

**An Investigation of the AVANCE Parent Child Education Program for diverse cultures.**

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**Introduction**

The aim of this ethnographic study/interpretative study was to understand the experience of the AVANCE program for participants at three culturally distinct sites. The AVANCE Parent-Child Education Program is delivered in a weekly session with parents throughout a nine-month period. Given the program's two-generation focus, it provides child development for children below the age of three and transportation to support parents' attendance. The main components of the program are the parental education classes, a toy making session, third hour speakers, the home visitation and a child development component. Participants refer to all individuals involved in the delivery process of the program and all recipients of the AVANCE intervention. Similarly, "culturally distinct" is generally defined as serving ethnically distinct groups in varied geographic locations. This study involved interviews to program staff and to a convenience sample of parents, as well as participant observations of the program components.

The study focused on the following set and subsets of research questions:

1. How do participants experience AVANCE at three culturally distinct sites?
  - a. How do AVANCE participants describe their experience and participate in the program?
  - b. How does AVANCE match or diverge from the participants' needs?
2. How is AVANCE enacted at the three sites?
  - a. How do the various components of the program function?
  - b. How does program staff understand the needs of their participants?
  - c. How does program staff draw upon and/or innovate from the AVANCE model?
  - d. How does staff understanding of their role shape program enactment?
3. How are experiences similar or different among the three sites?

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<sup>1</sup> This report analyzes data based on the collaborative field work done by the authors together with Judith Alexandre, Amy Bergstrom and Alexandra Figueras-Daniel. All correspondence about this work should be addressed to Milagros Nores at the following email address: [mnores@nieer.org](mailto:mnores@nieer.org).

## Methodology

To investigate the answers to these questions, we carried forward a formative evaluation to describe the experience of the program delivery of AVANCE and whether culture had implications on program delivery, on adaptations made to the model, if any, and how the model was enacted in three culturally distinct sites. Sites were chosen based on those potentially serving a predominantly African American community, a predominantly Native American community, and a predominantly Hispanic, Non-Mexican community. From October 2011 to June 2012, the Newark (NJ), Brooklyn (NY), and Cloquet (MN) sites were the focus of in-depth ethnographic activities. One field ethnographer trained in ethnographic research methods and knowledgeable about the culture in each site conducted fieldwork with direct involvement of the principal investigator. The various methods of data collection allow for triangulation of information, as well as ensure that we are able to grasp the perspectives of those who deliver the program as well as those who attend the program.

### 1. Families and the goodness of fit of AVANCE for new cultures:

**Family Case Studies:** Three families were selected on site for in-depth case studies. A purposive selection process was used to include families that represented different types of participants. This was done to ensure that we collected information on how the program played out for various types of participants. For example, age of child and parent, marital status and education levels were all relevant factors to consider, and in the case in which there were males attending the program, these were included. The ethnographer conducted interviews of approximately one hour with families in the case study at the beginning and the end of the program year. She also conducted a visit to the home with the home educator to better understand the families and their context. These visits also focused on observing parent-child interactions and the role of the home educator. These were meant to complement the observations that took place during the classroom-based components and the interviews to selected families and to staff. At the end of the program year, all families in the program were given children's books to thank them for their participation and cooperation with the research team.

**Background Information:** The research team also reviewed information on family backgrounds collected by the sites through short AVANCE questionnaires responded by all participants. This information was collected by the sites themselves through intake forms.

### 2. Perceptions of program staff on the AVANCE program and on goodness of fit with the culture and/or needs of the families.

**Participant observations:** Ethnographers participated in the program sessions<sup>2</sup> alongside the parents throughout the 9 months of the program. Each of these weeks, they

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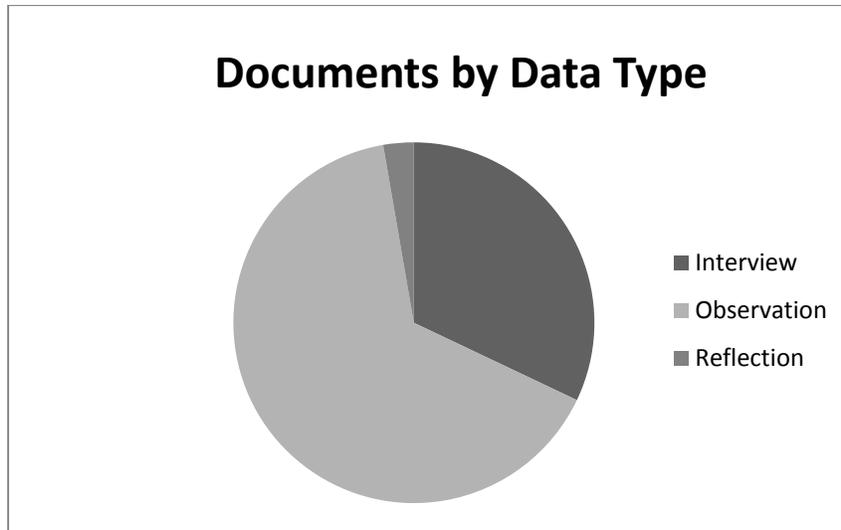
<sup>2</sup> Three hours per week, 12 weeks in Cloquet, 17 weeks in Newark and 20 weeks in Brooklyn. The variation has to do with sites running one or more than one class, or starting late.

conducted participant observations throughout the three-hour sessions for one of the groups to which the program was delivered. Through observations they developed their own perceptions on participants, staff and the program. These ethnographers observed adaptations, questions, discussions, participation, attendance and issues that arose. The sessions were observed including all three components (parent educator, toy making, and third-hour speaker).

**Staff Interviews:** The ethnographer conducted structured surveys of approximately one hour at the beginning and end of the program to all program staff to obtain information about staff views of the program, its implementation, participants, children, challenges, responsibilities, training experiences and suggestions for modifications. In addition, the researcher used informal conversations with staff members throughout the year to determine the program staff members' perceptions of the program and of the target families' participation.

## **Data Set**

The team collected a total of 188 observations and interviews throughout the program year for all 3 sites. All interviews were recorded, with the permission of either the parent or the program staff being interviewed. All interviews were carried out following very detailed protocols developed in advance by the research team and approved by an independent ethics committee. Afterwards, these interviews were transcribed, by a professional team of transcribers, into word documents. Both the research team and the transcription team were careful in protecting identifiable information. The field team also created memos following protocols designed for the observations, which documented the sessions. Figure 1 shows the type of documents collected by the team by source of information. Both interviews as well as participant observations were equally relevant in the fieldwork, and information for this report is drawn from both these sources. In addition to these two sources of information, ethnographers were encouraged to write reflections on their observations and interviews throughout the year, which were also used as a source of information.



Given the research questions outlined for the project, a series of codes were generated to analyze documentation. We looked at the documents using different families of codes that were a combination of ‘a priori’ codes (developed beforehand with the research questions and methods in mind) and inductive codes (that emerged as we analyzed the data): Staff views of the program, Staff views of parents, Staff actions; Parents’ views of the program/staff; Parents’ actions, Parents’ expressed needs; Identity; Curriculum and Environment. Each of these included a group of sub-codes that attempted to identify what components parents liked and did not like, their perceptions on different aspects of the program, their perceptions on what the program gave them, their needs and how the program served these, staff’s perceptions of the program and the parents, staff perceptions of the different components, the type of interactions occurring between staff and parents and among parents, and when/if culture, identity or race played some type of role (e.g. cultural references, specific acts, discussions, issues, language), among other things (e.g. staff actions, parents actions, aspects related to curriculum, environment).

This document is organized as follows. We first provide a description of the parents and staff in the program. Then we describe the main components of the program in terms of key aspects and staff roles. Lastly, we describe in depth the findings in terms of the research questions outlined above. Identifiable information for individuals (names and locations) is kept confidential in line with ethical standards for the research approach reported in this report. Location is reported only when this would not easily allow readers to relate the information to the person who was interviewed or observed.

### **Participants’ characteristics across sites**

Information from this section is based on the AVANCE intakes that were provided to all participants (in the sessions we focused as well as in additional sessions) at the beginning of the program.

Table 1 and Table 2 present selected participant characteristics. On average, participants (mostly mothers, with few exceptions) were 30 years of age with only slight variations in age across sites. All sites had parents predominantly in their 20s and their 30s (ranging from 20 to 52). Young or teenage mothers were not enrolled in the program. In addition, mothers in both Brooklyn and Newark reported having lived in the U.S. a significant amount of years, with an average of 18 and 10 years respectively. This is not applicable for Cloquet parents. It appears that the program is serving parents that have not immigrated recently. While mothers report having had on average almost 24 years of age at the time of their first birth, there is significant variation across parents. That is, mothers with births in the teenage years as well as mothers with births in their late 20s were part of this cohort. Reported average annual family income is around \$19,000 per year, with Newark parents reporting slightly higher income levels, Brooklyn parents reporting slightly lower income levels, and Cloquet parents reporting almost half this amount.

Table 1. Participant average characteristics.

Participant Characteristics	All	Brooklyn		Cloquet		Newark	
	Mean/SD	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
Age	30.4 (6.5)	30.0 (6.4)	25	27.23 (7.2)	13	32.0 (6.0)	30
If not born in U.S.-number of years lived in U.S.	11.0 (6.1)	18.5 (2.1)	25	- -		10.4 (5.9)	30
Age when first child was born	23.6 (5.7)	25.0 (6.6)	25	20.7 (2.5)	13	23.6 (5.4)	30
Annual family income	18,872 (11,951)	18,157 (11,393)	25	10,775 (6,010)	13	22,047 (12,749)	30

Male participants are the exception to the rule, a few of them in the Brooklyn and Newark sites, but none at all in the Cloquet site. The sites were selected based on these serving an African American community, a Native American community and a Hispanic non-Mexican community. Race/ethnicity distributions reflect what was expected when the sites were chosen. Brooklyn largely served African Americans (80 percent). Cloquet mostly served Native Americans or American Indians (42 percent) and a similar portion of parents self-identifying themselves as White Non-Hispanic. Newark served only Hispanics, with the largest portion, 50 percent, being from Ecuador. The second most widely served group were Mexican (10 percent) and equal numbers from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru and Puerto Rico. In terms of marital status, there was a higher concentration of single mothers in the Newark and Cloquet sites, and a higher proportion of married mothers in the Brooklyn site. Lastly, the program served a large proportion of women with small children (62 children), rather than pregnant women. Of the children in the program, parents reported that 43 percent were U.S.-born, 6 percent were born in Latin America, and interestingly for the rest of the children, parents did not report birthplace.

Table 2. Distribution of participants by age, race, primary language, marital status and pregnancy.

Participant Characteristics		Total	Brooklyn	Cloquet	Newark
Gender	N	67	25	12	30
	Male	3.0%	4.0%	-	3.3%
	Female	97.0%	96.0%	100.0%	96.7%
Ethnicity / Race	N	67	25	12	30
	White Non-Hispanic	7.5%	-	41.7%	-
	Hispanic	49.3%	8.0%	8.3%	100.0%
	Black/African-American	29.8%	80.0%	-	-
	Asian	-	-	-	-
	Native American	9.0%	4.0%	41.7%	-
	Other	4.5%	8.0%	8.3%	-
Primary language	N	65	25	12	28
	Spanish	36.9%	4.0%	-	82.1%
	English	50.8%	84.0%	100.0%	-
	Both	9.2%	4.0%	-	17.9%
	English/ Haitian Creole	1.5%	4.0%	-	-
Marital Status	N	68	26	12	30
	Single	37.6%	60.0%	41.7%	16.7%
	Married	35.7%	28.0%	8.3%	53.3%
	Divorced	-	-	-	-
	Separated	7.4%	4.0%	8.3%	10.0%
	Widowed	-	-	-	-
	Living with partner	19.2%	8.0%	41.7%	20.0%
Pregnancy Status	N	67	25	12	30
	Yes	6.0%	8.0%	-	6.7%
	No	92.5%	88.0%	100.0%	93.3%
	n/a	1.5%	4.0%	-	-

Table 3 shows aspects of language for the individuals in the program. Language proportions map race and ethnicity distributions closely, with higher proportions of Spanish speakers in Newark and higher proportions of English speakers in the other two sites. Similarly, Newark experiences a higher ratio of individuals with lower abilities to understand, speak and/or write English and the inverse is true for Spanish. This is likely because 93 percent of Newark parents were not born in the U.S., half do not have more than a High School degree and half received their education outside of the U.S. (described below).

Table 3. Language.

Language backgrounds		Total	Brooklyn	Cloquet	Newark
Primary language	N	65	25	12	28
	Spanish	36.9%	4.0%	-	82.1%
	English	50.8%	84.0%	100.0%	-
	Both	9.2%	4.0%	-	17.9%
	English/ Haitian Creole	1.5%	4.0%	-	-
Ability to understand English	N	67	26	12	29
	Not at all	10.4%	-	-	24.1%
	Somewhat	25.4%	-	-	58.6%
	Very well	64.2%	100.0%	100.0%	17.2%
Ability to speak English	N	66	25	12	29
	Not at all	16.7%	4.0%	-	34.5%
	Somewhat	21.2%	-	-	48.3%
	Very well	62.1%	96.0%	100.0%	17.2%
Ability to write English	N	66	25	12	29
	Not at all	22.7%	4.0%	-	48.3%
	Somewhat	18.2%	8.0%	-	34.5%
	Very well	59.1%	88.0%	100.0%	17.2%
Ability to understand Spanish	N	66	25	12	29
	Not at all	37.9%	64.0%	75.0%	-
	Somewhat	15.2%	28.0%	25.0%	-
	Very well	47.0%	8.0%	.0%	100.0%
Ability to speak Spanish	N	66	25	12	29
	Not at all	43.9%	76.0%	83.3%	-
	Somewhat	9.1%	16.0%	16.7%	-
	Very well	47.0%	8.0%	.0%	100.0%
Ability to write Spanish	N	66	25	12	29
	Not at all	45.5%	80.0%	83.3%	-
	Somewhat	12.1%	12.0%	16.7%	10.3%
	Very well	42.4%	8.0%	-	89.7%

Table 4 illustrates participants' educational background. Like language and ethnicity, where parents received their education matches expected distributions with most of the Newark participants having attended school outside of the United States and only 10 percent reporting having done so in Mexico. These data corroborate that the sites were effectively chosen to represent the three ethnic groups of interest for the study: one site strongly Native American, one mostly Hispanic non-Mexican and one mostly African American.

Educational attainment (highest level of education completed) varied across sites. Brooklyn evidences a somewhat balanced distribution with similar proportions of individuals having less than high school (24 percent) or completed high school (also 24 percent), a slightly higher proportion of individuals with some college or technical education (30 percent) and a slightly lower proportion of individuals having completed college (20 percent). Cloquet’s parents reported higher levels of education with none having less than a high school degree, 25 percent having completed high school, 42 percent having some college or technical education, and 33 percent having completed college. Newark parents reported the highest proportion of individuals without a high school degree (37 percent). Parents in Newark were also much less likely to have completed college (3 percent), with 77 percent of parents with a college degree or higher having acquired this degree outside of the U.S., and with all parents with a high school or lower degree having also done so.

Table 4. Educational background.

Education		Total	Brooklyn	Cloquet	Newark
Location	N	67	25	12	30
education	United States	52.2%	80.0%	100.0%	10.0%
was received	Mexico	4.5%	-	-	10.0%
	Outside of the U.S.	43.3%	20.0%	0.0%	80.0%
Highest level	N	67	25	12	30
of education	Less than High School	25.4%	24.0%	-	36.7%
	High School	22.4%	24.0%	25.0%	20.0%
	Some College or Technical	37.3%	32.0%	41.7%	40.0%
	College	14.9%	20.0%	33.3%	3.3%

In addition to education, parents were asked about their employment status and occupation (Table 5). Brooklyn parents reported higher rates of unemployment (21.7 percent) than parents in other sites (17 percent in Cloquet and 10 percent in Newark) and lower rates of full-time employment. Newark parents show indicators of higher job insecurity (which could be related to an immigration status). On the other hand, Cloquet households seem largely dependent on the mother’s employment, without support from a partner or spouse and correspondingly more likely to use WIC (42 percent); although this could have been mostly for formula (we do not have information on how they used the benefits). Across all three sites though, parents reported high levels of government support through WIC, food stamps or both.

Table 5. Employment and Occupation.

Employment		Total	Brooklyn	Cloquet	Newark
Participant	N	65	23	12	30
occupation	Full-time	20.0%	13.0%	41.7%	16.7%
	Part-time or seasonal	16.9%	4.3%	16.7%	26.7%
	Job training program	1.5%	4.3%	-	-
	Enrolled in school /education	1.5%	4.3%	-	-
	Retired or disabled	-	-	-	-
	Seeking employment	15.4%	21.7%	16.7%	10.0%
	Stay-at-home parent	32.3%	34.8%	8.3%	40.0%
	Various or other	12.3%	17.30%	16.60%	6.60%
Person	N	65	23	12	30
providing	Self	36.9%	47.8%	75.0%	13.3%
main	Partner	52.3%	39.1%	8.3%	80.0%
source of	Family member	7.6%	13.0%	8.3%	-
income	Other	3.1%	-	8.3%	3.3%
Source of	N	60	21	11	28
main	Wages from a job	55.0%	57.1%	54.5%	53.6%
income	Alimony or child support	1.7%	-	-	3.6%
	Government assistance (TANF, general support)	15.0%	14.3%	27.3%	10.7%
	Social security	1.7%	4.8%	-	-
	Wages, alimony/child support, government aid	1.7%	-	-	3.6%
	Other-partner	8.3%	-	-	17.9%
	Wages, alimony	5.0%	-	-	10.7%
	Unemployment	3.3%	9.5%	-	-
	Various/other	8.3%	16.4%	18.2%	-
Received	N	64	24	12	28
family	Food Stamps & WIC	59.4%	54.2%	50.0%	67.9%
benefits	Food Stamps	9.4%	25.0%	-	-
	WIC	23.4%	20.8%	41.7%	17.9%
	None	7.8%	.0%	8.3%	14.3%

Parents were also asked about medical insurance in the household (Table 6). Consistent with previous indicators on place of birth, most Newark parents reported being uninsured (72 percent) while all of Cloquet parents and 80 percent of Brooklyn parents reported being insured. This does not necessarily translate to children having medical insurance since most parents have access to Medicaid.

Table 6. Insurance.

Employment		Total	Brooklyn	Cloquet	Newark
Medical insurance	N	66	25	12	29
	Yes	60.6%	80.0%	100.0%	27.6%
	No	39.4%	20.0%	-	72.4%
Do children have medical insurance	N	63	22	12	29
	Yes	98.4%	100.0%	91.7%	100.0%
	No	1.6%	-	8.3%	-
If yes what type of insurance	N	60	20	11	29
	Private insurance	15.0%	10.0%	27.3%	13.8%
	CHIPS	-	-	-	-
	Medicaid	80.0%	90.0%	45.5%	86.2%
	Other	5.0%	-	27.3%	-

### Staff Demographics

Staff at the centers closely resembled parental composition. Staff characteristics for all three sites together are presented in Table 7. All staff in Newark being of Hispanic ethnicity and speaking Spanish whether as a first or second language. Brooklyn staff was a mix of White and Black ethnicity with one member of the staff speaking French and Creole, and staff in Cloquet were either White or of a White and Native American ethnicity. Age, experience and education of the staff varied significantly within and across sites.

Table 7. Staff composition.

Staff Characteristics		Mean (Range if applicable)
Females		97%
Years Experience		9 (0-21)
Age		43 (22-60)
Ethnicity:	Hispanic	33%
	White	33%
	Black	20%
	White/American Indian	13%
Languages:	French/Creole	7%
	Spanish	33%
	English	60%
Education:	AA	27%
	CDA	7%
	BA	47%
	MA/MBA or in process	20%

## **Organization of the AVANCE experience**

### **Child Development Component**

The child development section of the AVANCE Parent Child Education Program has the main responsibility of engaging children ages 0-3 in developmentally appropriate activities while parents attend the three-hour parent education course once per week. During the time that children attend, they are fed a snack and a lunch as well. The role of the child development staff is to develop lesson plans and execute them with the children each week. Children attend this portion of the program in classrooms that are assembled with child-sized furniture and appropriate materials, toys and books for their age groups. Staff serving in these positions remain consistent across the week, serving various groups of children on the day when their parents attend their respective sessions. Child development workers also share information with parents about their child's development.

### **Toy-Making Component**

The toy-making component is the first hour of the three-hour parent education block and one of the unique aspects of the program. The purpose of the toy-making component is two-fold. The first is to allow parents to spend relaxed, unstructured time to build relationships with each other in a casual fashion. The second purpose is to allow parents the opportunities to gain a sense of completion around a project each week. This latter purpose is felt to be crucial as for many of the at-risk parents in the program, seeing a project through to the end is a major goal of the program at large. The toy-instructor's role is to introduce the parents to the toys each week and to give instructions and materials to complete them. They also offer support to parents when needed. At the end of each session, the toy instructor hands out a "possibility sheet" which is an instructional sheet that illustrates all the ways in which the toy that they have created can help them encourage various skill developments while playing with their children. These possibility sheets lend the ideas that are later observed during home visits by the home educators.

### **Parent Education Component**

The parent education component is the second hour of the three-hour block, which parents attend each week. During this hour, the parents are given a lesson on topics related to children and childrearing. Topics are presented in units with various weeks linking together. Units include topics such as health and safety, hygiene, discipline, development of cognitive skills, gross motor skills, fine motor skills, etc. The goal of the topics is to shed light on practices that help to maximize parent/child interactions in developmentally appropriate ways that reflect current research and methods. The parent education leader, or parent educator, delivers this component, by way of the power point slides designed by AVANCE. Their responsibility is to deliver the lessons, but also to be attentive to parent's individual needs as topics are presented. In many cases, the parent educator may have been parents who previously attended the program themselves. The parent educator must remain sensitive to the needs of families while delivering the messages for each week.

### Third Hour Speaker Component

The “third hour speaker” component is delivered by an outside speaker each week. Usually the content of the talk is related to the topic of the parent educator and is delivered by a representative of a local community resource center or organization. The goal of the component is to further develop topics and to expose families to the available community resources and their representatives.

### Home Education Component

The home education component is offered by a “home educator” who schedules home visits with individual families various times over the course of the program. The goal of the home visits is for the home educator to observe families interacting with their children and the toys that they create in the toy-making component. This is also the time when the possibility sheets are revisited to ensure that families understand the goal of individual toys and how to work them with children. Home visits are expected to be monthly.

### Other Roles

Other supporting roles include a cook, a bus driver and a supervisor. Each role though charged with specific duties, is expected to overlap with each other. The information provided by one role to another is supposed to help families progress with their children in a holistic way.

## Findings

### **I. How do participants experience and participate in AVANCE at three culturally distinct sites?**

The study focused first on drawing from the participant’s experiences on the program and on observing their behavior through the sessions. The following sections draw from interviews to parents at the beginning and end of the program, as well as from participant observations, to analyze parents’ experiences and perceptions with the program, within and across sites.

#### **A. Participant Experiences with and Participation in AVANCE**

This section describes the experience of participating in AVANCE, from the perspective of participants. Using data from interviews and observations, it explores how the participants experienced and participated in individual program components. The positive descriptions of parents across all sites can be summarized in this statement by a Newark parent,

Todo lo que yo pensé, se ha cumplido. Y, ha mejorado mi vida también, porque ha cambiado mucho mi forma de ser, con los niños ha mejorado mucho.  
[Everything I envisioned has occurred. And, it has improved my life too, because it has changed my way of being, which has improved a lot with the children.]

In effect, when asked, parents in all three sites stated they would recommend the program, with some of them already having done so. In addition, one parent defined the components as “En el día a día, como que es un, un conjunto que va uniéndose” [Day to day, it is like a, a set that is coming together].

## **Toy Making**

Across the sites, parents appreciated that the toy making sessions gave them a time and place to socialize, relax, and enjoy each other’s company; they found the toy making to be fun and creative; they believed that the toy making was useful; and they expressed the desire for more time spent in toy making sessions. Parents were asked to rate the toy making component on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive rating. Most parents rated it a 4 or a 5, with only one parent rating it a 3 due to the amount of sewing.

*Toy making provided time for parents to socialize, relax and enjoy each other’s company.* Parents across all sites enjoyed how the toy making session allowed them time to talk to each other. As one Brooklyn parent explained,

I love making the toys. We sew, we color, we glue things together. We cut. It’s arts and crafts, so is very entertaining and while we [are] making our toys we listen to music and we talk amongst ourselves. We discuss how our week went and how our kids are doing.

A Cloquet parent simply stated “To sit down and do a project and talk with other women, it’s great. I love it.”

The observer noted, “They are pretty quick to advise each other and as they stated, they need to vent about what’s happening in their private life.” In one instance in Newark, for example, mothers advise a pregnant participant:

The mothers are talking, mainly giving advice or warning [name] to what she should expect from labor and nursing a newborn. One mom stated: “You need to sleep when the baby sleeps otherwise, you will turn into Godzilla very quick.”

Some conversations are quite serious, as in one site, when a participant talked about her verbally abusive husband and how she could not leave him. She was encouraged by the group to leave him. In this case, the observer noted that the toy instructor described this mother’s situation as being like an allergy where you are not able to see clearly, but that she needs help. The toy instructor then stated she would give her a call to reinforce the importance of leaving an abusive partner, and then she let the subject drop.

*Toy making was fun, creative and relaxing.* Parents enjoyed the creative process of toy making across all sites. “I feel that it is very creative,” a parent shared, and another parent defined it as “entertaining.” A toy instructor described how,

They really get into it and they really enjoy making the toys. I think they enjoy the toy more than the child might enjoy the toy. Even one parent said to me she went home with the toy and the dad was the one playing with the toy, putting the chips in the can and rolling the can. They are enjoying what they are doing.

Making the toys provided a creative and relaxing outlet for the parents. This same instructor recounted that,

There's this parent that, not one, there's a few of them actually. She actually expressed how when she started this program she would come in so, you know, with so much on her mind that she was so depressed. So much going on, but she came into the program and it's like she said you showed me how to sew and now I can sew. She made a whole costume and now she feels more relaxed. Now she is more at peace when she comes. She does things in a different way.

*Toy making made helped parents feel pride and accomplishment.* Making the toys also helped to establish a sense of pride and accomplishment. Another instructor mentioned that,

There's a lot of general things that they usually get out of it, and that's the working with their hands and maybe escaping from – it's a stress-relieving activity, and creativity, that can feel good. There's some kind of endorphins or something must be released when you create something and you feel good, take pride in what you've created.

Participants spoke proudly of their children's responses to the toys that the parents made for them. As one Brooklyn participant shared,

We did a toy chest for them to keep their toys in and I made it. So it's like he has so many things that he's saying, wow -- that I made that's for him. It ain't for nobody else. It's for him and he gets real "it's mine." Because he like, he knows. He ain't to share with nobody. That is his. And I love it. When I come in, I say, okay, what we doing today?

Participants spoke about the opportunity to have the time, and ideas to make things for their children. A Newark parent shared,

Pues, uno hace algo que no se atreve a hacer en la casa. Porque uno dice: "Ah, no tengo tiempo para hacer un juguete." No lo hace. Y, y cosa que uno lo puede hacer y uno a veces va a comprar un juguete, y en la casa lo puede hacer con cosas simples que uno tiene en la casa. [Well, you do something that you wouldn't attempt at home. Because you say "Oh I don't have time to make a toy." You don't do it and, and things that you can do, you sometimes go out and buy a toy and at home you can make it with simple things that you have in the house.]

*Toy making was useful for them and for their children.* Parents at all sites found the toy making to be useful for them, both as learning tools for their children and for themselves. One Brooklyn parent shared that, of the whole program,

I think the toy making is the most helpful, because every toy that we make is sort of like a learning tool for our child. We can use the toys in different ways to help them learn.

*Skills learned during toy making were transferable.* Parents felt that they were learning some skills during the toy making sessions that might be useful in other contexts. As one participant in Brooklyn explained,

I didn't sew. My mother's a seamstress, was a seamstress. And I never pick up a needle or thread or do anything and when I first got here, I was like, oh, they think somebody going to be sewing stuff and they not going to get me to do that

because I can't do it. And I would doubt myself. But I'm finding not that, you know, to the point that I hemmed my daughter's pants. And I was like, wow. You know. Because I would take them to the cleaners and my husband still would say try. I would never try. But when I had to do a uniform for him, I said, okay. If I did this, then he's going to wear. I can hem up pants.

In general, the toy-making component received strong positive feedback from all of the participants across all three of the sites. Observations and surveys reflect that this piece of the program provided families with both social/emotional supports as well as skills to generalize to other areas of their lives.

### **Parent Education Sessions**

During the parent education sessions participants felt they learned to be better parents, learned new content, had time to discuss their own parenting issues, and had a chance to talk and have adult time with other parents. Parents were asked to rate the parent education component in a scale of 1 to 5, with five being the most positive rating. All but one parent rated it a 5.

*A place to learn to be a better parent.* Across sites, participants spoke of the parent education session as a place for learning to be a better parent. A Cloquet participant explained,

So I think it's a good program for them first time parents or even second and third time parents. But for them to learn more parenting skills and get better parenting skills.

A Brooklyn participant shared that she valued the sessions, "because it is giving me the tools that I need to be a successful parent."

More so, a Newark participant, described the change that the program made her approach to her young children from a reactive style to a proactive style,

Antes yo salía y en la calle los abochornaba a mis hijos, les hablaba, pero, ahora no, siempre ahora yo en la casa antes de salir, les explico que vamos a ir a algún lado, y que por favor se comporten. Y, ellos se – ellos me entienden y bastante que se han compuesto, porque antes yo me salía de mis casillas, y ellos atrás se ponían tensos todos los – mis hijos y yo. Y, ahora les hablo y me comporto de manera diferente, y ellos están bien, y están más tranquilos. [Before, I used to go out and I would embarrass my children, I would talk to them but not now, now I always talk with them before leaving the house. I explain that we are going somewhere and that I need them to please behave and they understand me, and they have improved very much, because before I would lose it and they would get very tense both them and me. Now I talk to them, I behave differently, and they are good, they are calmer.]

*Learning content.* During the parent education sessions, participants in different sites felt they learned new and important information. One Brooklyn participant explained,

Well, when the parent educator teaches us anything about early childhood development I always pay attention and take a look at my daughter and see what new things she's accomplishing and how I can encourage her to meet those goals. So I take what I learn and I try to utilize it in my every day.

Another participant in Newark shared that the program helped with their understanding of what to do with their children and how children learn,

Gané en experiencia, cómo enseñarles, como con cositas pequeñas uno enseñarles a jugar a los niños, integrarlos a, a mi casa así conmigo, en todo así como aprenden a, a ju... jugando-aprendiendo. [I won the experience of how to teach them, how with small things you can teach children how to play, to integrate them in my house with me, in everything, how they learn and how they learn through playing]

*Time to discuss individual parents' issues.* During some of the sessions, parents were able to share child-rearing issues they faced. They valued these exchanges, which included discussion of issues their children were having with food and with separation anxiety. One observer reflected that “[t]he parents behave the same way whether there is a power point or not. They asked questions and talk about their experiences.”

*Chance to talk with other parents, reduce stress, have “adult time” while kids are productively occupied.* Finally, parents deeply valued the opportunity to talk with peers while their children were productively occupied in the child development room. Often this was social in nature. As an observer noted, “During parent education classes, they digress from the topic and talk about other things they are interested in. The parent educator has to help them refocus several times during the hour.”

Many times these conversations had to do with parenting issues. Parents enjoyed and valued the opportunity to share childrearing experiences with their peers while their child is in the child development classroom. A sample of parents' comments illustrates this phenomenon:

I get to talk with other parents. We get to share what our feelings about our upbringing and our children, what level they are. What they're doing and new things.

I enjoy the workshops. I enjoy the social. I enjoy the speakers when they come in.

I think it's cool that I can bring my kid here and go on and be with adults and know that he's okay and that there's kids he can play with and people that are good with kids watching him.

[Best part of the program is to] meet new people and sharing our challenges with other parents.

...you have some parents that come in and they are – they had a rough day. Or they had a rough night. And they're not really focusing on – it's just like stressed.

Sí me sentía frustrada. Pero, aquí viniendo, o sea, digo, no puedo dejarme caer... Ya siempre viniendo a acá, y este, con el programa que da [parent educator], nos dan la fuerza y todo eso de las charlas, entonces, uno vuelve a levantarse. [Yes I felt frustrated. But, coming here, that is, I mean, I couldn't let myself fall... Always coming here and with the program that [parent educator] they gave us strength and all that talking, so one could lift oneself up again.]

Everything is like stressed and she has a way of bringing them in group and getting into the conversations. Where they wouldn't talk, they'll talk. And they become to open up because, you know, sometimes when you air out what you feel, it better – it helps you, you know, relieve it, but when you hold it everything and bottle it up in, you know, you just a tight ball. But once you start to open up and breathe and do, you know, and sit back and go, okay, I'm going to get through this and we going to do this and it's for me to be the best I can be to be the mother that I need to be or the parent that I need to be, the father I need to be.

I think we were talking about how parents need to take time for themselves, because that was a big topic in my life recently, because I was getting questioned with me having time with my friends, with everything going on in our lives. So it was a nice topic and it helped. It—I don't know. It made an impression that it was okay kind of a thing. I should be doing that. It's helpful.

*Opportunities for personal development as both parents and individuals.* One participant from Newark expressed their feelings on valuing the parent education classes as they helped her to develop herself as well as her perspectives on child rearing,

Nos ha ayudado a salir en adelante, a como prosperar, como tratar a nuestros hijos, y como, pues, devolverse uno. Y, es lo mejor del programa, que ahí vamos. [It has helped us to move forward, to prosper, how to treat our children and as such to return to oneself and it is what is best of the program, so we attend].

The parent education component also received complimentary feedback from participants across all three of the research sites. Data reflect that participants felt that they received valuable information about safety, child development and developmentally appropriate disciplining practices. In short, many of the parents alluded to the fact that the classes helped to make them better parents.

### **Child Development**

Parents at all sites valued the child development experience their children received at AVANCE, for the content they felt their children learned during the sessions and for the social time for their children.

*Parents felt comfortable leaving the children with the child development providers.* Parents felt comfortable having their children under the supervision of the child development staff. As one Brooklyn participant explained, “I feel very comfortable. I know that she is in good hands with the volunteers and she plays with the other kids and they do developmental activities for her. So she is having fun as well.”

A family in Newark described how seeing their child so comfortable in the child development class made it obvious to them that she was benefitting from the program,  
Sí, siempre pienso que está bien...Con, con el solo hecho de llegar y ver a la nena que llega con su, con su mochilita, ella se saca la mochilita, va y coge su sitio, y enseguida empieza a jugar, y se olvida de los papás....A jugar, se involucra con los demás niños ahí en sus actividades. Y, a nosotros, como decir le vale. [Yes I always think she’s ok. Just by arriving and seeing that she arrives with her little backpack, she takes off her little backpack, goes and get in her seat and immediately begins to play, and she forgets about her parents....To play, she gets involved with the other kids there in their activities. And, she does not care about us.]

In talking about whether they would recommend the program to other families, one parent in Cloquet expressed how the child development component offered parents the ability to have time with other parents without leaving their children behind,

Well my friend, she just had a baby and she said oh, there’s just some things I don’t know what to do and I wanna be able to hang out with people, but I don’t wanna leave my baby. So I said oh my gosh, you should come join this AVANCE Program. It’s out on the Res<sup>3</sup> and your baby will be there, you’ll just be in a different room. You can talk to these people and they’ll help you out with all this stuff and give you all this information. If your baby needs you, you just have to go down the hallway I said and it’s really nice, because you can make stuff for your baby. The people there are super nice and helpful. You should come with me. She said okay.

*Parents felt the children learned new skills and gained confidence.* Parents described how their children benefited from the AVANCE child development component. One Brooklyn parent described,

And I find it to be very helpful because since we've been coming to the program, I noticed that he verbally expressed more of what he wanted as opposed to just maybe cry. He's now more verbal and to say, mommy, I want it. Or mommy can I have or I can do it. He has a lot of confidence in himself, whereas he'll go, no I can do it. You know, you don't got to do it for me. I can do it. And I find before he wasn't like that. He would let you do everything for him. And now, being around other children, he's more independent.

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<sup>3</sup> Reservation.

A parent claimed her children were learning motor skills in the playroom. Another parent attributed her child's knowledge of how to sing the ABCs and his increased politeness to the child development component, saying,

Oh, they're wonderful. I walked in. They did it – they had the parents come in and I notice it and my husband notices it and other people notice it. Because what they do in the classroom, he come home and they do it. Like now, they must have been singing A, B, Cs for a long time because sometimes he sing that in his sleep. He laying there and he sleeping and he's, A, B, C, D, E, F – he don't get them all and he go, now I know my A, B, yay. ...and he's being more polite because he knows now you give him things, he goes thank you. And before, my husband goes, how did you get him to say yes? Because he wouldn't say yes for nothing. You know, he would just go uh huh. He would go huh, huh. But now if you call him...he go yes. He responds so much differently and he'll come see – yes. And you're talking to him. I said do you understand? He go yes. And before we couldn't get none of that of that out of him. So I know in school, when they working with him, and he see the other children, he follows what they do. So now he knows that's the proper way to respond. That's the proper way to answer.

*Parents felt the program provided their children opportunities to socialize. A number of parents found the child development component to be the most helpful aspect of the program. One Cloquet parent said her favorite aspect of AVANCE was “my son getting to come and socialize and play and do projects.”*

Parents spoke of the child development room as an environment in which their children could learn social skills. Another Cloquet mother explained,

My son...I want him to be maybe less aggressive with other children and learn how to socialize better. He loves doing the projects with the teachers and he loves coming here every week. He's excited to come.

A Brooklyn participant shared that she “wanted him to be able to socialize with other children and get him used to being around other children before he gets ready for school.”

A similar view was expressed by a participant family in Newark, who felt the child development component was key in helping to prepare their child for preschool,

A que se abran el ca... El camino ya hacia – a los niños chiquitos, que se abran el camino para, para el preschool, la escuela. [To open the, open the path for young children, to open to path for, for preschool, for school.]

The child development component was regarded highly by parents across all of the sites. All of the parents interviewed expressed that they felt the experience helped their children to begin to become comfortable being away from their parents, many for the first time, to socialize with other children and to begin to develop the necessary skills for preschool. That these parents so value the child development experience at AVANCE and the socialization opportunity it provides their children may indicate that their children are not experiencing other out of the home educational care. Therefore, the child

development component is indeed a fundamental and valuable piece to the program to them.

## **Home Education**

Parent experiences with the home education component seem to vary strongly depending upon the site. Parents were asked to rate the home visitation component in a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive rating. Most parents rated it a 4, one fourth rated it a 5 and one parent rated it a 3. This last parent did so because of the emphasis on observation over interaction.

*Parents like the home educator to focus on the child.* At some sites, parents appreciated the focus on the child demonstrated by the home educator during her visit. One Brooklyn parent shared that,

I like it. It's nice. At first I thought, oh, why do they got to come every month. But when she comes, I like the way she interacts with him. And although she's seeing other children, she sees him for him and she meet him where he's at and she deals with him with the things, even to the point that she know he likes Caillou.<sup>4</sup>

Parents valued the personal attention that the home educator could bring to their children. Another Brooklyn parent commented that,

The home visitor comes and she plays with my daughter. She makes sure that my daughter is meeting all her milestones and she just, she talks to me about anything that I want to talk about and she shares with me resources as well.

This could be helpful for specific concerns. The parent noted that, “there was some other things that I had concerns about with my oldest son and she was able to look into things for me. Give it to the right people for them to be able to give me answers and help with.”

*Not memorable, short, being observed.* In two sites, home visits were brief and limited in terms of meaningful exchange of information. One parent reflected that, “It [the home visit] was kinda hectic. I forgot about it and running late and just a lot going on.”

Another participant experienced the visit solely as being watched by the home educator, sharing “... they just observed our interactions, so it wasn't too intrusive. She just sat there and visited and see what me and my son did.” At this same site, a parent felt these were awkward because there was no real interaction occurring. This parent defined the experience with the home visit as “being observed and sitting there and being watched is kind of uncomfortable, but it didn't bother me too much. It was awkward.”

*Learning things during the home visit/a bridge to the program content.* The home visit could serve as a bridge to program content, with the parent participants learning from the home educator through demonstration and direct instruction. One Cloquet parent

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<sup>4</sup> Caillou is a character in a television series with the same name broadcasted on Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

explained that “for the most part it was nice having them there and we tried doing the puzzles and the game pieces or some of the toys that we made. So it was nice.”

A Brooklyn parent explained in detail what she learned from the home educator’s visit, explaining,

[We were] working more with some things that he was weak at, she was able to tell me where I can gain strength with getting him to do it more. Not so much we doing it for him. And I still bad at it because today, we were over there tussling because we were working on these and I wanted him to be perfectly in the line and stuff, and he was like, he snatched it from me. He said, “I do it.” And everybody was over here looking like, and I'm just saying like, “but you ain’t doing it the way I want you to do it.” And he's like “I got it. I'm doing it.” And he's doing it his way. He's like –they're like leave him. He's only two. He's not going to be in – he, it's too much for him to look at it and say, okay, stay in the line at two years old. He's going to – that's how they color.

*Like the company.* Some parents expressed that they liked having the company of the home educator, which is a reflection of their degree of isolation. One home educator shared that “The parent had said to me, I really enjoy the company, ‘I really enjoy having somebody to talk to’.”

Generally, the home visits received a positive response from most parents. One Newark participant expressed, “Si puedes venir todos los días a decirme que tengo que hacer...” [If you could come every day to tell me what I have to do...] Others also expressed the opportunity for partners who did not attend the program, to get to hear some of the information that they had learned from program staff directly. However, home visits varied by site stylistically, as well as in frequency and duration, and this affected the perception parents had of these.

### **Third hour Speaker**

Third hour speakers provided parents with content on various topics and with community resources. Participants were also asked to rate the third hour speaker component on the same scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most positive rating. All parents rated this piece a 5, with only one exception who rated a 4.

*Third-hour speakers provide content.* As a participant shared, “...we have speakers—different speakers that come and talk about different topics like financial counseling or stress release.”

Other participants expressed the impact that one particular speaker had on them, for example:

A mí me impresionó mucho el tema donde vino el, el que daba sobre – ya se me olvidó el nombre, como dicen, de primeros auxilios... Eso fue muy impresionante... A mí me puso nerviosa. Sí. Y, yo no, no estaba, como digo, al

tanto de que cosas así tan simples podía ser peligrosas, o que... Puede salvar la vida, cosas tan simples. [I was greatly impressed with the topic where the guy came, the one that presented about, I have already forgotten the name, how do they say, on first aid... That was very impressive... It made me nervous. Yes. And, I was not, how do I say, aware of how things like that, so simple, could be dangerous, or that... You can save a life with things so simple.]

Topics for third hour speakers occasionally included agency staff members themselves (e.g. child development workers or home educators) to share information about their particular job or expertise. In other instances community agency representatives visited to share information. The chart below illustrates a sample of the variety of visitors and topics addressed during third hour speaker components across sites during NIEER observations:

Child development supervisor	To tell parents what children are doing in child care to develop physical, social, emotional and cognitive skills
Child development supervisor	Object permanency and separation anxiety
Representative from Dept. of Health	Talk about the amount of sugar in drinks
Pediatric dentist	Talk about pediatric dental hygiene
Representative from Early Intervention	Red flags for developmental delays and how to get in touch for intervention
Pre-k Teacher	Early literacy
Representative from Imagination Library	Information about Imagination Library and registration for Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)
Yoga instructor	Yoga class for mothers to participate in
Representative from Early Intervention	Questions and answers
Mother (worker, motivational speaker from the community)	Most of the conversation was centered on resources for special needs children.
Representative from Hospital/WIC	Information about WIC and general nutrition
Child development supervisor	Potty training
Retired fire official	Use of a fire extinguisher
Representative from Health Clinic	Smoking and quitting
Representative from the Salvation Army	History of salvation army and Christianity
Home educator	Gives overview of what she will be doing over the course of the year when she visits homes
Early childhood specialist from the Office of Early Childhood	The topic was about engaging children in language and literacy activities at home
Domestic abuse counselor	Talks about what domestic violence is and where to find resources for help
Spanish-speaking librarian	Talks about the library and its collections and services for Spanish speakers
Representatives from a post-partum depression agency	Talk about how to know what PPD is (symptoms) and how to get help
Representative from community center	Talk about the importance of vaccinations
Representative from community	Talk about importance of early education and registering for preschool
Home educator	Show of home visiting videos recorded by home educator

## **B. Match with and Divergence from Participant Needs**

### **Match**

Across all of the program components, parents valued the relationships and discussions with peers and staff, their learning and development as parents, and the help they received in navigating the system.

*Parents need relationships and discussion with peers and AVANCE provides this.*

Parents spoke positively about the opportunity the program provided for them to socialize with and receive support from their peers. As one Cloquet participant said, succinctly, “I love it. My kids love it and I love it. Its good socializing for me and the kids love doing the projects.”

Toy making, meals, and parent education sessions were often punctuated by the laughter and conversation of participants. In Newark, three mothers talked about formulas and bath products while making toys and talking with their babies. In Cloquet, parents bolstered each other during a parent education session (“I don’t have any strengths” “You are a wonderful person”). They discussed their concerns, exchanged stories, and commiserated about parenting.

This social support seemed to be highlighted by many parents. A number of quotes illustrate this idea:

The most [important part of the program] would probably be support. That’s really beneficial. You have support from other parents and you and the other people involved.

I just enjoy the time with other parents mostly. I guess it’s because I can get their aspect of things and what they’re going through with their kids, if it’s similar to what I’m going through with my kids.

I like just the gathering of everybody personally, because then it’s adult time and all of kind of parents or you’re all parents. Just talking about the kids and how they act with stuff and how to deal with it.

Siempre estamos juntas, siempre hablamos del programa, y tratamos de ser lo mejor, lo que hemos aprendido. Y, si es que alguno está fallando, uno ayuda a decir: “No, las cosas no son así.” [We are always together, we always talk about the program and we try to be better, what we have learned. And if it is that someone is failing, one helps saying: “No, it’s not like that.”]

*Parents need relationships with knowledge holders, and AVANCE provides this.* Parents also spoke positively about the relationships they developed with the staff at the program sites. At Cloquet, when asked what she would tell a friend about the program, a participant said, “[t]he people there are super nice and helpful. You should come with me.” She liked the program “because I can bring stuff up and I have a group of people that can help me or [staff name] will run and print me off some information or everyone’s really helpful, so that’s good.”

*Parents want to develop their parenting skills and AVANCE helps them to reach that goal.* Parents expressed a strong desire to improve their parenting skills through education and reflection. They spoke of wanting to learn more about parenting and child development in order to improve their parenting,

...como educarnos un poco más con los niños, porque uno vive en una cultura diferente. A veces es, es diferente lo que a uno le enseñaron cuando chico y a lo que uno tiene que criar – que aprender aquí, cómo son las leyes y todo eso. [...how to educate ourselves some more with the children, because you live in a different culture. Sometimes it is different from what we were taught when we were small and from what one has to raise, to learn here, like the laws and all of that.]

*Parents are motivated to “be the best parent” they can be, and AVANCE helps.* Many parents expressed a desire to be better parents to their children, citing this “para ser mejor mamá” [“to learn to be a better mother”] as a primary reason for enrolling in AVANCE. Participants in Brooklyn and Newark explained,

I’m going to get through this and we going to do this and it’s for me to be the best I can be to be the mother that I need to be or the parent that I need to be, the father I need to be.

Ha sido de mucho ayuda, porque no sabía muchas cosas y aquí vine a aprender muchas cosas. Y, me he tratado de integrarme con las demás personas, porque yo era de una de las personas que a mí no me gustaba que nadie me diga lo que estaba mal. Entonces, aquí llegando aprendí a como aceptar lo que de verdad estoy mal. [It’s been a great help, because there were lots of things I didn’t know about, and I came here to learn many things. I’ve tried to integrate myself with the other people because I was one of those people who didn’t like for anyone to tell me I was wrong. So, coming here I’ve learned to accept what I was truly wrong about.]

One Brooklyn parent shared that the program, “motivates you to want to do better. It motivates you to be, to want to be a better parent.” Some parents truly hungered to develop as parents. A Newark parent explained that the parent education classes help you to change what you are doing wrong, learn new things, such as how to raise your children,

[L]e ayuda a uno como padre a cambiar lo que uno está haciendo mal y a hacer cosas – aprender cosas nuevas, pero, como criar a los hijos, y como desenvolverse en ciertas cosas. [It helps one as a parent to change what one is doing wrong and

to do things, learn new things, but, how to raise the children and how to act on certain things.]

*Parents want to learn about child development and other related ideas to help them be better parents, and AVANCE can fill this need.* Many parents expressed the desire to learn about child development in order to become better parents. As one Brooklyn participant shared,

I hope to learn more about myself as a parent, as a new mom. I hope to learn about early childhood development so I can teach my child you know, the proper things in life and on education and start her early on her role to success, even though she is six months old.

Similar views were expressed for example by three different parents in Newark:

Me interesa entender la crianza de los niños y ayudar a desarrollar...[I am interested in learning about child rearing and help the child's development]

...tratar de entender a los niños y aprender cosas nuevas [to try to understand children and to learn new things]

...para aprender educar mejor a mis hijos. Yo puedo enseñarle los valores... [to learn how to better educate my children. I can teach values....]

Parents were reflective about their past parenting and how they lacked information. One Brooklyn mother explained that through the program,

I'm learning things that – some things I did and that was good, but I guess from watching other people, but then there's some things that I've learned that I maybe could have went a different way, when I had [child name] at her age being so young. And I find it helpful in his learning, his ability to teach him, I pace with him. Understanding the way they minds develop and different things. Because before he never looked at it like that. You just say the children are growing. But to see the stages of where they grow and where they're at the age level.

Another participant in Newark expressed,

Bueno, he ganado mucho, he aprendido muchas cosas, muchos métodos de cómo criar a los niños, cómo educar a los niños, sobre la crianza y son muchas cosas que he modificado y he aprendido y estoy tratando, porque uno piensa... yo tengo una niña de 10 años y cuando uno dice, "Ah, ya tuve una niña de 10 años," y ahora después de siete años tener otra, uno dice, "Ah, ya pasé por eso," ya sabe uno. Sí, pero yo al principio lo hice mal, entonces ahora estoy tratando de corregir y gracias a este programa que yo no voy a cometer los mismos errores que cometí con mi primera hija. Entonces, ahora estoy tratando de seguir al pie las clases que [parent educator] nos da y trato de ser cada vez mejor madre para la niña que tengo, la última, de no cometer los mismos errores que hice antes. [Well I have gained a lot, I have learned many things, many methods on how to raise children, how to educate them, about child rearing and there are many things that I have modified and I have learnt and am trying, because you think... I have a

child who is ten, and you say, “Ah, I already had a ten year old” and then after seven years, having another, one says, “Ah, I already went through this,” one knows. Yes, but I did it wrong at the start, so now and thanks to this program I am trying to not make the same mistakes that I made with my first daughter. So, now I am trying to follow to the letter the classes that [parent educator] gives us and try and be a better mother each time to the daughter I have, the last one, so as not to make the same mistakes I made before.]

A Cloquet participant shared that “it’s helping develop my kid’s social skills more and then mine as a parent with other parents and more open minded with things.” In essence, parents across the different sites report how the program has changed them,

Ha sido de mucha ayuda, porque no sabía muchas cosas y aquí vine a aprender muchas cosas. Y, me he tratado de integrarme con las demás personas, porque yo era de una de las personas que a mí no me gustaba que nadie me diga lo que estaba mal. Entonces, aquí llegando aprendí a como aceptar lo que de verdad estoy mal. [It has been of great help, because I did not know many things and here I came to learn many things. And, I have tried to integrate with the other people, because I was one of the people who did not like being told what was wrong. So, in here I learn how to accept what I am truly doing wrong.]

Some parents reported being able to use what they learned at home and with all their children, not just the child they enrolled in AVANCE to support.

Del programa, ¿qué he aprendido? He aprendido mucho. Como, como a tratar a mis hijos, como enseñarles a jugar y, y todo eso. [From the program; what have I learnt? I have learnt a lot. Like how to treat my children, how to teach them to play and, and all that.]

[I]t’s helping develop my kid’s social skills more and then mine as a parent with other parents and more open minded with things.

En cómo tratar con mis hijos, como ayudarles así para no salirme rápido de las casillas. [On how to treat my children, how to help them, so that I do not lose my temper quickly.]

Porque, yo antes iba al – yo les hablaba a mis hijos y no los dejaba hacer. Entonces, ahora trato de, de involucrarlos en – a veces yo estoy cocinando y cosas que ellos pueden hacer, servir ensalada, entonces, yo trato de involucrar... involucrarlos en eso a mis hijos. [Because before I would speak to my children without letting them do. Therefore, now I try to, to involve them - sometimes I am cooking and there are things they can do, serve salad, so, I try to involve, to involve my children in that.]

Gané en experiencia, cómo enseñarles, como con cositas pequeñas uno enseñarles a jugar a los niños... [I have gained experience, how to teach them, how with small things one can teach children to play...]

Y, ahora les hablo y me comporto de manera diferente, y ellos están bien, y están más tranquilos. [Now, I talk to them and behave differently, and they are fine, they are more relaxed.]

Some parents expressed great faith in what they were learning from the program, taking what they learned home to share with their other family members.

...a lot of things that they are teaching even, then I go home and share with my husband. I go look, we should do this because statistically-wise, this is the better way to do it. This is a better way of handling it. And sometimes even just in playing with your kids... I never knew that just shaking your child, it either play – you know, because my husband used to have a thing where he would play with [child name]. He likes to be up in the air, so he would up and he'd go all the way down. And I said, oh, don't do that because I'm coming here not knowing that it's shaking up stuff that you shouldn't shake up and he can either play, it can hurt him and it's not good.

*Match of the staffs' background to the parents helped deliver content.* At all sites it appears that the match between the parent educator identity and the participants' identity was important in delivering content, particularly if this would challenge their preconceptions. For example, all the staff in Newark spoke Spanish, and classes were delivered in Spanish. At the Cloquet site, one observer noted:

[Toy instructor] is really doing a wonderful job when he introduces a toy he always begins with a story either of himself or about him and his children. Story is a significant form of teaching in Ojibwe culture and he uses this method very well. The participants also see a connection to what they are doing and how it might work with their children as he shares his experiences.

Parent spoke of learning alternatives to “old school” or “cultural” approaches to childrearing, saying,

Sometimes people used to tell us we are old school. Oh, just let them cry. Letting them cry sometimes really good but how to address their feelings when they're crying because in their cry, they're trying to tell you something. And, maybe they don't know how to express this so they're trying to express it in their crying and I've learnt go see what it is that's making them irritable or cry and learn how to talk and say what's the matter. First give them comfort to let them know it's okay. And then look to see why they may be crying because they got feelings too.

[B]ecause it's teaching me new parenting styles. Maybe how I was brought up I can learn new approaches with my child, so it doesn't have to be the same cycle. I can learn my own parenting style.

One Newark parent recalled a difficult moment being one in which she recalled her experience with her own parents:

Con las clases de, de que como los padres de uno no han, no han estado con uno. Han estado, sí, pero no, no como decir jugando, con uno. Eso es lo, lo más triste

que yo recordé. [With the classes, about how our parents have not, have not been with us. They have been yes, but no, no like say, playing with you. This is, is the saddest thing for me to recall.]

Another Newark parent states how their experiences as children define what they do as parents, when talking about the things they have learnt to question,

A veces uno está acostumbrado al antiguo, que si la abuelita lo hizo, mamá lo hizo y uno sigue así y le da palmaditas a las nenas y uno no sabe cómo disciplinarlos, como educarlos correctamente. Uno lo toma de la manera que a uno lo han tratado y sigue. [Sometimes, you are used to the old, that if the grandma did it, mother did it, and you just follow suit and give the little spankings to the girls and you do not know how to discipline them, or educate them correctly. You take the way you were treated and follow suit.]

*Parents use what they learn with their children.* Parents spoke about new things they had learned that they could teach to their children. One Brooklyn parent enjoyed the process of being in this role with her child, explaining,

I like the fact that I can say [red book] – and open up the book in front of him and I'm saying, red book. And then he can go, red book. Red fire truck. It's a different relationship and it brings on a different type of one – like I'm his teacher now. You know, and they say parents are the first teacher. I feel like I'm having more control as opposed to just him.

Parents expressed that the program helped them to be more intentional about their parenting, “Ahora voy cada cosa que voy haciendo, voy pensándolo” [now everything I do, I think it through].

Some parents applied concepts from the parent education sessions directly to their approach with their children at home. For example, a Brooklyn parent mentioned,

They talk about banking, how – they start early savings for your children. How to get them into having bank accounts and putting aside money and saving for their future. So they'll learn how to be debt free. And it was amazing because my daughter is already set up. I didn't set [name] up at an actual bank yet. He has his savings started at the house. But with my daughter, she has savings through home and then she also has her bank account that she has because she knows that money is for you to save towards school, you know. I don't want you – that's not money you can play with. It's not for you to say, okay, I want to buy something or – we have a bank that we do with her at home and it's divided into four savings.

This same parent found the sessions so valuable that she attended twice a week.

I come Tuesdays and Wednesdays and I said – I don't care if I have to hear it again. It's like when you teach your kids, you know, you repeat. I said, so sometimes, I don't, I know they going to have it for this session and they're going to have the – I'm like, okay. So what? I'm here. Because it's in – information

I'm getting, the more I hear it, the more I learn. The more I do it, the better I get at it.

*The program reduced the families' isolation and provided emotional support.* The program provides sometimes the only source of socialization for parents and children. Parents report this and talked about the friendship they made, the emotional and childrearing support they received, and how sometimes their friendships have extended beyond the classroom. One parent described that part of her goal in the program was to make new friends and that they will miss each other when the program ends. The following additional statements serve as images of how parents felt about socialization:

It was good to be able to hang with a group of parents every week, and go over parenting skills.

I get to go out, socialize with people from my culture and share our experiences with each other.

...be able to socialize with the other parents.

I love that I can go and socialize with other adults and other parents and that my kids enjoy it too.

I encouraged [my sister] to come and learn everything that she is learning here. She is a first time young mother and it's very beneficial for her. She says she loves coming, she learns so much. It's a good way for her to come and socialize also, so. Just like the neighbor, I would encourage them to come.

... it's a good time to come and socialize with other parents and see

Parents felt a strong emotional support from the program and the people they socialized with in it:

Prácticamente cuando uno se está pasando por una situación muy dura, y uno viene y comparte aquí la idea, entonces, aquí lo, lo incentivan, lo apoyan a uno. [Basically, when one is going through a tough time, and one comes and shares this idea here, then, here they, they motivate you, they support you.]

They were just people like if you're going through a hard time you'd be able to talk to them.

*Parents need help navigating the system and AVANCE can provide this.* Finally, parents valued the program's assistance to them as they attempted to navigate the multiple systems that impacted their lives, including getting access to special education resources, qualifying to enroll their children in daycare, getting the heat turned on by the utility company, finding books in Spanish, getting into a lottery for better housing, information about food stamps and food pantries, and support for keeping up with WIC and prenatal appointments. This support seemed to be more systematic at two of the sites. As one participant put it, "there's so much information that I feel that so many parents, especially

young parents, are missing out on. [For example], they bring in social workers.” A home educator describes a process in which this type of support went beyond the home visit or any particular component of the program:

[I]f I went to a visit and the parent had a question, I didn’t have the answer or needed a refer, and I didn’t have one on me then, when I get back to the office, then I’ll call the parent over the phone and say, we talked about this, this is what I’ve learned, here’s the website or something like that. So the interaction is at the home, during the visit, over the phone, after group, before group, during mealtime.

*The program helped reinforce a sense of community.* In two sites, eating was separated from the toy making and parental education component. This adaptation allowed program staff to interact with parents, to model behavior with children, and to reinforce a sense of community.

We also find it less disruptive than eating – than bringing the food to the parents while they’re in class. It’s a little bit easier if they’re not eating while they’re in class to be able to focus on the parenting education component and toy-making component for obvious reasons, and also the third hour speaker. So instead of taking time away during the class, we take a little bit of time on the front end, the time which is often used in other AVANCE programs for the parents to drop off and transition their children to the child development setting. We use that as an opportunity for us to gather as a community, as an opportunity for us to observe the parents interacting with other parents, interacting with them, which we see in the groups, but we don’t have the opportunity to see them interacting as much with their children. So we can observe that. And we can also model for the families the type of interactions we’d like to see them engaging in with their children so they’re able to observe us while we’re interacting with their children.

Well, I think what made an impression on me is that fact that we actually eat dinner as the family—as one big family coming together. Even us, the parents, the kids, the teachers, we all eat together. So I really like that. I was surprised; I didn’t know we can get free food as well, by coming to this program. So I don’t have to cook on Thursdays so that’s good I think.

The observer noted:

The meal is a bigger part of the [program]. The whole family gets a meal not only a nutritious meal for the children and a snack for the parents. The first half an hour of the class is spent in the cafeteria where people eat, feed their children and interact informally with each other...

In sum, parents across all sites expressed positive feelings on the opportunity the program provided them to socialize, engage in discussions with peers, learn from knowledge holders, learn valuable content, support their parenting skills, apply this knowledge with their children and in accessing community and other resources. In addition, the parents’ testimonies showed how much the program provided them with socialization experiences that reduced their isolation and reinforced a sense of community with similar parents.

## Diverge

*Parents need more time for some program components.* Parents expressed a desire for more time for the toy making sessions. One Brooklyn parent explained, “I think that the toy making is too short. We should have a longer time to make our toys, because sometimes we don’t get to finish.” Another stated, “...I just enjoy myself making the toys and we don’t get to finish making the toys on time. So we have to do it another time, but we make different toys every week. So that would be good to finish a toy in one session or finish half the toy in one session.” In one of the sites, the toy instructor reported having made 22 toys throughout the program. However, observations across all three sites noted that many toys were done in more than one session a couple of the sites. In addition, the lack of time could be the consequence of variations across sites of the actual toy making components, with this being one hour consistently at one site, 45 minutes almost consistently at another, and varying constantly between 20 minutes to 1 hour and 20 minutes at a third site.

Similarly, a parent at one site expressed the inability to absorb all the information from parent education sessions as the parent educator rushed through the power points to include all of the content. This mother expressed that she liked receiving the printed handout versions of the slides to write notes, but shared that

Eso me parece bien, si uno tiene algo que ponerlo y eso, uno la usa. De hecho yo lo quería hacer pero a veces [parent educator] da la clase rápido, rápido, no le da tiempo a uno... a escribirlo, a veces sí y a veces no [This seems good, if you have something to put down, you use it. However I wanted to but many times [parent educator] gives the class fast, fast, and there is not time for you to....write, sometimes yes and sometimes no.]

These types of comments from parents were not as obvious in sites that did not use power points or where toy instructors stretched toys through various sessions.

*Parents expressed interest on a higher program intensity and availability.* Parents expressed the program would be of even greater interest if it was “longer, spent more time, have more days,” or that the program should be extended, be more advertised and available to a larger number of people in the “community.”

*Parents need home visits that increase the bond between the family and the home educator and focus attention on the child.* In some cases [as described earlier] the home educator made brief visits and was less “hands on” than in others. These visits were restricted to observation and simple feedback, too short, without the more personalized support that parents appreciated from some of the home visits, and without any modeling or interactions with the toys and the children. Home education sessions provide a unique opportunity for working with families and parents acknowledged these to be so and in some cases seemed disappointed, while in others they talked positively about them, depending strongly in the site.

An observer noted the following from one of the home visits observed:

I'm surprised again that [home educator] does not model use of the toys. There is no conversation of any of the possibility sheets. In short I'm surprised about the total length of the observation which was only in fact about 10 minutes, not counting the snack part of the visit.

Similarly, this same observer noted the following interaction for this visit:

[Parent] is shocked that it's over.

“¿Eso es todo?” [That is all?]

[Home educator] smiles and answers “sí” [yes]. [Parent] insists that we have a cup of coffee and an Ecuadorian treat. I agree as it seems as though [parent] has gone through much effort to prepare for our visit and that it was all too quick.

In some occasions through, parents seemed unengaged and uninterested, which made the visits difficult for the home educator and uneventful for the child. One home educator recalls the following challenging case:

Went to a home visit and the mother of the baby was still in bed. And she didn't get up. So she called us into her bedroom and we had to stand there and do the interactions. And the baby was lying behind her in the bed. And when the baby seen us, the baby sat up, but didn't move off the bed. And she didn't encourage the baby either to get off the bed or anything. And she lied in the bed the whole time.

A similar situation was recalled same home educator: I had a parent who got up from the home visit and went and took a shower. I was like “okay, she just needed to take a quick shower” and then she opened the door and I was like “okay, I'm still here” she was like “I'm washing my hair” and had the door open very wide, so I had to tell her that I was still here, and the child was still here, and I need to go, because she went and took a shower and then started washing her hair, so how do I finish if it's like that? ... I let the older cousin know that I was leaving, so the child had to go into the room with the older cousin. But the mother, the parent stayed in the shower.

In contrast, and particularly at one site, the home visiting component provided a unique opportunity for parents. One of the home educators recalls experiences with families, in which she worked closely with them,

Sometimes, even though I know it's time for me to go, I end up staying beyond an hour, because a family's need might be different, and a parent need might be different. For example, we've had a parent who I was helping with literacy, so I would have to devote at least 35 minutes of the time to helping her with literacy, and then I would have to go back to my regular home visit component, as far as bringing the books, bringing the toys, and going over what's happened in class, going over what happened in class, do they have any questions, so, it will take a little longer than others.

Similarly, another parent explained how although it was not the most comfortable experience at the beginning, she did find there to be value in it by the end,

Para mí, al principio no me gustaba, porque a uno le gusta que le digan lo que, lo que debe hacer. Al principio no me gustaba, pero, después yo vi – yo pensando dije: “Ella tiene razón. No estoy bien”... Sí, a mí me ha ayudado, porque ya le digo, al principio no me gustaba que me digan lo que debía hacer, pero, después ya poco a poco fui entendiendo, y sí. [For me, at the beginning, I did not like it, because you do not like people telling you what you should do. At the beginning, I didn’t like it, but, after I saw, I thought and said “She’s right, I’m not right”... Yes, it has helped me, because as I told you, at the beginning, I did not like being told what to do, but after, slowly but surely, I started to understand, and yes.]

One other parent talked about home visiting being a comfortable way for children to be observed,

But I think that’s cool too, because then you get to see how the parent and child interact when they’re at their house and not when they’re just out in public. It’s kinda more comfortable for the kid I think.

*Some parents would like to be able to attend for multiple years.* Some parents mentioned wanting to be able to continue with AVANCE beyond the established 9-month time period.

Yes, it’s over so quick. I’m upset, I wish they had ... the preschooling that they were able to continue with the next level for the children, because he really enjoyed it.

Seguir, continuar con el programa, pienso yo. Continuar con el programa y si puede haber algunas clases extras de inglés o de lo que sea, para poder estudiar, y salir en adelante. [Continue, continue with the program I think. Continue with the program and if there could be some extra English classes or of anything, to study, and to be able to get ahead.]

*Incorporate other important adults in the child’s life (stepparents, grandparents, etc.).* Some parents expressed the desire to have other significant adults in their child’s life be able to attend AVANCE sessions, and it would appear that they did not feel this was the case,

I think a big thing that would be, like, parents that are, like, stepparents maybe could be incorporated, or just other figures that are involved or not really their parents, but if they want to learn to deal with situations, maybe. Something in that sense.

At one site the mothers had the impression that the program was fundamentally for mothers, even though at this site a father actually attended the program,

Ms. [program director], you need to have a class for the fathers no offense to you [name father] but most men don’t know these things that we are learning here.

*Unclear purposes for filming the parents and not evident how it was used across sites.* There was less reference to parents being filmed throughout the program period, or on whether these videos were used in any particularly way. In one site, these were not used at all, and on the other two sites, they were not necessarily effectively used to support the work with parents.

In one site, the home educator stated she did not use the video, and provided the following reason,

I felt like a lot of parents were uncomfortable with it, because they were even uncomfortable with the idea of being interviewed, and, I guess because their background, how they felt about it, I did not use the videotaping.

In particular, it seemed that this decision was made taking into account the community. This same home educator stated how videotaping was really a challenge,

One other challenge that we we're grappling with now is the videotaping of the home visit and then the critique of the home visits in a group setting by the other parents. It's very, you know, having worked with parents in this community for a really long time, I know how hard it is to get them to agree to let us into their homes and then build their trust and then when we finally do that, to, you know, to talk to them about videotaping what we see in their homes and then exposing that to everybody else I think is very difficult on a number of different levels. And that was something I knew we couldn't mandate...

At another site where videotaping was more common, one parent shared that,

Pues, un poquito incómodo, porque como ella lo tiene que estar grabando y tiene que estar escribiendo y uno siempre está, “¿Lo estaré haciendo bien?” o cosas así, pero ese es su trabajo, lo tiene que hacer y uno tiene que estar disponible a eso. [Well, a bit uncomfortable because since she has to be taping and has to be writing, you are always like “am I doing it well?” or things like that. But it's her job, she has to do it so we have to be open to it.]

One observer described a third hour speaker session towards the end of the program, in which the home educator was the speaker, and she showed four videos, but the staff did not make comments about these and neither did the parents,

The video shows [mother] playing on the floor with her two kids. The older girl is playing with the hobbyhorse. The other younger baby is sitting on [mother's] lap. [Mother] can be heard asking questions of the kids about what color things are, or why the happy/sad face pillow is sad.

In particular, the observer wrote, “[t]here is no feedback from [parent educator] on the video or upon reviewing the video.” In addition, she mentioned that some of the videos shared were only a few seconds long and little could be interpreted from these.

*Matching content to cultural background.* While there did not seem to be a mismatch between content and the needs of particular groups, across all three different sites a few parents and staff mentioned a few things that could be done to better match the activities and content to their background:

I think that they can include more cultural activities.

Maybe we can make the toys, we can like make costumes maybe, because Trinidadians, they like carnivals. So when it's around that time maybe we can make carnival costumes for our children.

I would say maybe do more stuff with the language and the culture, like make Ojibwe books for your kids or—you know what I mean. Something like that. Or like little drums for them or you know. I think that would be a good idea.

I feel that they can introduce some form of music. Teaching the music because that's a part of early learning too and they can introduce. Even if it's a segment where they listen to different music, or they hearing different music.

In one site, the parent educator mentioned that the power point and the content were complex and seemed to be designed for one particular nationality, and this implied some difficulty in translating the concepts for the parents they served:

Y, el power point, las, las letras más entendibles para la comunidad que estamos trabajando... Es que aquí me decían mucho: “Y, ¿qué significa esto? Y, ¿qué significa aquello? Y, ¿qué es esta palabra?” [And, the power point, the, the words easier to understand for the community we are working with... It's that here they said a lot: “And, what does this mean? And, what does that mean? And, this word?”]

Y, y tenemos de varias nacionalidades – nacionalidades, que hace más complejo el grupo, porque ellos entienden una manera y el, el otro currículo, está diseñado para una nacionalidad. Y eso hace que el, el rol mío sea más difícil para poder explicarle. [And, and we have several nationalities - nationalities, which makes the group more complex, because they understand in one way, and the, the other curriculum, is designed for one nationality. And this makes my role more difficult so as to be able to explain to them.]

There were some efforts to incorporate some of these things, but it would appear these could be furthered if the degree to which the staff could build on the curriculum was made more explicit. For example, in one site, power point was not the means of presenting the information to parents on the parent education session. Also, at another site, as the observer noted:

One additional handout that [staff name] provided was titled “Parenting: Past and Present” which focused on Ojibwe cultural beliefs on child rearing and parenting. Interestingly, however the handout was not talked about or incorporated into the lesson.

At this same site, the program director talks about how certain modifications were done in the toy making component and how these were negotiated with AVANCE staff:

Just based on the fact that we're on a reservation. We have a very strong governmental board, we have state law, we have the criteria that we have to fall

under. For instance, the toy making component, we had to re-adjust, and AVANCE - we would like to have more native traditional, but we also need the safety, and [AVANCE] were very understanding.

I've made some changes, sometimes based on input from, like Indian Health Services gave us some input on some of the designs.

In addition, it would appear that when the language of the group diverges from the language of instruction, incorporating language into the sessions would benefit the group. While in Newark staff was Spanish proficient, and sessions were in Spanish, the other two sites had representation of parents with a stronger Ojibwe background, or with a Caribbean background (from Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica, Mauritania and Trinidad). In this case, the language of instruction was the one that would facilitate communication with everyone (English), but would not necessarily bridge cultural differences in language. This same observer remarked, "One participant is looking through an Ojibwe book as the lesson is being presented. Some have asked what the [language] translation would be for some of the basic concepts being presented and use the language book as a reference."

## **II. How AVANCE is Enacted at the Three Sites**

This section uses data from interviews with staff and participants in the three AVANCE sites and ethnographic observations of program aspects to describe the enactment of the AVANCE program at the three target sites. In it, we describe major themes found within each aspect of the program.

### **A. How did various program components function?**

#### **Toy Making**

Toy making sessions involved instruction in making the toys, instruction in how to use the toy with a child, peer support, and socializing.

*Instructions on making the toy, including modeling.* During toy making sessions, the instructor explained how to make the toy to the participants, providing the group with a model of the toy. As the instructor at one site described,

At the beginning... I would have already a display of what they're going to make, like a finished product. Sometimes I will sit and according to how the classroom is, I am able to sit with them and be an example as to what we're doing. Just sit there with them, even though I have one finished already, just sit and do one with them while they're doing it so that they will understand.

Toys were prescribed, but some allowed room for individual creativity. For example, the instructor explained how the creation of a toy box allowed for innovation by each parent, saying,

...their toy box was like the lettering was on the side, but I had to put mine on the top, and with the parents, they chose when they decorated it how they wanted, which showed that they're not really having me think for them, so they're thinking for themselves, and they're creating it how they want it. Their toy box was one toy on one side and a box on the other, the child's name on the top, and they decorated it the way that they wanted it, but from the content and the examples of the materials and the patterns was helpful.

In one site, an instructor expressed that she worked with parents on making a graduation gown for the children, even though this meant departing from the established set. This same toy instructor reported that some of the toys seemed unattractive to parents and she would like to be able to change some of these. She described following the manual and in her description of the process appears she felt little room for changes on the toy making. On the other hand, this same toy instructor expressed in terms of the match between the toys and the parents' cultural background,

Estuvo bien, porque, ¿quién no tiene una muñeca o una pelota? Yo creo que eran juguetes que podían adaptarse o, o estar bien para cualquier tipo de cultura. [It went well, because, who doesn't have a doll or a ball? I think that they were toys that were adaptable or, or that they would be alright for any type of culture.]

*Teaching new skills.* Parents sometimes learned new skills while making the toys, such as sewing. As a toy instructor described,

One parent said to me, and she came into the sewing class. She was like, [Name], I don't know anything about sewing and last week she came and she was like, [Name], I sewed my boyfriend's jacket. She was so excited. I'm like, what did I tell you? Whenever you come in this class there is no I can't do. It's like I can do it, and even if you can't do it at the time, put your best foot forward, try, because nothing beats a fail but a try. If you don't try, you won't know that you can do it. I think it brings them to a place of comfort in themselves. If I didn't try this, I wouldn't know how to do it, and they did it, and they're happy about it. That gives me a happy feeling.

Another toy instructor talks about the parents learning various specific things in the process,

Yo creo que ellas también desarrollaron habilidades que no tenían, como por ejemplo, coser, medir, sumar, multiplicar, sobretodo eso, puede ser – aprender en lo que es hacer un juguete. [I believe they have also developed abilities they did not have, like for example, to sew, measure, add, multiply, and above all, maybe, learn what it is to make a toy.]

*Instructions on how to use the toy.* During toy making sessions, parents learned how to use the toys as teaching tools with their children. As a researcher observed,

[Parent educator] asked [supervisor of child development services] to explain to the parents how they can use the toys they have already made in toy making class and what area they can stimulate with these toys. [supervisor of child development services] explained how the rolling can can be used for language.

Parents can label everything on the can, color, shapes, forms, speed, spatial relations and so on.

A toy instructor explained,

...what we're doing now is the wall hanging with their child's favorite cartoon character or whoever the child likes. If it is Yo Gabba Gabba, Elmo, Pooh, Max and Ruby<sup>5</sup>. I said Yo Gabba already. What's her name? Little Kitty. With that the children can learn colors. They can identify who's in the picture. The parents can put the child's name so they can even learn to spell names from doing this last project that we're doing right now.

Another toy instructor describes their learning as,

... ellos [se] desarrollaron también, aparte de que aprendieron como jugar con los niños, aprendieron qué podían enseñarle de un juguete a su niño, no solamente darle una pelota y que la patee, por ejemplo. Si no que podían enseñarle colores, números, formas. [... the also developed themselves, besides learning to play with the children, they learned they could teach their child from a toy, not only give him/her a ball and to kick it, for example. But rather, that they could teach the child colors, numbers, shapes.]

Possibility sheets furthered this process when the content of it was discussed in the sessions, which was predominantly the case at only two of the sites. A toy instructor described their use:

The guide sheet is a sheet that we give out to the parents to further explain the toy and how it's used, and how you can get conversation out of just that little toy, like little questions you can ask the child so they can answer the question so you know they're getting an understanding of what this is, to help them with vocabulary, like to give them words like what the can is used for. Such words as with the chip in the can you put it in, roll, color, like if there is red on it, or you can identify whatever they draw on it if it's trees or a ball, or the park, so all that vocabulary is developed. That's what the guide sheet is there for, to help the parents go about explaining the toy and how it's used with the children.

One parent described their use as dependent on the staff:

I think the possibility sheet was usually used by the toymaker. But the possibility sheet, the role of it was after giving a lesson, and sometimes some of the toys we made didn't always correlate depending on a number of reasons, but with the possibility sheets and the five senses and all of the other little adjectives and all the other things that were on there, you could basically make that association. And our toymaker did an excellent job in getting that message across and the association both in the classroom and at the home visits.

The toy instructor distributes the possibility sheets in relation to a toy, but the interpretive role is left to the parent educator, leaving them for use with the home educator as a

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<sup>5</sup> These are characters from television programs for children. Yo Gabba Gabba and Max and Ruby are programs that are broadcasted on Nick Jr. Elmo is a character on Sesame Street that is broadcasted by Public Broadcasting Service Kids (PBS Kids). Pooh, also called Winnie-the-Pooh or Pooh Bear, is broadcasted by the Disney Channel.

reference. Therefore, this process may mean that in part, the utility of the possibility sheets may be lost in this process. One toy instructor defines her role as being solely responsible for giving it out, “según el manual yo solo las tengo que entregar [according to the manual I only have to give them out].” Similarly, a parent educator at a second site expressed that maybe it would be good to dedicate 10-20 minutes of the session to go through them and connect it to the work done by the home educator, and that this was possibly something they had not done well. Likewise, the home educator at the third site stated “I just didn’t use it. I’ve given the parents things to work on before I leave, like homework things at first, to look forward to, and some things I would say ... next time I come back I want to see [child name] doing this.”

In sum, it would appear that the possibility sheets are sometimes an underutilized piece. One that in fact connects the toy making, the parent education sessions and the home visitation pieces. In contrast to the toy instructor’s views described above, in one site, the program director provided an adapted version of the possibility sheet and effectively described the ideal process with these as (which was not in fact accurately enacted at this site),

The toy maker uses the possibility sheet idea and shows the parents things they can do with it. Then the parent educator reinforces the possibility sheet lesson for the parents. The Home Educator verifies that the parents do what they supposed to do with the toy and correct the parent and report to the parent educator if there is a pattern of misunderstanding about proper use of the toy or if the toy is not being used at all.

*Peer support.* During the toy making session, parents supported each other, encouraging each other to work on difficult tasks. As an observer reflected,

...they motivate each other to finish their work and they push each other to get out of their comfort zone to do things they might not be interested in doing (sewing was a big one).

*Socializing/discussion.* Finally, during the toy making session, parents spent time chatting with each other socially. As a staff member described, “...most of the time, you see that they’re really involved in what they do. Once they get the hang of what they have to do, they will get really involved in what they’re doing. There’s a lot of chitter chatter which goes on, which is good.” Observations of the toy making sessions illustrated numerous opportunities of socialization or discussion, for example,

[Name] and [name] converse about how many children they each have as they work.

Two groups of four moms each and one table eating and talking to each other.

Three moms with babies continue to converse about formulas and bath products. They go between conversing and cooing and talking to their babies.

They are now talking amongst themselves as they select the yarn for hair color.

[T]wo others are having their own conversation amongst themselves. One is expressing her relationship troubles.

The conversations around the table seem to revolve around helping one another, and discussing what happened the previous week for those who might have missed.

The socialization occurring within the toy making experience is in line with the statements of parents mentioned in the previous section that illustrated the positive socialization experiences the program allowed. Socialization in the toy-making piece emerges naturally from the parents, without facilitation from the staff. The possibility sheets seem to have been used with varied intensity across sites.

### **Parent Education Session**

During the parent education sessions, participants learn content related to parenting, socialize with each other, and reflect on their own parenting experiences.

*Learning content.* Parents learned content about parenting and early childhood education during parent education sessions. As one Brooklyn participant explained, The purpose of the program is to educate parents on their children to teach them what they should be teaching their children. For example, they encourage the parents to read to their children or make sure reading is very important in their everyday life. Also, you get to learn resources, for example like on housing, food stamps or schools or stress relief, parenting styles, financial counseling, anything like that.

*Understanding the importance of school readiness.* In one particular site, staff educators highlighted how their work related to school readiness and how they tried to communicate this to parents. As the director mentioned,

Early literacy, school readiness, early childhood and parenting education is all, has been – is what we have always been about and so I think pretty prepared in terms of delivering the AVANCE program model.

We tie everything we do into school readiness so the parents can understand not only emotional development but across the board how what they're doing now is going to prepare their children for when they enter school. We have examples of, or samples of the toys in the child development rooms, so the children are exposed to, if not the exact same, you know, exact same toys, similar props and toys. So they're exposed to it. We, for that, for emotional development, we have various speakers that we're bringing in., people who work in mental health facilities, talking about the importance of emotional development, children's emotional development, and the resources that they can offer the parents and how the parents can access those resources. We have representatives from local Head Start programs to come in and talk about it and again tie emotional development into school readiness. We really do take a lot of time and, but we, you know, the

whole step because we'll talk about it and brainstorm and try to find people that we can bring in, practical examples that we can use. The examples that we use during the parenting education component are largely taken from questions or observations from home visits or groups. We try to make it all as relevant as possible and tie it all together.

In a parent education session at this same site, the parent educator “picked up one of the emotion pillows and said ‘I want to connect this with what we are talking about. It’s also connected with school readiness. How do you validate your kids’ emotions?’ ”

*Socializing and discussion.* As during the toy making sessions, participants chat socially during the parent education sessions. An observer noted for one of the parent education sessions that “[a]fter each [parent] sharing there were several conversations and laughter going on in the room and [parent educator] had to intervene so they could move on to the next mother.” At another session in this same site, she notes that “parents got into a conversation about separation anxiety.” Moments when parents were clearly socializing and/or sharing emerged in the observations in all three sites, with a lot of exchange among parents,

I just think [parent educator] was a very good adult-ed instructor. She seemed to really be here for us, not only with the stuff she would talk about for the sessions, she would - we would go into in-depth discussions and she just seemed very supportive with stuff we brought to her.

I just like the fact that our discussions are very interactive, so you don’t need to feel shy or you don’t need to just sit there and listen without speaking. Everybody can join in on the discussion. So Trinidadians love to talk, so that will be good for them.

One parent educator expressed that though she felt that the program did not have much room for her to change things, she felt the group needed more time to talk and so she allowed for this,

Yo creo que tuve que poner en las actividades que ellos se expresaban más. Al saber que ellos le tenían una necesidad que era hablar, comunicarse, expresar lo que tenían en, en su mente, lo que estaban pensando, hablar un poquito más. Y, por eso se me hacía difícil con el tiempo. Pero, era necesario...No, no pude cambiar mucho. A mí me gusta cambiar mucho. Pero, no pude cambiar mucho, porque sé que eso es un plan piloto y no se puede cambiar mucho. [I think that I had to put into the activities for them to express themselves more. Knowing that they had a need to talk, communicate, express what they had on their minds, what they were thinking, talk a little more. And so this is why I had trouble with the timing. But this was necessary... No, I wasn’t able to change much. I like to change things. But I couldn’t change much because I know this is a pilot program and you cannot change much.]

*Reflection on parenting.* Participants spend time discussing and reflecting upon parenting during the sessions. A Cloquet participant shared that,

...we were talking about things that our parents did that helped that we want to pass onto our kids. That was one—we talked about that and that—I liked talking about that one, because it made me think about things my parents have done or things that I've seen other parents do that I wouldn't do with my kids or things that I would want my kid to do.

An observer described how the class discussed a parent's struggles to wean her 18 month old from drinking too much milk and the parent educator talked about types of milk and quantities appropriate dependent on the age of the child. Other images of such reflection occurring reported by observer are:

[Parent] talks about how when she tries to talk eye to eye with her children, that she feels their eyes look sad, and that this causes her to change her mind about being strict.

[Parent] talks about how it's often hard to know what her child is talking about or referring to. [Other parent] follows up with a story. [Parent educator] talks about babbling and how you need to be patient.

The parents explained how scary it is when something happens to their kids and they have to go to the hospital. The personnel at the hospital would ask them questions that make them afraid their kids might be taken away from them.

[Parent] said: "My daughter took a one hour tantrum and she couldn't tell me what was bothering her. I realized it was a tantrum so I relaxed and didn't make a big deal about it but after she calmed down, I was tired."

When asked about what aspect of the program do you find most helpful and why? Two different parents from Cloquet and Brooklyn responded,

Just the open discussions that everyone has, because like I said, it's just nice hearing other people's point of views; it makes you kinda think differently. If you think you're doing something wrong you can bring it up and people don't jump on you, they just try to help you and give you different ideas, so I think that's nice.

I like the speakers and the teaching, because I just the topics are very interesting. I just love the discussions that we have. The parents and the speaker, we have an interactive conversation. So we give our—the parents give their opinions and share their experiences and give their feedback to the discussion.

Not all conversations on parenting were as positively received, as a couple of parents demonstrated some resistance to changing their behavior. However, the program exposes them to the information needed. For example, as an observer noted at a parent education session,

They also talked about someone who came to the group to talk about safe sleep. The father said his child sleep on his chest all the time and even when she grows, she will still be sleeping on his chest. [The parent educator] quickly recapped for the parents what the expert had said. The father said he already had a whole argument with the hospital staff about her daughter sleeping on him. [The home educator] explained to the father why especially for his child who has asthma it's not a good idea to sleep on him. [The parent educator] promised the dad to give him some reading materials about safe sleeping for the father.

Overall, a lot of sharing, discussions and reflection occurred within the parent educator sessions. Parents talked about their experiences, reflected on these, and appreciated the content even if a few times they resisted it. Resistance means that the content was being grasped by the parents. Interviews to parents and observations of the parent education sessions (as well as the other components) strongly showed that discussions, socialization, and discussions of children's needs or behavior were among the most prominent codes that came out of the analyses.

### **Home Visit**

Home visits varied among sites. Visits usually included assessment of the parent's progress in the program, and sometimes involved modeling of child-adult interactions and childrearing advice. In one site, visits were much shorter and focused on the first of the three aspects. In addition, enactment in this piece also varied in the number of visits parents received. Different parents interviewed recalled having been visited between 1 to 7 times in the 9-month program period. In addition, the three different home educators reported different lengths of visits, reporting average home visits of 5-15 minutes, 15-20 minutes and 30-45 minutes or longer, respectively.

*Assessment of parent's progress.* In one site, home visits centered on an assessment of the parent/child interaction with some home educators understanding the purpose was not to assess only a behavior but changes over time:

...we go in, we'll greet the family, ask them how they've been, how they like the program, do they have any concerns or anything. And then we'll start the parent/child interaction. That'll last about 5 to 15 minutes, just so that they can interact and see how much their child has learned in the classes and what skills they've developed. Then after that, I give them comments or feedback on what they did good or what they can improve. Then we just reschedule a follow-up visit for the next month. Then we go from there.

To see their progress, to see where they're at and at the end, where they get to. The interaction just to see them do the toys in the last class, and how they dedicate so much time doing that. So they'll take that and dedicate that time with their kids.

A home educator described how the focus on her visits was on observing changes over time,

...my goal is to – because I'm also recording them – to see the differences when we finish this class, to when we record and everything, just to see the differences, how far they've gone and stuff like that.

When asked about instances in which the visits were particularly useful a Cloquet parent replied,

The feedback [home educator] gave me was useful, I guess. He let me know where he saw my strengths being a parent, and it made me feel proud.

The previous selected pieces reflect the home educator seeing her or his role as one that included a feedback process, and parents for whom the experiences were useful because of this.

As mentioned earlier, not all home educators reported using videos, and/or when sharing these with the rest of the parents, these were shared as seconds of an interaction, without a feedback process being part of the experience.

*Supporting parents' practices using the possibility sheet.* In some cases, home educators appear to have been using the possibility sheets to guide their work with parents. One home educator described how she used the possibility sheets. When asked about what she would look for in the parent-child interactions, she described:

Just to see key words. Like, I would see if they actually write the possibility sheet. Like, you would know what the different things they do with the toy. I would see if they practice colors and numbers, alphabets, just different – it depend what age group I was working with.

At another site, the staff explained that during the visit, parents should be demonstrating what they have learned, and educators say that it is to see how much progress the parent has made:

She [the home educator] explains to the parents that she will observe one time per month for a half hour to 45 minutes. She stresses the fact that this is not meant to be punitive or judgmental and adds that they must study the possibility sheets so that they can be doing this when the visitor comes.

Possibility sheets, as mentioned earlier were more strongly used by home educators. However, these were not necessarily integrated to the other components. As an observer noted,

AVANCE Inc. wants the [parent educator] to give out and talk about the Possibility Sheets but I have never heard the [parent educator] talking about a Possibility Sheet or making the connection between the toys the parents are making and the concepts she is teaching or supposed to teach.

In addition, this was not the case for in all sites. One observer noted,

I'm surprised again that [home educator] does not model use of the toys. There is no conversation of any of the possibility sheets.

*Providing a source of support for other needs.* In more than one site, the home educators mentioned examples in which the families needed referrals or other sources of supports and how these were addressed when feasible:

You don't know what you're going to get. I went to this one home, she didn't have any electricity and she has two little kids. We got help for her. But that was heartbreaking because she's a single mom and she has two kids. She was, you know, I haven't been able to – I have to go outside and buy food for my kids because I can't even cook. I felt really bad. And it was the winter too, so it was kind of cold. So I called [program manager] up, and we got her some help. I think that was – you never know what you're going to get. Like, you know, they don't have electricity or they don't have Pampers for their kids, stuff like that. Their basic needs, they don't, you know, have.

*Modeling of adult-child interaction.* During some home visits, the home educator demonstrated strategies for interacting educationally with children. In one instance, for example, the home educator demonstrated how to encourage a child to name colors and pictures. In another, the home educator demonstrated how to congratulate a child for accomplishing a task, exclaiming “Look [name] is stacking the cups all by himself. Good job [name]!” The observer noted how this home educator went on to demonstrate how to extend the child’s play, saying,

“Look [child name] put the red cup inside the white cup like that. [As she is doing it herself.]” [child name] took the cups, tried for a minute then was able to stack the first two. The home educator gave him a third cup and told him to do the same thing. [child name] did it.

Home educators sometimes brought toys and demonstrated new ways of playing. One home educator describes such an interaction,

...the baby kept going back to the nesting toy. And she kept trying to figure it out. And I kept trying to give her verbal direction. I said, tell her, help her. So the mother started saying, put the green one in the red one. Put this in this. Then finally we kind of like not paid attention anymore.

And we turned around, it must have been less than a minute or a minute, and we turned around and she had completed the nesting thing. She put the whole thing together. And the mother was like “oh my god. I didn’t think she could get that. It looked so hard. Where can I get this toy? Oh my goodness.”

And she was just raving and gave her a kiss. The baby was just beaming that she got it done. Then we took it apart and she tried to figure it out again. The mother was really into it trying to help her figure it out, and giving her verbal directions of how to put it in. So it created a whole thing about how smart she was and she needed to go get more toys like that.

*Supporting the process with additional indicators of child development.* The Brooklyn site supported their home visitation piece by using the ASQ (Ages and Stages questionnaire). This screening tool allows an understanding of children’s needs and

whether further evaluations or referrals might be needed. As it was explained to parents, “the ASQ can help parents to decide on an evaluation or not...,” the parent educator also “explained how the program can support and help parents if they have a concern and talked about the ASQ.” This is a positive innovation that focuses on children’s support needs and does not necessarily have a cultural aspect to it. This innovation strongly supported the work of the home educator. As recalled by a staff member, a parent “was so amazed to see how much her son could do when she administered the ASQ to him that she was moved to tear[s].”

*Giving advice and information to the parent.* During the home visit, the home educators sometimes gave parents direct advice and information. In one visit, for example, the home educator told the parent to speak to her baby, even though the parent expressed that she was not sure if the baby “understands” her. The home educator also told the parent to put the baby on the floor rather than the bed in order to help her start crawling. At another site the home educator suggested that a parent use a humidifier and not let the baby play with the cat, so as to help her child avoid asthma attacks.

The home educator also shared information relating to parental concerns. During one home visit, a home educator explained to a parent how post-partum depression works, saying, “You had all these hormones in your body plus a new baby, you were sleep deprived and living a kind of life that you were not used to. It was normal.” Home educators also shared information about resources, such as food pantries, in the community.

*Brief home visits.* Although many home visits were lengthy and rich in interaction between home educator and family, some visits were very short and did not include much content. After one such visit, the parent appeared shocked that it was over so quickly, exclaiming, “eso es todo?” [That’s it?] The observer noted,

In short I’m surprised about the total length of the observation which was only in fact about 10 minutes, not counting the snack part of the visit.

In this instance, the parent insists that the visitor stays for a cup of coffee and a treat from her country of origin. The observer notes “it seems as though [the parent] has gone through much effort to prepare for our visit and that it was all too quick.” While the home educator in this instance was of a similar cultural background than families, this particular home educator lacked experience. This home educator reported the shortest lengths of the home visiting when asked to recall her role (5-15 minutes), and described her work in a way that suggests inexperience with home visiting, relative to the other two sites:

It's fun. I mean, you never know what you're going to get. Like, the first month, I was petrified. I'm like, I'm going to stranger's homes. And then I got used to it. They started welcoming me with open arms. I started to have fun with it. I'm like, I have a fun job. I get to go to people's houses and see how they play with their kids. And it's just been a fun experience.

In sum, home visitation is the component that evidenced most variation in length, depth and execution across sites. Some of these were strong in content, interactions, supported

by additional instruments like the Ages and Stages Questionnaire, and some used the possibility sheet quite effectively as part of the feedback process to parents, while others were shorter, uneventful, and not as enriching.

## **Early Childhood Education**

*Spaces and environment.* Early Childhood Education areas are colorful and well equipped, with developmentally appropriate and caring staff. Sites varied slightly in the organization of the infant rooms. An observer described at one site where children were segregated by age but shared one room,

There is seating for 6 children at each table. The tables sit on a white linoleum floor, that is clean and reflecting the overhead florescent lights. At the edge of the linoleum floor is carpet and there is a semi-circle gate that encloses the infant area, which has cribs lined up against the wall. Outside of the infant area small colorful climbing structures. A stair set with a slide down one side, large beanbag type chairs, large rubber balls, and against the walls are cubby style shelves with toys and various play materials. There is a wooden play kitchen sitting in the middle of the carpet floor area.

At another site, the observer noted three areas: a babies' room with age appropriate materials, a toddler/preschooler's area which was half a gym separated by partitions and mats and a school-age area which uses the other half of the gym where they played basketball, did homework and other active games. This site offered care with the support of volunteers services for all the children of the families in the program, regardless of age, covering this way the childcare needs of the families it served. This was particularly important given that this was the evening session at this site.

Age grouping varied across sites, and the lack of separations by age affected the process of the child education component when this was the case. One child development provider at a site without such age separation remarked,

I think it would be easier to do if we had all the age groups separated, or even in different sessions. I don't know if that would be possible with our set up because if the family has siblings or whatever, but even if we just had, say the infants in a session or the toddlers and the preschoolers, then you could focus on just that age group. When the ages are combine it makes it kind of difficult to—just to find the curriculum that you know, if you do something with the older ones, the infants obviously can't do it. If you're doing something with the infants then the older ones are bored and it just kind of—it's hard to—so, I think individualizing the groups would make it a lot easier and more beneficial for the children.

One particular interaction between the trainer and the staff at one site shows how child development settings may need to be more clearly and accurately defined by AVANCE. In observations of the training for the child development component at one of the sites,

the AVANCE trainer mentioned that “AVANCE follows the ECERS<sup>6</sup> model for classroom setting.” At this training, the site staff corrected that it should be the ITERS rather than ECERS and then the trainer referred the site staff to the ECERS classroom profile in the binder. In addition, a child development staff member at one of the sites mentions this issue as well and how her experience has allowed her to figure out how to best serve the children,

[In] the guide there’s the ECERS and we’re working with infants and toddlers, so we need to use the ITERS and look at those standards. Just having the experience working with infants and toddlers, the type of activities that were provided in the guide weren’t really appropriate for the ages and stages of the children. So making those adjustments. But I’ve had the experience of working with the ages, so it’s easy for me to make the adjustments, but I don’t know if someone else without that experience, they would get the guide and just take it as is. So that would be comment towards that. We really have to really expand the focus, because it is zero to three.

In revisions of the guidelines for child development staff, ECERS is in fact the environment scale mentioned for preparing and setting up the classrooms (p.43-65). The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) is the scale that addresses children aged 2 through 5. In contrast, the Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS) focuses on children from birth to 2 ½ years of age. Consequently, child development staff should be focusing on a scale that provides them more accurate guidelines for the classroom given the age of the children served.

*Warm and intentional interactions versus other types of interactions.* One observer reported warm interactions that a child development staff had with the babies and toddlers in her care. In this observation, the staff member read a touch and feel book while asking children questions about the illustrations, and then rocked a baby in a blanket while gently singing him to sleep. The interaction therefore showed a combination of warmth and intentional teaching that made it a strong and effective one. This contrasted somewhat with another site that leveraged their volunteers (high school students) to provide the children with reading experiences and where the intentionality of the experience might be lost given the lack of training of voluntary staff,

Reading was done one on one with the children who wanted to read. The volunteers and the staff offered to read with the kids sometimes one on one and sometimes in small group of two or three kids all throughout the evening. The other kids continued to do their free play.

While volunteers can be an asset in tipping the staff:child ratio more positively, they need to be strongly coached and mentored so that the intentionality of the processes that occurs in the classroom environment is present in all the work with children.

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<sup>6</sup> ECERS stands for Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale and ITERS stands for Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale.

Similarly, at another site the child development staff was not effective at engaging children as noted by an observer,

[Child development staff] calls the older two children over to join her at the table as she sets out the lesson for the evening. The children are having trouble joining her as she asks them several times to come join her. “Don’t you want to paint something to take home?” she asks them. The boys look at her and continue to run around the room.

*Lack of strong content.* The child development provided by AVANCE allowed parents to focus on the adult activities at hand without needing to care for their children. While in the child development room, students were safe and, to a greater or lesser extent, depending upon the caregiver, stimulated. However, observers and child development staff noted the lack of structure and support for the delivery of this component. Child development providers mentioned this across all three sites. At one site child development providers remarked,

[W]e have much younger children in this group, so just having a lot more infant toys and space for infants to have tummy time and that sort of thing, but that’s more immediate. Just space wise and configuring that and having more staff, because we’re serving a greater number of children and younger children, so we need more staff to handle infants versus just having toddlers as we did before. And also adjust curriculum, making sure that we have curriculum that’s geared towards infants and young toddlers. As far as what we’ve been given through AVANCE is that’s geared toward a little more older children.

In another site, the most common challenge among child development staff was the difficulty they had with planning appropriate lessons. One staff member shared, Well, it’s been very challenging for work, because we have to develop everything. We don’t have a curriculum, so we need to be looking in...school curriculums to see what they’re going to be – what is going to be the topic of the month or the week to develop that curriculum and also the lesson plan. So it’s been a lot of work and hard to try to cover all the areas that we need to be developing at that age.

At the site with the strongest child development component, staff mentions how they worked much beyond the AVANCE guidelines,

To include more things for infants and toddlers and the ITERS. I think—I use the creative curriculum. Something that I use in my classroom all the time and they have a wonderful guide for infants and toddlers. It’s a great curriculum to kind of follow for that age group. So that’s what I kind of use as my guide.

Other challenges that surfaced regarded timing issues and insufficient time to satisfy all of the requirements in the given time they are employed. The same staff member that mentioned difficulty in planning lessons explained,

So, and also the time, because we only are here for four hours and to keep track of all the reports and everything that happen and to document it’s very hard. So but yeah, there is right now I am doing the child development record and we need to

evaluate each child between 25 month to 36 months. So you know it's very hard, because I don't have the time in the classroom to be looking for each, you know is maybe I could say okay, he can jump. He can do –

*Use of 'child care' when describing the role of the child development component.*

Whether incidentally or because staff understood the child development component to be of a 'child care' nature, staff across the different sites used this concept to describe their work with children or what it provides to parents,

I think we're doing pretty well with meeting these needs for the parents. I know two parents came in and they were interested in getting childcare for their children and didn't know how or where to go to do it and since they've been in the program, their children has been in daycare. They found daycare for their children.

I think it's just that the people and how things are done, and I feel like our coordinator and our teacher and the childcare and the van driver and all the other staff are extremely flexible and open.

...they can bring them, the child, to the childcare while they're in their session...

The childcare is a challenge, although the staffing that we hired I thought had some good experience in this, obviously for the parents that were participating, they hadn't experienced leaving their children and we just talked about it earlier.

In sum, child development staff at all three sites described themselves as working with low scaffolding and support and recommended further development of this component. Clear guidelines, a strong content based on existing strong curriculums in the market with which the staff might be familiar, and some degree of professional development would strengthen the child development piece.

## **B. How do the program staff understand the needs of their participants?**

Staff members feel that parents need caring and encouragement, they need to learn about child development, and they need support with the difficulties that come with living in poverty.

*Staff feels parents need encouragement and caring.* Staff members see the parents as being in need of support, caring and encouragement. As one staff member put it, So what the people need, they need someone who is empathetic who really, really cares and I think that's what the [site] ... They really, really care from ... program manager down. And then that the people need someone who is going to challenge them and they have been challenged there in [site].

*Staff feels parents care about child development and need support to learn about it.* Staff members at all three sites expressed that parents need to learn about child

development and, in some cases, change their approach to child rearing. As one staff member explained,

I think a lot of it is learning about child development and the appropriate things to do with children. I think there's been a—from what I've—when speaking with some of the families, kind of the cycle. I was raised this way so I don't know anything different and they wanna learn what's different, what's better, a better way of raising their children.

Well they come from an underserved population and some of the families are below the poverty level, some are working-class families. They have different needs. They come from different backgrounds, but what their commonality is that they want to raise the best children and expose their children to a variety of things and really make life better for themselves and their families. I would say they're really caring parents. They're very open. They're very giving of themselves. They're very open to this opportunity. I think they have been enjoying it quite a bit and getting a lot out of it, even though it's only been a month.

Although less frequent and at only one of the sites, parents were seen as needing support on, and knowledge about, children's needs and behaviors. One staff member recounted to an observer how a parent “didn't understand that it was normal for a two-year-old to fall apart after being dragged up and down subways and buses to several appointments.” Another explained that the parents needed help, not just in “accessing books and educational opportunities,” but also in “understanding the importance of reading to children and how to read to very young children.” Similarly, when asked about parent's needs, a program manager at one of the sites expressed,

... many of the families we serve, many of the parents never had the types of childhood or upbringings where they were exposed to a lot of play activities and books.

At other sites, staff also described the type of content on parenting parents need,

Definitely just education. A lot of them don't know how to – if their child has a burn, you know, what do you do, you know. So just a lot of basic things that they maybe don't know. Just, they learn that and, you know, and how their child – what are key things their child – what milestones their children should be at by the age they are. Because maybe a lot of parents don't – they can't identify, you know, maybe something's wrong with them and this might help them.

In sum, staff members expressed that education and knowledge about child development and child rearing were important for the families they served, but also tied this need to issues of poverty and their own experiences as children. In spite of the issues the families face, staff recognizes the interest these parents have of becoming better parents to their children.

*Staff feels parents need help with both “basic” needs and support.* Staff members at all sites mentioned parents are in need of assistance to meet various basic needs – clothing, food, housing, employment, and medical care. A staff member described parent needs, Access to healthcare, either for themselves or for their children. Some of our family—we have a couple of families who are living in shelters, so just getting some type of permanent type of housing, that’s a need. Or they may be in housing that they’re not really comfortable being in and they want better housing, so that’s something that they’ve expressed. Actually we try and get a guest speaker today. Actually a guest speaker today is coming in to talk about housing with the families, so something that we’re addressing. But I think it’s—like dental care was another thing that came up and we had pediatric dentists last week and we’ve—with some of the children that had some severe needs, they’ve already been in the process to go to a pediatric dentist to address those issues. It’s helpful having someone from the Department of Health come in to talk about sugar-sweetened beverages, you know that sort of thing.

I think they need access to health care, to mental health services. I think they need access to benefits counseling and financial assistance. Food is very – and we’re seeing this getting progressively and rapidly progressively worse with the families’ access to food, particularly healthy food, is very limited.

They also need counseling and would benefit from having a counselor in the staff. One staff member explained,

Their needs are all different. Some of them are in need of housing. Some in need of clothing, food, jobs. Some of them need just support. Support groups. Somewhere they can just come and express how they feel, just to talk about it. What else I can say they need? They need mostly support. That’s what I can tell you. Mostly support. I know of one who is really in need of counseling, because she’s really going through a rough time.

Because of the complexity of the needs of the parents, and the need for comprehensive services to address the different issues the families faced, staff at two sites mentioned the importance of strengthening the program through partnerships and the need for social services to play a role,

So they really do have vast needs and need comprehensive services to which we, you know, to which we try to work and address through our, through community-based organizations with which we partner and who we bring in to talk about their resources and their program services through the ... components.

From the perspective that I saw it, a lot of housing, a lack of education in terms of resources. A lot of unresolved psycho-social issues, which may be common in society in general but that’s one of the things that I go back to the social service part of it that it’s really needed.

*Staff sees parental poverty as an underlying issue.* Some staff members attribute many of the families' difficulties – from access to healthy food and health care to their approaches to parenting – to their low-income status. One staff member explained, I think there are families that perhaps didn't have the parental skills demonstrated to them. I find their family—the parents that I work with are parents who—the number one common link through most of them is the poverty piece. And, in recognizing the poverty brings to the table all sorts of dynamics. All the — everything that—everything that they don't have access to. Whether it be lack of education. Whether it be lack of having demonstrated to them their own parental—I guess growing up. So, it's a combination of things but I do think that some of those things are—and it's a thought. Poverty is a whole element unto itself.

As another staff member described parent needs,

The needs are vast. I think that parents in general, there's no training for that role and so the parents in general need a lot of assistance. A lot of parenting is not so intuitive. You know, it's more learning by trial and error but I think that the families that we serve, because of their backgrounds, because of their limited education, because of their parents' limited availability when they were growing up...

A parent educator mentioned the overwhelming emotional needs of participants, and how it made it challenging to deliver the content. Two staff members at this site mentioned the need for a social worker to support the emotional side of families. She explained,

Yo siento que – vuelvo otra vez y te digo, el trabajador social. Porque, había muchas problemas que se aceptaron en el grupo, que necesitaban gente que tenían sus problemas, desde muchos años, me imagino, y, y lo sacaron en el grupo. A veces se me hacía difícil controlar el grupo. Una decía una cosa y se ponía a llorar, la otra venía y se ponía a llorar, y la otra venía y se ponía a llorar. Y, yo les decía: “Dios mío, esto parece una terapia.” Entonces, a veces esto tenía que inmediatamente asimilar en mi mente qué hago en este punto, para controlar que esto no es terapia, esto es algo educador. [I feel that– I'll go back again, I tell you the social worker. There have been many problems that surfaced in the group, that needed people that had those problems, from many years ago, I imagine, and they exposed them in the group. At times it made it hard for me to control the group. Someone would say one thing and would start to cry, and another would come over and start to cry and then another would start to cry. I would tell them “Oh my God, this seems like a therapy session.” So sometimes these would have to be dealt with immediately and in my head I'd think of what to do at this point, to control and make it not about therapy but about education.]

Staff at the different sites tried to match their programming and their support services to parental needs. As one staff member explained, “We're really trying to match the advocacy with the immediate needs of the family. Even if it doesn't match what we're talking about as far as child development, but those great needs, so we try to match those speakers.” In addition, through partnerships with local organizations or referrals, staff

provided support for at least some of the issues related to poverty that families faced (although we were not able to gauge whether staff saw this as part of their AVANCE program or rather as part of the organization providing the program more generally):

Well, these families, they have, they carry their little backpacks with different problems and stuff. So for instance, well one of the participants called us, because her heat hadn't been turned on, so I gave her the number for where she can reach and stuff like that. And just like little things that people, they it's not they may not be big for us, but it will be big for them. So we just help them with their individual problems and stuff and just give them resources.

One program manager mentioned that the site found itself having to go beyond a referral service to a stronger way of supporting families in a way that suggested that AVANCE requirements were not enough for this site,

I can tell you we kind of like incorporated that social work component, that assistance because it happened frequently on a daily basis that we had to intervene with families. And I've got to tell you, I can't afford to have a social worker there but we would have people respond to issues that some of the families were having in the afternoon, et cetera, so that's something we added, something that we have to change instead of just telling them here's an address and go see someone else. We intervene.

However, staff at one site mentioned that when the issue was related to their immigration status, they were less able to support families accordingly in the one site where “un 50% o más, son indocumentados [50 percent or more are undocumented].”

*The importance of cultural sensitivity.* One staff member described how cultural differences between the parent's home culture and that of the United States might be responsible for some of the parents' difficulties, saying,

Their needs are really great in terms of just. I think, you know, knowing how to guide discipline is really tricky across the board and it's particularly difficult for a lot of our families, many of whom were raised in – many of whom were raised outside of the United States and in cultures and communities where discipline was addressed very differently.

While this was true across all sites, at one particular site, one staff member new to the community seemed disconnected from the families. This person expressed concerns about the cleanliness and safety of participants' homes. One observer noted,

The staff people new to the community and to the program are less comfortable with the parents and the neighborhood. They express their fear of getting sick from interacting with the families and doing home visits. Some of the other staff, members of the community, have expressed their disagreement about the way certain staff from this last category treat the parents.

In this particular, the home educator stated,

The only problem I have is if the house is so dirty – I know that's not politically correct, but if the houses are dirty that I can't even sit on the floor, there's no place for me to sit, than it kind of makes it uncomfortable for me to actually be relaxed for me to interact with the parent or the baby.

Overall, it would appear that the experience of the staff in the community (as well as in similar roles) might be fundamental to the delivery of the program. Earlier we mentioned that a home educator at a different site was initially ‘afraid’ of entering parents’ houses. In both these cases, experience in the role, and/or experience in the community, seem to be at the center of their views on working with families in their homes. While this was not an issue for most of the staff, across the three sites, stronger staffing recommendations could reduce these issues.

### **C. How do program staff draw upon and/or innovate from the AVANCE model?**

*Curriculum/teaching dependent on power points in one site.* In one of the three program sites studied (Newark), staff adhered much more closely to the AVANCE curriculum, with AVANCE generated power point presentations as the core of instruction. However, in Newark, parent education classes seemed to be more rushed, with the parent educator making sure to go through all the content and not necessarily allowing for as much interaction moments.

*Curriculum/teaching varies from power points at other sites.* The other two sites (Brooklyn and Cloquet) changed how they presented their information to more flexible approaches that they found would better serve the families in their program. At these sites, the parent education sessions were not as tightly bound to the AVANCE curriculum. An observer noted,

The [parent] education sessions are not quite structured. [Staff] came up with their own scheduled of topics based on what was provided to them by AVANCE. [Staff] doesn’t use a PowerPoint at all for their sessions.

The director at another site describes how they have adapted the model to be “very relaxed,” implying that the original structure inhibited learning at that site. She explains: In our small unit, you know, we’re not comparable to for instance the [other site]. And there’s been lots of discussion on how our people learn. How our people interact. And, what works and what doesn’t work. This has been brought about just from my background, from—for instance, when the program first became implemented at—when we started the program, I started following what the dynamics of the program had said, the structural. I could see that the parents weren’t—they just were not gathering the information. Then, after a discussion with the trainer, I expressed that to them that I went too and she felt maybe I should go back. So, I tried again to attempt to do it and we’re very—it’s very relaxed. It’s not—what should I say, a clinical environment. It’s just a very relaxed. So, along with that comes that structure of how they’re going to absorb this information. How they’re going to be able to gather and actually ponder some of the things that they’re learning with the curriculum.

This same director however clarifies how this adaptation does not affect the essence of the program, but rather the format,

You know, quite frankly, I think we're pretty, we're closer than I would have originally thought. And, unfortunately, math and statistics particularly are not my strongest suit. I mean I probably say, and because I want, I'm being conservative, maybe 80 percent and it's probably, you know, it's probably higher. We're probably adapting, we're probably [not] using the model more closely than a lot of other sites are so, but the family style meals, the practicum, you know, the 12-hour practicum, the, whether or not we'll be able to videotape and show those videotapes in group, I think those are the areas in which we, you know, we change things up, change things up the most.

Such “deviations” appear to be a positive aspect of the program at these sites. While parental sharing is not an explicit part of the AVANCE curriculum, such interactions are, as described earlier, felt by parents to be one of the most valuable parts of the program. Parents say that the program provides them with a highly prized opportunity to discuss their own parenting issues with peers and experts; in diverging from the set curriculum, or by not focusing on delivering a certain amount of content in an allocated time slot, staff provided a more valued experience to their participants. In sum, flexibility in the structure in which the program is delivered seems to have strengthened the adaptability of the program without affecting the content and the essence of the experience.

#### **D. How does staff understanding of roles shape program enactment?**

Staff members see themselves as having multifaceted roles. Many see being able to establish a close connection with parents as key to their work in the program, whether this is through shared experiences, community ties, common cultural background, or empathy. They see this relationship as important for them to then be able to connect the parents to the program's content, goals and services. This need for connection between parents and program leads some staff to want the program to be responsive to parent needs and concerns, and therefore they move it in that direction when they deem necessary.

*Multifaceted roles.* Staff members play multiple roles. As one staff member shared, I'm the supervisor of children services, so I create lessons, plan curriculum; I supervise the childcare staff. Let's see what else. I develop a relationship with the parents. I also help with curriculum; help with the parent educators—meeting with the parent educator and going over curriculum. Working with our home visitor and talking about the children and the things I see go on with the children, so she can bring it back to the families during the home visit, so that it's more

individualized. I also do assessments of the children, using the Ages and Stages<sup>7</sup> and developmental milestones.

The combination of roles sometimes seems to have conflicted with other responsibilities. At one site, roles overlapped as needed. One of the child development staff members talked about not having time to prepare when she is used as the substitute bus driver. In these occasions, she had no time before class starts to prepare because she had been out picking up families.

*Establishing a close connection.* Staff saw the establishment of a personal relationship with parents as a critical part of their role in the program. This could be facilitated by a variety of factors: being program graduates themselves (in line with AVANCE principles but was only a possibility at one site), sharing community and cultural bonds, or through the exercise of empathy, good listening and nonjudgementalism.

*Staff as program graduates.* Some staff felt that their status as program graduates helped them to establish personal relationships with the program participants. One home educator who had previously graduated from one site explained,

I was in the program prior. I'm actually a graduating parent. So I've had a home visitor come to my house and we've done this. So that was like first-hand experience. And then training when [Name] hired me. And I think I have natural ability to do it.

In the one site where this was the case, observers noted that the staff member who was a program parent seemed to understand the parents' needs better than other staff members, and this strengthened their relationship with parents. Other program staff relied on this staff member to either help them understand or deal with participant issues. Observers noted that this staff member was not embarrassed to talk about her AVANCE experience, allowing the participants to relate to them as peers and see them as models. They were also knowledgeable about resources in the community and the parents' needs.

*Staff with similar cultural background and experiences.* Most staff shared cultural and/or community backgrounds with program participants (program composition was described earlier), which they felt greatly facilitated the establishment of strong relationships with parents. This was evident across all three sites. A home educator explained, "I found out when people can share similarities with you, they're more open. When people have a commonality, when you have a common ground." This could include sharing an ethnic/national background. Sharing such connection seems to have facilitated the connection to parents. A staff member explained,

I had my appraising as a Haitian American, who I said "oh yes," could agree to certain things and then incorporate that, so I understood the parents' point of views, and be able to respect them in that manner 'cause we kind of understood where they were coming from. And that made it easier to work with their cultural - with the culture. We could understand better where they're coming

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<sup>7</sup> Ages and Stages (ASQ) is a developmental screener for children between one month to 66 months. <http://agesandstages.com/>.

from as far as raising their children, education, what they want, their goals. It made it easier for me.

This same staff member shared how it broke down barriers to be able to say, I understand your view on this and that because of how you was raised and because of your background, but I share the same upbringing as you and I could still look at it this way. So I'm not putting you down or not understanding where you're coming from, I'm just trying to show you a different way that you can look at it. So you have to know I understand when I say "oh yeah, I know too."

At this same site, a staff member explains how her own immigration history strengthened their work with parents,

I think even though I am, I'm a second generation American, I think my parents and I think my family is very, the immigrant experience is not, has not been lost on me and there's a lot of, there's always been a lot of talk and a lot of identifying with being, not a recent immigrant, but the experiences of my family. So I think that also comes into play with the families with whom I'm working with here. Yeah. So yeah. I think they're not, there's some pretty strong parallels and what and where there aren't parallels I think, you know, I think we're just, speaking for myself, you know, for the others on the staff who aren't, whose race and ethnicity is different from the families we serve, you know, I'd like to think that we're open-minded enough and interested in race and ethnicity and cultural enough that we are, that we learn from the families and we have that, those experiences inform every aspect of our program development.

At another site, the one director commented to the observer on a setback that occurred with hiring a director who was not culturally similar and did not speak Spanish. He shared,

It's important to have culturally sensitive staff, okay, and that was one of the fallbacks that we had early on. Culturally sensitive language, have the ability to speak the language and to be familiar with the different cultures, now just someone who's from one particular region or one particular country thinking that that's the way everyone is. So the person needs to be culturally sensitive and bilingual, very important.

Other staff related to participants by sharing their experiences as parents. The following comments illustrate this:

One thing I do use is my experience. Mothers like when you share yourself with them. And I would say things like, when I say oh my baby does that too, and explain how I handle it, then they realize, oh my child's not the only one that does this.

[Y]ou have a – let's say an older parent or a parent who has many children, they kind of just open up, just looking for somebody to talk and just want somebody to even be in the same like – I could say something and you know exactly what I'm

saying. I know what you're saying. We understand each other because we share the same experiences.

I think once you find that you find somebody who you're able to connect or you're able to talk to. It helps in the social need, because then you don't have to be snapping at the baby. That's just my take on it, because if you do not understand why a child's acting a certain way, you might react differently, if you do know why the child's acting that way. So if I was able to come to you and say, oh my child acts the same way, but I try this and this works.

Staff sometimes used their own ethnic identity or their identity as parents themselves to relate to parents and translate the knowledge as participants by including their own cultural identity in the description of an issue. For example, one observer noted, "She also addresses an issue of how Hispanic women feel that they always have to defer to their husbands and what they want." Similarly, at another session the observer notes, "[parent educator] talks about other things that she used to be seen done in her country like dunking a person into ice water with a fever, and that this should not be done." In this case, the parent educator is using a reference to her own country of origin to illustrate to parents how common parenting practices at home may not be appropriate. Other examples dealt specifically with being a parent. One observer reported that "[parent educator] gives example of diaper changing routines that she uses to distract her son from attempting to put his hand in the way of her changing him. She explains that supplies need to be ready to go." In another occasion, the observer reported that the [parent educator] explains that talking to children even less than 18 months is good and then gives an example of the sort of things she does with her son.

Being non-judgmental and a good listener was also part of establishing a close relationship with parents as seen in the following group of statements from the home educator, parent educator and toy instructor at one site :

Some[times] I sit anyway if I'm allowed to sit, because I want that parent to feel like I'm not judging them or any kind of way. I try to make sure the parent is comfortable with me being in the home.

[W]ith the parents, how I build that relationship is through our classroom time, and I show interest in whatever they are talking to me about, or trying to—for me, I'm open. I'm an open book with them because I know that if you want someone to trust you, you have to be transparent with them. This is the case. This is what I stand for. I always try to give them encouraging words to let them know the— yeah, to encourage them to let them know they can come to talk to me about whatever is going on and win their trust over that way.

The parent had said to me, I really enjoy the company, I really enjoy having somebody to talk to.

First I think I try to establish a relationship with the mother. I make the mother feel comfortable, and I let her observe how I treat the child or how I introduce myself to the baby. And when they get comfortable then I would bring out the toys or a book and try to model play with the baby, and pass on that book or toy to the mom, and try to get the interaction between the mom and the baby. And then while doing that, maintaining a conversation about whatever the mother would like to talk about, or even about child development.

*Close relationships created a sense of satisfaction for the staff.* Close and positive relationships also provided a sense of satisfaction to the staff, not only the parents. Staff then felt changes in the participant and/or knowledge exhibited by parents in the program. She's like I'm so happy about this toy box. Then she said I'm going to go home and I can get other boxes and I can always put the contact paper around it and yes, I feel satisfied when I hear them say things like that. I'm happy that some of the women, they're more relaxed. They actually found something that [they] can actually look forward to doing and enjoy it.

El, el programa me parece que fue muy fructífero, o sea, que dio mucho fruto. Y, y lo vemos con los clientes. Vemos no solamente los cambios, si no hacia dónde ellos quieren seguir. Muchos de ellos, quieren irse hacia su propio negocio. Otros quieren seguir – nos dijeron a través de este programa, quizá no sé si este programa fue la última parte de la vida de esa persona, que necesitaban como para decir: “Voy a seguir estudiando.” O, quizá fue la – el programa en sí, lo que le dijo: “Necesito seguir estudiando.” [The program it seems to me was very successful, it bore much fruit. And we see it with the clients. We see not only the changes, but also where they want to continue to go. Many of them want to start their own business. Others want to continue, they told us through this program, and perhaps I do not know if this program was the last experience they had in their life, but it seems it is what they need to say “I'm going to keep studying.” Or perhaps it was the program itself that told them said, “I need to continue to study.”]

*Connecting parents to program.* Building a relationship with parents allowed staff to help parents make connections between their own lives and what they were learning in the program.

I try to connect it with what the parents are learning about. So right now they're doing physical development, so we try to do activities that are geared more towards the physical and that would be the highlight of what we do with the children. Like today we're gonna do music and movement, because they're learning about physical development, so in that regard we use AVANCE, but in a different way to help develop our curriculum for the children. So when parents are talking about physical development we do something that reflects physical development. That's what we highlight as the teacher, child activity—the teacher guided activity. That's our main focus for the day. So whatever the topic is, we try to match it together with what we're doing here.

*Modeling/teaching behavior.* The staff at one site saw the modeling and teaching of parenting behavior to be part of their role. At one site, the home educator described how she modeled how to use a toy to encourage challenging play, saying,

I would bring age-appropriate toys, something I would know that would also challenge them. So the first thing I would pull out is a toy I know that they wouldn't be able to do just do in one second and pass out. Like I would bring like a nesting toy, and I would model how it goes into the baby, you know, how to make it fit, the colors, then allow the baby to try to figure it out.

Another home educator explained,

[T]he modeling is me doing it. I'm saying to the baby, oh it's blue, the crayon is blue, let's draw a blue line. Then I would try to pass it on to the mother.

In doing so, the staff person would teach "key concepts,"

And then I might teach the parent. I might say to the parent – I would give the parent some key concepts. You know what, scribbling is really good for them because it helps build their strength for writing. You know, I also noticed that she made a circle, that's advanced for her age, because right now they're scribbling, not making circles, and she's advanced. And you know, reading to the baby also helps encourage writing skills or school readiness skills while they're doing that. So I think the teaching come afterwards.

Doing this took careful observation to ascertain when (and if) and how to jump in to model a behavior. A home educator described this process, saying,

First I would bring out the toy or a book or – and say hi, how you doing and start conversation. Then I would observe how the parent responds to the child. Are they encouraging the child to [stay] back or just the social interaction itself? After observing, after I pull out the toy I would give the toy to the baby and then I'll model how to play with the baby. If the parent doesn't jump in to actually play with the toy, because I'll allow a couple of minutes or a second for the parent to be able to play with the baby. And if they don't jump into that interaction than I would model the play with the baby. Then I would say, why don't you go to mommy, give mommy the crayon. Let her do a line. Or give mommy the Q. What color is it mommy? And try to encourage the mommy to participate in play.

If staff members knew parents well, they could target their assistance to specific needs, as in the following case,

I had lots of good things this week. [Parent] has come such a long way. Now he feels more confident about using books with his daughter. The challenge for me is to get him to learn to praise her. Although he talks about her accomplishment very proudly, he doesn't give her direct praise. I am working with him on that so I do a lot of modeling for him.

[Parent name] was so amazed to see how much her son could do when administered the ASQ to him that she was moved to tear[s].

*Trying to ascertain and meet needs, connect parents to services.* Staff saw a major part of their role to try to meet the needs of the families, either through aspects of the AVANCE program or by connecting parents to outside resources. Staff described how they responded to perceived needs by building on top of the program curriculum, for example by matching the speakers to the needs of the parents:

We're really trying to match the advocacy with the immediate needs of the family. Even if it doesn't match what we're talking about as far as child development, but those great needs, so we try to match those speakers.

If something that I think can affect overall, like if I spoke to a parent and there was a need for someone to talk about housing, then I would talk to everyone to see if other parents have expressed that need. And go to [Name] and say hey, do you know of someone that we can call to come in as a third-hour speaker, then we try to develop activities that reflect what the parents are speaking about.

The home educator role, when a close connection was forged between home educator and parent, was ideal for directly helping parents with immediate needs and with making the home visiting experience stronger, as illustrated by the following quotes:

Then when the [possibility sheet] is done, then we'll have a conversation with mommy about questions they might have or about the baby's development, something I've noticed with the baby or something that was raised in the last visit.

...if I went to a visit and the parent had a question, I didn't have the answer or needed a refer[ral], and I didn't have one on me then, when I get back to the office, then I'll call the parent over the phone and say, we talked about this, this is what I've learned, here's the website or something like that. So the interaction is at the home, during the visit, over the phone, after group, before group, during mealtime.

Because I feel like that particular family needed a little more and I needed to give them resources also and to follow up. And the best way for me to follow up was to go and speak to the parent.

An observer noted an innovation at one particular site to support parents even more effectively,

The [parent educator] has been doing the first home visits with [the home educator]. [Both] have been talking about the parents need for support and outside referrals. The [home educator] provides a great deal of support to the parents and she participates in the classes with them helping with the newborns and sharing parenting ideas.

*Desire for program to be more "parent-centered."* Staff at one site expressed a desire to have the program be even more responsive to parent needs and less attached to following a set curriculum:

I think I would not be as concerned about the structure of the curriculum and have it be a little more of a therapeutic, organic – I hate that word – natural process where the parents are directing because I think that you can choose like a certain demographic, every group's going to be different and every parent's going to have different needs. And so I think that this program allows for that but I would probably be a little more looser with the curriculum planning. Not because – I mean, I like curriculum planning. But I think I would be a little more open to having it be more parent-driven.

This is in line with parent education staff at another site mentioning that parents want and seem to benefit from discussions, which are hard to fit in the parent education sessions given the amount of content that is to be delivered.

In general, when the home educator and other staff see their role as connecting with and establishing commonalities and a relationship with parents, and are able to accomplish this, the program is able to more effectively meet the needs of the families it serves. The staff mentioned that parents' needs were more closely met with relationships that were aligned culturally, with speakers that were aligned with their parents' needs, and with parent education sessions that would trade off some content for parent driven discussions.

### **3. How are experiences similar or different among the three sites?**

Based on the previous sections and on additional aspects observed in the programs we found sites diverged mostly on processes while preserving the basic core of the AVANCE program. While the program was similarly structured across the board around the three in-site components (the parent education session, the toy making session and the third-hour speaker) and the off-site component (the home visiting), the program varied across sites in how it was delivered. Among these differences were the mentioned differences in home visits with these being less frequent, shorter and less substantive at one of the sites. In addition, there were more adherences to direct instruction during parent education sessions at one of the sites, while less use of power point, more discussion and more flexibility was observed in the other two sites.

Overall, there did not seem to be explicit variations in content or structure, but rather processes, related to culture, except for one case in which the third-hour speaker component was difficult to enact due to the inability to provide third-hour speakers with some incentives in gratitude for their time. In this site the director mentioned the relation between this and culture, “which is a very traditional native, when you ask something of somebody [to compensate them] through the tobacco traditional way and/or you give them a thank-you gift”). Similarly, two sites used the meals to strengthen a sense of community among participants (children and parents), we well as to model behaviors.

Some sites built upon the content by adding information related to culture whether explicitly through handouts or implicitly through discussions of parenting within their

culture or background. In addition, one of the sites used a developmental screening tool to further enhance the work of the home educator and better match referral services to children. Beyond these aspects, different groups of parents brought different assets to the table related to customs and language, but most differences appeared unintentional and not linked to systemic or cultural differences that would require changes in content and form. In various instances parents expressed that the fact that the program offered this opportunity to “mothers” was in itself valuable, without any expressed additional needs related to culture being voiced. Instead, the opportunity for parental sharing and support was highly valued by parents across the board without cultural distinctions and a piece that could be strengthened based on the recommendations from some staff.

## **Conclusions**

Through the implementation of the program, parents had the opportunity to socialize, learn content that they appreciated, gain peer support, share experiences and reflect on their parenting practices. The toy making sessions were particularly useful for assessing parents’ needs, modeling interactions and supporting the content learned in the parent education sessions. Participants of all cultural and linguistic backgrounds reported positive experiences with the overall program as implemented in each site.

Parents valued the opportunity to socialize, relax and enjoy the sessions. In particular, they found the toy making sessions creative, fun, useful for their children’s development, providing them with transferable skills, although many mentioned that they were too brief. In addition, they described the parent education sessions as opportunities for learning how to be better parents, learn valuable content on parenting, and share individual experiences and issues. The child development component was described as a safe source of socialization for their children and an opportunity for them to learn valuable content. Home visits were highly valued when effectively enacted. Effective enactments included helping parents bridge the content and use the toys, a clear focus on the child, modeling, and providing a source of socialization and support to parents. Home visits that focused solely on assessment were less valued by parents.

Across sites, parents deeply valued the time to talk with their peers and receive support for their growth as parents. Child development was a particularly popular topic. Open-ended discussion was prized, and perhaps should be more directly encouraged. Parents felt strong social support from the program and their peers, without variation across sites or by cultural background. Parents expressed positive feelings about the program as a whole, without cultural exceptions. Parents also greatly appreciated the child development component, although this appeared to the researchers and according to staff to be the least developed component of the program, and the one with the least scaffolding. In addition, across sites, the home visitation component appeared to have had the most variation in program delivery and therefore parents’ perceptions varied greatly in terms of their usefulness and when describing their content and format.

Staff had an overall caring view of the parents with whom they worked. They appeared knowledgeable about the variety of difficulties parents faced. While they attributed the large majority of parent difficulties to poverty, they mentioned how cultural differences with mainstream culture were responsible for a portion of these difficulties, particularly parents' lack of understanding of how to navigate "the system." That is, supporting parents in the AVANCE program requires helping parents understand how to get access to the resources they need, and culture may be mediating this process.

The cultural match between the staff and the community seems to be key in facilitating the implementation process and in understanding and matching the needs of the parents. Staff members drawn from the community or who had experience working within the target community and the role for which they were hired appeared more understanding of parental difficulties, and were able to better interpret and deliver the AVANCE program. In line with this, it appears that culturally, while program content and format does not appear to be a concern, program delivery does matter. That is, sites introduced changes in the way the content was delivered to parents, in the way meals were provided, in the use of videos, and in some of the toys, to better match their parents. Changes were mostly stylistic, rather than in content. Staff understanding of the local community facilitated better experiences for parents in all the sites. In two of the sites, this flexibility implied not following a structured power point format, but rather more of a conversation structure with parents during the parent education sessions. At the one site that did follow the power point structure, the parent educator mentioned that the program could be actually be strengthened by incorporating the parent discussion piece into the curriculum.

Generally, the best experiences mixed AVANCE programming with peer support and time for open-ended discussion – parents report feeling they benefited, as well as happiness and contentment during such activities. Parents strongly valued the opportunity to socialize with other parents while their children have fun nearby.

Parents' recommendations for a better cultural fit between the program and the community were limited to accommodations regarding music, culture and language. The availability of some of the material in the language of the community facilitates delivery and parental engagement. While this has been the norm for AVANCE when working with Spanish-speaking communities, this was missing when working with parents' whose native language was not Spanish. In particular, the parents from the different communities served at the three sites studied may have benefitted from power point material that provided synonyms across different Hispanic dialects, or that were supported with materials in their first language. Some of these communities are used to being mostly taught in English, but since this is not really their first tongue, some degree of adaptation of the materials would support the learning process. This is more difficult in communities such as Brooklyn, where parents differed in the first language between themselves.

## **Recommendations**

*Support from AVANCE.* Drawing upon data from this qualitative study, we propose that the program would greatly benefit from a stronger support system from AVANCE, particularly in the early stages of implementation (e.g. the first year) and specifically to walk through adaptations or different aspects that may need to differ for each enactment of the program and on the home visitation component.

*Encourage staff recruitments that matches the community served.* In more than one occasion, it appeared that the staff was able to more closely relate to the parents, respond to their needs, and transfer knowledge when their background, experience and or cultural background related in some way to the population served. This was true for all toy instructors, parent educators and home educators. In addition, this could be strengthened with job descriptions or profiles made available by AVANCE for each staff role, to ensure that the staff hired on each site is knowledgeable on the program content and has the appropriate experience for the role.

*Peer support.* AVANCE should consider how to leverage the success of the parental peer support/social aspect of the program, examining materials and practices to look for ways to strengthen and extend the parts of the program that allow parents to raise and discuss concerns and to learn about child development within a social context in which they can share their own experiences. Workshops could be part of the program, formalizing this way a time where parental discussion would be expected and promoted. Parents could be the ones leading these workshops. In addition, the program could support networks of AVANCE parents (current and past) so that the peer support asset extends beyond the program period.

*Increasing length and/or time.* In addition, the extension of the program to more hours/time was a recurrent theme across sites. The amount of the information in the program, the potential for program impact, as well as the possibility of program participants to receive support beyond the program content all seem to support this premise. In terms of time restrictions, one potential solution implemented in some of the sites was for parents to take the toys home to finish them. This might not be a practical approach for all parents. For the parent education session, it could help to hand out the handouts (power point) the session before, so that parents who have some time at home might be able to look at them before hand and follow the parent-education sessions better. Alternatively, revisions to the materials to shorten them and make them more interactive might facilitate the delivery of the content.

*Whole family/male involvement.* The program could also include a stronger emphasis and effort on involving men or other members of their households, even if in separate sessions, so that they can benefit from the program and become active proponents of changes in their homes. As it is, mothers become translators of the information in their home, and this process can be easily challenged by fathers and/or made more difficult.

*Focus home visits on training, support and modeling.* There were different enactments and purposes in each site in terms of the home visitation. In some sites, these had a clear training, support and modeling purpose, while in another site these had solely an assessing purpose. The emphasis of the former over the latter appears to make these significantly more effective and valued, and more in line with the AVANCE purpose for this component. The training, support and modeling aspect of the home visit should be supported, and each site should discuss how to strengthen these aspects of the home visit. In addition, it seems that home educators would benefit from training that clarifies the aim of this component, and presents them with alternative strategies or examples to achieve such aims. Given that videos are already part of the home visitation experience, some of these could easily be included in training sessions.

*Provide the tools for translating some of the material to the primary language.* As has been the norm in the past when working with Spanish-speaking populations, community relevant language translations of other material available in each site would strengthen the program. AVANCE could potentially provide a template or resources for translations of concepts and handouts to be made available to different communities in their relevant language. This should probably be encouraged, in particular when working with communities with a wider variety of first-languages.

*Further develop the ECE component.* At all three sites both observers and staff described the child development component to be a unique opportunity to deliver content to children. Even though parents showed satisfaction with the child development piece, observers and staff noted the lack of structure and support for it. In particular, it appears this component would benefit from scaffolding and a stronger curricular content. In addition, AVANCE requires that this component be delivered in spaces following the ECERS, which is not the appropriate tool for infant and toddlers. This would be the ITERS for children under 2 and a half years of age.