthy ways, dysfunctional family patterns can be

changed (Stanberry & Stanberry, 1994). Stanberry and Stanberry (1994) made some suggestions for operating a successful parenting education program—the program should (a) stress personal competence as well as parenting skills training, (b) identify and build on family strengths, (c) identify and develop family resources, and (d) guide parents to realize the changes necessary as they and their children grow through the family/individual life cycles.

Clark (1993) reported three major parental needs: (a) Parents lack motivation and internal resources for effective involvement with their children academically and behaviorally, (b) parents lack the understanding that it is not just the school's responsibility to take ownership of a child's education, and (c) parents lack training in parenting and lack an understanding of the educational system. These parental needs should be the focus for a successful parenting program, and through the medium of altering perceptions of all stake holders, advances in parenting education and involvement can be achieved (Downey, 2002; Epstein, 1991; Lopez et al., 2001; Mitchell, Weiss & Schultz, 1993; Reese & Gallimore, 2000; Rockwell et al., 1996; Walberg, 1986).

### Summary

Most of the past research studies conducted in the field of Even Start family literacy program showed positive effect on both of the adults and children. Through the studies on Even Start family literacy program, we have learned that adults made improvement in many areas such as (a) literacy skills (Anderson, 2000; Connors-Tadros, 1996; Farrer, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; U.S. Department of Education,

2003), (b) parenting skills (Brent, 2002; Brizius and Foster, 1993; Farrer, 2000; Meehan et al., 1999; Meehan et al., 2000), (c) education level (Anderson, 2000), and (d) participation in their children's education (Farrer, 2000; Meehan et al., 1999; Meehan et al., 2000; Pamulapati, 2003). For the Even Start children, they also showed improvement in various areas such as school-readiness (Anderson, 2000; Gamse et al., 1997; Meehan, 1999; Riedinger, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2003), transition from kindergarten to public school (Riedinger, 1997), school attendance (Gamse et al., 1997), and vocabulary development (Anderson, 2000; Meehan, 1999; Gamse et al., 1997; Riedinger, 1997).

Research studies in parenting education programs also indicated that parenting education has positive effects on both adult's and children's lives. The positive effects include improved children's academic achievement (Anastasi, 1988; Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Rich, 1988; Riley, 1994; Zimmerman, 1993), increased parental knowledge toward childrearing and child development (Borger, 1994; Farrer, 2000; Gomby et al., 1993; Minow, 1994; Pamulapati, 2003), improved confidence (Craig & Borger, 1995; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Sheldon, 2002; Pamulapati, 2003), and change of attitudes toward school (Bond, 1996; First & Way, 1995; Norris & Williams, 1997; Renard, 1994; Sheldon, 2002).

Even though findings from research studies have shown positive effects of parenting education on children's academic performance, parents' knowledge of child development, and parents' attitudes toward parenting, there were findings that did not provide support for parenting education, for example, the study conducted by Spring

(1998). It was also acknowledged that the effectiveness of the parenting program is difficult to measure (Carter and Kahn, 1996). As a result, it is not surprising that only limited number of studies conducted with the focus on parenting education as one component of Even Start program were found (Brent, 2002; Connors-Tadros, 1996; Logue, 2000; Meehan et al., 2000; Zimmerman, 1993).

As important as measuring the effectiveness of parenting education in Even Start program, investigating Even Start participants' perceptions toward parenting education is equally important. It matters to the parenting education participants the most whether or not the parenting education component in Even Start program is effective, and in what ways is it effective. It is the intention of this study to investigate Even Start participants' perceptions toward parenting education, what does it do for the parents, and how do parents benefit from it.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Most of the past research studies conducted in the fields of parenting education and Even Start family literacy showed positive effects on both the adults and children (Anderson, 2000; Anderson, 2002; Brent, 2000; Connors-Tadros, 1996; Gamse et al., 1997; Meehan, 1999; Meehan et al., 1999; Riedinger, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). However, there is very limited research conducted to investigate Even Start program participants' perceptions toward parenting education. The goal of this study was to investigate the Even Start family literacy program participants' perceptions of parenting education, explore issues related to parenting education, and identify the impact of parenting education as perceived by the Even Start family literacy program participants. This chapter describes the overall characteristics of the Dahlia Even Start program where the study was conducted, its participants as well as the design and procedures for data collection and analysis. The parenting education in the Dahlia Even Start program and the study participants' profiles are discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study. According to Merriam (1988), "descriptive research is undertaken when description and explanation are sought, when it is not possible nor feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study" (p. 7). Data for this study were acquired through interviews and classroom observations conducted by the researcher. Documentations such as needs assessment,

behavior surveys filled out by Even Start participants and home visit summaries filled out by parent educators, as well as other artifacts were also collected. The process and strategies employed for ongoing data analysis included unitizing, categorizing, triangulation and member checks. Detailed descriptions about data collection and data analysis are presented as follows.

### Selection of Program and Study Participants

#### *Program Description*

This study was conducted within the Dahlia Independent School District (Dahlia ISD). Dahlia ISD was selected based on the following criteria: (a) the program is in the third cycle and all the services are in place and functioning as proposed, (b) the program serves a large most-in-need population, (c) the program staff and parents showed a willingness to participate. Another reason Dahlia ISD was selected for this study is that the researcher has been working with the program for three years on the program evaluation. Before this study was conducted, the researcher had visited the program several times and talked to the program staff and participants during those visits. The working relationship with the program has enabled the researcher to be more familiar with the program.

Dahlia ISD is the one of the top five largest and one of the fastest growing school districts in Texas. The highest concentration of illiteracy in this southern city where Dahlia ISD is located occurs in the western sector of Dahlia ISD. The western sector of Dahlia ISD is where the target schools are located. A comprehensive program of

integrated educational services to children and parents is in critical and urgent need. To address these critical literacy and economic needs, the Even Start program in Dahlia ISD was serving 150 families enrolled, with a waiting list of families in need of services during the fall 2002 when the study was conducted. With the District's growth (1,5000 and more new students annually), it was anticipated that the number of families in need of services will soon double.

Dahlia ISD serves about 65,000 students in 45 elementary, 12 middle, and 12 high schools, including three magnet high schools. The 355 square-mile district is growing by approximately 1,200 to 1,500 new students each year. Dahlia is ethnically diverse with a desegregated student population of 54.1 % Hispanic, 6.7% black, 2.2% other and 37.1% white. A study on illiteracy in this southern city in Texas in 1993, conducted by the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA), revealed that on average 15% of the adult population in the city is functionally illiterate, defined as achievement of less than ninth grade. In the district, the highest concentration of illiteracy occurs in the western sector of Dahlia ISD, where the target schools are located.

Dahlia ISD Even Start program provides the following services:

1. Parent Literacy Training: English as a Second Language, GED Preparation, Adult Basic Education, Computer, and Citizenship Classes.
2. Early Childhood Education: For children zero to four years old, Even Start provides an early childhood program with stimulating educational centers at the same campus where their parents attend classes.

3. **Parent and Child Interactive Literacy Activities (PACILA):** During PACILA, parents and their children play together in planned and organized activities. Parents learn how to teach their children through play, and practice what they learn.
4. **Parenting Classes and Seminars:** The Even Start early childhood specialist and parent educator hold scheduled activities on campuses focusing on parenting skills and educational programs. Guest speakers also provide additional information on a variety of programs that can help parents.
5. **Home-Based Education and Child Development:** At least once a month, each Even Start family is visited by its parent educator. An in-home curriculum stresses to parents that they are their children's first and most important teacher. Parents discover how to better encourage their child's development through play and learning activities in which they can participate together.

#### *Even Start Participant's Eligibility*

Eligible Even Start participants are children (birth through seven years old) who reside in the Chapter I school attendance area designated for participation in the Chapter I basic program, and their parents. Parents must be eligible for participation in the adult education program under the Adult Education Act which specifies: (a) an adult is an individual who is 16 years old who is beyond the age of compulsory school attendance; (b) parents are not currently enrolled in school; and (c) parents lack literacy skills to

perform a job and need information processing skills, communication skills, computational skills, GED, or job skills for the current labor market.

### *Study Participants*

The sample of this study was a purposive sample of 12 Even Start parents who had been participating in the program for more than two years, and who had at least one child participating in the early childhood education component. It is the presumption of the researcher that only when the parents had been attending the parenting education for a certain amount of time, and had applied or had chances to apply what they learned in the class at home, could these parents provide more insights regarding their perceptions on parenting education. Only adult parents were recruited to participate in this study due to the consideration for involving human subjects in the study.

The English proficiency level of the study participants was not a selection criterion for this study since the majority of Dahlia ISD Even Start parents were Spanish speakers and not many parents eligible for this study spoke fluent English. A Spanish/English bilingual parent educator was present during every visit made by the researcher as well as during the interviews to provide translation assistance when needed.

A tentative schedule for Dahlia ISD Even Start parenting class during 2002-2003 was provided at the initial contact regarding this study by the program coordinator. Parenting class was scheduled once a month for each of the five sites Dahlia ISD Even Start program served. The parenting sessions were offered from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Thursdays, and from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on some Fridays. Breakfasts were provided on Fridays, and lunches were provided on both Thursdays and Fridays. The

visits were made when there were parenting sessions on both Thursday and Friday during the week in order to make the most use of the site visits.

The participating parents were not pre-selected. With the help of the parent educator, the parents eligible for the study were identified when the researcher arrived at the Dahlia ISD Even Start program. Due to one of the selection criteria that only parents who had been in the program for more than two years were eligible for the study, the number of possible study participants was limited. The researcher purposively selected the study participants from those who have been in the Even Start program for at least two years assuming that with two-year's participation in the program, parents would have received a sufficient amount of parenting education, applied the information in their daily lives, and built up enough experience to provide rich information for this study.

Another reason that limited the number of possible interviewees during each visit was parents' attendance. Since the participation in all the program components was strongly encouraged but not compulsory, not all the parents attended every class session regularly. As a result, some of the eligible parents might not be present when the researcher visited the program and were not invited to participate in the study. Each of the five sites Dahlia ISD Even Start served was visited at least twice to maximize the possibility of interviewing as many eligible parents as possible.

For each individual site visit made by the researcher, the number of possible candidates for the study ranged from one to four. There were 27 eligible parents enrolled in Dahlia ISD Even Start program during the Fall, 2002 when the study was conducted, and 12 were interviewed. All of the interviewees were females, including 11 Hispanics

and one Caucasian. Once identified by the parent educator, each possible candidate was approached by the parent educator to find out if she was interested in participating in the study. If the parent agreed to participate, she would join the researcher and the parent educator in a quieter place, usually the adjacent room or school library, for the interview. Study participants' profiles and the component of parenting education in Dahlia Even Start program are described in further details in Chapter IV.

#### Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was developed and was piloted on two Even Start participants. Modifications to the interview questions were made based on the feedback from the participants. The interview contains sections to include information on the four components of the Even Start program with focus on the component of parenting education. Participants were asked questions about their experiences in parenting education and questions about their perceptions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the parenting education in Dahlia ISD Even Start program. A copy of the protocol can be found in Appendix C.

#### Interview Procedure

Once a parent was in the room with the researcher and parent educator, she was briefed about the purpose of the study and encouraged to ask any question freely. A Spanish-speaking parent educator was present during ten out of twelve interviews because the majority of parents eligible for the study were Spanish speakers, and their English was not fluent enough for them to carry out the conversation with the researcher

in English. In order to get down the information as accurately as possible, the participant was asked about being audio-taped for later data analysis. With the parent's permission, the interview was audio-taped. Every study participant was fully aware that she could request the recorder to be turned off anytime during the interview.

The parent was then introduced to the consent form, which was in Spanish, and given time to review it. The interview started after the consent form was signed. All the participating parents were given a copy of the consent form with the researcher's contact information circled. The interview proceeded with the researcher asking a question from the interview guide; the parent educator translated the question into Spanish for the parent and then translated the parent's responses into English for the researcher. In some occasions, when the parent understood what the researcher was asking, she would respond to the question directly without the parent educator's translation. Most of the study participants were comfortable about being interviewed; it might be due to the fact that (a) these parents had been visited by people outside the program in the past, and (b) the parent educator with whom they were familiar was present during the interviews.

### Data Collection

The researcher was the only instrument for data collection and analysis; therefore, all information obtained was through the researcher's insight. Humans are the primary data-gathering instruments in naturalistic studies

because it would be virtually impossible to devise a priori a nonhuman instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered; because of the understanding that all

instruments interact with respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; because the intrusion of instruments intervenes in the mutual shaping of other elements and that shaping can be appreciated and evaluated only by a human; and because all instruments are value-based and interact with local values but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account those resulting biases. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp.39-40)

Data for this study were collected through interviews and classroom observations conducted by the researcher. Documentations such as a needs assessment, a behavior survey filled out by Even Start participants, and home visit summaries completed by parent educators were also collected for the study. Merriam (1988) suggested interviews for a study if the purpose is to acquire specific information from the perspective of the interviewee, if it is not possible to get access to that information by observing alone, or if something that has happened in the past is investigated. Interviews allow the researcher and respondent to move back and forth in time; to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interviews also help the researcher to understand and put into a larger context the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment.

An individual interview ranging from thirty minutes to ninety minutes was conducted with each of the participating parents. A Spanish-speaking parent educator was present during the interview to help with translation. With the participant's permission, each interview was recorded using two recorders—one is a digital voice

recorder and the other one is a mini-tape audio recorder. Fieldnotes were also taken by the researcher during each interview for information that recorders cannot capture such as body language, facial expressions as well as interactions among the researcher, participant, and the parent educator. Conversations occurring between the researcher and the parent educator who served as the translator in this study were also recorded in the fieldnotes for future reference.

The researcher also acquired data through various classroom observations in order to obtain insights about the setting, the social climate, the parents' interactions with teachers, and the parents' interactions with each other. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain the benefits of using observation;

Observation ... maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like; observation... allows the inquirer to see the world as his subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment; observation...provides the inquirer with access to the emotional reactions of the group introspectively—that is, in a real sense it permits the observer to use himself as a data source; and observation...allows the observer to build on tacit knowledge, both his own and that of members of the group. (p.193)

Observations enabled the researcher to experience things directly and to draw her own conclusions. Depending on the schedule of parenting class, content of the lesson on the instructor's agenda and the number of parents who agreed to participate in the study, the

length of each classroom observation varied. On Thursdays when parenting class was scheduled from 12:30 to 2:30, the classroom observations were shorter than the ones on Fridays when the parenting class was from 8:30 to 12:30. The researcher was advised to conduct interviews at the beginning of the class so that the participating parents would not be kept around after the class hours. As a result, the length of time for the classroom observation was shorter if more parents were interviewed during the visit. The length of time for each classroom observation ranged from thirty to ninety minutes, and field notes were taken during each observation.

The researcher also collected documents such as an adult education student data form, home visit summaries, needs assessment for Even Start families, Family Literacy Behavior Survey, Even Start pamphlets, Reading logs, agendas for parenting classes, parent success stories, the program funding proposal and evaluation reports. These documents enhanced the researcher's understanding of Dahlia ISD Even Start program and its participants.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing throughout the process of data collection. The ongoing process led to minor modifications of the interview questions and shaped what was asked in subsequent interviews. As a result of the ongoing data analysis during the data collection, a few questions had been either deleted or modified after the first interview as other questions that elicited important information were added. Once the interview was completed, the taped interview was transcribed and translated into English by a bilingual person who was fluent both in English and Spanish as well as experienced

in translating and transcribing. Even with the parent educator's translation which was also recorded on the tape, each interviewee's responses in Spanish were translated into English when the tape was processed.

It seems that the parent educator who assisted in translation during the interviews sometimes added her own interpretation and elaborated the interviewees' responses when she saw appropriate. The parent educator's comments were made based on her experiences working with the interviewees on different occasions such as parenting class sessions, home visits and field trips. The English translations, one from the parent educator and the other one from the tape transcriber, were compared. The parent was consulted if any discrepancy was found between the translations. For further analysis, the data were then saved as a word document with each page and each line of the text numbered.

Each unit of meaning from the entire data set was identified and was written on a separate four by six index card which was labeled and numbered accordingly. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), units should have two characteristics: "First, it should be heuristic, that is, aims at some understanding or some action that the inquirer needs to have or to take...Second, it must be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself, that is, must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out" (p. 345).

Each index card also contained logistical information such as the interview number, page number and line number from which a unit of information originated on the

word documents of the transcribed interviews. Each interview was numbered in chronological order and each number corresponded with the same number on the transcribed interview and on the audio tape. The preliminary work of labeling each index card enabled the tracing of each unit of meaning back to the original interview very rapidly if a unit needed to be reviewed in its original context.

Next, the index cards were sorted with similar or related content into categories. The process of categorizing, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), enables the researcher to

bring together into provisional categories those cards that apparently relate to the same content; to devise rules that describe category properties and that can, ultimately, be used to justify the inclusion of each card that remains assigned to the category as well as to provide a basis for later tests of replicability; and to render the category set internally consistent. (p. 347)

Each index card was read carefully in order for the researcher to determine if it was like the previous card. If so, the card was placed into the same pile of yet-to-be-named category as the previous card, and if not, a second new pile of yet-to-be-named category was created. When a pile of index cards reached six to eight cards, the cards were reviewed and a name that caught the essence of all the cards in the pile was assigned to the category. Following this procedure, a list of categories was established. All index cards under each category were checked again to ensure the accuracy and the appropriateness of being grouped together. When an index card had to be placed under more than one category, the card was duplicated and placed accordingly. It is the goal of

defining categories in such a way that “they are internally as homogeneous as possible and externally as heterogeneous as possible.” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.349) These categories represented and described the data. The researcher made inferences and determined emerging themes based on the categories.

Just as validity and reliability are the major concerns to quantitative researchers, trustworthiness is the major concern to qualitative researchers. Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities created by the people involved in the study, and as a result, the reality constructed by one person might not be the same as the other person’s reality. Several strategies were used to ensure the internal validity. The first strategy is triangulation. Triangulation refers to the collection of data that involves multiple sources including interviews which were the major source of data, and complementary sources of data such as classroom observations and existing documentation including surveys, participants’ geographical data, researcher’s field notes, program descriptions, and etc. “Triangulation may establish that the information gathered is generally supported or disconfirmed;...it enhances meaning through multiple sources and provides for thick description of relevant information” (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p.115).

In this study, triangulation was carried out in the way of comparing interview data with observation data, documentations that included home visit summaries, needs assessment, a Family Literacy Behavior Survey, reading logs, Even Start pamphlets, and researcher’s field notes. Each item of information was triangulated before it was taken into serious consideration. The second strategy is the member check. Since the data

analysis was on-going during the data collection, during the visit following each interview with the Even Start parents, the analyzed data were brought back to the interviewees for discussion to ensure that the results were meaningful and represented them or their thoughts appropriately. The third strategy is classroom observations. The researcher was present during the parenting class sessions whenever interviews were scheduled. Fieldnotes were taken during the classroom observations and were used as references during the data analysis.

Since the researcher was the only instrument for data collection and analysis, all information obtained was through the researcher's insight. As a result, the researcher's bias was present. As suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985) and Merriam (1988), a possibility to deal with researcher bias is to be aware of it and to always keep in mind not to impose one's own values and views but try to understand reality from the minds and perspectives of those under study. External validity in qualitative studies, according to Merriam (1988), is the extent to which findings can be applied to other situations in qualitative research, and readers will determine the applicability of the studies.

Merriam (1988) suggested thinking of reliability in naturalistic studies in terms of the findings being consistent with the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) term this trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation such as using a combination of several sources for data collection was used. An audit trail was another strategy suggested by Merriam (1988) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). It is a process by which another person can follow the steps of the researcher in detail from the very beginning through the process of data collection, data analysis, and the principles based on which

conclusions were derived. For this study, an outside person could go through the whole process of this study beginning with the interview guides, the description of the sites, the audiotapes, the transcribed data, the field notes, the collected documents, the units of meaning on index cards, the derivation of categories, and at the end the emergence of final themes.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this study was to understand the Even Start family literacy program participants' perceptions of parenting education. The secondary purposes included exploring issues related to parenting education, and identifying the impact of parenting education as perceived by the Even Start family literacy program participants. The researcher conducted classroom observations as well as interviews with 12 parents enrolled in Dahlia ISD Even Start program in southern Texas. For analysis, the researcher also collected documents such as adult education student data form, home visit summaries, needs assessment for Even Start families, Family Literacy Behavior Survey, Even Start pamphlets, reading logs, agenda for parenting classes, parent success stories, program proposal and evaluation report.

In order to provide a picture as complete as possible of the study findings, this chapter presents thick descriptions in regards to parenting education in Dahlia ISD Even Start family literacy program, study participants' profiles, and researcher's involvement with Even Start family literacy programs. The findings of the study are presented after the section on the researcher's involvement with Even Start family literacy programs.

## Parenting Education in Dahlia ISD Even Start Program

### *Parenting Class*

A parenting class was scheduled once a month for each of the five sites Dahlia ISD Even Start program served. The flyers for the parenting class were distributed to the Even Start parents in all five sites, but normally the majority of parenting class attendees were from the campus where the class was held. This is not surprising because Even Start sites are located in school campuses that are convenient for the Even Start family to attend; in other words, close to where they live since most of the attending parents do not have the transportation means to go to other campuses.

To make sure Even Start parents in all five sites receive the same information, Even Start staff normally focused on one theme for each month and then conducted parenting class sessions around the theme in all five sites during the month. The class sessions were from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. on Thursdays, and from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on some Fridays. Breakfasts were provided on Fridays, and lunches were provided on both Thursdays and Fridays. The researcher visited the Dahlia ISD Even Start program 11 times and interviewed 12 parents during those visits.

The emphasis of the parenting class was on child development, family reading, discipline of children, child safety and school safety, family budgeting, health and nutrition, and the child's transition to pre-kindergarten. The class sessions were generally fun, with numerous hand-on activities for the parents to practice. During the beginning of one parenting session on child development, the early childhood education specialist and the parent educator asked three parents to volunteer for a classroom activity. They

talked to these three parents for a few minutes and gave them the instruction about the activity. After most of the parents sat down and were ready for the class, the early childhood education specialist briefed the class about the topic they would work on during the session. Then she asked those three parents who volunteered for the activity to demonstrate to the whole class, using a baby doll, different ways of teaching a toddler to walk.

The first parent held the doll and walked behind it. She had her legs against the doll's legs, and she moved her legs one at a time to slowly push each of the doll's legs forward. She did not talk to the baby doll during the demonstration. The second parent did not have any physical contact with the doll; instead, she encouraged and cheered the doll verbally and waited for the baby doll to take its first step. The third parent used both methods demonstrated by the first two parents. She held the doll's hands and walked with the doll slowly. She provided physical assistance to the doll but tried to minimize her physical assistance as much as possible. She also verbally encouraged the doll a lot while pretending to help it practice walking.

It was fun for the class to watch these three parents' demonstrations. Some of the parents laughed with the volunteers during the demonstrations; some parents smiled and nodded in agreement with a particular demonstration, and some wanted to jump up and show the class how they taught their toddlers to walk. After the demonstrations, the early childhood education specialist and the parent educator facilitated a discussion about the differences among the strategies used by these three parents. They discussed which one is a better strategy and why. The whole class was actively engaged in the discussion.

They shared their experiences and provided feedbacks especially to those who said they were trying to teach their toddlers to walk.

During some of the parenting class sessions, parents were given short story books to keep and to read to their children at home. They were asked to record the length of time they read to their children. When giving short story books to the parents, the early childhood education specialist or the parent educator usually demonstrated different methods in reading the stories to keep a child's attention and to elicit the child's responses regarding his/her comprehension about the story. They read to the class emphasizing certain phrases, pointing out things such as colors, shapes, and animals on the page the parent could use to initiate a discussion with the child.

Different activities the family could do together to enhance the learning through the story were also introduced to the parents. During one of the parenting sessions, the parent educator demonstrated to the class how to read and interact with their children by reading a book about a selfish Rainbow fish who does not want to *share* with others. Parents were encouraged to talk to their children about the story and relate the story to their children's everyday life with questions such as (a) will they share their toys with their siblings and friends; (b) how does it make them feel when others do not want to share books or toys with them, and (c) what do they want to do if their siblings, friends or new classmates ask to play with their toys? Parents were reminded that they could take opportunities to practice this exercise with their children in school, playground or at home.

Speakers from different organizations were invited by the Even Start staff to some of the parenting class sessions to talk to the parents. The contents presented by the speakers included:

1. A representative from the Metropolitan Health District spoke about children's health and immunizations,
2. A representative from University of Texas Health Science Center's Dental School talked about dental hygiene,
3. A staff member from Women, Infants and Children (WIC) discussed the eligibility and benefits from WIC,
4. A representative from City Public Service talked about electrical safety geared towards children,
5. A policeman from the City Police Department discussed issues regarding gangs and violence,
6. Two teachers from the public school talked to the parents about children's transition to the public school system, assessments used in Texas and their importance,
7. An instructional specialist from the public school talked about how to prepare children for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten,
8. A representative from Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) talked to the parents about the services available through the organization, the benefits and eligibility, and

9. A staff member from Putting an End to Abuse through Community Efforts (PEACE) initiative addressed issues on family relations and the impacts on children.

Most Even Start parents appeared comfortable during these sessions, and they were eager to participate in the discussions. Most of the parents participated actively in discussions with their classmates, the early childhood education specialist, the parent educator, and the speaker(s). They talked about their experiences and opinions related to the topics, and they also asked questions to acquire more information.

#### *Home Visit*

Home visits provide such advantages as (a) presenting instructional activities directly in the family setting; (b) providing opportunities for individualized, family-oriented instruction; (c) enabling parent educators to identify factors in the home environment that may affect the family's capacity for learning, and (d) reinforcing parenting lessons learned at the Even Start sites. The parent educator normally started the first home visit with a family after the parent had been coming to the program for a couple of months, and after the parent was comfortable about having the parent educator in her/his home.

The visits were conducted in a non-threatening and relaxed manner with the parent educator introducing simple and fun, but structured, activities to the parent and the children. Both the parent and the children could continue their learning by repeating the activities in their home after the parent educator left. The parent educator would also structure the home visit activities around the topics that were being discussed at the

parenting sessions during the month when the visit occurred. One parent educator was responsible for conducting home visits with parents in each of the five Even Start sites. Depending on the scheduling and the family's availability, each family generally received one to two home visits per month.

### Participant Profile

Twelve parents were interviewed; they are Julia, Rose, Mary, Ellie, Roxie, June, Marisa, Olivet, Vicki, Marla, Mindy and Marie. Pseudonyms were used for the study participants to protect their identities. They are all females from 24 to 44 years old. Among the study participants, Roxie was born and raised in the United States, and Mary was born in Mexico but came to the United States while she was little. The other ten study participants were all born and raised in Mexico; they came to the United States during their adult ages, with the length of time in the United States ranging from two years to sixteen years.

Except for Roxie whose native language is English, the other 11 study participants' native language is Spanish. Out of the participants whose native language is Spanish, Julia was the only one who was comfortable and fluent enough to be interviewed in English. Mary has been in the United States for more than 30 years, but she did not feel that her English was good enough to be interviewed in English. Thus, along with the rest of the study participants, Mary was interviewed in Spanish with a parent educator present to help with the translation.

*Julia.* Julia is 38 years old and she finished ninth grade in Mexico. She has been in the United States for the past six years. She has two children; one is five years old,

and the other one is two years old. They both were enrolled in the Early Childhood Center at the Dahlia ISD Even Start program. She has been coming to the Even Start program for the past three years. Julia was comfortable talking to me in English. A parent educator was present during the beginning of the interview session to see if any translation was needed, but she left shortly after the interview began. Julia talked to me about her goals for participating in the Even Start program; her goals are to learn English, obtain the certificate for General Education Development (GED), become a citizen, read to her children in English, and be involved in her children's school.

Julia is a very outgoing and hard working person. According to her teacher, Julia has been studying very hard in the adult education program, and the teacher was very confident that Julia would pass the upcoming GED test. Julia enjoys coming to the program because she can learn a lot of things such as how to speak, read and write in English, and while she is studying in the adult education class, her children are also getting free educational services in the Early Childhood Center. For her, the parenting class is a place where she can talk with others, exchange personal experiences and improve her parenting skills through the information given and exchanged at various parenting class sessions. Julia said that Even Start program is where she can get to know people and stay busy learning.

*Rose.* *Rose* is a 39-year-old mother with four children who are one, seven, ten and fourteen years old. Rose has a bachelor's degree from Mexico and she has been in the United States for 16 years. She has participated in the Even Start program for about three years, and she is still struggling with her English. Rose recently gave birth to a

baby and she is very interested in the stages of child development. She said she did not have a lot of information in the past to help her raise her older children, and now she wants to learn as much as she can about child development in order to help the baby. She has learned how to read to her baby in the parenting class, and she is trying to read to her older children as well. She hopes that the older ones will one day develop reading habits themselves. For her, attending the parenting class helps her improve parenting skills, enables her to share and discuss her experiences with other parents, and helps her practice English, too. She said the other reason why she attends the parenting sessions is because it is required by the Even Start program.

*Mary.* Mary is 33 years old. She came to the United States when she was little, but she received only very little public education in the United States. She has been coming to the Even Start program for the past two years with a six-month break when she had to quit the program to go to work. She has three children; they are one, four and ten years old. Her four-year old has speech problems, and she has been taking him to a speech therapist as well as trying to find other ways to assist him to learn. However, it has been hard for her to locate assistance for her son, and the fact that Mary does not speak much English does not help the situation either. She wishes to improve her English at the Even Start program and get her GED one day.

Mary enjoys coming to the parenting class because she always learns useful information that she could apply at home and work with her children. The useful things she thought she has learned at the parenting are how to interact with the children, how to read to them, how to recognize some of their problematic behaviors and how to react to

those behaviors. How to budget money is also a topic from which she thought that she has benefited a lot. She is very proud of herself for being able to provide suggestions, based on her own experiences, to her classmates on some of the issues discussed at the parenting sessions.

*Ellie.* Ellie, my fourth interviewee, is 28 years old. She has been in the United States for eight years and attending the Even Start program for four years. She finished up to sixth grade level in Mexico. Ellie has two children; one is five and the other one is six years old. She came to the Even Start program to improve her English skills and because of the requirements, she participated in the rest of components; i.e., parenting education, PACILA, and home visits. It took Ellie about a year to feel comfortable enough for the parent educator to conduct home visits at her house.

Ellie has been practicing with her children the activities the parent educator showed her either at the parenting class sessions or at her house during the home visits. She has noticed some improvement in her children's reading after practicing reading to them at home for a few weeks. The teacher from Early Childhood Center mentioned to the parent educator that Ellie's children have been making great progress in reading. The children are more attentive when the teachers talk or give instructions in the classroom, and this is one of the things the parent educator has been working on with Ellie and her children—paying attention to the people when they speak to you. Ellie's husband has a drinking problem, and it has become a problem for the whole family. She is working with the parent educator to get counseling on how to deal with this situation.

*Roxie.* Roxie is the only Caucasian female interviewed in the study. She is 24 years old, born and raised in the United States. She is a high school drop-out and for many years, she did not know what she wanted for her life. After she had her first baby, Roxie and her baby stayed with her mother. Roxie did not work because she needed to take care of the baby and because she did not have a high school diploma. A few years after she had the baby, she saw a flyer from her child's school about the Even Start program, and she decided to give it a try. She has been in the Even Start program for two years, and she just had her second child last year.

For Roxie, coming to the Even Start program gives her a purpose of life, and she has acquired the belief that she can better herself, and that she is capable of improving her life for herself and for her children. She attends the Even Start program hoping to get her GED, and after she gets her GED, she wants to go to college and get a job so that she can provide a better home environment for her four-year-old and one-year-old children. Through her own improvement in the Even Start program, she also wants to be involved in her children's school more effectively. Roxie admitted to me that she did not know how to raise a child two years ago; she relied mainly on her mother's assistance to take care of her older child when he was born. After the parenting class, PACILA and home visits, she is more confident now about taking care of her children, talking to them, reading to them, doing different types of activities with them, disciplining them, and helping them with their education.

*June.* June is 32 years old, and she has been in the United States for almost six years. She finished up to sixth grade level in Mexico. She does not speak much

English. She seems to be a person with strong opinions and to have strong confidence in herself. She told me her main reason for coming to the Even Start program is to learn English. She attends the parenting class because it is one of the requirements for participating in the Even Start program. During the parenting sessions, she socializes with others and practices her English. She also wants to read to her children who are seven and three year olds, in English, and help them with their homework. She has been in the program for three years.

*Marisa.* Marisa is 43 years old; she finished an equivalent of sixth grade level of education in Mexico. She moved to Texas six years ago with her family. Marisa has been coming to the Even Start program for the past three years, and she enjoys all the classes, especially the ESL class. She thinks it is important for her to be able to read, write and communicate with others in English because she is in the United States now. Marisa's child is in special education program, and she does not think that the Even Start program has helped her much in parenting her child because of his special condition. However, as Marisa mentioned later during the interview, she still enjoys the parenting class for various types of information introduced and discussed among the parents. She comes to the parenting class because the class is fun, and she sometimes learns new things even though she can't really apply them at home with her son.

*Olivet.* Olivet, 44 years old, had her bachelor's degree from Mexico. She came to the United States two years ago with her family, and she has been attending the Even Start program ever since. Olivet did not speak any English at all when she first enrolled in the Even Start program; she came to the program because a friend of hers told her that

the Even Start program is a place where she can learn English for free. Now she speaks and understands some English. She has three children, and the youngest one turned nine last year. Because none of her children are currently at the age range that Even Start program serves in the Early Childhood Center, she no longer receives home visits from the parent educator.

Olivet enjoys both ESL and parenting classes. Olivet said she has improved her English vocabulary in various subject areas due to the topics covered in the parenting class. In the parenting class, she discussed with others information regarding a child's talent, a child's developmental stages, the importance of education, family budget, health issues, drugs at school, and the like. She said she knows a lot about the topics introduced in the parenting class, but it is good for her to go over those topics again, learn about the topics in English, and share and discuss her experiences with others.

*Vicki.* Vicki is 28 years old with a two-year-old child. She has been in the United States for three years, and she has been coming to the Dahlia ISD Even Start program for almost two years. Vicki is very concerned about her child's education and she wants to learn English not only for herself but for communicating to her child's school teachers and helping her child with his education in the United States. She also wants to get a job some day after she gets her GED. She likes the Even Start program very much because it provides English classes for the adults during the day which free her to cook and be at home when her husband gets off work. She also likes the educational services her son is getting from the Early Childhood Center, part of the Even Start program. She had been reading to her son even before she came to the program,

and they have a lot of toys at home that her son plays with all the time. For Vicki, parenting education provides validations on some of the things she has already been practicing with her child.

*Marla.* Marla is 33 years old. She finished eighth grade level in Mexico. She came to Texas about two years ago, and her family is currently living with three family friends. She has three children, one is nine years old and the other two, twins, are six years old. They have been an Even Start family for about two years. Marla wants to improve her parenting skills and practice her English in the parenting class. When she first came to the United States, Marla felt useless in terms of helping her children with their school work because she did not speak nor understand any English. Her husband was mad at her a lot of times and blamed her for their children's poor school performance.

Marla used to send her children to the neighbors for help with their homework. She also had to ask her neighbors for help with English many times. After coming to the Even Start program, she has been learning English at the ESL class, acquiring knowledge regarding parenting strategies and public school information at the parenting sessions, and receiving assistance from the parent educator to establish contacts with her children's school teacher. Marla is now more confident in helping her children with homework, and she is also more comfortable about discussing her children's performance with their school teachers and with her husband. She is very pleased with her children's performance at school; she said her children have been making good progress, and they even received a certificate for good performance from the school.

Marla told me that she has gained a lot of knowledge in the parenting class, and the whole family has benefited from it. She thinks the topics covered in the parenting class are especially important for the Hispanic families who are new immigrants in this country. According to Marla (personal communication, December 11, 2002), a lot of things are different between Mexico and the United States, such as the school system and various common problems in the school. She recalled one parenting session when a policeman came to the class to talk to them about violence in school and school safety; she felt “Hispanic families need lots of information like that [because] it is not available in Mexico.”

The parenting class has helped her communicate with and discipline her children better. She frequently reads to her children in English and Spanish. They also discuss the stories they read together or movies they watch together. Marla now feels more comfortable about her parenting style and the use of English. She wishes that her husband could participate in the parenting class because “he needs to learn some of these things” (Marla, personal communication, December 11, 2002).

*Mindy.* Mindy is 31 years old. She has been in the United States for eleven years, and she has an equivalent of seventh grade level of education that she received in Mexico. Like Marla, Mindy wants to learn English not only for herself but also for helping her children’s education. She has two children who are six years old and two years old. She has been coming to the Even Start program for three years, and she works very hard in the ESL class. It is mainly because she feels the importance of being able to

read, write, listen and speak in English, and being fluent in English will also enable her to be more involved in her children's education.

Mindy's husband did not want her to come to the Even Start program at first because he was afraid that there might be bad influences for her in the Even Start program. Mindy convinced her husband by telling him that Even Start offers classes for adults and children during the day, and some of their friends are also enrolled in the Dahlia ISD Even Start program. He was still hesitant but agreed to let her try it. Now he is very happy to see how Mindy has improved her English, and is impressed to see how Mindy interacts with their children and helps them with learning activities. Mindy said she has learned a lot from the parenting class; she has received information on how to work with her children, how to read to them, how to keep them interested during the reading, how to communicate with them and how to discipline them. The parenting class has also educated her about the public school system in the United States, and it will help her to be more involved in her children's school when they are ready to attend the public school. Mindy thinks that Even Start has provided opportunities for families to improve and to succeed in the United States.

*Marie.* Marie is 27 years old and very pleasant and friendly. She finished the second grade in Mexico and has been in the United States for three years. She has been attending the Even Start program for almost two years, and so are her two children—ten and two years old. She came to the Even Start program initially because it gave her a place to go rather than staying at home all the time. After coming to the program for a couple of weeks, she started to enjoy the classes and has been making friends along the

way. Even Start has provided a safe and comfortable environment for her and her children to learn and to socialize with others. She has learned a lot of English from the ESL class, and she has learned a lot about child-raising strategies, family budgeting and the public school system from the parenting class.

Because of the parenting education, Marie has become more patient with her children; she communicates and does activities with her children more; and she applies what she has learned in the parenting class at home. For Marie, the parenting class is where she can discuss her problems relating to child-raising and family issues, and get some feedback from her classmates who have experienced the same situations. She enjoys sharing and discussing personal experiences with her Even Start friends.

#### Researcher's Involvement in the Even Start Program

“Because of the understanding that all instruments interact with respondents and objects but that only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction; ... and because all instruments are value-based and interact with local values but only the human is in a position to identify and take into account those resulting biases” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, pp.39-40), and because all information obtained was through the researcher's insight, the researcher's bias was present. The researcher was aware of it and tried to understand reality from the minds and perspectives of study participants. The data collected for this study were analyzed based on the researcher's understanding and experiences working with the Even Start programs. Since the researcher's involvement in Even Start programs and the study

findings are interwoven, the researcher's involvement in Even Start programs is addressed before presenting the findings.

It was four years ago when I became involved in the Even Start Family Literacy Program. I began by assisting an independent consultant in evaluating Even Start programs. I later became an Even Start program evaluator myself. Even Start Family Literacy was new to me at that time. What kind of the program is this? Who are the participants? Why do they enroll in the program? What do they learn in the program? How have they benefited from the program? And what have changed in their lives since their participation? After my first year of working with several Even Start programs, I gradually gained a deeper understanding about the Even Start program, its participants and its effects on the participants' lives.

From my experience working with Even Start programs, I had come to know that a majority of Even Start program participants initially enroll in the program for two reasons. One is to learn English and the other one is to get the certificate for General Education Development (GED), an equivalent to the high school diploma. Learning English is a main reason for participating in the Even Start program, especially for the immigrants who do not speak much English but want to be an active participant in this country. Almost forty percent of the Even Start program participants in Texas are Hispanic, from low-income families. Since Even Start programs provide free services including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and childcare, which is what the participants initially viewed as the desired part of early childhood education, Even Start is an ideal place for them to get what they need –English language and childcare.

The other main reason for participating in the Even Start program is to get the GED certificate; this is more the case for participants who are native speakers of English with low family incomes. Most of them dropped out of high school, and later in their adulthood they realized the importance of having a high school diploma in relation to getting a better paying job to provide for the family and/or for going to college. Since going back to the high school is no longer an option for them, many of them enrolled in the Even Start program for the adult literacy class to study for the GED. And because it is a family literacy program, their children from birth to seven years are also being looked after while they are enrolled in the program.

While I have been working with Even Start programs, I have not met a parent who enrolled in an Even Start program for the parenting education. For Even Start parents, the initial motivation for them to participate in the Even Start program was for their own literacy development. The early childhood education component of the Even Start program was an add-on that provides convenience for the parents to reach their goal—learning English or getting the GED. It also helped their children by giving them a head start in the development of language and literacy. Attending parenting education for the Even Start parents was just a requirement they had to meet to stay enrolled in the program.

Did these adult participants reach their goal(s) which they originally came to the program for—being able to speak fluent English and/or getting a GED? Most of them have reached their goal(s) and they left the program with more than what they had planned to gain when they signed up for the program. During the time these parents

were in the program, their children received proper educational services that prepare them for public schools, and the parents also gained valuable knowledge about parenting and child development from the program and from each other. For some parents, after a few weeks of Even Start participation, what used to be “Oh, do I have to go to that class?” turned into “Come on, let’s go to the parenting.” Their attitudes changed about participating in parenting education. What changed these parents’ attitudes toward the parenting class? What kinds of changes occurred because of their participation in the parenting class as the parents see them? Is there any impact perceived by the parents? If yes, what is the impact? These questions are addressed in this study.

### Findings

Three research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the Even Start family literacy program participants’ perceptions of parenting education?
2. What are the changes in their lives as a result of participation in parenting education as perceived by Even Start participants?
3. What impact does parenting education have on their lives as perceived by Even Start participants?

The findings are presented in the following sequences:

1. Participants’ perception of themselves and the Even Start program.
2. Participants’ perception of parenting education.
3. Changes perceived as a result of participating in parenting education.
4. Impact perceived as a result of participating in parenting education.

### Participants' Perception of Themselves and Even Start Program

The participants in this study are 12 Even Start parents who have been participating in the program for more than two years, and who have at least one child participating in the early childhood education component. All of them are females including eleven Hispanics and one Caucasian. Before they enrolled in the program, most of them stayed at home to take care of the children and to do house chores such as cooking and cleaning. They did not have much contact with the outside world nor ideas about the possibilities and opportunities for them to make any changes in their lives. As Marie said “things were harder back in Mexico; things were hard here in the U.S. [as well]” (personal communication, December 11, 2002). With the language barrier, the differences between American culture and Hispanic culture, and without accessible resources, they felt helpless and powerless in terms of merging into this society where they now live, and in being active and productive participants.

Most of them wanted to learn English because they did not understand what people were saying, and every time they had to use English they felt nervous, stressed, embarrassed and sometimes depressed. Some of the participants' spouses speak English, but they speak to each other in Spanish at home. As a result, a majority of interviewed parents reported that not only did they know very little English; they also did not have opportunities to learn English at home from their spouses. In the Even Start program, they learned how to speak English with a lot of opportunities to practice.

They knew that changes occurred in their spouses' work, children's school and the community. They knew that these changes might impact their lives, but they did not

know how to stay informed about the changes, nor did they know how to locate the resources that would assist them in making informed choices in response to the changes. They would like to get jobs too, to learn new things and to help the family. But they were limited in the jobs they could get because of their lack of English, sometimes the lack of job skills, and oftentimes the lack of a U.S. diploma.

Most of them did not have a strong support system before they enrolled in the Even Start program, and their support system normally consisted of only family members. For the Hispanic families who had only been in United States for a few months, their support system was even more limited for they were the only ones who came to the United States and many of their family members were still in Mexico. With limited support systems, Even Start families, disregarding the ethnicities, suffered from limited access to information and resources. For example, Roxie, the only native English speaker in this study, reported that being a single mother, she had trouble finding the resources or acquiring the support she needed for her family. “I did not know who to ask or how to ask for assistance [before participating in the Even Start program]” (Roxie, personal communication, October 24, 2002).

Many of them wanted to help their children with their homework, but were unable to do so because they did not understand English or did not feel competent about their abilities to assist in their children’s learning. Some of the Hispanic study participants might require their children’s assistance interacting with others outside of the family; shopping for groceries is an example. Parents tried to seek assistance from their neighbors or friends, but as one parent said “you could not keep asking the

neighbors to help your children with their English homework; they also have things to do.” It was also embarrassing for some of them to ask others to help their children with homework, because they were not able to do so themselves. What also worried some of the parents who have children attending public schools was that they might only have little knowledge about the happenings at their children’s schools because (a) they did not fully understand the information their children brought home from the school in such forms as report cards or fliers, (b) they did not know how to establish or maintain contacts with their children’s schools to stay informed, (c) they might not have communicated effectively with their children to know about school happenings, or (d) they were not fully aware of the school culture that would impact their children’s development and learning. With limited knowledge about the happenings in their children’s schools, the parents were handicapped in enhancing the quality of their children’s learning.

They all cared about their children and wanted to make sure they were safe and making progress at school. They were also concerned about the possible bad influences their children might be getting from the school or barriers their children might encounter while trying to advance themselves at school. With limited English, not knowing how to contact the school for information needed, and sometimes not wanting to be embarrassed in front of the school personnel, some parents experienced difficulties in trying to be more involved in their children’s education than how they would have wanted to.

They wanted improvement in their lives, the way they interacted with others, how they felt about themselves, and how they participated in the society. They also

wanted improvement in how they involved themselves in their children's education and child-raising. Even Start is a program that works with parents and children in developing their literacy skills, and provides opportunities and possibilities for any kinds of improvement its participants want to make.

#### *Services Perceived by the Study Participants*

Even Start program provides free services including English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, Adult Basic Education (ABE) classes, Adult Secondary Education (ASE) classes, General Education Development (GED) classes, Early Childhood Education classes, Parenting Education, Parent and Child Interactive Literacy Activities (PACILA), and home visits. There are Spanish-speaking staff to help the parents who do not speak, or who speak little, English to acquire the assistance or information needed.

In adult education classes, teachers are friendly, patient and willing to help. They always give the students plenty of time to absorb the lessons and activities carried out in the classroom. They use different teaching methods such as lectures, small group discussions, role play, or media-assisted learning to deliver the content. Some teachers also provide computer lessons to familiarize students with basic computer skills in addition to teaching the academic content. The materials used in the classroom are usually related to the students' daily lives such as aids for grocery shopping, newspaper articles, job applications, and children's report cards from school. They also provide a lot of opportunities for the students to practice. Because of the non-threatening

environment and caring atmosphere in the Even Start program, students are comfortable about being in the program, asking questions, and learning at their own pace.

Since most of the Even Start participants are parents who can only participate during the day, the adult education classes are generally scheduled in the morning at the same time as the early childhood education classes to maximize the opportunities for the targeted population to participate. Parents with small children can come to the Even Start program for the literacy classes while their children are being taken care of at the early childhood education class. According to the study participants, since the majority of the adult participants at Dahlia Even Start program are Hispanic females, some of the Hispanic husbands feel more comfortable about their wives' participation in the program.

#### *Environment Perceived by the Study Participants*

“Even Start provides a place where families can get together, and all of my friends are like family here” (Marla, personal communication, December 11, 2002). Parents improve their language and academic skills while their children are learning in the early childhood education classroom. Parents acquire new parenting knowledge through discussion with others and exchange of experiences and advice at the parenting class. Parents practice some of the parenting skills they learned at the parenting class with their children during PACILA time when immediate feedback regarding their practices can be acquired from the early childhood education specialist or the parent educator. According to the parents interviewed, Even Start is a place for them and their children to socialize, a place for parents and children to learn things, and a place to

improve self and family. It is a place where parents get help and support, gain confidence and literacy skills, and equip themselves to better assist their children's development and learning to enter the job market, and to function productively in the society.

### Participants' Perception of Parenting Education

During the first few months of their enrollment in the Even Start program, the majority of the parents interviewed indicated that they attended parenting class because they had to. Unlike other programs, to acquire the services from the Even Start family literacy program, each eligible family has to participate in all of the four components, i.e., adult basic education, early childhood education, parenting education and parent and child interactive literacy activities (PACILA). Parents were required to attend the parenting class. Some of the parents were not sure about the applicability of the content delivered in parenting education because they are parents themselves, and they have been raising their children to the best of their ability even before they came to the Even Start program. They changed their attitude toward parenting education after a few of the parenting class sessions.

The interviewed parents considered parenting education as an important component in Even Start family literacy program. As part of the Even Start curriculum, parenting offers its participants useful and important information pertaining to their children and family. According to the study participants, they learned in the parenting class not only through information presented by the early childhood education specialist, parent educators or the speakers but also by sharing and discussing their ideas with each

other. The early childhood education specialist and parent educator who were in charge of parenting education in the Even Start program did not impose their values on the parents. And exchanging ideas and getting input from the parents who had experienced similar situations makes other parents more receptive than just listening to their teachers or speakers.

### *Parenting Topics*

As indicated by the parents in this study, topics that were most important to them are (a) communication with children, (b) communication with others involved in children's lives, (c) safety and drug issues, (d) spousal relationships, and (e) child-raising. These topics were not arranged in accordance to their importance.

*Communication with children.* Parents want to know how to communicate with their children in a better way so that they stay informed about what is happening in their children's life outside of the family context. They want to know their children's interests and problems at school, but sometimes they did not know how to ask questions or did not realize the importance of asking their children questions. The parents also want to know how to communicate with their children effectively so that the children will talk to their parents about their lives, ask their parents for guidance, understand why they are being disciplined, and know that their parents care and love them no matter what.

*Communication with others involved in children's lives.* Parents all agree that it is very important for them to stay involved in their children's education. One of the reasons why parents stay in the Even Start program was to get a better education so that

they can help their children with their education as well as show them the importance of education. Some of the interviewed parents said in the past, they did not know what to talk to their children's teachers about, did not know when and how to establish contacts with their children's teacher, or did not feel comfortable or confident enough to meet with their children's teachers to discuss their children's education.

The reasons why they did not feel comfortable or confident enough to meet with their children's teachers include insufficient language ability, not knowing the school's expectations, and being unaware of how the education system works in the United States. Language is a barrier for these parents when it comes to communication with their children's teachers, who might only speak English. Most of the parents interviewed do not speak English very well, and they often felt embarrassed and concerned about how their children's teachers would perceive them because of their English ability. For the parents who had poor experiences in their past schooling, they think it is important for them to be able to communicate with others involved in their children's education so that their children will have a better chance in getting positive educational experiences at school. In the parenting class, they learned how to initiate contact with their children's teachers, how the school system works, and different ways of staying involved in their children's education.

*Safety and drug issues.* Speakers were invited to the parenting class to talk about safety issues at public schools and around the residential neighborhoods. Parents were very attentive to information about the safety issues at their children's school. One of the parents reported that her child came home one day and told her that her classmate

was using drugs. She was afraid that her child might be involved with drugs, but she did not know how to address her concerns to her child's teacher or the school authority. From the parenting class, she learned how to handle it and later on went through the proper channels to address her concerns to the teacher and school board.

*Spousal relationship.* Some of the families had marital problems due to various reasons; e.g., stress from moving to a new country and having to adjust to the new environment, stress from finding work to support the family, and for many, stress from not being able to communicate in English. In rare instances, a bad spousal relationship may have led to domestic violence. In the parenting class, issues regarding spousal relationships or domestic violence were briefly discussed by one of the invited speakers. These issues were also brought up by a few individuals to the parent educator outside of the classroom. For some parents, especially those who had problems in their spousal relationship at home, they had never discussed the situation with others, and after a long time participating in the Even Start program, they felt safe and comfortable enough to talk to the parent educator about these issues.

Parents felt more at ease talking about spousal relationship or domestic violence issues after a long period of time attending the parenting class. Talking to the parent educator and their peers, they learned that they were not alone; they were not to be blamed, and there were coping mechanisms they could use to try resolving the problems at home. They sought counseling from the parent educator and sometimes from their classmates, and when necessary, the parent educator would refer them to professional counselors for assistance. The support from the parent educator and their classmates in

the parenting class meant a great deal to the participating parents. They knew they could count on each other whenever needed. For the participating parents who experienced domestic violence at home, improvement of the situation was observed by the parent educator and/or their classmates later on during the program year.

*Child-raising.* Most of the parents in the Dahlia ISD Even Start program are Hispanic immigrants. They raise their children the way they were raised. Even though most of the parents feel confident about the ways they have been raising their children, they still enjoy the topics presented to them in the class, especially when they are introduced to new activities they can practice with their children at home. The topics of interest to them related to child-raising include how to be patient with children, how and when to correct or discipline them, how to interact and communicate with children, how to handle the situation when the child is irritable, and how to set rules for the children. Parents also enjoy the information related to child development, age appropriate activities, brain development, drugs and violence at school, the importance of spending time with children, respect for each other, setting appropriate expectations for different age group children, how to recognize children's talent, and how to help children develop their potentials.

“[Parenting] teaches different things and Latin parents are getting a lot of useful information” (Marla, personal communication, December 11, 2002). For example, children's brain development was discussed during one parenting class session; how the brain develops as a child grows up and how parents can assist their children's growth was introduced to the attending parents. The parents then discussed their experiences

and reflected on what they had learned from that session. As the study participants pointed out, they appreciated new knowledge introduced to them at the parenting class, and they also enjoyed and learned through the discussion afterwards. Information presented around these topics may not be new to the parents, and for those who have been practicing the parenting skills introduced in the parenting class, these sessions validate what they have been doing.

#### *Opportunity to Practice Literacy Skills*

For the parents, parenting class also serves as a place where they can practice their literacy skills—English language skills learned in the adult basic education class. The topics presented and discussed during the parenting sessions are not always academic; they range from child-raising, parent-child communication, interaction among family members and with others, and issues that are related to the participants' everyday lives. As a result, parents learn new vocabulary and practice their English on these topics in a casual and conversational way. For example, they learn the names of the medicines they can get over the counter when their children are sick; they learn how to describe symptoms of illness, and they practice how to communicate to a doctor when they have to take their children to a clinic. These practical topics and opportunities to practice their English on these topics are considered very useful by the study participants.

### *Learning Environment*

According to the study participants, parenting class provides a safe and comfortable environment for them to learn and discuss various topics related to child-raising, parenting, family, and day-to-day life. Through guided discussion, new information and skills are incorporated into existing beliefs and skills that are related to parenting. New information and skills presented in the parenting class are not necessarily coming from the early childhood education specialist, parent educator or the invited speakers. Some of the new information and skills come from the participants' personal experiences that are shared in the class; as Vicki put it "Parenting [class] is information" (personal communication, December 11, 2002).

Parents do not want to miss the parenting class because the information presented is generally useful and will help the family and the children. "Even though I might have experienced some of the things we talked about in the class, I still learn new things from the teacher, speakers, and a lot of time, from my friends [classmates]" said Marie (personal communication, December 11, 2002) who also expressed her excitement about being able to share and provide her experience to others. Parents also prefer to learn about parenting skills through lecture and face-to-face discussions rather than watching television or listening to the radio, which some of them did before coming to the Even Start program.

Sharing is an important element in the parenting class. As Marla pointed out, being involved by sharing and learning together makes the information delivered in the classroom more meaningful for everyone. Parents listen and share experiences or life

stories with each other. They respect each other's opinions, and they are appreciative for the things they learn and the support they receive in the parenting class. Parents are sympathetic and supportive to each other.

I remember a class that I took last year, there was a lady that when she had a problem in her home with her husband or whatever, she would leave her house and she would be mad and she did not want for anyone to talk to her and if someone did, she would get ugly with them. And I told her that she could not do that. It was not anybody fault that she had problems that happen at home. For example, if you have problems at work, you leave them at work in the place where they belong and not try to make another in a bad mood over what is bothering you. (Rose, personal communication, October 17, 2002)

“Attending parenting makes the parents feel better” (Marie, personal communication, December 11, 2002). Parents feel valued and respected because they can contribute to the class by sharing what they know and/or have experienced. They feel knowledgeable and proud when their parenting skills are validated by what is introduced in the parenting class. They feel related to others when they hear their classmates talk about similar experiences. And they feel supported when they talk about their problems and their classmates listen and try to do what they can to help. Parents in the parenting class see each other as friends, and they see parenting class as a supportive and informative community.

### Changes Perceived as a Result of Participating in Parenting Education

Study participants indicated that at home, they practiced some of the parenting skills and strategies introduced to them during the parenting class. If the new skills and strategies work for their family, or if they can see long term benefits associated with the activities introduced to them, they will practice the activities with their children and with their spouses when applicable. Changes in their lives as perceived by the study participants are presented in the following sections: family activities, home and school connection, attitude, parenting practices, and sense of community.

#### *Family Activities*

Most of the parents try to apply what they have learned at the parenting class at home. According to the study participants, they and their children are now involved in various housework activities together when in the past, they either did not know the relevance of incorporating those activities into their children's lives or simply did not want to involve their children in those activities. For example, some of the parents used to do house chores alone; after they discussed how working on house chores together with their children may improve parent-child relationships and help children develop a sense of responsibility, some parents now include their children in attending to simple chores such as putting the dishes away, taking the trash out, cleaning their rooms and looking after the younger siblings.

Parents set quality family time for outdoor activities such as playing football in the park, riding bicycles in the neighborhood, and for indoor activities including watching educational television programs, reading, and doing crafts together. Parents

reported that they follow the reading exercise pattern they have learned in the parenting class. The pattern includes several steps: first, read to the children or with them; second, engage their children in lively discussion about the materials just read to ensure their comprehension, and third, if applicable, find applications in real life situations and discuss different scenarios. Some parents are proud of themselves because they can discuss the books they read or movies they watch with their children in two languages—Spanish and English. Parents reported that having quality family time has improved their relationship with their children.

#### *Home and School Connection*

Parents are encouraged to take an active role in their children's schooling. In the Even Start program, parents reported different barriers in getting involved in their children's schooling. For example, some parents had limited knowledge about the school system in the United States and did not speak much English; some did not have much experience in formal education, and some had poor experiences in their past schooling. After attending the parenting sessions where speakers from the public school system talked to the parents about how the system works, the school's expectation on collaborating with the parents, and ways to stay in contact with their children's teachers and the school, parents became more involved in their children's education by implementing the knowledge or practices introduced to them. They are informed about the availability of language assistance in school, and they can request assistance when needed.

Most of the parents have been caring about their children's education even before they enrolled in the Even Start program, but with the school-related information presented to them at the parenting class, they now talk more to their children about school. They are more sensitive about different experiences their children may have at school due to their cultural backgrounds. When parents are actively engaged in their children's school, whether it is about going to the school to meet with the teacher or just having a casual conversation with the children about school, children are more inclined to share their school experiences with their parents. For example, children talk to their parents about what goes on at school, what they have learned, things they do with their friends, problems they have at school or with study, and their favorite activities or subjects.

Some of the parents, due to their own improved literacy skills and the awareness of the importance of their children's education, are more able and eager to help their children with their school work. For the parents who used to just ask their children to do their homework, they now sit down with their children and watch them or assist them in doing their homework. Some of the interviewed parents reported that they study with their children, too. Their children sometimes help them with their studies, especially English lessons.

### *Attitude*

*Attitude on child's education.* For some of the parents, they not only realize the importance of their children's education, they are now taking an active role in staying informed about their children's education. They talk to their children about homework,

their friends and school; they talk to their children's teachers about their children's behaviors and performance at school, and they conduct educational activities such as reading at home. They pay more attention to the fliers sent from the school, and they participate in the school meetings. Parents who wanted to but did not know how to help their children with their studies in the past are now able to do so because different ways of helping their children's education are introduced and demonstrated to them in the parenting class. As Olivet (personal communication, October 25, 2002) said, "it's important to review children's homework." It does not matter what language the parents use with their children; it can be in English or Spanish. What matters is that the parents take an active role and show strong interest in being involved in their children's literacy development.

Many parents believe now that if they show interest in their children's education and if they themselves set an example by studying hard for their English or GED, their children will want to work hard at school as well. In addition to setting an example, they work toward "improving the home environment for their children to succeed" (Roxie, personal communication, October 24, 2002). For example, they buy books or check out books from the library for their children; they watch educational television programs with their children, and they talk about the importance of education and school at home.

*Attitude on being right or wrong.* Parents used to think that they have to be right all the time in front of their children. They do make mistakes from time to time, but it is not a good idea to admit their mistakes to the children. However, knowing that admitting mistakes and apologizing to their children can be an educational exercise as

well as setting an example for their children, they are now more receptive to admitting their mistakes or apologizing to their children.

Children have the right to tell us [parents] about it [if we did something inappropriate to them, for example, not talking to them properly.]... We need to put ourselves in our children's place... think about what they want, what they did and why they did it. Give them a chance to explain themselves to us. Think about what [we would] have done if we were them. (Marla, personal communication, December 11, 2002)

For the parents, it is important “not just getting [going after] children but letting them know what they've done wrong and explained why they are being punished” (Marie, personal communication, December 11, 2002). The parents in the study all agree that communication is important and it needs to be communication between the parent and the child, not communication from the parent to the child. Parents should have the authority but they also need to listen to their children, respect their children and be reasonable and rational when setting rules or making decisions about their children.

*Attitude on showing affection.* Parents should also “praise their children” as Mindy said, and discipline them when necessary. Children need to know they are loved and cared for by their parents, and it is important for the parents to “tell” them physically and verbally how much they love and care about their children. Parents should not be shy about expressing their emotions and feelings for their children.

*Attitude on providing limits and setting guidelines.* Loving one's own children does not mean letting them do whatever they want, whenever they want. Parents need to

take authority and set rules for their children. Parents pay more attention to their children's behaviors. They discuss their children's behaviors and performance with other parents in the parenting class as well as with their children's teachers in order to react to their children's behavioral problems properly and promptly. For example, Ellie noticed that her child did not like to listen to instructions, and she discussed with the parent educator as to how to help her child pay attention and be patient listening to instructions. The parent educator and other parents gave Ellie some suggestions, and she practiced some of the strategies at home with her child. After a few weeks, both the parent educator and the early childhood education teacher noticed the difference in Ellie's child's behavior and told Ellie about it. Ellie told me that it was because she had been teaching her child proper manners at home, including listening to elders' instructions.

### *Parenting Practices*

Parents all want the best for their children. After participating in the parenting class, parents reported that they now know more ways of raising children. They used to raise their children the way they were raised because that was what they knew, and for some parents, that meant their children could watch television as much as they want, eat whatever kind of food they want, or go to bed whenever they want. There were no rules at home for the children to follow, and parents were not taking an authoritative role. After the parenting class and after finding out what others are doing in terms of being authoritative and providing a productive home environment for their children to grow, they started to exercise their rights as parents, setting rules for their children, disciplining

them when necessary, and spending quality family time together doing indoor and outdoor activities.

They changed some of their parenting practices. Some parents yell at their children much less now because at the parenting class, they learn that yelling at one's children is neither a good way for solving problems, nor to get messages across. Parents learn to control their tempers and not to hit their children when they make mistakes. Parents try to be more understanding and patient with their children.

Because their literacy skills have improved over time, and they have been provided with different resources in the parenting class, they are more confident and comfortable in seeking additional information for advancing themselves, their children and the whole family. Some parents take the initiative in asking their children's doctor what they can do to help their children recover faster when the children are sick. Some take initiatives by asking the teachers about their children's behaviors and performance at school, and they want to know what they can do to enhance their children's learning or to correct their children's behavioral problems if any. Some parents are taking their children to public libraries regularly as a family activity. They have library cards and check out books for themselves and their children. Parents are taking a more active role in pursuing a better life for themselves and for their children. As Marisa (personal communication, October 25, 2002) said "I now read more, speak more, and know more." They are proud of themselves for making the changes. Most of the parents believe they are better parents now because they know how to take better care of their children.

Some parents share with their spouses what they have learned in the parenting classes so that their spouses can practice the techniques and work with their children.

Some parents said that they now communicate better with their children because they listen and pay attention to what their children have to say to them. Because parents receive validation on their parenting skills at various parenting class sessions, they are more positive and confident about being a good parent. They enjoy talking about their parenting experiences and sharing their experiences with others.

### *Sense of Community*

Since parenting education is where parents learn, discuss and share parenting issues and personal experiences, it is easier for the parents to identify themselves and be bound with each other. Things they discuss in the class can come from a handout, a book, an article on an “expert’s” point of view, or other parents’ real life experiences. Every family is different, but there is always something a family has experienced that can be of use or benefit to the other families. During the interviews, the study participants used the term “friends” when referring to their classmates in the parenting class; they enjoy talking with and learning from their friends.

As friends, they are appreciative, sympathetic and supportive to each other. As friends, they acquire new information and skills through discussion or simply chatting with each other. “I feel more comfortable now to tell others what I think and about my experience” (Mindy, personal communication, December 11, 2002). To Mindy, it does not matter whether or not the listener will take her advice, because each family is different, but she knows her experience might be valuable to someone, and she is willing

to share it with others. She is also comfortable about asking questions and discussing problems she has at home and is open to others' feedback. "You learn something new everyday" (Marla, personal communication, December 11, 2002). Marla believes that speaking of personal experiences and being involved makes the information more meaningful for the participants. For Marla, as well as other parents, parenting class is a community where they share and explore numerous valuable life lessons together.

#### Impacts Perceived as a Result of Participating in Parenting Education

Most of the study participants identify the impacts resulting from their participation in the parenting education as positive and consistent phenomena they have observed at home and in their lives. They perceive impacts as resulting from the changes that occur consistently and have produced or will produce positive outcomes. For the perceived impact, the findings are presented in relation to the following themes: (a) child development and education, (b) perception about parenting and parenting practices, and (c) communication and family relationship.

#### *Child Development and Education*

The role of the parent is a multifaceted and challenging opportunity to support and contribute to the growth and development of their children. Parental competence involves behavioral, affective and cognitive components (Coleman & Karraker, 2000). In the parenting class, parents learn information about the public school system and different ways to support their children's growth and education. In the early childhood education class, Even Start children receive educational services and become used to the

school routine. Along with their parents' assistance, a smooth transition from the Even Start program to the public school is expected for the children who are from zero to seven years old, and a more positive education experience which may go beyond the public school system is envisioned for them as well as the children who are above the age of seven years old.

Parents are more attentive to children's development and growth, and when they notice that something may be wrong, they seek the school counselor's or the school teacher's help to resolve the situation. Ellie (personal communication, October 24, 2002) expressed her concerns about her child who tended to forget what she just learned very quickly. She observed the situation and the child's pre-kindergarten teacher had also brought up her concerns about the same problem. The parent educator suggested that Ellie talk to the child's teacher and find out what they can do to examine her child's situation more thoroughly and hopefully find a solution to the problem.

Because of the parents' early involvement in the children's learning, and because of the information about child development presented in the parenting class, they are able to identify learning problems their children may have in early ages and to provide necessary assistance to their children. It is the same for recognizing their children's talent and potential as well. Because of the parenting education, parents are better equipped to assist their children in developing their potentials as much as possible.

#### *Perception of Parenting and Parenting Practices*

Since their participation in the parenting education class, parents' perceptions about what a good parent means have changed to varying degrees. Parents reported that

they share their changed perceptions with their family members and friends who are not Even Start program participants. Some of the parents have also changed their parenting practices because of the parenting education. These changes are both external and internal. Examples of external changes include such activities as reading to the children consistently, talking more to the children about school, and being more patient with the children. Examples of internal changes are their beliefs about being a good parent, what counts as providing for the family, and their attitudes about child-raising. These external and internal changes have impacted their lives.

For example, they are now striving to be role models for their children, and through their valuing their own education, their children will see the importance of education and try to do well. They also acknowledge that a good parent does not mean letting the children do whatever they want to, whenever they want to do it. Parents need to do what is the best for their children and discipline them when necessary. “A good parent should try to form good habits with children’s eating” (Rose, personal communication, October 17, 2002; Ellie, personal communication, October 24, 2002). Ellie (personal communication, October 24, 2002) said “my daughter does not like to clean up her things, she walks around barefooted and those are the things I don’t like and I get after her.”

The study participants talked about what being a good parent means. They practice good parenting and envision that their children will benefit from it and carry on the valuable practices. For the study participants, being a good parent is to (a) study with their children, (b) teach them about the bad influences of smoking and using drugs,

(c) teach them to be loving parents, (d) teach them to be respectful, (e) teach them to be appreciative, (f) respect their way of doing things, (g) show them how to treat people, and (h) let them develop their own opinions.

### *Communication and Family Relationship*

Study participants reported that they now communicate better with their children because of the strategies and content they have learned from the parenting education. And because of the improvement of their English skills, they are more competent in helping with their children's homework and providing guidance. According to the parents interviewed, better communication has improved their children's behaviors and performance at home and at school. Children are more inclined to consult with their parents when they have questions or problems. They are more willing to discuss different issues at home. They pay more attention to their education and bring their parents fliers from school. They want their parents to be involved in their school activities. They make good progress at school, and their progresses are acknowledged by their teachers. It has been noticed that because of the improvement in children's school performance, and the encouragements and complements from the parents and teachers, the children are more motivated to perform well at school. The children value education because their parents have set an example for them.

The study participants reported a better family relationship with their children and spouses because of the changes resulting from their participation in the parenting class. In parenting education, parents learn communication skills and practice with each other. They learn about coping mechanisms for various situations as well as receive

support from the class. These sessions have helped them improve their communication with the family which results in a better family relationship. Better communication enables Even Start parents to share the information and materials they learned from the parenting class with their spouses and friends in an effective way. Some of their spouses started to practice the activities at home as well. For example, it used to be hard for some of the fathers to show or tell their children how much they love them; however, as some of the study participants said, their husbands started to hug their children and tell them how much they love them after the wife told him about the importance of it, and after seeing the children's reaction when the wife and he/himself does it.

### Summary

This chapter discusses the parenting education in Dahlia ISD Even Start family literacy program with descriptions of the 12 study participants. The study participants talked about themselves, the Dahlia ISD Even Start program, and parenting education from their perspectives. This chapter also discusses perceived changes and impacts related to the parents' participation in the parenting education class in the Dahlia ISD Even Start program.

The parents interviewed considered Even Start program a place to go for help and support, a place for parents and children to socialize, a place for them to learn things, and a place to improve self and family. The sense of being connected or related to others helps build the Even Start community and is attributed a lot to the parenting education class. One of the study participants said, "Even Start provides a place where families can get together, and all of my friends are like family here." They enjoyed the

convenience of program location and scheduling as well as the education services the program provides for their children.

The interviewed parents considered parenting education an important component in Even Start family literacy program. Parents learn in the parenting class not only through information presented by the early childhood education specialist, parent educator or the invited speakers, but also by sharing and discussing their ideas and experiences with each other. Parents enjoy the topics presented to them at the parenting class especially when the topics are related to communication with children, communication with others involved in children's lives, safety and drug issues, family relationships, and child-raising. They also see parenting class as a place where they can practice their literacy skills, mainly English language skills in a context related to their everyday life.

According to the study participants, parenting class provides a safe and comfortable environment for them to learn and discuss various topics. Through guided discussion, new information and skills are incorporated into existing beliefs and skills that pertain to parenting. Parents learn or validate their parenting practices through parenting education. Parenting class provides an environment for people to identify themselves with each other and build up a network of support system. Parents share their knowledge by discussing their personal experiences related to the parenting topics; they ask questions, talk about problems, look for answers or solutions together, and support each other in any way they can. They see each other as friends, and they respect each other for what everyone has to contribute to the class. And because the information

is not only delivered by the teacher but also shared by their peers, it becomes more meaningful and valuable to the participants.

The parents interviewed perceived that changes occur in various aspects in their lives. They experience different parenting practices at home, for example, by setting quality family time for parents and children to read or to work on simple house tasks together. Through the resources received from the parenting class and with their own improvement in literacy skills, they can become more involved in their children's education. Because of the parenting education, they may have changed, modified and/or validated their attitudes toward their children's education, being right or wrong, showing affection and setting disciplines because of the parenting education.

The parents have perceived impact from their participation in the parenting education in several areas. For children from birth to seven years old, the parents have perceived the occurrence of a smooth transition for their children from the Even Start program to the public school system. For those children who are already in the public schools, they will continue to perform well. And because of the parents' active involvement in children's learning and in acquisition of useful parenting information, they can enhance their ability in assisting their children's growth and literacy development.

Since their participation in the parent education, the study participants reported that they have gained new insights about being a good parent. They also reported better communication with their children and other family members which they attribute to the strategies and content they have learned from the parenting class. By incorporating the

new insights into their existing parenting practices and with better communication, the perceivable impacts are higher level of education for the children, prolonged parenting values and practices, and improved family relationship.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Most of the past research studies conducted in the field of Even Start family literacy program showed positive effect on both of the adults and children. Through the studies on Even Start family literacy program, we have learned that adults made improvement in many areas such as (a) literacy skills (Anderson, 2000; Connors-Tadros, 1996; Farrer, 2000; Pamulapati, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2003), (b) parenting skills (Brizius and Foster, 1993; Meehan et al., 1999; Meehan et al., 2000), (c) education level (Anderson, 2000), and (d) participation in their children's education (Farrer, 2000; Karther, 1995; Meehan et al., 1999; Meehan et al., 2000; Pamulapati, 2003). For the Even Start children, they also showed improvement in various areas such as school-readiness (Anderson, 2000; Gamse et al., 1997; Meehan, 1999; Riedinger, 1997), transition from kindergarten to public school (Riedinger, 1997; U.S. Department of Education, 2003), school attendance (Gamse et al., 1997), and vocabulary development (Anderson, 2000; Meehan, 1999; Gamse et al., 1997; Riedinger, 1997).

Research studies on parenting education programs also indicated that parenting education has positive effects on both adult's and children's lives. The positive effects include improved children's academic achievement (Anastasi, 1988; Downey, 2002; Lopez et al., 2001; Rich, 1988; Riley, 1994; Zimmerman, 1993), increased parental knowledge toward childrearing and child development (Borger, 1994; Gomby et al., 1993; Minow, 1994), improved confidence (Craig & Borger, 1995; Henderson & Berla,

1994), and change of attitudes toward school (Bond, 1996; Downey, 2002; First & Way, 1995; Lopez et al., 2001; Norris & Williams, 1997; Renard, 1994).

It was the goal of this study to contribute to the understanding about the effectiveness of the parenting education as an integral component in the Even Start family literacy program. The primary purpose of this study was to explore the changes and impacts perceived by the parents as a result of participating in the component of parenting education in the Even Start family literacy program.

## Discussion

### *Parental Behaviors That Support Children's Literacy Development*

Powell (2004) stated that both parental beliefs and parent behavior which is affected by parental beliefs either support or limit the development of children's language and literacy competence. He described the characteristics of parental behaviors that support children's language and literacy development in four relevant dimensions. These four dimensions are (a) family verbal environment, (b) supports for literacy, (c) expectations of child's learning and development, and (d) active engagement of parenting role. Family verbal environment, the quality of adult-child verbal exchanges is tied to children's school performance. A positive environment can be created by casual conversation between parents and children, shared book reading, language use, or a parenting style that shows affection and warmth. Supports for literacy may include the availability of reading and writing materials at home, parents' reading

habits, parents' use of literacy for problem solving, parents' enthusiasm about literacy activities, and parents' self-efficacy as a teacher of their children.

Parents' knowledge about child development and learning, and their assessment and expectations of their children's abilities are also related to children's school performance. Parents who actively engage themselves with the parenting role tend to be those who have strong self-efficacy beliefs, act on the knowledge of child development, and assist the development of their children's literacy in various ways. Even Start parents in this study have demonstrated the characteristics of parent behaviors that support child's language and literacy development as described by Powell (2004).

It should be noted that parenting education is not implemented under the assumption that Even Start parents need to be educated about how to be a "good" parent. Some of the parenting practices introduced at the parenting class are nothing new to the parents. However, it can still provide parents with validation as well as an opportunity to review their existing practices. Parents may increase the intensity and quality of an existing parenting practice when it is reinforced at the parenting class. As reported by the study participants, parents spend more time reading to their children now, and they engage themselves in parent-child discussion about what they read afterwards. Different ways of reading to the children and methods of asking questions to ensure children's comprehension have been demonstrated at the parenting class, and it is found that parents do practice these strategies at home. They try to relate what they read with the children to real life situations so that reading can be more meaningful and fun for the children.

### *Parenting Topics*

For parents to intensify or implement the parenting practices they value, it is important to address the content and topics that interest them. A large percentage of the parents in Even Start family literacy programs in Texas are immigrants. An unfamiliar environment in the new country, unemployment, and lack of social support can be stressful for them (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995; Pamulapati, 2003). To serve its participants, parenting education should diversify contexts and interactions surrounding literacy-related activities in order to address participants' day-to-day concerns (Auerbach, 1995). Parenting education should also assist parents in evaluating their children's schooling critically instead of helping parents assume that they are solely responsible for the success of their children's schooling, giving unquestioned support. Parenting education creates a safe context where parents can explore attitudes and concerns about education as well as their everyday life.

Henderson and Berla (1994), Kellaghan and colleagues (1996), Lopez et al. (2001), Miller (2003), and Reese and Gallimore (2000) pointed out that regardless of income, education level or cultural background, families can and do contribute to their children's school success. It is what parents do in the home rather than their status that is important. One of Henderson and Berla's (1994) conclusions is that children do best when their parents are enabled and play four key roles in their learning. These roles are teachers, supporters, advocates, and decision-makers. As teachers, parents create a home environment that promotes learning, they reinforce what is being taught at school, and develop the values and life skills children need. Regardless of the ethnicity, income

level or education level of the study participants, they have all shown great care about their children's literacy development and well-being. In addition, they make efforts to stay actively involved in their children's education by providing stimuli for their children's literacy development, asserting the importance of education and staying informed about their children's schooling.

### *Parent Attitude*

Even Start parents may have poor attitudes regarding learning and literacy because of their past experiences. Parenting education focuses on increasing parents' knowledge about early childhood development and effective parenting behaviors and practices so that parents can contribute actively and constructively to their children's development. Parental views and beliefs about education have an impact on their children's development and school performance (Downey, 2002; Lopez et al, 2001; Powell, 1986; Powell, 1991; Powell, 1996; Sheldon, 2002). In order for parents to build skills to be partners in education and teachers of their children, they must first understand and value their role as teachers. Parents must be aware that they influence their children's development. Parents must value education so that they will be motivated to support their children's learning prior to school entrance and beyond. In the Even Start program, because the focus in adult basic education and early childhood education is mainly on literacy activities, it is of primary importance that parents understand and recognize informal literacy opportunities. Parenting education plays an important role in assisting parents in understanding and recognizing informal literacy opportunities.

### *Communication*

Communication is an important area that needs to be addressed in parenting education. Two of the favorite parenting topics according to the study participants are communication with children and communication with people involved in children's education. It has been reported that communication skills addressed in the parenting class have improved parents' communication with their children, their spouses, school teachers, and others. Communication is the predominant way that parents assume the role as teachers of their children. Through their communication, parents help children learn to understand and use words, images, and symbols. Through their communication, parents and children create a positive environment to learn and to grow together, which enhances the family relationship.

Discussion with peers is also a promising strategy for parents to think about new information in relation to existing perspectives on parenting. The adult education literature long has suggested that personal experience be used as a learning resource, and that programs include strong experiential components (Brookfield, 1996). Discussion is an opportunity for parents to digest new information and insights within existing belief frameworks. Through discussion and sharing in the parenting class, parents bind with each other and create a comfortable learning environment—a supportive community (Sheldon, 2002).

Heitzman-Hull (2003) indicated that the comfortable environment provided by an Even Start program enables its participants to discuss health care issues more easily. As a result, Even Start parents have little difficulty understanding medication instructions

and indications; they also have little difficulty navigating the health care environment or understanding health care professionals. Even Start parents appreciate the inclusion of this type of information in the parenting class because it is a day-to-day concern to them.

### *Assessment*

Another frequently discussed issue about implementing parenting education is assessment. As integral as parenting education is in most family intervention programs, it is acknowledged that the effectiveness of the parenting program is difficult to measure (Carter and Kahn, 1996). The underlying assumptions for parenting education is that increased knowledge will result in positive changes in parental attitudes toward and behavior with children, and that those changes, in turn, will improve outcomes for children. Several findings of short-term positive effects of parenting education on maternal knowledge, attitudes, and behavior suggest that while it is possible to use parenting education to increase maternal knowledge, to change attitudes, and possibly to change the behavior with children, parenting education will not, by itself, result in improved outcomes (Quint, Polit, Bos, & Cave, 1994; Travers, Nauta, & Irwin, 1992).

There are instruments for measuring the effectiveness of parenting skills and practices, for example, the Caldwell and Bradley Home Inventory and Parenting Satisfaction Scale. However, an assessment designed for one particular population may not be appropriate for another population. While measuring the effectiveness of the parenting component in the Even Start is important, it is critical to select an instrument that is culturally sensitive and not intrusive to the parents from different cultural backgrounds. A good parenting instrument is yet to be developed, but in the meantime

we should not overlook the value of parenting education in Even Start family literacy program.

Various studies have indicated that parenting education contributes to positive changes of parent attitudes, beliefs and practices. Parenting education also contributes to children's development and education. The study participants reported that they have benefited from the component of parenting education in the Even Start family literacy program. The importance of parenting education in the Even Start program should not be under-estimated due to the lack of appropriate assessment instruments.

#### *Ecology Model and Family Literacy*

Bronfenbrenner (1979) provided an ecological way to look at family literacy. According to Bronfenbrenner, the process of human development occurs in different settings and these settings are not independent of each other. A child is nested within a set of increasingly complex environment which contains three circles. The inner circle of his model is the microsystem, where the family resides; it includes the neighborhood and community. The next circle is the exosystem, environments in which parents participate but where children seldom enter. Three of these are especially likely to affect the child's development: the parents' workplace, the parents' social networks, and the community's influence on family functioning. The outer circle is the macrosystem, where social and cultural beliefs reside. Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that developmental process takes place between two or more settings and there are linkages between the settings.

In the family literacy program, parenting education is a linkage between microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. It connects the components of adult education and early childhood education so that parents' improved literacy skills can be used to assist children's learning and development in a more effective way. It connects home environment and school environment; it connects families with families and that in itself create a supportive environment for families to learn and grow. It also connects family with communities where resources can be located.

Parenting education connects parents' and children's literacy development by introducing to the parents valuable child-raising information and parenting strategies that are incorporated with parents' social and cultural beliefs. It enables parents and children to enhance and support each other's literacy development. In the parenting class, parents broaden their knowledge about parenting; they learn strategies and different ways of working with their children to better support their children's growth and literacy development. They practice their literacy skills acquired from the adult education class in the parenting class sessions as well as at home while working with their children. In addition, parents are informed about the school system, school's expectations and how the system works. Because of the improvement in parents' literacy skills, parenting knowledge and parenting practices, they can implement what they have learned and valued in the parenting class at home more effectively. The implementation of valuable parenting practices will support their children's development and education.

Parenting education enables the parents to be more actively involved in their children's education; it connects home environment and school environment. Parents'

involvement in their children's school is influenced by different factors such as their attitudes toward school, confidence level, and knowledge about the school system.

Parenting education has positive impacts on parent's attitudes toward education, child-raising and family relationship. How parents view themselves is reflected in all of their actions, especially in their acceptance of the parenting role and how they interact with their children, family members, school personnel or others (First & Way, 1995). Parents reported improvement in children's school performance, parenting skills and communication with children, family members and school personnel because they have changed their attitudes due to their participation in the parenting education (Bond, 1996; Melnick & Fiene, 1990; Norris & Williams, 1997; Swick et al., 1993).

Participating in the parenting education in Even Start family literacy program has also increased parents' confidence as well as their social network. In the parenting class, parents become more knowledgeable, feel valued and respected because while learning from others, they also contribute to the class by sharing what they know and/or have experienced. They feel related to others because of their background and the experiences they share. Parents have made parenting class a community where they obtain knowledge and support, and where families are connected to other families.

Parenting education connects family and communities such as schools, churches and libraries. Community resources are introduced to the parents as described in the study by either early childhood education specialist, parent educator or invited speakers. Parents should be encouraged and shown how to obtain and take advantage of the community resources. A successful family literacy program provides a quality

environment for the development of parents and children from the most in-need families. In a successful Even Start family literacy program, adult basic education, early childhood education and parenting education are interwoven and work together so that the programs effect on participants' lives can be maximized.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted based on the assumptions that (a) the instrument used in this study measures the existing perceptions of parents regarding the component of parenting education in the Even Start family literacy program, and (b) the interpretation of the impact of the parenting education will be accurately reflected by those participating in the study. The study has its limitations. First, the participants in this study consist of parents who were involved in the Even Start program on a voluntary basis, so that a factor of "self-selection" may play a part. Consequently, it may be that the attitudes of these parents are different from those who are not enrolled in Even Start programs, or different from those who are not enrolled on a voluntary basis.

Second, information acquired from the study participants could be affected by social desirability factors. The results that are most likely to be affected by social desirability are the impression of high involvement, the favorable image parents convey of their role as teachers, and the aspirations that parents have in regard to the future of their own children. Third, the presence of a parent educator who is a staff member of the Even Start program might have prevented the participants from expressing their views more feely during the interviews. Furthermore, the researcher does not speak Spanish as the majority of the study participants do. Most of the data collected from the interviews

were translated by an experienced translator and then analyzed by the researcher. It is possible that some key information was lost during the translation process. In addition, the researcher might not catch certain clues that were lost during the translation and may attribute to richer information.

#### Recommendation for Further Research

It will be valuable to research types of stress commonly present in the newly immigrated families, the relationship between the length of time in the United States, the stress, and its effect on family and spousal relationships. For the program where the majority participants are new immigrants, it is possible that these families are undergoing a lot of stress which may in turn have a negative impact on the family relationship. Future research is needed to address this issue and identify effective coping mechanisms for the parent education curricula.

Future research needs to be conducted regarding the long term impact parenting education has on adult education and early childhood education in the Even Start program. What happens to the Even Start families after they leave the program? Have they continued to benefit from what they have acquired from the parenting class in the Even Start program? Have they maintained the support network developed while they were in the Even Start program? How has the network impacted their lives after Even Start?

According to the study participants, parenting class also serves as a place for the Hispanic parents to practice their literacy skills, mainly English language skills. Will the same situation apply to different Even Start populations such as African American and

Caucasians? If different Even Start populations also practice their literacy skills at the parent education, what are the specific literacy skills? Have they improved their literacy skills through the parent education? Are those literacy skills related any specific topics addressed at the parenting class?

The study participants are mainly Hispanic females who dominate the Even Start parent population in Texas. Will the same findings apply to different Even Start populations? Will Even Start parents from different ethnic backgrounds view parenting education differently? What are the differences? What will be the impact of parenting education on a different Even Start population?

All of the participants in this study are females; it is common that the majority of Even Start program participants are females. There were no studies conducted to explore reasons why the number of male participants is very small in the Even Start program. A possible explanation is that since most of the adult males in the Even Start families work during the day, they can not participate in the program which schedules most of its classes during the day. Because mothers do not work, they should take more responsibility in children's development and their education. What are fathers' involvement in their child's development and education?

Is there a need for the fathers to participate in both the adult literacy and parenting education components in the Even Start family literacy program? If there is a need, how can the need be met? Further studies need to be conducted to research (a) the family dynamics among the Even Start families, (b) fathers' needs for adult literacy classes, (c) fathers' needs for parenting classes, and (d) both parents' believe about their

role and their involvement in their children's development and education. Further studies are also needed to explore the relationships and impacts between family dynamics and adults' and children's literacy development.

### Recommendation for Educational Practice

Most of the Even Start parents' primary goal is to advance their literacy skills for pursuing further education or entering the workforce. It is clear that adult education service is what motivates parents to enroll and to participate in Even Start family literacy program. Parents might begin participating in the Even Start program without understand why they are required to participate in the component of parenting education. They might not see the benefits that parenting education can provide for them and their family, or anticipate the social network they may establish with others from the class. During the interview sessions, parents talked about what they learned in the parenting class and reviewed how they have applied what they learned in class at home. Through the discussion, they recognized the connection between the parenting education and their lives—how parenting education has assisted them in various ways on child-raising, child's education, family relationships, self-esteem, as well as building a support network.

The recommendation for program implementation is to provide parents opportunities to review what they have learned in the parenting class, and how the parenting education content has affected their family lives. Parents' reflection can be conducted in the parenting class with assistance from the early childhood education specialist or parent educator, and it should occur consistently throughout the program

year. During these reflection sessions, parents can also revisit their needs and give their feedback to the early childhood education specialist or parent educator for organizing or planning the curricula for parenting education. Through the reflection sessions, the early childhood education specialist and parent educator should pay special attention to what parents have to say about the topics that need to be addressed, and the influence parents' cultural backgrounds may have on their parenting practices. They should incorporate parents' cultural background and beliefs in the parenting education sessions to assist parents in developing the most effective parenting skills. The parent education curricula need to be reviewed and revised consistently because parents' needs may change throughout the course of their participation in the Even Start program.

Another recommendation for educational practice would be to host several parenting sessions in the evening when fathers can participate with their spouses. The curricula for these evening sessions should be planned according to the needs of its participants as well. A needs assessment regarding fathers' needs and wants from the parent education should be conducted to ensure the content delivered at the sessions can be best utilized by the participants. The focus for these evening sessions could include collaboration and communication between both of the parents and among family members to enhance the family relationship and family environment for both parents' and children's growth.

For some sensitive topics such as spousal relationships and domestic violence, it may be more effective to schedule them for the later part of the program year. A safe and comfortable environment is critical for Even Start parents to participate, share and

learn. As indicated in the study, it takes time for parents to build up trust and bond with each other before they feel safe and comfortable enough to discuss personal issues.

Speakers from other organizations may be viewed as outsiders and prevent parents from discussing their opinions or asking questions freely. It is recommended that if a speaker is invited to present on sensitive topics, the program staff should inform the parents about the speaker and the presentation topic prior to the class session. Program staff can also ask parents for the questions they want to be addressed and share the questions with the speaker during the class session.

Even Start parents need to be involved in the curricula planning in terms of identifying topics for the parenting class and providing input in scheduling the sequence for presenting the identified topics. Auerbach (1995) suggested a participatory approach with which learners are involved in researching the issues and literacy uses in their own lives. A formal or informal need assessment may be conducted regularly throughout the program year. People's needs change and in order to better serve the Even Start parents, the program staff should acquire feedback from the parents regularly and adjust the parenting curricula according. Caldwell (1994) pointed out that there are many different ideas about what constitutes effective parenting and those ideas vary often with cultural predispositions and orientation. Therefore, it is important to recognize multiple understandings of what constitutes good parenting across and among cultures, design parenting curricula, and develop effective ways to deliver the content while embracing diversity.

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APPENDIX A

NUMBER OF EVEN START PROJECTS, FAMILIES, PARENTS AND CHILDREN,  
BY PROGRAM YEAR

<b>NUMBER OF EVEN START PROJECTS, FAMILIES, PARENTS AND CHILDREN, BY PROGRAM YEAR</b>					
<b>PROGRAM YEAR</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PROJECTS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF FAMILIES</b>	<b>NUMBER OF PARENTS</b>	<b>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</b>	<b>NUMBER OF FAMILIES PER PROJECT</b>
2001-2002	1,125	NA	NA	NA	NA
2000-2001	855	31,859	32,793	43,374	37.3
1999-2000	770	31,570	31,301	41,586	41.0
1998-1999	737	32,200	30,800	40,500	43.7
1997-1998	655	30,500	30,286	41,528	46.6
1996-1997	637	34,400	35,800	48,300	54.0
1995-1996	576	31,500	36,400	47,800	54.7
1994-1995	513	30,752	34,609	56,858	53.0
1993-1994	490	29,400	33,081	39,920	58.0
1992-1993	340	20,800	23,404	28,243	61.2
1991-1992	239	14,900	16,607	20,822	62.3
1990-1991	122	6,460	7,457	8,629	54.1
1989-1990	76	2,460	3,529	3,940	32.4

Note: Adopted from U.S. Department of Education 2003.

APPENDIX B

EVEN START FEDERAL EXPENDITURES, BY PROGRAM YEAR

<b>EVEN START FEDERAL EXPENDITURES, BY PROGRAM YEAR</b>			
<b>PROGRAM YEAR</b>	<b>FEDERAL EVEN START EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>FEDERAL EVEN START EXPENDITURE PER PROJECT</b>	<b>FEDERAL EVEN START EXPENDITURE PER FAMILY</b>
2001-2002	\$250,000,000	NA	NA
2000-2001	\$150,000,000	\$175,439	\$4,708
1999-2000	\$135,000,000	\$175,325	\$4,276
1998-1999	\$124,000,000	\$168,250	\$3,851
1997-1998	\$101,997,000	\$155,721	\$3,344
1996-1997	\$101,997,000	\$160,121	\$2,965
1995-1996	\$102,024,000	\$177,125	\$3,239
1994-1995	\$91,373,000	\$178,115	\$3,359
1993-1994	\$89,123,000	\$181,884	\$3,031
1992-1993	\$70,000,000	\$205,882	\$3,365
1991-1992	\$49,770,000	\$208,243	\$3,340
1990-1991	\$24,201,000	\$198,369	\$3,667
1989-1990	\$14,820,000	\$195,000	\$6,024

Note: Adopted from U.S. Department of Education 2003.

APPENDIX C  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me about your experience in the program (Even Start).
2. Have you been to any literacy program other than Even Start? If yes, what is/are the differences between the two?
3. What are the changes that occurred in you and/or your family(ies) after you attended parenting classes? What do you think caused the changes?
4. What kind of impacts do you think parenting classes have on your family?
5. Which component (Adult Basic Education, Parenting, PACT, or Early Childhood Education) of the Even Start program do you like the most? Why?
6. Why do you attend parenting classes?
7. Do you think it is important for the Even Start to provide parenting classes? Why?
8. Why do you attend PACT?
9. Do you think it is important for the Even Start to provide PACT? Why?
10. Please describe the activities that you do with your children. Why do you do those activities with your children?
11. In your opinion, what's the main function(s) of ES?
12. What do you think a good parent is (should be) like?

APPENDIX D  
ENGLISH CONSENT FORM

## INFORMED CONSENT

Institutional Review Board—Human Subjects in Research  
Texas A&M University

**PROJECT TITLE:**

Even Start family literacy program participants' perceptions of parenting education, an integral component in literacy programs

As a participant in the Even Start family literacy program, I have been informed by Chia-Yin Chen that I have been invited to participate in an research study in family literacy. I will be one of 45 people participating in this study.

1. I understand that I will be interviewed and observed during the regular educational activities.
2. I understand that my enrollment and assessment records, recorded by the Even Start may be used in this study.
3. I am aware that this information is for research purposes and may be available to the general public in the form of conference presentations, journal or newspaper articles, or in books. I will not be personally identified in any reports.
4. I am free to ask for clarification on any question.
5. I am free to withdraw from the research project at any time. Choosing not to participate in the study will not affect my participation in the Even Start program in any way.
6. I have been assured that steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality of my responses.

**I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board—Human Subjects in Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Dr. Michael W. Buckley, Director of Support Services, Office of Vice President for Research at (979)458-4067.**

**I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.**

**I have been given a copy of this consent form.**

Consent for Observations

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Participant  
Consent for Interview

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Participant  
Consent for Taping

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Principal Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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APPENDIX E  
SPANISH CONSENT FORM

**Aprobación de Aviso  
Mesa de Reviso Institucional – Investigación Subjectos Humanos  
Texas A&M University**

**Título del Proyecto:**

**Los concurrentes de la programa alfabetización de familia Even Start, dan sus opiniones en la educación de padres, un componente integral en programas alfabetización.**

**Como concurrente en el programa de familia de alfabetizamo Even Start, yo es sido informado por Chia-Yin Chen, que a sido seleccionado para participar en una evaluación e investigación sobre alfabetización familiar. Yo seré uno de 45 personas que participaran en este estudio.**

1. Comprendo que voy a sere observada y entrevisada durante las actividades reglares de educacionales.
2. Comprendo que mis archivos de matriculación y elvaluación por Even Start podran ser aprovechados en este estudio.
3. Estoy consciente de que esta informacion es para pospositos de investigacion y que quizas pueda ser presentada al publico en general en diversas conferencias, revistas cientificas or articulos de periodico, o en libros. Mi identidad no sera revelada e identificada en ninguno de los reportes de investigacion.
4. Tengo la libertad de pedir clarificion de cualquier pregunta que se me haga.
5. Seré libre de retirame del proyecto de investigación en cualquier momento. Al escojer no participar en la evaluación o investigación no afectará de ningún modo mi participación en el programa Even Start.
6. Me han asegurado que se tomarán los pasos necesarios para asegurar la confidencialidad de mis respuestas.

Comprendo que este estduio de investigación ha sido revizado y aprobado por el “Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects Research, Texas A&M University”. Para problemas relacionados o cuestiones entorno a derechos humaos, el “Institutional Review Board” puede ser contactado a trevés del Dr. Michael Buckley, Director of Compliance and Administration, Office of Vice President for Research, al siguiente numero telefónico (979) 458-4067.

**Yo, he entendido la explicación y he dado mi consentimiento para participar voluntariamente en el proyecto de investigación.**

**Se me ha dado una copia de la presente forma de consentimiento para mi revisión personal.**

Aprobación para observación

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

Aprobación la entrevistar

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

Aprobación para garbar

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del investigador principal

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

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## Education

- Ph.D. (August 2005) Curriculum and Instruction, Texas A&M University, College Station.
- M.A. (May 1997) Linguistics Department, California State University, Fresno.
- B.A. (August 1994) English Department, Soochow University, Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C.

## Work Experience

- Researcher (July 2002 to present) Texas Center for the Advancement of Literacy and Learning (TCALL), College of Education/Department of EHRD, Texas A&M University, College Station
- Independent Evaluator for Even Start family literacy programs (September 2000 to present)
- Graduate Assistant—Researching (May 2000 to July 2002) TCALL, College of Education/Department of EHRD, Texas A&M University, College Station
- Lecturer (August 2000 to August 2001) English Language Institute, Texas A&M University, College Station
- Graduate Assistant—Teaching (January 2000 to May 2000) College of Education/Department of EDCI, Texas A&M University, College Station

## Publications

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