

Reflection

The concept of partnering to foster collaborative learning proved most successful. Students not only achieved academic mastery, but they developed a desire for lifelong learning. The teacher's time was used more effectively since she was not the sole source of instruction for the class. Students expressed that pairing reduced their inhibitions to ask questions. As socialization and rapport among students increased, so did learning. The only difficult aspect of the intervention was experienced when one partner graduated and moved on to other training. The remaining partner mourned the loss of the relationship and took time to heal before a partnership could be formed with a new student. However, the benefits of partnering and the learning and bonding far outweighed the difficulties experienced when a partnership dissolved. One student articulated the benefits of partnering during a post-intervention discussion: "I used to think I was the only person who didn't understand something, and I was too ashamed to ask for help. But with my partner right next to me . . . struggling with the same stuff I was . . . I realized I wasn't alone. The only dumb thing I did was sit there and pretend like I understood when I didn't. It's OK not to know how to do everything. You never learn if you don't ask, and having a partner made it a lot easier to ask for help."

Maximizing the Recruitment of Family Literacy Participants with the Collaborating School District

Mary Lou Friedline

Background

An action research project through the Pennsylvania Action Research Network (PAARN) was conducted in the Family Literacy Program of the

Mary Lou Friedline is Family Literacy Instructor with the Private Industries Council, Wesmorelant/Fayette Counties, Inc.

Private Industry Council (PIC) of Westmoreland/Fayette, Inc., to improve recruitment and increase enrollment within the collaborating school district. This district covers, geographically, approximately 100 square miles and consists of a small town and a township that is a sizable rural area. Community activities are focused strongly around school district activities. The district reported higher statistics of poverty than the rest of the county: 43.4% of students in K-12 are from low-income families, and 23.8% of the borough and 28.5% of the township are comprised of adults aged 25 and older with less than a high school education. Most county residents believe that, to take advantage of the PIC adult education programs, one has to be on welfare and need a GED diploma. Because of the rural nature of the county and a misconception of eligibility, efforts to recruit families into a family literacy program produced low results, yet the demographics indicated a high need for family literacy.

Plan

The goal of this project was to recruit and enroll four eligible families during the specified time by working closely with the school district. To improve the recruitment process the invention plan called for (a) developing a strong collaboration with the two principals, (b) preparing a short dialogue about Family Literacy to give to teachers at the August in-service, (c) asking primary teachers to include an introduction to Family Literacy in their back-to-school letter, (d) presenting program information to the K-4 parents at their October support meeting, and (e) meeting the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) officers. The timeline was August through December, 1999, with a goal of enrolling four new families.

Action and Data Collection

I established a strong collaboration with the building principals and gave detailed program information to the teaching staffs prior to the start of school. Teachers included a short paragraph about Family Literacy in their back-to-school letter for parents. In September I presented Family Literacy Program information during a 10-minute program to large groups of parents in five Back-to-School Nights. All were very well attended; grades 2 and 3 had standing room only. A sign-in sheet was available for parents who wanted to be contacted to get further information. A 45-minute presentation about learning styles was conducted in October for the K-4 parents in groups of seven or eight. One parent from this group

enrolled in the spring. Family Literacy information was presented on November 10 at a daytime PTO meeting that was attended by 20 parents of children in grades 2 through 5. A husband and wife both enrolled in March as a result. No contact was made at the primary PTO meetings since very few parents participate. Data to support the research included a log, a reflective journal, open interviews, and a focus group consisting of a primary principal, a teacher, a PTO parent, and the Family Literacy instructor.

Results

Only two families were recruited and enrolled during the established time frame. A follow-up article was written for the October principals' newsletters. Three parent quotes appeared in the November newsletters. No parents made contact after reading the articles. Evening and Saturday classes were rarely attended and did not appear to be useful for recruitment. Three parents called to inquire about attending but were insistent that they were only interested in learning computer skills. An informal Phase 2 of this recruitment effort continued after December 1. Seven additional parents attended as a direct result of hearing about Family Literacy either at Back-to-School Night, the K-4 Learning Styles workshops, and/or the PTO meeting. Four enrolled after 12 hours of attendance. Three families were enrolled during the time frame through the Head Start collaboration. This action research project, therefore, met the established goals and provided countless unanticipated benefits for the Family Literacy Program that will have a positive impact on recruitment and enrollment in succeeding program years.

Reflection

Although the targeted number was not achieved during the established time frame, many positive results have been achieved for the Family Literacy Program:

- Increased awareness in the two local communities through word of mouth.
- Strong recommendation of the program by participating parents to other parents.
- Stronger collaboration with the school district with greater access to

- computer classrooms equipped with Microsoft Office and the Internet.
- Inclusion of the Family Literacy instructor in school district in-service and training programs.
 - Request for the Family Literacy instructor to provide computer workshops for primary parents as part of *Read to Succeed*.
 - Request for the Family Literacy instructor to speak at the final Title I parent meeting in May, the perfect time to include information about the summer reading and education program.
 - Stronger collaboration with Adams Memorial Library. The high school library, a branch of Adams Memorial, becomes the community library after school hours and during the summer.
 - Supportive response from the school district that far exceeded expectations. Once again the summer program offered classes for Word, PowerPoint, the Internet, parent and child Internet activities, and parent and child reading activities in connection with the summer reading program at the libraries. ABE/GED studies will also be offered.

Knowing that the superintendent, principals, teachers, Title I coordinator, and guidance counselors believe that parent participation is extremely beneficial for the children is essential for effective recruitment. Recruiting by presenting learning topics such as learning styles is a powerful and useful tool. Defining the word *literacy* is imperative in all presentations and printed materials. This year's brochure has a checklist of skills including academic, parenting, workplace, and computer. PIC employees and administrators are addressing new marketing strategies and techniques in detail. The Family Literacy instructor is on the Marketing Committee. The most important thing that was learned during this process is that participating parents are the best recruiters available. Parent involvement in recruitment is being accomplished with a two-minute video of a school district parent explaining the benefits of the program for her family. The video, made in class by the parents, is being shown at this year's Open Houses and Back-to-School Nights.