

2015 Educateurs sans Frontières Assembly – NOTES

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Lumin Education operates Montessori programs serving 500 low income families on four campuses in high need Dallas neighborhoods. I'm going to talk about one of those programs today – Bachman Lake Community School.

All of Lumin's schools are AMI Montessori schools, although each one has a different history – they were founded in different ways and they are funded in different ways. If we have time at the end and if you are interested, I can briefly tell you about these very creative approaches to social change. But today I'm focusing on the Bachman Lake Program and how it came to be.

Lumin's guiding principles:

Start young,

Involve parents

Use Montessori principles

So how did the Bachman Lake program begin?

In 2008 a group of 13 major Dallas foundations joined together to form the "Zero to Five Funders' Collaborative." They wanted to help parents in the poorest area of Dallas prepare their children for success in school. They wanted to fund programs that would help parents interact with their children to nurture healthy communication and language development.

Why did they pick the Bachman Lake area? Let me show you some of the reasons why they wanted to concentrate this effort here:

Chart showing need

This neighborhood is next to Dallas's Love Field Airport. The population is 94% Hispanic, mostly low-income, new-immigrant families, primarily from Mexico. Many of the parents are undocumented and speak little or no English. Some cannot read or write either English or Spanish.

In this neighborhood, there is a 36% unemployment rate. Less than 30% of the adults in the neighborhood have graduated from high school. 96% of school-age children are considered "economically disadvantaged," and only 33% of the Hispanic children finish high school. The neighborhood has a high level of gang activity, drug use, and teen pregnancies.

<i>Educational Disadvantage (elementary school students)</i> ¹	
"Economically Disadvantaged" (school lunch eligible)	96%
"At-Risk" Students	87%
Limited English Proficiency	75%
Children entering Pre-K who are below grade level ²	92%
Dallas County Hispanic Students Who Finish High School ³	33.4%
Women of child-bearing age (15-44)	15,767
Average household size	3.88
Median Age	26.24
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>	
Hispanic/Latino	94.0%
Hispanics of Mexican Origin	84.5%
Black/African American alone	3.0%
Median Household Income	\$29,298
Owner Occupied Units	14.4%
Household Income less than \$25,000	41.5%
Families Whose Income is Below Poverty Level	24.3%
Children under 5 Who Live in Poverty ⁴	31.0%
No Health Insurance ⁵	61.0%
Over 25 Population No High School Diploma or GED	71.7%
Households with no vehicle	13.8%
Over 16 and unemployed or Not in Labor Force	36.4%

A survey conducted in this neighborhood asked the residents to identify their greatest concerns and needs. Here's what the people said were their greatest problems:

Slide of survey results – What did the neighbors say?

- 1) Poverty; lack of resources; basic human needs (clothing/food/rent/utilities/etc.);
- 2) Language barriers; need translators; ESL classes;
- 3) Drug activity; crimes; abuse;
- 4) Lack of family support services—parenting programs, budgeting, drug awareness, etc.;
- 5) Lack of transportation;
- 6) Lack of parental involvement or support;

¹ Dallas Independent School District (2008). District data regarding Bachman Elementary Schools.

² Zero to Five Collaborative (2008). *Bachman Analysis Report*. Dallas: Author.

³ Percept Group (2009). *Community Discovery and Assessment: Northwest Dallas*. Dallas, TX, Primera Iglesia Bautista Mexicana.

⁴ Percept Group (2009), *Ibid*.

⁵ Parkland Foundation (2005). *Our Community Health Checkup*. Dallas, TX: Author.

- 7) Lack of immigrant services;
- 8) Lack of youth programs and summer programs;
- 9) Lack of mentors and tutors for youth and families;
- 10) Youth behavioral problems and truancy; and
- 11) Lack of affordable health/dental/vision care.

So we applied for a grant from the Zero to Five Funders Collaborative, because we thought we might be able to meet some of the needs that these neighbors had. In the Spring of 2009, we learned that we got the grant!

Location of Project

The families in this neighborhood arrive and live in very large low-income housing complexes. They are uprooted from family ties and from their culture. They don't know the language. They don't have transportation. They are unfamiliar with the education system, health care system, legal system, and they are afraid of being undocumented and subject to arrest and deportation. The fathers are typically employed in labor and construction. The mothers and children can often be very isolated in apartments.

One of these complexes provided an apartment to us for this project. So our first home was right here at Cornerstone Chase Apartments. [photo of Terry in front of the apartment]

Perfect because the mothers and children are right there.

How Did We Enter Into the Community?

We partnered with Dallas Area Interfaith. This is community organizing group. With the help of a Hispanic community organizer who had come from the same type of community in Mexico as many of these families, we went door to door, meeting the residents, talking about our project and asking them what they needed most. This was challenging because of the residents' fear and apprehension about U.S. authorities, specifically immigration.

We also identified community leaders (priest, principals, etc.) and asked them to identify parent leaders.

Held house meetings, with childcare so that the parents could learn more about us.

When we moved into the neighborhood, we had a party! We planned a big fiesta for all the residents in the apartment complex for January 6, 2010, the Dia de los Reyes, an important holiday in Mexico. It was very cold that day, but 300 people turned out for the party. [photos from Dia de los Reyes, children sliding]

There were games [musical chairs],

arts and crafts [crowns],

and face-painting for the children. [photos of face painting]

Hot chocolate and tamales for everyone. [photos of food]

There was music and dancing. [photos of dancing]

Every parent was invited to choose a free book to take home for their children. [photo of books]

We offered information about our parent education program, and here you see pictures of people signing up for the program. [photos of parents signing up]

Early Head Start Grant

In 2009 we learned that federal grants would be awarded for Early Head Start centers. But the time frame was short. Usually it takes about a year to write a grant for this kind of program, and we had only 3 weeks! We put together a team that included a federal grant specialist, an Early Head Start specialist, community volunteers, and writers knowledgeable about finance, budget, and program. And we worked day and night -- writing, rewriting, throwing it out and starting over, we finished the grant request and we got it submitted on time. We had to translate Montessori language to “government speak.”

And, in April 2010, we got the official word – we were awarded a grant of \$1.5 million to establish an Early Head Start center in the Bachman Lake neighborhood! And that’s \$1.5 million per year, for 2 years. That funding has been cut somewhat since then, but we continue to maintain our status as an Early Head Start center.

Current Programs

Five years later, the program currently serves 194 children:

124 children and pregnant women in the home visiting program for prenatal to age 3.

54 children in the home visiting program for ages 3-5.

16 children in the “combination” program. That is – home visits plus Montessori toddler community.

In addition to the home visits and toddler communities, this program offers:

Leadership Development
 Medical/Dental Services
 Mental Health Services
 Fatherhood Program
 Parent Workshops
 Staff Development

Community Partners:

These are just a few of the many community partners you see on the slide:

- Dallas Area Interfaith, an organization and trains and develops local parent and community leaders, has done community organizing work
- The Dallas Independent School District 4 elementary schools in our neighborhood
- Parents as Teachers Program, an internationally recognized parent education outreach program developed at Washington University in St. Louis, MO. It is based on the science of brain development that serves families with children from pregnancy to age 5. All parent educators must be bilingual, and all must take a one week training from PAT. Then we also have a Montessori Mentoring program to help them present this information in a way that is compatible with Montessori principles. I will tell you more about that later.
- Montessori Institute of North Texas (MINT), our Dallas AMI teacher training center, and the Dallas area AMI schools that are supporters of MINT, has offered two Assistants Courses for 0 to 3. Chacha helped design the Montessori elements of the program. We have offered two Assistants Courses (more later), and also two toddler teachers have trained with Chacha in Vancouver.

- ECI/LaunchAbility – Children with Disabilities. We must have 100% of children below poverty level, and 10% with disabilities.
- WIC – Women, Infants and Children nutrition services
- UT Southwestern Medical School – health services. All the children are required to have a “medical home” within a short time of enrolling in the program. Parkland also helps with this. Immunizations, well-baby checks, referrals for health or developmental problems. Also, dental services are provided through partnerships with local providers.

Weekly Home Visits

The families receive weekly visits in their home from a trained, bilingual parent educator who provides information about child development, ways of talking and playing with the child; periodic developmental screenings; and links to community resources they may need (health, dental, food bank, etc.).

[photos from home visit] Angie, at a visit with Olivia, the mother of Daniela, who was 14-months old. The topic was: language development. Angie talked with Olivia about the importance to talking to Daniela, giving her the names of objects, like these little farm animals. Olivia said she was grateful to get this information, because in her family it was not the custom for the adults to talk to the very young children. She said that her two older children had not begun talking until age 3 or later.

The moms learn how to make simple toys for their children out of things they have in their homes. [photo of chips in a can, stacking yogurt cups]

Books are always a part of the visit, and the parent educators model how to look at a book together, how to turn the pages, how to talk about the pictures. [photos of child reading, mom and child with book]

Montessori Mentoring Program

Many of the Parent Educators have backgrounds in traditional ECE or Head Start. So we needed to give them some very basic training in Montessori principles and how to incorporate them into the home visits.

Objectives:

1. Continue to familiarize PEs with the Montessori Philosophy and its implementation during home visits.
2. Create a common ground in our understanding of child development and the way we present information to parents.
3. Create a clear and well defined protocol for home visits to be used by every PE.

Program Content:

1. Classroom observations
2. Assigned reading (*Understanding the Human Being* by Dr. Montanaro) with weekly group discussions of the Montessori philosophy, and
3. Before-and-after home visit videos for self-evaluation.

We use 4 basic Montessori concepts in the presentation of materials from the PAT curriculum:

1. Predictable Routine
2. Freedom of Choice
3. Possibility of Repetition
4. Beauty and Order

Results: Just a few weeks into the training, the participants reported the following improvements on their home visits:

- Children and parents showed more interest in following predictable routines
- Children were choosing work independently and remained engaged with the work through the entire visit
- Children were mastering the use of materials. PEs –and parents- were able to track the process of mastery
- Parents were more engaged in the process and actively participated on presenting materials and redirecting their child using the same kind, loving, and firm approach modeled by the PEs
- Most parents took the initiative to make modifications to their homes to provide a prepared environment where their children could work independently. Some of the parents went as far as to *make* child size furniture for their children.
- Planning, preparing, and conducting a Montessori home visit was an easier and more relaxed experience for the PEs
- Reading the book and participating in book discussions prepared them to give a more effective delivery of the PAT handouts during home visits

Video of Before and After Montessori Mentoring Program

<https://lumineducation.org/downloads/>

Slides of child working at home

Group socializations

- Monthly group meetings with activities or speakers [photos from group meeting]

This meeting was a discussion about language development with some simple advice:

- getting down on the child's level to talk with him,
- letting him watch your mouth and lips as you talk,
- naming objects and using the correct words instead of baby talk.

We served dinner at the meetings, and we have childcare. This encourages the parents to come to the meetings. [photos of dinner]

Some of the group meetings take place with the children present. This one involved showing the parents how to play games and sing songs with their children. [slides of Angie and moms]

Field Trips

To the zoo, the library, a park.

Aurolina

In addition to the medical and dental services, the program also offers mental health services. We have a bilingual Marriage and Family Therapist – Aurolina -- a former Montessori child whose mother is a Montessori teacher from Mexico. Her two sons were in Tricia's Adolescent Community.

Mental Health Services

Statistics

Reflective supervision for Parent Educators is very important.

Self Esteem Groups for moms.
Most Common Issues
Stress
Low Self Esteem
Anxiety
CPS
Post-Partum Depression
Domestic Violence

Fatherhood Program

The fathers are mostly working in unskilled jobs, as laborers, in construction. At the first Fatherhood group meeting only one father came. It started small, but it didn't stay small. Activities with the children. The fathers have made low shelves and tables for the children to use at home in the apartments. They have installed a playground at the apartment complex.

They say things like:

"When I was little my father didn't play with us. I remember that he hit me a lot. I don't want to be that kind of father to my children."

Picture of entire group

Training

We partner with the Montessori Institute of North Texas – our AMI teacher training center.
Pictures from Assistants Course

In 2012, AMI Teacher Trainer Larry Quade delivered the AMI Assistants Training, a 60-hour course, to 20 BLCS parent educators, staff members, parents, and friends. The course was designed to introduce the students to Montessori principles for children from birth to age 3, with special focus on the home environment. The participants received the international AMI Assistants Certificate.

In 2015, AMI Auxiliary Trainer Sharlyn Smith delivered the AMI Assistants Training for 0 to three to 46 students including 15 parent educators and assistants from Bachman Lake Community School. Again, the participants received the international AMI Assistants Certificate.

Pictures from Toddler Communities

We sent two parent educators to the AMI training center in Vancouver, BC for A to I training.

In the summer and fall of 2012, BLCS at last opened two Montessori toddler communities, operating in shared space in the Foundry Church. Now we have 2, for 16 children, 2 days a week. The new infant communities serve 16 children. They promote parent education by inviting parents to participate for a part of each morning in their children's experience at school. In addition, these families receive two home visits from their teachers each month, during which the teachers help the parents implement elements of the Montessori home environment.

Leadership Training for Adults

Empowered by the role they are now playing in their families' lives with regard to health, education, and community involvement, BLCS parents are speaking up and creating the change they want for their families.

They serve on a Policy Council that meets monthly to review all the statistics of the program. They elect officers, run the meeting, take minutes, vote on resolutions. They have responsibility for oversight of the program. They review all the personnel decisions, the budget, the credit card expenditures, the attendance, the enrollment. Everything is in English and Spanish.

2 slides: They have organized their neighbors to work for better educational options for young children in their neighborhood. The parents' developing civic and leadership skills bore fruit when they addressed the Mayor of Dallas and the Dallas City Council.

They also met with the Superintendent of the Dallas Independent School District. Due to their efforts, the new elementary school that will be built in their neighborhood within the next 3-5 years has already set aside six classrooms for early childhood program use!

Self Assessment Process

Our program does a Community Needs Assessment every year.

We also do a very thorough Self-Assessment every year.

What are we assessing?

How do we Assess?

The Self Assessment Process

Parent Survey Showed

What's the Best Thing Our Program Offers?

The education/information related to my child specific to age or stage of development

We were shown to teach our children with household items

The help to resolve problems for babies like finding a doctor or medicine

To better comprehend & communicate with our children

You helped us become better parents

You helped our children become better prepared for school. Their abilities are better developed.

Lessons Learned

- Follow the community – listen to what the community says it needs and respect what you hear
- Collaborate with community partners
- Plan carefully – training is critical
- Nurture leadership within the community
- Go slowly – financial stability is essential for sustainability
- Assessment is needed for accountability
- Be open to opportunity

Above all, don't be afraid to think big! Be bold!

Butterfly

Big things come from small beginnings. Transformational growth and change can happen.

Otto Scharmer is a professor at MIT who studies how organizations can shape the future. And here's what he says:

Slide

“When a small group of key persons commits itself to the purpose and outcomes of a project, the power of their intention creates an energy field that attracts people, opportunities, and resources that make things happen.”

This is our vision for Bachman Lake Community School. When our small group commits itself to the purpose and the mission of our work here, then the power of our commitment attracts people, opportunities, and resources that make things happen.

Example: Opportunity to purchase plot of land formerly a strip club on the highway. We raised \$2.6 million in two months! This will be the site of our new public Montessori charter school for Bachman Lake – toddler through 3rd grade. Because all of our campuses are expanding and we have to structure priorities, we estimate that it will take at least 5 years to raise the funds to build the school.

Meanwhile, portables have been brought in to accommodate the Bachman Lake program and also three other local early childhood programs. When we move, the new facility and community initiative will be called Bachman Lake Together and there will be a Family Resource Center. The four central agencies are Lumin Bachman Lake, The Concilio, Avance, Catholic Charities (all focused on early childhood development).

Last Slide: Butterflies

I want to end with one of my favorite quotes, and I have it for you to take home. I first came across this quote hanging on the wall in Terry Ford's office at East Dallas Community School in 2001. I've had it on my office wall, and on my refrigerator at home, ever since:

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness.

Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then providence moves too.

A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamt would have come his way.

I learned a deep respect for one of Goethe's couplets: "Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it!"

Lumin East Dallas Community School – 1978 -- parent education program P-3; public Montessori charter school 3-9; 2 Primary classrooms; 2 Lower Elementary classrooms. Originally funded 100% by private fundraising, it is now a public charter school. It receives funding from the State of Texas, supplemented by continuing private fundraising.

This was the original school founded by Terry Ford. I was the director at this school for 9 years. This school is located in a low income, Hispanic neighborhood in Dallas. The public high school in this neighborhood had a very low graduation rate – the high school dropout rate was over 50% when our school came to the neighborhood. We have tracked the children who went through this program through the third grade. Our data shows that the children who completed our Montessori program graduated from high school at the rate of 95%, and 89% of those children went on to college. Based on the outcomes at this campus, our friends and donors in the community urged Terry to expand and serve more children, so the next school that was opened was --

Lumin Lindsley Park Community School – 1999 -- parent education program P-3; public Montessori charter school 3-9; 4 Primary classrooms; 3 Lower Elementary classrooms. LPCS was founded as a public charter school. Funded by State funds supplemented by private donations.

Lumin Bachman Lake Community School – 2009 -- This is the program I'm going to talk about today. It offers parent education program/home visiting P-5/Montessori toddler classrooms. It is an Early Head Start Center that receives Federal funds. 80% Federal funds/20% private donations.

Lumin Wesley-Rankin Community School – 2014 – This is the newest campus. It offers parent education program P-3; Montessori toddler community and Primary classroom. This is a partnership with a Methodist Community Center. It is funded by the Methodist Community Center, and all programs are run by Lumin.