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A Qualitative Evaluation of School-Based Family Resource and Youth Service Centers

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As part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, school-based Family Resource/Youth Service Centers were commissioned to address those poverty-related issues that attenuate children and youths' coming to school prepared to learn. The centers had flexible mandates and were to adapt their service profiles to local urban, suburban and rural communities. A variety of grounded, inductive qualitative strategies were employed in an implementation evaluation that yielded profiles or domains of program elements, and descriptions of implementation strategies and impact on participants. These program descriptors were considered accurate by program personnel, formed the basis for training new program coordinators, and have served as reliable predictors of educational outcomes for program participants, thus affirming the utility of the qualitative evaluation approaches.

KEY WORDS: family resource/youth service center; qualitative evaluation.

Approximately two decades ago, a variety of grass roots and university-initiated family support programs arose in response to the ongoing effects of poverty, joblessness, poor health care, substance abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, and other socially disintegrative factors. These programs provide

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a wide variety of emotional, informational, and instrumental assistance for families (Zigler, 1994).

The basic premise for these programs rests on evidence that children's sense of self and achievement is tied to that of their parents, and that the quality of parents' lives is affected by the resources and environment of the community in which the family lives (Weissbourd, 1994). Other influences on the development of family support programs include the recognition that the child service system tends to be fragmented, inaccessible, duplicative, and ineffective (Illback, 1994; Saxe, Cross, & Silverman, 1988); and evidence for the efficacy of preventive versus remedial crisis-oriented programs (Schorr & Schorr, 1988; Zigler, 1994).

At the same time, there was growing recognition that, although schools contribute to the social and academic development of children, by themselves they cannot make up for the lack of resources many students experience outside of school (e.g., Alexander & Entwisle, 1996), and that parental involvement in the education process can have significant positive effects on student achievement (Christenson, Rounds, & Gorney, 1992). This has led to the development of comprehensive integrated home–school–community family support initiatives (Booth & Dunn, 1996).

School-based family resource and support programs assume that socially disintegrative factors that affect families attenuate the ability of children to fully profit from their educational experiences. The primary focus of these programs is to enhance the participation of families in the educational process and to strengthen the capacity of families to enable children's readiness for learning. Broadly, this is to be achieved by empowering families to access a variety of services and resources, and to forge cooperative links among families, schools, and communities. (Dunst, Trivette. & Deal, 1988; Kagan & Weissbourd, 1994).

These programs are proliferating rapidly, and while there have been some evaluations of them (e.g., Pecora, Fraser, Nelson, McCoskey, & Neezan, 1995; Weiss & Jacobs, 1988), their diffusion has outpaced implementation and outcome evaluation efforts in this area (Dryfoos, 1994; Powell, 1994). This paper describes the qualitative implementation evaluation of one of the more ambitious school-based family support efforts, Kentucky's statewide Family Resource and Youth Service Center (FRYSC) initiative. Consistent with the purpose of this special issue, this paper not only reports an evaluation of the FRYSCs, but also reviews the particular qualitative approaches employed in this study. A brief description of the FRYSC program and the specific challenges to evaluation presented by its features is provided, followed by the relevant characteristics of qualitative research that make this approach particularly appropriate for this evalu-

ation. Next, the evaluation of the FRYSC program is described as illustrative of the application of qualitative research tenets and methods.

BACKGROUND

Family Resource/Youth Service Center Program

Kentucky's Family Resource and Youth Service Center program (FRYSC) is an essential component of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). Family Resource Centers (FRCs) in the elementary schools are encouraged by legislation to address core services that include (a) full-time preschool child care for children 2 and 3 years of age; (b) after school care for children ages 4 through 12 with full-time accessibility during the summer and when school is not in session; (c) a comprehensive Family in Training program for new and expectant parents; (d) a Parent and Child Education (PACE) program; (e) a mechanism to support and train child day care providers, and (e) health service coordination and referral. Youth Service Centers (YSCs) in the middle and high schools provide (a) referrals to health and social services; (b) employment counseling, training, and placement; (c) summer and part-time job development; (d) drug and alcohol abuse counseling; and (e) family crisis and mental health counseling. At the secondary level, the focus is on the needs of youth as they face the problems of adolescence and adulthood.

In addition to core services required by legislation, centers provide a variety of other services. Examples of optional services for a FRC might include (a) informational clearinghouse; (b) recreation program development; (c) addressing child and family needs in areas such as housing, social services, and financial management; and (d) GED classes for parents. At YSCs, optional services might include (a) coordinating with the local legal system; (b) developing school-based health services; (c) facilitating reentry into schools from residential programs; (d) peer mediation/conflict resolution programs; and (e) providing after school recreational programs. The core services components are somewhat more representative of YSC activities than FRCs. However, both types of centers engaged in a much greater variety of activities than the core services, and thus the core services alone do not provide an adequate representation of center programming.

During the 1991-1992 school year, 133 centers were funded through a request for proposals RFP) process. The program has since expanded rapidly, with 222 centers operational in the 1992–1993 school year, 385 in the 1993–1994 school year, 455 in 1994–1995, and 560 in the 1995-96 school year (serving over 700 school buildings). The rapid expansion of the pro-

gram is consistent with the legislative mandate to implement the program fully in all eligible school buildings across the state. Applicant school districts are required to conduct community needs assessments and develop annual workplans to meet identified needs. Although initially at least 20% of the children or youth enrolled in the school are required to be eligible for free and reduced price school meals (a measure of poverty) for the center to be funded, all children, youth, and families in a funded school are eligible to receive services. FRYSCs are operated by coordinators who are selected primarily based upon their familiarity with the local school system and/or community. Coordinators' backgrounds vary considerably, ranging from a variety of human service professionals and educators to paraprofessionals such as a retired coal miner and a factory worker. The modal staffing for a center is a coordinator, an assistant, and volunteers. Centers are located in single offices or suites in school buildings, or in trailers on school grounds. Some centers serve more than one school. Consistent with other family support programs, the general mission of FRYSCs is to reach out and establish connections with and among families and students, schools, and community agencies. They are supposed to carry out their tasks by adapting their services and approaches to local characteristics and resources; to, whenever possible, broker or mobilize community resources, rather than provide direct services; and, to empower families to identify and utilize formal and informal resources to meet their own needs.

An initial group of about 40 coordinators participated in a 1-week immersion orientation which emphasized an empowerment mission (Dunst, *et al.*, 1988), and bonded them into a mutual support network. Coordinators who came into the project subsequent to this group received little or no orientation or initial training, aside from an annual FRYSC conference. The state branch that administers the project experienced an unplanned complete turnover for every year of the project. This resulted in coordinators having few guidelines for the start up and operation of their centers, aside from a needs assessment carried out by the those who prepared the initial application. In addition, coordinators came to rely more on local informal peer networks. This lack of central direction may have unintentionally facilitated the creativity and empowerment of coordinators, and may have increased the variation in program approaches.

Evaluation Challenges

The characteristics of comprehensive family support programs in general, and FRYSCs in particular, present a number of challenges for evaluation. The FRYSC diffusion process has, in essence, resulted in a set

of"field experiments" in which coordinators are selected by local committees, given broad mission and service guidelines, and "turned loose" to meet identified needs however they can.

FRYSCs are rapidly expanding, evolving programs that take considerable time to reach a stable (i.e., evaluable, Wholey, 1979) level of operation. They have been encouraged to adapt to (i.e. vary with) local conditions, and to provide or broker whatever services are needed to meet the needs of participants. As such, it is not only impossible to standardize the treatment in such programs, it is difficult to specify the actual program parameters (Weiss & Jacobs, 1988). Knapp (1995) referred to this as the elusive independent variable. The children, parents, families, and groups who choose their level of participation also compromise sample integrity and represent differing units of analysis. Moreover, as full-coverage programs that are mandated to serve all families, these programs leave little room for comparison of control groups. They present ethical, political, and logistical problems for withholding services, and factors that influence participation are difficult to secure in comparison groups (Powell, 1994).

Finally, FRYSCs, as do other family support programs, address concerns within the multiple contexts of family, school, and community, each of which comprises subsystems, all of which influence program interventions and outcomes. Bond and Halpern (1988) described their cross-project evaluation as a multisite, multimethod demonstration in which methods were confounded with site and population characteristics.

Given these complexities, it is not surprising that evaluations of school-based family support services have also been plagued by the lack of sufficiently valid and reliable measures that capture program processes and impacts at the varying levels of child, family, school, and community. Evaluators, as well as program administrators and staff, share the concern that evaluations do not tap what really matters in integrated services (Larner, 1992; Schorr & Schorr, 1988). Thus, evaluators struggle with the dilemma noted by Weiss (1988) to evaluate with inappropriate standard measures and risk no results, or evaluate with unproven measures and risk both credibility and results.

Rationale for Qualitative Methods

To capture the process and impacts of these complex and dynamic programs, there is growing consensus for a shift from the positivist research paradigm with its emphasis on pure variables devoid of contextual influences, manipulation and control of processes being studied, neutral experimenter maintaining distance from passive subjects, and search for general

summative conclusions. As Weinstein *et al.* (1991) concluded, "psychological methodology and ecological questions are not compatible bedfellows" (p. 401).

Instead, reports from the field describe the need for process evaluation, collaboration between program personnel and evaluators, incremental clarification rather than general conclusions, and a focus on action research in which results are continuously employed to inform program decisions (Cronbach & Associates, 1980; Illback, Zins, Maher, & Greenberg, 1990; Jacobs, 1988; Weinstein *et al.*, 1991). This leads to a consideration of the utility of qualitative research approaches.

The growing interest in qualitative evaluation and research approaches is reflected in a number of comprehensive books (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1990). Patton's (1986, 1990) pragmatic approach, which he called "utilization-focused evaluation," best captures our evaluation process. That is, a pragmatic approach involves the selection of methods to match the practical problem at hand, rather than being dictated by some abstract set of principles. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are seen as complementary, not competing, approaches, and "In practice, the naturalistic approach may often involve moving back and forth between inductive, open-ended, and phenomenological encounters with programs to more hypothetical-deductive attempts to verify "hypotheses" or solidify ideas that emerged from those more open-ended experiences" (Patton, 1990, p. 194).

Patton (1990) listed several situations for which qualitative approaches are particularly appropriate, including (a) in new fields of study where few definitive hypotheses exist, and little is known about the phenomenon; (b) when programs are implemented incrementally by a process of adapting to local conditions and needs, in which case the methods used to study implementation must be open-ended, discovery-oriented, and capable of describing developmental processes and program changes; (c) for process evaluation, because depicting process (understanding how a program operates) requires detailed description, process is fluid and dynamic, and participants' perceptions are a key in process considerations; and, (d) to confirm or add depth and detail to quantitative results.

As can be seen, each of these applies to the evaluation of FRYSCs. The lack of knowledge about how these centers operate appears to reflect the national level of information in this area. Weissbord (1994) noted that family support programs are faced with demands to define themselves more clearly, as the principles and philosophy of family support leave the actual substance or content of programs undefined. Knapp (1995) stated that if comprehensive, collaborative services can be so many different things, it makes sense to put a great deal of emphasis on the description of particular

cases of such services. He noted that qualitative "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) are especially appropriate.

Thus, in the absence of the controlled implementation of specified interventions, our task was to find out what coordinators were *doing* to fulfill a mandate that was both flexible and ambitious. That is, they were to adapt to local circumstances, to attenuate the impacts of poverty on families, and to increase their participation in an educational system from which most of them were estranged. The goal of the qualitative evaluation was to open up the black box and produce a detailed set of program descriptors that could inform the practice of center coordinators as well as national family support efforts. These qualitative findings would also serve as the basis for quantitative descriptors of the degree of implementation of various program elements or domains within and across centers. In turn, these descriptors would be used in the assessment of relationships between degree of program implementation and outcomes associated with program participation.

METHOD

General Considerations

To produce the thick description that characterizes qualitative research and evaluation, the evaluator must enter into and spend time in the real world settings under investigation. Thus, qualitative approaches are often depicted as employing "grounded theory" (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), in that the results and conclusions are inductively grounded in real-world observations, rather than deducted from a priori theories. In the present evaluation, this required us to spend time in FRYSCs, learn from coordinators, and generate program descriptions from these experiences.

Knapp (1995) recommended several types of studies to evaluate comprehensive services for children and families. The present study included two of the approaches recommended by Knapp: (a) multiple case thick descriptions of collaborative services that address such questions as, what do providers do to integrate their efforts, and what forces and conditions impinge on their attempts to address social needs through collaborative efforts; (b) profiles of individual participation and change that address such questions as how does the individual child or family participate in collaborative services, what does participation involve, and in what ways do these individuals change. Knapp also recommended analyses of data from management information systems (MIS). The overall evaluation of which the present qualitative study was a part included an MIS system that was im-

plemented in all centers across the state (Illback & Kalafat, 1995). Data from this system were examined to triangulate findings from the qualitative evaluation.

Design and Sampling

Rodwell (1995) described a constructivist qualitative research design known as an *emergent* design, which was basically employed in this study. The design is called emergent because it evolves as data and stakeholders (participants) are identified. Participants' identities emerge through purposeful sampling methods. Utilizing participants' inputs, the evaluation involves three phases. In the first phase, *orientation and overview*. the evaluator enters the process without an a priori theory or questions, as participants tell the evaluator what (s)he ought to know. The goals of this stage are to obtain enough information from the stakeholder perspectives to identify what is important to follow up on in detail in the next phase, and to identify other important stakeholder groups. Using "somewhat directed" interviewing, the evaluator focuses on discovering details about the agency, the community and the larger environmental contexts that affect the program.

In the second phase, *focused exploration* moves from general discovery to more targeted probing, as analysis of the data from the first phase allows general themes to emerge that require further investigation. More structured interviewing and observations are carried out with participants who have been selected for maximum variation of viewpoints and issues.

The last phase consists of a comprehensive "member check" to obtain confirmation from program personnel that the report has captured the data as constructed by informants.

The first two waves of this study corresponded to Rodwell's first two phases. The design did not exactly follow the phases outlined by Rodwell in that member checks of the themes and patterns in the first wave and second waves were carried out prior to the second and third waves, respectively.

According to Patton (1990), qualitative investigations are characterized *by purposeful* sampling approaches. The logic underlying purposeful sampling is different from that of probability sampling that typifies quantitative approaches. The logic and power of probability sampling depends on selecting random and statistically representative samples that permit generalization to a larger population. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases whose in-depth study will illuminate the particular questions under consideration. There are different

strategies for selecting information rich cases, and the logic of each serves a particular purpose.

The centers included in the first wave of this study were selected through an *intensity* sampling approach. An intensity sampling consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely, as in best or worst cases). The goal here was to obtain a substantial introductory understanding of center operations and issues that could inform the investigations in subsequent waves.

In the second and third waves, centers were chosen through a *purposeful random* sampling approach. The logic here is that random sampling even of small samples will substantially increase the credibility of the results. While this sampling approach aims to reduce concerns about possible bias in selecting cases for study, it still does not permit statistical generalization.

The selection of families for interviews in each wave represents a form of intensity sampling called typical case sampling (Patton, 1990). Coordinators were asked to identify families that would illustrate how they provided multiple services to families in need. The purpose of this sampling was described by Knapp as a bottom-up approach of anchoring the investigation of service delivery to the experiences of the consumer. It should be noted that, while sampling of nonusers of services would provide added information, such information would not be relevant to this particular purpose.

In Wave 1 of the present study, an intensity sample of 10 centers was chosen. Selection criteria were that centers were in operation for at least 1 year, and, according to state officials who monitored the centers, were exemplars that appeared to be providing a range of services that was representative of the array of programming that existing centers had developed to that date. The centers were also chosen to represent urban (2 FRC, 1 YSC), suburban (2 FRC, 1 YSC), and rural (1 FRC, 2 YSC) geographic regions. The goal of this phase was for participants (coordinators, staff, principals, and families) to "tell evaluators what they ought to know" about FRYSCs. General themes and patterns of program activities emerged in this phase.

In the second wave, a sample of 12 centers was randomly chosen with the goal of yielding greater variability across sites. This was a blocked random sample, as centers were randomly chosen to fill urban (2 YSC, 2 FRC), suburban (4 FRC), and rural (1 YSC, 3FRC) categories. In addition, 3 centers from the first wave were selected for second site visits, in an effort to discern developmental processes. Two of these centers were chosen for revisits because they were operated by new coordinators who had appeared to be struggling in some of the domains that emerged in the first wave

(connection with community and with the school). The third was randomly selected. Themes that emerged from the first wave shaped the inquiry in this phase. It was expected that in the random sample some themes would be confirmed, other would not, and new ones would emerge.

In the third wave, 10 additional centers were selected at random (6 FRC, 4 YSC) and 3 centers from wave 2 (2 FRC, 1 YSC) were randomly selected for revisits. For this wave, centers were assessed in specific operational domains that were identified in the first two waves and member checks. In this wave, the qualitative descriptors evolved into quantitative ratings of degree of program implementation. These were the specific program descriptors that would be used in the next phase of evaluation: linking implementation to outcomes. Because of the qualitative evaluation focus of this paper, only brief overviews of this wave are included in the remaining sections of this paper in order to illustrate the complementary relationship between qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Data Collection

In each wave, site visits were carried out by the first author and a different advanced graduate student. These individuals conducted two site visits together in order to check the reliability of their observations (Wave 1), the emerging categories (Wave 2), and their implementation domain ratings (Wave 3). The site visits lasted 4–5 hours. According to Patton, the three main methods of qualitative data collection are observation, interviewing, and records review. All of the data collection methods described below were employed during the site visits in each wave of the study, with some modifications as noted.

Coordinator and Staff Interviews and Document Review

At each center, interviews were conducted with the coordinator and any staff or volunteers s(he) wished to include. The number and type of staff made available at each center was left up to the coordinator, and varied from center to center. For example, at one Youth Service Center, the coordinator had arranged social work field placements, and thus four social work students were included in the interviews. At a rural Family Resource Center, the coordinator used volunteers extensively and had empowered them to assume a good deal of shared responsibility for the center. The interview at this center was conducted with a group of parent volunteers along with the coordinator. Other coordinators chose to demonstrate

their collaboration with community gatekeepers and arranged group interviews with these personnel. These varying arrangements could not have been anticipated, and thus the inductive approach yielded information as to the various ways that coordinators enhanced their service capabilities.

Coordinators were told that the purpose of the site visits was for evaluators to learn about the operation of the centers—the who, what, how, and why of what they do. It was emphasized that the purpose of the visit was not program monitoring, which was done by visits from state personnel. Rather, consistent with an action research frame, the goal was to clarify how FRYSCs operate for the purpose of sharing among coordinators for program development and management, training new coordinators, and informing an interested national audience. By prior agreement, no individual center or coordinator was identified in our reports. The aim was to create an open atmosphere in which coordinators felt free to share their successes and frustrations.

Although an effort was made to keep the coordinator interviews conversational and collaborative, more structure was added in each wave of the evaluation. Patton listed three types of qualitative interviews: (a) the informal conversational interview, which relies entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction; (b) the general interview guide approach, which involves outlining a set of issues to be explored that serves as a basic checklist to make sure that all relevant topics are covered; and (c) the standardized open-ended interview, which consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words. The pilot interviews of this study employed the conversational interview, and the remainder of the interviews employed the general interview guide. Even though the guide for Wave 3 was quite detailed, the interview format was not as formal or standardized as the third type of interview described by Patton.

Prior to the first wave of site visits, two pilot visits consisting of coordinator and principal interviews were carried out in an urban FRC and a YSC that served both rural and (bussed) urban youths. Based on these pilots, and emerging from the ongoing site visits, the first wave interviews covered such topics as needs assessment approaches, service patterns (including barriers and facilitators to program development, and best practices), extent of and strategies for obtaining parent and community involvement with the school and center, connections between center activities and the missions of involving parents in the education process and enhancing school readiness, and strategies for empowering families.

In Wave 2, these categories were developed in greater detail, and levels of implementation within each of these categories began to emerge. In the third wave, Innovation Configuration Analysis (Hall & Hord, 1987) was employed as a tool for monitoring program implementation. This procedure consists of identifying relevant components (operational features) of programs and specifying various levels of their implementation from "not implemented" to "fully implemented". The resultant measure is called an Innovation Components Configuration (ICC) map.

Drawing on findings from the first two waves of site visits, a committee of evaluators, coordinators, and state personnel developed an ICC map that was employed to summarize the wave three site visits.

Document Review

Prior to the interviews, the coordinators sent a copy of their annual work plan which listed the goals' objectives and program activities for the current school year. Evaluators perused the work plans and, during the site visits, asked coordinators to provide any necessary clarification. In addition to the work plans, other documents assembled by the coordinators to depict their activities were reviewed. These included brochures, newsletters, needs surveys, in-kind contribution logs, and community health and social service information materials.

Principal Interview

In each wave, the principal was interviewed alone. These interviews remained constant across the waves, employing the questions in Table I.

Parent Interviews

Waves 1 and 2. In each wave, coordinators at each center were asked to select parents from two families that were representative of the type and array of services that they were providing. In each wave, the sample consisted of mothers, with the exception of one father per wave. There were 40 parents in the first two waves. Eighty-five percent were in their 30s or 40s; 77% were White, 23% Black; 50% were single; all were high school or less educated; all were low SES; families had 1 to 6 children (M = 2.8). Table I lists the questions employed in the first two waves.

Wave 3. In the third wave, the parent interviews were expanded into more detailed interviews. The interviews were meant to capture parents'

Table I. Principal and Family Interview[a]

Principal interview
What do you see as the main purpose of the center?
What does the center do for you and your school?
How integrated (known, used) is the center into the school?
How involved is the community with the center?
Tell me about some of the accomplishments of the center.
How does the center affect school perfoormance? How do you know? (indicators).
What difficulties/barriers have you seen to the success of the center?
Family interview
How did you get involved in the center?
What services has the center provided to your family?
Tell me about the coordinator.
What is your current involvement in the center?
What effect has your involvement had on you and you family?

[a]These interviews were not strictly structured as the intent was to keep them as conversational as possible. These questions may have been phrased differently in different contexts and followed by various clarifying questions.

experience of the way in which coordinators provide assistance; and, to identify specific coordinator actions (behaviors) that served to empower families, enhance their sense of self-efficacy, and link them with skills and resources to meet their own needs and support their children's educational efforts. As in the first two waves, coordinators were asked to select the parents. These interviews pursued themes that had emerged in the first two waves as well as themes from the family support literature, including those of empowering families to meet their own needs (Dunst *et al.*, 1988) and promoting parental involvement with the educational process (Christenson *et al.*, 1992).

In addition, Dunst and his colleagues have been gathering evidence that effective helping is "not simply a matter of whether or not helpseeker needs are met, but rather the *manner* in which needs are met that is likely to be enabling and empowering" (Dunst, Trivene, & Hamby, in press, p. 4). Twenty-three questions were developed to elicit information about the circumstances of the family's situation, types of assistance received, family accomplishments and changes, and strategies that Dunst, Trivette, Starnes, Hamby, and Gordon (1991) posited as enhancing and empowering families. These included enhancing a sense of community, mobilizing resources and support, sharing responsibility and collaboration, and protecting family integrity.

The parents' responses to the interviews were summarized in sets of field notes. These notes were subjected to content analysis which yielded patterns or categories of responses across centers. The notes were then reviewed again and responses were put into the categories by both inter-

viewers, who resolved differences through discussion. This process resulted in the combination or elimination of some categories.

A total of 22 parents were interviewed in the 13 centers visited during the third wave. Eighty-two percent were in their 30s or 40s, 14% in their 20s, and one parent was 18; 59% were single; 77% were White, 23%, Black; all were high school or less educated (5 were taking college courses); all were low SES; families had 1 to 5 children ($M = 2.6$).

Observations

As is consistent with qualitative field work, interviews and formal document reviews were supplemented by a variety of observations during the site visits:

The Physical Setting of the Centers. How accessible or easy to locate; how comfortable and inviting; and availability of materials such as books, tapes, community services brochures. Examples: accessibility was partially assessed by asking a student upon entering the school to direct or take us to the resource center; there was ongoing unresolved discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the center being located in the school building or in an outbuilding or trailer near the school; centers ranged from somewhat formal office settings to more homelike settings that included continuously available coffee and food brought in by parents, and well-stocked clothing closets.

Demeanor of the Assistant. This individual was nearly always present in the center, whereas the coordinator was usually in the school or community. As such, they must be comfortable around children or adolescents, as well as parents, school personnel, and community personnel.

Ongoing Interpersonal Interactions. How did the coordinator relate to the principal, teachers, students, and community members. Examples: some coordinators could joke and relax with the principal and teachers, while others were still in the establishing relationships state, were more formal, or were "breaking in" a new principal; some coordinators could walk into any ongoing class; most coordinators were greeted by students in the halls or even hugged by younger students; some coordinators were able to round up an impressive number of agency personnel for a luncheon during the site visit (all site visits included lunch to help asses these interpersonal interactions); one site visit was conducted with the coordinator and group of parents sitting around a coffee pot, as parents in this center had a strong sense of participation and ownership of the program; many site visits included home visits which were particularly revealing in regard to the degree to which families were empowered or remained "clients" (e.g., one center

had hired a part-time social worker who answered every question the evaluator directed to a parent, oblivious to every nonverbal cue the evaluator could muster).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton list a variety of methods for enhancing rigor in qualitative research. In the present study four methods were employed:

Prolonged Engagement and Persistent Observation in the Context of the Phenomenon Under Investigation. Thirty-two centers were visited for approximately 4 hours each over a period of 3 years, and evaluators also spent many hours with coordinators and parents in meetings and conferences; the revisits of 6 centers also yielded new insights into center operations and provided a longitudinal or developmental view that complemented the snapshot visits.

Peer Debriefing. The first author regularly reviewed methods and findings with the second author who had extensive experience with the centers, but was not involved in the site visits; regular meetings were also held with the advanced graduate assistants, as well as a regional official who had remained in his position since the beginning of the FRYSC project. These consults provided clarification of findings, fresh insights, and multiple lenses through which to view the phenomena.

Member Checks. This involved ongoing checking of findings with the coordinators, which was accomplished through discussions at their annual conferences, meetings with individuals from their state coordinators association, and the formation of the ad hoc committee to develop the ICC tool. Patton considered this a form of triangulation through multiple analyses by having the findings reviewed by those who were studied.

Triangulation. This was accomplished with multiple methods (interview, observation, survey, document reviews), multiple investigators (different students in each wave), and multiple data sources. These data sources included quantitative data (MIS and teacher surveys) that were gathered concurrently with the qualitative data. These data are not reported in this study, except to provide an example of triangulation.

RESULTS

Wave 1: Opening the Black Box

Content analysis of the initial efforts to describe FRYSC activities yielded a number of themes.

Comprehensive Center Services.

These centers were family-centered in their orientation as contrasted with a more bureaucratic agency-centered approach. That is, they brokered and delivered a wide variety of wraparound services to meet whatever family needs were identified, without extensive forms and procedures, eligibility requirements, or limiting service categories. For example, coordinators arranged school-based immunizations for students and GED classes for their parents; helped families find adequate housing; got merchants to donate shoes, eyeglasses, and alarm clocks; and, taught parents to manage budgets. The creativity of coordinators in meeting family needs was illustrated by a variety of "best practices," including:

Annual "Fall Ready Fests" in which clothing, school supplies, and other materials that students needed to return to school were donated by community merchants and arrayed in the school auditorium in booths manned by parent volunteers. In addition, local health personnel provided necessary immunizations to children at this time.

A Youth Service Center organized a "Reality Store" in the school auditorium in which volunteer representatives from local businesses and agencies, such as grocery stores and banks, set up booths. Students were assigned job titles, "paid" equivalent salaries, and had to budget their resources as they made use of community services.

A Family Resource Center employed parent volunteers to place calls to every family in the school 2–3 times per year in which they elicited feedback, suggestions, and needs. Calls were logged, and the logs were shared with the school principal for her School-Based Decision-Making Council.

MIS data on over 14,000 families confirmed the variety of services provided by centers.

Community Connections

As indicated in the above examples, most coordinators were making efforts to connect with community agencies and resources, and were able to call on existing resources for referrals, for in-kind contributions, and to help in program provision.

Family Connections.

Based on both qualitative and quantitative MIS data on family characteristics, centers appeared to be serving families in need, and were making headway in bringing parents (mostly mothers) into schools. Parent

interviews provided evidence of increased parent confidence and competence for participating in their children's' educational process. For example, a mother of three said:

> I started coming to GED classes here because it's close to home. Now I volunteer in the school. I used to be so shy, I didn't know what to say that would work, so I wouldn't come to school or talk to the principal or the teachers. For example, when other kids were picking on my son on the bus. Now I'm around, I know the kids, the teachers, and the principal, so if there's a problem, I can go talk to any of them, without yelling, in a way that works because it gets me what I want. I see some parents who won't come in, or who come in and yell, and either way they don't get what they want.

School Connections.

Next to the coordinator, the most critical element in the success of the center is the support of the principal. Nearly all the coordinators had established solid relationships with their principals, although there were some instances of micromanagement by principals. Principals were able to identify specific benefits that they derived from the presence of a Family Resource or Youth Service Center in their school. For example, principals' comments included:

> I see parents in this school that I would never see without the Family Resource Center.
>
> I'm in and out of there constantly—I use her brain. She's helped us get grants, has taken day care off our hands.
>
> The FRC has no threat or stigma like the principal or counselor.
>
> We are giving parents a different experience of the school—a caring place.
>
> We now have resources—a clearinghouse to them—that can turn families and kids around whom we might not have had resources for last year.
>
> If Kentucky Education Reform fails completely, the FRC needs to stay because it has more impact than technology and curriculum changes. I see impact on attendance.
>
> We have more participation from the community—we know each other better and our school has a better reputation now.

Centrality of the Coordinator

The scope and quality of the services offered and the "feel" (psychological, cultural, and temporal accessibility) of the centers was to great degree dependent upon the characteristics of the coordinators. These

coordinators exhibited a combination of warmth, acceptance, energy, determination, and resourcefulness. These characteristics are reflected in the comments of parents and community gatekeepers. Parents' responses to the open-ended question, "Tell me about the coordinator," elicited such responses as:

> She's very encouraging to me. She is there for you no matter what. She is easy to talk to, so even kids in school go to her with their problems. She made me feel comfortable to come in.

> She's easy to talk to. She listens and puts herself in your place and doesn't give the impression that she doesn't have time. She cares about what's wrong. She calls if she hasn't seen me. She found work for my husband. I don't know how she can do so much and be so many places.

> It comes from the heart, not the wallet. She doesn't take no for an answer; she's a miracle lady. I hope I can pay back all the help I've received. I've started to volunteer after work.

> I don't think of them as just doing their job, but as friends. Even when I'm upset, they're so calm and resourceful they make me think that way—that there's some options. The whole town knows him. He won't quit until either I or he finds a solution.

The tenacity implied by these comments was echoed by community gatekeepers who commented on coordinators' persistence in obtaining their involvement. The coordinators also acknowledged this as an essential characteristic through their adoption of a phrase from Star Trek, "Make it so," as one of their mottoes.

Some variability among coordinators in the following interrelated areas raised some concerns:

Direct service: There appeared to be a danger of becoming overwhelmed with direct service provision, which would leave little time for preventive, enhancement, program development, and networking activities. More services needed to be brokered, which may involve initially greater time investment in community mobilization that will pay off for the coordinator, the community resources, and the families in the long run. The dilemma of this strategy was captured by a coordinator who commented:

> My principal would like to see me in my office all day seeing troubled kids. But when I'm participating in a community consortium that is trying to bring businesses into the community, I feel like this is going to benefit more families in the long run.

Empowerment: The mission of the centers is to empower families to meet their own needs rather than to become the irreplaceable first option for families. In response to the question, "What does empowerment mean to you?," many coordinators could articulate specific strategies for promoting families' competence in obtaining resources. For example:

> I selectively remove barriers—I don't do everything for them, but if placing that first call will help get the ball rolling, I'll do that.
>
> If I help them obtain a service or solve a problem, and they need me the next time for the same situation, then I didn't do my job.
>
> Parents must learn that it is their *right* to be involved in the school to make sure their child gets a piece of the pie; teachers respond differently to children whose parents are involved.

Other coordinators could not provide an articulate response to this question, and appeared to be promoting dependence of families on the center as their first option. The impressions gained from discussions with coordinators were often confirmed in the parent interviews. Some parents could not think of another option beyond the coordinator when asked for ways to address a problem, while others affirmed their growing empowerment or identified the coordinator s empowerment strategy. An example of the former was a mother who said: "My asthma is smothering, but my husband is more smothering. He's got to let me start doing things."

When this was reported to the coordinator she acknowledged the widespread problem of getting fathers involved, and of some men being threatened by their wife's attempts at growth. (The coordinator got this particular man involved by asking for his help in operating some video equipment.) Coordinators also acknowledged that they have been unable to move some families beyond dependence.

Wave 2: Confirming Themes

It was expected that this sample of centers might yield greater variability among the sites, but this did not occur. This evaluation essentially confirmed the impressions garnered from the first evaluation, with some additional findings. That is, this sample, combined with the first year sample, presented a picture of 22 centers led by dynamic coordinators who were providing a broad array of needs-based programming that appeared to have won strong support from families and school principals.

Two exceptions to the overall positive findings were found. One was a center in which the coordinator was enmeshed in extensive direct service provision, and one which was hampered by political infighting among the three schools that it served. These problems underscored the initial concern about direct service provision and reinforced the importance of principal support to center success.

Other influences that appeared to be contributing to these phenomena pointed to the importance of the ecological contexts in which centers operated. First, there appeared to be more press for the provision of direct services in rural areas that had few community resources, as compared to the relatively resource-rich urban areas. Centers serving rural, resource-poor communities provided more services than those serving urban areas. Second, some principals, particularly in the high schools, were pressuring coordinators to remain in their offices to see troubled students rather than engage in preventive outreach activities; and, some principals, as well as teachers, were less supportive of parent involvement. Coordinators did not consider these as static barriers. Instead, they treated them as problems to be addressed and resolved over time.

The Wave 2 evaluation yielded two additional themes. The first was a concern about "mission drift". In their effort to meet the myriad needs of families, coordinators were at risk for losing sight of their educational mission and becoming a general social service agency. This raised a concern over targeting their activities in those areas that may have the greatest impact on parent involvement and school performance, versus dissipating very limited resources across too broad a range of activities. This led to the development of a rating system, employed in Wave 3, to assess the degree of relatedness to the mission of each activity in the work plan.

The second theme was the discovery of a developmental process for centers. The reassessment of the centers from the first sample found that centers that had not appeared to be well connected to their schools or communities, or were having some difficulty with the principal, had significantly progressed in these areas by the second visit. One coordinator had "broken in" her principal such that he trusted her to set her own priorities (a development that he acknowledged without using the same terms). The other coordinator had become more familiar with and to community resources, and no longer felt overwhelmed in her effort to address needs. Thus, some of the variability among a cross-section of centers may be due to differing developmental stages.

There appeared to be a developmental sequence followed by centers in which, during the first few months, coordinators provide a wide variety of services, and respond to nearly all requests in an effort to establish relationships with the school and community. After this period, coordinators have established enough capital with schools and familiarity with families' needs to begin to establish program priorities and target resources. This finding was reinforced through subsequent discussions with a variety of coordinators. Coordinators stated the they "start with people and move to programs."

Table II. Center Relationship with School

Connectedness

1. Negative (turf/hostile)
2. Uninformed (inappropriate or no requests/referrals)
3. Customers (school personnel make appropriate requests/referrals; starting to be impressed with center capabilities)
4. Advocate (enthusiastic about center; see it as needed resource/capability of school)
5. Team (school works collaboratively with center; buys into the family involvement education mission)

Principal support

1. Negative (either micromanaging or turf/hostile)
2. Laissez-faire
3. Supportive/customer
4. Advocate
5. Involved/collaborative

Principal's attitude toward family involvement

1. Not open to it
2. Neutral
3. Appreciates outreach to families
4. Promotes family involvement
5. Has track record and strategies for family involvement

Teacher acceptance of parent involvement

1. None
2. Some (very little)
3. Many (somewhat)
4. Most/all (very much)

Teacher interaction with center

1. Refer to center: (3) all, (2) most, (1) some, (0) none. (multiply "1" by rating)
2. Drop by center: (3) all, (2) most, (1) some, (0) none. (multiply "2" by rating)
3. Participate in center programs/activities: (3), (2), (1), (0). (multiply "3" by rating)
4. Assist in center programs/activities: (3), (2), (1), (0), (multiply "4" by rating)

Perceived effects on school performance

1. Center is not seen as improving student attendance, classroom performance, or student achievement.
2. School personnel are unsure about the effect of the center on student attendance, classroom performance, or student achievement.
3. Center seen as important, but school personnel unsure of impact.
4. Center is clearly seen as improving student attendance, classroom performance, and achievement.

Wave 3: Profiling Center Progress

The first two waves of the FRYSC implementation evaluation yielded a set of themes or domains that appeared to capture the activities engaged in by coordinators in collaboration with staff, volunteers, educators, and community personnel in their effort to carry out their mandate. As Patton

Table III. Manner in Which Service Is Provided[a]

Accessible/reaches out	Respect	Support/motivation
It wasn't a situation where I had to ask—C volunteered.	C will not criticize you or anyone else.	C said "don't use the word 'can't'".
C came to me, called me up & introduced hereself and started to help me without making me feel like I was begging.	If you are on AFDC, you are treated the same as someone with 3 times as much.	C will find someone in worse shape than you are so you look at it totally different.
Everyone has hard times-she helped me take the load off.	You could be the worst person in the world and C would still try to help you.	The way C talks to you—it doesn't seem as bad.
C makes things easy—no forms, no registration.	C is very polite, concerned—not like she's trying to do a job, more like a friend.	(C. A lot of women need encouragement—they are intelligent, but have low self esteem—they are not getting positive feedback elsewhere.
You can call C at home—she'll call you at home.	C made me feel like a *person*.	The main thing is confidence building by getting out there and doing something.
C stops what she's doing to help.	Everyone has hard times, and she didn't come at me in a hard core way.	You're not the only one out there in this situation—you're gonna make it.
It's safe—the main problem in parents asking for help is fear.	C makes it easy for me to talk to—I'm not belittled.	The main thing I got at first was a safe place with support that is confidential.
C calls parents, stops them in the halls, gives door prizes, snacks, calls before meetings to remind them.	C remembers names.	Where else can you go and just blow out your problems—just cry.
C made home visits—very seldom do you see someone from school come to a home.	C makes you feel equal.	C said "you can do anything that you want to". She helped me go back to school at KY State.
C always returns phone calls.	You know she doesn't look down on you.	I have hope and self confidence—I'm no worse than anyone else.
C is well-natured—she takes time when other people get frustrated.	C is easy to talk to because she won't blame.	C comes to IEP meetings.
C always has a smile—never has a bad world.	No matter what comes up, it's ok.	C made us appreciate that there's good people out there who don't give a hand out but a hand up.
C goes above and beyond—she keeps going until the problem is solved.	You are treated with an open hand—It doesn't matter your race, income, how you look, you get a warm, polite welcome.	
	C wanted to know what kind of values I had for my daughter at home so she could work together with me.	
	C isn't above me—I could go to her with anything.	
	When they found out what my father did to me and what I wanted to do to him, I thought they wouldn't want me around children, but they still care for me.	

[a]C = coordinator.

[b]All coordinators' comments.

Table III. (continued)

Identifies strengths	Collaborative quid pro quo	Empowerment[b]
I was flat on my back when I got the kids. C got on the horn, knew who to call. Got my spirits back up. Made me feel like I can handle it.	C feels like a partner—someone else to work with me.	This parent now comes to me to see how I'm doing. I'm looking for wisdom, so I'm getting something out of the relationship.
C got me thinking about using my volunteer experience to get a job, then helped with resume writing.	It's like a family—you want to give back.	One family kept wanting groceries each month, so I suggested financial counseling and they haven't come back for food.
I feel like I can now voice my opinion and be heard—in school, with officials.	The more they gave me, the more I wanted to give back.	From the *beginning* you have to be honest that you're doing things to help them be independent. You won't always be there. We'll help you through the tough spots until you're on your own.
I got a 3.4 in school—proved I'm not a "moron."	I felt like there's a lot more people out there that need to be touched. They fear authority, but they will talk to me and they know the C.	They can use my phone, but I won't call, or next time, I'll have to do it again and I don't have the time.
We've got it within us—we just need someone to bring it out. When we are treated polite, we can be that way with each other and ourselves.	C gave me TARC tickets and let me use her phone if I watched a LG&E film on budgeting my money.	It's different for each family—what you can do to empower each. A lot of it is letting them know what they can do, what options are available. Sometimes it's actually saying you are gonna do this for yourself.
C was the only one in the meeting who talked about something good my child was doing, so I would only talk to her.	C expects us to keep our commitments, not just walk in and out.	I let them make mistakes and process what they could do different.
I see the excitement in my kids when I am in the school	C does the same things we do—wiping tables—she doesn't ask us to do things she wouldn't do.	At first, they want you to do it for them and when they realize you aren't going to and they need it bad enough, they get it for themselves.
	Kids sign contracts to work help off.	When I started, the parents taught *me* what agencies do what.
	I'm teaching other parents how to do things with their kids a little at a time.	I brainstorm with them—who could help start with family and friends before going to agencies. People have strengths that they are not aware of.
	You won't just go to a parenting class. You hear about other programs and you get involved with other parents to meet their needs.	She had a developed strengths as breadwinner and organizer when her husband went on disability. She was able to get the whole family in and it showed everyone cared. Someone in the family would go out and pull a member back in when things got tough in the room.
	You hear about school needs that you can help with.	
	I went from participant to volunteer to the Advisory Council.	
	I got friends involved on the Advisory Council.	
	I recruit parents for the FRC and volunteer at recreation programs.	
	I bring new parents into the parenting classes.	
	I made a commercial for the United Way.	
	I'm a Girl Scout leader.	

noted, it is possible to convert detailed qualitative descriptions into quantitative scales the validity of which is enhanced by the rigor of the qualitative investigation. Because the third wave consisted of a more quantitative analysis of center's progress, only a brief overview of this phase is included.

The themes that emerged from the first two waves formed the basis for the six broad domains of the Innovation Components Configuration Map which was developed by a committee of evaluators and center coordinators. These are: Needs Assessment, Relationship with School, Relationship With Community, Relationship with Families, Advisory Council, and Mission Focus. Within these broad categories, degrees or levels of accomplishment of specific tasks were identified. As an example, Table II depicts one of the domains, Relationship with School. To create an overall domain score, the number of points earned within a domain or dimension is divided by the total number of possible points and converted to a percentage. Using this method, profiles of individual centers or a profile of a sample of centers can be generated. These ICC maps were generated from the same site visit methodology employed in the first two waves. The ICC maps served as a general guide for the site visits, and were not used as a formal interview tool. Some ratings were completed during the site visits and some were completed afterward, based on field notes. Reliability scores for the ICC maps were generated by two or more site visitors.

In addition to the ICC maps, a teacher survey was conducted in the third wave. Details of this survey are beyond the scope of this paper; it is mentioned as an example of the triangulation of qualitative results. That is, the teacher survey assessed the degree of teachers' familiarity and involvement with the centers. Positive correlations between the survey and the ICC implementation ratings, Relationship with School (Table II) provided evidence for the validity of the implementation ratings.

Parent Interviews

The third component of Wave 3 was the expanded parent interviews. The goal of these interviews was to operationalize the *ways* in which coordinators engaged and assisted families. This level of detail was considered particularly relevant to the provision of training and technical assistance to coordinators. Therefore, the parent interviews are summarized in a different manner than the typical case study in that the parents' words are organized to reveal the *process* of service delivery. The content analysis of parents' responses to the interviews yielded three broad categories, each containing several subcategories. The first broad category is the *types of service* or assistance provided to families. We were particularly interested

in whether parents could describe coordinator efforts to link them to resources, in addition to providing direct services to them. Within this category, parents listed services that included basic needs (e.g., clothing, eyeglasses), concrete skills (e.g., GED classes), coping skills (e.g., dealing with divorce), links to resources, and links to informal supports such as churches. The second category, following Dunst's conceptualization, is the *manner in which help is provided* (how helping is experienced by families). In Table III, this is depicted on three levels. The column headings categorize the coordinators' helping strategies that promote self-efficacy and empowerment. The parents' responses contained in each column identify specific coordinator actions or behaviors that describe or operationalize how coordinators carried out the helping strategies. Reading across the column headings from left to right captures the actual helping process. That is, coordinators begin by being accessible and reaching out to families, provide general acceptance and encouragement, identify specific strengths, and then encourage active participation on the part of the families. Finally, the third category (Table IV) identifies some of the outcomes or impacts *(family accomplishments & involvement with the school)* of the service provided and the manner of service provision.

DISCUSSION

The three waves of this study demonstrate the utility of qualitative strategies for beginning to explicate the unfolding process of Kentucky's ambitious family support initiative, and for providing a foundation for the initial evaluation of its role in educational reform. Patton stated that the first task of qualitative analysis is description. The goal of this evaluation was to generate a description of these innovative programs that was sensitive and credible. Such formative evaluations are essential for interpreting summative findings of program outcomes.

In this study, site visits to over 30 FRYSCs suggested that their success depended on active, generalist coordinators who readily crossed program boundaries to establish relationships with families, schools, and communities. The motto of their statewide organization, "Bridges Over Barriers" captured their central strategy to forge synergistic links among these elements as the best way to address the stresses and supports affecting children's coming to school prepared to learn. The resultant framework that emerged for the implementation evaluation followed this process from ongoing needs assessment, through establishing relationships with families, schools, and communities, to mission focus. National reviews of family support programs have also identified this linking strategy (Booth & Dunn,

Table IV. Impact Of Families' Involvement with the Centers[a]

Family accomplishments		Involvement with School	
I learned a lot when I was a substitute teacher here. I went from 5th to 11th grade level in math and history.	My child is more of an individual. I learned a lot about children and child care	There's a lot of people involved here—a lot more than used to be.	I can attend meetings at school because of transportation. If it wasn't for the FRC, I wouldn't be involved in the school.
I take what I've learned teaching other kids home to my kids and we've gotten closer.	I feel like I'm more in control of my life, am a more competent person. My kid's school work has improved.	FRC definitely helped me not be embarrassed or afraid of coming to the school.	I feel better about this school—I hadn't been happy that my child was bussed here.
I learned not to blame myself for what happended to me growing up.	I get along with them a lot better. Our family is closer, and can talk without urgency and share more with each other.	C advocated with the teachers to let me volunteer in their classes, and then pushed me to do it.	Being involved in the parent committee has gotten me to meet more people at school and I'm more familiar with the school.
I'm 32 an I feel almost like an adult now. I don't panic, I don't have anxiety attacks. I know what to do and where to get help.	My mother and I are a lot closer because of the help the C has given me.	Since I'm here all the time, I talked to the teachers a lot, now I don't feel reluctant to talk. The fear is gone.	My kids feel better about school, and are doing better in school.
I went back to college. I wouldn't have if it weren't for the FRC.	FRC helped me learn a craft and show my daughter how to do it. We're closer now because I'm at school more.	I got involved in Chapter I through the FRC.	We're closer now because I'm at school more.
When you come to school, you get involved in a lot of things and you want to know what's going on, so I started paying attention to the news.	We do family things together, I get support from my husband.	When I walk down the hall, all the kid recognize me and say hi.	C makes the kids want to go to school—this is the first time my 8 year old hasn't said school is a drag.

If I had known then what I've learned, I'd have straightened out my life years before.	I coordinated a neighborhood yard sale and enjoyed it. I feel more like I belong here. I have more power now.	When you eat lunch with your kid, you have to interact with all the other kids. They like seeing parents in the school-its someone they recognize—someone who cares—not the teacher-she's the boss.	I now ask in detail what is going on with school work. Instead of "what did you do in school today? Nothing", I ask about specific activities—"How was the school play?".
I talk to my kids, read stories to them.		Now all the school principals know me—it's not just "what do you want". People care more about you when you're involved.	I hear, "Mom, you haven't been at lunch in school lately."
It made us closer in some ways—made me a better parent. I now preview parenting tapes for the C.		When my daughter started school, she wanted me to come. So I went and liked it and became a parent volunteer.	I'm on the PTA.
The kids seem to like school more—they're more involved and it builds their self-esteem. The whole family has gotten closer.			I volunteer at the school for hearing tests.

1996; Kagan & Weissbourd, 1994). In regard to the parent interviews, Patton (1990) stated that the task for qualitative researchers is to provide a framework within which people can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their experience with a particular program. The parent interviews provided a description of the way coordinators can engage families and move them toward a sense of self-efficacy, capacity to access formal and informal resources, and ability to participate in their child's educational process. They do not imply that all coordinators necessarily do this or that this is accomplished with all families. Where patterns and trends have been identified through qualitative analysis, the rigor and credibility of these analyses can be enhanced by the identification of "negative cases" (Patton, 1990). Examples of these included crisis-prone families who remained dependent on the FRYSCs, and center staff who seemed to promote a provider-client, versus collaborative, relationship.

The credibility of the program description depends not only on prolonged engagement and triangulation but also on the ability of the evaluator to create a collaborative, nonthreatening context for the observations. Patton (1990) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that in qualitative inquiry. the evaluator is the instrument, and that the validity in qualitative methods therefore hinges on the competence of the persons doing the field work. In this case, systems entry and consultation skills were necessary to establish rapport with coordinators, their staff, and principals. The site visits were framed as an opportunity for coordinators to "tell their story." Evaluators also shared ideas that they had gleaned from other centers or from relevant literature.

To some degree this collaborative approach involved an attenuation of the traditional clear separation between "objective" researcher and research "subject" that other field researchers have noted. For example, describing their efforts to design their school-based field study, Weinstein *et al.* (1991) reported that "Our negotiated study rocked the expectations of more formal relations between researchers and subjects" (p. 348). Feedback from coordinators provided evidence that a collaborative mutual exploration was, for the most part, achieved. Upon conclusion of the site visits, many of the coordinators commented that "this was better than I expected"; and, as the visits progressed, reported that they were told by coordinators who had been site visited that it was a positive experience. Some of the coordinators commented as to how useful the review and rating of their work plans as to mission focus was for their efforts to clarify priorities, and engaged nondefensively in these reviews.

Subsequent contacts with coordinators who had not been site visited were also validating. A common comment was "You never visited my center, but you described it completely." At one regional meeting attended by

one of the evaluators, a coordinator stood up and said that she had read our reports and appreciated the accuracy of our portrayals of centers. This was followed by applause from the group of coordinators. Although applause may not necessarily be a qualitative indicator of validity, it stands in contrast to the frequent complaint of program personnel that evaluators had not captured meaningful or relevant aspects of their programs.

The "evaluator as instrument" also implies that s(he) must be aware of what frameworks s(he) brings to the inquiry. One prominent framework that the first author brought was that of a community psychologist. The positive impression of the coordinators and their centers conveyed in the reports was due in large part to the sense that they embodied many classic community mental health and community psychology values and tenets. In fact, a check of a 30-year-old community mental health source revealed a description of Neighborhood Service Centers that shared many features with FRYSCs, such as "less formal," "accepts any problem in any form," "has no waiting list," "willing to make home visits," "helps people with concrete, present-oriented problems," "attempts to expand the know-how and coping ability of clients," "fundamentally concerned with problems of the neighborhood," and addressing a "population economically deprived" [and with] "a marked dearth of services available to it" (Reissman, 1967, p. 163).

Clearly, we have been impressed with the resourcefulness, creativity, and commitment of many of the center coordinators. However, there is an inherent danger in collaborative, ethnographic research that the evaluators will "go native" and fail to retain their discerning and critical capacities. The peer debriefings were an important counterbalance to this tendency. In this regard, we have raised concerns about centers enmeshed in school contexts that may not be supportive of parent involvement; in community and school contexts (or professional biases) that create pressure for direct services to troubled families and students more than community development and preventive approaches; and, in the dissipation of finite center resources over a broad range of social services, rather than focusing them in those areas that are most likely to have educational impacts. Moreover, we observed that while many coordinators have accessed such programs as Comer's (1986) home-school project, or Missouri's Parents As Teachers (Pfannestiel, Lambson, & Yarnell, 1 991), there has not been a systematic process of infusion of information from national sources.

The explication of the helping process through the parent interviews and the development of the ICC domains move beyond pure description to the identification of program operations that are hypothesized to be necessary for achieving program goals. Patton referred to this as formulating a program's theory of action, which links implementation and outcome

evaluations. In addition, Patton noted that "It is possible to convert detailed, qualitative descriptions into quantitative scales for purposes of statistical analysis" (1990, p. 195). In this regard, a report in preparation describes exploratory analyses in which factors derived from ICC implementation scores and items from the teacher survey were employed in regressions to predict improvements in a number of educational categories among students who received services from 20 FRYSCs. Significant positive relationships have been found between implementation scores (degree of implementation) and center outcomes (proportion of students who improved on pre-post teacher ratings). These results affirm the utility of qualitative strategies of prolonged observation in a collaborative context, and suggest that the qualitative program descriptors may have captured important program variables. However, evaluations to date must be considered exploratory and as providing incremental clarification rather than conclusive findings.

The program domains and service delivery processes represent a broad map that requires further clarification. Some of this clarification can be achieved through the iterative process of triangulation with larger quantitative data sets. For example, surveys of representative samples of parents and community gatekeepers can increase the understanding of the connection with families and community as the teacher surveys have done for the connection with school. Also, other qualitative analytical and sampling strategies can shed additional light on program processes. For example, extreme or deviant sampling such as outstanding successes or notable failures can yield valuable information.

FRYSCs represent a convergence of service integration, family support, and comprehensive school-based service movements, each of which has been long on philosophy and short on operationalization. There is growing consensus that rigorous qualitative approaches can contribute to the methodological pluralism (Sechrest & Sidani, 1995) that is necessary to evaluate these complex interventions.

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