

2002-2003 evaluation of BASE and HOME:
recommendations for revision of theory of change

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The History of BASE

Alternatives in Action (AIA) is a non-profit organization founded in 1994 to “create and implement programs to enhance the quality of education and community life for children and youth in the greater Bay Area (Sperling and Murillo 2003).”

In the fall of 1996, AIA launched a youth development program called HOME that sought to build self-assured, effective young citizens. These youth collaborated with adult staff members, called “coaches,” to initiate a number of community projects that reflected youth interests and needs. In its first several years, HOME youth and coaches started a youth employment agency, developed a child care program, planned an inter-generational arts conference, sponsored a violence and drug-free nightclub event at the U.S.S. Hornet, and built an outdoor skate park with 900 youth and adult volunteers (O’Donaghue et. al. 2003).

Beginning in Spring 2000, youth from HOME worked with coaches to expand the organization. HOME youth campaigned for an affordable lease for meeting space on Alameda Point, the former Naval Air Station, and raised enough money to expand the child care program into a full day, licensed preschool facility. In February 2001, a group of ten youth worked in partnership with adult experts to write and submit a youth-initiated charter school application to the Alameda Unified School District. In this charter application, the youth stated that the goal of BASE would be to provide a high school consistent with the principles and practices of HOME; that is, the youth pledged to create a school organized around innovative learning, community projects, and open and collaborative relations among youth and between youth and coaches. The charter application also promised to provide instruction fulfilling the course requirements for admission into the University of California system. After receiving a unanimous vote of approval from the Alameda school board, the Bay Area School of Enterprise (BASE) opened on September 4, 2001 (O’Donaghue et. al. 2003).

The BASE Evaluation

Upon opening BASE, AIA simultaneously began to develop and implement a comprehensive three-year evaluation of BASE and HOME. There was a pilot year during 2001-2 when BASE piloted survey instruments and interview protocols. The formal evaluation began in Fall 2002.

The BASE and HOME evaluation has been led by an internal evaluation coordinator and a team of qualitative and quantitative research consultants. Table 1 reports how the responsibilities were split between this coordinator and the lead quantitative and qualitative researchers.

Table 1: Split of Responsibilities

Task	Evaluation Coordinator	Qualitative Lead	Quantitative Lead
Communication with BASE and HOME Staff Members			
Management of Administrative Support Staff			
Management of Research Support Staff			
Research Design and Design of Instruments			
Collection of Quantitative Data			
Collection of Qualitative Data			
Data Analysis			
Writing			

While particular instruments have been continually refined, the research team has consistently collected survey, interview, and observation data during each year of the project. Through collection of this data, researchers have evaluated youth experiences, youth outcomes, adult development outcomes, and the involvement of parents and community members.

Collection and analysis of data has been based on the AIA theory of change. The qualitative and quantitative research leads have found this theory of change too complex to succinctly describe and evaluate. In the next section, we make recommendations for simplifying the most recent version of the theory of change. We will then present an evaluation of BASE youth experiences and outcomes based on the revised theory of change.

The AIA Theory of Change

In the late summer and early fall of 2001, AIA senior staff members, HOME and BASE coaches, and evaluation consultants developed a “theory of change.” This theory of change was revised several times to make concepts less vague. As the document became less vague, it became longer and more complex.

The July 2003 version (see page 3) is composed of four different sections: Experiences, Coaching Roles, Community Involvement, and Youth Outcomes. There are four subheadings and sixteen specific items under Experiences, five subheadings and fifteen specific items under Coaching Roles, three subheadings and ten specific items under Community Involvement, and five headings and thirty-five specific items under Youth Outcomes.

For the pilot year and first formal year of the program evaluation, researchers used this theory of change as the framework for the program evaluation. They designed surveys as well as observation and interview protocols around these intended experiences and outcomes. Many of the specific goals stated in the theory of changes were still too broad to capture in one survey question, requiring multiple questions for measurement. As a result, the instruments became very lengthy. The survey to assess coach outcomes measured thirty-five specific skills. The survey to assess youth experiences and outcomes was split into three parts. A “Youth Personal Skills Form” measured changes in fifty-four skills. A “Youth Questionnaire” contained eighty-six questions to capture changes in youth attitudes about their experience. A “Youth Feedback Form” asked a series of ten survey questions about youth experiences as well as four open-ended questions.

Researchers found the resulting data difficult to analyze for three reasons.

- The number of variables made it difficult to gather high quality qualitative and quantitative data. The number of questions that researchers needed to ask required a brisk interview pace and led to superficial interview data. Additionally, youth were frustrated with the length of surveys, which could have led to poor quality answers as youth completed the instruments swiftly.
- The number of variables made it difficult to develop a coherent and succinct explanation of what was happening. As researchers felt compelled to discuss findings for each intended outcome, the reports became lengthy and difficult to read.
- A number of variables were defined as both experiences and outcomes. For example, the concept of “collaboration” is listed twice as an intended experience (“collaborate with adults and peers” and “collaborate with adults and peers on work and on decisions/planning around work”), a category of coaching role, and as a youth outcome (“collaborative/teambuilding skills”). Similarly, the theory of change listed “develop meaningful, reciprocal relationships” as an intended experience and as a youth outcome (“develop trusting and mutually beneficial relationships with peers, adults, and family”). This made qualitative and quantitative analysis very difficult, as researchers struggled with what was an intervention provided by the organization and what was a youth outcome.

This report recommends a simplified theory of change in order to solve these three problems. In particular, we have tried to shorten the list of intended experiences

and outcomes while eliminating duplication. At the same time, we have tried to remain sensitive to the organization's concerns about over-simplifying their model.

Our recommendation is based on three sources of data.

- Staff-selected priorities for youth outcomes.
- Staff-questionnaire responses about the most important components of the theory of change (See Appendix A for questions and responses.)
- Participant observation field notes collected between May and October 2003.

From this data, we decided to develop what program evaluators call a “logic model.” Logic models list intended organizational inputs, short term goals, intermediate goals, and long term goals.

In order to develop a list of intended organizational inputs, we took the four experiences identified on the staff questionnaire and then added three additional experiences. In particular, we

- incorporated adult mirroring of “ways of being” because BASE staff feel this is the most direct way that adults shape youth outcomes.
- incorporated community projects because all instruction is organized around community-based projects in order to make learning relevant.

The next step was to develop a list of short, intermediate, and long term goals. We decided that youth mastery of “ways of being” should be listed as the short term goals because these are learned by mirroring adults. We developed the essential list of “ways of being” by compiling those listed in the staff priorities and questionnaires. We added “making plans” because our observations suggest that this is a highly valued behavior within the culture of BASE.

The list of intermediate goals was the most difficult to develop. Appendix B provides a table listing the sources of each variable. In summary, we took the answers from the staff questionnaire and eliminated all of the variables that had been already listed as experiences. We then added variables from the staff list of priorities that additional text found on the staff questionnaire suggested were also important. For example, staff stated that it is important for youth to know what they think, believe, and feel. However, they had not listed measures for knowing what youth believe and feel. Finally, we added gains in academic achievement because this is one of the outcomes identified by their current program evaluation grant.

With regard to long term goals, BASE staff stated that their main goal is to help youth develop into effective citizens. BASE staff feel that effective citizens are

people who know how to take action based on their belief. For this reason, taking action is listed as the long term goal.

Table 2 provides the recommended simplified theory of change, with the first column listing the seven program inputs or “experiences,” the second column listing the short term outcomes, or youth “ways of being,” the third column listing the intermediate youth skills, and the fourth column listing the long term goal.

Table 2: Recommended Simplified Theory of Change

Youth Experiences (Provided by BASE staff)	Short Term Outcomes (Ways of being that emerge from mirroring adults)	Intermediate Outcomes (Skills developed over a longer period of time due to BASE experiences)	Long Term Outcomes (Behaviors learned over an even longer period of time due to BASE experiences)
Adults who -communicate with others honestly and directly -ask for help when they have a problem -show concern for others -hold others accountable for their work -make plans for getting things done -keep promises, agreements, and commitments	Youth will -communicate with others honestly and directly -ask for help when they have a problem -show concern for others -hold others accountable for their work -make plans for getting things done -keep promises, agreements, and commitments	Youth will -identify and express their feelings -know what they believe and care about -understand how they learn best -speak clearly -write clearly -analyze a problem -show improvement in academic achievement -get along with people from different backgrounds	Youth will -take action based on their beliefs
Coursework structured around community projects to make learning relevant.			
Instruction fulfilling the course requirements for admission into the University of California system			
Collaboration between youth and adults			
Youth ownership of projects			
Public Performances			
Reflection			

Recommendations for 2003-2004 Data Collection

Given limitations in data collected over the last two years, we recommend that BASE consider the following changes :

- Reduce the length of youth and adult surveys to reflect the simplified theory of change. The coach survey could be reduced from thirty-five to six skills. The youth surveys have already been considerably reduced over the summer. They could be further reduced to an outcomes-based survey that asks fourteen questions and an experience-based survey that asks five to eleven questions, depending on whether or not you ask youth opinions about adult “ways of being.”
- Revise youth and adults surveys so that they accurately measure all experiences, ways of being, and outcomes.
- Revise interview and observation protocols to reflect the revised theory of change. This will allow researchers to collect focused qualitative data, greatly easing final analysis.
- Collect academic achievement data on a larger number of BASE youth. We currently only have matched data for between five and eleven youth per cohort.
- Explore the use of alternate academic achievement data. In particular, BASE might use data from youth learning plans.
- Collect control data in order to compare changes in BASE youth skills to youth in the general population.

appendix a

Staff Questionnaire for Narrowing the Theory of Change

HOME and BASE Exercise for Narrowing the Theory of Change 10/20/03

Q1: What are you trying to accomplish at HOME and BASE?

ANSWER:

Develop effective citizens.

Q2: How do you define the term/terms identified in Q1?

ANSWER:

Effective citizens are continual learners who know and share what they think, believe, and feel and can work with others to take action on behalf of self and community.

Above sentence adjusted to incorporate some of the dimensions that seemed peripheral in skills below. The concept of continually learning and sharing (which encompasses personal and being able to express oneself) were included.

Clarification on think - Our conception of what it means to “think” is clarified in the dimensions and items of the personal skills form and we prioritized the longer list already into to expresses thoughts and reflects. Everything we have to offer to explain think has already been presented.

Clarification on take action – We literally mean “to act,” to move forward, to make something happen. As we talked about last week, this can be something simple and small scale (like asking for help) to something big (like creating the skatepark.) As referenced in description of effective citizen, this action can be something done for self or others.

Q3: What are the 5-7 most important skills/outcomes that all HOME and BASE youth should share when they leave the program?

ANSWER:

5 Outcomes (can be reordered to follow flow of core sentence):

1. Youth will be able to think powerfully (cognitive development)
2. Youth will be able to interact effectively with others (social development)
3. Youth will be able to take action based on beliefs (civic/moral development)
4. Youth will know themselves (emotional/identity development)
5. Youth will be committed to continuous learning (critical attitude/way of being)

Most critical skills (12) that HOME *and* BASE youth would have:

Outcome: think; Skill(s): expresses thoughts clearly, ability to reflect (reflect defined as ability to observe, make meaning, compare, and transfer learning)

Outcome: interact (work well) with others; Skill(s): have positive relationships with youth and adults; compromise and work well with diverse group on plans or projects (combination of appreciating others who are different and working – also not combined as one item on skills form)

Outcome: take action; Skill(s): keep agreements, promises and commitments, start, carry out and finish a project that benefits the community

Outcome: know themselves; Skill (s): share him/herself (who he/she is, thoughts, feelings, beliefs), identify strengths and weaknesses, ability to gather/identify information about self (not on personal skills form – not sure language is right)

Outcome: committed to continuous learning; Skill(s): know how to learn best, will ask for help and seek resources, ability to gather information about self (also shown above)

We have pared down as far as we can go. I recognize that the skills above have more than one item on the personal skills form. I will forward you the priority skills BASE and HOME identified (used to pare down the skills form) which may help – I think you already have the ones from HOME on second thought. Otherwise, you may use your judgment about which measures make the most sense to use. All we can say is that we care about all these dimensions and believe they are core. We adjusted the core sentence to reflect the dimensions that were not represented there before.

Q4. What are the three most important opportunities that you provide to HOME and BASE youth in order to teach the skills identified in Q3?

Answered these for both HOME and BASE. These would shift our language in experiences section of Theory of Change.

ANSWER:

Ownership or personal signature

Youth/adult collaboration

Real world performance (athletic performance model)

Reflection (opportunities to observe, make meaning, generalize and transfer learning from experience)

Co-creation pulled apart and clarified

These are unique in combination and in terms of our understanding that these opportunities move people to action.

Clarification/elaboration on ownership – By ownership and signature we literally mean the opportunity to be the creator of something, to put your name on it. This can be anything from BASE’s charter document to a wall in the main room

constructed through a Build, to the mural, to creating the name and coursework for a class, to putting on a festival. The key is that it wasn't there before and that you, often with others, made it happen.

Q5. How is community involvement supposed to shape youth outcomes?

ANSWER:

Provides opportunities to personally impact others in a way that makes learning relevant and dramatic.

Q6. How is adult development supposed to shape youth outcomes?

ANSWER:

This needs work.

The answer to this question is critical for final report shift and will be very helpful for work AIA is doing with Adult Learning Institute. We have some common thoughts, listed below – John Esterle and Edd are working on this question and we need to bring them in.

Three thoughts:

- Mirroring is critical – Coaches cannot create the experiences in kids unless they are having these experiences themselves.
- Adult development opportunities help clear blocks to enable better performance (every coach has something in their way to working most effectively with youth)
- Adults share knowledge about techniques and practices

appendix b

Sources of Variables Identified in Theory of Change

Table 17: Sources of Variables Identified in Theory of Change

Staff Priorities	Questionnaire	Observations	Action
Ways of Being			
I communicate with others honestly and directly			Included
I show concern for others			Included
Keeps agreements, promises, and commitments	Keeps agreements, promises, and commitments		Included
I hold other people responsible for what they said they'd do			Included
When I have a problem, I can ask for help	When I have a problem, I can ask for help		Included
I share myself with other people	I share myself with other people		Eliminated due to duplication with reflection as an experience
		I can make plans for getting things done	Included because observations suggest that this is a highly valued way of being
Intermediate Outcomes			
I can speak clearly/I can write clearly	Expresses thoughts clearly		I can speak and write included as two separate measures.
	Ability to reflect		Eliminated due to duplication with reflection as an experience
	Have positive relationships with youth and adults		Eliminated due to duplication with collaboration with youth and adults as an experience
	I can compromise		Eliminated due to duplication with collaboration with youth and adults as an experience
	I can start and carry out a project		Eliminated due to duplication with project work as an experience
	I can work with others who are different than me		Included
	I can identify my strengths and weaknesses about myself		Eliminated due to duplication with reflection as an experience as well as I know what I think, know, and believe
	I can gather information about myself		Eliminated due to duplication with measures for I know what I think, believe, and feel.
I know what I believe and care about			Included as a measure for I know what I believe
		I can identify and express my feelings	Included as a measure for I know what I feel
	I know how I learn best		Included as a measure of "I know what I think"
		Youth will show gains in academic skills	Included because BASE is being evaluated for academic achievement
Long Term Outcomes			
I take action based on what I believe			Included because this is a clear measure of taking action, the long term goal of BASE

References

O'Donoghue, Jennifer L., Sally Brown, William Dyckman, Heather Hughes, Juliet Stein and Julie Lieberman Neale. 2003. "HOME BASE Evaluation Report: Findings, Implications and Questions. Pilot Year 2001-2." Unpublished report to the Stuart Foundation.

Sperling, Jane and Patricia Murillo. 2003. "Alternatives in Action's Interim Report. Expanding HOME's After School Program and Sharing Home's Model." Unpublished report to the Cricket Island Foundation.

**HOME AND BASE
Theory of Change –
Updated July, 2003**

A. HOME Experiences

An emotionally and physically safe environment with opportunities to:

Make meaningful change in the world

- Engage in “real world” challenging work
- Confront situations with risk (with possibility of failure)
- Have public performances and presentations

Build relationships

- Develop meaningful, reciprocal relationships
- Collaborate with adults and peers
- Develop relationships with outside resources
- Show and receive mutual concern and support

Continually learn and develop skills

- Develop academic and real-world knowledge and skills
- Develop and defend positions
- Reflect on and improve performance
- Engage in political analysis and strategy

Co-create

- Be engaged in varying levels of involvement and leadership
- Shape one’s community [HOME BASE, Alameda]
- Initiate and plan projects
- Collaborate with adults (staff, parents, community members) and peers on work and on decisions/planning around work

B. HOME Coaching Roles

Support

- Provide support/encouragement
- Elicit and accept ideas
- Develop genuine liking, appreciation, warmth

Share

- Communicate beliefs, opinions, vulnerability
- Foster youth and adult self-awareness
- Relay personal knowledge and experiences (to stimulate curiosity)
- Inspire; hold a picture of what is possible

Challenge

- Push; move beyond comfort zones
- Give open, honest feedback, critique (part of developing organizational culture)
- Hold consistent, high expectations

Collaborate

- Share responsibility
- Balance guidance & collaboration
- Connect to community resources

Plan and Facilitate Learning

- Create and implement structures and activities to promote HOME practices
- Manage goals, objectives and timeline

C. Community Outcomes

To build relationships between parents, community members, HOME youth and staff as evidenced by:

Community impact

- HOME is a resource in the community
- HOME projects and events build relationships and sense of community

Community Adult impact

- Positive change in adult attitudes about HOME youth
- Positive change in adult attitudes about youth in general
- Positive personal impact on adults as result of their HOME experience
- Increased support or advocacy by adults of HOME-like approach to youth development (if applicable)

Parent impact

- Positive change in parent attitudes concerning youth in general
- Positive change in parent attitudes and relations with their own child
- Positive personal impact on adults as result of their HOME experience
- Increased support or advocacy by adults of HOME-like approach to youth development (if applicable)

D. Youth Outcomes

To develop effective citizens who can:

▪ **Think powerfully (Cognitive development)**

Be curious, creative, expressive, reflective, see perspectives and how things relate, be able to assert concepts and provide evidence and be able to test ideas.

▪ **Interact with Others (Social development)**

Have strong communication, negotiation skills, collaborative/teambuilding skills, develop trusting and mutually beneficial relationships (peers, adults, family) and be multi-culturally competent

▪ **Act on Beliefs (Civic/moral development)**

Develop and apply values and beliefs, hold themselves responsible, hold others accountable, be aware of and involved in community issues and projects.

▪ **Know Themselves (Emotional/identity development)**

Have sense of self-efficacy/personal power, a positive view of future/goal orientation, self awareness and self knowledge, and ability to cope, and deal with stress.

▪ **And are marked by:**

Self-confidence, eagerness to learn, involvement in HOME, involvement in their community, initiative, willingness to take daring action, concern for others, helping others and asking for and accepting help when needed.

