

FROM INCARCERATION TO PRODUCTIVE LIFESTYLE

Bringing Family Literacy
to Incarcerated Settings:
An Instructional Guide



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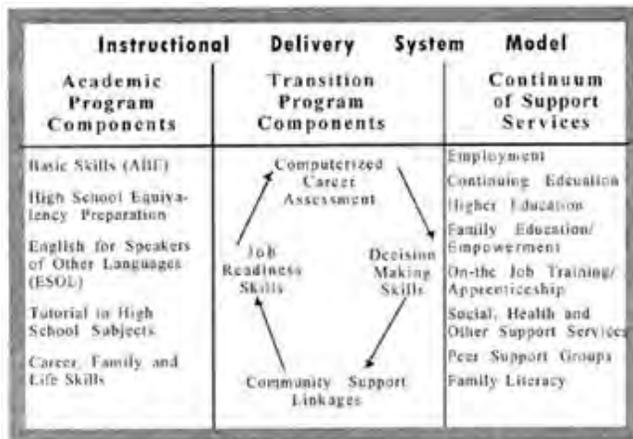
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FOREWARD

In an ongoing effort to support the education of incarcerated youth and adults, *Bringing Family Literacy to Incarcerated Settings: An Instructional Guide* is offered as a supplement to the *From Incarceration to Productive Lifestyle* series. This most recent document shares the valuable experiences of numerous individuals and agencies who have successfully incorporated family literacy into incarcerated education programming.

For many years, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) advocated its Instructional Delivery System Model as a means to increase the economic self-sufficiency of youth and adults after release from incarceration and to reduce or eliminate altogether the likelihood of repeat criminal behavior and recidivism. As depicted below, this model consists of an academic component, a transition component, and an equally important continuum of support services.



“If we believe that promoting healthy relationships between parent and child reduces risk to children, it make sense to pay attention to the parenting role of inmates. Indeed, most incarcerated parents will be released from jail and will parent in the community. So, it seems wise to view prisoner parents as parents who can and do contribute to the optimal development of their children and to use their time in prison to promote healthy attachment.”

Family and Corrections
Network Report Issue 3 1994

Family literacy is a promising approach to providing the comprehensive family education called for in the Instructional Delivery System Model. To that end, the efforts of several programs in New York State (NYS) have created a blueprint for integrating family literacy services into incarcerated programs.

One of the earliest program models was developed through the Albany City School District. The significant pieces of its model were the development of a life skills/parenting class and a structured time for incarcerated parents to be together with their children. The activities that occur during the family’s time together have a literacy theme and are appropriate to the learning level of both parent and child.

Many other NYS incarcerated education programs have adapted this model to fit their programs, facility operations, and families. These projects ⁽¹⁾ include:

- East Meadow Union Free School District/Nassau Correctional Facility
- Literacy Volunteers of America/Fulton County Correctional Facility
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community School/Onondaga County Justice Center
- Onondaga-Cortland-Madison BOCES/Onondaga County Department of Corrections
- Southern Westchester BOCES/Spring Brook Academy
- Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES/Tompkins Public Safety Building.

Additionally, NYS was a recipient of a federal Even Start Family Literacy Women in Prison grant. This two-year grant funded a family literacy program at the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Although direct federal funding ended, the project has obtained alternative funding to continue. Two existing Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships (Sodus-Lyons Even Start and Yates-Ontario Even Start) expanded their projects to the incarcerated setting.

Each of these projects has contributed tremendously to the growth and development of family literacy within the field of incarcerated education. To incarcerated-education providers, family literacy is a means to provide services during times of dwindling resources. But to incarcerated parents, family literacy is more than improving their own education. It is also an opportunity to maintain their identities as parents, foster loving ties with their children, and actively participate in their education despite incarceration. The purpose of *Bringing Family Literacy to Incarcerated Settings: An Instructional Guide* is to assist all who are interested in implementing a successful family literacy project within an incarcerated setting.

¹ A brief description of each of these projects is provided in Appendix A.

INTRODUCTION

Diane Nembhard works as a prison guard at the Ithaca Correctional Facility for Women. Her husband is currently serving time at the Onondaga County Justice Center. The Nembhards have three daughters, ages 17, 8, and 3. They are a loving family made stronger by the lessons learned through a very unique program for incarcerated parents called PACT. PACT or Parent and Child Time is time for families to engage in interactive literacy activities. The following is Diane's story.

Ladybug

I sat quietly watching my husband and three-year-old daughter, Mercedes, at play. I knew better than to intrude. This was their special time together, and my experience (working with incarcerated families) told me that these precious moments shouldn't be taken for granted.

This became all too obvious when I looked around the room at the other families in the PACT program. A woman inmate, particular, caught my attention. She was not much older than myself, and her daughter was about Mercedes' age. Our eyes met for an instant. I could see by the way she interacted with her child, just how much this visit meant to her. I kept thinking about the young women at the correctional facility, many of whom spend 16 hours a day behind bars. Some experience mood swings, others never see their parents. And the sad fact that the majority of these young women have children of their own. As a person who sits on both sides of the prison fence, there's no doubt in my mind that there should be a PACT program in every correctional facility in our country.

As our visit neared conclusion, I listened to Mercedes ask her father questions about the book he was reading to her. This simple connection made me realize how important these visits had become. The speech problem Mercedes had developed when my husband was first incarcerated could hardly be detected. Seated on his lap, she was animated, excited, and happy to be at (what she called) her daddy's "house". For the first time, there was hope that the painful images of earlier prison visits, (when her father couldn't touch or hold her) were fading from her memory.

***"Remember how important and special your child is! Always show your child love."*TEXT**

Participant in family literacy program

As the other inmates' families said their good-byes, Mercedes clung tightly to her Daddy, "Just one more story, Daddy" she whispered. "Ladybug wants to tell you one more story." And so she put the picture book down and made up her own story, about a little girl who sprouted wings and learned to fly – to fly anywhere, unafraid. "Daddy," she said, looking up at my husband who had tears in his eyes, "Ladybug's name used to be Mercedes, but now everybody calls her Ladybug."

That's how Mercedes became Ladybug, and we started to become a real family again.

Note: Mercedes still calls herself Ladybug. Her father was recently transferred to another facility, where there is no PACT program. Everyday Ladybug says "It's time to go to Daddy's house."

Mercedes is one of approximately 1.5 million children of incarcerated parents in the U.S.

In a very humanistic and touching way, the story of Ladybug reveals an aspect of incarceration not often considered. The impact of incarceration on families and children is very profound, very real. Ladybug's story reveals the vital role family plays in the success — social, educational, and emotional — of not only children, but their incarcerated parents as well.

What is Family Literacy?

Family literacy is the learned, not innate, intergenerational process of sharing that occurs between parents (2) and their children which supports and expands the range of learning in a family. This process of learning occurs in all families, although in different ways for each family and each family member. Family literacy programs strive to build upon this process.

Although a significant force for many years, family literacy programming only recently started to receive its deserved attention. Several major pieces of federal legislation acted upon by the 105th Congress recognized family literacy as a successful strategy for helping families achieve self-sufficiency. For the first time, a single, consistent, and comprehensive definition of family literacy services was used in federal law. As stated in the 1998 Workforce Investment Act, Improving America's Schools Act, Reading Excellence Act, and Head Start Act, family literacy means . . .

. . . services provided to participants on a voluntary basis that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration, to make sustainable changes in a family, and that integrate all of the following activities:

- a. interactive literacy activities between parents and their children
- b. training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children
- c. parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency
- d. an age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

“Thank you for showing me another way to spend my time with my children. I’m a young mother of 3. Some things I didn’t know, but this program showed me.”

Participant in family literacy program

2 The definition of parent or parents includes, in addition to a biological or adoptive parent, a legal guardian or other person acting in place of a parent or legal guardian, and may include a person such as a grandparent, stepparent, aunt, uncle, older sibling, or other person either (1) with whom the child lives or (2) who has been designated by a parent, legal guardian, or court to act in place of the parent, legal guardian, or court.

The four activities described in this definition are often referred to as components. Each component is briefly described below.

- a. *interactive literacy activities between parents and their children*
Opportunities for positive interaction between parents and children, in which the value of literacy in families is encouraged, are provided.
- b. *training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children*
Parents learn how to be their child's most enduring teacher. They learn how to teach their children during play and learn activities, while developing new interaction patterns. They learn about the expectations schools have of their children and learn how to support their children in achieving academic success. They become empowered, thereby enhancing their parental self-esteem.
- c. *parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency*
Parent literacy training offers instruction to enhance parents' skills as delineated in NYS learning standards. Parents are encouraged to set goals for their educational achievement. Through academic programs such as high school equivalency, GED preparation, adult basic education, Action for Personal Choice, etc., parents develop skills to thrive in society.
- d. *an age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.*
Preliteracy skills, such as vocabulary building and verbal expression, as well as organizational and social skills, like sharing and active exploration and investigation, are stressed to support the child's social, physical, and educational development. Linkages are created between categories outside of the correctional facility and quality early childhood programs.

Family Literacy in Incarcerated Settings: Why ?

By its very definition, family literacy has an almost universal applicability. Adult education classrooms, pre-kindergarten programs, homeless shelters, libraries, programs for pregnant/parenting teens, and Head Start sites are but a few of the settings in which family literacy services thrive. Family literacy can be particularly appropriate for the incarcerated population, as well, considering:

Seven in ten prisoners perform in the lowest two literacy levels.(3)

On a continuum created by National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) researchers, literacy was divided into five levels. Adults at Level 1, the lowest skills level, —demonstrate difficulty using certain reading, writing, and computational skills considered necessary for functioning in daily life, and generally function at below the fifth grade reading level.” Adults at Level 2 have stronger skills than adults at Level 1, but still have —significant literacy needs.”

Furthermore, as many as 82% of inmates are reported to be high school dropouts.(4) No less significantly, research indicates that —at least twice as many young adults in the criminal justice system show signs of dyslexia as those in the general population.”(5)

Approximately 70% of incarcerated individuals are parents.

The number of children of incarcerated parents in the U.S. is most frequently cited at 1.5 million. However, —in 1994, there were 5.1 million persons under correctional supervision. At year’s end, on a given day, over one million persons in state and federal prisons, and nearly 500,000 were in city and local jails. There were some 20 million admissions and releases. So, we know that there are millions and millions of children with parents who are or have been incarcerated in prison or in jail.”(6)

“The ideal setting is to have the adult and the child involved in the same process of learning, if that process has to take place in a prison, so be it.”

Family literacy specialist

3 Adult and Family Literacy in the United States: Key Issues for the 21st Century, White Paper for 1999 National Literacy Forum (National Institute for Literacy)

4 Statistic shared at the Eighth Annual National Conference on Family Literacy, Closing General Session (Louisville, KY: April 12, 1999)

5 “Dyslexia and criminal offenders.” Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy (October 1996), 40:2.

6 From Center for Community Alternatives Internet site, <http://www.dreamscape.com/ccacny>. April 9, 1999

Just as poverty and low literacy become a cycle within a family, so often does incarceration.

As noted by the Center for Community Alternatives, —The research on children of incarcerated parents indicates that the loss of a parental figure...has a profound effect on children and adolescents. For adolescents, parental incarceration has been associated with poor academic achievement, involvement in delinquency and gang-related activities, violence, and eventually adult criminal behavior. One study estimated that children with imprisoned parents are almost six times more likely than their counterparts to become criminally involved and incarcerated at some point in their future . . . Many of these children [who are separated from their parents by incarceration] see no chance of having their lives follow paths which are any different than those of their parents.”⁽⁷⁾

“Kids are mirrors of me and what I say and do.”

Participant in family literacy program

When released, incarcerated individuals often return to families that may not be supportive of change.

A strong support network is important for individuals in the midst of transition. Children, parents, spouses, and other family members can be powerful influences — both positive and negative. On a positive note, parents who have participated in family literacy programs report that their children were their greatest motivation for achieving personal and family goals. On the other hand, incarceration, whether short- or long-term, can erode a parent’s confidence in his or her own capabilities to parent successfully.

Others in the surrounding family and social systems may feel and express the same kind of doubts. Even in infancy, children can sense this doubt and might reject the parent as unreliable, unpredictable, unloving, and uninvolved. When incarcerated parents feel isolated from or rejected by their children, they may be more likely to act out in a jail setting, and may incur more punishments. Those punishments, in turn, may result in extended sentences that lengthen the period of physical loss and conflict.

The purpose of family literacy within county/municipal correctional facilities, then, is to use education as a means for breaking the intergenerational cycles of illiteracy, poverty, and recidivism and strengthening the connection between incarcerated parents and their families. Preliminary reports are encouraging. Studies of a Wisconsin-based program, *Breaking Barriers with Books: A Father's Book Sharing Program from Prison*,⁸ detected:

- less recidivism among program participants
- strong continued literacy interaction between fathers and children facilitating transition to parenting in person upon release
- less in-house [disciplinary] tickets dispensed to participants
- more frequently occurring father-child visits.⁽⁸⁾

Family literacy programming is effective for incarcerated populations because of certain underlying principles. First, learners (or inmates) are not only learners (or inmates), they are also family members. This is an important concept because it helps create a picture of where the individual came from and where he or she is going. Additionally, the following principles are assumed:

- All families have strengths.
- Parents can positively affect their children regardless of external stresses (such as incarceration).
- Parents are their child's primary and most enduring teacher.
- Parents teach by example.
- Parents have a profound effect on their children's success in school and life experiences.
- Children benefit from parental involvement.

In a statistic shared at the Eighth Annual National Conference on Family Literacy, the value of education in reducing recidivism was revealed: 80% of inmates who didn't receive their GED returned to prison. This is in contrast to 52% who received their GED and 18% who attended college that returned to prison.

⁸ From *A Partnership Model: Linking Literacy to the Needs of Children and their Incarcerated Fathers* presented by Dr. Margaret Humadi Genisio at the Eighth Annual National Conference on Family Literacy (Louisville, KY: April 18-20, 1999).

Implementation of Family Literacy

As with any new enterprise, providing family literacy within an incarcerated setting can be challenging. Many times, incarcerated individuals have had few positive educational experiences. Providers of services can be overwhelmed and frustrated by inmate reluctance and system operations. And, the stress associated with the day-to-day administration and security of a correctional facility can obfuscate the fine line between reformation and punishment.

It is therefore heartening to remember that the nature of family literacy programs minimizes these potential obstacles. Family literacy is the integration and contextualization of existing services. It is not necessarily “added” as another program to an already full docket of programs and services. And, family literacy programs are tailored to meet the needs of each unique setting. Every facility has something upon which to build, whether it be church services, a GED program, or family visitation days.

Perhaps most importantly, inmate resistance to participating in education will likely be negated. The draw of spending quality, interactive time with their children overrides inmates’ fear or disregard of educational experiences. To the participants, family literacy is a nonthreatening opportunity for themselves and their families. And, this opportunity ideally leads to the inmate’s return to the community as a contributor. The potential impact of family literacy on learner, teacher, correctional officer, administrator, family and community is boundless.

The challenge of implementing family literacy programming is offset by its reliance on respect among the various “players.” Respect is important for the smooth operation of any setting, but particularly so for the highly stressful setting of a correctional facility. Respect — for the program, for the facility, for families, etc. — must be encouraged. Empowerment, or providing opportunities to make decisions, is one way in which to display respect for others. To the extent possible or practical, learners, teachers, correctional officers, administrators, and families should be allowed to voice their wishes and concerns.

“I was particularly struck by several incidents during the course of the three task force meetings that bespoke of young fathers’ valuing of reading. Whenever a children’s book was read aloud to the group of inmates, most listened with delight. One inmate reacted with pure delight when the librarian read a book that his sister had read to him as a child. It was quite clear that this book was a legacy, and one that he might well wish to pass on to his own children.”
Family literacy specialist

Finally, and most specifically, creating a family literacy program calls for:

Literacy focused instruction

This is achieved through adult education, adult basic education (ABE), high school equivalency (HSE), preparation for the tests of General Educational Development (GED), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Career, Family & Life Skills, and/or Action for Personal Choice (APC).

Contacts between parents and children

Other than visitation, these contacts encourage a bond through reading, playing, and communicating activities. Families have the opportunity to work on different literacy activities together including making audio tapes, sharing stories, and writing.

Strengths-based parent empowerment/education

Family literacy programming is designed to build on family strengths. Families are responsible for identifying their own priorities and making decisions. Parents are provided with the information and support needed to feel empowered in:

- reaching their family goals.
- learning about their children's developmental stages.
- supporting their children's later success in life, both in and out of school.

"I would really like to thank the foundation for giving me an opportunity to improve my parenting and communication skills with my child. Thanks to this project I have learned how to bring up a very well-behaved, smart, thoughtful, responsible young man. Thank you."
Participant in family literacy program

Child care linkages

Linkages are formed between incarcerated individuals, their children, custodial caregivers, and community service providers.

Connections to post-release support

Upon release, linkages are in place between incarcerated individuals/their families and community programs, such as:

- schools and libraries
- Head Start programs
- community based organizations (CBO)
- Even Start programs
- literacy volunteers
- adult education programs
- Education for Gainful Employment (EDGE) programs
- Adult Centers for Comprehensive Education and Support Services (ACCESS).

Flexibility and innovation

Programs must be flexible enough to meet the various needs and goals of families. Services should be adapted to family goals, rather than fitting families into existing programs.” The design and implementation of programs should recognize that family strengths, interests, and needs are not uniform across all families. Innovation and creativity are necessary to accommodate the diverse and changing needs of different families and the security and administrative realities of the correctional facility.

Any program can begin the process of building a comprehensive family literacy project that suits its facility and resources. Consider, as an example, an incarcerated education program consisting of a single adult education class convening once a week for two hours. Although modest, such a program does have something upon which to build. The lessons presented during the two-hour class period may be contextualized to include family literacy activities (see "classroom sessions"). Or, an extra half-hour of parent empowerment and support for those students with children may be added to the class. These simple examples prove that the integration of family literacy need not be revolutionary.

In a correctional or jail setting, family literacy services provide a wonderful opportunity for parent and child to stay connected or become connected again. Parenting inmates realize their own strengths and improve their literacy levels. They also gain insight into child development and acquire strategies for parenting effectively. Recognizing the basic belief that incarcerated individuals will be returning to the community and embarking on a productive lifestyle, nurturing connections to family is a significant opportunity for growth and change.

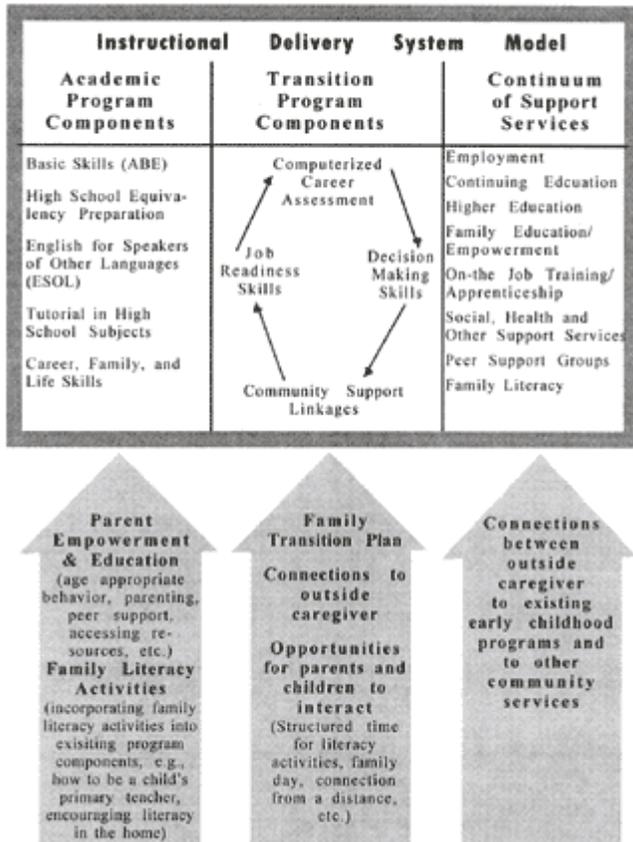
RANGE OF PROGRAM DESIGNS

The value of family literacy within a correctional facility is evident, but perhaps less clear is how such services are provided. As referred to earlier, the NYS Instructional Delivery System Model (IDSMS) is comprised of three components: academic, transition, and a continuum of support services. How does family literacy fit into this model?

The ensuing section describes a comprehensive family literacy program in terms of the IDSMS. It is important to note that this description serves as a model in the truest sense of the word: a standard of excellence to be replicated. Of course, the ability of each facility to provide services depends on a variety of circumstances, such as participant needs, facility size, staffing patterns, space, staff needs, resources, and cooperation and support from correctional and institutional administrators. It remains true, however, that every facility has something upon which to build a family literacy program that will meet the needs of its inmates.

“It keeps the incarcerated parent a part of his or her family, builds communication and, hopefully, a stronger relationship for all.”
Caretaker

In preparing for transition back into the community, the focus for many incarcerated individuals is often employment. A comprehensive family literacy program suggests that transition back into a family setting is equally important. Since balancing work and family is an issue for all families, the family and work connection transcends transitioning individuals. However, for this population in particular, there are several transition issues to also consider. By helping incarcerated individuals plan for the reality of a new way of life in terms of employment and family life, transition may become less stressful. Family members and peers can often trigger old behavior patterns. Therefore, developing a strong support network within the family is important. Toward that end, the items noted below are added to the IDSMS.



The above graphic represents a comprehensive range of services, with family literacy integrated throughout, available to incarcerated and transitioning individuals. Individual programs may be at any point in the development of this comprehensive model. (In fact, Appendix A features programs in various points of development.) The flexibility and fluidity of this program allows individual programs to operate at any point in their development as well as make decisions at a local level.

Decisions at a local level are key to family literacy programming in correctional facilities. The correctional facility — its security issues, resources, space availability, existing programs, and staff — will determine the design of the family literacy program, perhaps to the point of supervising final inmate selection for participation in the program. Education providers are, after all, guests under the roof of their host, so they must be respectful of their host's wishes.

The priorities of the host, i.e., the correctional facility, are safety and security. Its purpose is to insure the safety of the public, staff and inmates. To that end, an important chain of command exists as standard operating procedure. Educators must understand this chain of command: who must be consulted or notified for what activity.

Regularly scheduled meetings between educational and correctional staff are necessary to both incorporate and operate a family education model in a correctional facility. These meetings should include security staff, educators, counselors, supervisors, librarians, etc. Ongoing dialogue between educational and correctional staff may, in time, expand the scope of the original family literacy model.

Although processes differ between ~~hosts~~, the basic building blocks of a family literacy project within a correctional facility remain constant. These building blocks — academic preparation, parent/child interaction, caregiver connection, and community linkage — are described in the following section.

The description of each building block is personified by the following hypothetical family and its situation: “John” is incarcerated in a maximum-security facility that serves sentenced and unsentenced, adolescent and adult males and females. Nineteen-years-old, John tests at a fifth grade reading level. He is the father of two children, “Sam” (five months) and “Angie” (three years). Their mother is “Tisha,” who is 17. She dropped out of school after the eighth grade and works part-time at a local grocery store. She and her children live at her mother’s house.

Academic Preparation (including Parent Empowerment)

The ultimate goal of any instructional program for incarcerated individuals, family literacy included, is to eliminate the likelihood of repeat criminal behavior and recidivism. Fostering inmates’ economic self-sufficiency, through legal and productive activities, is one way in which to lesson the likelihood of recidivism. Such economic self-sufficiency is specifically encouraged by the very definition of family literacy. ~~“Literacy training that leads to economic self sufficiency”~~ may be provided by a combination of:

- adult basic education
- ESOL
- GED preparation
- tutorial in high school subjects
- Action for Personal Choice
- Literacy Volunteers
- library sessions
- life skills

Generally, classroom sessions use literacy building strategies to create new, productive traditions for communicating, reading, writing, resolving conflicts, solving problems, and interacting as members of a society, in addition to teaching parents to recognize themselves as their child's primary teacher. Some programs may add a stand-alone family literacy class that blends literacy and parenting education, but there are also many ways to integrate family literacy activities into existing academic classes. This is often referred to as contextualized learning, i.e., lessons are presented within the context of family or parenting issues. The following strategies can be used in either approach — a stand-alone class or integration into existing classes:

John is working in a group setting with a Literacy Volunteer that meets for one hour twice a week. He will soon transition into a GED preparatory class. His goal is to obtain his GED and move his family out of his mother-in-law's house. Since the family literacy project began, the Literacy Volunteer has contextualized the literacy training materials by using various parenting magazines, children's books appropriate to his children's ages, and the apartment listings in the newspaper. The class was also extended for an extra hour on both days to discuss parenting issues. The class is opened up to other inmates interested in discussing parenting issues for the second hour. Several lessons have been incorporated through the use of the contextualized materials. Some of the topics include the use of age-appropriate toys and books for children, the importance of reading to children regardless of their age, sequencing of newspapers, budgeting for an apartment, developing action plans, communicating with real estate agencies or land-lords, using questioning techniques when reading stories to children, etc.

- *utilizing children's literature* by practicing reading in the context of reading to children, discussing the moral of the story, or asking parents to write or draw a children's book
- *providing reading materials* that are contextualized around parenting/family issues, such as magazines, age appropriate toy catalogues, etc.
- *contextualizing math lessons*. A math lesson on fractions can be presented within the context of an easy and affordable cooking recipe. This could then be connected to a parenting discussion about safety in the kitchen, about occupying your child while you cook, etc.
- *incorporating a variety of learning styles* and connecting the variations to how children learn. For example, a lesson on movement could be followed by a description of motor skill development in very young children.
- *writing resumes*. Resume writing helps learners become familiar with a variety of forms. This activity could be expanded to include completion of other forms, such as doctor's forms, childcare registrations, etc.

"I am very thankful to you for this opportunity to learn more about being a parent, to help us see a new way of dealing with children and ourselves."

Participant in family literacy program

- *practicing job interview strategies.* Strategies used in the job interview process (developing a list of questions, looking at references, using appropriate body language) could also be used when interviewing childcare providers or school personnel.
- *collectively establishing “ground rules,”* such as using positive language, listening in a respectful manner, etc. This can be connected to developing rules for children.

Infusing academic preparation with family literacy activities provides an opportunity for improving literacy skills as well as for sharing parenting strategies. Unlike the academic components that exist in most facilities, however, parent education is sometimes less evident. But, as discussed earlier, the need for parenting skills is very real. The objectives of a parent empowerment and education program, then, are to increase parents’:

- opportunities to learn and to share parenting concerns and successes
- understanding of child development
- awareness of how their own choices impact their children’s lives
- ability to be their children’s primary teacher.

Parent education, in its broadest sense, may include information on child development, relationships, communication, family budgeting, health and safety, drug and alcohol counseling, etc. From family literacy classmates and teachers, inmates may learn about a wide variety of topics (see middle box). The goals and needs of the learners and their families are addressed during class.

There should be ample time within the class to discuss both familial and academic issues affecting learners. Materials reinforcing the concepts taught that day might also be distributed at the end of each class. Each class session should include an assessment, whether oral or written, to determine what has been learned. This assessment might involve the creation of an action plan that identifies activities the parent will use to increase self-sufficiency when released from incarceration.

Breaking Barriers with Books, a Wisconsin-based program, has found parent support meetings, run by inmates and their elected group leader, to be integral to their program.

Parent Empowerment Sample Topics

- making parenting easier and fun
- using alternative methods of discipline
- choosing age-appropriate toys
- reading to children, including newborns
- defining ways to praise children
- encouraging children’s participation in school
- acknowledging the importance of play in developing learning
- understanding how children of every age learn through example.

Reading the Write Way

The Stillwater Correctional Facility received a \$600 grant from the Minnesota Education Association Foundation to fund a program for inmates called “Reaching out the Write Way.”

Not only are the inmates at Stillwater taught how to write books during their literacy classes, they learn to illustrate and bind books.

The program, which is relatively inexpensive to run, was initially designed to improve adult literacy and help fathers connect with their children. However, the program has now become a therapeutic link for families. Inmates can write to any member of their families.

Parent/Child Interaction

As depicted in the [“Ladybug”](#) story, the value of interaction between incarcerated parent and child is priceless. Face-to-face interaction, a time when parents can physically and verbally display love and affection to their children, is ideal for maintaining family connections. Additionally, the opportunity for the incarcerated parent to talk to their child is so important. Language between a parent and a child is an integral part of a child’s intellectual and emotional growth. It is also an excellent opportunity for incarcerated parents to apply the experiences and knowledge gleaned from their studies, practicing their responsibilities as their children’s primary teacher.

In some models, children and incarcerated parents come together to engage in what is known as —interactive literacy activities”. Generally, an interactive literacy activity is a regularly held one-hour session in which the incarcerated parent, his or her child, and the child’s outside caregiver meet at the facility. A member of the corrections security staff and an instructor are also present at this time. The instructor may record his or her observations of the interaction between parent, child, and caregiver for later reflection and discussion in a family education class.

During this activity period, incarcerated parents and their children can engage in a variety of literacy-building activities, such as reading, talking, and playing alphabet and number games. Puzzles, coloring books and crayons, and other toys might also be available to help engage children who may be shy or somewhat fearful in the unfamiliar surroundings. Parents may also feel shy and unsure about what to do during a visit, so it is helpful to introduce sample activities to the parents and let them become familiar with the materials before their children arrive.

In many cases, it is not possible to bring families together in this way due to security or other issues. Fortunately, there are many ways to —connect from a distance.” Incarcerated parents may be able to:

- write letters and draw pictures to send to their children.
- send a book, accompanied by an audio tape of the parent reading it, home to their children.
- create an audiotape of songs, rhymes, poems and number exercises for their children.

“I felt real good about seeing my son and his mother without a table separating us and holding him without someone saying you can’t do that. And it went by too fast for me, but I was thankful for the little time we spent together and I thank you for that.”

Participant in family literacy program

Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children occur twice monthly. During the visit, Tisha, Angie, and John choose a book or educational game related to the theme being taught in Head Start. The visit provides an opportunity for John to practice the techniques learned through his classes. It also provides opportunities for Tisha to feel supported in her efforts at home and for Angie to be prepared for success in school and life.

These activities hone literacy skills of parents, encourage positive relationships between parent and child, and promote learning for children. They can also serve as topics of conversation for when parents are able to either telephone their children or participate in a family day at the facility.

Caregiver Connection

Naturally, interaction between children and their incarcerated parent will be strongly affected by the outside caregiver. As the link between incarcerated parent and child, the outside caregiver can foster interaction in a family literacy context by:

- encouraging children to correspond with their parents.
- making books and other materials sent by parents readily accessible to the children.
- engaging the children in other literacy-building activities. For example, the outside caregiver might read with the child. The child may then wish to send a “book review” to his or her incarcerated parent.
- enrolling in a family literacy program with the child.

For those programs offering time for interactive literacy activities between parents and their children, the role of the outside caregivers becomes even more prominent. They will, after all, be responsible for the children’s and their own involvement in the program. This role must be clear to all involved.

“I learn[ed] today about reading to children and how fun it would be to read to them. Kids are so fun to read to. You can see how much they know and how they learn and what they are thinking about. I, personally, would like to read to my children right now and see what they know and learned.”

Participant in family literacy program

With permission from the incarcerated parent, program staff should contact the outside caregiver to explain the family literacy program and the parent and child time which is spent engaging in interactive literacy activities. In some circumstances, this can be achieved through a visit between program staff and outside caregiver at a mutually convenient site, such as the caregiver's home, the library, or other community site. During this visit, the purpose of the family education program and the interactive literacy activities is explained. The requirements of the correctional facility — such as bringing the child's birth certificate to visits — are also explained. Books, materials, and activities that are used in the program can be reviewed and left with the caregiver. This visit also gives the caregiver an opportunity to voice any concerns about the program. If a visit between program staff and outside caregiver cannot be arranged, information about the program can be relayed via telephone, with written materials sent as a follow-up measure.

When the caregiver is sufficiently informed, the first interactive literacy activity time can be arranged. As circumstances warrant, program staff may wish to offer transportation assistance and other means of support to the caregiver.

Regardless of the availability of time for interactive literacy activities, outside caregivers are vital to any family literacy program operating in a correctional facility. They tend to the health and well being of the children, help strengthen familial ties, and support learning activities of both children and incarcerated parent. The outside caregivers are not alone in carrying out these responsibilities. Both the IDSM and the comprehensive family literacy model advocate connections to a continuum of support services, including early childhood programs.

Community Linkage

In transitioning out of a correctional facility into a community, incarcerated individuals need the support of that community. And, those transitioning individuals who are also parents will find that transition is as life altering to their children and family as it is to them. Linkages to support services facilitate the successful return of incarcerated individuals not only to the community but also to a reunified family.

Tisha brings Angie to visits to be part of an interactive literacy activity between family members. She hopes to bring Sam to some of the visits, but in the meantime, reads stories to him and talks to him about the visit.

Through Tisha, the Literacy Volunteer made a community connection with the Early Head Start program in which Angie is enrolled to find out what themes and topics were being used with Angie. Often, Tisha shares the materials being used in the classroom and includes a description of how the materials support Angie's learning.

Although Tisha is not fully enrolled in a family literacy program in the community, she is beginning to attend some of the family literacy activities at the Head Start.

Support services and community linkages are beneficial to and necessary for all parties: incarcerated parent, child, and outside caregiver. Community linkages for the incarcerated parent include transition services provided through the facility that are available in each locality (see IDSM chart for possible services). For the incarcerated parent as well as the outside caregiver, linkages may be to:

- counseling services
- community-based organizations
- employment programs
- educational opportunities
- family support programs
- the Department of Social Services
- religious organizations.

Examples of outreach services for the children are Head Start programs, preschool programs, connections to the local library, counseling services, etc. Incarcerated parent, child, and outside caregiver can also all benefit from role modeling, mentoring opportunities, and linkages with other family literacy programs provided by “outside” individuals or agencies.

It is prudent to reiterate that the four building blocks — academic preparation (including parent empowerment), parent/child interaction, caregiver connection, and community linkage — are indeed that: building blocks. Depending on the sequence and assembly of those building blocks, any number of sound structures can be formed. To further the analogy, the building process can be fraught with delays and obstacles. With a comprehensive blueprint, however, these challenges are minimized. Such a blueprint includes the builder’s (in this case, the correctional facility’s) unique circumstances: participant needs, facility size, staffing patterns, space, staff needs, resources, and cooperation and support from correctional and institutional administrators.

John attends counseling services for drug and alcohol abuse provided through a community based organization (CBO). Once a month, the counselor from the CBO joins the parent information group to support discussions related to the effects of drug abuse on families.

Angie is enrolled in an Early Head Start program.

BLUEPRINT FOR IMPLEMENTATION

A blueprint is any exact or detailed plan or outline. The following checklist might be considered a generic blueprint for implementing a family literacy program within a correctional facility. Of course, the details of the blue-print will be determined by the unique circumstances of each facility.

Research local, state, and national family literacy initiatives.

- Visit facilities with existing family literacy programs.
- Contact the *National Center for Family Literacy* (see Appendix B for “Resources”).
- Review the program descriptions included in this guide (see Appendix A).
- Conduct a search on family literacy and/or support and empowerment on the Internet.
- Consider program alternatives.

Establish a family literacy committee.

- Develop a partnership with jail/corrections administration and staff. It is *very* important that they be involved in every aspect of program planning and implementation.
- Identify and invite other individuals to serve on the committee, including family literacy providers from the community.

Conduct a preliminary program assessment.

- Assess existing services, including volunteer, within the facility.
- Assess the facility's population, noting inmates in need of literacy services who are also parents of young children.
- Poll educational and correctional staff to determine interest in family literacy project.
- Assess space availability for family literacy program and for storage of materials.
- Assess existing equipment (telephone, fax, computer, email, software, printer, etc.).

Develop a budget.

- Assess funding streams (see ["Funding" section](#)).
- Work with existing programs and build on their momentum.
- Gain financial support from facility and outside sources.

Address procedural details.

- Evaluate existing program schedule.
- Evaluate visitation schedule.
- Establish a timeline with the facility.
- Establish referral procedure.
- Establish criteria for program participation.
- Establish program calendar of events.
- Establish procedure for parent/child interaction (including permission to contact outside caregiver, transportation to and from the facility, alternative methods of interaction, release of information/pictures).
- Procure space.
- Develop necessary forms (see Appendix D).

Develop and implement a marketing plan.

- Meet with facility administrators/staff and program staff to develop a marketing plan.
- Review the ~~Marketing~~ section of this document. (See ["Marketing"](#)).
- Create a fact sheet, brochure, flier, etc.

Train staff.

- Identify preferred qualifications for staff members (e.g., life skills educator, social worker, certified alcoholism credential, Action for Personal Choice trainer, trained in civilian orientation, certified adult educator, a person with experience working with families, etc.).
- Send staff to regional and state conferences.
- Review this document, particularly the section on staff development.
- Participate in Staff Development Consortia offerings (see Appendix C).

Forge linkages.

- Identify community resources valuable to transitioning individuals and their families (such as local schools and community colleges, medical/health facilities, libraries, family literacy programs in the community, etc.).
- Meet with representatives to confirm linkage.
- Develop referral system.

Devise classroom learning experiences.

- Review model learning experiences.
- Review NY State learning standards.
- Ensure learning experiences are parent/child-centered (meeting the needs of the family).
- Incorporate a variety of instructional strategies and learning styles.
- Encourage creativity and flexibility.
- Order multicultural materials appropriate to the population.

Conduct follow up and post program assessment.

- Follow up with facility and program staff through meetings and other sharing opportunities.
- Develop a participant evaluation to assess participant satisfaction (journal, portfolio, checklist, suggestions, etc.).
- Assess literacy gains (see [Assessment](#)”).
- Consider longitudinal studies (impact on kindergarten readiness, academic gain, family stability, recidivism, etc.).

Due to family literacy's focus on local decision making, the above checklist is purposely general. However, the universal applicability and importance of some items — namely, raising education standards for all students (children and adults), funding, marketing, and staff development — is of such a nature as to warrant further description.

Raising Standards

The bottom line of family literacy, whether offered in a correctional facility or elsewhere, is furthering learners' language development. New York State defines the parameters of "language development" in its English Language Arts (ELA) learning standard. ELA is one of seven learning standards established by the New York State Education Department in its statewide effort to raise standards for *all* students, including adult learners. This effort focuses on setting high standards, building capacity, and accounting for results. (All seven of the learning standards are presented in Appendix E.)

THE NEED FOR HIGHER STANDARDS

The effort to raise learning standards is inextricably embedded in the foundations of family literacy. The need for higher standards for parents and children is evident:

- Research by the Rand Corporation (1996) indicates that one of the most important influences on student test scores is the level of parental education
- Statistical profiles of schools with low or declining performance show that these schools serve comparatively high percentages of students whose parents have limited or no English language proficiency, have not completed high school, read at less than an eighth grade level, and currently receive public assistance.
- Children's literacy levels and readiness for school are directly linked to their parent's literacy level.

With approximately 70 percent of incarcerated individuals as parents and reports of over 33 percent of women in custody having three or more children,⁽⁹⁾ the need for family literacy in an incarcerated setting is no less compelling. Family literacy can help foster a powerful interdependence within the family and give hope for the next generation.

Learning standards have two primary dimensions. *Content standards* describe what students should know, understand, and be able to do. *Performance standards* define levels of student achievement pertaining to content. The teaching and learning taking place between these two dimensions is perhaps the most crucial element of the entire process.

9 Statistic from Project Greenhope: Services for Women, Inc. (New York, NY)

Family literacy programs set goals to raise literacy levels of individuals within family units. Embedding the learning standards can enhance the level of family literacy functioning. It is critical to the success of family literacy in incarcerated settings that these standards be incorporated into its design and delivery. By so doing, incarcerated adults will be better prepared as parents and individuals to tackle the economic, social, and familial challenges and realities existing today. This, in turn, provides the tools for parents to be their children's primary and most influential teacher and to prepare their children for later success in school.

It should be cautioned, however, that adult learners' goals may not include mastery of all the learning standards at one time. For all adults, the reality is study interrupted by life's demands (family, work, health issues, etc.), followed by more study. Incarcerated adults in family literacy programs are no different. They may choose to master only one or two of the learning standards. This may be, however, the beginning of a continuing effort to address other learning standards. Later, during transition, they may enter another adult education program, further enhancing their skills by tackling another learning standard. Or, they may enter an employment training program, again strengthening their skills.

Teachers and counselors can help adult learners and their children by utilizing a family literacy context. Learner's goals can be achieved by creatively using the critical educational processes: instructional planning, curriculum development, classroom management, peer review, and assessment. With thoughtful planning, teachers can create parent-child literacy activities that:

- capitalize on skills and life experiences.
- maximize impact.
- meet families' time frames.
- achieve the learning standards.

“Many parents commented that they thought they had to spend a lot of money on toys and books, but now they knew about the library or using household items to play with their children. One father stated that he thought all a parent needed to do was to buy his son food and toys. He now understood the importance of reading and playing with his son.”

Family literacy specialist

PLANNING PARENT-CHILD LITERACY ACTIVITIES

The learning standards are a starting point in any educational endeavor. This particular document focuses the benefits of family literacy on adults in facilities, so the information as it relates to learning standards in this guide is geared toward adults. (For more information on children, please reference the K-12 and Pre-K resource guides.) From this point, educators can examine instructional practice, share what they do each day, work in collaboration with other teachers and students, and grow in their understanding of their craft. Educators planning family literacy programs in incarcerated settings, in particular, face both tremendous challenges and wonderful opportunities.

In order to maximize the impact of parent-child literacy activities, language basic to education should be explicitly defined. At the minimum, instructional planning, curriculum development, classroom management, peer review, and assessment must be clear.

<i>Instructional planning:</i>	designing learning experiences or activities
<i>Curriculum:</i>	a set of intended learning outcomes
<i>Classroom management:</i>	orchestration of all phases of instructional planning, implementation, and delivery; also known as “creating a learning community”
<i>Peer review:</i>	a formalized process for fine-tuning learning experiences, building capacity of teaching technique, and incorporating learning standards
<i>Assessment:</i>	the measure of outcome mastery

Instructional Planning

Instruction, properly conceived, is an effort to assist in shaping growth. The events and experiences of a family’s life also shape growth. By imaginatively incorporating a family’s experiences into instructional planning, it is possible to optimize learning. After all, instruction is about designing learning experiences or instructional activities that build on prior experiences, meeting families’ goals and needs, and achieving the learning standards.

Even though inmates and their families are in programs for limited times, skilled instructional planning, imbued with a little creativity, can broaden the learning experience.

- Adult educators should not be shy about tapping into their own resourcefulness in planning instructional activities and learning experiences. The breadth of available resources for planning is unending:

newspapers	children’s books	children’s programs
toys	clothing	subway maps
health brochures	advertising flyers	situation comedies
quiz shows	world wide web sites	music videos

“While I was walking to the lobby with the families after Parent and Child Time and asking questions about their impressions of this family time together, Mercedes, a 3-year-old, mentioned that, of all the toys, she liked the books best. I asked, “What kind of books do you like to read?” She answered “Bear Books!” I promised I would have bear books for her next visit. Her mom Dianne, who works at a women’s facility, was impressed and very happy to participate. She said it meant the world to her 3-year-old.”

Family literacy specialist

- In order to select and achieve learning standards, it is necessary to become familiar with this document and the *Adult Education Resource Guide and Learning Standards* (see Appendix B for “Resources”).
- To assist in instructional planning, SED has developed a number of programs and other resources addressing a variety of populations and issues. (Consult the *Adult Education Resource Guide and Learning Standards* for a list of programs.)

Curriculum Development

Once learning standards consistent with the learner’s goals are selected, it is then necessary to further delineate the learning by selecting learner outcomes or performance indicators.

Ultimately, intended learning outcomes must be expressed in measurable terms. As teachers become seasoned in developing learning experiences, the identification of performance indicators becomes second hand. For additional guidance on curriculum development, consult the *Adult Education Resource Guide and Learning Standards*.

Classroom Management

Another way to broaden the scope of learning standards is to look for opportunities in classroom management. This important educational process encompasses all activities that contribute to making a family literacy program in any setting work.

While classroom management extends far beyond, the correctional facility is the hub where learning experiences and activities are planned, guided, facilitated, assessed, and documented. The care exercised in creating an inviting and safe environment for instruction to take place will go a long way to ensuring that families achieve their goals in a timely fashion. This can be especially challenging in a jail where danger, rather than safety, is the unspoken message.

The extent to which classroom management is relevant to instruction and the learning standards is a function of the program. Family literacy may range from inmates sending recorded readings home to an actual program in a correctional facility. Depending upon the nature of the family literacy program, good classroom management can extend from greeting families when they enter the room; to selecting instructional

“It gave us a chance to maintain the rapport and bond that we have, and lets me monitor my child’s behavior when interacting with other people. I commend the teachers involved in the Parent and Child Time program for their understanding and enthusiasm when teaching the program.”

Participant in family literacy program

resources; to organizing the environment in a comfortable, non-threatening arrangement; to encouraging self-monitoring of behavior; to settling disputes and managing differences in a respectful way. Many of these management activities provide opportunities for addressing the learning standards.

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for addressing the learning standards lies with the diversity of incarcerated adults and their families. As cited in learning standard two of Languages other than English:

*Students will develop cross-cultural skills
and understanding.*

Asking learners from different cultures and their families to share their traditions, stories, songs, and unique-ness can be part of a series of activities that facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Diversity is reflected at the same time that the valuing of diversity is communicated. This example maximizes the impact of common classroom management practices. Other opportunities for addressing the learning standards abound.

Peer Review

As with other education programming, learning experiences are a vehicle for incorporating the learning standards into an incarcerated setting's family literacy program. In New York State, the best of learning experiences are shared through a formal process called peer review. Peer review provides an opportunity to enhance the applicability and ensure the quality of learning experiences.

Initially, peer review occurs at the regional level through the adult education staff development consortia (SDC). Upon approval at the regional level, learning experiences undergo a statewide peer review. All adult educators, including family literacy practitioners, are encouraged to share their best practices with others by submitting and presenting learning experiences to peer review groups. More information can be obtained from the appropriate SDC listed in Appendix C.

Assessment

In creating parent-child literacy activities, the discussion thus far has touched on meeting families' goals and time frames, capitalizing on skills and life experiences, and achieving learning standards. What is missing? Assessment.

Although assessment can be the subject of a far-reaching discussion, it will be described here in terms of indicators for parent-child literacy activities in an incarcerated setting. Generally, assessment makes the educational process complete by:

- measuring the achievement of the learning standards.
- establishing benchmarks for the skills learners already possess.
- evaluating the effectiveness of a program.

As noted earlier, family literacy activities begin with the establishment of adult learners' goals for themselves and their families. Based on these goals, instruction is structured by measurable performance indicators or outcomes. For example, if parents want to help their children with homework, their instruction would be structured within the context of that activity.

As instruction occurs, how someone progresses in literacy is often characterized as a highly complex process. It need not be. Rather, it is simply a systematic method for determining the skills a learner possesses and whether instruction has been successful. For example, assessment might occur after 100 hours of family literacy participation to measure participant gain. A variety of methods — number of books read with children, increased participation in other programs, library visits, etc. — could be used to make this assessment.

From standardized testing to portfolio or other authentic assessment, any number of techniques are available to determine the success of instruction. Traditionally, educators have regarded standardized testing, either norm-referenced or criterion-referenced, as the primary mode of assessment. Thankfully, authentic, performance-based assessments, such as portfolios, have become increasingly accepted as valuable measures.⁽¹⁰⁾ Both traditional and authentic (or performance-based) assessments are de-scribed below.

10 The New York State Interagency Assessment Work Group, *A Guide for Developing High Quality, Comprehensive Assessment* (Albany, NY: New York State Education Department.)

Traditional Assessment Strategies

As stated earlier, standardized testing is the traditional assessment strategy most often used in education, both K-12 and adult. The two major types of standardized testing are norm-referenced measures and criterion-referenced measures.

Norm-referenced Measures

Norm-referenced measures compare an individual's performance to the performance of groups of people, i.e., the norm group. Presented in terms of percentiles, stanines, or grade levels, these measures show whether a learner ~~knows~~ "more or less than other persons in the group. The GED tests and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are examples of this kind of standardized test.

Criterion-referenced measures

Criterion-referenced measures evaluate learner performance against skills they are expected to achieve. Their progress is measured against specific criteria, such as the knowledge needed to master a specific job, life-related tasks, etc. Although less common than norm-referenced measures, many adult educators will recognize the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE) as an example of a criterion-referenced measure.

Authentic, Performance-based Assessments

Authentic, performance-based assessments are designed to supply direct evidence of what a learner is able to do in contexts that have a real work or life purpose. In other words, learners supply answers, perform actions, and/or create products that demonstrate their mastery of the learning standards, goals, and objectives. Authentic, performance-based assessments, which may be considered less traditional, include surveys, interviews, learner self-assessment, portfolios, observation measures, etc.

In using performance-based assessments, it is important that both the teacher and the learner understand what is expected. The basic ingredients of a performance assessment are trifold: the specification of a performance to be evaluated, the development of exercises or tasks used to elicit that performance, and the design of a scoring and recording scheme for results.⁽¹¹⁾ Thus, some form of scoring instrument should be used for making decisions about the quality of the performance.” A checklist, some form of anecdotal record, or rubric should be developed to formalize the assessment process.

Remember, too, that learners should have a voice in how they will demonstrate their mastery. Learners with strong writing skills may wish to include an essay of self-reflection in their portfolios, while those with strong people skills may wish to complete a group project. Roleplaying, demonstrations, videotapes, reports, journals, illustrations, interviewing — the list of potential tools for assessment is endless.

All of these methods provide information on whether an objective has been met. As part of the ever-changing planning of instruction, assessment is a work in progress. Creative educators can and do devise ways of assessment which are effective and nurturing, and give value to what learners know about life.

Funding

Theoretically, the bottom line in transitioning incarcerated individuals back to the community is to provide unrestricted access to any and all educational services facilitating that passage. In today’s reality of narrowing resources, however, this idealism is tempered somewhat by the age old question of, “How will it be paid for?”

A perceived lack of funding should not be the sole criterion upon which family literacy planning takes place. First, it is important to remember that a family literacy project builds on existing programs and services. Second, family literacy has become an important component of adult education planning and funding. Hence, more and more sources of local, state, federal, and private funding are becoming available; a partial list is noted below.

“When I read to my child, I will make sure that I explain to her the story I read [so] she under-stands it clearly. I can also let my child choose the book that she desires.”

Participant in family literacy program

11 Stiggins, R.J. *Learner-centered classroom assessment* (Columbus, OH: Macmillan, 1994)

Barbara Bush Foundation

This private foundation focuses primarily on family literacy. An annual competitive process awards 15-20 programs nationwide with up to \$50,000. In Onondaga County, a 1998 Barbara Bush grant awarded to OCM BOCES provided a significant start-up fund to develop a comprehensive Family Education/PACT program (time for parents and children to engage in interactive literacy activities) at the Onondaga County Department of Corrections.

E P E

NYS Employment Preparation Education (EPE) funds are generated on a contact hours-basis for adults 21 and older who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. These funds may be used to provide educational services (e.g., adult basic education, GED preparation, life skills, training for employment) for adults participating in educational programs.

Even Start

Even Start Family Literacy federal dollars are available in NYS through an annual competitive application process. Even Start Family Literacy Partnerships provide intensive family literacy services that integrate the four components described in the family literacy definition on page 4. Families involved with the family literacy program and PACT can be linked to Even Start as a way to continue developing the role of parent as first and most important teacher.

F A C E

Family and Child Education is a model that shows the portability of family literacy across cultural lines. A total of 22 FACE sites operate at American Indian schools in nine states. FACE is the result of an alliance among the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Parents as Teachers, High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, and the National Center for Family Literacy.

Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start are comprehensive child development programs which serve children from birth to age five, pregnant women, and their families. They are child-focused programs and have the overall goal of increasing the school readiness of young children in low-income families.

The Head Start program is administered by the Head Start Bureau, the Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF), Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Grants are awarded by the ACF Regional Offices and the Head Start bureau's American Indian and Migrant Program Branches directly to local public agencies, private organizations, Indian tribes and school systems for the purpose of operating Head Start programs at the community level.

Knight Family Education

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation joined the family literacy movement in 1994. Knight programs were funded for three years. Over those three years, the programs provided a view of "big city" problems and how to address them through family literacy in smaller communities.

Neglected & Delinquent

Neglected & Delinquent refers to state aid generated by school districts in which jails or county correctional facilities are located. Based on an attendance factor (calculated annually in October), these funds can be used to support family literacy in the facility, staffing supplies, and materials.

STAC

Chapter 683 of the Laws of 1986 is designed to provide educational services to incarcerated youth, ages 16-20. State Aid (STAC 201) funds are intended for use while youths are inside the facility.

Title I

School districts can access Title I of Improving American Schools Act funds. This program includes family programs, early literacy, and parenting education. Programs can link with school districts and provide these services at the school.

Toyota Families for Learning

The Toyota Families for Learning Program is designed so that family literacy programs use initial start-up funding for three years, while, at the same time, building local funding collaborations to sustain their operation after that three-year period passed. From its initial investment in 1991, Toyota has expanded its support to include a total of 19 cities.

UPS Family Education

The United Parcel Service Foundation has supported family literacy programs, both in urban and extremely rural areas. Nine program sites in Louisville and McCreary County, both in Kentucky, have helped prove family literacy's versatility in a number of diverse settings.

W I A

The Workforce Investment Act was signed into federal law in 1998 and is being developed at the state level for implementation in FY2000. This act clearly makes family literacy a high education priority, linking adult/ parental academic achievement with children's academic readiness and success. It also acknowledges that improved academic levels help the family support itself through gainful employment. Through NYS, fund allocation will be competitive and linked to performance measures and NYSED's learning standards.

21 st Century Community Learning Centers

Annual awards were established by Congress to provide educational and social programs, particularly those focusing on literacy, children's daycare, 12-month programming, library service, and parenting skills. Grants are made to consortia of schools, both urban and rural, to enable them to plan, implement, and expand projects that benefit the families of the district. The awards range from \$35,000 to \$300,000 for each of three years.

There are many sources of funding, particularly for those who can think "out of the box." Local funding may be more readily available than expected at first glance. For example, commissary funds provided through the jail or correctional facility are intended for use in the facility and have helped programs purchase equipment, supplies, and materials. As part of its longstanding focus on adult literacy, the Rotary has donated materials and supplies. Churches may be willing to transport inmates' families to the correctional facility for parent and child time which includes parents and children engaging in interactive literacy activities.

Other examples abound. Inmates themselves have been known to donate some prison earnings to purchase books for programs. Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) donates millions of books to facilities serving children unlikely to grow up with books. A Wisconsin-based program receives books from the National Council on the Humanities.

To get started on the funding challenge, remember to research, research, research. Conduct Internet searches on family literacy and funding. Contact the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL). In addition to providing technical assistance, NCFL has resource materials (e.g., *Funding a Family Literacy Program*) available and presents an annual national conference. Peruse trade journals such as *The Chronicle of Philanthropy: The Newspaper of the Non-Profit World* (for information, see <http://philanthropy.com>).

"The Parent and Child Time I spent with my child today and all other Parent and Child Time is of immense value to me. I enjoyed myself very much, and from my observation, so did my child."

Participant in family literacy program

Marketing

Family literacy is *good* — therefore it speaks for itself. Unfortunately, in a time of 30-second sound bites and meals on the run, anything that someone needs to “buy” must be sold, marketed, or promoted — particularly to potential funding entities.

The notion that family literacy in alternative settings needs to be marketed can be an anathema to program planners. However, marketing family literacy is the same as marketing anything else. It is *always* based on the “WIIFM Principle” — What’s in it for me? Why should I buy? How is my life (family, school, future) going to change if I buy? Madison Avenue *really* knows how to market!⁽¹²⁾ When an advertisement appears on television or in a magazine, it is targeted toward a particular group or market segment. Madison Avenue promises that life will be better if we buy jeans; eyeliner; beer; a fancy new car, truck, or van; laundry soap; cigarettes; etc. And we believe Madison Avenue. We buy!

While one could argue about commercial advertising’s tactics, its principles are worth examining. Applying Madison Avenue’s principles to family literacy in an incarcerated setting requires asking the following questions:

- What’s in it for me?
- What is the product?
- What’s the transaction?
- Who are the buyers?
- Who is the seller?
- Are the buyers internal or external to the system?

12 Adapted from Hudson River Center for Program Development, Inc., *WORK-BASED LEARNING: A Resource Guide for Change* (Glenmont, NY: Author, 1996.)

INTERNAL BUYERS

When planning a family literacy program in an incarcerated setting, it is important to consider the people within the system who must be convinced that it is a good idea, i.e., those who must “buy” the concept. These internal buyers may include teachers, administrators (both corrections and education), corrections officers, and administrative bodies (such as boards of education).

As an example, consider why teachers would want to be involved in or supportive of family literacy. What’s in it for them to “buy?” They might answer:

- Staff development opportunities and additional resources will be made available.
- As part of a collective whole, teachers will feel supported.
- Teachers will have a positive impact on the entire family.
- Students will be more likely to seek services upon release.
- Students will be more motivated to succeed in their work.
- Families will be drawn together during incarceration.

Why would corrections’ administrators be interested in family literacy? Examples of their answers are:

- Inmates will maintain closer relationships with their families, thus, observing the rules.
- Inmates will be less apt to recidivate because of closer ties with their families.
- The jail administration will gain recognition as innovators.

EXTERNAL BUYERS

As a marketing campaign is being developed for promoting or selling family literacy in incarcerated settings, the same questions must be asked of external buyers as internal buyers. External buyers might include funding entities, community service providers, and families of incarcerated individuals. The inmates/students themselves might also be considered external buyers since, in the vast majority of cases, participation in a family literacy program is voluntary.

As these questions are asked of all buyers, the thrust of the marketing campaign will become clear. For example, the reason inmates might buy a family literacy program is:

- It provides them with an opportunity to communicate with their children.
- Their participation might make them feel better about themselves as parents and enhance their image in the eyes of their children.
- All parents like to talk about their children.
- It passes time.

Funding entities and community service providers might be interested in supporting family literacy programs because:

- It satisfies their mission of working with troubled families.
- The program tests the importance of parent-child relationships in successful transitioning from a correctional facility.
- Staff development opportunities may become available.
- It provides an opportunity for community building.
- They can be perceived as innovative in their efforts to strengthen families during incarceration.

Support for family literacy will be garnered based on the extent to which its –sellers” are deliberate and thoughtful about defining the product and identifying the various buyers. The seller’s perception of why someone should buy the product is inconsequential. The critical perceptions are those of the buyers.

Buyers’ perceptions can be positively influenced in a variety of ways. Marketing strategies that successfully promote family literacy include:

- large and small group presentations at staff meetings, regional workshops, and conferences
- videotape presentations of successful programs
- site visits to successful family literacy programs
- brochures and letters
- interviews on specific talk shows or cable access programs
- articles in local newspapers.

One of the most successful marketing strategies draws from the do with, rather than to, theory of program development. Creating a planning team of teachers, administrators, corrections staff, students, and service providers within the jail will promote ownership of the program. A multifaceted project like family literacy requires a multifaceted team to make it successful. In all cases, people have to clearly understand what the specific benefits are to them.

Different strategies have to be developed for different buyers or market segments (although it is true that to some degree, buyers may share significant, deeply felt reasons for buying – see box). Developing targeted strategies for different groups may be more work than having one generic strategy but the results will testify to the soundness of the approach. More effective persuasion of the importance of family literacy and more tangible support for the program will result. (For further information on marketing, consult *Social Marketing: A “How To” Approach*.⁽¹³⁾)

“Within each person lies a bone-deep longing for freedom, self-respect, hope, and the chance to make an important contribution to one’s family, community, and the world. Without healthy outlets for this powerful, natural longing, the desire for freedom turns into lawlessness, and the need for self-respect is expressed in aggression and violence. Without avenues to make important contributions to family, community, and the world, hopelessness translates into dependency, depression, violence, substance abuse and other forms of self-abuse. No government program can help families become self-reliant, contributing members of their communities unless it is built on a recognition of the power of this bone-deep longing for freedom, self-respect, hope, and the chance to make an important contribution.”

Excerpted from Dean, Christiann.
Cornell Empowering Families Project.
*Empowerment Skills for Family Workers: A
Worker Handbook*. (Ithaca, New York: Author
1998)

Staff Development

As described above, marketing must occur both externally and internally. Without external marketing, marshalling outside resources can prove difficult. Without internal marketing, project implementation may be halted. In fact, the enthusiasm of staff can really ~~make~~ "make or break" a project such as family literacy. Staff development, therefore, is key to successfully providing family literacy services within a correctional facility.

Family literacy is an unusual project in that it builds on existing services and operates using a strengths-based approach. Because family literacy is really a ~~project~~ "project of coordination," it can be difficult to pinpoint a curriculum for staff development. Staff development can and does occur, however, and on several different levels. Efforts should focus on the key components of family literacy:

- contextualizing adult education to help parents reach the goals they have for themselves and their families
- providing parents literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency
- supporting parents in their roles of primary teacher to their children and full partners in the education of their children
- facilitating life skills
- creating opportunities for incarcerated parents and their families to make positive literacy-based connections
- using a strengths-based approach
- making transition to home and community a priority
- forging connections with the family outside of the facility to existing community resources (*i.e.*, creating a natural support network for the entire family upon release)
- connecting children to age-appropriate education that prepares them for success in school and life experiences.

Although there is no “pre-packaged” way of providing family literacy, numerous resources are listed in the *Resources* section of this document (Appendix B) and some preliminary steps are noted below:

- Before thinking about a staff development plan, be sure to have a handle on the basic concepts of family literacy. Take advantage of the many research tools available by:
 - accessing the Internet to conduct a search on family literacy and/or family support and empowerment.
 - visiting the library or calling the National Center for Family Literacy or the Family Resource Coalition of America for an information packet (see Appendix B for phone numbers and web sites).

- Contact an existing family literacy program in an incarcerated setting to arrange a visit. If you have a limited travel budget and are new to the concepts of family literacy, try to visit any local family literacy site. Technical assistance teams are also available to share their experiences with and expertise on family literacy. (For more information on technical assistance teams, please contact the Hudson River Center for Program Development, Inc. See Appendix B for its phone number and web site.)

- Contact a local staff development provider, such as the New York State Staff Development Consortia (see Appendix C) and ask to be put on their mailing list.

- Attend New York State Incarcerated Education regional or statewide conferences.

- Review the program descriptions provided in this guide. (See Appendix A).

- Review materials on children’s developmental stages and 0-3 year brain research.

- Talk to the front-line staff working directly with the families (e.g., Adult Basic Education teacher, Literacy Volunteer, parent education volunteer from the community, school personnel, correctional officers, transition counselors, drug and alcohol counselors, etc.).

The last item in the preceding list is particularly important. Family literacy is not a stand-alone program, so staff development should benefit *all* staff involved with the program. Family literacy is truly a team effort — for families, for front-line staff, and for the agencies involved. Although one person may be coordinating the effort, it is important to develop a team of partners. A family literacy team may include:

- parents
- community service providers
- custodial care-givers
- transition counselors
- teachers/educational services staff
- schools
- correctional officers
- child care providers
- drug and alcohol counselors
- service providers (including church services, health, social, employment, etc.)
- facility librarian or book providers

Putting together a family literacy team should begin with a partnership or link with the programs and services manager of the correctional facility. Then, it may be helpful to brainstorm a “wish list” of contact people both in and out of the facility that might be interested in, or valuable to, a family literacy program. This is an important step since many educators and other service providers work part-time, making it difficult to know exactly which services are provided or what agencies are working with the facility.

Another way to unearth interest in and ideas for a family literacy program is to survey program, service, and facility staff. It is impossible to tell who might contribute what, so avoid setting parameters on who receives the survey. Take advantage (if appropriate) of the facility’s mailbox system!

Through the survey and other communications, seek answers to the following questions in terms of either a proposed or currently existing program:

- Does our staff development plan help provide interactive literacy activities between parents and their children?
- Does our staff development plan help prepare parents to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in their education?
- Does our staff development plan provide parent literacy preparation that leads to economic/social healthy interdependence?
- Does our staff development plan provide appropriate connections that prepare children for success in school and life experiences?
- Will staff feel prepared to include methods of teaching beginning learners, ways of addressing learning differences, and ways to incorporate positive life experiences to contextualize learning?
- Will staff feel prepared to build on individual family strengths? Will staff feel prepared to help families reach their own goals, rather than goals made for them?
- Is the staff development plan culturally appropriate?

“I think the program is a wonderful idea. It gives my daughter a chance to spend quality time with her father as to where he can play with her, read to her or just hold her and kiss her, as to regular visits he can’t.”

Caretaker

Finally, remember the audience. Even though a family literacy program is guided by many factors (e.g., facility regulations, existing program services, staff expertise, and community resources), the actual recipients and beneficiaries of family literacy are incarcerated parents and their families. Inmates should be surveyed, too. What services do they currently receive? What additional services would be helpful? What are their family’s goals both during the time of incarceration and for the future? Are these goals attainable based on the support and instruction they currently receive?

Such communication among all potential partners of a family literacy team helps form the linkages throughout the facility so integral to the success of family literacy. Although trust issues and fear of change may hamper preliminary efforts, over time, linkages will strengthen. And, initially, a “team” may very well consist of two people sharing an interest in family literacy. Recognizing the network inherent in every facility and community, however, this team will double, quadruple, and so forth. Regardless of the size of a dedicated family literacy team, its goals remain the same: to reduce recidivism and to help families break the cycle of incarceration.

CONCLUSION

Ironically, breaking the cycle — of incarceration, of illiteracy, of poverty — can be achieved by strengthening the fundamental cycle of intergenerational relationships. Parents teach children who may become parents teaching their children. In an even tighter cycle, children are, in a sense, teachers to their own parents. Parents learn by reading to and about their children, enhancing reading comprehension skills, knowledge of child development, etc. And, many parents cite their children as their primary motivation to further their education.

It is particularly befitting for incarcerated parents to interact with their children in literacy-promoting activities. Too often, this population is at an educational disadvantage. This disadvantage has profound implications for not only their own achievement, but also for the achievements of their children. Family literacy programs strive to minimize the impact of such disadvantage. Through the careful construction of its main building blocks (academic preparation, parent/child interaction, caregiver connection, and community linkage), family literacy programs maximize the familial, educational, personal, social, and vocational opportunities of intergenerational learning.