FAMILY LEARNING

HAND BOOK

**This manual chronicles the Lockeport and Area Family
Learning Program's experience in creating and implementing
their family learning program.**

This book was compiled and written by Bonnie Nickerson, Rebecca Tudor, Lisette Jones, and Rhonda Tufts-Blades.

This book is dedicated to Diane McGee who is a true supporter of lifelong learning.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Use Of This Handbook

This handbook was designed for use by coordinators and educators wishing to set up a family learning program in a rural area.

Community services personnel and health outreach workers will also find this handbook helpful in understanding family literacy issues.

Awareness of family literacy issues provides a beginning stage. An understanding of the generational cycle of low literacy will help generate support from the community, which is crucial to the success of any program.

Other Considerations

Appendix 3

Appendix 2

Bibliography"

History

The Origins of the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program

The Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program was created by chance, really. We are the result of a gradual partnering of people who had previously been working single-handedly within their community to address issues of literacy. It is our goal, in publishing this handbook, to chronicle our formation and development and, in doing so, to make it easier for other groups to organize similar programs in their communities.

To really understand how we came to be, we thought it might be useful to first give a brief description of our community, followed by an overview of the events that led to our formation as a family learning group.

Lockeport is located on the South Shore of Nova Scotia. The town and its outlying area has a population of approximately 2,000 people. The main industry is fishing, which has experienced many changes in the past few years. Because of Lockeport's rural location and economic challenges, community support has grown to provide a strong infrastructure on which to build a healthy and vibrant community. The Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program is proud to be part of that infrastructure.

****

About three years ago, in 1994, a local resident, Rebecca Tudor, was attempting to tutor an adult learner who could not read or write. She was having difficulties because she was not trained to do this type of work. Feeling frustrated, she contacted a friend who was dealing with adult literacy in the workplace. Darcy Rhyno suggested that she take the Tutor and Instructor Training and Certification Program offered by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture.

Meanwhile, some of Rebecca's friends and acquaintances were having difficulties with the school system - they felt communication between school administrators and parents was poor. This small group of acquaintances, brought together by their common interest in educational issues, began meeting on a regular basis to discuss their concerns.

Once the people within this group began pooling their varied experiences with literacy issues, they soon became aware of some of the reasons people are not able to read or write, and what factors within the community contribute to this. In Lockeport, one factor was the closure of a local fish plant. For many years people had been able to leave school and be employed in the fisheries, either on land or at sea. With limited education, they were still able to make a living. With the downturn of the fisheries, many people went on TAGS (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy). This fisheries assistance program, created by the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and Human Resources Development Canada, initially encouraged the unemployed fishers and fish plant workers to upgrade. Unfortunately, many were not at a level to enter any type of formal educational program. There was a gap between their abilities and the program's requirements.

Mother & son share a light-hearted moment

Many of these people had families, and they were also having difficulties helping their children with their schoolwork. The group of concerned community members realized this problem could be solved in two ways: the children could be tutored for the rest of their school careers, or the parents could be empowered to help their children themselves. The group agreed that empowering the parents would be much more beneficial to everyone concerned. Now the group had a goal, a vision: Create a place that parents can turn to when they need help helping their children. The next question was how to go about reaching that goal.

Rebecca had joined the Shelburne County Learning Network, a non-profit group that oversees the operation of several family learning groups within Shelburne County on behalf of the various government agencies that provide funding. Through the Network, Rebecca reamed about the funding available for projects like the one she and her group had in mind, and how to go about applying for that funding. The Shelburne County Learning Network agreed to submit a proposal to start a family learning group in Lockeport. The proposal was sent to the Nova Scotia Community Learning Initiative, a program operated by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture.

Once the proposal was accepted, Bonnie Nickerson, one of the members of the original group of concerned Lockeport citizens, was hired as the coordinator. Bonnie had been volunteering at the local elementary school a couple of days per week, so she was aware of the children who were having difficulties with their schoolwork. She also knew their families. Bonnie approached these families and told them about her program. Through word of mouth, her program became known. For the first few months, Bonnie worked with these families out of their homes. By meeting with them on their own terms, in places they felt comfortable and not threatened, Bonnie was able to gain their trust. That trust led to a firm belief in the program.

After about three months of individual attention, these families felt they were ready to work together as a group. This first group met in the Lockeport Library. Bonnie felt that this location was more appropriate than the school since many of her learners had had negative school experiences. Over time, and with the second group of families, the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program was able to use the facilities at the school.

****

Today, the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program sees itself filling a large gap in the learning cycle of &mikes in the Lockeport area. We see literacy as a three-way process that includes the parents, the children, and the community, which in turn includes the schools the children attend.

Our job as we see it is to deliver a literacy program to families; that is, to parents and their children, so that both will be able to improve their literacy levels. Since experience has shown us that lack of interaction with the school is a factor in literacy development problems within our client families, we have made it the focus of our family literacy program. We want to have an influence on how the school and the families interact so the cycle of literacy development problems can be broken.

Our clients' ultimate motivation is to break the cycle of literacy development problems and poor school performance that has affected their families over the generations. Their method is to learn about school and learn what school is teaching, then to interact with the school through their children and the teachers to improve their children's school performance and literacy development. They are reading to their children. They are reading some difficult learning theory information. They are engaged in the writing process with their children They are learning about outside agencies and school policy/curriculum through guests They are going on their own, with their children and with their tutors. to the school to work with teachers on their children's education We see this as a huge step forward for these families

What is Family Literacy?

Most family literacy programs focus on the role of the family and its influence on a child's early development. As such, there is no one definition of family literacy. We believe, however, that a child's home environment plays a significant role in his or her personal growth and development and, subsequently, promotes the concept of lifelong learning.

Family literacy encourages the development of self-esteem and positive self-image for family members. It is based on the premise that men and women who think positively about themselves will, in turn, provide a nurturing and healthy approach to life. They will serve as role models to their children, friends and community.

The need for education and training programs to provide the skills and tools for people to feel good about themselves is the foundation of the family literacy approach to learning.

Given the changes in the economics of rural communities in Nova Scotia, it is becoming increasingly important that parents take an active role in the education of their children. But for parents who left the education system early, whether for economic or social reasons, the task of supporting their children's education becomes overwhelming.

As we have learned, an important element in the beginning work with families is to make the connection between educational success of parents to that of their children. When children view their parents working to raise their own literacy levels, they learn that education is important. Such attempts also reinforce the belief that learning does not start at one particular age and end with formal graduation from school, but that learning can be a lifelong pursuit.

Factors Affecting Learning

We have learned that there are many factors that affect the learning of adults. Understanding and addressing these factors is important for the success of the family learning program.

Society expects adults to have a certain level of education. We rarely question adults if they can read or write before we pass them a form to fill out. It is often this preconception society has that makes it difficult for adults to take the step to upgrade their education.

Many adults also have low self-esteem because of their lack of education. They become frustrated with their inability to help their children with schoolwork. Family learning programs enable the parents to become involved in their children's learning experiences. This raises their own self-esteem.

Financial and transportation problems can affect a learning program. Some families don't have money for materials or means of transportation. Financial problems at home can disrupt their concentration.

Childcare may also be an issue. Parents may not have someone to baby-sit or be able to afford to pay someone to do so. Finding the time to upgrade may be difficult for parents who have children and work outside the home.

All of the above have proven to be reasons why adults won't or are unable to participate in the upgrading programs we provide. This is why the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program tries to be flexible and takes these barriers into consideration.

Tutor conferencing with parent

Program Model/Design

Preparation of Program

There were many issues we needed to consider carefully when we started our family learning program. Before any learners were recruited, various support systems were put in place in order to eliminate as many barriers for the learners as possible. Some of these support systems included consideration about transportation, childcare, scheduling, and location. The following 12 topics cover the steps we took in developing the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program.

How Do We Get Participants?

Our first step was to raise community awareness. Here are some methods we found useful

- We developed simple brochures outlining pertinent information. We kept the language simple and to-the-point. Goals and objectives were stated, and contact person(s) were listed.

- Our local cable station was receptive to interviews. We met with the interviewer in advance to ensure that all necessary information would be covered during the interview. (Most cable stations also offer free advertising on their community bulletin boards.)

- We took advantage of local newspaper articles and advertisements. (Newspapers also offer free advertisements in their coming events sections.)

- Local service clubs proved to be very useful partners for distributing information, as well as for providing funding for materials.

Our second step was to meet with teachers and administrators in our area. We presented the program and enlisted their help and support in reaching the people it would benefit. Educators' support was invaluable to our coordinator, as they had contact with both students and parents on a regular basis. Here are some of the things we did to make the school system work to the advantage of our program:

- We used the school's facilities to run our program. In order to do this, your school's principal must be supportive by providing rooms and materials such as flip charts, etc.

- We requested a booth at report card time in our school. We had information available and took time with each parent to explain the program and what we could offer. Then we set up a time when we could meet with interested parents to obtain more information as to their specific needs. We also explained clearly that this program was designed for parents and children both to attend.

Initial Interview With Learner

The coordinator of our program met with the potential learner in an agreed location, which sometimes was the learner's home. Wherever the interview took place, we were careful to ensure that the surroundings were as comfortable to the learner as possible.

This initial informal interview takes place to establish interests, needs, and support required, such as baby-sitting and transportation. The following are the types of questions we asked:

Name(s) of Parent(s):_____

Address _____

Phone Number:_____

Student's name:_____

Grade:_____

Any Recommendations:_____

Area of difficulty:_____

What is preventing the parent/parents from helping?_____

_____

One or both parents must be present at each session - who will attend? _____

_____

Comments:_____

_____

_____

We found that report card day could provide an excellent opportunity to find potential participants for our program. After the parents had spoken with the teacher, we could usually sense whether or not it was a good report card. Asking how the report card was encouraged parents to discuss the difficulties their child was having. We made pamphlets available to the parents and, when possible, asked them for a phone number so we could call them back later.

Recruiting Tutors

We believe that training tutors is an important process because tutors must have an understanding of the general philosophy of the family learning program and an understanding of the importance of flexibility. confidentiality, and sensitivity in the delivery of programs. The more tutor volunteers available to the program, the better the chance of making successful matches between learners and tutors.

Attending a Tutor and Instructor Training and Certification Program and becoming a tutor requires a substantial commitment on the part of the tutor volunteers. Volunteers have to donate their time and sometimes cover incurred expenses such as baby-sitting for their own children. They also need support. We have an ongoing support system set up for our tutor volunteers so they can share successful or unsuccessful strategies and get guidance on how they might design their lesson plans, etc.

Matching Volunteer Tutors and Families

Finding a good match between a family and their tutor is essential. If a match does not work as well as it should, the tutor and learner should have support and encouragement so they don't become frustrated. It is the role of the coordinator to make the matches between the learners and tutors and to be available to both if problems arise. We always stress to our learners that if they are uncomfortable for any reason with the tutor assigned to them, they can talk to the coordinator and new arrangements can easily he made. Flexibility on the part of the tutors is important.

Meeting with Tutors

A tutor helps develop a math game

Early on in the development of the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program, we realized the importance of consistent support and collaboration among the tutors. There must he ongoing discussion and exchanges of ideas if I tutors are to feel confident and enthusiastic. When something isn't working, it is tremendously helpful to hear suggestions from other people who may have had similar experiences. Or, if something is working particularly well, it is important to share that information

In order to maintain the lines of communication, we decided to have the tutors meet once a month after a family learning session. This seems to work very well because all the tutors are already present and ideas and problems are fresh in everyone's mind. This process is instrumental to making the program cohesive and focused. These meetings also provide an opportunity for the coordinator of the group to talk with the tutors and reinforce the value of the work they are doing. This last point is an important one, and it is also one that can easily be overlooked. It is extremely important for tutors to feel that they are valued, that what they are doing is recognized. This is where the coordinator can help. A little commendation can go a long way.

Location

Finding a location that is comfortable and not intimidating to the learners is extremely important. We planned ahead of time as to where our sessions could be held, but the group should always be encouraged to have input on decisions like location. For example, schools can be an excellent place for family learning meetings because of availability of desks, blackboards, books, etc., but they may be completely inappropriate for learners who have had bad experiences associating with school or who feel intimidated in such a setting.

We found the local library was a more neutral location for our first family learning group because it was small and coy. Our second group, however, felt comfortable using the local elementary school. Sometimes the local elementary school is a good option if there are a lot of pre-school and elementary school-age children involved. This setting worked well when we did cooking projects and scavenger hunts with the parents and children.

Coordinator instructs parents

Childcare and Transportation

The method by which to deliver childcare depends largely on how the program is designed. For some of our families. tutors went to the homes so the parents didn't have to worry about childcare. Our second program was designed so parents could bring the children with them, but individual tutors worked with the children in one area of the building while the parents attended the presentations designed specifically for them in another part of the building. Even in a case like this, it is still important to be able to offer , childcare for younger children who may not be attending the program. This can be accomplished by volunteer baby-sitters or by having money available to parents so they can hire the baby-sitter they are most comfortable with. Always encourage parents to talk about what they would like to have in place.

Transportation is often a problem for parents, especially in rural areas like ours. Both tutors and learners may need assistance getting to the program. Usually car pools with other parents or tutors will work, but sometimes it is necessary to have extra volunteers available to drive people if they live farther away. Sometimes gas money is necessary if a lack thereof seems to be a barrier to the family attending.

As was the case with us, local service clubs often will volunteer their services or offer financial assistance for needs such as childcare or transportation.

Dealing With Sexual/Child Abuse

Abuse in its many forms has become an invasive part of everyone's life, through victimization or simply a heightened awareness of its presence. That is why any group that works with children must be extremely careful to protect, first and foremost the children, but also the group itself from the effects of abuse. There is no such thing as paranoia or over-protectiveness when it comes to shielding children from abuse. It is no longer enough to assume that people wishing to work with children are "good" people. Potential tutors must be carefully screened to ensure they are trustworthy.

There are several ways to screen potential candidates The Child Abuse Registry is perhaps the most effective method and is available to groups who work with children under the age of 16. There is no cost for this check. For general inquiries about the child abuse check in Nova Scotia. contact the Head Office of the Department of Community Services at (902) 424-3200.

The local RCMP can also be very helpful They can provide a release (Big Brothers/Big Sisters also carries these forms) that each tutor must sign. authorizing a basic police check to be done on his or her background.

In addition to the Child Abuse Registry and police checks, there are some basic guidelines that all family learning groups should adopt. This is the main rule we have established within the Lockeport Family Learning Group: No tutor is allowed to be alone with a child or children. The learning itself always takes place in a group setting, and if any child must leave the room for, say, a bathroom break, two tutors accompany that child. As mentioned above, guidelines such as these are put in place to protect the children and their families, but they also serve to protect the credibility of the program and prevent future lawsuits.

Linking Family Learning Programs with Other Programs

We believe that one of the goals of any family learning program is to encourage family members to interact through learning. Children and their parents learn academic skills, learn about the world around them, and learn more about each other when they are involved in activities that encourage them to communicate and work together on specific projects. Making connections with other programs outside their immediate family and the family learning program can help children and parents learn in these ways.

Another goal for family learning programs is to connect families with organizations and activities in their community, province, and even country. Children and parents sometimes feel isolated. As a result, any activities they are involved in can become very important to them. Getting children and parents involved in their community and beyond can help overcome the belief they may have that school and other learning programs do not apply to real life. In addition, children and parents will become familiar with local, provincial, and national organizations and perhaps increase their level of comfort in interacting with such organizations.

Those who manage family learning programs can watch for opportunities to make connections with other organizations and activities. The link the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program made with the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History is a good example of one way in which programs can cooperate for the benefit of program participants.

The Museum wanted to improve the level of participation of the public in its services and programs They also wanted to expand the ways in which people think of how a museum can be visited and, in the broadest sense of the word, "read" or interpreted. The Museum decided to hire a coordinator to find adult learners in Nova Scotia who wanted to keep running logs over a six-month period of wildlife in their communities. In other words, the Museum wanted Nova Scotians to see that they could "read" natural history around them.

The Museum coordinator contacted all the adult learning programs in the province, including the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program. Bonnie Nickerson, the coordinator of the Lockeport program, found several interested students. One agreed to keep a diary of a pond beside her house. Another decided to keep a record of the wild flowers she saw in her community. A third agreed to submit regular reports on the birds coming to the feeder in his backyard. All three of the adult learners involved both their tutors and their children as they made their observations.

The adult learners submitted reports on a monthly or more frequent basis, according to a schedule they worked out with the Museum coordinator. As the reports arrived from around the province, the Museum displayed them along with interpretive materials. For example, when an adult learner wrote about blue jays, a mounted blue jay was displayed along with a feather sent in by the reamer. The learner's letter explained that the feather fumed brown when held up to the light, thus proving that blue jays' feathers contain no real blue pigment. Another adult reamer demonstrated the ways in which supplementary materials and local language were explored by linking the two programs. The reamer recorded a "Canada Jay" at his feeder. When he researched this bird, he discovered that the bird's nickname is "Carrion Jay" because it is known to feed on dead animals. Previously, the learner had been calling the bird by the local nickname "Carryin' Jay" because it was so brave that it would steal bait from traps and bacon from frying pans on open fires and carry them away. The reamer was clearly learning about several things on a number of levels at the same time

Learning computer skills

At the end of the program, the coordinators, the Museum, and the Lockeport program agreed to arrange a two-day session in Lockeport, during which time a book based on the natural history writings of the adult learners would be assembled. The three learners from the Lockeport program participated, as did another from a program elsewhere in the province. When printed, copies of the book went to all the adult learner participants in all the programs around the province

Those who participated considered the program a success for a number of reasons. It provided a "real" learning experience for the adult learners It presented an opportunity for children and parents to work on a project together It allowed learners to put to work their skills at interpreting the natural world at writing about what they observed, at reading background and supplementary materials and at constructing a book Learners could see from the changing display at the Museum and the book that what they observed and how they recorded their observations was valued by others beyond their immediate learning program. Linking the Museum program and the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program was of benefit to all involved in a number of ways.

Guest Speakers

Another way in which the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program has been able to make use of resources outside the group is by inviting guest speakers in on a regular basis to discuss the ways in which they use reading skills in their professional and personal lives. An important consideration, however, is that having guest speakers should first be discussed with and must have unanimous consent from the group. Literacy is a delicate area for some learners and they may feel uncomfortable bringing in the outside community.

We also meet with our guest speakers before extending an invitation to determine their sensitivity to literacy and to assess their ability to maintain a comfortable atmosphere.

The Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program attempts to cover a wide range of guests, from RCMP officers (very popular with young children) to store clerks that they see on a regular basis. We ask our guest speakers to discuss the importance of reading in their lives, what kind of leisure reading they do, and then invite them to read a book aloud.

We took our group to the local library on one occasion, where some members of the group filled out library cards. Another method might be to bring in your local librarian to talk about the importance of the library, services offered, and how the library works. The librarian may want to bring in library cards to be filled out by families.

Fund raising

The Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program has found that fund-raising serves three purposes. In addition to raising funds for such necessities as office supplies, learning materials (paper. pens, Bristol board. etc.), baby-sitting, and travel expenses, it also heightens the awareness of literacy issues in the community, which can entice volunteers to come forward as either possible clients for the program or candidates for a tutor training program

Fund-raising can take the form of raffles bake sales, and approaching service clubs in the area The list of possibilities is only limited by your imagination, so be creative!

Proposal Writing

Proposal writing is an essential component of family literacy programs. Writing proposals that are clear and to the point makes it easier to receive funding for the set-up or continuation of programs. The following are some tips on effective proposal writing that the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program has utilized:

-Use key phrases such as self-confidence, self-empowerment, self-esteem, etc., in discussing what the program will accomplish.
-Make sure that objectives are listed clearly.
-Solicit community partners and list who they are.
-Describe what you are aiming for and what goals you want to achieve.
-Make sure the program fits the needs of the participants.
-Clearly define the population the program will serve.
-Show how the program will be evaluated and how it will be held accountable.
-It can be beneficial to get letters of support to include with the application.

It is important to submit proposals for new projects well before the current one has expired so there are no interruptions in program delivery. Interruptions lead to losing parents from the group. It is also important for the program to run from September to June so it will conform to the school year.

Learning Considerations and Activities

The following section outlines the various learning considerations and activities the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program has found most useful in helping to increase the reading and writing skills of our families. We encourage any family learning group to make use of these suggestions, modifying them as their own experience requires.

Learning Styles

There are three basic ways people learn - by using their auditory, visual, and kinesthetic skills. In other words, some people learn by hearing information, others by seeing things be done, and some by hands-on experience.

Stop and think for a moment *whet your* learning style is. How do you remember how to spell a word - by seeing it, by writing it down, or by the way it sounds?

Because everybody learns differently, family learning programs must use methods that incorporate all learning styles.

Writing

Learners should be encouraged to write often. After all, most of us read with greater ease than we write simply because we read more then than we write. Writing allows the learner to practice vocabulary words. As learners manipulate sounds to *write* words, they are also getting better at manipulating sounds to *read* words. Writing is a form of expression and helps with organizing thoughts.

The Stages of Writing

(PET Literacy Alliance, <u>Learning and Reading Partners</u> 1996, pg. 2-4)

Pre-Writing/Planning

The first stage of the writing process may involve:
-choosing a topic
-brainstorming to see what is known about the topic
-deciding what else the writer needs/wants to know about the topic
-thinking about characters plot and setting (for a story)
-searching for information
-making notes
-making outlines

Any idea or information that comes to a writer during the planning stage should be written down. It can be discarded later, but if it is not written down it may be forgotten.

Stage Two: Drafting

The draft stage in report writing and story writing includes taking the ideas and information of the pre-writing stage and putting them into sentences and paragraphs. (This stage is often referred to as the "rough copy.")

At this stage, any idea or information obtained in the pre-writing stage can be accepted or rejected. Any interesting idea or form of expression that comes to a writer should be written down. The point is to get all creative ideas down on paper so they won't be forgotten. These "skeleton" sentences can later be refined. reworded or deleted.

Stage Three: Revising

At the revision stage the writer "looks again" at what he/she has written and asks: -Does this say what I want to say? -Have I left anything out? -Will my readers understand? -Is there a better way to say this? -Are there more interesting/appropriate words that would convey the message/information more effectively?

The writer may decide to make big or small changes to improve the story or report. The purpose of revising is to make sure the composition really communicates what the writer wants to say in the best possible way.

Editing a story

Stage Four: Proof-Reading

At the proof-reading stage you check for small changes, correct spelling, punctuation, paragraphing. There are times during proof-reading when you may also wish to revise because you have decided that some significant changes need to be made.

Stage Five: Publishing

This is the stage at which you are prepared to have others read what you have written. It is the finished product.

At this stage, you must decide on what form the finished product will take. You consider such things as: choosing the final illustrations, having the text handwritten or typed, making it into a booklet or a book, putting together information about the author, designing a cover and producing the final, best possible copy.

Brainstorming

As part of the first stage of writing, we have referred to brainstorming. Brainstorming is a way to organize our thoughts on paper. The learner begins with a topic and then expands on different aspects about it.

This was one brainstorming session the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program produced:
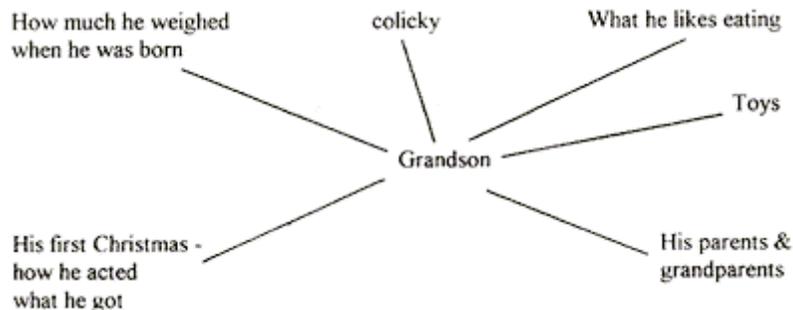
Each cluster can serve as a topic for each paragraph

Main Idea

The main idea is the guiding purpose of a paragraph, section. chapter or book.

The main idea is the most important information of the story or text in a few words. Main idea is developed through a sequence of important events.

When learners begin to write stories, they may have difficulty developing the main idea of their stories. -This will become evident as the learner will appear to be unable to stay on topic. Learners need lots of practice in picking out main ideas. Parents can be taught to assist at home through a number of activities.

Activity 1

Have the learner think about each of the following things and point out the main idea, the essential parts that develop the main idea, and the details:

A house, a bicycle, a refrigerator, a cake.

Activity 2

After reading a story, the learner should try to select the main idea in a sentence. Then ask the learner to give the important events that move the story along. Finally, discuss the details - the interesting but less important parts.

The ability to recognize the main idea is a good indication that the learner comprehends the selection read and it also helps the learner stay on topic while writing.

Group Writing

Group writing is a very useful exercise in a family learning setting. It enables the whole group to participate in writing one story. You may want to choose the topic or let the group decide. Once a topic has been chosen, you may want to set up a web (webbing is discussed on the next page). The web will help the group organize and sequence the story, i.e.. What happens first, what happens next.... .

Group writing is also extremely helpful in creating and supporting the bond of the family learning group.

Webbing

Creating a web is useful for organizing information or ideas and planning reports or stories.

A web can be used when working on activities such as word bases, words that rhyme, and reinforcing phonemes (individual letter sounds).

Examples of webbing:

Word Base AKE

```
Wake        Bake        Cake
              |
            AKE
Lake                  Take
```

Rhyming

```
pat              cat
           BAT
fat              sat
```

Words that start with "B"

```
Back                  Band
           B
Best                  Boy
```
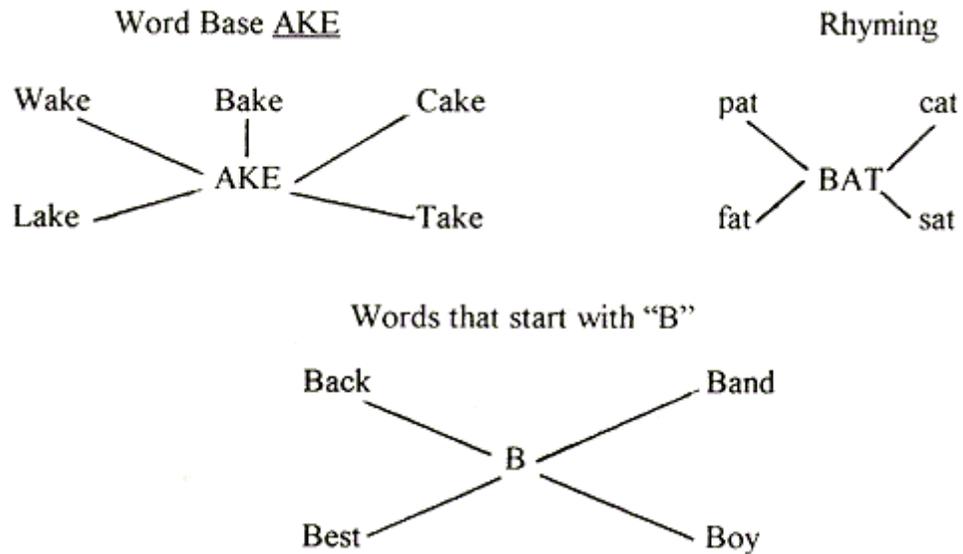
Webs are very useful for learners in organizing stories.

Example:

A learner is writing a story about Christmas. This exercise would follow brainstorming.

1st paragraph
Topic sentence:
What I wanted for Christmas.
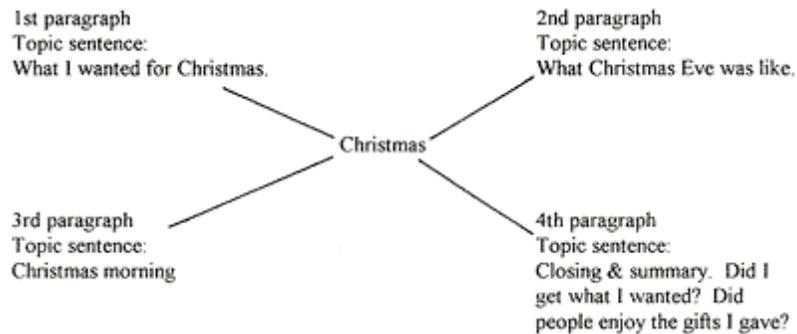
2nd paragraph
Topic sentence:
What Christmas Eve was like.

Christmas

3rd paragraph
Topic sentence:
Christmas morning

4th paragraph
Topic sentence:
Closing & summary. Did I
get what I wanted? Did
people enjoy the gifts I gave?

Webs are also useful in report writing. A learner may be given a report to write on a subject such as bears. Starting with a web, the learner can ask questions about bears. Each question can be turned around to form a topic sentence, i.e.. Where do bears live? Bears live.... Webs also give a visual cue for staying with the main idea of a story or project.

Spelling

Conventional Spelling- the commonly agreed-upon way to spell a word.

Temporary Spelling - a learner's attempt to represent words when the conventional spelling Is not known. Also referred to as "invented spelling."

Learning to spell accurately begins with a willingness to take risks. Encourage the learner to write using temporary spelling. Conventional spelling will come.

With beginning writers the goal is to encourage writing Getting caught up in spelling every word correctly will impede the progress of writing

Start building a list of words the reamer can spell with I 00 percent accuracy. It will grow gradually, but make sure that you allow and encourage invented spelling to continue or the reamer may become discouraged and simply stop writing

Strategies to help develop correct spelling:

1. Use sound patterns
2. Compare with correct spelling
3. Recall what a word looks like
4. Remember the shape of words
5. Pronounce words correctly
6. Learn to recognize compound words - two small words put together to make one larger word, i.e.: "daytime" comes from "day" and "time"
7. Remember that related words have similar spelling, i.e.: "correct" and "correction" Look for word parts that have meaning, i.e.: "hi" means two; "tri" means three
8. Use visual and auditory cues, i.e.: "chocolate" - "Think you're too late. I ate the chocolate."
9. Use patterns, i.e.: Q + U usually go together; the vowel E is used to make a preceding vowel long
10. Spend part of every lesson with your learner on spelling

Language Experience

Language experience is using the learner's own personal experience to develop writing and reading skills.

Language experience is a very powerful tool in encouraging writing and reading. Learners will have more interest and motivation, as they are writing about topics they know very well. Success is guaranteed, since the learners have prior knowledge of everything in the story and have experienced it; therefore, comprehension is good. The reading material is in the learners' own words, so they know what each word means. They just have to learn to recognize the words in print.

This approach is good for self-esteem, since the learners recognize their experiences as being valued.

Language experience can be used with young and adult learners

Father and son completing a writing assignment together

Activity 1

The learner dictates a story while the tutor records word for word what is being said. The tutor reads the story aloud, then the learner reads the story aloud.

Activity 2

Create a language experience by providing an outing. This should centre around the reamer's interest, i.e.: if a learner is interested in gardening, arrange a trip to visit a gardener. With young reamers the interests may be different, but the exercise is basically the same.

Once a learner starts getting comfortable with writing, you can introduce the writing process.

Written Conversation

Holding a written conversation with the reamer can also prove to be an effective aid to encouraging writing with reamers. The idea behind a written conversation is to simply convey in writing everything that is said between tutor and learner. For example. rather than asking "How are you?," the tutor writes the words, and the learner. to respond. must write something like "I am fine."
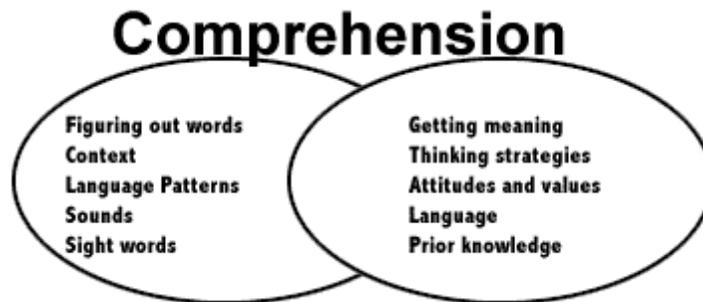
Holding written conversations accomplishes several things. First. the learner gets to see a sentence being composed. The structure, the spelling. and so on all comes to life before the learner's eyes Second, the learner, in turn, can imitate the tutor's style and gets practice in composing a sentence, spelling, writing, and reading.

Reading

Reading is a complete, interactive process with thinking as the connecting thread and comprehension as the goal.

Reading involves knowing language patterns, knowing sound patterns, thinking about what is being used, relating what is being read to our own knowledge and experience, and putting these things together to get meaning.

Reading involves figuring out words and getting meaning from what is being read.

Comprehension

Figuring out words	Getting meaning
Context	Thinking strategies
Language Patterns	Attitudes and values
Sounds	Language
Sight words	Prior knowledge

Motivation for reading covers a wide spectrum, from people wishing to feel comfortable enough to fill out forms to people who love to read and enjoy the magical world where books can transport them. Whatever the motivation, every attempt should be made by a family learning group to support and promote families of readers. Coordinators are only limited by their imagination in terms of what activities they can incorporate into their programs to achieve this goal.

The Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program has made use of the fact that the community of Lockeport is composed of a number of smaller communities, each with their own unique histories. From women fending off privateers in the late 1700's to ships built for rum-running in the 1920's to a lock-out of fish plant employees in the 1930's, Lockeport has had its share of interesting events. Many of these events have been documented, and we encourage our learners to read about them and report back to the group

Games

Games are very useful tools for families on many levels. The games can be designed to assist in everything from spelling and grammar to math, geography, history, science, music, or even art. The children in the Lockeport group were very creative with their board design and they worked with their parents to come up with the questions they wanted to be used in the game.

Games are a great way to relieve stress often associated with learning while doing homework. An example of this would be if a child has a spelling quiz to study, the words could be written on Bristol board coloured cards. The dice are rolled and when you land on a coloured square, your opponent asks the spelling question from the card with the corresponding colour. The parents and children are learning together and are having fun at the same time.

Other games like card games, Scrabble, or Monopoly provide opportunities for parents to interact in a positive way with their children at home.

Information Sessions for Parents

A lot can be shared with parents in a setting designed to address individual aspects of reading.

Choose a subject every week that will offer strategies to help strengthen reading ability. Programs can be developed around the following themes. (It is important to choose reading material appropriate for different age groups.)

-How to read to your learner
-Shared reading
-Phonology
-Enhancing comprehension

There is a wealth of material available through your local school system. Make every attempt to get your educators on side. Discuss what particular skill or strategy you are working on and request help

Teachers may also be invited to address the group on various subjects.

Other Considerations...

Life Skills

Taking responsibility for our actions is an important part of growing up. Parents must remember that when children fail, they are learning.

Cushioning children's lives to make sure that they are never hurt and never fail only hurts them later in life. Children who are responsible for their actions are children who will have the confidence to attempt any task without fear of failure. There is no such thing as completely failing, since with each experience we learn how to do it better the next time.

Tips for TV Viewing

The most common mistake people make is using television as a substitute baby-sitter. People's active life-styles often make it easy to fall into this trap. While it is not possible or advisable to ban TV viewing completely, the key is to be active in selecting and limiting the programs that children watch.

Here are some guidelines to follow:

-Decide if children can watch television on school days and if so, for how long.
-Determine how much television can be watched on weekends.
-Be clear about the time a child can watch television.
-Don't let children feel TV time can be saved up.
-Establish rules about finishing homework, practicing, reading, or doing chores before watching TV.
-Remind children that they have control over the television. When a show is too unbelievable or scary, they can turn it off.
-Recognize that when a program is over, it is best not to just walk away. It is important to find out what your child's feelings and impressions about the show are
-Keep in mind that specials may arise that your child wants to see. Such an additional show may have to be worked into the weekly allotment.
-Watch for children being captivated by habit-forming soap operas or serialized shows. There is little value in children keeping a daily appointment with such shows.
-Be aware that when children are alone, they get bored. Sometimes they turn on the TV because they're frightened. Parents need to offer constructive alternatives. (PEI Literacy Alliance, Learning and Reading Partners 1996, pg. 15)

Parent/Teacher Interview

Teachers spend a lot of time preparing for parent/teacher interviews. On the other hand, parents seldom give the interviews much thought beforehand and see them as obligations that they have to fulfill.

Parent/teacher interviews have the potential to be highly productive. While teachers can provide helpful information, parents can also ask questions regarding their children. Parents should do their homework by preparing questions in advance. Parents can give teachers helpful information as well.

Here are some questions parents should be asking:
-How is my child functioning in Math, Language Arts, Science, etc?
-How is my child relating and interacting with the other children?
-Is my child at grade level? Above or below grade level? How do you know?
-Tell me some strengths you see in my child.
-Is my child participating in some enrichment activities? What are they?
-What tests and reporting methods do you use?
(Joy Smith, Lies My Kid's Teacher Told Me 1994, 80-81)

Health

At first, food, health, and learning might seem like unrelated subjects. But when we stop and think for a minute about how the way we feel affects how we do things we start to see the connection. It is important to remember that there are more types of health than just physical well being.We must consider our social, spiritual, and mental health as well.

The healthier we are in the above areas, the more resources we have for dealing with daily life Therefore. the more we are able to learn and improve our skills, the better we feel about ourselves For example. if we feel well, physically, our bodies will perform to the best of their ability Improving our social health leads to better relationships with family. friends. and strangers Workings to improve our mental health helps us make informed. creative decisions. gives us a positive, realistic attitude, and helps us find solutions to problems Being healthy spiritually increases our ability to hope, believe, and care. not only about ourselves, but also about the world around us.

It is important for family learning programs to focus on all the different aspects of healthy living as a means of promoting and enhancing a learning atmosphere. There are some obvious ways of promoting a healthy life-style as a means of promoting learning. Eating well and getting enough rest are the more obvious examples. Less obvious areas to concentrate on include developing the skills needed to relate well with others, or to think logically and clearly. Once this groundwork is in place, the less-tangible things like an ability to hope, believe, and care will likely come naturally to most people. Whatever approach is taken, the key is to making learners aware of how all aspects of their lives affect their learning, and how their learning, in turn, affects their lives.

Appendix 1

Suggested Programs and Reading

Any family learning group can benefit from working with other groups and organizations and taking advantage of the services and information they offer. The following is a list of some groups and materials that the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program has found particularly useful:

- **The Tutor and Instructor Training and Certification Program,**
  administered by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture
  Contact 1-902-424-7288 for the name of the Adult Education
  Coordinator in your area.

- **Learning and Reading Partners -** PEI Literacy Alliance, PO Box 400,
  179 Queen Street, Charlottetown, PE CIA 7K7

- **Laubach Literacy Council**
  In Cape Breton, contact the Volunteer Resource Centre at 1-902-562-1245 for the name and number of the Council in your area.
  On the mainland. contact 1-902-678-4557 for the name and number of the Council closest to you.

- **Community Learning Networks,** supported by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Culture Contact
  1-902-424-5165 for the names and telephone numbers of learning network chairpersons in your area.

- **Local School Administration** - they can advise of any in-services taking place that can be applied to a family literacy program. Consult your local telephone directory for the numbers of the schools in your area.

Appendix 2

Learner's Stories

The following are four examples of actual stories composed by learners in the Lockeport and Area Family Learning Program. They were written over the course of a number of sessions, and they were completed using a variety of methods. For instance, some learners were more comfortable using a scribe, or a person to whom they could dictate their stories and have them recorded, word for word, as they told them. Learners sometimes find composing on a computer less intimidating than using a pen/pencil and paper. Using a computer means that they always have a clean copy, at any stage of the writing process. Using a pen/pencil and paper can lead to a page full of crossed out words, which can frustrate and discourage the learner.

The adult learners in our program worked through the writing process with their children to help them produce these stories. It gave the adult learners the opportunity to work on the computers and get an understanding of this process.

TAZ THE SMART DOG

Once upon a time there was a dog. His name was Taz and he could talk and walk on his hind legs. And he could read books. He was a very smart dog. One day Taz was playing in the yard with a ball and then he decided to take a walk. He thought to go to his friend's house and he said to his friend "Do you want to play hide and go seek?" lathe friend said yes. Then he asked his friend to come to his house so he could show him how smart he was. And he showed his friend that he could read.

By Courtney, Grade One

A Day Lobstering

When you go lobstering you should wear oil gear. Oil gear is rubber pants and rubber jacket. You should wear rubber boots when you go lobstering too.

You have to get up five o'clock, get dressed, eat breakfast, get in the truck and drive to the wharf.

When you get to the wharf you get out of the truck, and take your lunch out to the boat. You get down aboard the boat, open up the doors to the boat, and you start the boat up and let it warm up for a half an hour.

Chop bait for the lobster traps. You untie the boat and you go out the harbour. It is still dark and you can see the lights from the wharf as you leave the harbour.

As you leave the harbour you steam for about an hour and you pull your marker buoy. You haul the trap on the boat. The lobster is measured, and if its too small then you throw it back.

The lobsters that are the right size are banded and put in a crate.

We haul 250 traps and it takes us nine hours.

When we are done we go back to the wharf. We go to the crate mooring and we put the lobsters in a crate on a long rope and put it back in the water.

We go up to the wharf and tie up the boat.

We clean up the boat by taking a broom and sweeping up the deck, it has sea urchins and dirt on it. We close up the boat and go home.

I am really tired and hungry at the end of the day but I've made a lot of money.

By Colin, Age 12

DINOSAUR AND ME

One day I went out for a walk with Brontosaurus Rex. We went knocking down jungle trees.

Then we met Tyrannosaurus Rex by the caveman's cave. T Rex killed my friend Branta because he want his meat.

Branta turned to bones and was buried under the sand.

I killed T-Rex with a spear because he killed my friend Branta.

I found an egg and hatched it. It was a baby Brontosaurus and I had a new friend. The Brontosaurus baby looked like my old friend so I called him Branta. He lived for a long time and gave me rides on his back.

By Kevin, Age 7

Top Gun

It was a cold day aboard a aircraft carrier in the middle of the Indian Ocean. Mavrick and Goose is in the same plane and they are getting ready to go on a mission. Mavrick is the jet flyer and Goose is the watcher. They are fighting for Canada.

The runway for the jets to go off of was too slippery. Mavrick and Goose was The only ones to make it up in the air.

Mavrick sees a enemy jet approaching but he is too busy playing around. Mavrick flips his jet upside down and gives the other jet flyer the finger and takes a picture.

The enemy is Viper and Jester and they are Americans. Goose doesn't see the enemy jet coming. The enemy locks on his target and gets ready to fire on Goose and Mavrick.

Mavrick and Goose does a little loop de loop and blows Viper up. Mavrick and Goose goes back to the aircraft carrier and they are heroes.

By Tyler
Grade 4

Bibliography

1. MacIsaac, Maitland, Nancy Estey, and Sandra Rendell-MacDonnell. <u>Learning and Reading Partners.</u> Charlottetown: PEI Literacy Alliance, 1996.

2. NS Department of Education. <u>Tutor & Instructor Training & Certification Program</u>, 1991.

3. Smith, Joy. <u>Lies My Kid's Teacher Told Me.</u> Winnipeg: Educational Enterprises, 1994.