

**Pennsylvania Family Literacy SEQUAL 2007-2008
Practitioner Action Research Project
A Report on Performance Outcomes and
Practitioner Perceptions**

Drucie Weirauch
Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy
The Pennsylvania State University

In Partial Fulfillment for Requirements for
the Family Literacy Statewide Evaluation

November 2008

Abstract

In 2007-2008, family literacy programs in Pennsylvania participated in an inaugural year of implementing a structured Practitioner Action Research (PAR) model as part of the program improvement process. Across the state, in three regional professional development events, programs were introduced to the four-step model and, in the workshop, developed tentative questions for their PAR project, tentative interventions, and potential data sources. Programs were supported as they began their projects by technical assistants and the PAR organizing staff. Practitioners were responsible for two products: a monograph describing their project and final findings due June 30 and a poster about their project and its results (to date) presented at three regional events in early spring. The poster and monograph detailed the PAR question, interventions, data sources, and results. This report provides two analyses. First, it includes a review of the monographs with PAR goals and results to determine project *performance outcomes*. The second part of this paper provides an analysis of the responses given by practitioners at the spring poster shows, where they shared their *perceptions* of the PAR process. The process of collecting and analyzing the results became the personal PAR project for the evaluator. The PAR question was, "To what extent will the statewide implementation of the PAR model result in program improvement and professional development as measured by analysis of monographs and of written practitioner responses?"

While it cannot be assumed that the PAR projects were the sole cause of the performance outcomes, it can be said that they contributed to the outcomes. With this caveat, results from the review of the monographs indicate that of the 58 monographs, 41 indicated that the project met performance outcomes (71%). Fifteen projects were a "Yes/No" (15%) which means they may not have met their performance outcome, but experienced other positive results, e.g. did not meet the enrollment performance standard, but did create more and better community partnerships which led to more referrals. Only two programs reported that their projects did not work as planned—one due to family attrition so that the intervention could not be implemented and the other because of staff changes and difficulty in sustaining a project.

The analysis of the reflections unveiled six categories of perceptions that cut across the five reflection questions used in the spring events (both successes and challenges) in terms of PAR for 2007-2008.

- Research and the PAR process
- Learning from other programs
- Project outcomes
- New techniques, resources, issues
- Team building and collaboration
- Pride, accomplishment, confidence

This report provides the background to PAR for 2007-2008 and the results from the two parts of the evaluation--performance outcomes and practitioner perceptions of the PAR process-- in the inaugural year.

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Background

Since 2000, staff in family literacy programs in Pennsylvania have participated in a process of collecting and analyzing data related to program-specific areas of inquiry. SEQUAL is Pennsylvania's Family Literacy Program Improvement Initiative, funded through the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) at the Pennsylvania Department of Education. In 2007-2008, SEQUAL initiated a Practitioner Action Research (PAR) model for program improvement. As in past years, each family literacy program was expected to form a program improvement team (PIT) to guide the program improvement process; however PAR applied more rigor and accountability to SEQUAL in 2007-2008.

According to B. Allan Quigley,¹ action research is defined as, "A type of research in which educators, often with stakeholders and other professionals, examine their own practice, take specific actions to improve practice, and interpret the results. In action research, people systematically analyze a problem, review the literature and relevant experience, set a baseline for purposes of comparative analysis, systematically gather evidence on the observed change(s), and collectively reflect on the outcomes (Quigley, p. 171²). He also once called it, quite simply, "Satisfying the itch."

There are four main phases to PAR:

- Question-Posing
- Planning
- Action and Observing the Intervention
- Reflecting

Before the action can begin, practitioners spend ample time planning and reflecting: thinking about the questions that are important to their program, considering different ways to address the questions, and examining different ways to collect data to see if they are making progress toward their goals. Throughout the process, action researchers monitor and assess, make changes, and try again. It is a recursive process with the goal of effecting change for a specific situation or problem. In the final step, action researchers look at the data, analyze them, and reflect on the data's meaning for their own program and for the implications the findings may have for the field.

What Action Research is NOT:³

1. It is not the usual things teachers do when they think about their teaching. PAR is systematic and involves collecting evidence and participating in rigorous reflection.

¹ Quigley, B.A. (1999). *Pennsylvania action research handbook and project planner*. Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education and the Pennsylvania State University.

² Quigley, B. A. (2006). *Building professional pride in literacy: A dialogical guide to professional development (Professional practices in adult education and lifelong learning.)* Melbourne, FL: Krieger Publishing Co.

³ Madison Metropolitan School District. *Classroom Action Research*. Retrieved August 14, 2008 from <http://www.madison.k12.wi.us/sod/car>.

2. It is not just problem-solving. It involves problem- or question-posing and is motivated by a quest to improve and understand.
3. It is not the scientific method applied to teaching. While it poses questions, devises interventions to improve, and uses data to inform, it is concerned about *changing* situations, not just interpreting them. It changes both the researcher, the situation and, often, the researched.

PAR is an iterative inquiry process that balances problem-solving actions with data-driven analysis to understand causes and improve practice. Practitioner action researchers track the intervention, collect data, and analyze those results to determine the effectiveness of the intervention. Even if a PAR project is implemented by an individual, reflection is best accomplished in collaboration with colleagues.

In Fall 2007-2008, Pennsylvania family literacy programs attended the SEQUAL Kick-off and were introduced to the PAR process. Each program chose to be in either Cohort 1 (identify own area of inquiry, devise own interventions, determine appropriate data to collect, analyze data, reflect on results) or Cohort 2 (use a pre-determined question and intervention, collect specified data, analyze the data, and reflect on results). The Cohort 2 question was about increasing children's oral receptive language using the *Talking About Wordless Picture Books*⁴ curriculum and measuring change using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) III. Cohort 2 participants were encouraged to adapt the intervention to best suit their programs and devise other ways to collect data. There were 43 monographs from Cohort 1 and 15 from Cohort 2. Questions posed by Cohort 1 covered topic areas such as retention in Adult and Parent Education and Interactive Literacy Activities (ILA); improving attendance of school-age children; enrollment; gains in early childhood education, adult education, and ILA. Some programs, whether in Cohort 1 or 2, had a special English Language Learner (ELL) focus.

In December, practitioners participated in one of several conference calls to discuss their projects. Organized by theme, the conference calls invited program staff with similar projects to interact and ask questions. Programs then worked independently on their projects with assistance from their technical assistants.

Three regional spring SEQUAL events featured a poster show, for which each Program Improvement Team (PIT) had the opportunity to create a poster display detailing their question, intervention(s), data collection, reflection on the results, and implications for best practice. Program staff heard about each of the projects, asked colleagues questions, and provided each other with valuable feedback.

Programs submitted a monograph detailing their project (question, interventions, data sources, results and reflection) by June 30. These monographs were organized and placed on the Pennsylvania Family Literacy website. The first part of this report describes the questions, the goals, and the results in an attempt to show the efficacy of PAR in terms of Performance Outcomes.

At spring SEQUAL events, participants responded to four reflection questions about SEQUAL and the PAR process for 2007-2008. They also completed a written evaluation, which included three open-ended questions, one of which was particularly relevant to this evaluation.

⁴ Fulton, J.M. (2006). *Talking About Wordless Picture Books*. National Center for Family Literacy.

Implementing PAR became the author's intervention for this personal action research project. The evaluator used data for the performance outcomes reported in the monographs. Data for practitioner perceptions included the results from the reflection questions and one relevant question from the evaluation form. The researcher's question was, "To what extent will the statewide implementation of the PAR model result in program improvement and professional development as measured by monograph-reported performance outcomes and written practitioner responses?" This report provides an analysis of the results.

Performance Outcomes-Data Collection and Analysis

SEQUAL coordinators wanted to determine the efficacy of the PAR project and how family literacy practitioners felt about the changes to SEQUAL with the much more structured and rigorous PAR model. To determine the extent to which programs met their performance outcomes, the evaluator reviewed the monographs determining goals and outcomes. The 58 submitted monographs were reviewed to determine if the programs reached the goals set for the PAR project. Performance Outcomes were organized by the PAR themes: Enrollment; Retention—Adult Education; Retention—Parent Education, ILA, School Age Attendance, Home Visits; Gains—Adult Education; Gains—Early Childhood Education and ILA; Receptive Oral Language Gains. (See Appendix for Table of Performance Outcomes.)

Performance Outcomes-Results

The evaluator reviewed 58 PAR project monographs (only one was not submitted in time for review, due to illness of the coordinator). Of the 58 monographs, 41 (71%) indicated that the PAR project resulted in meeting the specified goal; 15 (26%) indicated that they did not meet the goal but, nevertheless, experienced positive outcomes. Only two monographs (3%) indicated that their program was unable to complete the PAR project. Each PAR theme is discussed below.

Enrollment

Ten PAR projects dealt with the issue of enrollment to exceed the performance standard or meet a prescribed enrollment goal. The enrollment performance standard was raised from 95% to 100% in 2007-2008. Three programs met or exceeded their performance outcome or target. One program had 109% enrollment (open houses, Head Start connections) and another 100% (community partners), while the third met the set goal of enrolling six families from Head Start. One determined that managed enrollment was successful for adult gains, as planned.

Referrals often play a part in enrollment. One program that intended to improve referrals from community partners increased the referrals by 200% by presenting family literacy information. This program also used the presentation with county commissioners and were awarded a \$13,800 grant. The five programs that were Yes/No did not meet their enrollment goal but did have performance outcomes in terms of increased community awareness, better determination of how to structure the program to meet student needs, and better idea of how to target distance learning to attract new students. A final program was placed in enrollment category because it wanted to determine if a multiple-sites model would increase enrollment. It did not, as expected, but the program staff learned that the program should return to a center-based model to increase enrollment and retention. This project was also in the Yes/No category. All enrollment PAR projects (17% of the 58 total) were completed with some success.

Retention—Adult Education

Ten PAR monographs dealt with Retention in adult education. Seven (70%) achieved the performance outcomes; two were Yes/No (20%); and one (10%) could not implement the

project as planned to report any outcomes. Those who succeeded in meeting their performance outcomes used the following interventions:

- Expanded partnerships to increase hours for adult education
- Structured goal-setting (EFF)
- Used force-field analysis to determine barriers to participation
- Revised orientation to create a learning community
- Distance learning augmented by home visits

Of the two that did not reach performance outcomes, one tried a schedule change, which the students preferred (Yes); however, bad weather and staff changes impeded better attendance (No). The second Yes/No did not reach retention due to students dropping out for reasons not related to the program (e.g. moving or job), which brought down the average. The program without any performance outcomes had internal factors that prevented them from completing the PAR project.

Retention—Parent Education, ILA, School Age Attendance, Home Visits

Only six programs investigated these areas: three met performance outcomes and three were Yes/No. Two programs wanted to increase hours for parenting education. One increased hours by 36% to meet the goal; the other did not increase retention, but did determine areas of parent interest. Both programs noted that involving parents in the project gave parents “voice.” One increased participation in ILA and also noted that the quality of ILA improved. The program that sought to increase school age attendance from previous years did so, to nearly exceed the Performance Standard with 82% of the children having three or fewer unexcused absences (standard is 85%). This program also noted an increase in children reading on grade level with 64% in 2007-08 (51% in 2006-07). A Yes/No program wanted to increase families keeping home visits to meet the Performance Standard. While they did not reach this performance outcome, they did create several interventions that the parents appreciated. The program determined that time management skills need to be taught with intentionality. The final Yes/No program hoped to increase retention overall by integrating the four components. The integration did not work; however, they learned what did increase retention (tutors, Head Start collaboration, and support from home).

Gains—Adult Education

Nine programs chose to improve adult gains through their PAR project. Eight (89%) met or exceeded their performance outcomes; one (11%) noted some success (Yes/No).

The following diverse interventions resulted in projects meeting performance goals:

- Intentional teaching of scientifically-based reading research strategies to improve vocabulary and comprehension (two programs)
- Increasing critical thinking skills (Bloom’s Taxonomy) in a multi-level classroom
- Cooperative learning to increase math skills and improve attitude
- Improving vocabulary with focus on Massey Academic Word List
- Reversing order of TABE 9B and 10B
- Story mapping to improve reading skills (ELL)
- Determining appropriate timing for pre-testing in a drug-alcohol rehab program to more accurately define skill level and develop appropriate curriculum

All programs noted that they will continue or expand upon these efforts. One Yes/No program implemented work groups to support students toward the GED. The work groups were

successful, but there was not enough time nor follow-up with students (disconnected phones, moved) to truly measure effectiveness.

Gains—Early Childhood Education and ILA

Seven programs looked to increase gains in early childhood education or ILA. Five (71%) reported meeting performance outcomes, while two (29%) were Yes/No. One of the Yes/No projects was a quasi-experimental study using extant data on school age children (Even Start and non-Even Start) and was not necessarily a PAR project.

Three programs addressed pre-school children and had excellent outcomes. One created packets to increase literacy skills as measured by the PALS-Pre-K. There was a dramatic increase in scores at post-test. Furthermore, parents gained a better understanding of teaching children literacy skills. Another pre-school project focused on the role of assessment in the ECE classroom, validating ECE teachers' knowledge of the use and purpose of assessment and improved staff-administration relations. The third program took over most of the ECE responsibility from its partners and addressed training on assessment and integration as the intervention. Children birth-5 had above average gains, and their parents became aware that ECE is more than "babysitting." This project also dealt with school age children. Results indicate that school age children improved reading skills and attendance. Another program addressed school-age children and created packets for families to improve children's reading skills. While the packets were enjoyed by parents, they did not result in meeting the Performance Standard as hoped. The program had 50% school age children reading on or above grade level, and the Performance Standard is 60%. The program with a quasi-experimental study noted that on some measures, Even Start children outperformed the like non-Even Start students, but not on all.

Receptive Oral Language Gains

The second cohort investigated increasing oral receptive literacy with the intervention *Talking About Wordless Picture Books* curriculum; gain was measured using the PPVT III. Programs were encouraged to add other interventions and to use other measures, as well. Of the 16 programs that investigated this area, 13 (81%) met their performance outcomes; two programs were Yes/No; one program (6%) was unable to complete the project. All of the programs meeting performance outcomes noted that children had gains as measured by the PPVT III. Programs with ELL children felt that ELL children made greater gains than English speaking children.

All of the programs also noted that there was more frequent and greater quality parent/child interaction, "They moved from spectators to facilitators." Parents became more interested in helping their children and had increased knowledge of literacy activities. One program video-taped adults and children as a pre- and post and noted marked improvement in their interactive reading.

Six programs also used the PPVT III with adults, and all experienced gains. And, three programs also looked at adult assessments (CASAS, BEST, and TABE-comprehension) and noted adult gains.

Another outcome mentioned by three programs was improved partnerships with Head Start.

For the two Yes/No programs, there was mixed success based on the assessment. However, both noted success in new instructional materials, a profile tracking tool, and improved home literacy.

The program that could not complete the project had a late start, lost students, had poor attendance, and had only one student; therefore, it could not report outcomes.

Conclusion

For its inaugural year, the PAR project was a success. To have 58 programs take on a more rigorous program improvement initiative from December to May with intensity is impressive in its own right. With nearly three-quarters (71%) achieving their performance outcomes and another 26% nearly achieving but experiencing other successes is testimony to the professionalism of family literacy in Pennsylvania. This report next considers the words of these practitioners and reflection on the PAR process for 2007-08.

Practitioner Perceptions Results Data Collection and Analysis

For practitioner perceptions, the evaluator analyzed anonymous reflections from colored-coded post-its collected at the three regional spring sessions (West, Central, and East). Participants answered these questions:

- What have you gained as a result of the PAR process?
- What have you gained as a result of the poster show (both creating it and seeing others)?
- What value has the PAR process added to your program's ability to think about your work in family literacy?
- What were your challenges with PAR this year?

The four open-ended Reflection Questions and one Session Evaluation question, "What was the most valuable information that you learned from today's SEQUAL poster-show event?" were analyzed using a well-established qualitative data analysis method.

Qualitative data analysis allows the researcher to discern, examine, and interpret patterns or themes. The process used to make sense of the information required multiple rounds of revisiting the data. The researcher used a common framework developed by Miles and Huberman⁵ that relies on three phases of data analysis:

- Data Reduction
- Data Display
- Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Data reduction requires organizing and meaningfully reducing or reconfiguring the mass of data. The researcher purposefully selected, simplified, and transformed the data to make them intelligible. From the Reflection Questions alone, there were over 500 quotations serving as data. Nearly 250 responses came from the Evaluation Questionnaire question #1. The abundance of data required making choices about what data to emphasize, minimize, or set aside if not relative. Cutting data is difficult, as the researcher and respondents play a personal role in the generation. Relevance and depth of the data for answering the particular question was paramount. While the original questions helped to organize the masses of responses, the researcher used both inductive and deductive analysis to make new meaning from the data.

⁵ Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis, 2nd Ed.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Data display is Miles and Huberman's (1994) second element in qualitative data analysis. Using the responses of the participants, the researcher organized and reorganized to find patterns and interrelationships. Higher order categories emerged from the simple ones that evolved during data reduction. Indeed, themes developed that crossed all questions during data display.

The final step in this qualitative data analysis is conclusion drawing and verification. This is the meaning-making step that requires revisiting the data again and again to cross-check and verify emerging conclusions. Here, validity refers to whether the conclusions are credible, warranted, and free of alternative explanation. It requires careful scrutiny of the data and the established (but still changing) themes and patterns and, often, a re-organization within those themes.

Practitioner Perception--Results

Data analysis of the PAR question responses followed these steps, sometimes recursively. First, themes emerged within each question. After reflection on the question-driven themes, it became apparent that the themes transcended the questions and were evident in nearly all four questions. It is interesting to see the number of responses for each of the six categories, to show the interest in them and the need for data reduction.

- Research and the PAR Process, 271 responses
- Learning from other Programs, 172 responses
- Project Outcomes, 110 responses
- New Techniques, Resources, Issues, 98 responses
- Team Building and Collaboration, 52 responses
- Pride, Accomplishment, Confidence, 29 responses

It is important to note that "What were your challenges?" necessarily elicited a different type of response. Nevertheless, Challenges contained all of the categories with the exception of "Pride, accomplishment, confidence." Two questions directly applied to the poster show event; therefore, they boosted numbers for two of the categories, "Learning from other programs" and "Learned new techniques, resources, issues." The categories and salient descriptive quotes from the five questions follow in the order of number of comments, starting with Research and the PAR Process.

Research and the PAR Process

PAR provided a more structured and rigorous framework for program improvement. More accountability was built into SEQUAL this year because programs were required to provide written documentation of the planning steps and create the poster show for public display. Each program also was required to write a monograph detailing their project. The researcher expected participants to have opinions about this new challenge – both positive and negative. Central to this category was intentionality, rigor, and purpose. Practitioners wrote:

- "PAR gave us a more structured way to evaluate our progress."
- "It makes us intentional in our planning. It gives our program 'teeth'."
- "We felt very involved in the entire process since we came up with our own question. We wanted something that really mattered, that would really make a difference."
- "Systematic approach that will be easily translatable to collaborators."
- "Made us more aware of the possibility of research as a way to improve our programs. Formalized the process we were doing to make it easier to analyze our data."
- "The PAR process has increased a desire to enhance the overall success of the program and to recognize problems and act—instead of letting go."
- "Importance of deliberate, intentional planning."

- “Bringing the staff into this process—seeing how they use it deliberately. Bringing the learners into the process with more intentionality.”

Within this category, the specific steps and elements of PAR emerged as sub-categories—focus on one area, implement an intervention, use data, reflect. General action research, overall, also was mentioned. While many participants highlighted the PAR process as being important and useful, others identified it as one of the greatest challenges. Indeed, of all the Challenges responses, 117 referenced the PAR process. The reflection responses that follow were culled from the copious data to represent the categories and sub-categories.

Focus on one area

Participants appreciated the tightness of the PAR process to narrow to one area of inquiry:

- “Discussed and identified areas that needed improvement; narrowed and focused on ONE.”
- “We were able to choose one area to investigate and weren’t trying to do too much. It targeted us.”

Likewise, Focus was a challenge:

- “It was a challenge initially to develop a question that was not too broad and that we would be able to research, collect data on, and have attainable results.”
- “Realizing our first question was not going to work and stepping back to frame a new, tighter question.”

Use of interventions

Practitioners felt a valuable part of the PAR process was the use of targeted interventions:

- “Learned the importance of evaluating your program to identify weaknesses and then establish a plan of improvement with interventions.”
- “The poster show made us look at our intervention ‘mid-stream’.”

There were challenges with the interventions, as well, both general and specific:

- “Coming up with fresh approaches to old problems.”
- “Getting halfway through the project and realizing there was a piece that wasn’t working and feeling there wasn’t enough time to make revisions to the intervention to try it out.”

Data

The power of data was cited as a benefit of the PAR process:

- “Realistic knowledge of numbers. You can make assumptions, generalize, and guess—but the numbers state the facts. Data are useful.”
- “A greater appreciation for data in guiding instruction and advocacy.”
- “Importance of formal and informal data.”
- The poster show focused us in on data collection to get results.”

As a Challenge, “Data” was mentioned in several respects—what to collect, how to obtain, and how to analyze:

- “Knowing what data we needed to address our question and intervention
- “Knowing how to interpret our data.”
- “Keeping the same student for a pre to a post.”
- “Collecting data—where to start?”

Two Challenges were reported regarding data specifically in terms of time:

- “Taking the time to put all the research data into a respectable poster show.”
- “We were unable to show our results as we are not done post-testing yet.”
(Several practitioners voiced this concern about the timing of the poster show and data collecting.)

General PAR process

Introducing PAR to the field helped practitioners realize the overall potential the process has for program improvement:

- “I have gained respect for the whole research procedure and I now see its value.”
- “The process gives a depth of impact: depth of understanding, making decisions based on our own research is particularly meaningful.”
- “Creating the poster helped me to know how to research and improve our program. Start with the problem questions and go from there—it all flows together.”
- “An understanding of everything involved in the research process—the questions that arrive when trying to answer a question.”
- “How important it is to identify a problem, establish a plan of improvement, and then evaluate your plan to see if you want to adopt it permanently or revise it.”

Most of the Challenges targeted specific aspects of the PAR process—the question, intervention, data, and poster show. However, time for the process was a challenge, “Having time to do all the things we ‘wanted’ to do for the PAR project,” and “Finding time for our PIT to meet.”

It is not surprising that so many responses were in relation to the PAR process because the questions, with the exception of one specific to the poster show, addressed this. Because the PAR process was new to most of the practitioners, they felt compelled to share their thoughts. However, other categories, beyond PAR and the Research Process, also emerged from the general questions.

Learning from Other Programs

Because the reflection and evaluation question responses were collected at the three regional spring poster show events, each of which included about 50 practitioners as well as state-level staff, there were many thoughts about the power of learning from each other. Not surprisingly, many responses from both the reflection questions and evaluation question addressed the value of sharing and learning. Sub categories from Learning from Other Programs included sharing commonalities, different approaches to similar problems, a chance to meet and network, and getting feedback from colleagues on their PAR project. Perhaps this, from the “value-added question,” captures the essence of this category, “There are two parts of family literacy that are ever-present: We want to share our programs’ successes (We love to talk about what we’re doing!) and we want to hear how other people are dealing with the same challenges we face.”

Commonalities; we are not alone

Participants commented that the poster show event allowed them to learn about their similarities, even though their programs may be very different.

- “I have gained much insight into other programs and this has given me more confidence that I am on the right track with family literacy.”
- “Although our programs are very different, we share the same challenges.”
- “I found it almost comforting to see that we all have the same struggles, but we keep working to improve and serve families.”

Different approaches to similar problems

Since there were multiple projects addressing the same or similar topics, program staff were able to see the different ways that other programs planned interventions and collected data for their PAR area.

- “Seeing other posters. Sharing ALWAYS results in new ways to tackle our similar problems.”
- “The posters let us see how a similar question can be approached and planned differently.”
- “Ideas I hadn’t thought about, especially for interventions.”
- “The pre- and post-videos (data source) of the parents and children together was a wonderful way to showcase the results.”

Networking

Participants in family literacy enjoy the opportunity to get together to share, network, and simply enjoy each others’ company. The poster show session provided this opportunity.

- “Shared sense of progress, curiosity, commitment to HONEST results.”
- “The poster show not only gave me numerous ideas to enhance my family literacy program, but also gave all family literacy agencies a sense of community. “
- “Getting to informally speak to other programs about what is working in their programs and how they achieved success.”
- “The power of networking with other agencies.”

Feedback on the project and poster

Participants were encouraged to provide feedback, either orally or written, about the projects and posters. Participants appreciated the feedback.

- “Many of the circulating people offered valuable ideas about our project.”
- “We got wonderful objective feedback that I’ll use in the monograph.”
- “You can receive positive feedback from other groups having the same questions and learning how they handled their questions. Ideal—sharing was great.”
- “I think this year’s PAR was excellent and allowed positive feedback from each group.”

More time should be provided to allow participants to engage in opportunities to participate in a learning community, share expertise and questions, and learn from each other. PAR for 2007-2008 certainly highlighted the power within the field and the mutual respect of practitioners. Another value described by the practitioners was the Outcomes from the PAR project.

Outcomes

Outcomes became a category, because practitioners talked about specific results or outcomes from their PAR projects as a success and, sometimes, a challenge. The quotations below were selected to showcase the broad range of the PAR topics and their outcomes.

- “The project has increased the number of home visits kept by parents.”
- “Gained increases in attendance (numbers and hours.)”
- “Being able to find resources easily shared between center and home-based teachers.”
- “We improved three important Performance Standards that we previously struggled with.”
- “It made us see our clients/learners, lesson plan preparation, and educational system in a new light.”
- “We learned how our parents feel about parenting issues.”
- “I realized how much the kids have improved in eight months.”
- “Understanding the barriers of the clientele is the first step in the direction to locate the resources for them to overcome these barriers.”
- “We boosted engagement and, thereby, enrollment.”

- “It is very important to respect cultural differences in a group. We learned that taking this into consideration helps the group in different areas.”

Challenge was not exempt from Outcomes: “We did not get the results we expected.”

Outcomes were the driving force behind the PAR process this year in the quest for program improvement. At the poster show events, practitioners were exposed to powerful outcomes from other programs. From these, practitioners learned new ideas, techniques and issues to take to their own programs. This is the next category to emerge from the data.

New Techniques, strategies, resources, issues to address

PAR in 2007-08, especially convening at the spring poster show events, allowed participants to be introduced to many new ideas, strategies, interventions, data sources, and resources. The events also introduced participants to potential new issues to address. General responses were common; so too were responses that targeted something specific.

General

There were ample general responses that suggested gain of new ideas, resources, process, and future issues. These quotes provide a sample.

- “New and innovative answers to some grey areas of family literacy that will help each and every one improve their program.”
- “Resources for enhancing my lessons.”
- “Some great ideas related to the same topic.”
- The poster presentation was PHENOMENAL!!! The information presented was so very helpful and adaptable. I have gained many suggestions and interventions that can be implemented in our program.”
- “Perfect idea-sharing environment.”
- “Ideas on how to implement next year’s PIT. One of my favorite SEQUALS!”
- “I really found the poster show method of presenting information very beneficial. I could spend as much time as I wanted at something that interested me or one I had a similar challenge with. I loved this new process. I took a lot of great ideas away from hearing about programs’ interventions, resources, etc.”

Specific

Participants also responded about specific ideas, resources, strategies they gained as a result of PAR and the poster show.

- “Good ideas from other programs—distance learning and Book Club.”
- “Introduced to the Wordless Picture Books curriculum. I want to learn more about it.”
- “Learned a lot about ‘cooperative learning’ techniques. Learned that the TABE version switch does not increase results.”
- “New ideas to implement in our program, such as ways to develop critical thinking skills.”
- “Ideas on what to try (outreach, retention, EC gains) and what not to try (TABE 9 and 10 urban legend.)”
- “Knowledge on how to integrate distance learning and family literacy; ways to integrate child assessments; ways to run a Book Club; use of videos for assessment.”
- Lots of ideas to implement in my program—more workshops with preschoolers; send more readings home; follow up results with parents; keep talking with your children and adults; keep motivating them to come to class.”
- “I liked how some agencies utilized the intake process to help focus their students prior to beginning work to secure outcomes.”

- “Great tips—putting rhymes on a cd as a gift.”
- “I loved the idea of using pictures from magazines to help students write creatively and realistically.”
- “We created a curriculum that can be used across programs and subjects. The lessons can be used by tutors, GED instructors, and ABE instructors.”

Practitioners appreciated learning from one another, whether they learned new ideas, strategies, or resources. The poster show provided this opportunity. The web-site based listing of all monographs invites practitioners to explore more in depth the new ideas that were generated from the field for PAR 2007-08. Another value of the PAR process mentioned by practitioners was team-building within the program and with partners and parents.

Team-Building and Collaboration

PAR required each program to form a PIT comprising staff related to the project. SEQUAL coordinators also recommended including staff not directly involved with the question (e.g. an early childhood teacher to help with an adult education question), collaborating community partners, and parents. Participants talked about the success and challenges of working with colleagues, other sites, partners, and parents, the sub-categories.

Colleagues

- “I gained insight of colleagues’ ideas through the informal sharing of ideas.”
- “We worked cohesively as a PIT to develop a family literacy program that can be viable.”
- “The poster show enabled me to work with my colleagues who may have different roles in my program.”
- “The process has given me the opportunity to work with my colleagues and listen to their concerns. It presented us with ideas and issues that we may not have taken the time to do.”
- “It has uncovered an un-charted dimension to our work. Subsequently, there has been increased dialogue among PIT members and agency administration as it relates to program improvement.”
- “A new respect for colleagues’ positions in what they (we all) do.”
- “Stronger cooperation with other sites within our program.”

Partners

- “I gained better collaborations with existing agencies.”
- “It made it easy to get all staff and partners involved in the program improvement process.”

Parents and families

- “It united staff and families in the program improvement process.”
- “Utilizing parents’ input resulted in increased program improvement.”

Positive team building did not always occur and was mentioned as a Challenge, as well, in terms of general resistance, multiple sites, and new staff.

- “Ignoring the pessimistic comments of some people and trying our intervention anyway.”
- “Going ahead with the intervention despite those who thought it would not be worthwhile.”
- “Getting everyone to participate. Could have gotten more support from staff.”
- “Being able to coordinate with another PIT in another county. Distance made it hard to accomplish our task.”

- “Sharing information among three sites.”
- “Major staff changes.”

Overall, the PAR process invited team building toward program improvement as in this response to “Value Added”: “Open communication within the PIT to ask the difficult questions and figure out how to answer them.”

The five top categories to emerge thus far, The PAR Process, Learning from Other Programs, Outcomes, New Techniques, etc., Team-Building, were important outcomes from this year’s inaugural PAR. Its success led some practitioners to share their thoughts on how they felt a sense of pride, accomplishment, and confidence -- the final category.

Pride, Accomplishment, Confidence, Empowerment

Practitioners articulated a final benefit from PAR—that of pride, accomplishment, confidence. Most responses were made to the Value Added question and to Question #1 from the questionnaire, “What was the most valuable information that you learned from today’s SEQUAL event?” Pride and accomplishment were mentioned for both the field at large and for individual programs. Confidence referred to how the practitioner felt about his/her own or program’s capabilities. There were no Challenge responses for this category.

For the field

The field has the right to feel a sense of pride for the work it has been doing for many years. The PAR process allowed them to highlight their work in a structured way and share with each other:

- “Recognition and celebration of our extensive professional wisdom.”
- “Knowledge that the field is capable of high quality research—and sharing it.”
- “We are working among many outstanding programs.”
- “I learned the depth of knowledge and experience in our program and in programs around the state.”
- “Seeing the great work done across the year.”
- “The great desire of agencies to provide quality programs. Participants are enthusiastic about what they do.”

For our program

Individually, practitioners also felt a sense of pride for what they had accomplished with their PAR project.

- “Sense of accomplishment. “Gave me more confidence to address a need and resolve an issue. Program improvement vs. program maintenance.”
- “Our project helps to validate my work in family literacy.”
- “Our project has helped us to feel better about our work in that we actually started something new to improve results.”

Empowerment

The question, “What value has the PAR process added to your program’s ability to think about your work in family literacy?” elicited a number of responses about empowerment:

- Staff felt empowered that we could make a difference.”
- “Results can be empowering to practitioners.”
- “The PAR process made me become more focused and reflective of my work.”
- “Programs can do this! Realizing how much good we do.”
- “I am more mindful about my work. That is empowering.”

- “I learned that I can be a direct participant in program improvement.”

The PAR process had the potential to change the field. Though it required more rigor and work, practitioners were ready for this challenge. By completing the process, they earned a sense of pride as this practitioner states, “I believe the value of this PAR project would be that everything we do with our family literacy program seems to be taken for granted. When we as a program discuss it and actually document it, we see how great we are and that we do make a difference.”

Conclusion

The question guiding the evaluator’s PAR action research project was, “To what extent will the statewide implementation of the PAR model result in program improvement and professional development as measured by written practitioner responses?”

The first part of the question deals with the implementation of the PAR process. Data regarding Research and the PAR Process indicate that the implementation was a success. This quote captures the essence of PAR as an intervention, “The process was an education in itself. Identifying a problem. Going through the various steps (researching, using data, intervention and reflection) was very helpful for me.” Another, “It has given us an opportunity to look at the program under a microscope, identify problems/issues, think about ways to address them and how to measure.” And one participant wrote, “I think you did a good job of presenting and implementing PAR. The projects are wonderful, which speak of your success at implementation.”

The category, “Learning from other Programs” also captured the value of the implementation. Programs learned more about how to implement PAR from each other, “All programs have problems that can be solved through innovation.”

Responses from the reflection questions do not necessarily attest to the success of the PAR process *statewide*. The responses captured only individuals’ perceptions for themselves and their programs and not, necessarily, the impact statewide. However, perceptions from the researcher and the other SEQUAL coordinators indicate that the implementation was effective statewide. As planned, SEQUAL was kicked off at three regional events. The intent of the fall workshops was to demystify research and show practitioners that they do it in their everyday practice. Participants were introduced to the PAR Handbook, “Living the Questions: Practitioner Action Research,” which outlined the steps with tips and examples. At the fall events, participants were urged to work through the Question and Planning steps and develop a preliminary question, intervention, and potential data sources. While some practitioners were still a bit uncertain about their project and the process, all left with a preliminary question. The field was given approximately three weeks to complete the Planning stage and send their plan to their TAs and to the appropriate SEQUAL coordinator for Cohort 1 or 2. Most of the plans were well developed, though some needed some extra work and support. Practitioners who were asked to tighten their question, better define their intervention, or consider other sources of data appreciated the support and guidance. By the December conference calls, most of the programs were well set with their projects, and many had already begun the intervention. All of Pennsylvania’s family literacy programs participated in the spring SEQUAL poster shows with impressive displays about their projects to date. All but one program submitted a monograph with final results as the end product of PAR. Participation in PAR and program accountability for posters and monographs, as well as the high quality of the projects overall, is evidence of statewide success.

The next part of the researcher's question concerns "program improvement." How PAR helped programs to improve their work was directly captured in the categories of Project Outcomes and New Techniques, Resources, etc. Programs selected issues that were program specific; therefore program improvement had many different guises. Some of the improvements in performance outcomes included:

- Increase in oral receptive vocabulary in children and parents
- Enrollment
- Increased hours for Adult Education, Parent Education, and ILA
- Improved instruction in the Adult and Early Childhood Education classrooms
- Use of distance learning
- Responding to parents' preferences and needs for Parent Education Improving the intake procedure
- Identifying and addressing family challenges to help them participate
- Increased authentic home literacy practices and materials and resources for its families
- Increased home visits
- Better attendance for school-age children
- Gains in reading for school-age children
- Better quality in ILA
- Increased use of English for ELL families
- Creative recruitment practices
- More integrated programming
- Use of scientifically-based reading research in the Adult Education classroom

In general, PAR helped programs meet Performance Standards with which they had previously struggled. PAR also invited programs to address Indicators of Program Quality. Less directly, PAR improved, for the most part, relationships among staff and with administration and collaborators. Importantly, PAR engaged parents in the research process as they assisted staff and partners to improve the program. Comments from the reflection questions address these aspects of program improvement.

The last part of the PAR question deals with the aspect of professional development and how the practitioners became systematic researchers in their programs. Certainly, the category of Pride and Confidence contained evidence that practitioners grew in their practice through participating in the PAR process. As one practitioner wrote, "PAR gave me more confidence to address a need and resolve an issue. Program improvement vs. program maintenance." Another stated, "The PAR process has pushed me to be more thoughtful in my practice."

Creating the poster and seeing others also was a form of professional development. "The most valuable information I learned was how to collect data and present it in a variety of ways," and "I would like to see how I can use the poster project idea with other events." Seeing other project posters provided staff with concrete ideas and tools to try in their own programs. Every aspect of this event has been helpful for our program. We have a summary of work done by each program here with tips and tools to improve our program."

Creating interventions and seeing how they contributed to program improvement, tweaking them for the future also contributed to professional development, "I feel that we will continue to implement the interventions we put into place this year. We learned so much from PAR. It has made it easy to operate and show our PIT and students the benefit" and "I learned so much by going through this project. It made me think and act. It was a year-long professional development." PAR also helped practitioners use data and see the value of data, "Doing

research on the assessment gives program staff a new perspective on how our tools impact service delivery.”

In general, the PAR process invited practitioners to grow into researchers within the context of program improvement, “I have gained a better insight as a family literacy educator in that it’s never too late to try something new, or that changing, updating, or adding an intervention to better achieve an outcome can be beneficial for the learners.”

APPENDIX

Enrollment**Performance Outcomes of PAR Projects 2007-2008**

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
Altoona Area SD	Yes	109% enrollment; enhanced community awareness of FL through open houses; stronger collaborations with Head Start and Teen Link.
AIU#3	Yes/No	No increase in enrollment or retention; but data to support return to center-based model, which provided a learning community for all involved.
Greater Johnstown Career & Technical Center	Yes	100% enrollment; new/enhanced partnerships (Beginnings, CareerLink); more referrals.
Huntingdon Co. Child & Adult Dev.	Yes/No	Did not meet enrollment; but data reflect improvement in quality of program (student satisfaction questionnaire).
Adams/Franklin Co. FL	Yes	24 referrals from community ESL Head Start; 6 enrolled (target), enhanced awareness of FL.
Mansfield University LIFT	Yes	Managed enrollment resulted in increased enrollment, greater gains on assessments, greater student satisfaction.
MCOL—School District of Philadelphia	Yes/No	Did not increase enrollment, but learned that ELECT students may be too immature or have too much going on in their lives to be appropriate for distance learning; ELECT staff enthusiastic about potential of FL. PCHP students flourished.
Literacy Council of Mercer Co.	Yes	Retention increased 13.9% (goal 5%); 200% increase in referrals. Community presentations increased awareness; presentation to County Commissioner resulted in \$13,800 to the FL program.
Mid-State Literacy Council	Yes/No	Did not reach goal for enrollment, but did increase community awareness about FL
Connect, Inc., Washington, FL	Yes/No	Did not meet enrollment, but did increase community contacts.

Retention -- Adult Education
Performance Outcomes of PAR Projects 2007-2008

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
ARIN Family Literacy	Yes	AE and PE hours increased; expanded partnerships (IUP, Head Start, Early Head Start); more resources for families; three interventions (distance learning, community, shared). Data on intervention families and "control group."
Carbon Co. FL	Yes	Increased hours and better enrollment. New understanding of learning needs (which led to retention), better partnerships and greater community awareness.
Luzerne Co. Community College	Yes	Structured goal setting, based on EFF. Improved hours.
MCOL—Center for Literacy and Interim House West		Internal factors prevented PAR project from being implemented as planned
MCOL—Indochinese American Council	Yes	Increased participation hours and quality; realized power of social interactions and creating a learning community
YMCA—Philadelphia Vicinity	Yes	Force field analysis allowed program to better understand learner needs and barriers and provide support; better attendance, more responsible students
Scranton School District	Yes/No	Did not reach retention hours, due to several enrolled students who dropped out (not program related) and brought down the average. Learned the power of team work.
Schuylkill IU #29	Yes	Distance learning provided a venue for families who cannot go to the center. Home visits augmented distance learning. 2008-09 project to be informed by home visit data.
Susquehanna Co. Literacy Program	Yes/No	Students more satisfied with schedule change; but weather and staff changes impeded retention
TIU#11—Fulton Co.	Yes	Revised orientation increased student interest and retention. Exceeded enrollment. Created a student support system.

Retention—Parent Education, ILA, School Age, Home Visits

Performance Outcomes of PAR Projects 2007-2008

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
MCOL--Chances	Yes	180% increase participation in ILA. Better quality in ILA
Delaware Co. IU #25	Yes	Exceeded school age attendance PS (82%); more school age children reading on grade level (51% in 2006-07; 64% in 2007-08); better data entry (attendance was recorded improperly in previous years)
Jefferson-Clarion Even Start	Yes/No	Determined problem with home visits; created appropriate interventions; inconclusive data. Need longer time line; may be trying to change a value deeply ingrained in culture of poverty. Identified time management as a needed skill.
Lawrence Co. FL	Yes/No	No increase in PE retention, but better understanding of what parents want and need. PAR project gave parents voice.
Somerset Co. FL	Yes	Significant gain in PE hours (36%). Identified time management as a skill that needs to be taught; PAR project gave parents voice.
Bedford	Yes/No	Intervention itself (integration of components) did not increase retention, but learned what does (tutors, collaboration with Head Start, support students receive from home)

Gains -- Adult Education
Performance Outcomes of PAR Projects 2007-2008

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
Crawford Co. READ Program	Yes	Raised critical thinking levels (comprehension, application, analysis, but not synthesis); learned that critical thinking is appropriate for multi-level classroom; separate from critical reading
TIU #11--Juniata	Yes	Used deliberate SBRR to increase scores on TABE and CASAS, increased vocabulary (Fry word list); improved critical thinking skills
Lancaster-Lebanon IU#13	Yes	Vocabulary scores increased significantly (Massey Academic Word List); teacher-made and TABE-vocabulary increased; determined problems from open enrollment
The Learning Center—Williamsport	Yes/No	Writing and math groups were successful but not with the initial target group. Of those we were trying to bring back to the program, only two returned. Many could not be reached by phone or mail.
Genesis II, Inc.: Caton Village	Yes	Determined that pre-testing drug/alcohol students too early results in inaccurate assessment. Waiting until after detoxification provides more accurate results and more appropriate IEP, which results in better student engagement.
TIU#11—Mifflin	Yes	Deliberate SBRR improves vocabulary and comprehension (formal and informal measures). The Book Club is an authentic and student-centered way to introduce SBRR. Improved attendance and class participation.
Private Industry Council of Westmoreland/Fayette	Yes	Debunked myth of reversing TABE 9B and TABE 10B to get better results
Seneca Highlands IU #9	Yes	Improved attitude and self-efficacy and achievement in math (algebra) from organized and strategic use of cooperative learning
VITA	Yes	Taught story mapping skills to parents for reading comprehension (and to help children with this skill). Gains for parents ranged from 43-83%. Higher gains made by adults in low-high intermediate ESL.

**Gains – Early Childhood Education and ILA
Performance Outcomes of PAR Projects 2007-2008**

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
ACLAMO	Yes/No	Quasi-experimental design. Five-year follow-up using school district data of Even Start school-age children and like non-ES. ES grads were statistically significantly higher in math, English, and language arts.
Community Action Southwest	Yes	Dramatic increases at post-test, after using packets to improve literacy skills (PALS-Pre K). Better parental understanding of purpose of teaching children literacy skills. Instructors more involved.
GECAC	Yes/No	Creative packets enjoyed by parents; however did not lead to meeting PS (60%) for reading on or above grade level (achieved 50%). Some variables beyond control of GECAC. Greater teacher awareness of what works best.
MCOL—Community Women’s Education Project	Yes	Improved language and literacy skills; better consistency in teaching; validation of ECE teacher knowledge for purpose of assessment; improved staff relations.
Union-Snyder	Yes	School age children improved reading and attendance. Improved parent awareness of report cards. Children B-5 with above average gains, even with limited hours. Stronger collaboration. Better parent-teacher relationships; parents no longer see ECE as “babysitting.”
Delaware Co. Literacy Council	Yes	Parents developed more confidence in English and used more English when talking with their children. Impressive gains on LAPR, PPVT for children and BEST for parents.
ProJeCT of Easton	Yes	More authentic home literacy practices; more intensity in home visits and on ILA reflection; more days in home literacy per week; reading more to child (79% in 2006-07; 90% 2007-08); more parents EFL gains (47% 2006-07; 69% 2007-08); class ILA more child-centered (less chatter and more English between parent and child)

Cohort 2—Receptive Oral Language Gains
Performance Outcomes of PAR Projects 2007-2008

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
YWCA Tri-Co. Area		Student attrition, poor attendance, late start. Only one student.
Chester Co. Even Start	Yes	Ave. of 23 Pt. increase on PPVT. Parents more comfortable with children; parents learned skills to support language development
Central Intermediate Unit #10	Yes/No	Mixed success. Staff turnover affected results. Also depended on chronological and developmental age of child and home support. Created new instructional materials and activities and a PALS Profile for greater ease and more authentic tracking.
CSIU Family Literacy	Yes	Increase in vocabulary—PPVT-- for parents and children. Increased parent awareness of value of early language skills and spending time with child. Impact on how own learning affected child's ability to learn.
Forbes Road Career & Technology Center	Yes	Children's PPVT scores increased as parents' did. More frequent and better quality P/C interactions. Increased attendance. Better teamwork among staff and partners.
Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council	Yes	Parents and children improved vocabulary; improved ILA environment. Target child group and parent group. Improved attitude in parents about book "reading." Gains for parents measured by BEST.
Indian Valley Opportunity Center	Yes	Children more verbal; improved bonds between children and staff. Parents more interested, taking activities home.
Lancaster Lebanon IU#13	Yes	Significant progress, especially for ELA (29%) vs. non-ELA (10%). Also measured increase between family literacy (85%) and non-family literacy (60%). Parents involved as research partners. Parents increased knowledge of literacy activities. Better Head Start partnership.
MCOL—New World Associates	Yes	In four months, CASAS gains for adults (34 pts.), BEST Oral (2.8 points); PPVT-Adults (9.6) and PPVT-Children (12.8).

Program Name	Met?	Performance Outcomes
Northampton Community College	Yes	PPVT increased for parents (22.9%) and children (60.5%). Children talked more and made connections between own experiences and reading. Parents more connected to children.
Northwest Tri-Co. IU #5	Yes	All students increased significantly in expressive and receptive oral language. Parents more involved with children on regular basis and more confident with their children.
MCOL—Pathways PA	Yes	Gains for adults and children. Adults created own wordless picture books based on own interests and family to share with children. Sense of voice and empowerment.
Adult Literacy Action—Penn State, Beaver	Yes	All 6 children increased vocabulary. 9/12 parents made significant gains in reading TABE-comprehension; 6 at least one EFL; 3 two EFL, 2 three EFL. ILA documentation doubled.
Reading School District—Act 143	Yes/No	Some gain, but needed more time. Parents more interested in literacy activities; home literacy increased.
Tri-Co. OIC—World of Words Opportunity in Children	Yes	Children's oral language increased. PPVT gains. Parents more involved with children's learning; moved from "spectators" to "facilitators." Improved partnerships with Head Start/OIC.
School District of the City of York	Yes	69% of children improved percentile rank on PPVT; 32% of adults for percentile rank, but 71% improved raw scores. Parent reflection indicates they learned new techniques and are implementing them at home. Parents demonstrated improved interactive literacy with children in pre- post-videos. All had greater vocabulary and fluency.