Your Child’s Strengths; Discover Them, Develop Them, Use Them
By Jennifer Fox, M.Ed.
Book Review by Erin Leedom, M.S.

Jennifer Fox wrote this book in an effort to change the philosophical conversation about how we raise and educate our children. The premise is made that we, parents and educators, tend to overwhelmingly focus on children’s weaknesses thinking that addressing concerns helps children overcome deficits, embrace their strengths and become life long learners. Contrary to this thinking, she believes identifying children’s strengths enables individuals to develop confidence and compensatory skills needed to overcome any weakness that may prevent them from achieving their ultimate goals. Furthermore, when children are part of their own educational process and given a voice in determining their own strengths and passions, obstacles will naturally be overcome. This will happen due to the greater need people have for personal gratification that is obtained when one achieves success.

As a researcher, theorist, and practitioner in school administration, Jennifer affects positive learning outcomes. Her M.Ed. is in school administration and she has expertise and great advice to share in this realm. However, the reader must be on alert throughout section one for Jennifer Fox’s personal viewpoints, not always backed by references to experts in specific fields in which she makes some powerful and sometimes controversial statements. Some comments become weakened by overstated opinion written in such a manner that at first glance one might believe she had expertise as a Learning Disabilities Specialist, a medical doctor, or a child psychologist. In her discussion about medication issues for example, I found it disheartening that she spoke about excruciatingly difficult family decisions to place one’s child on medication as if she held a medical degree. When reading section one, stay alert to what is reinforced by medical experts or specialists and what information relates to Jennifer Fox’s personal opinions and experiences.

That being said, I do believe Jennifer Fox makes an extremely compelling case for adhering to the Strengths Movement she describes in Part 2 of the book. This section, entitled “The Strengths Awakening”, clearly points to one example after another that demonstrates the power of focusing on children’s strengths in the educational process. Her book, in my opinion, should have started with Part 2 as that is where her strengths lie. Section 3 is written in a textbook/workbook format. Parents and educators may gain understanding about a child’s strengths by utilizing the assessments and curriculum materials found in this section. Students also may enjoy taking the inventories. The more people learn about their strengths and passions, the more they are able to develop educational and career paths that are fulfilling according to Jennifer Fox. She conveys this message well the second and third section of her book, Your Child’s Strengths.