

# **Atlantic Summer Institute: Healthy and Safe Communities**

## **Family Literacy**

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# Overview of session

- Importance of active family involvement with schools.
- Overview of research on
- “Enhancing Family Literacy” program.
- The benefits of family literacy.
- Future????



# What Families Desire from Schools

- Needs of families remain largely misunderstood and neglected (Paul & Simeonsson, 1993).
- They have a myriad of needs These needs are restricted only by the circumstances of the families involved.
- Generally fall into five categories.

# Needs of Families



- Appropriate educational direct services
- Information exchange opportunities.
- Resource use and advocacy preparation.
- Parent/family home and community training programs.
- Parent/family consultation, support, and counseling (Simpson & Simpson, 1988).



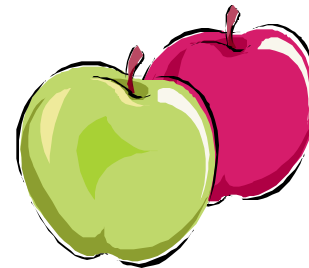
# Myths about Families' Involvement in Schools

- There is often meaningful family involvement in schools especially in pre-school and elementary school (Dunst, 2002).
- Single parents are less involved in their children's schooling (Epstein, 1985).
- Students in secondary education do not benefit academically from family involvement in school (Simon, 2001).

- All forms of family involvement have an affect on students achievement such as:

- COMMUNICATIONS WITH SCHOOLS
- VOLUNTEERING
- ATTENDING SCHOOL EVENTS

(Henderson & Mapp, 2002)



# Definition of Family Literacy

- Family literacy encompasses the way parents, children and extended family members use literacy at home and in their community. It occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children “get things done”. (Saint John Learning Exchange 1999).





# Increasing Literacy

- **Willms (2000) states “Raising and leveling the bar will not likely be achieved by any single strategy or reform. It will require a comprehensive strategy aimed at eliminating poverty, increasing provision during the early years, enabling families, and improving schools.”**

- Willms states “A number of studies worldwide have consistently shown that family influences on student achievement outweigh the effects of either school or community.”

- Canadian NLSCY (National Longitudinal Study of Children & Youth)

Identified four important aspects of family life which influence child behavior and achievement:

- Parenting practices
- Cohesiveness of the family unit
- Mental health of the mother
- The extent to which the parents engage with their children

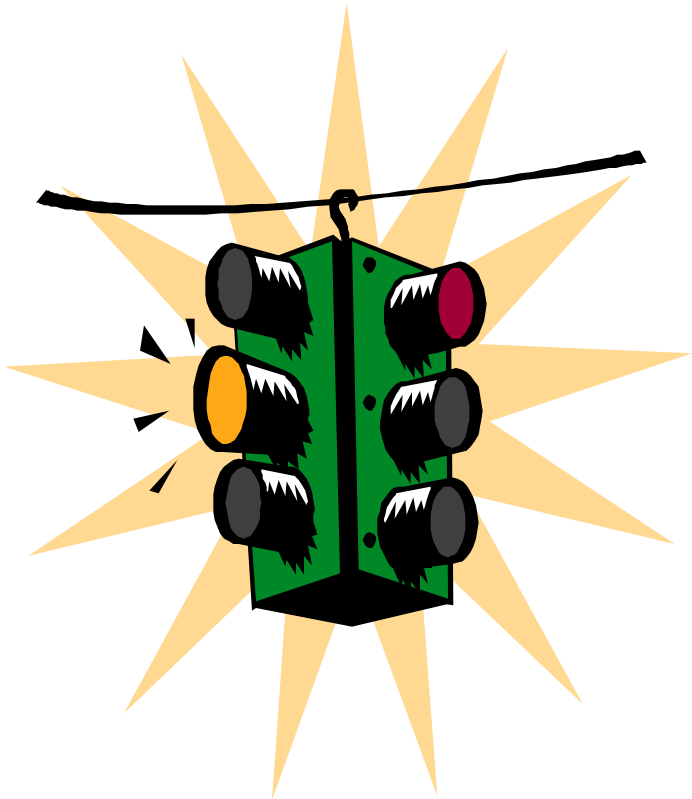
(these outweigh the effects of family income or other socioeconomic factors)



# Home and School Relationships

- Most relationships are built on home deficiencies in explaining low achievement (Brantlinger, 1991).
- Some family members avoid school relationships due to long standing negative experiences with schools (Muscott, 2002)
- Parents are often viewed as agents of teachers (Dunst, 2002).

# Barriers to an Effective Home-School Partnership



- A lack of clarity in the boundaries between schools and families regarding expectations.
- Professional jargon of educators can confuse some parents.
- Robinson & Fine 1994

# Influence of Socioeconomic Status

- Study by Reay 1999
- Making contact with the school constituted an enormous psychological effort on working class mothers.
- Middle class mothers were more likely to request a meeting with the school.



# Excerpts from School Newsletters

Please reword the following:

- “Student achievement, demonstrates service to the community that is positive and **verifiable**, demonstrates **capacity** for leadership and ability to motivate others and demonstrates interest in **innovation**.”
- “Parents must **assume** much of the responsibility to ensure that students make this commitment. Parent involvement improves student achievement, **promotes** positive attitudes toward school and **motivates** students to succeed.”

- Many working class mothers wanted to challenge the school's evaluations but felt unqualified to do so.
- Feelings of being treated like a child were predominate with working class mothers (Reay 1999).

# Family Experiences

- Many parents face literacy challenges.
- They are intimidated by their children's school work.
- Literacy challenges are surrounded by shame.

# Home Visits: “A Possibility”

- Home visitations by teachers get parents involved.
- Most teachers report that their home visits have a lasting effect on the child, the parent and parent-teacher communication.
- Schools in England, Australia and Japan all report success with teacher home visits (Steele-Carlin 2001)
- Other strategies might be a phone call home or a note of positive reinforcement.

# Family Literacy is not just about Reading and Writing

- It's about getting parents involved in their children's learning experiences.
- Parents who are involved in family literacy programs are also improving their own literacy skills.
- Family literacy develops literacy with the family as a whole.
- All family members can benefit!



# Benefits of a Family Literacy Program

- Student's grades and test scores improve.
- Parents believe teachers have better interpersonal and teaching skills.
- Parents rate schools as more effective.
- Parents show an increased understanding of school functions, rules and policies.
- Parents participate more with learning activities at home.

# Our Research

- Looking at families with multi generational literacy challenges
- Funded by NCE and NLS



# Participant Selection

- Self selection
- Recruitment in local establishments
  - Church bulletin announcements
  - Advertisement in local paper
  - Flyers



# Enhancing Family Literacy in Rural Atlantic Canada

This is a family literacy program specifically developed for rural communities.



It is based on the families' identified literacy needs. The participating families are assisting with the development and piloting of the program.

# Impact of Literacy Challenges on Families (Timmons, 2002)

- Lack of education to help children with homework.
- Reduced mobility.
- Not aware of community services such as libraries, community centres, etc..
- Not enough finances to buy books.
- Seasonal work, long hours.
- Cannot afford child care to give time to increase education.

# Quotes From Parents from a Literacy Needs Assessment

- “like I find with the principal at our school, was my teacher in high school and I’m like...this little kid again. This is ridiculous! I’m an adult.” (Needs Assessment 2000)
- “the guidance counselor at school...she’s a lovely lady...her children are perfect...who are you to tell me how to raise my children, or whether my problems are actually problems...we’re very different people.” (Needs Assessment 2000)

# Issues Teachers Face Working With Families

- Teachers can assume that parents are not doing enough.

“You can ask the parents to do things but they don’t help at home. They expect the school to do everything.”

Teachers can be influenced by family histories and previous family experiences.

“His Dad had reading difficulties as well. I’ve been here long enough that I taught his Dad too.”

# Program Set Up

- 10 week program
- 1.5 hour sessions
- 2 facilitators
- Direct-adult, direct-child, and parent and child together time

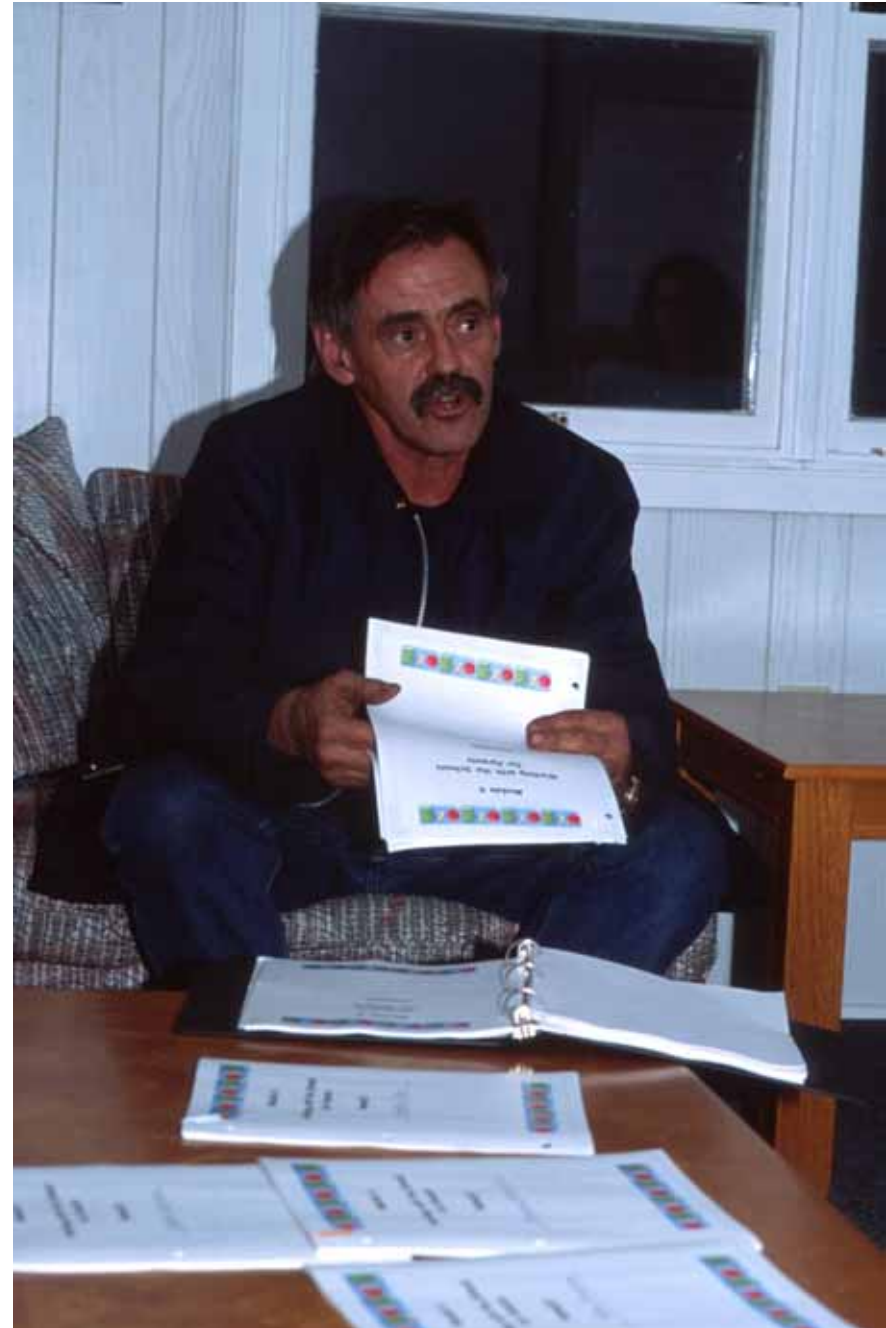




# Literacy Modules Developed

- Homework
- Comprehension
- Parenting
- Decoding
- Literacy in and Around the Home
- Guided Reading
- Language Experience
- Fluency
- Word Recognition
- Relationship with Schools

# Resource Packs



# Data Collection

- Wechsler Individual Achievement Test
  - Pre and post reading assessments
  - Basic reading, reading comprehension and listening comprehension
- Written evaluations
- Interviews

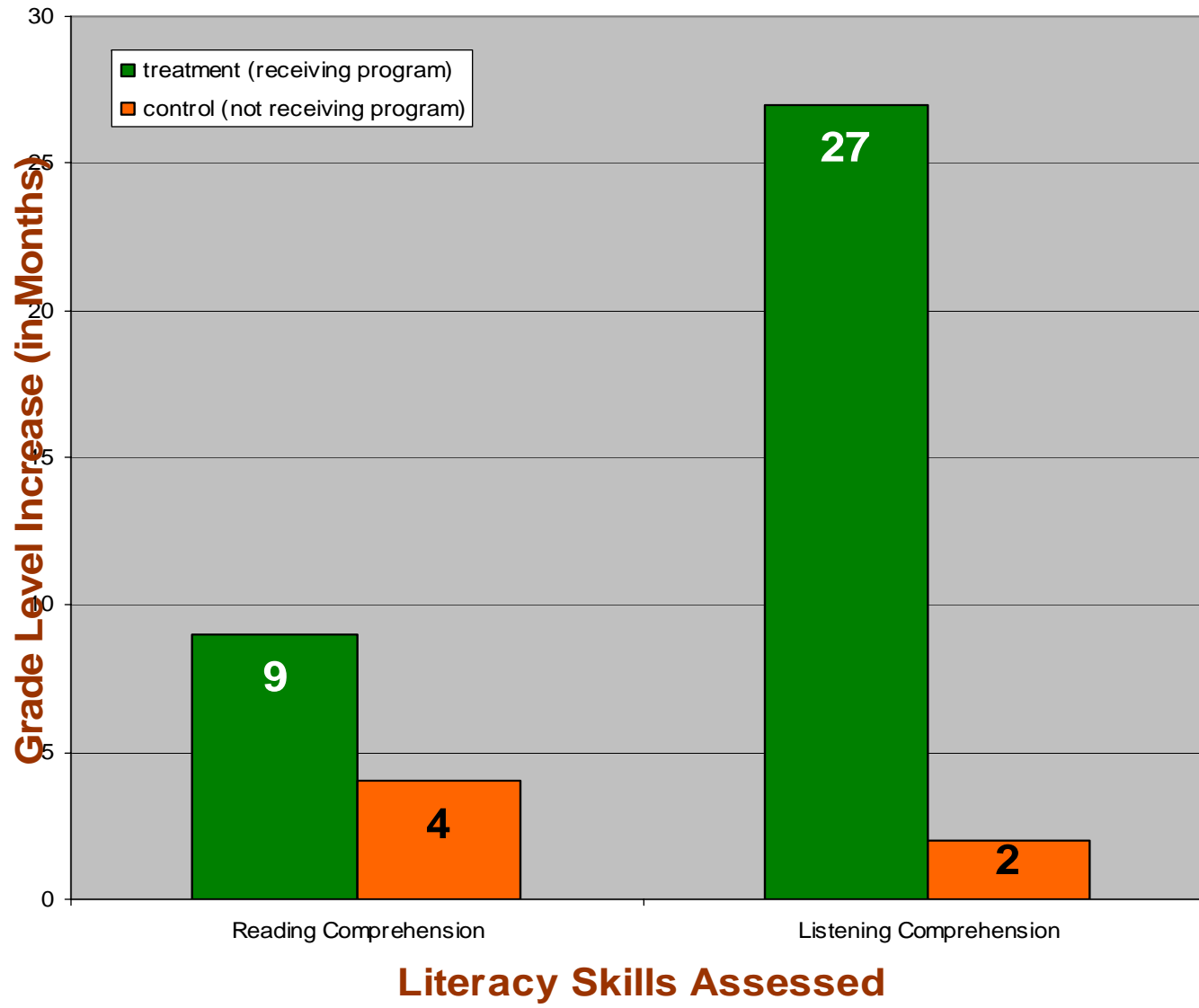


# Reading Scores 2003-2004

	Fall Program	Winter Program
Basic Reading	<b>.83</b>	<b>.35</b>
Reading Comprehension	<b>.86</b>	<b>.46</b>
Oral Expression	<b>1.7</b>	<b>.52</b>
Listening Comprehension	<b>1.6</b>	<b>.61</b>



# Reading Results After Ten Week Rural Family Literacy Program in Prince Edward Island 2005-2006





**Honesty**  
Thankful to others  
Respectful to yourself  
Take what's not yours  
of what's yours  
Being honest others can trust

**Respect**  
Respect others the way you  
like to be treated  
Don't make fun of anyone  
Don't talk about or be  
rude about others  
Listening when the other is  
speaking

**Caring**  
Caring is giving help  
to someone who  
needs it  
Caring is being  
friendly and  
helping others  
Caring is being  
kind to everyone



# Evaluation Comments

- “It was worth every minute we put into it.”
- “I liked that we learned together as a family.”
- “We are still doing things that we learned in the program.”
- “I am glad now that there is a program being made available for people that need help with their kids.”





# Aboriginal Family Literacy (Timmons and Walton)

- Same process.
- Contextually appropriate.
- Thematic approach.
- Skills embedded in the theme.





# Implications for an Aboriginal Community

- Literacy must be relevant.
- Connected to real life experiences.
- Needs to build on culture and family strengths.
- Cannot be developed as a deficit model.
- Must tap children's natural inquisitive natures.







Milkmaid Flax

# Needs Assessment Themes

- **Parenting:** *“My husband can’t read so he can’t help our children.”*
- **Literacy:** *“Well, to do a lot of stuff you have to know how to read.”*
- **Education:** *“I hope that they all finish school at least Grade 12. They all **have** to.”*
- **Worries and Hopes for their Children:** *“I don’t want my kids to get stuck. I just look at my friends now and some of them can’t even read, and it scares me.”*
- **Relationship with the Schools:** *“This school is excellent, I love them there.”*
- **Bullying:** *She’s picked on by almost everyone in the class.”*
- **Culture:** *“I am proud to be Mi’kmaq.”*



# Aspects of a Aboriginal Thematic Family Literacy Program

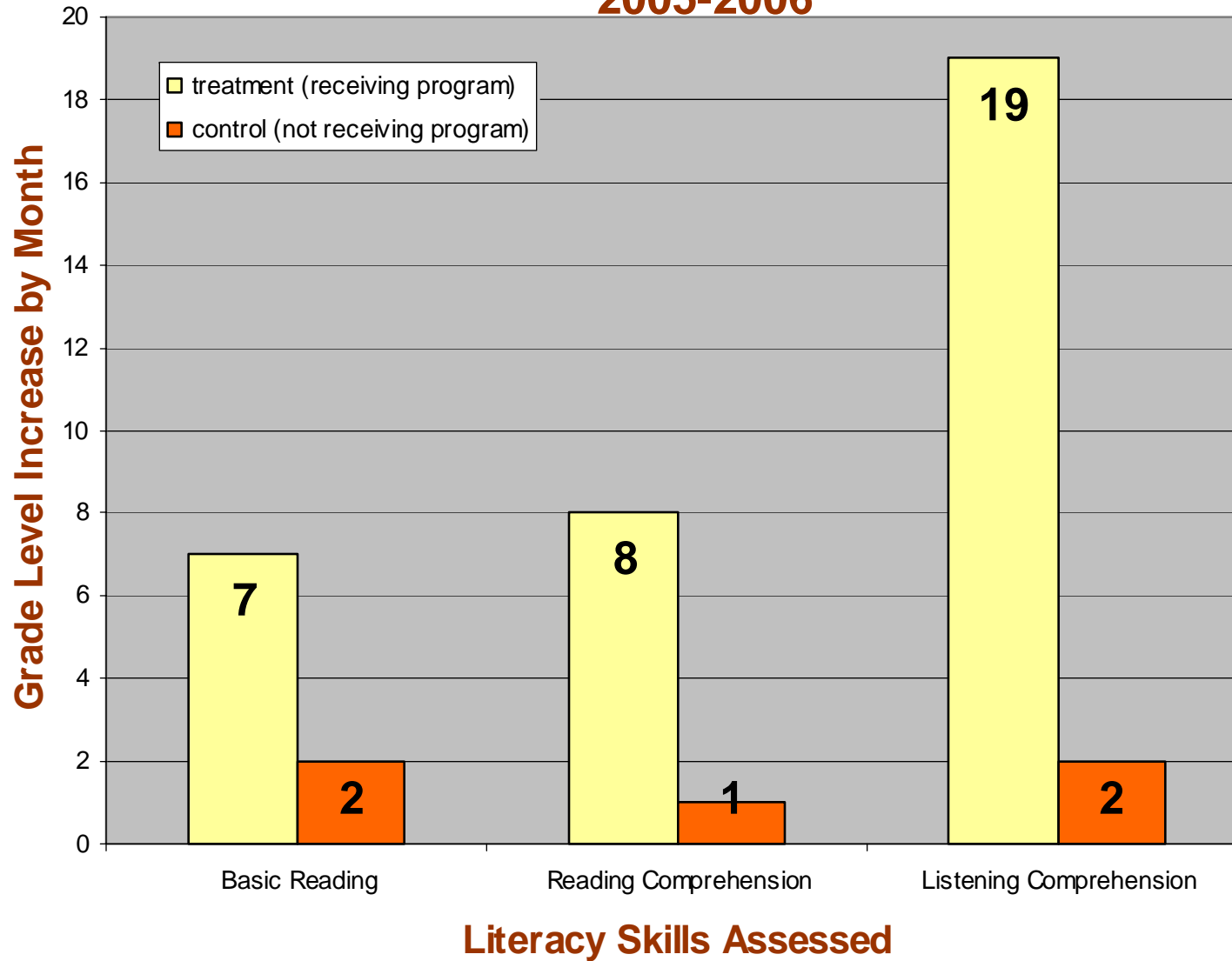
- Animals/ Comprehension
- Reading in and Around Your Home
- Oral Traditions
- Valuing Cultural Diversity and Respect (Bullying)
- Parenting and Discipline
- Native Pride and Culture/ Guided Reading
- Encouraging Kids to Read Using the Medicine Wheel
- Homework
- Nature/Fluency
- Respect for Elders/ Decoding & Phonics







## Reading Results After Ten Week Mi'kmaq Family Literacy Program in Eskasoni, Nova Scotia 2005-2006



# Quotes from Parents

- “It was an awesome program for me, I enjoyed it”
- “I had to go to parent teacher interviews yesterday, and they’ve been seeing the difference.”
- “I think that it was just perfect. I liked it.
- “I know it’s helping [my daughter], and I’m really happy.”
- “Every night we do homework, and if it’s time for reading, it’s not a chore or anything anymore.
- , “[I liked] when the parents get in there together and we talk.”





# Shared Responsibility

**“Family literacy is a shared responsibility including parents, children and teachers.”**

# Teacher Educators

- Teach about family communication
- Highlight active family engagement
- Dispel myths and prejudices
- Bring families in to speak on their experiences
- Promote family centered activities
- Challenge practices: Parent/Teacher Interviews

# Strategies To Meaningfully Engage Families

- Encourage active participation not passive
- Adopt a no-fault policy in school
- Ask parents about ways they encourage learning at home and ways to share cultural traditions
- Develop interactive homework at least once a week
- Promote families connecting with other families

- Work with families to develop parent/teacher agendas for meetings
- Open the school to community meetings
- Develop families' efficacy: develop their confidence
- Translate communication into home languages
- Use clear language when communicating

# Concluding Comments

- Literacy is a family issue.
- Families can participate in the solution, building on their strengths.
- Research in smaller jurisdictions such as Prince Edward Island can produce models that can be nationally implemented.
- Family literacy programs must be contextually appropriate.
  - Aboriginal
  - Rural

# Next Steps

- Train the Train: Aboriginal Communities
- ESL Family Literacy Program

I dreamed I stood in a studio  
And watched two sculptors there.  
The clay they used was a young child's mind,  
And they fashioned it with care.

One was a teacher – the tools s/he used  
Were books with music, art;  
One a parent with a guiding hand,  
And gentle loving heart.

Day after day the teacher toiled,  
With a touch that was deft and sure,  
While the parent labored by her side  
And polished and smoothed it over.

And when at last their task was done,  
They were proud at what they had wrought,  
For the things they had molded into the child  
Could neither be sold nor bought.

And each agreed we would have failed  
If s/he had worked alone,  
For behind the parent stood the school,  
And behind the teacher, the home.

- Anonymous

“To teach  
is to touch lives  
forever”

- Anonymous