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ABSTRACT

Family literacy programs are developed on the premise that the important relationships between children and adults affect literacy achievement and activity. The programs bring parents and children together in a teaching and learning environment. The critical teacher in a child's life is the parent. Family programs support and strengthen family functioning; family strengths become the focus for curriculum design and implementation. The "Strengths Model" for learning builds upon the parents' existing knowledge; beliefs; and powers of body, mind, and spirit. The model is based on healthy traits of families, connecting those traits to the development of literacy. The model creates awareness of healthy family traits and develops competencies to enhance those traits. Programmers should develop a curriculum that focuses on students' strengths in order to help them become more successful family members. (This document includes the following: guidelines for a "strengths-minded teacher," grounding curriculum in the group culture, connecting family interest and practice to literacy development, reading and writing activities, and a list of 34 resources. Six appendices contain a genogram, gifts to give and receive, adult life-cycle stages, healthy family traits, using literacy as a basis for discussion of family strengths, and a parent/child interaction graph.) (NLA)

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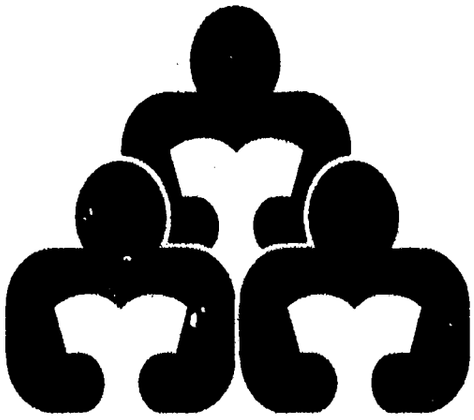
# A Strengths Model for Learning in a Family Literacy Program



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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....1

Introduction..... 2

WHY a "Family Strengths" Model"?.....3

WHAT is a Family Literacy "STRENGTHS MODEL"?.....5
Guidelines for a "Strengths-minded Teacher".....7

Is Your Program a "Strengths Model"?.....13

References and other resources.....16

Appendices.....18
What's in the appendices.....18
Appendix A--Genogram.....19
Appendix B--Gifts to give and receive.....20
Appendix C--Stages in the adult life cycle..... 21
Appendix D--Traits of healthy families.....22
Appendix E--Using literature as a basis for discussion of family strengths.....26
Appendix F--Parent/Child Interaction graph.....30

An Invitation.....31

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# ABSTRACT

Family Literacy Programs are a growing phenomonon in the United States and Canada. Developed on the premise that relationships between children and adults are important and that these relationships affect literacy achievement and activity, the programs bring parents and children together in a teaching and learning environment. While practices differ among programs, the common thread that runs through all family literacy programs is practice associated with the belief that the critical teacher in a child's life is the parent. Unfortunately, not all parents realize it, and many feel inadequate in the role.

Research and experience shows us that Family Literacy Programs that seem to have the most impact upon educational values, develop parents' sense of their critical role, hold adult students longer, and maintain attendance are those which meet a variety of needs; they are family-centered projects, likely to support and strengthen family functioning. But unlike "deficit model" adult education practice, Family Literacy Programs represent a new model of education, in which family strengths can become the focus for curriculum design and implementation. Nation-wide interest is turning to the "strengths model" approach.

*A Strengths Model for Learning in a Family Literacy Program* examines the why, what, and how of a "strengths model" and positions providers to establish a program that will build upon the parents' existing knowledge, beliefs, and powers of body, mind, and spirit.

Staff at the **National Center for Family Literacy** developed the "strengths model" based on healthy traits of families, connecting those traits to the development of literacy. The goals and objectives of this model are to create awareness of healthy family traits and to develop competencies to enhance those traits. This document outlines methodology that will enable programmers to take the next step of developing curriculum that will focus on their own students' strengths in order to help them become more successful as family members, and in the variety of roles assigned to them. Contents of the document include:

- Guidelines for a "Strengths-minded Teacher"
- Grounding Curriculum in the Culture of the Group
- Connecting Family Interest and Practice to The Development of Literacy
- A Course of Action
- How to Make Your Family Literacy Program a "Strengths Model"
- Practical Suggestions--Reading and Writing Activities that place emphasis on engagement with literacy, while striving for personal growth
- Resources for Further Information

# INTRODUCTION

Family Literacy Programs are a growing phenomenon in the United States and Canada. Developed on the premise that relationships between children and adults are important and that these relationships affect literacy achievement and activity, the programs bring parents and children together in a teaching and learning environment. Helping undereducated parents achieve skills and develop talents encourages them to support their children's learning needs. Individual families come together in family literacy programs to become a larger family, participating in playful learning, support groups, academically focused adult education, and quality preschool experiences for the children. Early research on family literacy programs (Nickse, 1989) concluded that 300 such programs were operating across the nation. The **National Center for Family Literacy** estimates that the number has grown dramatically. Even Start Legislation is currently funding over 200 programs nationwide with a projected 350 total programs in 1992-93. Head Start has provided comprehensive services to economically disadvantaged preschool children and their parents for over 25 years. Grants ranging from $125,000 to $225,000 have been awarded to 13 Head Start projects for the purpose of demonstrating how Head Start can collaborate with other educational and social service agencies. Chapter I program resources are helping local providers to enhance or develop family literacy projects, as well. Fifteen new Library grants will soon be added to the 25 awarded in 1990 to implement family literacy programs in public libraries nationwide. Corporate initiatives, such as the Toyota Grant, continue to add programs. In July, 1992 there will be 10 family literacy sites on Native American Lands, funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Each part of a family literacy program enhances and builds upon the others, but programs are not merely a combination of instructional components for children and adults. Rather, they represent a new model of education.

Practices that are effective for planning and delivering adult education and early childhood programs separately are not necessarily effective in family literacy programs. Even within family literacy programs, practices that focus on shared learning are one thing; practices that include the motivational aspects of shared teaching and learning, as well as the effects upon the family system, are another. Especially significant is the question of "deficit model" practice versus "strengths model" practice.

**The common thread that runs through all family literacy programs is practice associated with the belief that the critical teacher in a child's life is the parent. Unfortunately, not all parents realize this, and many feel inadequate in the role.** The purpose of this document is to share ideas about practice that enable parents to build upon their strengths in order to accept the role of the child's critical first teacher.

## WHY a "Family Strengths" Model?

Family Literacy Program developers and providers know that families differ enormously, but they presume that enrolled families believe in and are committed to the well-being and growth of individual family members and the family as a whole. Programmatic decisions are also based on a few other assumptions:

(1) All families, even those whom service providers consider "at risk," have strengths and bring positive characteristics to the learning situation.
(2) Families can call upon these strengths in times of crisis or adversity to help them recover.
(3) The development of literacy skills can enhance families' efforts to address their own felt needs and work toward personal and family goals.

To address these assumptions within a contextual framework, the **National Center for Family Literacy** advocates a "Strengths Model" of Family Literacy. When parents enter the programs with their children, they often lack the self-esteem necessary to consider themselves proficient "first teachers." A deficit model reinforces their fears; a strengths model honors their capabilities. The premise of the strengths model is to build on parents' diverse knowledge, beliefs, and powers of mind, spirit, and body, affirming what they already do well and encouraging them to do even better. The existing healthy traits of these families provide an infrastructure for growth and a focus for curriculum planning.

If it is true, as Dewey (1963) suggests, that "the only true education comes through stimulation of [one's] existing powers by the demands of the social situations which one experiences," then the task of the true teacher is to create awareness of those powers, especially when the educational population consists of participants who have suffered bruising experiences in previous educational settings. Their powers may have been short-circuited, strengths may have been fractured or even usurped by well-intentioned but misinformed instructors, who elected to "educate" by attacking deficits rather than to create awareness by building on strengths. Those powers can be restored by an educational experience which communicates an emphasis on positive characteristics of the individual and the family.

A "Strengths Model for Family Literacy" makes the parents aware of their personal strengths and begins to prepare them for the future--a future that can include success for them, their children, and whole families. The model provides a mechanism and an atmosphere that promotes critical thinking and problem solving relative to families. Parents experience opportunities to examine their successes and their failures and to evaluate how they accomplished goals or missed the mark. They are given a voice and an opportunity to express themselves. They become aware that the power to run the generator that will electrify future success does exists within them.

Once the awareness of their power has been aroused, the adult students begin to question how they are presently conducting their lives. The process of education continues as parents begin to look inward and outward to explore options. Growth occurs when the families in the programs begin to test some of the options and recognize their responsibilities as members of a unified group, whether that group is their own smaller family unit or the larger Family Literacy Program unit.

Those whose strengths are appreciated will be more motivated to set goals for self-learning and child teaching. They will be more fulfilled by the understanding of their individual healthy traits. Unlike many of their previous school experiences, in which their deficits were the focus for instruction, students in "strengths model" programs feel less isolated and alienated. They are participants in a healthy learning environment. As a result, their attendance will be less sporadic; they will be less likely to leave the educational setting (Popp, 1991).

More self-assured and confident that they can meet the needs of their families, the adults in Family Literacy programs begin "to balance internal and external resources for coping and adapting to life events and planning for the future," one of the strengths in family functioning style, designated by Trivette, C. et al (1990). It is the goal of Family Literacy Programs, and the *National Center for Family Literacy*, that part of that planning will focus on quality education for their children. As affirmation of strengths transfers into a more highly developed sense of self-worth, the parents will awaken to their role as first teachers, and the value and importance of learning will assume a central role in these families. More time and energy will be assigned to educational needs.

## WHAT is a Family Literacy "STRENGTHS MODEL"?

The focus of the "Strengths Model" is on the healthy traits of families. Program providers, then, make every attempt to include an emphasis on those traits when they are developing curriculum. Teachers must be prepared to listen and to learn before they begin to teach, and Family Literacy Programs must, themselves, be healthy, serving as models for healthy families.

For example, group process will advance in groups that are relaxed and welcoming, comforting and caring. The group experience will offer the possibility of regeneration. Shared leadership and shared responsibility will be a natural outgrowth of the healthy group process. Healthy groups, in which the staff functions as a team, are as distinguishable from unhealthy groups as healthy families, in which members affirm and support one another, are distinguishable from dysfunctional families.

A Family Literacy Program may be described as successful when any one of its participants succeeds; it may be identified as successful by the attributes which characterize it; or it may be considered successful when it performs the functions considered to be the responsibility of the program. The same is true of individual families: they may be identified as successful when one member is recognized as exemplary, or when family interaction is characterized as actualizing, or when it fulfills the responsibilities considered to be the functions of the family.

Family Literacy Programs ought to develop self-determined, independent graduates, while offering intellectual and emotional support. From a clinical perspective, families ought to raise children to become autonomous and emotionally mature, while providing an environment which nurtures growth. When programs accomplish their tasks, they are competent; likewise, when families accomplish theirs, they are competent. When either of these entities fails at the task, it can be considered less competent or even dysfunctional.

Maria Krysan (1990, p. 3) cites Stinnet who proposes that a successful or strong and healthy family **"creates a sense of positive family identity, promotes satisfying and fulfilling interaction among members, encourages the development of family group and individual members, and is able to deal with stress."** Wrap that description around a successful or strong family literacy program and we have one that develops a sense of self-worth, promotes social interaction to increase cognitive stimulation, encourages the development of individual students and the group as a whole, and teaches strategies for dealing with stress.

Olson and colleagues (1986, p. 104) state that families should be able to use effective strategies to cope with stress and after having experienced problems, end up with a more cohesive unit. Their definition is contingent upon family interaction. Again, an application is appropriate to programs as well as to families. Group interaction within family literacy programs may, itself, be a stressor. But healthy groups will end up even healthier.

These descriptions reflect what strong families and strong programs <u>can be and do</u>; when they exhibit certain characteristics or traits which create that success. <u>How well</u> they succeed depends upon their awareness of healthy traits and their consistent effort to keep those traits in order. The goals of a "strengths model" program, then, are to create awareness of healthy family traits and to develop competencies to enhance those traits.

There are many models of family functioning that point out critical attributes of success. While there are some differences in particulars, there are many similarities, and Krysan (1990, p. 4) says "there seems to be a consensus about the basic dimensions of a strong, healthy family." Those

characteristics that are most frequently mentioned by researchers and those which are cross-cultural include:

- communication styles that encourage give and take
- encouragement of individuals to reach their goals
- commitment to family, a feeling of closeness and attachment
- religious orientation or spiritual wholeness
- social connectedness rather than isolation or separation
- ability to adapt to new, unusual, and difficult situations
- expressions of appreciation for small and large efforts
- clear roles and carrying out of responsibilities
- time together.

No family has all the traits; some have many more than others, but one absolutely necessary trait in healthy families is good communication, which means that family members talk and listen to one another. When they do, the development of literacy becomes a natural occurrence in those families as the simple and natural acquisition of skills via daily experiences. Communication is always high on the list of priorities when we poll our families. They think they <u>might</u> have communication skills; they know they <u>want</u> to become more skilled; and they are <u>willing to work on developing better communication.</u>

What does this mean to the curriculum planner whose task it is to address the needs for literacy enhancement?

- It gives us a place to start, even without formal assessment.
- It motivates the teachers to accept responsibility for making their programs unique and responsive to the individuals in the group.
- It grounds the curriculum in the culture of the group
- It connects family interest and practice to the development of literacy, giving dignity and authority to the parents' experience and beliefs.

## Guidelines for a "Strengths-minded Teacher"
## A Good Place to Start--FOCUS on ENVIRONMENT

1. **The physical environment will reflect the emphasis on communication.**
   - There will be small tables for group discussions and listening centers will house tape recorders and interesting literature on cassettes.
   - Message centers will allow class members to communicate with each other in writing. Post-it notes will be available for quick jottings, and a variety of paper products issued for practice-writing and "pieces in process."
   - Students will be encouraged to "publish" their thoughts and ideas on bulletin boards, in newsletters, as greeting cards.
   - Puppets, dolls, masks, costumes, and props will encourage role play and debriefing sessions.

2. **Opportunities for student inquiry will be purposefully built into the instruction.**
   - Frames and materials for inquiry will be provided including guides which model planning and elicit discussion of faulty logic.
   - Good questioning techniques will be modeled and taught.
   - Opportunities will exist for students to create and modify hypotheses.
   - Cooperative learning strategies will become an integral part of the classroom.
   - Interactive video and audio computer software will appeal to the technologically adept.

3. **Students will be encouraged to bring in artifacts from their home environments to share as teaching tools.**
   - Family recipe books, picture albums and birth records set up experiences in geneology and geno-grams.
   - Traditional dresses, uniforms, old clothes and hats encourage explorations into beliefs and customs of the culture and race.

4. **Strategies will be put in place that encourage learning to learn, critical thinking, and whole-language orientation.**
   - Planning, organizing, and reviewing will be a part of the daily routine. Both students and teachers will employ the strategies of "plan, act, and monitor."
   - Prior knowledge, based on experiences and on linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic aspects will be accessed and integrated with new information.
   - Prediction exercises will enable participants to create meaning.
   - Active reading will connect speaking, listening, and writing.
   - Literacy and numeracy activities will be social and interactive, relevant, and useful.

5. **Teachers and staff will help learners construct meanings by serving as supportive models, coaches, facilitators, and instructors.**
   - Teacher/instructors will set goals and objectives for themselves and make these goals known to students.
   - Teacher/instructors will be viewed as readers, writers, and learners.
   - Staff and students will view curriculum-building as an on-going process.
   - The daily routine will allow for student-teacher interaction and frequent conferencing.

A Good Second Step: Grounding the Curriculum in the Culture of the Group

1. **Intense curriculum planning does not precede but follows a collection of data. The healthy traits of the particular group with whom we are working are unique and become the focus for planning. The questions are:**

   - **What strengths or traits are present in your family?**
   - **Which ones would you like to develop further?**

We have learned that the process must be group-specific in order to develop a culturally-relevant set of lessons. And it must be the students, themselves, and not the instructor, who select traits. Data can be collected in several ways:

- by observation--the teachers watch and listen to parents and children, individually and collectively
- by self-report--let families tell their own stories
- by the use of family environment scales
- by reading and analysis of published constructs on family strengths--adult students participate in the baseline collection of data.

2. **Once traits are identified that are important to that particular group, a list of observable characteristics is compiled which the instructor can use to select materials and methods for application and intervention.**

For example, assuming the group chose "communication"--a particularly productive area for intervention-- as one of the target traits, we might list the following as observable characteristics of healthy family communication:

- They show interest in other family members by asking questions about their activities.
- They listen attentively and actively to what other family members say, possibly summarizing the message, rephrasing it, or asking for clarification.
- They respond to messages with voice, eyes, and body language.
- They write notes to those in the household and letters to those in other places.
- They own and express feelings, both positive and negative.

A second example assumes the group chose "a belief in rituals and traditions" as one of the target traits. We might list the following observable characteristics of healthy family practice:

- They celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other special occasions in particular ways.
- They hold on to connections with the past, such as pictures, hand-made items, plates, and other articfacts.
- They treasure family legends and talk about family characters from the past.

A third example assumes the group chose "time together" as a target trait. A few observable characteristics are:

- Families attend functions such as sports and scouting events, school programs, etc. as a family unit.
- They take walks, picnic, or just sit together talking.
- They play indoor and outdoor games together.
- They watch TV together and discuss program content and applicable "lessons."

## The Third Step: The "Strengths Model" Connects Family Interest and Practice to the Development of Literacy

1. **Using materials directly connected to the healthy traits of families and observable characteristics of those traits gives meaning to the function and form of literate behavior. For example, in the case of the target trait of communication:**

   - Questioning techniques and strategies are teachable and transferable; they are essential for adult reading and writing processes, and good questioning strategies are important when parents share books and stories with their children.

   - Active listening strategies are teachable and can be practiced in role play among adult students and tried out in *parent/child interaction time*, then discussed in *parent time groups*.

   - Parents can be taught the difference between *response* and *reaction* to verbal messages.

   - Writing lessons and practice can focus on the use of real artifacts from home--good techniques for business and personal letter writing, clear message conveyance, fun notes to share with family members, lists and records--documents and prose.

   - Numeracy lessons can be taught and practiced using grocery coupons, newspaper ads , focusing on the communication that is necessary to maintain family budgets.

   - All family members can participate in the practice of sharing feelings about real events in the context of the family. Children and parents can role play the basic feelings of mad, sad, glad, and afraid; families can develop a sense of story by telling or writing their own stories in which these emotions are the focus.

2. **Recognizing strengths of families and using those aspects of wellness as a focus for curriculum says to the participants in the program that they are important, and what they say matters. What follows is a heightened sense of self-worth, an absolutely necessary attribute in the process of adult education. Improvement in self-esteem supports, affirms, and contributes to the development of literacy in a number of ways, for example:**

   - Parents are more likely to take risks, to share their triumphs and their failures with others in the class, both verbally and in writing.

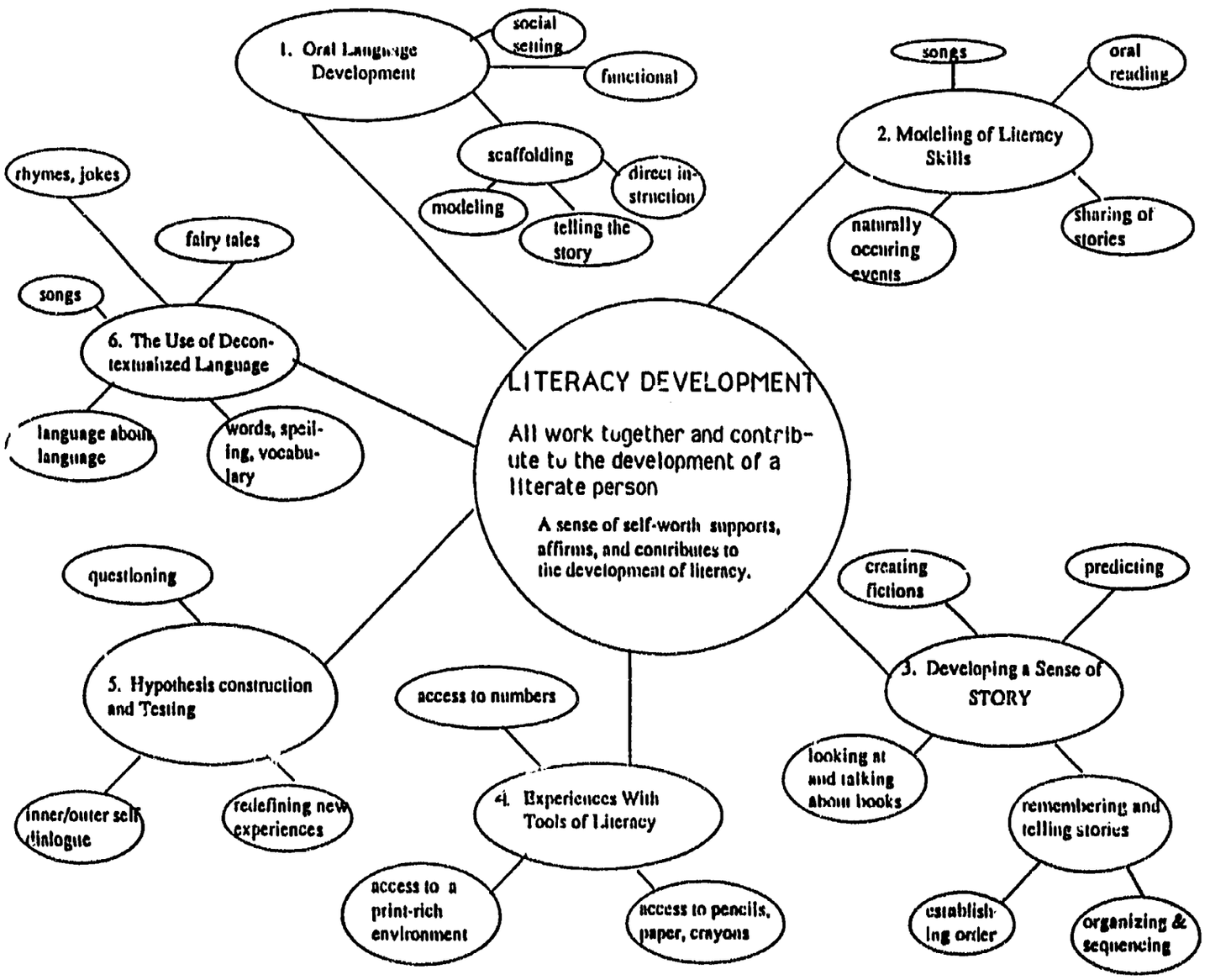
   - They are willing to experiment with language and learning and less afraid to make mistakes.

   - They are less reluctant to model literacy skills for their children, more apt to read aloud, tell stories, sing, and participate in word play.

   - They are willing to participate in a teaching/learning environment with their children, understanding that reciprocal education is a legitimate function of the family.

3. **Each of these ideas is directly related to the development of basic skills in the family education program and in the home and illustrates the connection between traits of healthy families and the development of literacy. The following graphic points out the connection:**

- Healthy families talk together, which naturally leads to the development of oral language and the confidence to reveal thoughts and ideas outside the home.
- Healthy families share stories of their pasts and make predictions about the future, connecting the sense of story to the modeling of literacy skills.
- Healthy families provide a multitude of experiences for their members, among those will be experiences with crayons, paints, pencils, paper and other tools of literacy.
- Healthy families learn to question, construct hypotheses, and test them out in times of play and in times of work, helping each other sort out thinking and put words to thought, which can later develop into reading and writing abilities.



Finally, A "Strengths Model" Individualizes a "Course of Action"

1. **Once a family identifies its strengths and healthy traits, those strengths form the core of a family support plan, such as the plan designed by Dunst, et al in 1990. This plan will mobilize resources to help families meet their needs for improved literacy as well as other needs. For example:**

   - One family's *concerns* include the fact that the family is dependent upon AFDC for support. The mother does not qualify an entry level job because she lacks education. The mother also is concerned about her 4-year-old, who lacks skills necessary for school readiness.

   - *Needs* include a GED and employability skills for the mother, childcare while she attends class, and preschool for her 4-year-old. The family strength that may serve as a resource is "encouragement of individuals." In the advisory session, during which the student sets her goals, she will be reminded to list those individuals upon whom she will depend for encouragement and support when she needs a boost. Is there someone who will drive her to class? Someone who will babysit the younger child? Someone who might fix dinner when she needs to study for her test?

   - Other *resources and support* will be listed, such as the strength of the family as demonstrated in their ability to adapt. She may be asked to write about the successful move from an abusive or unpleasant situation and the coping strategies she garnered to succeed.

   - She will determine *a course of action* and develop *an action plan*. The strength that will help her here is her commitment to her family. She may be encouraged to write a personal mission statement in which that commitment shines through.

2. **As the class determines the family strengths already in place and identifies those requiring development, the instructor also prepares an action plan. He will focus on the listed observable traits and gather ideas for activities and lessons. For example, if the group selected "time together" as one of the significant characteristics for emphasis, the instructor:**

   - will collect menus from the families' favorite restaurants, McDonald's, Wendy's, Burger King, etc. for reading and math lessons. Discussions will include a focus on family interaction and quality time together, using meal time as a sharing experience, emphasizing that home conversation is one of the most critical issues in development of intelligence and readiness for school.

   - will find Little League brochures, scouting manuals, zoo posters, museum notices, city park and recreation schedules, etc., for lessons which focus on reading, computation, and life skills.

   - will use family oriented games in the classroom setting to teach sequencing, rules procedure, and sportsmanship.

   - will bring TV guide and newspaper TV sections into the classroom for reading and discussion purposes, focusing not only on literacy skills acquisition, but also bringing in ideas related to TV watching.

- will help families celebrate with each other, taking advantage of the opportunity to teach planning.
- will include music and movement as teaching and learning tools.
- will make family story telling and family story writing priorities in all components of the program.

## Is Your Program a "Strengths Model"?
## You Can Make It Happen

1. **Learn family systems theory**
Friel and Friel (1988) state that in a system of any kind, every member of the system is profoundly affected by all other members. When changes occur in the system, every member must change if the system is to remain intact. This is particularly true if the family system has been performing in a manner that is debilitating to one or more of its members. An intervention, such as a positive experience in a family literacy program, creates positive changes in one or two members, and the normal pattern of family interaction is disrupted. Even though dysfunctional, the system will seek to return to its original state. Sometimes, when only one or two members of the system become healthier or change significantly, their only alternative is to leave the system.

If we believe that most families have some strengths and healthy traits, we must build upon those to address the function and structure of the family so that all members become healthier. The significant others in the lives of adult students can become a part of the communion, or they can sabotage the efforts of the partner. Healthy Family Literacy Programs recognize this issue and address it up front.

**Practical Suggestion: Genogram--See Appendix A, p. 19**

2. **Learn strategies for demonstrating empathy and expertise**
Wlodkowski (1989) suggests that adults will be motivated to participate and will learn more when the instructor shares something of herself with the students, such as humor and mutual experiences. And the successful instructor will promote the learner's personal control of the context of learning, allowing time for reflection as well as time for planning, attributing success to personal causation and personal strengths.

**Practical suggestion: Gifts to Give and Receive--See Appendix B, p. 20.**

3. **Relate Learning to Life Cycle Phases**
*To Everything There is a Season,* and in each of those seasons of life, both individuals and families have varying strengths to help them cope with the events of that season. The self-concept of the individual in each stage can be strengthened or damaged by the family, and self-concept is a variable in learning with both cognitive and affective consequences.

Families have self-concepts, as well, and healthy families see themselves in terms of connectedness, so that the family-concept belongs to the whole. This broader concept changes, too, as families grow and age. Most families pass through crises which reduces cohesion, but strong families continue to encourage and support one another. Family Literacy Programs must make every attempt to help families recognize how they are relating to one another in various phases of their existence, using their strengths to maintain a sense of belonging.

Cross (1981) and Lynch (1991) provide frameworks with which to examine individual problems and ultimately understand more fully why individuals behave as they do at various stages of development.

**Practical suggestion: Compare and contrast matrix--See Appendix C. p. 21.**

4. **Become familiar with a variety of strengths models--indicators of health in families, lists of healthy traits, effective practices to build strengths, etc.** Researchers choose a variety of methods to collect factors of family health, and the language of the literature refers to *qualities, keys, traits* and *dimensions* of strong or healthy families. A review of the literature reveals that much of the work in this field has focused on white, and/or middle-class families (Krysan, 1990, p.14), but some studies have been conducted across cultures.

Abbott and Meredith (1985, cited in Krysan) studied four groups: Mexican Americans, African Americans, Hmong, and Native Americans. They found general agreement among the four groups relative to the traits of healthy families.

The **National Center for Family Literacy** has conducted workshops in various sections of the country and found consistency in selection of crucial traits across cultural groups. There have been, however, occassional singularities that are cultural or regional in nature. For example, 48 of 58 Native Americans chose "a sense of play and humor" as very significant to healthy family functioning. In "Bible-belt" areas, "spirituality" often assumes first place on the list. The significance of this must be noted: when building curriculum, programmers must be aware that ethnic and cultural differences are variables of instructional design. Sensitivity to various subpopulations is crucial if the "strengths model" approach is to be relevant to individual programs.

Nick Stinnet and John DeFrain identify six qualities of strong families; Virginia Satir discusses four key factors; Dolores Curran lists 15 traits. Both Robert Hill and Reginald Clark focus on Black families, each describing characteristics that create functional and effective methods for survival and achievement. Carolyn Attneave discusses strengths of Native Americans and John Red Horse writes about family structure and values in Native American homes.

**Practical Suggestion: Analysis and compilation of group-specific construct**
**See Appendix D, pp. 22-25.**

5. **Select literature that, in itself, links events and characters to the healthy traits of the individuals within the story's families and to total family wellness. Beyond "reading activities," create opportunities for the students to interact with the literature, making connections to their own family strengths.**

**Two pieces of literature that hold particular promise for a focus on healthy traits and family strengths are:**

a. ***A Summer Tragedy* by Arna Bontemps**

b. ***A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Newton Peck**

**See Appendix E, pp. 26-29.**

6. **Design activities, using a family focus, which will engage students in a collection of skills needed to acquire the GED or other credential.**

Every well-designed activity that focuses on individual and family issues will benefit the students in many ways, but we need also to remember that most of our students have established goals to acquire an educational credential. Therefore, objectives will be in place that will interface social/emotional or affective issues with academic, cognitively-oriented

goals. The three major areas identified by the Educational Testing Service and other agencies as primary for adult education are *prose literacy, document literacy,* and *computation*. The Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System identifies*content areas* and *competencies* in which most adults need to be proficient in order to function successfully in the dominant culture. Other assessment systems identify specific and discrete skills necessary for academic credentialing.

Adult students need to know that instructors have designed "strengths model" activities and will use techniques and methodology that will help them build the skills needed to acquire the General Education Diploma.

Each of the activities in the appendix meets this requirement for accountability. See specifically the **practical suggestion: Parent/Child Interaction Graph.** **See Appendix F, p. 30.**

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# APPENDICES

**What's in the appendices...**
The content of language study often comes from real life; indeed, in a Family Literacy Program the most accessible, applicable, and curiosity-provoking content is context-centered and culturally appropriate.

Content should be aimed at helping students become creative and powerful users of language and computation. The few activities suggested here have the following qualities:

- They are all "reading and writing" activities, placing emphasis on engagement with literacy, while striving for personal growth.
- They are whole language in nature--requiring **input** from the four language modes and enabling **output** in application of reading skills, composition, and verbal communication.
- They are interdisciplinary in content.
- They are highly individualized, yet social and interactive, allowing for privacy and confidentiality, while providing a mechanism for cooperative learning and teaching.
- They encourage higher-order thinking, planning, and problem-solving in which students and teachers function as a team.
- They provide for skill-building and association with prose,document, and quantitative literacy.
- They can be simplified for the non- or low-level reader so that everyone in the program can participate in the activities.
- THEY ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING.

Practical suggestions include:

- A Genogram
- Gifts to Give and Receive
- Life Stages Matrix
- Methodology for Analyzing Healthy Traits and Formulating Group-specific List
- Literature-based "Strengths Model" Activities
- An Applicable Graph

# Appendix A--GENOGRAM

The family is a system. As such, it has a **structure** and a **function.** Individuals and extended family members form the structure.
The function of the family is to provide a psychological and social foundation:

- basic needs--food, clothing, shelter, safety, warmth, nurturance, love
- belongingness needs--a sense of communion
- preparation for separation--autonomy, promotion of self-worth
- sense of playfulness--a fun-loving function
- spirituality
- others?

Objectives of a Genogram: identifies the **structure** of a particular family and the **functions** of each of the individuals within the family. Methodology: Analysis; Discussions which focus on how members of the system are affected by other members, and on what happens when functions are not carried out or when functions change.
Applied skills: analysis, synthesis, document literacy.

ROBERTS FAMILY

| STRUCTURE | FUNCTION |
|---|---|
| Dad--Henry | works at Kroger Food Store-provides basic needs |
| Grandparents--Jim and Betty | provide spiritual leadership, promotion of self-worth, fun-loving |
| Aunt Mary | works at laundry, pays rent, provides food, other basics |
| Children--Vega & Jimmy | sense of communion--continuation of family--love--fun |

22

# Appendix B--GIFTS TO GIVE AND RECEIVE

Before asking students to participate in this exercise, instructors should read, *Creating New Images of Strong Families* by Ted Bowman.

A. Strengths of character are identifiable and can be transmitted purposefully from one generation to the next. Even those adult learners who have bruised egos and sorrowful memories of their own familial experiences remember someone from the past who had strengths or traits which they have adopted. Ask your students to draw a family tree, add dates, and then give **Questions to consider:**

1. What strengths can you identify that have been passed down to you from your grandparents and parents? *This is the gift you received.* (We begin by recognizing that all of our adult students have **courage**--without it, they would not have come into the program.) Add at least one more trait or characteristic.

2. How and when do you call upon those strengths? Describe one specific incident in your life during which one of those strengths came to your aid or to your rescue. (This can be a written or an oral exercise.)

3. What strengths do you want to pass on to your children? *This is the gift you will give.* Make a list or complete the sentence stem: If I could give my children family strengths, I would choose to pass on...

4. Picture yourself passing on a healthy trait or strength to your children. What does this picture look like? How will you accomplish that goal? What specific ways will you choose to transfer those qualities to the next generation?

B. Explore events, find quotations, and investigate the people of the era in which your grandparents and parents were young.

1. Does this historical perspective give you a new appreciation of your family background? In what ways? Discuss in dyads.

2. How did these events or people affect the strengths of the family? How does this knowledge affect your understanding of and respect for your ancestors? Complete a journal entry which begins:
   **We reach new understandings all the time,**
   **take a second look, maybe change our minds...**
   (from BIG RIVER, a musical about Huckelberry Finn)

Applied skills: Prose, document, and quantitative literacy. Interdisciplinary content highlights social-psychology arena of Social Studies subject matter, applicable to GED.

3

# Appendix C--STAGES IN THE ADULT LIFE CYCLE

Objectives:

- To aid in the understanding of adult life cycles so that individual family members will recognize and appreciate the development of self concept through those cycles.
- To help individuals recognize strengths in each family member.
- To see that strengths may differ in various stages of life.
- To predict how members of the family can learn from each other.

1. Available literature on the adult life cycle is often academically oriented and difficult for the layperson to read and interpret. The teacher may want to assign a good reader to write a summary of the articles for others in the class who might have difficulty with the subject matter and reading level. Reading provides the knowledge base required for the analysis and synthesis activity which comes later.

- Lynch and Lynch, *Self-concept Development Through the Life Cycle* will help adult students in Family Literacy Programs understand their own feelings about themselves, their parents, their spouses or significant others, and their children.
- Gottlieb's *20 Good Things That Happen to You as You Grow Older* is an easier-to-read (even fun) and less academic article.

2. Complete a matrix, which includes each family member, identify strengths, and predict how families can learn from one another. For example:

| | Sherry | Carl | Aldus | Beverly (Mom) | Grandmom | Granddad | Great-Grandmother |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 83 | | | | | | | Wisdom |
| 53 | | | | | | Determination Patience | |
| 47 | | | | | self-reliance sharing | | |
| 27 | | | | affirms & supports | | | |
| 10 | | | humor awareness experimental | | | | |
| 7 | | energy faith in others | | | | | |
| 3 | Trust curiosity | | | | | | |

Applicable skills: Analysis, synthesis, prose and document literacy

# Appendix D--TRAITS OF HEALTHY FAMILIES

Why is it important to identify "Traits of Healthy Families"?

- to establish the model as a "strengths" vs. a "deficit" model
- to select strengths which will be used to develop a family support plan
- to use as a guide for choosing teaching strategies and to individualize instruction, and
- to identify the culture of the group.

To begin the individualization strategy:

1. Analyze the traits identified by researchers or students. (Listed on next page)
   a. Connect to literacy development by matching a trait to a learning factor
   b. Formulate relationships by constructing a written statement

2. Select 5 traits that are significant to you as an individual.

3. Prioritize by circling 3 of the 5.

4. Star 1 of the 3.

5. Construct a group list by compiling all the starred traits.

TASK:

1. List the observable characteristics of the traits.

2. Describe materials, tasks, and methods which support the trait and which will address the needs for literacy enhancement.

3. Match selected characteristics to competencies.

# An Overview of Healthy Traits Constructs

*Traits of Healthy Families*
Dolores Curran

The Healthy Family:
Communicates & Listens
Affirms & Supports One Another
Teaches Respect for Others
Develops a Sense of Trust
Has a Sense of Play & Humor
Exhibits a Sense of Shared Responsibility
Teaches a Sense of Right & Wrong
Has a Strong Sense of Family in which Rituals and Traditions Abound
Has a Balance of Interaction Among Members
Has a Shared Religious Core
Respects the Privacy of One Another
Values Service to Others
Fosters Table Time and Conversation
Shares Leisure Time
Admits to and Seeks Help with Problems.

*Secrets of Strong Families*
Stinnett & DeFrain

Commitment
Time together
Coping with crisis
Spiritual wellness
Communication
Appreciation

*The Strengths of Black Families*
Robert B. Hill

Strong Black Families Have:
Strong Kinship Bonds
Strong Work Orientation
Adaptability of Family Roles
Strong Achievement Orientation
Strong Religious Orientation.

*Ten Characteristics of Effective Families*
Reginald Clark

The Effective Family Demonstrates:

A feeling of control over their lives
A frequent communication of high expectations to children
A family dream of success for the future
Hard work as the key to success
An active, not a sedentary life style
A devotion to home-centered learning hours each week
A mutual support system & problem-solving unit within the home
Household rules, clearly understood and consistently enforced
Involvement with schools/frequent contact with teachers
Emphasis on spiritual growth.

*In Strong Families*
David Olson

Parents have a strong and happy marriage.
Members feel close to each other but also allow each other privacy and freedom to act independently.
Family members are flexible, creative as a group, and able to solve problems together.
Family members are able to listen and share both negative and positive feelings with each other.
Family members are able to cope effectively with stress.

*In Healthy Families There Is...* Virginia Satir

Promotion of positive self-worth, An open communication system, Clarity as to family rules and expectations, and a link to the wider society--commitment beyond the family.

## Traits of Healthy Native American Families:

1. All tribes are based upon the family unit, and in all tribes family members share in the love of their children and find meaning in helping them grow to maturity to represent the best that human beings can be.

2. All tribes have an accumulation of tribal wisdom.

3. Family structure patterns lend themselves to horizontal and lateral extended families, an active kinship system which often includes non-kin.

4. Extended family systems foster interdependence, collateral relationships in which family involvement, approval, and pride are highlighted.

5. All tribes have embedded cultural features, many of which remain constant: family structure, incorporation and relational bonding, and Indian preferences in social behavior.

Compiled from *Family Structure and Value Orientation in American Indians* by John G. Red Horse and *The Wasted Strengths of Indian Families* by Carolyn Attneave

## Assessing Family Strengths and Family Functioning Style

Trivette, C. M., Dunst, C. J., Deal, A. G., Hamer, A. W. & Propst, S. (1990).

- It is important to note that no one family member and not all family units possess all these qualities. But the compilation of family strengths put together by the above authors includes:

1. A belief in and a sense of commitment toward promoting the well-being and growth of individual family members as well as that of the family unit.

2. Appreciation for the small and large things that individual family members do well, and encouragement to do better.

3. Concentrated effort to spend time together and do things together, no matter how formal or informal the activity or event.

4. A sense of purpose that permeates the reasons and basis for "going on" in both bad and good times.

5. A sense of congruence among family members regarding the value and importance of assigning time and energy to what the family considers its goals, needs, projects, and functions.

6. The ability to communicate with one another in a way that emphasizes positive interactions among family members.

7. A clear set of family rules, values, and beliefs that establishes expectations about acceptable and desired behavior.

8. A varied repertoire of coping strategies that encourages positive functioning in dealing with both normative and non-normative life events.

9. The ability to engage in problem-solving activities designed to evaluate options for meeting needs and procuring resources.

10. The ability to be positive and see the positive in almost all aspects of their lives, including the ability to see crises and problems as an opportunity to learn and grow.

11. Flexibility and adaptability in the roles necessary to procure resources to meet needs.

12. A balance between the use of internal and external family resources for coping and adapting to life events and planning for the future.

# APPENDIX E--USING LITERATURE AS A BASIS FOR DISCUSSION OF FAMILY STRENGTHS

1. **Poems and greeting cards** can open discussions about family strengths and healthy traits, especially now that the current line of cards highlights a variety of emotions and circumstances, from apologies to congratulations, from sympathy to esctasy. The brevity of the text allows for a variety of presentations, comparisons, analyses, and evaluations.

2. **Short stories** are useful tools for the discussion of family traits. Unfortunately, those in which family strengths are emphasized are too few. We have found, however, that the following provide a solid base for recognition and discussion of healthy characteristics:
   O'Henry's classic, *The Gift of the Magi*
   Truman Capote's, *A Christmas Memory*
   Arna Bontemps', *A Summer Tragedy*

   The first two are more familiar to most educators than the last. All three relate stories from the past.

   Arna Bontemps was a writer out of the Harlam Renaissance era. He wrote both from the heart and from experience. His story, *A Summer Tragedy*, details a particular day in the lives of Jeff and Jennie Patton, who, confronted by starvation and poverty, have run out of hope. He is lame, crippled by a devasting stroke; she is blind.

   Their five grown children had all died within a two-year [illegible]. How is it possible that two people, consumed by crises, can demonstrate stren[illegible]

   Our readers and listeners (this is a good story for reading aloud) readily identify the terms of endearment that pass between the two. They recognize the support given between the two as they feel compelled to make the most painful decision of their lives.

   The pride and dignity, which helped them survive earlier tragedies, bolster them as they follow the only escape they think honorable.

3. The use of longer literature provides multiple opportunities to link discussions of family strengths with reading/writing skills, critical thinking techniques, and student's lives. We have found several high interest/easy reading novels that lend themselves to the blending of teaching objectives. One is *A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Newton Peck.

   The story of Rob, a 12-year-old boy who becomes a man in one short year, chronicles the months leading up to his father's death. The strength of the family permeate every chapter and are easily identifed by students, who relate closely with a family that lacks education, money, and opportunity, but one that demonstrates caring, love, affirmation and support, reciprocal teaching and learning, communication and above all--understanding.

   The following strategies focus on prose literacy and couple effectively with central ideas surrounding family strengths.

## ACTIVE READING/STRATEGIC TEACHING: AN EXAMPLE

Activities with the novel, *A Day No Pigs Would Die* by Robert Newton Peck.

**A. Focus on the use of prior knowledge and experience**

1. Choose one crucial contextual referant--a word or concept from the text and ask: "What do you think of when you hear the word...?"

In this case, we might select the word, Shaker.
Responses could be salt shaker, mover and shaker, earth shaker (quake), teeth shaking from the cold.

The instructor will be prepared to make connections between their responses and the construct of the word in relationship to the text. In this story, Shaker is the religion of the family. What does it have to do with their concepts of shaker? How can the instructor extend their understanding of the novel by relating information about the religion? Is it important? Why?

2. Search prior knowledge about historical, geographical, and situational context. Ask "What was the most significant event or condition in the thirties, forties, etc. What do you know about the man who was president at this time? Have you ever lived or visited this area?

In this case, we might want to discuss the beginnings of the depression era. What did this have to do with this family, if anything? The setting of this story is Vermont. What significance is there to the events of the story?
Dealing with these issues frames the story for the student, providing information that not only adds interest but relevance.

3. Expose relevant vocabulary. Which unfamiliar words are most likely to reduce comprehension and enjoyment of the story? How can vocabulary create an inconsiderate text? How can vocabulary reduce the rhythm of reading?

In this case, the vocabulary creates dissonance because of the vernacular associated with the religion, the geographical area, the era in which the story takes place, and the particular events. Ask students what sayings are common in their families and in their own geographical areas. Talk about humor and language, how words can confound and yet amuse us.

4. Connect to students' lives by reference to characterization. Ask pointed questions, such as: "Have you ever known anyone who was so perfect, she didn't seem real? What were some of the things she did that you admired? that irritated you?
Have you ever known anyone who was mad at the world?
Who liked peanut butter better than ice cream?
Who made everyone laugh?"

In this case, it would be helpful to introduce all the characters in the family in order to frame the setting for the reader. This can be accomplished by listing on the board or by asking students to make their own characterization reference cards, which they will then use as bookmarks.
To set the story, ask, "Do you remember what it was like to be 12 years old?"

**B. Establish a goal for reading for the entire text,** such as "We want to be able to learn the causes for WW II," or "We want to find out what happened to the families lost in the snowstorm." Establish a goal for reading shorter sections, chapters, units or chunks of text, such as "We want to discover the relationship between WW I and WW II," or "We want to see what made James so mad that he ran away."

In this case (reading the novel *A Day No Pigs Would Die*) one goal might be to discover what the reviewer meant when he said that "this story is one of love, which suffuses every page," or why another said that "the novel is about the love between a father and a son, and a coming to manhood."

A section goal might be to discover what it was like to be 12, a Shaker and going to school with others who didn't understand Shaker ways, or to discover the meaning of "weaseling a dog."

**C. Connect reading to writing.**

1. Construction of a Learning Log will enable the reader to connect facts with feelings, to establish a knowledge base and to use higher-order thinking skills.

2. Writing dialogue journals enables students and teachers to converse on paper. The student responds to the reading, and the teacher responds to the student.

3. Focus on Family Strengths. Using published constructs or the class-generated list of healthy traits of families, compare strengths to those of the family in the text. Write family memories in which similar strengths come to the aid of family members.

**D. Use "Directed Reading Strategies" such as those discussed earlier.**

1. The teacher sets up the text, connecting to students' prior knowledge. In this case, "What do you think this title means?"

2. The teacher asks a question to establish the goal. In this case, What kind of book "leaves you better than it found you?" (The words of a reviewer) or "Why would the author dedicate this book to his father?"

3. The teacher reads aloud. In this case, read all of chapter one. It is only 4 1/2 pages long and establishes the boy's character.

4. The teacher uses prediction schemes.

5. The students participate in "Sustained Silent Reading".

6. Discuss -literal meanings, interpretive, and applied.

7. Repeat cycle.

**E. Plan Questioning Strategies to include prereading questions, inserted questions, and post-reading questions.** Include questioning techniques which require higher-order thinking skills.

**F. Prepare for Review or evaluation of text**; ask for students' judgments in various ways:

1. What was the effect of the author's language upon you?

2. Why do you think this is considered classic literature? In this case, the book is not a classic, per se, but it has become a classic example of young adult literature, and it has remained popular for more than 15 years.

3. Why do you think the book (poem, essay, article) is widely read?

4. Do you think the information in the text is accurate? Why or why not? Are the experiences in this text easy or difficult to identify with? Why or why not?

# Appendix F--PARENT/CHILD INTERACTION GRAPH

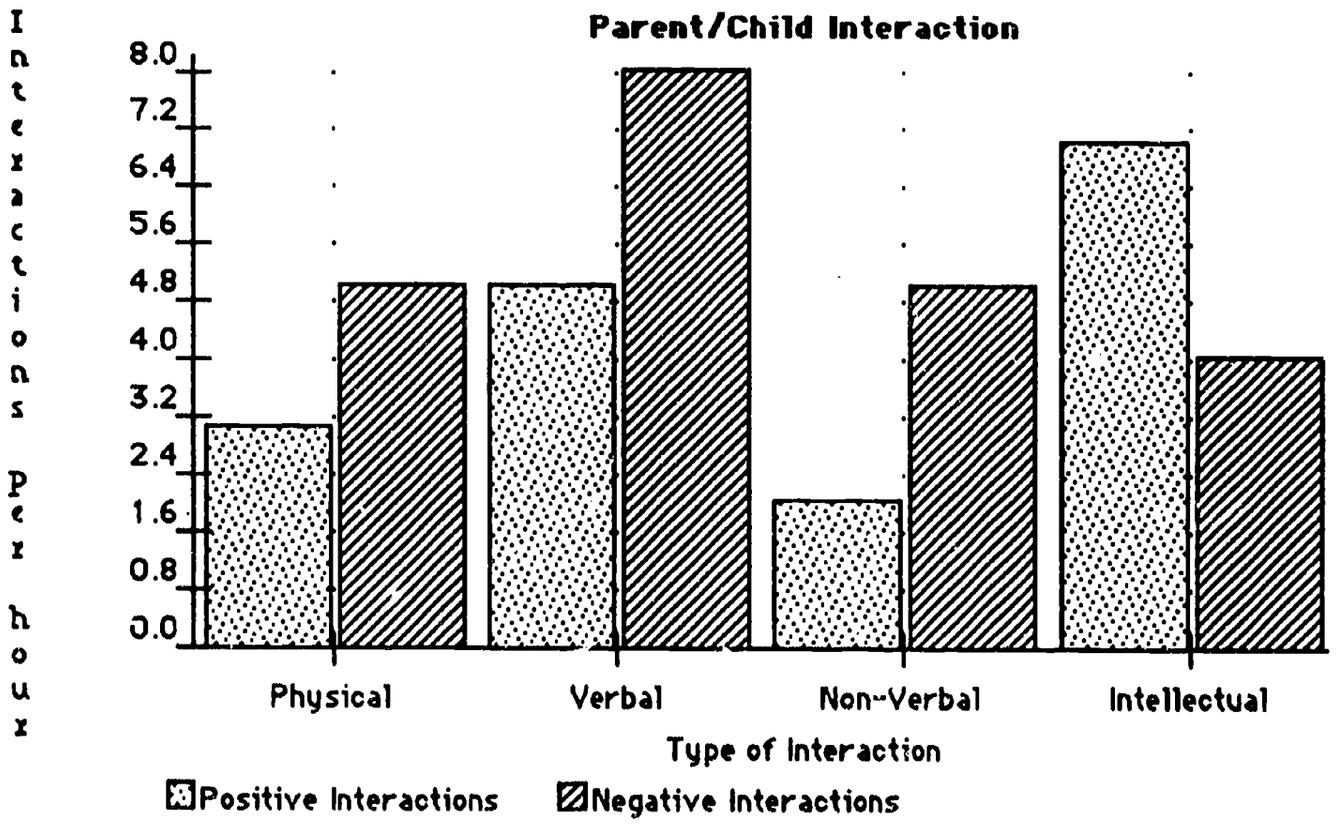
As we design activities which emphasize a family focus, we also want to keep in mind the need of most of the adults in our programs for a collection of skills that will lead to the acquisition of the GED or other educational credential. One of those skills may be referred to as "document literacy" or the ability to construct, read, and interpret scales, tables, charts and graphs, etc.

At the same time, instructors in Family Literacy Programs set goals to increase positive interactions between parents and children. The following activities combine both skills-acquisition and healthy-traits analysis.

1. Read the documents "Children Learn What They Live" and "100 Ways to Say GOOD JOB!" Discuss the importance of modeling positive behaviors, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication as positive interactions.

2. Brainstorm ways in which parents can provide physical support, verbal, non-verbal, intellectual or cognitive support.

3. Parents will log their parent/child interactions for a pre-determined time period. After logs are complete, each parent will graph interactions, comparing positive with negative incidents. All too often, we realize that too many of our interactions are on the negative side. The goal, of course, is to accentuate the positive!



# An Invitation

Family Literacy Programs offer us a tremendous opportunity to work with adults in creative modes, experimenting with play and artistry that may not be possible or practical in other adult education classes. All of the suggestions here are intended to be used as springboards for the imaginative teacher, the one who is anxious to expand upon the usual into the unusual, the one who is looking for ways to couple cognitive instruction with affective benefits, the one who knows that the most effective classroom activities are those that transfer into the lives of the students.

We know that this document will be used most effectively by those instructors who are already "strengths-minded teachers," and we invite you to share your successes, your questions, and your enhancements with us, as you set about to build upon the strengths of families. We have heard from some of you who previewed the draft and know that some of the suggested exercises have already been expanded by your creativity. Thank you for sharing those ideas with us. All other ideas are welcome and encouraged. Please write to us at:

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