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*interview on* **Reading and Participation Survey**

## **Informal Reading Inventory**

I decided to use an informal reading inventory which is short passages with questions. I chose that because **I did not feel that the parents would tolerate a lengthy standardized testing format.** Particularly the parent staff talked about how the parents were very focused on their children. They were willing to come and spend time as was needed with their children. But they really did not like to come for other kinds of activities.

Particularly for the adult reader, it is very important for them to be as candid and as honest as they can be. Because their learning reading experience by this time is outside the school classroom. So it is very difficult really to gauge an adult literacy level.

When I approached the parent staff I asked them to recruit the parents. I said it would take from 15 to 30 minutes. And they right away said to me that when they tried to recruit parents, the parents were very nervous. They wanted to know how long it was going to take. They told them 30 minutes or less. They wanted to know what it was going to be used for and why did somebody want to know their literacy level? The parents explained to them it was for a governmental report. It was only going to be used internally. No results would be sent to anyone outside the school project environment.

So that verified what I thought would happen, that the parents were very reluctant to have their reading level assessed. They recruited them and got the parents that were the most receptive to being tested first. That

was actually very important for me. So **I started out the survey asking them about their own personal reading. And I also asked them about their comfort level. And I asked them what did they think their reading level was. High, Medium or Low.** Most of them said it was probably about average. Some thought maybe low, they never really liked to read.

In the process of the interview I also asked them about their children's literacy. The purpose was to engage them in conversation as I was getting them into their own reading level. **And that is when they were the most animated and they would talk about their children and their goals for their children. And how much they really enjoyed being in the library and reading with their children. They enjoyed reading with the children before bedtime.** And some said they read more than just at Even Start and bedtime.

So then I had them start reading the paragraphs and answering the question. And as it got more difficult for them, we stopped and talked a little bit about why it might be difficult. The interesting thing I thought was that of the group that I did the formal assessment with, **I would gauge that 25% probably needed glasses.**

They knew they needed glasses, they had a prescription, but either they did not like glasses or they couldn't afford glasses. I talked about how important it was for them to wear glasses, because their children might also need glasses. And this would

possibly keep their children from wearing glasses, if "Mommy and Daddy don't wear them" so then "I don't need to wear them." And in terms of learning to read, as well as a lifelong reader, it was also going to handicap them.

As part of the inventory I asked how many had finished their high school diploma. **All but one had finished their high school.** Most had done it through a traditional route, a few had done it through GED.

In this inventory, you read until you make a certain number of errors. And that determines what is your instructional level, and anything above that is your frustration level. And then I was able to calculate their estimated reading level, at least based on this one estimate.

The lowest of the parent group was about 6th grade. The majority had a junior high, freshman in high school, an 8th - 9th. About 25% was actually quite good, very high. The interesting thing I found out, however, **was that even of the parents that scored relatively low, 6th or 7th grade on comprehension, they had one year of junior college, or they had finished beauty school, or they had started their own business. Or had been involved in other training and had been very successful.**

So this raised the question of why there was a gap between what I was seeing on the assessment and functionally how well they had done in an educational environment as well as a community environment. And this was where it was important to ask what they actually read on a daily basis. This was where **I asked them about their own personal reading, and I asked them about their attitudes towards reading.** I asked them about how often they read the newspaper, how often they read magazines, and also books.

**I also asked them, in terms of writing, did they write to their family or their friends.**

Did they write job reports or memos. Did they write for fun and enjoyment and notes to their child's teacher or for applications for jobs.

So that's what I did initially, a combination of a survey about the kinds of things they did in reading and writing with their children, their personal reading and writing habits, and a formal reading assessment that gave us an estimate of their comprehension level.

**My hunch is that the formal reading assessment scores were probably lower than they really are. Many of the adults at that point were not doing very much reading, and if you don't read you basically don't lose these skills, but it is kind of like riding a bicycle, you don't forget how, but if you start to do it you might not be as aerobically fit to ride a bike for a while, until you do a lot of it.**

## **Post Instrument -- Parents as Interviewers**

This in itself was, I think, a very critical piece. A lot of the parents at this point had gotten very busy. They had either taken jobs or their shift had changed. They were still coming to program with their children, but they didn't want to stop and do an interview. So for us to get the end of the year report, we decided that we could do it through phone interviews. However it would be very difficult for me to do a large number of parents by phone interview. So it was decided that we would ask the parent staff to do the phone interviewing.

And so I met with the parent staff. Three women. And I went over the inventory with them. I asked them, how they felt that the parents would receive it. In fact, they kind of practiced, they felt that there was a few things they suggested that I change. We determined that it was fairly long ... but we wanted the information badly enough that we were going to go ahead and ask them the long survey.

They divided up the parent group among the three of them. And they went into the phone interview format.

### **Parent interviewers discuss with Dr. Jo Ann Karr the use of parent interviews**

Edna Kerrison, Parent Assistant

JK: Did you think that we got an honest response,

EK: Yes, shakes head "Yes, I think we got it honest and accurate."

JK: Based on what you saw them doing with their children at the school site, as well as what they were telling you on the phone.

EK: Yes, shakes head yes.

Sally Johnson, Parent Assistant

JK: "And you also did interviews.

SJ: "Yes, they cooperated, but it was long " (the survey.)

JK: "Since you did some in person and some on phone, what would you recommend?"

SJ: "There was one lady who I was interviewing in person, and we got started, and then she said, 'You've got to call me.' So you just have to do some by phoning in and some in person."

JK: "So some preferred the phone because that was more convenient."

SJ: agrees.

JK: "And you thought that the responses you were getting..."

SJ: "They were honest."

### **Categories in Parent Phone Interview**

One category was their own personal reading. We included also in there writing. Another section was on adult literacy and career planning. Another section was on parent education and that was particularly on the parent club offering. Parent-child activities, such as reading to their children. And also their reaction to the different program items.

# Parent Reading Habits

## Summary Findings interview with Dr. Jo Ann Karr

One of the first questions is "I feel I have a positive attitude on my own reading, Yes or No."

**Ninety percent of the parents suggested they have a positive attitude towards the reading.**

The next one is, "I feel I have a positive attitude toward my own writing skills," Eighty-five percent of those interviewed suggested that they have a positive attitude.

In the question about newspaper reading, about Sixty-seven percent read some piece of the newspaper. In fact in terms of the whole paper, there was actually a significant amount that read the whole paper.

Then I asked, that **as a result of Even Start, had they expanded their reading of newspaper since September? About seventy-one percent said they had.** Which I thought that was very significant.

The next question I asked was if they expanded their reading of magazines. About eighty-five percent of the parents suggested they had. **They often volunteered that if magazines were around and available, they would read them. Very few, if any of them had subscriptions coming into the home. So since Even Start program had magazines in the Parent Room, and actively encouraged parents to take them home,** I really think this made a difference in terms of their reading. It was actually the result of my initial (survey) that the parent club put out more magazines and circulated them more aggressively.

Then I asked them a little bit about their choice of reading material in terms of books. If they had a preference for self improvement books, books about real people and events, fictional novels, cook books, travel books, or how to do it books. **Eighty-one percent suggested that they liked to read cook books.** That was the highest. Many of them said they did not read books about self-improvement but they did read magazines or they read brochures. And particularly in the Parent Club, they read what they were given there. They tended not to read longer self-improvement books, but I think that could be because of the expense. (They might read them) If they had been provided. So that was going to be one of my recommendations for next year.

I also asked them, since their family had been in Even Start, had their personal reading for information or enjoyment (and I gave them several choices) stayed about the same, went up slightly, increased a book a month, increased a lot, or included more variety. About forty-seven percent said that it had gone up slightly. However **a key eighty-five percent suggested that it had included a lot more variety than what they had had previous to being enrolled in Even Start.**

I asked them a series of questions about reading information that was coming from the school. And of the choices, **one hundred percent said that they read the (school) newspaper.** Homework assignments, school report card information, flyers, and parenting tips. **The piece they read the most often outside the newspaper was parenting tips. Ninety-five percent.** And that was one thing that they indicated that they would like to read more about. I thought that was significant, that they were seeking it out, and if the school provided it, they definitely were willing to read it. I thought it was interesting that they did not read too much homework assignments. But that could be because the children told them verbally the assignment, or they went to the teachers and asked them, rather than trying to get that through written information. About twenty-three percent said they read information coming from the school more frequently than they had before. About fourteen percent said they read with more understanding. Even if the fourteen percent seems a little small, I think it is still significant that some parents, through interacting with staff, and with the teacher staff,

actually were able to get more out of the material that was coming from the school. Because often the problem is that material is not reader friendly. People who are not in the habit of doing a lot of reading, often will not persist to get through to the nugget of the message of the written document.

## Parent Writing Habits

There was some writing to their family or friends. That wasn't a real high item. But they did indicate that **they felt they had learned more about how to write a resume. And the frequency of writing had gone up slightly by the end of the project.** When I asked if they wrote notes to the teachers, they said there really wasn't any reason to because they saw the teachers all the time. What I tried to help explain was, even though they could tell their child what to do, in terms of the reading-writing process, it was really important to write some of the information. In little codes like "Hang up your coat" or "I'll see you later" so that children saw the utility or function of the reading-writing. Some parents that I talked to indicated that they were making an effort to attempt to do that. But that is not a big piece.

In terms of their writing in the workplace... Eighty-one percent suggested that it was adequate and about Twenty percent suggested that it could be improved. **And several of them have said that if there was some kind of a writing workshop that they would attend.** So that is another recommendation to the project. To do more of the writing activities to help the parents understand the link to the reading phenomena.

## Adult Literacy and Career Planning

I asked them **what category of activity did you want to participate in during this school year?** Did they want to do the computers, the GED class, career planning, videotaping, resume writing, and job hunting.

The **most popular one was career planning, which was eighty-one percent.**

Then I asked them, Of those following, which did you improve: computer literacy, GED, job training, career planning, resume writing, job hunting, job hunting skills.

**Sixty-one percent suggested that they improved in computer literacy.**

In terms of career planning, eighty-five percent suggested that their skills had improved. And many of them attributed that to the parent club as well as being able to read some of the material that was distributed.

In job training classes, **eighty-five percent attended some kind of job training classes.** I think they counted the Even Start as job training, but some of them were enrolled in other types of training.

Career planning and planning goals, sixty-six percent reported that it had increased.

**Ninety percent, suggested that resume writing and job hunting had improved.**

Ninety percent suggested they knew how to call for a job. They talked about the rehearsal they had had in the parent club and how that had paid off.

**Eighty-one percent suggested that they could go on a job interview and feel confident.**

# Parent Education / Activities with Children



Field Trip to nearby beach



**Ninety percent went on an educational field trip with their children.**

Ninety percent volunteered either in the school or in the community or within their church group.

Seventy-six percent of the respondents suggested they had been a mentor without another family or with other children. They felt that they had gotten a lot from the program and they wanted to give it to the next generation of children. **It really impressed me that the parents who had been there a little bit longer felt very committed in terms of recruitment and putting the new group of parents at ease and helping them take advantage of some of the things that they had.**



Beach Field Trip.

Parents liked the trip so much, and the picnic, they requested to go again. This is one of the neat things about the project. We took parent input, switched things around, and were able to go again. Although the beach was close to the school and neighborhood, many had never been there.



Dr. Elizabeth Landerholm, Project Director



## Parents Reading at Home with Their Children

This is a question about how often they read to their children. Sixty-two percent said they read once in a while. Nineteen percent suggested they read three or four times a week. Ten percent admitted that they did not read much.

This question, "I understand more about how to help with homework than when I started the program." **One hundred percent suggested they knew how to help their children with homework.** I thought that was significant in terms of the impact on children's literacy.

**Seventy percent have gotten library cards for their family.** As the children get older in the school, it is going to be more and more important that the family access the public library. So that they can get the range and the variety they need. And also to be able to get it on Saturdays or after school. So in terms of life long reading for themselves and their family, I think that the fact that seventy percent had gone to the public library and had a card for their family is very significant.

I asked them whether they thought their child had improved in reading and writing because of the Even Start activities and the activities they did with them in the home. **Eighty-eight percent said that the children had improved more than they had expected.**

**"Even Start has increased my ability to help my child at home at school and in the community with reading, math, science and computers," Seventy-six of the respondents said, "Yes," it had.**

The question -- **during the school year my overall parenting skills (a) improved a lot, (b) a little, or (c) not much. Eighty-two percent said they had improved a lot.** Seventeen percent suggested they improved a little. No one suggested that it had not helped them at all.

**Seventy-six percent said they were looking for a job.**

**Seventy-one percent had used the computer.** Was that your initial goal? I asked. And Sixty-six percent said "yes," that they had wanted to do that and they were able to do it. Ninety percent indicated that their children had used the computer. **"Do your children want to learn more about the computer?" and the answer definitely was yes, by eighty-five percent.**

"Would you like to learn about games for kids by having a visitor come into your home?" One hundred percent said "Sure." The fact that the parents are open for someone to come into the home, I think, is very significant in terms of the fact that the program has won their confidence and rapport to the extent that they would either do it school based or home based.

**One hundred percent sometimes go to the library.**

When asked “What would you like to do, “ **One hundred percent said they would like to garden.** The rest of the group was split between arts and crafts, help with computer and photography.

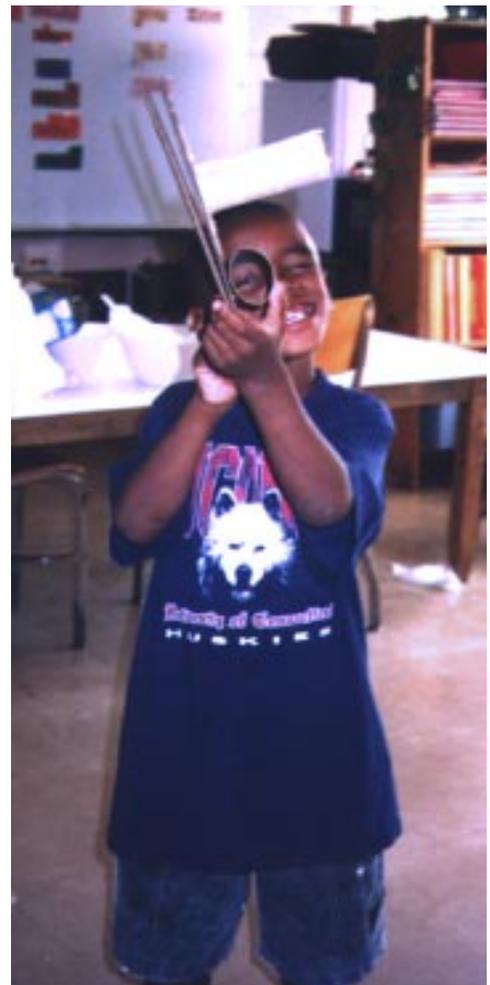
**Seventy-one percent suggested that they would like to do photography.** This is an outgrowth of the program where all the parents have had an opportunity to take pictures as well as receive photographs of themselves and their family. I think again, that with the photography and the videotaping and the reflection with the parents and children using those images is very critical in terms of the reading-writing process. As part of the visual communication. And the feedback that gives the parents in terms of what their literacy behavior looks like. Either their reading skills or their eye contact with their children, the enthusiasm they exude when they are reading. As they model for each other as parents, notice things on the video that other parents are doing. Or examining photography to talk about what they have done.

Documentation using videography and photography establishes the connection between reading and writing.

**For them to go back over those activities and talk about them orally with the children and inside the parent group, and then to record that information so again the children and parents are seeing the connection between the reading and the writing. That it is not a separate act, it is actually a connected act.**

So when they read another author’s point of view , they will be able to look for theme, and other things that go into what we call critical reading. Which a lot of times in the early childhood reading programs are left out because the emphasis is more on phonetics than on word identification.

We know it is crucial for the children to start to do deep thinking and contextual thinking at a very early age if they are able to persist through the vocabulary load they are going to have to acquire as they go into different subject areas.



**Student has constructed this “video camera” and is using it to document events at EvenSart.**