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Research Report DFE-RR156

Review of best practice in parental engagement

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Department for Education

This research report was commissioned before the new UK Government took office on 11 May 2010. As a result the content may not reflect current Government policy and may make reference to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) which has now been replaced by the Department for Education (DFE).

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Education.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Benefits of parental engagement

Parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning. This was the single most important finding from a recent and authoritative review of the evidence:

> Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups. (Desforges 2003).

It is therefore a priority to identify interventions that are effective in supporting parental involvement, particularly those parents who are either not significantly involved in their children's education or who are not involved at all. That is the purpose of this review.

Aims and objectives

This report presents a review of studies of interventions aimed at supporting and improving parental engagement in the education of children aged 5-19, and which also offer evidence on educational outcomes. The overall aim of the review is to:

- highlight findings and conclusions from the evidence reviewed
- identify key themes and messages for practitioners and school leaders.

In particular the research will:

- analyse the interventions, approaches and practices that are most effective in promoting positive behaviours in all parents and particular groups of parents, and which also lead to educational outcomes
- identify the features of interventions that are most effective in supporting parental engagement and improving children's outcomes
- present a profile of 'what success looks like' in terms of the behaviours of schools, services, practitioners and parents that have the largest impact on outcomes.

Scope of review

The review is confined to studies of interventions aimed at supporting and improving parental engagement in their children's education and which offer evidence on educational outcomes. Priority is given to studies undertaken in the period 2000 - 2010, although earlier, frequently cited studies are also included.

We adopt a broad interpretation of 'parental engagement', which includes learning at home, school-home and home-school communication, in-school activities, decision-making (e.g. being a parent governor) and collaborating with the community.

The **evidence** is presented in three categories:

- School – home links.
- Support and training for parents.
- Family and community based interventions.

Appendix 1 in the report includes a **model of good practice.** This includes evidence-based key messages and challenges for **school and service leaders, practitioners and policymakers**. The model draws on evidence described in the report, and summarises the activities and strategies that should be put in place to initiate and enhance interventions to support parental engagement.

SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

School - Home Links

Whole school approach

Attempts by schools to engage parents in their children's learning are unlikely to be successful if they represent a 'bolt-on' to mainstream activities. A parental engagement strategy, therefore, should be integrated into a whole school approach to parental engagement. And school based family and parent support activities should have the improvement of children's learning as a clear and consistent goal.

Staff' needs

To engage effectively with parents, staff require training and coaching, particularly when working with parents whose backgrounds are very different to their own. School staff should therefore receive parental engagement training through initial teacher training or continuing professional development.

Parents' needs

Schools which successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parental engagement, and their parental engagement strategies accord with the interpretations and values of the parents they are aimed at. Parental engagement with children's learning is effectively supported when parents receive clear, specific and targeted information from schools.

An outward facing strategy

A parental engagement strategy should be outward facing, involving not only the views of parents, but the evidence and expertise of other schools and services in the community. Equally, the transfer of knowledge and understanding should be part of a two way process: not only from school to home but from home to school.

Information and communication technology

ICT can contribute to improved parental engagement by providing a convenient means for parents to access up-to-date information about their child's learning. ICT enables parents to be more engaged with their child's learning, and supports more flexible working arrangements for staff.

Challenges

Teachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to work with parents, and schools do not always recognise or value the ways in which parents are already engaged with children's learning. Furthermore, schools generally do not collect sufficient data on their own interventions, particularly relating to the impact on academic outcomes. For their part, parents face numerous logistical barriers to further engagement, including costs, time and transport.

Support and Training for Parents

Benefits

Significant outcomes of parental support programmes include: parents' acknowledging that a problem exists; gaining knowledge and skills to manage children's behaviour, and the confidence and empathy to use these skills effectively.

Programmes can have an impact on how well children bond with school staff, and how involved they become with the school. Parents report a reduction in parent-teenager conflict and an improvement in parenting styles.

Literacy and other curriculum areas

There is extensive evidence on the positive impact of parental engagement programmes on children's literacy. Effort focused on some aspects of literacy – for example, training parents to teach specific reading skills to their children – is more

likely to be effective than effort focused on other aspects – for example, encouraging parents to listen to their children to read. However, with the partial exception of numeracy, very little is known about whether interventions have an impact on outcomes relating to other parts of the curriculum.

Approaches

Effective programmes and interventions are informed by a needs analysis and targeted at particular types of parents – disadvantaged parents for example. And parental support programmes which focus on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills are more effective than interventions that do not include such training. In all cases, parents need specific, detailed guidance on programmes and on their expected contribution.

Understanding parents

The evidence confirms the importance of a parental needs analysis, along with understanding what parents already do with their children and how they are most likely to respond positively to attempts to engage them (further) in their children's learning. Programmes should therefore be targeted at particular groups of parents, showing sensitivity to cultural norms and expectations, and including specific, detailed and directive advice and guidance.

Family and Community Based Interventions

Benefits

The evidence of the impact of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes on children's academic and learning related outcomes is extensive and robust, particularly in the case of literacy, but also numeracy and alongside other learning related outcomes including motivation and achievement. Furthermore, family literacy and numeracy programmes can have a positive impact on the most disadvantaged

families, including the academic outcomes of the children. The benefits have been shown to last beyond the duration of the intervention.

Partnership and multi-agency arrangements

Partnership and multi-agency arrangements are an essential component of a comprehensive strategy for parental engagement. Multi-agency arrangements enable schools to share information with partners, including the police, social services and the voluntary sector, and to draw on external expertise from agencies specialising in mental health, nursing and community activities.

Sharing information

Schools are in a stronger position to respond to their communities when they receive information and data identifying how their performance compares with other schools and services. Information needs to be shared between schools and other services when learners move from one stage or location to another. In the best practice local authorities and individual educational settings shared information effectively.

Challenges

Information was not always shared across partners, or communicated at points of transition from one location or school to another. And data on the impact on children's academic outcomes is largely absent.

CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Many of the most impressive programmes included in this review are family learning programmes and, of these, the evidence of the impact of literacy interventions is particularly robust. There are also notable examples of effective interventions to support home-school links and to provide training to parents on how to support their

children's learning - The Manchester Transition Project, and the SPOKES, FAST and SAAF programmes are four of many.

Evidence gaps

At the same time, there are numerous gaps in the evidence base. Much of the evidence is weak, or based on poor quality research. There is little robust evidence on many academic and learning related outcomes, and on many of the specific activities schools and services should undertake in pursuit of the general features of an effective parental engagement strategy. The evidence will not yet allow reliable and fine grained assessment of the relative effectiveness of interventions at different key stages of children's development.

A parental engagement strategy

The evidence included in this review points towards the following as key features of an effective parental engagement strategy.

Planning

Parental engagement must be planned for and embedded in a whole school or service strategy. The planning cycle will include a comprehensive needs analysis; the establishment of mutual priorities; ongoing monitoring and evaluation of interventions; and a public awareness process to help parents and teachers understand and commit to a strategic plan.

Leadership

Effective leadership of parental engagement is essential to the success of programmes and strategies. A parental engagement programme is often led by a senior leader, although leadership may also be distributed in the context of a programme or cluster of schools and services working to a clear strategic direction.

Collaboration and engagement

Parental engagement requires active collaboration with parents and should be pro-active rather than reactive. It should be sensitive to the circumstances of all families, recognise the contributions parents can make, and aim to empower parents.

Sustained improvement

A parental engagement strategy should be the subject of ongoing support, monitoring and development. This will include strategic planning which embeds parental engagement in whole-school development plans, sustained support, resourcing and training, community involvement at all levels of management, and a continuous system of evidence based development and review.

Challenges

Challenges to the successful implementation of a parental engagement strategy include:

- Parents perceiving schools as presenting obstacles in the form of lack of encouragement, not informing parents of what they can do, and having too little scope for fitting around busy working and family lives.
- Parents facing numerous barriers to engagement, including costs, time and transportation, language (for some parents for whom English is not a first language), low levels of literacy and numeracy, and a lack of confidence in supporting children's learning or engaging with a school.
- Sustainability: in particular retaining committed and inspiring senior leaders, high levels of commitment across staff teams, and access to the funding streams and resources that successful programmes require.
- Reaching and involving parents who have chosen not to engage either with their children's school or with their children's learning.
- Lack of staff experience and knowledge of working to support parents in engaging with their children's learning.

Summary

An increasing number of the general features of parental engagement strategies are supported by evidence derived from high quality research. Whilst many of the specific activities required of parents and schools are less well supported, studies often agree on what is effective. There is now a sufficient body of information to provide a firm basis for a programme of ongoing development and research - trialling, testing, evaluating and building on the best evidence we have.

2. ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aims and objectives

This report presents a review of studies of interventions aimed at supporting and improving parental engagement in the education of children aged 5-19, and which also offer evidence on educational outcomes. The overall aim of the review is to:

- highlight findings and conclusions from the evidence reviewed
- identify key themes and messages for practitioners and school leaders.

In particular the research will:

- analyse the interventions, approaches and practices that are most effective in promoting positive behaviours in all parents and particular groups of parents, and which also lead to educational outcomes
- identify the features of interventions that are most effective in supporting parental engagement and improving children's outcomes
- present a profile of 'what success looks like' in terms of the behaviours of schools, services, practitioners and parents that have the largest impact on outcomes.

Scope of review

The review is confined to studies of interventions aimed at supporting and improving parental engagement in their children's education and which offer evidence on educational outcomes.

There is very little robust evidence that meets this description, and too little to provide evidenced based judgements about many of the key variables, or the relative effectiveness of work in different key stages of children's development.

'Robust' is, broadly defined to refer to any research that provides explicit and good evidence for the connection between the parental engagement intervention and an educational outcome. This includes (but is not limited to) research conforming to an

experimental design and which offers reliable evidence on effect sizes in relation to children's educational outcomes; other designs also meet the requirement for robustness.

There is extensive research on interventions falling within the scope of this review, but which are not robust in the sense identified above. This includes research incorporating either quantitative or qualitative designs, or a combination of both. However, it is important to develop our understanding of whether, and how, interventions promote children's outcomes beyond the evidence offered up by the limited number of experimental studies that assess impacts on outcomes. Therefore, whilst drawing attention to any methodological limitations, we also draw on evidence from studies if and when this is corroborated by evidence from alternative sources. The interpretation of evidence of this kind must remain provisional, and it is highlighted as such, but it is included as evidence that is worth investigation.

The review covers research on parents of children aged 5-19. Where possible, points of general importance are illustrated with examples from both the primary and secondary phases of schooling. A small number of additional studies are included which refer to children under five, either because these studies warrant conclusions that also apply to children aged 5 or over, or because the effects of the interventions can be shown to extend into school age.

In respect of subject areas, most of the robust evidence applies to literacy; there is less evidence on numeracy and on behavioural outcomes. There is very little subject-based evidence in relation to most of the rest of the curriculum.

We make selective use of parental engagement studies which, whilst not concerned with children's achievement outcomes, offer valuable insight into the design of interventions aimed at improving these outcomes.

All studies are from the UK unless otherwise stated. Non UK studies are also included where these are both authoritative and pertinent to the UK context, but any attempt to draw conclusions about UK practice from international evidence should be treated with caution.

Priority is given to studies undertaken in the period 2000 - 2010, although earlier, frequently cited studies of notable significance are also included.

‘Parental engagement’

‘Parental engagement’ includes a wide range of activities. For the purposes of this review ‘parenting’ is taken to include the provision of:

- Housing
- Health,
- Nutrition and safety;
- Home conditions to support learning and development; and
- Information to help schools know about the child and the family.

‘Engagement’ is taken to include:

- Learning at home: help with homework, subject skills, other skills and talents, attitudes, values, aspirations and behaviour
- Communication: school-home; home-school
- In-school activities: volunteering; helping in classrooms, parents’ evenings, field trips; participating as a member of an audience
- Decision making: undertaking role as school governor or other committees and advisory groups
- Collaborating with the community: community contributions to schools and families; family and school contributions to the community

How the report is organised

Chapter 3 provides a brief context for this research and **chapter 4** briefly describes the methods used for selecting and reviewing the sources of evidence.

The evidence is presented in chapters 5 - 8. Interventions to promote parental engagement are organised into three categories:

- School – home links: activities designed to promote the relationship between schools and parents, with a view to supporting children's learning, achievement and behavioural outcomes (**chapter 5**).

- Support and training for parents: programmes aimed at supporting and training parents in parenting and relationship skills, and promoting their health and wellbeing, which have the aim or effect of promoting children's outcomes (**chapter 6**).

- Family and community based interventions: family and community learning programmes which have the aim or effect of promoting children's outcomes (**chapter 7**).

Whilst many interventions include features from more than one of these categories the categories are retained for the purpose of presenting the evidence in this chapter. Where necessary, evidence is discussed under more than one heading.

Chapter 8 provides a profile of the evidence base, including a summary of where the evidence is most and least robust, and where the principal gaps in the evidence remain.

The conclusions **(chapter 9)** focus on the principal messages to emerge from this review and the implications for a parental engagement strategy.

Separate **Appendices** include:

- a Practitioners' Summary – a summary of evidence-based key messages and challenges for school and service leaders, practitioners and policymakers
- full details of all sources used in this review
- list of references
- a glossary.

3. CONTEXT

The Schools White Paper (Department for Education 2010) sets out how the Government will improve the outcomes and life chances of all children. Schools will be increasingly accountable to parents for the progress and achievement of pupils. The White Paper presents the Government's strategy for raising achievement levels, improving pupils' behaviour, and lowering the attainment gap. The Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances (Field 2010) identifies a central role for parents in meeting each of these goals, particularly in the early years. The White Paper and the Field Review reinforce the need to involve parents in education, and to create a good home learning environment.

In recent years, schools have increasingly recognised the importance of involving parents in their children's learning. This has been supported by developments such as the emergence of online technology and Parent Support Advisors. Since September 2009 Ofsted has been considering how effectively schools engage with parents. The focus has been on building positive relationships with parents, the quality of communications, reporting to parents on progress, and the mechanisms for helping parents to support their children's learning. Evidence from Ofsted suggests that a critical dimension of effective teaching and learning is the relationship between the teacher, their pupils and their parents. Just as the quality of teaching and leadership in schools is the key determinant of educational attainment, so the degree and quality of engagement that parents have with their child's learning is a crucial factor outside the school environment.

The more parents are engaged in the education of their children, the more likely their children are to succeed in the education system. School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement. Schools that improve and sustain improvement engage the community and build strong links with parents. Where schools build positive relationships with parents and work actively to embrace racial, religious, and ethnic and language differences, evidence of sustained school improvement can be found.

4. THE REVIEW PROCESS

This review was conducted over a period of 5 months in 2010-2011. The time scale did not allow for an exhaustive and systematic review as exemplified in the work of the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre). Previous reviews were drawn upon where available.

The following data bases and websites were selected on the basis of their potential for including material falling under the scope of this review:

- Databases: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts, the Australian Education Index, the British Humanities Index, Education Resources Information Centre, Education Research Complete, Informaworld, Ingenta, Sage Online and Sociological Abstracts.
- Websites: DfE, NFER, Ofsted, C4EO, Family and Parenting Institute, National College, and Harvard Family Research Project.

Expert advice was provided by Professor Charles Desforges (University of Exeter), Jon Robinson and Peter Apostolou (Department for Education).

Search terms:

- parent (or parental or parenting or family)
- engagement (or involvement or interest or support)
- pupil (or student or child or youth)
- achievement (or progress or adjustment or development)
- community (or family)
- education (or training or development)
- intervention (or programme or scheme or partnership)
- support (or guidance)

Evidence and practice in early years' settings has been extensively reviewed; this review is focussed on parents of children aged 5-19.

An initial review for the period 1995-2010 yielded approximately 47,000 titles, of which over 1200 were investigated as most relevant to the aims of this study. This included evidence on both spontaneous parental engagement and interventions aimed at supporting parental engagement. Desforges (2003), Harris and Goodall (2008, 2009) and Lindsay (2008) have reviewed the evidence on the impact of parental engagement on children's education and achievement. These reviews showed that there is robust evidence that parental engagement has a beneficial impact on children's educational outcomes. In view of how much is already known on this subject, the subsequent reviewing process focussed exclusively on *interventions*.

This review is therefore confined to studies of interventions aimed at supporting and improving parental engagement in their children's education and which offer evidence on educational outcomes. There is very little robust evidence that meets this description. 'Robust' is taken, broadly, to refer to any methodology that makes explicit, and provides good evidence for, the connection between a parental engagement strategy and an educational outcome. This includes (but is not limited to) research conforming to an experimental design and which offers reliable evidence on effect sizes in relation to children's educational outcomes; other designs also meet the requirement for robustness.

There is extensive research on interventions falling within the brief of this review, but which are not robust in the sense identified above. This includes research based on either or both quantitative and qualitative designs. It is important to develop our understanding of whether and how interventions promote children's outcomes beyond the limited evidence offered up by experimental studies. Whilst drawing attention to any methodological limitations, we therefore also draw on evidence from studies *if and when this is corroborated by evidence from numerous alternative sources.* The interpretation of evidence of this kind must remain provisional, and it is highlighted as such, but it is included as evidence that is worth pursuing further.

Priority is given to studies undertaken in the period 2000- 2010, but earlier, frequently cited studies of notable significance are also included.

We make selective use of parental engagement studies which, whilst not concerned with children's achievement outcomes, can also offer valuable insight into the design of interventions aimed at improving these outcomes. Examples include Fraja 2010, which points to the importance of the pupil in shaping parental engagement,[1] and Hingle 2010, which suggests that (there are occasions on which) specific and directive interventions may be more effective than holistic and general interventions.

In general terms the search strategy includes material available in the English language either published in academic journals or recommended by experts in the field (whether published or in 'grey' literature).

This strategy runs the risk of omitting studies that are either unpublished or largely unknown to experts. It is also liable to exhibit 'publication bias' - the tendency to include only those studies reporting positive effects, since those which report 'no effect' tend to attract little (published) attention. As a product of the same bias, however, this review includes any study in the context of English education which, whether published or not, provides evidence on interventions aimed at supporting parental involvement and which are shown to have an impact on pupil's learning outcomes.

[1] The Futurelab website provides information about what schools are doing with pupils to encourage parents to engage in learning.

5. HOME SCHOOL LINKS

Key messages

A parental engagement strategy should be integrated into a whole school approach to parental engagement.

Interventions should be informed by an ongoing parental needs assessment in the context of a school improvement strategy.

Schools which successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parental engagement, and their parental engagement strategies accord with the interpretations and values of the parents they are aimed at.

School based family and parent support activities should have as a clear and consistent goal the improvement of children's learning.

School staff should receive training in parental engagement, in the context of initial teacher training or continuing professional development.

Parental engagement with children's learning is effectively supported when parents receive clear, specific and targeted information from schools.

Improving home school links can lead to improvements in completion of homework, learning behaviours and improved attendance.

Building home-school links through out of hours' clubs, parenting classes, extended schools and outreach work is a powerful lever for improving children's achievement.

More parents now believe that they have a responsibility for their children's education at a time when confidence to help with homework is declining. This presents schools with an opportunity to support parents by improving home-school links.

Solutions to logistical barriers to parental involvement include: car-pools, including children in school based parental activities and, taking account of parental work schedules when organising programmes.

Key messages (cont'd)

ICT can contribute to improved parental engagement by: providing a convenient means for parents to access up-to-date information about their child's learning; enabling parents to be more engaged with their child's learning; supporting more flexible working arrangements for staff.

In a Becta study only 25 per cent of parents received information about their child's learning via online tools; 84 per cent of parents reported that their child's school provided them with little or no resources to help support their child's learning at home.

Levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning.

Further research

There is insufficient robust evidence on the effectiveness of home-school interventions, and, in particular, on the mechanisms that explain how interventions are related to outcomes.

More evidence is required on how parents engage with their children in the home, particularly parents who are less likely to engage positively with their children at school.

Introduction

It is well known that strong links between school and home are essential to promoting parental engagement in their children's learning, and Ofsted currently assess schools on their work with parents. This chapter gives evidence of what characterises strong links, and what best promotes a positive relationship between the school and the home. If school-home links are to be sustainable and supportive of children's attainment, they will form part of a whole school approach to parental engagement. They will work with a broad understanding of what parental engagement includes, and be informed by an ongoing needs assessment. A parental engagement strategy will be pursued under strong leadership, following a clear vision embedded in the culture of the school, and shared by all staff. Teachers will be trained to work with parents from all backgrounds. Knowledge and

understanding will be part of a two way process: not only from school to home but from home to school. Schools will face outwards to work with parents, and to collaborate with other schools and services. Outcomes and interventions will be monitored and evaluated. And there will be a clear, consistent focus on raising children's achievement.

A whole school approach

The Manchester Transition project (Dyson, Beresford et al. 2007) demonstrates the importance of a **whole school approach to parental engagement.** The aim was to increase the capacity of nursery and primary school staff in eight schools in Manchester to support parents, particularly at the transition into foundation stage, and from foundation stage into year one.

The project ran over two years. Nursery staff received 3½ days training and year one staff received 2½ days training. All staff had access to coaching sessions, and they were encouraged to share their learning with others in the school through staff meetings and meetings with heads and governors.

Parents with children at foundation stage were offered: a home visit or a one on one interview with staff; an opportunity to meet other staff and parents; booklets and other day to day means of communication, a stay and play session; a parenting workshop and a focus group. Further support was available through a teaching assistant. Year One parents attended a class meeting to receive information about the project. They also received a pack of activities to use at home before the children arrived at school, workshops on literacy and numeracy and a celebratory assembly.

All participating schools were able to identify new parental engagement practices stimulated by the Project. Examples include homework projects, stay and play sessions and family learning events, and these had since become embedded in the school**.** Based on evidence from school and parent evaluation questionnaires, and a limited comparative analysis of data from 10 schools randomly assigned to control and intervention groups, the impact of the programmes included:

- Parents and teachers **reported improvement's in children's phonological awareness, phonics, communication and language skills, self-esteem**
- Increased dialogue and time **spent between parents and children**
- Building relationships between parents and schools
- Increased learning through **play at home**
- Reaching a **wide range of parents**

Evidence suggests that the project generated its effects by:

- Encouraging schools to **systematise and extend their parental involvement activities**
- Acting as a catalyst for the development of staff skills and school action
- Supporting the practical implementation of **well trialled and sustainable strategies and resources**
- Building the **confidence of participating staff**
- Developing staff awareness of and contacts with other agencies.

Features common to the schools reporting the largest impact included:

- **head teacher commitment**
- identification of an appropriate **staff member responsible for parental involvement** and with the qualities, skills and commitment to make contact with disengaged families
- **training followed by coaching** for the staff in school
- **networking between schools**
- **formalisation of effective practice**.

It should not be assumed that school staff are confident about working with parents; likely barriers to involvement – particular with families from deprived communities – should be identified and overcome. This implies **teacher training**, as part of initial teacher training or continuing professional development (Dyson 2007).

The principal message from the Manchester Transition Project is that **parental engagement works best in the context of on-going whole school development**. Parental engagement should feature in school improvement strategies, and this priority could be reflected in the standards for Head Teachers and in the Ofsted inspection framework.

In a report on good practice in parental engagement in primary schools Estyn 2009 surveyed all local authorities in Wales, visited a representative sample of 17 primary schools, and interviewed head-teachers, teachers, parent governors and groups of parent representatives. Estyn reported that, amongst the schools visited, **few schools have a consistent approach that results in high levels of parental involvement** across a wide range of activities. Good practice was found in schools which were **proactive**, had **listened to parents**, and **refined their strategy to take account of their suggestions and built on activities it considered successful**. Where there is effective parental involvement the single most important factor was found to be the **enthusiasm of the head-teacher.**

Redding et al 2004 investigated the effects on student achievement in 129 American schools in deprived areas, all of which implemented a common set of parent-engagement strategies over a 2 year period (Solid Foundation schools). The strategies included: parental participation in decision making at the school; aligning the school's policies on homework and parent-teacher conferences with evidence-based practice; discussion of the contributions expected of parents, teachers and students; parent education focused on home reading and study habits; and outreach activities - home visits, family nights, and a family resource library.

Comparisons were drawn between participating schools and those from the state as a whole, using matched groups of schools. The proportion of students meeting state expectations in the Solid Foundations schools rose from 51.3% in 2001 to 55.8% in 2003. This gain was significantly greater than the overall gain for all schools in the state. While the Solid Foundation schools saw a 4.5% increase in test scores, the comparison group moved from 51.3% to 53.8% (an increase of 2.5%). During the

same period, all the elementary schools in the state moved from 63.8% to 63.9% (an increase of 0.1%).

The effects of the programme are described in terms of the overall impact of numerous interventions. Family attention to learning increases, and as teachers interact with parents, teachers are reminded of the importance of parental engagement, and **the child's learning increasingly becomes the focus of parent-teacher interactions.** This was found to lead to better, more frequent interactions between parents and teachers, and a school community which is more supportive of children's successes (Redding 2004).

Interventions which involve **parents not just as recipients but as active partners** often provide evidence of benefits for both parents and children. Redding gives evidence of how parental involvement in school decision-making contributes to modest but significant achievement gains.

Focus on raising children's achievement

O'Mara et al 2010 reviewed evidence on interventions designed to support parents and carers of 7-19 year olds and having the aim of improving attainment rates. O'Mara found that school-based programmes can improve child behaviour, educational attainment, school attendance and avoidance of substance misuse, as well as improving family relationships and stability (O'Mara 2010; see also Harris and Goodall 2008). The most effective school based programmes **have a clear focus on raising children's achievement**; many schools, however, prioritise their relationship with parents without embedding this in a strategy for promoting pupil achievement (Harris and Goodall 2008).

O'Mara found that the **most commonly reported needs of parents were for advice and emotional support**, which is frequently provided in school without the need for referral to specialist services. Attendance at programmes based in school can also **remove the fear of stigmatisation** which acts as a barrier for some parents (O'mara et al. 2010).

Interventions are more likely to be effective when they are informed by the views of parents identified by means of a **thorough needs assessment**. This applies in particular to interventions with groups such as minority ethnic parents and fathers (both resident and non-resident) (O'Mara, 2010).

Behaviour and relationships: the FAST programme

Families and Schools Together (FAST) is an evidence-based parenting programme. In 2010 Save the Children piloted the FAST programme in five primary schools in Ealing, Manchester, West Belfast, West Dunbartonshire and Caerphilly.

The FAST programme has three aims:

- to help children succeed at school by improving their behaviour, supporting better home–school relationships, and improving their educational achievement in reading, writing and maths
- to strengthen families by improving attachment between parents and their children, improving communication and building parents' confidence
- to strengthen communities by building trust between parents and reducing social isolation.

The programme has three phases. During the first phase, focused on community outreach, a multi-agency team is set up to deliver the programme and build a supportive community around the school. The team includes FAST facilitators, parents with children at the school, members of staff from that school and community-based partners such as health and social workers, and other members of the community. The team then recruits families to participate voluntarily.

The second phase includes an eight-week course designed to help build relationships between parents and their children, parents and the school, and parents and other parents. Each weekly session includes:

- a meal shared as a family
- communication games played between the family

- time for parents to talk to other parents
- a self-help peer-support session (without children present)
- one-to-one time between parent and child
- a fixed lottery, which each family wins once, in which they receive a hamper of goods to help them support their child's learning at home, followed by a closing game for the whole group.

During the third phase parents meet every month for 22 months. Parents who have graduated from an eight-week FAST course plan and lead these meetings with support from the school. This ensures that relationships and networks developed during the programme are sustained.

Lexmond 2011 reports on an independent evaluation by Middlesex University of the outcomes achieved by the Save the Children FAST pilot across the five different primary school sites. Statistically significant outcomes include:

<u>Improved family functioning</u>

- Parent–child relationships improved by 19 per cent
- Nearly four-fifths (78 per cent) of parents had a better understanding of their children and less conflict in the home
- On a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ – a clinically verified behavioural screening tool) pro-social behaviour increased by 12 per cent
- SDQ emotional symptoms reduced by 40 per cent
- SDQ conduct problems reduced by 39 per cent

<u>Reduced risk of educational failure:</u>

- 88 per cent of parents reported that they felt more able to support their child's education
- The impact of emotional and behavioural difficulties in the classroom as measured by the SDQ had reduced by 46 per cent

Strengthening parents' social networks and informal support

- 74 per cent of parents reported they had more friends and more local support
- Support provided to others increased by 45 per cent
- Support received from others increased by 70 per cent
- Total reciprocal support increased by 56 per cent
- During FAST 26 per cent of parents had attended more parent teacher association meetings
- During FAST 25 per cent had attended more community centre activities (Lexmond 2011).

Recognising 'parental engagement' and non-English speaking parents

There is often a difference between what is perceived as 'parental engagement' and what actually goes on in the homes of children (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003; Harris and Goodall 2009). **'Parental engagement' does not always mean the same thing to parents and schools** (Martinez and Velazquez 2000; Harris and Goodall 2006; Harris, Andrew- Power 2009) and **many activities valued by parents as engaging with their children's learning are neither recognised nor acknowledged by schools** (Conteh and Kawashima 2008). More evidence is required on how parents engage with their children in the home, in order to inform interventions that are appropriate to the needs, behaviours and values of families.

Similarly, the concept of 'parenting' is not always understood as including one and the same set of practices and attitudes. Kim and Rohner 2002 attempted to apply Baumrind's classification of parenting types to 245 Korean American adolescents and their families. All students had lived in the US at least five months; 90% of them had lived in the US for three or more years, although 51% of the young people had been born in Korea. The parenting types of 75% of Korean American mothers and 73% of fathers were not recognised under Baumrind's classification. Although a study of only one ethnic minority group, this message is consistent with evidence on the importance of **adopting interpretations of 'parenting' and 'engagement' that accord with the interpretations and values of the groups they are aimed at,** including in particular disadvantaged and ethnic minority families (Manz 2010).

In an assessment of parental engagement interventions aimed at disenfranchised parents and children in Texas and Illinois, Lopez found that **schools which were successful in engaging parents operated with a broad definition of parental engagement**: in addition to or in place of interaction with the school, this included working with the child at home and taking an interest in the learning of the child. Home visits were a high priority for these schools, as were continuing interactions with the families (Lopez et al 2001).

Lopez examined the work of four schools which successfully engage with migrant parents in the United States. The research team found elements common to these schools, all of which were able to build bridges to these families. The common elements included **home visits, knowledge of the complex and changing needs of families, and a commitment to meeting those needs**. Lopez gives evidence of the importance of conceiving parental engagement as focused on children's learning (see also Desforges and Abouchaar 2003 and Harris and Goodall 2007), and found that the schools worked with a broad understanding of parental engagement, including at home learning activities and supporting parenting.

Estyn 2009 reported that schools which effectively involve parents in supporting improved standards of achievement: offer **flexible arrangements for parents' evenings**; provide translators for parents who do not speak English; **provide parents with clear information about their expectations** regarding the homework policy and set appropriate homework with **enough information so that parents know how to help**; provide parents with a topic or subject sheet outlining the term's work and choose topics where parents could help easily; record stories for parents who do not speak English to follow the book with their child at home; and encourage parents to borrow 'story sacks' to use at home with their children (Estyn 2009).

Home-School Knowledge Exchange

The Home - School Knowledge Exchange Project (HSKE) (Feiler, Greenhough et al. 2006) explored the possibilities and challenges for exchanging knowledge between home and school. The research team explored children's out-of-school activities that

informed classroom teaching and learning, as well as the more common sharing of school knowledge with children's families. The report cited here concentrates on the impact of programmes on literacy at Key Stage 1 (ages 5-7) and on numeracy at Key Stage 2 (ages 7 – 11). In each of these strands four primary schools were involved, with students followed over a 2 year period as home-school knowledge exchange activities were developed. The project made use of materials that did not rely on the written word, including videos and disposable cameras, and a targeted approach was taken to visiting parents. For example, a Bengali-speaking learning support assistant visited almost all the homes of children supported by Education Maintenance Allowances in a school with a significant proportion of Bangladeshi heritage families.

Although no evidence is offered in respect of attainment outcomes it is notable that the **agency of children was found to be a significant element in the success of knowledge exchange activities.** The importance of the child as having an impact on parental engagement and other outcomes is highlighted in other studies; Hingle 2010 gives evidence that the most effective indirect method of promoting parental engagement is **getting children to involve their parents in learning-related activity**.

Feiler finds that **'one size does not fit all',** and that the more successful knowledge exchange activities included different family members at different times and in different ways. This implies that **schools should make it a priority to find out from parents what kind of activities and support would be most appropriate and helpful**. The use of disposable cameras was found to be both cost-effective and supportive of parental engagement, as was the **use of videos to show parents how literacy and numeracy were taught at school**, and ensuring that some video clips were recorded in children's home languages (Feiler, 2006).

School Home Support Practitioners (SHSPs) provide a further example of home-school knowledge exchange (Rogers, Hallam et al., 2010). The role of SHSPs is to help promote parenting skills and children's social development, with the further aim of supporting the literacy and numeracy provision that children receive at school. Rogers investigated the impact of SHSPs, with 60 interviews undertaken with staff at

20 schools in the pilot areas of Bradford, Bristol, Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets. Focus groups were undertaken with class teachers, parents and children (188 individuals overall). Information was collected on attendance, behaviour and parental involvement, and the same information was collected from a group of comparison schools.

Compared with children not involved in the SHSP project, Rogers found a significant improvement amongst pupils involved in the programme in: classroom behaviour, attendance and punctuality, completion of homework, preparedness for learning, ability to follow routines, problem solving and completion of tasks. Teachers reported that parents involved in the programme provided significantly higher levels of engagement with their children's learning, and parents reported that they were more involved with their children's learning and with the school (Rogers et al 2010).

Greenhough et al, 2007 examined how progress in children's attainment and their dispositions to learn can be supported through knowledge exchange activities between school and home and home and school. The research concentrated on literacy at Key Stage 1, numeracy at Key Stage 2 and the transfer between Key Stages 2 and 3.

Four primary schools were involved, two in Bristol and two in Cardiff. In each city, one primary school had a high proportion of students eligible for free school meals[2] while the other primary school had a low proportion of eligible students. The major receiving secondary school for each primary school was also recruited to the research, along with students from a comparison group of four primary schools.

The intervention was designed to support pupils' preparation for learning, parental support and family relationships. Pupils involved in the interventions made significantly greater progress in literacy from Year 6 to Year 7 as compared to those who were not involved. The city in which children lived, the proportion of Free School

[2] Free school meals (FSM) status is used by the government as a proxy for deprivation.

Meals (FSM), gender and ethnicity had no effect on the results; the results for numeracy were not significant.

Students involved in the intervention appeared to adjust more quickly to secondary school than students in the comparison group. The intervention students scored more positively on the question ‘’Before you started did you know what to expect?’, and on questions about how quickly they found their way around and how quickly they became used to other students. The research points to the **positive impact on attainment and academic progress of interventions which seek to support students personally, emotionally and socially through the transfer from primary to secondary school** (Greenhough et al., 2010; see also Harris and Goodall, 2009).

Parent Support Advisors

Lindsay et al 2009 report on an evaluation of the Parent Support Advisor (PSA) pilot. Data were collected from all local authorities involved in the pilot, and 12 authorities were selected for inclusion as case studies. Lindsay gathered data on all parents supported by PSAs and conducted interviews with strategic leads (20), PSA co-ordinators (24), PSAs (245), line managers (144), other professionals (23) and parents (105). Data were collected on attendance and the number of pupils identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and this information was used to compare schools with and without a PSA. Data were also drawn from the National Pupil Database 2005/6.

Lindsay found that PSAs provided immediate, individual support for parents and children and supported parents to engage with school staff. Over 80% of line managers stated that the PSA pilot had led to increased parental engagement with children’s learning, 84.9% that pupil attendance had improved, and over 90% pointed to improved relationships between parents and schools. Parents were overwhelmingly positive about the experience, with 100% reporting that they felt they had been understood and respected, and 95% that they felt more confident to deal with emerging school-related difficulties.

Persistent absentee rates in PSA secondary schools decreased from 8.5% in 2005/06 to 6.6% in 2007/08 (a drop of 1.9.percentage points), whilst in non-PSA schools the figures decreased from 7.0% to 5.4% - a drop of 1.6 percentage points. Hence, during this period the difference in the percentage of persistent absentees between PSA and non-PSA secondary schools reduced from 1.5 to 1.2 percentage points. However, whilst absentee rates decreased for both PSA primary schools (6.4% to 6.2%) and PSA secondary schools (9.3% to 8.3%), similar reductions were found for non-PSA schools (5.9% to 5.6% for primary schools; 8.5% to 7.5% secondary schools) (Lindsay 2009).

Effort

De Fraja 2010 examined whether the effort exerted by children, parents and schools affects educational outcomes. The team used data from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) on a cohort of children born in March 1958, and their achievement at ages 7, 11, and 16 (that is, in 1965, 1969 and 1974). The analysis provides a **strong endorsement of policies designed to support parental efforts**. **Pupil effort, parental effort and school effort each separately have a positive impact on achievement.** Parental effort and pupil effort complement each other – that is, more effort from parents induces more effort from children, and vice versa. However, school effort is not complimentary in this way – **more effort by schools induces less effort by pupils whilst inducing more effort by parents**. The study finds that schools respond positively to pupils' (but not parents') efforts. Many socio economic factors have an influence indirectly through parental effort.

De Fraja found that, whilst schools responded positively to pupils' efforts, they **did not respond positively to parents' efforts**. This is consistent with evidence from other sources that parental effort toward **children's learning is often not recognised by schools** (Lopez, Scribner et al. 2001) or that schools do not respond to that effort, and support it.

Questions arise from this study and others about how parental 'effort' is understood. An example: 'mother reads to child age 7' would appear to require a scale allowing

for degrees of parental effort, but in De Fraja it is accompanied by an all-or-nothing tick box. If two mothers tick this box, one a wealthy graduate with a house full of books, the other barely literate and with no reading materials to hand, it is likely that the two ticks will not represent equal effort. Whilst, therefore, De Fraja offers significant evidence on the impact of effort on achievement, close attention should be paid to how 'effort' is operationalised; in particular, it should not be interpreted in ways that do not take account of the context in which parental effort is in evidence.

Barriers to engagement

Peters et al 2007 conducted a telephone survey of a nationally representative group of over 500 parents in 2007. They found that 24% of parents reported having no specific barrier to being more involved in their children's school lives. (For Black/Black British parents the figure was 34%; for Asian/Asian British parents the figure was 40%). Work commitments represented the main barrier (reported by 41% of parents). Similarly, Russell and Granville 2005 found that pressure of time owing to work or family commitments was the most common reason for any lack of involvement. Harris and Goodall found that parents reported that lack of skills was the greatest barrier to involvement with their children's learning (29% of parents), followed closely by parents' experience of their own education (28%) (Harris and Goodall 2007).

In Bayley et al 2009 **fathers** reported the following as barriers to involvement in parenting support services: work commitments; a lack of awareness that services existed and what they offered; the perception that services were largely geared towards women; lack of organisational support; and concerns over the content of services.

Parents also reported a **fear of being stigmatised** if they were seen to be accessing services (O'mara 2010). Hallam 2004 also finds that parents were likely to perceive attendance at parenting programmes as an admission of inadequacy. However, school-based programmes may alleviate this fear if parents can be encouraged to feel comfortable when coming to school; targeted support need not be seen as

stigmatising if designed to accord with the needs of parents who have been reluctant to engage (Blewett 2010).

Parents can also perceive the school as presenting obstacles in the form of lack of encouragement, not informing parents of what they can do and having too little scope for fitting around busy working and family lives. Parents are frequently reluctant to participate in bodies such as the Parent-Teacher Association and School Board because they perceive these as forbiddingly formal, and they do not identify with the other parents who are members. Parents would benefit from advice and support on how to become involved in school based parent bodies, and some families would welcome services that enable them to overcome the personal obstacles that otherwise prevent attendance (Russell and Granville 2005).

The Bienstar programme is a school based diabetes prevention programme in Texas focussed on a group of parents who rarely engage with school based programmes (Garcia-Dominic 2009). The research reported here took place in four schools, randomly selected from 20 of those involved in the diabetes programme. All non-participating parents of fourth grade (10 year-old) children (were invited to take part in the research process. **Parents spoke of numerous logistic barriers**: lack of transport, lack of child care, competing family demands, work schedules, lack of time and the programme placing too great a demand on parents. Solutions included organising car-pools, inviting children to the diabetes sessions, taking work schedules of parents into account when setting times for programmes, and reducing the number of programme inputs across the year. **Once provision was re-designed more in line with parental preferences, parental involvement in the programme increased from 17% to 37%.**

Re-engaging disaffected and reluctant students in secondary schools

Ofsted 2008 undertook a survey of 29 secondary schools to identify good practice in re-engaging disaffected students in their learning. The report emphasises the importance of engaging parents and carers in supporting young people.

All the schools identified a close partnership with parents or carers as fundamental to re-engaging students. One head-teacher commented that '**working in partnership with parents or carers is the most powerful process that we have in schools for bringing about lasting and effective change.**'

Some parents and carers were intimidated or embarrassed by visiting the school. Reasons included lack of confidence, negative experiences of their own schooling, and a perception of teachers as their 'superiors'. In response, the schools gave out the telephone number of a designated member of staff, other than the pastoral support manager; other schools arranged a separate entrance for parents who found visiting uncomfortable. **The building of trust and a close relationship between the school and the home led to effective communication, and this allowed for both parties to communicate difficult as well as positive messages.**

In addition to pastoral support managers, **all the schools had home–school liaison teams** providing adults who were in a position to supplement parental support. The most effective teams focused their work on specific families. **They also visited homes, social clubs, bars and other places where the community met regularly** in order to establish positive relationships with parents and carers and help them to support their children better. **This led to clear improvements, particularly in attendance.**

All schools were flexible about the timing of meetings and reviews to make sure that the students could attend them with their parents or carers. One school held regular meetings with small groups that included parents of students who were disengaged, as evidence by levels of motivation and attendance. This was designed to provide parents and carers with an opportunity to share experiences and concerns and to become aware of the help that was available (Ofsted 2008).

Parental views

Improving the relationship between home and school accords with a trend in parents acknowledging responsibility for their children's education. Peters 2007 found that **increasing numbers of parents (28%) believed that their children's education**

was mainly or wholly their responsibility, an increase from 20% in 2001 and 19% in 2004. This is also in line with an increase in parents who felt very involved with their children's school lives: 29% in 2001; 38% in 2004; and 51% in 2007. 94% of parents in the survey were confident that their involvement would help their children, if the school informed parents that pupils were not making good progress.

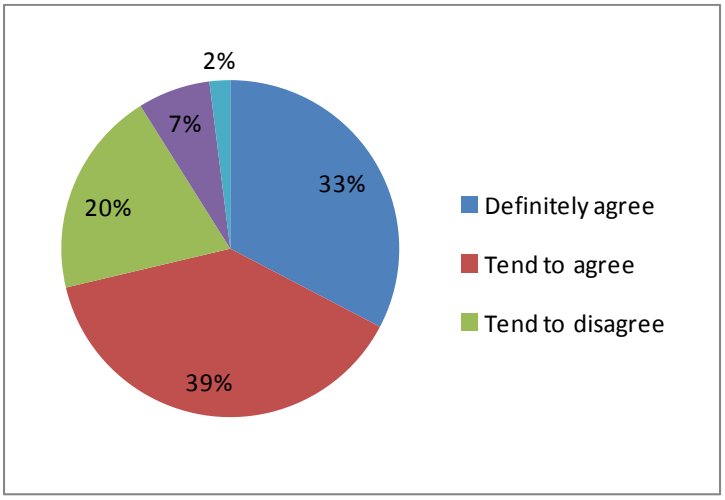

Figure 1 Whether parents would like to be more involved in their children's school lives, Peters et al. p. 36

This shows a rise in parental awareness of the need for and value of their engagement with children's learning. (It also accompanies a similar rise in parents reading with their children: 70% in 2004, 79% in 2007). At the same time, however, there is evidence of a **decrease in parental confidence in helping children with homework**: 41% in 2001, 35% in 2004 and 33% in 2007. These results suggest that **schools have a significant opportunity to support parents by improving home-school links.** And once parents become involved in school activities, (including, for example, parent councils and homework clubs) they are more likely to want to become more involved with their children's education (Peters 2007). Initial involvement can encourage a preparedness to become more involved, by helping to break down previously existing barriers.

Russell and Granville explored the views of parents in Scotland on their own engagement in their children's learning (Russell and Granville 2005). 34 focus groups were held with groups of parents, which included the 'silent majority' (having a low level of interest or involvement), the engaged, foster carers, asylum seekers and others.

The majority of parents were found to be involved in the following types of participation: ensuring that children complete their homework and helping with it

when they can; attending the parents' night meetings at school; supporting their children when performing or playing sport; and keeping track of their children's academic progress ((Russell and Granville 2005).

Most parents recognised that they are required to offer some support and input into their children's learning, for example to help them be punctual, behave well and respect others. At the same time **many parents held fixed assumptions about the division of labour between home and school,** and it is a challenge for schools to know how best to encourage parents to re-consider or revise these assumptions.

Parents are more likely to participate if they perceive a direct positive impact on their own child as a consequence of their involvement, and this is a message that should inform strategies for involving parents. Channels of communication tend to work most effectively at the pre-school and primary stages, when parents have more opportunities to communicate informally with the school and teachers. Parents' most important requirements are ongoing feedback about their child throughout the school year, and regular feedback about performance and behaviour (Russell and Granville 2005).

Chrispeels and Rivero 2000 explore how Latino parents define their parental role, their relationship with their children's schools, and how they perceive their place in the education of their children. Eight parent education classes were offered by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). Ninety nine parents (from 300 who attended the initial programme briefing) graduated from the programme. Pre and post questionnaire data were obtained from 95 families for both questionnaires, all sessions were videotaped, 11 in-depth interviews were undertaken and artefacts were reviewed. The results showed that there was often a **discrepancy between Latino parents' view of their place in their child's education and the expectations of the school.** Although a small scale project, the results are line with those we report elsewhere (see, for example, p. 29).

Crozier and Davies 2007 conducted a two year, qualitative ESRC funded project to explore Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents' views of home-school relationships,

parental roles in education and students' perspectives of this, and teachers' views (Crozier and Davies 2007). 591 interviews were conducted with the parents of primary, secondary and post-compulsory aged children, and with the young people themselves. The respondent families lived in the North-east of England. Of the 89 Pakistani heritage families, 62 fathers and 58 mothers had been born in Pakistan. Of the 68 Bangladeshi families, 61 fathers and 63 mothers had been born in Bangladesh.

The study found that the eight primary and five secondary schools involved **had little understanding of the parent body,** or its needs and perspectives. **The information given to parents was not fit for purpose**. **Few parents initiated contact with schools, but rather waited for the schools to contact them. Some parents stayed away from parent-teacher conferences owing to lack of confidence in English**. Parents did not understand the importance of these meetings, and were unaware that non-attendance would be interpreted as indifference. This lack of understanding and acknowledgement undermines the relationship between parents and schools. Schools often perceive parents as 'hard to reach' (Crozier and Davies 2007; Sherbert Research 2009) or uninterested (De Gaetano 2007), and do not respond to the efforts parents are already making with their children (De Fraja 2010). Parents, on the other hand, often consider that interactions with their children are either undervalued by schools, or have little value in themselves.

Gender and Ethnicity

Peters 2007 found that Black or Black British parents were more likely to be involved with a PTA (43%) than were White parents (20%). In general men were slightly more likely than women to be involved in homework clubs (15% and 14% respectively), but women were much more likely to be involved in school duties – such as working in the library or employed as dinner supervisors - than men (42% and 26%). 61% of mixed race parents were involved in library and dinner duties, but only 14% of this group were involved in homework clubs.

Black parents were 136% more likely than White parents to say that they were very involved in their children's education. Black /Black British and Asian/Asian British parents were more likely than White parents to state that it was extremely important to help with homework (84%, 82% and 72% respectively.). The same trend can be discerned in relation to the desire to be more involved in children's education: 84% of Black or Black British parents; 82% of Asian or Asian British and 63% of White parents.

Extended schools

Statham 2010 reviewed the evidence on what works in strengthening family wellbeing and community cohesion through schools and extended services. In common with other studies reported on in this review, Statham identified few studies providing evidence on the impact and outcomes of interventions. Nevertheless, the principal message to emerge was that providing support for parents to assist their child's learning in the home is the most effective way to raise achievement. **Building home-school links through out of hours clubs, parenting classes, extended schools and outreach work is a powerful lever for improving children's achievement** (Statham 2010).

Monitoring and evaluation

The National College 2010 presents evidence of the importance of monitoring progress, collecting evidence and analysing outcomes so as to enable schools (and other organisations) to identify the impact of any intervention.

A good example of this practice is provided by the Soho Links cluster team. This includes the cluster co-co-ordinator, parent support adviser and information co-ordinator. The cluster has developed a parents' forum based in schools and children's centres. Meetings are informal, with coffee mornings providing opportunities to share information about the services on offer and to offer up ideas about improvement. Parents' forums are facilitated by a parent worker or other member of staff (National College 2010).

The Soho Links cluster uses data from its monitoring and evaluation to establish baselines and agree targets for parental involvement. Data are monitored on parents' completion of homework records, parents' attendance at their child's review meetings, consultation events, volunteer activities and participation in family events. The information allows staff to identify strengths and gaps in provision, and to support the development of parents in taking a leadership role in cluster activities (National College 2010).

In a second cluster – the Sherwood Cluster, the extended services co-ordinator collects data and evidence on the impact of its parental engagement activities, which is then used to target and support vulnerable groups of children. One school has identified eight girls at Key Stage 2 and the parent support worker for the school works with the girls and their mothers to raise aspirations. The school provides baseline data and the extended services co-ordinator tracks progress and collects feedback from staff, the girls and their parents. In-depth tracking in another school showed up a correlation between children making insufficient progress with parents not coming into school. Beginning with salsa dance and self-defence classes the emphasis is increasingly put on supporting children's learning and includes Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) and Mad Science (educational content for children that presents science in a visual and interactive manner). Attainment has risen significantly. In the view of the headmaster this is as result of increased parental engagement (National College 2010).

The evidence reported here is based on small scale studies of clusters of extended services in England. Nevertheless, along with information presented elsewhere in this review, it provides a strong initial case for the importance of schools monitoring and evaluating data on their interventions. Schools are then better able to assess the effectiveness of their activities and the outcomes they lead to, and to have evidence on which to engage in an ongoing programme of development and research.

Information and communication technology

Becta 2008 identifies four ways in which ICT can contribute to improved parental engagement:

- Providing a convenient means for parents to access up-to-date information about their child's learning
- Enabling parents to be more engaged with their child's learning
- Supporting more flexible working arrangements for staff
- Enabling information to be captured more efficiently as part of learning and teaching processes that exploit technology (Hollingworth 2009b).

ICT enables new forms of communication between schools and parents:

- e-mail and text messaging to communicate with parents
- school websites displaying key information for parents and pupils
- e-portals and online reporting which allows parents to monitor their children's progress, punctuality and performance
- Learning Platforms (or Virtual Learning Environments)
- Mychildatschool.com: a national initiative that offers parents access to information on their child's schoolwork progress, attendance and behaviour via the school's administration system (Hollingworth 2009b).

Becta 2010 conducted an online survey with 2000 children aged between 9 - 13 and 2000 parents of children belonging to the same age range. The survey explored how children and parents approached learning and school work outside the classroom, and how they made use of technology in learning.

84% of parents reported that their children ask for help and advice with school work and revision at least once a week, and 53% reporting being asked for help most days or every day. However, 22% of parents reported that they frequently found themselves unable to help children with homework because they didn't understand the topic being learned in class.

81 per cent of parents would welcome support and guidance on how best to support their child's learning at home, and 79 per cent of children report that they would like their parents to know more about what they are learning in class so they can provide more support outside the classroom.

Although the evidence suggests that many parents are keen to engage in their children's learning, many schools appear not to engage parents by using technology to enhance at-home learning. **Only 25 per cent of parents received information about their child's learning via online tools** and 84 per cent of parents reported that their child's school provided them with little or no resources to help support their child's learning at home. At the same time, 67 per cent of parents reported already using the internet informally as a research tool to help them better understand what their child is learning at school. In general the evidence suggests that **levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning.**

Lewin and Luckin (Lewin and Luckin 2010) examined two projects looking at how technology can support parental engagement in elementary education. The first - the ICT Test Bed evaluation - involved 28 providers, including 23 elementary schools and three FE colleges, all of which received interactive whiteboards, data projectors, visualisers, graphic tablets and management information systems. Providers were organised into clusters, each cluster allocating ICT resources to the homes of each of their learners. One cluster provided computers and internet access; a second provided computers but no connectivity; and a third provided laptops. The second 'Homework Project' took place over two phases to support maths learning: the first with a class of 40 children, their teachers and families for four weeks, and the second with 32 children, their teachers and families for two weeks. The children were aged between 5 and 7. In both phases, families were provided with tablet PCs.

The Test Bed project showed evidence of an increasingly sophisticated use of school websites to support parents' engagement with their children's learning, partially as a result of improvements in the school's ICT capacity. The most significant progress occurred in schools with enthusiastic members of staff, who also

possessed effective management and leadership skills. Lewin and Luckin suggest the use of **'learning champions' – whether staff or parents - to promote the use of technologies**.

Evidence from both projects suggested that **parents welcomed information about children's learning derived from the ICT, particularly information on the activities and subjects children engage in at school.** The evidence also suggested that an assessment of parental needs should be undertaken prior to any intervention, and that, in order for the use of technology to be effective, parents require clear guidance about how to work together with their children. Activities should be provided by schools that encourage cooperation between parents and children.

Harrison et al 2003 found that the pupils in their study spent more time using ICT at home than in school, and that parents should be made more aware of the importance of home access to ICT technology. Children tended to regard classroom activities that were also engaged in at home as 'games' even when learning was clearly taking place. This suggests the importance of discussions between school and parents about the learning opportunities provided by technology in the home (Hollingworth 2009b).

Hollingworth 2009a carried out a study of parents of children at Key Stage 2 (aged 7-11) and Key Stage 3 (aged 11-14) in five local authorities in the UK: Croydon, Brighton and Hove, Hampshire, Luton, and Leicester City. Within each of these areas, focus groups were held with 80 parents, and 20 interviews were undertaken with local authority representatives and other stakeholders. The evidence suggested that online reporting had the potential for providing detailed information to parents in a way that some other means of communication did not (text messages for example, or newsletters).

Harrison 2003 discusses the opportunities for creating and consolidating links between home and school through the use of ICT. These include the use of email in ways that allow parents to initiate and engage in communication with schools. It is

suggested, further, that learning platforms should be linked to the school website, and that parents should have opportunities for training in the use of these technologies.

Challenges and barriers

There is a division between families with ICT and internet access at home and those who do not, often referred to as the 'digital divide' (Hollingworth. 2009b). According to the Office of National Statistics 2010 only 73% of households in the UK had internet access.

The availability and use of ICT creates new demands. For schools, there are challenges in the way of meeting the costs and providing adequate infrastructure. For teachers, parents and pupils, there are new skills to be learned and embedded in teaching and learning (Harrison 2003).

Lewin and Luckin 2010 found **evidence of barriers to parental take-up of home computers for children, even when these were offered by schools**. Barriers stemmed from concerns about safety, costs and being monitored, and the absence of land lines in homes where families relied on mobile phones. In addition, many parents lacked the skills to help their children use ICT in the home.

Evidence from the US

In a review of literature on parenting interventions in the US, Mattingly 2002 analysed 41 evaluations of programmes aimed at parents of kindergarten, primary and secondary school children. 78.6% of the interventions were designed to help parents support their children's learning in the home. Taking account of only those studies which were designed to support children's academic outcomes (20 studies) 15 showed a positive impact of benefits of parental support programmes. However, only 5 of these studies used a control group and only four used a design consisting of matched controls, a pre-test and a post-test (representing the highest standards of

evaluation methods). Of these four, two found improvements in children's outcomes, and two did not.

This study is frequently cited in later reviews, some of which claim that it provides no support for the view that parental support programs improve outcomes (see, for example, Nye et al. 2006). Mattingly states that there is a lack of evidence in favour of parental involvement interventions, not because there is extensive evidence indicating that such interventions do not work, but because there is a paucity of robust evidence indicating that they do. This is consistent with evidence from White, Taylor and Moss (1992) that there is a lack of conclusive evidence to confirm or deny the effectiveness of parental support programs.

Conclusions

The challenges to creating and improving effective school-home links are clear. Attempts by schools to engage parents in their children's learning are unlikely to be successful if they represent a 'bolt-on' to mainstream activities. Teachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to work with parents, and schools do not always recognise or value the ways in which parents are already engaged with children's learning. Engagement strategies often lack a clear, consistent focus on raising children's achievement. There are numerous logistical barriers to improving parental engagement and effective interventions are often resource intensive. There is too little robust evidence on the effectiveness of interventions – schools generally do not collect sufficient data on their own activities, and what works in one context cannot be relied upon to work in another.

There is now sufficient evidence to suggest that many of these challenges can be wholly or partly overcome. School-home links should be underpinned by a whole school approach to parental engagement, and informed by an ongoing parental needs assessment in the context of a school improvement strategy. Schools which successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parental engagement, and their parental engagement strategies accord with the interpretations and values of the parents they are aimed at. The transfer of

knowledge and understanding will be part of a two way process: not only from school to home but from home to school.

A parental engagement strategy should be outward facing, involving not only the views of parents, but the evidence and expertise of other schools and services in the community. To engage effectively with parents, staff require training and coaching particularly when working with parents whose backgrounds are very different to their own. And for their part parents require clear, specific and targeted information if they are to undertake engagement activities as intended by the school.

The logistical barriers that parents face should not be under-estimated. But there are examples of successful responses in which schools shape their engagement policy to suit the complex needs and patterns of parents' lives. Interventions are resource intensive; but there are examples of cost effective interventions that help to keep costs down and which encourage 'hard to reach' parents to become involved – as with the use of SMS messaging, disposable cameras and video technology.

There are notable gaps in the evidence base: for example, much more information is required about how parents – particularly disadvantaged parents - engage with their children in the homes . But there is more than enough preliminary evidence to support the adoption of many features that make up effective school-home links. What is now required of schools is that they are encouraged to implement existing good practice, and trial, monitor and evaluate those practices in their own context, and in the course of an ongoing programme of development and research.

6. SUPPORT AND TRAINING FOR PARENTS

Key messages

Effective interventions are informed by a parental needs analysis and targeted at particular groups of parents – this is particularly important for minority ethnic parents and disadvantaged parents.

Parental support programs which focus on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills are more effective than interventions that do not include such training.

Parents require specific and detailed guidance and understanding of programmes, and what programmes expect parents to do.

Significant outcomes of parenting programmes include: parents' acknowledging that a problem exists; gaining knowledge and skills to manage children's behaviour; the confidence and empathy to use these skills effectively.

Parental engagement interventions can significantly improve the relationship between parents and children.

Parent tutoring interventions are effective in improving literacy skills for children.

Interventions for parents targeting children's reading outcomes bring significant benefits. Training parents to teach their children reading skills can be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents to listen to their children read.

The Supporting Parents on Kids Education programme (SPOKES) can yield a benefit for children equivalent to six months of reading age.

A supportive, non-judgemental approach is most likely to lead to parents internalizing and using tools provided by a programme aimed at supporting parenting skills.

Studies frequently provide too little information to permit conclusions about how and why interventions are related to outcomes.

Introduction

Many parents are involved in their children's learning in ways that are not adequately recognised. But equally many parents lack the confidence and knowledge to know how best to support children with their school work and in their learning generally. What parents do – irrespective of background - can have a large impact on children's attainment and other educational outcomes. Yet the evidence base on the efficacy of interventions – on what works and why - is patchy, especially in respect of a wide range of academic outcomes. What is clear is that all interventions should be informed by a parental needs analysis and targeted at particular groups of parents. Successful programmes display cultural sensitivity and a supportive, non-judgemental approach is most likely to encourage parents to internalise the tools offered by the programme. Parents require specific and detailed guidance about programmes and what is expected in the way of activities and interaction with children. The evidence is particularly strong on how programmes can improve children's literacy, but much less for almost all other parts of the curriculum (numeracy is a partial exception). There is extensive evidence on the impact on children's behaviours and relationships with their parents. There is very little information on how and why effective interventions are related to their outcomes. As a result not much is known about the mechanisms or particular activities responsible for the outcomes we wish to replicate.

Needs analysis and targeted interventions

Parental engagement interventions are more likely to be effective if they are informed by **a comprehensive needs analysis** and **targeted at particular groups of parents** (Lopez 2001; Carpentier 2005; Feiler 2006; Brooks 2008; Statham 2010). Interventions should be tailored to meet parental needs (Asmussen 2009, Kane 2007), following a needs assessment prior to intervention (Norwood 1997). In other words, interventions should be matched to the needs and profile of the families and parents they are aimed at, rather than providing general 'one size fits all' support (Statham 2010).

A needs assessment is particularly important for minority ethnic parents, disadvantaged parents and fathers (O'Mara et al 2010). The Ocean Maths and Mothertongue projects, and the HSKEP, also provide evidence of the importance of including parents in a process of assessing needs, and for that assessment to inform parent engagement interventions aimed at groups with distinctive needs and profiles (Carpentier 2005; Feiler 2006)

In a C4EO review of evidence on family and parental support in the Early Years, Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2009) recommend an 'ecological' perspective on parental and family support. This approach emphasises the context of children's lives and their home and socio-economic environments, suggesting that details of these contexts and environments should inform interventions aimed at promoting parental support. The review also highlights the need for training on the part of those involved in inter-agency working, particularly with a view to identifying early on any evidence of children at risk of underachieving (Statham, Harris et al. 2010).

As Carpentier 2005 reports, from a study of successful programmes in London, a programme that works with one group may not work with another. Successful programmes need to **show cultural sensitivity** (Centre for Community Child Health 2007). In a review of evidence on US parental engagement programmes Kumfer and Alvarado 2003 find that those which exhibit cultural sensitivity are associated with increased recruitment and retention. Brooks reports that a significant value for providers of family literacy programmes is to show **respect for the first language used in the family** (Brooks 2008).

Parental advice and information

Moran and Ghate 2005 undertook a systematic review of literature on parenting support, which was taken to include interventions provided by formal or semi-formal support services. The review included studies that describe an intervention or group of interventions which had been evaluated, were relevant to UK policy and practice, and were methodologically robust. The study found that general parenting programmes which aim only to supplement parental knowledge or to change attitudes do not reliably translate into improved outcomes for children. **Parents**

require detailed and specific information about programmes and interventions (Hoover-Dempsey 2005; Moran and Ghate 2005; Centre for Community Child Health 2007), a finding repeated at many other points in this review.

Homework and coursework

The fourth survey of the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS4) provides initial findings on homework (Hansen 2010). 79 per cent of children in Years 1 and 2 received help at home with at least one of reading, writing or maths. Children with parents with higher qualification levels were less likely to receive subject help at home. Children in families living in poverty were more likely to get help at home, as were children who did not have a parent in a professional or managerial occupation. Among children who did receive help, those with parents with lower-level qualifications were more likely to get help every day, while those with parents with higher-level qualifications were more likely to get help several times a week. There was no significant difference in the frequency of receiving help among those who did receive it by the income status of the family or the parents' occupational status.

In addition to receiving help with homework from someone at home, 5% of MCS children received tutoring or extra lessons outside of school in reading, writing or maths. Children of parents with higher qualifications were more likely to be receiving tutoring. There were no differences in the rates of receiving tutoring by family poverty status or parents' occupational status (Hansen 2010).

Catsambis 2001 analyzes data from the parent and student components of the 1988 National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) to investigate family educational involvement in secondary education. The Base-Year NELS:88 survey is based on a representative sample of 8th grade pupils (13-14 years of age) in the US in 1988, and consists of student, parent, teacher and school administrator surveys. Longitudinal data were collected at intervals of two years from 1990 to 1994. Catsambis reports on the base year (1988) and the Second Follow up (1992), the only two years that included surveys from parents. There are data on 13,580 parents and children who

were surveyed in 1988 and 1992. Students who dropped out of schools and their parents are not included.

Although the overall relationship between parental indicators and student achievement growth was weak, parental encouragement was strongly correlated with the number of credits earned by students. In relation to eighth graders, parental expectations have the strongest association with high school credits completed, and is stronger for maths than for science or English. Parental indicators are also strongly associated with senior students' enrolment in an academic high school programme and with their coursework in core academic subjects.

The most important parental factor in relation to completion of credits for all families, was parental knowledge of coursework. Parents who closely monitor school work tend to have children who complete more credits in science and English, underling the importance of good communication between home and school.

High levels of educational expectations, consistent encouragement, and actions that enhance the learning opportunities of children are the family practices that are positively associated with the educational experiences of high school seniors described above. The relationships between parental involvement and educational outcomes exist regardless of students' socioeconomic or race/ethnic background, and regardless of whether parental practices are measured in the middle grades or in high school (Catsambis 2001).

Confidence and subject knowledge

Peters 2007 found that 4% of parents were never confident helping their children with homework, and 31% were only confident occasionally. Of these, 42% in 2007 (40% in 2004 and 37% in 2001) reported that changes in teaching methods from their own school days was the reason for this lack of confidence. 38% of parents in 2007 reported that they did not understand their children's school work. In a systematic review of the literature on parental engagement interventions, Stratham et al found that parental 'upskilling' in literacy and numeracy was a necessary prerequisite to raising children's achievement (Statham 2010). This is evidence of a

need for schools and other agencies to improve both parental confidence and their knowledge of the curriculum in ways that will benefit their children's learning.

Improving children's learning

Carpentier 2005 reviewed parental engagement projects in London focused on parents considered as 'hard to reach'. The project included a comprehensive literature review, questionnaires to 15 London local authorities, and case studies on four projects in 19 secondary schools. The projects were selected on the basis of demonstrating successful or innovative attempts to involve parents in the learning of the child.

The principal message from one intervention – the Ocean Maths Project – was the **need for family and parent support activities to have as a goal the improvement of children's learning**, and for the **intervention to be integrated within the school and community**. A second project - The Black Parents' Group – included termly meetings between parents and staff, and focused on raising achievement for young people, particularly boys. The meetings were led by parents, who also took part in mentoring activities, pro-actively identifying how to influence and modify children's behaviour. Qualitative feedback suggests a **positive impact on behaviour and fewer instances of miscommunication** (Carpentier and Lall 2005).

Training in parenting skills

Blok 2005 explored the impact of the type of delivery and other programme characteristics on the effectiveness of early childhood interventions. In a meta-analysis of 19 studies of the effectiveness of early intervention studies, dating back to 1985, Blok found that **parental support programs which focus not only on academic outcomes, but which also included training in parenting skills, were more effective in improving cognitive outcomes than interventions lacking such training.** Early intervention programmes tended to be moderately effective in the cognitive domain, but not as effective in the socio-emotional domain. However,

the studies did **not provide enough information about parenting skill training to enable the review to draw conclusions about how and why such training affected intervention outcomes.**

However, Blok points to the likely importance of an emotionally supportive home environment in encouraging and supporting cognitive gains. As Van Tuijl and Leseman 2004 suggest, embedding parenting skills training in cognitively focused programs may improve parental emotional support, with positive effects for academic outcomes. A second possible explanation is that the inclusion of parenting coaching in academically focused programs increases the attractiveness of such programs for groups at risk of dropping out and disengaging improving attendance and overall parental involvement in the programme. Blok surmises that this may in turn have the effect of improving the integrity and quality of such programmes.

Parenting programmes

Kane 2007 undertook a systematic review of qualitative research on parenting programmes. Following a robust selection process four papers met all of the inclusion criteria (Spitzer 1991; Kilgour 2000; Barlow and Stewart Brown 2001 and Stewart Brown et al 2004.) In one study, the parents had attended the Family Links programme (Barlow & Stewart-Brown 2001) and in the remaining three parents had attended the Webster-Stratton programme.

These studies showed that parents who attended parenting programmes gained parenting skills, knowledge and empathy for their children, and developed a sense of acceptance and support from other parents in the group. The most significant processes fostered by parenting programmes were found to include: an acknowledgement by parents that a problem exists; gaining knowledge and skills to manage children's behaviour, and the confidence and empathy to use these skills effectively (Kane 2007).

Norwood 1997 investigated a two year parental programme involving a university, a graduate school of social work and a local community school. In consultation with parents, programmes were devised to support African American parents in the first

year and Latino parents in the second. The programme first concentrated on six areas: positive behaviour management, giving effective praise, nurturing children, child development, promotion of children's self esteem, and personal stress management. Following this, the focus moved to developing the academic readiness of both parents and children. Evaluations were carried out with participants and children's teachers.

Children whose families had participated in the programme were matched in age and socio-economic status with a control group, and an analysis was undertaken of the evidence and test scores from both groups.

Parents identified several positive results of the programme. **A warm, supportive and non-judgemental approach was found to be most likely to lead to parents owning and using the tools provided by a programme aimed at supporting parenting skills.**

All parents felt more able to nurture their children, and more involved in their children's education at home. The programme had a positive impact on parental self confidence and feelings of 'personal power' in dealing with the school. The 39 students whose parents (or grandparents) had attended the project achieved higher scores on reading and maths tests than the comparison group. The project led to parent participants being more able to interact with their children in the home and more widely with teachers and others at school.

Scott 2010 undertook a similar exercise with minority ethnic parents. The Primary Age Learning Skills (PALS) programme was the subject of a randomised controlled trial, targeting the relationship between parents and children and child literacy. From 672 children of 5 and 6 years of age attending four inner city schools, the parents of 174 children were selected for inclusion in the project. 88 children were allocated to the PALS programme, which included the Incredible Years preventative programme and a shortened, six week version of the Supporting Parents on Kids Education (SPOKES) literacy programme (see below and Appendix for more details). 86 children were allocated to the usual community services. Of all of the children involved in both groups, 152 (87%) were successfully followed up after one year.

Children's reading ability was tested, and parent interviews and observations were used to analyse relationship quality and child behaviour.

A year after the programme, **those allocated to the intervention showed significant improvements in the relationships between parents and children, compared to those in the control group.** This effect was similar across all ethnic groups. There was no improvement in children's behaviour and reading.

Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools

In a randomized controlled trial, Sylva 2008 investigated the effects of a parental engagement programme: Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools (SPOKES), which included the 'Incredible Years' group parenting programme. SPOKES was designed to tackle behaviour and literacy problems during the first years of school (Sylva 2008). 100 children from eight schools in a disadvantaged community in inner London took part over three terms in 2001-2. The programme offered 12 sessions on behaviour management to parents in the first term, 10 sessions on the literacy programme in the second term, and, in the third term, 6 sessions combining the two elements. All sessions lasted two and a half hours, and the intervention included centre based training and home visits.

Parents in the comparison group were offered support through a telephone helpline; a member of the team responded to helpline queries within 24 hours on weekdays. No direct help was offered to parents; rather they were directed to the usual local authority services.

The literacy outcomes for the children were assessed using the British Ability Scales II (BAS) word reading, combined with the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS) and other measures. 104 children took part in the pre-and-post literacy tests (58 in the intervention group and 46 for the comparison group).

Controlling for the amount of time parents spent reading with their children at pre-test, the effect of the intervention on reading time at post-test was near zero. Controlling for the effect of the reading strategies used at pre-test, the effect of the intervention on post-test measurements of reading strategies was highly significant.

Overall, the advantage for children in the intervention group was found to be equivalent to six months of reading age.

Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (GRAD) project

Burke and King-Berg 2005 analysed parent engagement outcomes using the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework and Epstein's framework of parent participation types. The focus was a five year (1999-2004) Graduation Really Achieves Dreams (GRAD) Project, targeting 15 K-12 schools with a combined population of over 20,000 students. More than 93.2% of the project's students were Latino, and 90.6% qualified for free and reduced lunches.

In two years, over 1700 parents participated in the Parents as Tutors programme; of those, 1600 received programme surveys, and a convenience sample of 400 parents was invited to take part in monthly focus group meetings. The aim of these meetings was to determine if the programme had contributed to increased parental participation in educational activities to support their children's development.

During the programme parents' needs and profiles were identified, as were the aspirations of Latino parents, along with what was required to help parents support children toward university preparation. Parents were offered literacy training, and training aimed at breaking down barriers between home and school. Parents and children received training from the Consistency Management and Cooperative Discipline and Connections programmes. The 'Parents as Tutors' programme provided parents with professional training linked to students' academic needs.

The study identified effective engagement strategies used with Latino parents to support their children's academic achievement. **The project had a significant impact on test scores for children and parental involvement in their children's learning.** Children whose parents consistently attended the 'Parents as Tutors' programme made the highest achievement gains. All of the elementary schools who participated in the programme exceeded their Academic Performance Index targets, with gains of 196 points in the period 1999- 2003, compared with an average gain in the state of 98 points. On the California Standards Test, schools involved from 2001

to 2003 increased their results by 12.9 percentile points, compared to the average gain in the state of 6.3 percentile points. In 2003, four years after the inception of the programme, 184 children from the programme were given scholarships for further and higher education, with 72% of these enrolling in four year programmes.

Parent tutoring and literacy

Sénéchal 2008 finds evidence for the 'global effectiveness of parent teaching'. The studies in her review support the hypothesis that **programs which train parents to teach their children specific reading skills can have a large impact on child literacy**. However, the **mechanisms underlying the apparent effectiveness of this approach are unclear.** One question is whether training parents to engage in focused exercises with their children is more or less effective than incorporating those exercises into a broader program of parenting training, such as that practised in Turkey's Mother-Child Education Program. Another question, related to home-based interventions, is to what degree these interventions should integrate with the school curriculum.

Training parents to teach their children reading skills appeared to be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents to listen to their children read. However, interventions of the former type may be more expensive. Training parents is likely to require workshops or other forms of active, face-to-face education, and teaching parents specific listening skills is less labour-intensive than teaching them how to teach specific skills to their own children. However, in Sénéchal 's review, programmes in which parents were trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children tended to demand only a small amount of parent training, usually 1-2 hours. This suggests that such programmes may be less resource intensive than might have been expected. Senechal's review is discussed further in chapter 9.

In a review of literature on parent tutoring, Erion 2006 found that support for parents based on learning in the home is an effective means of improving children's literacy skills. Erion reviewed studies produced between 1971 and 2004, including evidence

based on 32 experimental comparisons. Of these, all but five included some measure of literacy, and the remaining five measured mathematical skills.

14 comparisons gave evidence of an increase in reading comprehension, 3 studies showed improvements in reading fluency and 2 in word recognition. Longer training sessions for parents seemed more effective than shorter sessions. On the basis of evidence from all studies, Erion concludes that **parent tutoring interventions are an effective means of improving literacy skills for children**. Despite investigating a range of intervention characteristics, the authors found little evidence of differential impact; reviews of this size will find it difficult to identify a sufficient number of programmes with the right combination of programme characteristics to draw conclusions of this sort (Erion 2006).

Erion's finding on duration should be set against evidence from Blok 2005, who found no significant effect from the duration or intensity of programmes. Blok, however, comments that previous evaluations may not have distinguished between the effects of duration and the other characteristics of interventions.

Reading outcomes

In a 2006 systematic review Nye reviewed the outcomes of 18 randomised controlled trials investigating the effects of parental involvement intervention programs on the academic performance of primary school-age children. The review included studies looking at the effects of parental involvement on reading, maths and science. The studies were undertaken between 1964 and 2000: seven between 1964 and 1982 and 11 between 1993 and 2000. 15 were conducted in the US, two in the UK and one in Canada. Interventions averaged 10.4 weeks in duration.

Nye found that the 12 programmes which sought to improve children's reading had a mean weighted effect size of 0.42, while interventions which aimed to support children by educating parents to help their children's academic performance improve had a mean weighted effect size of 0.61 . Both results are positive, and **Nye concludes that interventions for parents targeting children's reading outcomes appear to have a moderate but significant effect.** However, the study did not

investigate the participant and programme characteristics that contribute to reading improvements. This is one of many examples included in this review in which **evidence is lacking on the features and mechanisms that explain how the intervention leads to the outcome**.

Behaviour

Reporting on the SPOKES project Scott 2010 shows that **children whose parents were involved in the programme showed a significant improvement in behaviour**; oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD) almost halved and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms reduced.

In a preliminary evaluation of a trial of the Triple P Programme an evidence-based world-wide Positive Parenting Programme for parents of teenagers at four schools, Ralph and Sanders 2003 found evidence of a significant positive impact. The trial involved 138 families in two locations in Australia, of whom 46 completed the programme. The programme included parental group sessions, with an emphasis on parenting risk factors such as harsh discipline styles, conflict and communication issues between teenagers and parents, parental monitoring of their children's activities, parental depression and marital conflict. One aim of the programme was to supply parents with the skills required for assertive discipline. The programme was delivered over 8 hours, often through two hour sessions once a week, in a group setting. Parents and students were surveyed immediately after the programme and again after one year later.

Parents reported a reduction in parent-teenager conflict, an improvement in parenting styles, and over-reacting less often to children's behaviour. Parental conflict over parenting reduced significantly and parents from the treatment group reported significantly less difficult behaviour and higher confidence than the control group.

Reid 2007 evaluated the Incredible Years parent and classroom interventions in elementary schools. Fourteen culturally diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged elementary schools in the Seattle area were selected for the project. These schools were matched on size, geographic location, and demographics of the

children, and matched pairs were randomly assigned to intervention or control conditions. From the 1,152 children enrolled in the study, a moderate-to high-risk group of students from each kindergarten classroom was selected based on parent or teacher reports of high levels of behaviour problems.

Children in intervention schools received a 2-year classroom intervention. In addition, children were randomly assigned to also receive parent training or only the classroom intervention.

The parenting programme together with the school curriculum had the largest impact on children's behaviour, who also bonded much better with school staff becoming significantly more involved with the school. The effect sizes, however, were small.

Following the intervention, mothers who received both the parent training and classroom intervention reported that their children were better able to regulate their emotions, as compared with control group children or children who only received the classroom intervention. Child–mother bonding was stronger with children who received both the parent training and classroom intervention, as compared with children in the control group. Mothers who received the classroom intervention and parent training were significantly more supportive and less critical than mothers in the control group, or who had received the classroom intervention only. Teachers reported that mothers who received both parent training and the classroom intervention were significantly more involved in school, and that children in the control group had significantly more externalising problems than the other groups of children. The outcomes were judged as significant but there was no assessment of the impact on children's achievements (Reid et al 2007).

Conclusions

A good deal is known about the impact of programmes on children's literacy, but, with the partial exception of numeracy (see chapter 7) very little is known about how and whether interventions have an impact on outcomes relating to other parts of the curriculum. Effort focused on some aspects of literacy – training parents to teach

specific reading skills to their children – is more likely to be effective than effort focused on other aspects – encouraging parents to listen to their children to read. The evidence confirms the importance of a parental needs analysis, along with understanding what parents already do with their children and how they are most likely to respond positively to attempts to engage them (further) in their children's learning. Too little is known about what parents do and what will best encourage more involvement. It is well known that programmes should be targeted at priority groups of parents and show sensitivity to their cultural norms and expectations. But in addition, there is a programme of development work in the way of developing resources that are both specific, detailed and directive – the evidence suggests that this is often effective – and produced in ways that motivate parents to become involved, whilst also including them as partners in a respectful collaboration.

Even in the case of literacy not much is known about the mechanisms which explain how and why interventions are successful, and that impedes efforts to replicate good practice on a larger scale or in contexts very different to the original study. It is a priority for ongoing research and development to identify the actions and behaviour that constitute successful interventions, not only for the purposes of replicating or adapting the original programme but to better understand which aspects of the intervention are worth including or adding to other programmes.

As elsewhere in this review there is very little information about costs, still less information based on a cost-benefit analysis. This is important because interventions are unlikely to be sustained over time if their costs are largely unknown or likely to prove prohibitively expensive. In addition, one intervention cannot be judged as more effective than another without a clear profile of their relative costs. Training parents to teach their children specific reading skills may have a larger impact on children's outcomes than encouraging parents to listen to their children read. But if the first option is greatly more resource intensive than the second there remains the question whether it is more sustainable to invest in the less effective programme if is inexpensive by comparison with the more effective alternative.

7. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY BASED INTERVENTIONS

Key messages

The evidence of the impact of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes on children's academic and learning related outcomes is extensive and robust, particularly in the case of literacy.

There are some outstanding models of family literary and numeracy interventions, including the Mother-Child Education Programme in Turkey.

Family literacy and numeracy programmes can have a positive impact on the most disadvantaged families, including the academic outcomes of the children.

Giving parents written information containing simple, specific techniques for helping their children during parent reading yielded greater benefits than providing parents with more general information.

There is not much evidence on how successful family based interventions are related to their outcomes, and there is conflicting evidence on the impact of the location of the intervention – whether home or centred based interventions are most effective.

Partnership and multi-agency arrangements are an essential component of a comprehensive strategy for parental engagement.

An evidence-based model that looks to build relationships across the family, the school, and the community can improve outcomes for low-income and socially culturally marginalised families.

Multi-agency arrangements enable schools to share information with partners, including the police, social services and the voluntary sector, and to draw on external expertise from agencies specialising in mental health, nursing and community activities.

Schools are in a stronger position to respond to their communities when they receive information and data identifying how their performance compares with other schools and services. In the best practice local authorities and individual educational settings shared information effectively.

Information was often not shared between schools and other services when learners moved on from one stage or location to another.

Introduction

This chapter presents robust evidence on some of the most effective interventions in the field of parental engagement – family literacy, language and numeracy programmes. The evidence of the impact of family literacy programmes is particularly strong, in respect of both children's academic outcomes and their wider learning related outcomes - including motivation and engagement. The impact has been shown to persist long after the intervention has finished, and the most disadvantaged parents and children are often the beneficiaries.

Also included in this chapter are reports on community based, multi-agency interventions, often including local authorities. The evidence base here is much weaker; there is nothing approaching the experimentally based evidence on family interventions. Nevertheless multi-agency interventions are included here because there is every reason to believe that attempts to pool expertise on parental engagement - including, in addition to teachers, experts in health, social care and housing – are integral to a parental engagement programme that is strategic, targeted and sustainable. Reports on community programmes tend to confirm the importance of features of parental engagement that are evidenced elsewhere: strong leadership, clear strategic direction, collecting, monitoring and sharing data, and pro-actively engaging with and reaching out to parents and their families.

After school, multi-family groups

McDonald and Moberg 2006 conducted a randomized controlled trial to evaluate a parent engagement strategy with Latino parents of elementary school children. Ten urban schools serving low-income children from mixed cultural backgrounds participated. Classes of children were randomly assigned either to an after-school, multi-family support group (FAST: Families and Schools Together) or to receive eight behavioral parenting pamphlets with active follow-up (FAME: Family Education). There is no set curriculum for the FAST project, and up to 60% of the provision may be changed to fit cultural preferences. Of 180 Latino parents assigned to FAST, 90% came once and 85% graduated. Two year follow-up teacher data were

collected for 130 Latino children. Significant differences were found in favour of an assignment to FAST rather than to FAME, particularly in relation to academic performance and classroom behaviour, including aggression and social skills (McDonald and Moberg 2006).

The difference in attendance between the two groups was marked: of the 80 Latino families assigned to the FAST programme, 90% attended at least one session, and of these, 85% attended at least five sessions and therefore graduated from the programme. These families then attended on average 9.9 parent-led family support groups over the next two years. Of the 50 Latino families involved in FAME, all were contacted with booklets, mail shots and phone calls but only 4% attended the FAME formal lecture.

After two years, teachers were asked to evaluate the children, without knowledge of whether their families had been involved in the FAME or FAST programmes. Teacher reports showed that FAST students had significantly more social skills, exhibited less aggressive behaviour in the classroom and had better academic skills than those whose families had attended the FAME programme.

The evidence from McDonald and Moberg suggests that **after-school, multi-family groups can increase parental involvement and, in turn, help to improve attainment outcomes for disadvantaged children.** An evidence-based model that looks to build relationships across the family, the school, and the community can improve outcomes for low-income, culturally marginalized families.

Parent-child communication

Brody 2004 conducted a randomized controlled trial, contrasting families who took part in the Strong African American Families Program (SAAF), a preventive intervention for rural African American mothers and their 11-year-olds, with a group of control families. Under the SAAF programme, these families are randomly assigned to either the SAAF programme or to a control group.

SAAF aims to prevent or limit early onset of sexual activity and alcohol use, particularly among African American youth in the rural areas of the southern United States. SAAF starts from the premise that regulated, communicative parenting causes changes in factors protecting youths from early alcohol use and sexual activity.

The SAAF programmes comprise seven weekly meetings, held at community centres, with separate curricula for parents and young people. The programme is designed to encourage frequent and harmonious parent-child communication with a view to reducing the onset of risk behaviours

Families who took part in the programme were found to engage in more communicative parenting practices, whilst families in the control group did not.

Compared with control-group families, parents and youths in the intervention group reported larger changes in communicative parenting and the factors known to protect youths from use of alcohol and early onset of sexual activity. Controlling for pre-test behaviours relevant to this study, the evidence suggests that exposure to SAAF helps to explain why the changes in the intervention group were greater than the changes in the control group. This in turn suggests that the **protective factors for young people can be supported by an increase in communicative parenting as promoted by the activities of the SAAF programme** (Brody 2004).

Family literacy

Family literacy programmes can have a significant impact on children's literacy outcomes, as evidenced by Sénéchal and Young 2008 in a meta analysis of the literature, briefly discussed in chapter 8. Fourteen studies published between 1970 and 2001 were analysed, in all of which researchers tested the impact of parental involvement on children's literacy. The two studies in which parents read to their children produced a small effect size of 0.18. Based on the number of studies of this type of intervention and the small effect size the author was unable to conclude that

this type of programme offered any benefits, at least with regard to the reading outcomes measured in the studies.

In contrast, the five programmes in which parents were trained to listen to their children read produced a combined weighted effect size of 0.51. The largest outcomes, however, were associated with interventions in which parents themselves taught specific reading skills to their children: the seven programmes utilising this intervention type produced an effect size of 1.15. The type of programme had a much larger effect on outcomes as compared with the length of the intervention or the provision of feedback to parents during the intervention.

Sénéchal concludes that training parents to teach their children to read is more than twice as effective as programs which encourage parents to listen to their children to read, and six times more effective than those which encourage parents to read to their children.

Alongside the benefits of training parents to teach reading skills to their children, the potential cost effective policy impact of programmes that encourage parents to listen to their children read is significant. It is unclear whether the author has differentiated between programmes in which parents are encouraged to listen to their children read and programmes in which parents are trained to listen to their children read. From the point of view of resource allocation, however, providing encouragement for parents can be a cost-effective option: for example, providing parents with appropriate books for their children to read and using publicity to encourage them to engage in this activity.

As Sénéchal observes, her finding of positive effects from parents listening to their children read supports the findings of earlier reviews. For example, Toomey (1993) found that **giving parents written information containing simple, specific techniques for helping their children during parent reading yielded greater benefits than providing parents with more general information**. This is one of several examples in which interventions that include specific and directive information appear to be more effective than those that are more general and less directive.

In a meta analysis of 14 studies of family literacy interventions targeted at children aged 2-6, Manz 2010 found that children from ethnic minority or low income families did not receive as much qualitatively measured benefit from family literacy programmes as White and/or middle-to-high income families. The authors suggest two reasons: a relative lack of educational experience and engagement amongst disadvantaged parents; and the lack of interventions which are 'culturally valid' for low income and ethnic minority families – that is, studies whose intervention methods are consistent with their values and norms. The significance of the second of these reasons is re-enforced by evidence from Peters 2007, discussed in chapter 6. The evidence from this review suggests that some interventions tend not to be sufficiently focused on the social and familial values of some groups of (ethnic minority) parents that those interventions are designed to support.

Family literacy, language and numeracy

Brooks 2008 undertook a UK-wide and international review of family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes and practice, looking both at how literacy, language and numeracy are enhanced by programmes, and also at how families' wider outcomes are enabled. The study included analysis of quantitative evidence from evaluations conducted around the world, and a complementary qualitative commentary on an overlapping set of studies. Details on selected studies are provided here.

Raising Early Achievement in Literacy: REAL

The REAL project was developed and implemented by teachers at 11 schools in Sheffield. It was of long duration (12–18 months) and low intensity (mainly one home visit per month). It adopted a broad concept of literacy involving not only books but environmental print, writing and aspects of oral language, and it was designed to build on families' existing practices. At the beginning of the study children were aged 2-3, but the study also collected attainment data at age 7.

Teachers at the 11 schools worked half a day a week with eight families each, and received professional training. Besides the monthly home visit, the programme provided: literacy resources, especially books but also writing materials, scrapbooks, and games; centre-based activities, where groups of parents met their teacher; special events, e.g. group visits, including to libraries; and postal communication, including birthday cards, postcards and reminder notes.

The programme was offered to 176 families, all of whom agreed to be randomly allocated to receive it or not. There were 88 families in the intervention group and 88 in the control group. All lived in areas of multiple deprivation.

The results appear to show that the programme had a strong impact while it was running, that is until the children entered school at 5, but that the main effect had disappeared by the time the children were 7 – **except for the subgroup of children whose mothers had no educational qualifications. For that group the programme appeared to have had a countervailing effect to their mothers' lack of qualifications** (Brooks 2008)**.**

Family Numeracy Programmes

An evaluation (Basic Skills Agency 1998) found that the children who took part in the family numeracy pilot programmes made significantly more progress than the children in a comparison group. Parents became more involved with school activities.

The programme adhered to a clear model: a minimum of 1-hour weekly joint sessions, a minimum of 2 hours weekly of separate sessions for the parents, a minimum of 1 hour for the children, and a minimum of 40–45 hours for the programme. Over 500 families took part in the pilot programme.

The evaluation examined: progress of the participating children and of a comparison group of children; changes in numeracy-focused home activity; and other areas of progress and progression. The **participating children's progress on both the**

number scale and the mathematical language scale was significantly greater than that of the comparison children.

In a subsequent study, *Family Numeracy Adds On* (Brooks and Hutchison 2002), teachers who were then teaching some of the children who had participated were interviewed. Data were collected on 60 participants, and on 60 comparison children. **Family numeracy children were rated more highly in relation to their numeracy skills than comparison children, and the support they received from their families was superior. Family numeracy children also had higher motivation, and their parents were twice as likely as those of comparison children to be involved with their child's school** (Brooks 2008).

Family literacy demonstration programmes (Basic Skills Agency)

These Basic Skills Agency programmes came into operation in early 1994. The programmes were mainly based in primary schools, but were jointly staffed by early years teachers and adult literacy tutors. Families were eligible to attend if they had at least one child aged between 3 and 6 at the start of the course, and if the parent and child attended together. In addition, a crèche was provided for any other children in the family aged under 3 who accompanied the family. The programmes ran for 12 weeks, and provided three sessions a week: two of three hours, with parents and children in separate rooms, plus one joint session of about two hours. In their separate sessions, the parents worked on their own literacy, as well as learning more about how to help their children's language and literacy development, and preparing an activity to undertake with them in the joint session. Meanwhile, the children received high-quality early years provision appropriate to their ages and stages of development: they always had a wide range of activities to choose from.

Data were gathered at the beginning and end of the courses from four cohorts of families: those which participated in the summer and autumn terms of 1994, and the spring and summer terms of 1995. Follow-up data were gathered on the first three cohorts 12 weeks after the end of the courses, on the first two cohorts nine months after the end of the courses, and in early 1997 on all the parents and children from

all four cohorts who could be traced. Also in 1997, interviews were carried out with the teachers of a sub-sample of the children who were traced.

Findings from the first two follow-ups: **at the 12-week follow-up the children had made further gains in vocabulary and reading; at the 9-month follow-up the children had maintained those gains; in writing, they continued to make gains on each occasion.**

The 1997 findings can be summarised as follows: **the 237 children re-contacted had on average maintained the gains in vocabulary, reading and writing made during the courses.**

Interviews were carried out with the class teachers of 99 former family literacy children. The teachers were asked to give ratings of these children and of a comparison child for each of them. The comparison child was the child of the same sex from the same class who had the nearest date of birth to the family literacy child. The ratings were on eight indicators of educational performance and inclination. On five items there was no significant difference on average between the two groups, but **on three items the family literacy children were rated significantly higher: support from family, classroom behaviour, and probable success in school**. The teachers were also asked about the involvement with school of the parents of both groups of children: **the family literacy parents were rated twice as likely to be involved with the school** (Brooks 2008).

Mother-Child Education Program, Turkey

The Mother-Child Education Program (MOCEP) developed out of the Turkish Early Enrichment Project. The duration was 25 weeks, and it was targeted at five-year-olds and their mothers, in order to reach children in the year before they started school. The programme was delivered via four or five home visits and weekly group meetings lasting three hours for mothers, who then implemented pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities at home with their children by means of worksheets intended to be used every day for 30 minutes. Mothers also received information about child

development, and about reproductive health and family planning. The families targeted were those where the children were thought to be at risk of educational failure because of their environment. The programme also expanded: between 1991 and 1998 it reached just over 21 000 families, and by 2004 had reached over 180,000 mothers and children, at an average cost of US$30 per family. In the early 2000s the yearly intake was 30 000 families.

Evaluation of the MOCEP began in 1986:

(1) One year after the end of the programme, and at the end of the children's first year in school, 92 experimental group and 85 comparison group families were re-assessed. Children were again tested on literacy and numeracy using experimenter-devised instruments, and the end-of- year scores awarded by their teachers were gathered.

The intervention group children had a higher average score than the comparison group for literacy, for numeracy, and for end-of-year grades, and their mothers reported them as having started reading earlier on average. Every mother in the intervention group described her child as having been ready for school, whereas only 28% of comparison group mothers did so.

The teachers rated the intervention group children more favourably than the comparison group on several aspects of readiness for school, and reported the intervention group mothers as more interested in their children's schooling and as attending more school meetings. Intervention group mothers continued to be less likely to beat or shout at their children, and more likely to explain, divert attention, and allow messy play.

(2) Both participating children and members of the comparison group were followed up at the end of their schooling. The MOCEP participants' average grade was 11.21, while that of the comparison group was 10.26. No statistical test of this difference was reported, but it was claimed to be significant.

(3) Participants and controls were again followed up at age 24: **44.7% of participants were attending university, whereas only 30.6% of controls were. The participants had an average vocabulary test score of 14.11; the controls' average score was 12.22.** As with the previous data, no statistical tests were reported, but the differences were claimed to be significant.

Overall, the data support the interpretation that this was a highly effective and well-designed programme (Brooks 2008).

Location of intervention

Manz 2010 conducted a meta analysis of 14 studies of family literacy programmes which used experimental (12 studies) or quasi experimental (2 studies) designs. The programmes were all aimed at families of children from 2 – 6 years of age and focused on the impact on families from an ethnic minority, low SES or who were not speakers of the language of the school system. The review also investigated the impact of various intervention characteristics, among which was the location of the intervention: home, centre-based or combined. The combined effect size of the studies was 0.33.

The site of the intervention yielded significant differences in effect sizes. Home based interventions had a combined effect size of 0.47, larger than the effect size of the overall interventions, and much larger than the combined home and centre-based interventions, which had an effect size of 0.13.

However, it is worth noting that Blok 2005 found significantly greater outcomes from centre-based or a combination of centre-based and home based programmes. **Further research is required to determine the impact on outcomes of the location of interventions, and, in particular, the benefits of interventions based exclusively in either homes or centres, or both.**

Local authority and community provision

The National College 2010 describes a project on the leadership of parental engagement, comprising the activities of 10 services clusters in England, including

schools and children's centres. Collaboration beyond the school, centre and cluster is a principal theme, and the report describes how schools developed relationships with external agencies, and local authorities in particular.

The Cheadle cluster in Staffordshire comprises 11 schools – 2 secondary, 9 primary – and 2 children's centres. The Staffordshire children's and young people's plan sets out what children's trust partners need to do to promote the development of services for parents as well as their involvement in shaping the services. The local authority has appointed a commissioner for parents, whose role is to be a voice for parents, influencing decision-makers and ensuring that parents' views are heard. There are clear lines of accountability, with parent support workers reporting to and managed by community and learning partnership coordinators. The co-ordinators have a pivotal role in implementing the objectives of the children's trust parenting strategy in their area through the district children's trusts.

All clusters are engaged with stakeholders beyond the schools and children's centres. Clusters share data in steering groups and other forums with partners including the police, housing, social services and the voluntary sector. They draw on **external expertise from agencies engaged in mental health, nursing and community activities to support parents and children.** They employ staff whose expertise is not confined to or is different from teaching – including counsellors, parent and community support workers.

These developments are helping to shape how leadership in some schools and centres is structured. The Watercliffe Meadow cluster in Sheffield has a **leadership team distributed across several centres**, and which incorporates engagement as one of its three core strategies. The Aylsham cluster in Norfolk has employed a cluster strategy manager whose role includes parental engagement and working with partners as a member of the senior leadership team of the high school. The Clapham and Larkhall Collaborative cluster has an outreach programme led by the partnership and extended services manager with a strategic leadership role for the cluster as a whole.

Some clusters are involved with external structures or programmes which include partnerships beyond the schools and centres. In Cheadle, the cluster is setting up a social enterprise business model. Partners are creating a business organisation designed to provide support to the local community. This initiative is supported by Staffordshire local authority, and is seen as having an essential role in **promoting the sustainability of its extended services, including parental engagement** (National College 2010).

Ofsted 2010 reports on a survey to evaluate how a sample of local authorities and education providers knew and understood their local communities, and how they helped learners to make a positive contribution to society. The survey findings are based on visits made between June 2008 and February 2009. The seven local authorities visited identified educational settings where leaders were succeeding in developing learners' sense of their contribution to society. Inspectors visited nine children's centres, 15 primary schools, 14 secondary schools and nine further educational colleges. To gain additional evidence beyond the seven local authorities inspectors visited a further 20 post-16 providers in February 2009 (Ofsted 2010).

All local authorities were found to be working hard to establish networks and support agencies which had a direct impact on the lives of children and families. Extended services, children's centres and family learning were found to be central to local provision, designed to engage the wider community and bring together different generations. This was identified as a priority for further growth and development.

The children's centres were found to be particularly effective in involving parents and families, encouraging participation in education groups and community projects. In interviews parents reported that the educational opportunities helped them to become more confident in speaking to teachers and developing an understanding of how to learn.

One of the secondary schools set up outreach centres to offer courses in mathematics, English, and information and communication technology. **Leaders understood the importance of going out into the community, and not waiting**

for parents or carers to come to the school. The school showed awareness of the need to engage parents and provide education opportunities for them in order to raise their children's aspirations and participation.

Colleges supported local authorities in working with wider family groups, including parents. Classes for adults in literacy, numeracy and information technology skills enabled parents to support their children better and to contribute more effectively to their own communities. **For example, through a range of activities to engage parents, a college successfully ran courses to help them to support their children at home and at school.** Coffee mornings with crèche facilities attracted many parents and allowed outreach workers to identify those who needed help with particular skills, especially English for speakers of other languages, literacy and numeracy. Many of the learners were Bangladeshi women, with low levels of skill in English, living in the United Kingdom for many years and often isolated in their homes. As a result of the courses, many learners progressed to further learning and spoke of having increased confidence in their daily lives and of feeling empowered (Ofsted 2010).

The secondary schools and colleges visited also worked in multi-agency partnerships to help them meet the needs of young people. For example, a liaison role in one school evolved to strengthen links between the school and the Pakistani heritage community. School related issues were conveyed to imams at the three local mosques to develop understanding between the school and the Pakistani pupils and their families. Achievements were shared and celebrated at Friday prayers, and role of sex education was discussed in order to alleviate parental concerns (Ofsted 2010).

Ofsted reports that schools were in a stronger position to respond to their communities when they received **information and data identifying how their performance compared with other schools and services**. In the best practice local authorities and individual educational settings shared information effectively. Successful strategic, multi-agency partnerships were also found to bring improved support for learners. However, nurturing of learning and their families in early years

settings was not always followed up and built upon. **Information was often not shared between schools and other services** when learners moved on from one stage or location to another (Ofsted 2010).

Conclusions

This chapter includes some of the most robust evidence on the effectiveness of interventions in the field of parental engagement. The evidence on family literacy, numeracy and language demonstrates that interventions can have a significant impact on children's academic outcomes, most notably literacy, but also numeracy and other learning related behaviour including motivation and engagement. The evidence on literacy is sufficiently robust and extensive to allow comparative analysis of the effects of different methods of involving parents in their children's literacy – as listeners or trainers for example – and of the effects of interventions on distinct elements of literacy – reading, being read to, writing and aspects of oral language. Some interventions are shown to particularly benefit disadvantaged families. The benefits have been seen to last beyond the duration of the intervention. Detailed and directive information has been found more useful to parents than general advice and guidance. There are some outstanding examples of methodological and content related good practice, including the Mother-Child Education programme in Turkey.

Little is known about the mechanisms that explain how family literacy, language and numeracy programmes - including the most effective interventions - are related to their outcomes. This should not prevent attempts to model and replicate the most successful programmes; on the contrary, there is more than sufficient evidence to support new development and research programmes, and to trial and test a range of less well evidenced activities and practices within the context of a robustly supported general framework for interventions.

The evidence on family programmes, particularly in the case of literacy, is sufficiently robust and extensive to make the case that these should be considered as a priority, whether or not they are embedded in a whole school engagement strategy. Whilst it is desirable that interventions should generally form part of such a strategy, the

evidence suggests that family literacy interventions in particular may be effective even if offered as a discrete programme.

Partnership and multi-agency arrangements are an essential component of a comprehensive strategy for parental engagement, enabling schools and children's services to benefit from a broad range of expertise – including health and social care – and from local authority and other services' knowledge of the needs and profiles of the local community. Strategic leadership, monitoring and sharing data, and pro-actively going out to meet and work with parents, families and community leaders are elements of a successful model.

Partnerships present challenges in the way of gaining access to and sharing data on parents and children. Information was not always shared across partners, or communicated at points of transition from one location or school to another. It is a priority for local authorities to share their data and knowledge of local communities more systematically, and for schools and children's centres to explore how best to transfer information between locations. Equally, it is essential to monitor and evaluate partnership arrangements, including engagement and participation rates on the part of parents and families. Data on the impact on children's academic outcomes is largely absent.

Sustaining partnerships and parental engagement in partnership activities requires not only monitoring and investment but initiatives that will sometimes extend beyond the involvement of schools and children's services. The social enterprise model developed in Cheadle and supported by Staffordshire local authority is one example.

8. PROFILE OF THE EVIDENCE BASE

Introduction

This review provides numerous examples of good practice in parental engagement which are also the subject of a rigorous evaluation. Many of the most impressive programmes are family learning programmes and, of these, the evidence of the impact of literacy interventions is particularly robust. There are also notable examples of effective interventions to support home-school links and to provide training to parents on how to support their children's learning - The Manchester Transition Project, and the SPOKES, FAST and SAAF programmes are four of many. The evidence warrants justified confidence in recommending that schools, or clusters of schools and children's centres, should select from existing evidence-based good practices and trial those best suited to their circumstances, or include these as a resource for their own programme of development and research.

At the same time, there are numerous gaps in the evidence base. A lot of the evidence is weak, or based or poor quality research. There is little robust evidence on many academic and learning related outcomes, and on many of the specific activities schools and services should undertake in pursuit of the general features of an effective parental engagement strategy.

In particular, in relation to interventions, there is limited evidence on:

- academic and social progress – for example, grades at Key Stages and at GCSE level. Literacy is a notable exception.
- The comparative academic and social impact of specific programmes. Family literacy programmes are a notable exception
- The extent to which the results of one intervention can be generalised to other contexts.
- The costs of interventions, and evidence from cost-benefit analyses.
- The sustainability of interventions, and in particular the resources required to sustain pupils' progress over time.

- Programme ‘fidelity’ – the extent to which the intervention was implemented as intended, whether parents received what they were supposed to receive, and whether parents do what they were supposed to do as prescribed by the programme.
- Parental needs – the extent to which instruments used to identify parental needs are fit for purpose, providing valid and reliable data.
- Parental activities in the home – evidence on existing parental practices aimed at supporting their children’s learning in the home – particularly, disadvantaged and ethnic minority families.
- Quality assurance – evidence from monitoring and evaluating the processes and outcomes of interventions, including staff development processes.

Several features of the evidence base deserve a more extended comment.

Implementation quality

Von Steensel 2010 observes that, although the quality of implementation will help determine whether a programme is successful, information on implementation quality and consistency is very rarely provided. This is a significant weakness of many studies reported on here. The manner in which parents and children carry out programme activities – how far they conform to the programme specification – is often a matter of speculation and ought to be a priority for further research.

Erion 2005 also calls for greater attention to implementation quality, both in relation to analysis and reporting. Many studies included in Erion’s review contained no information about the presence or absence of key intervention characteristics, leaving it unclear whether programs offered parents training, consultations or other forms of assistance. As Erion observes, this information is necessary if research is to identify not only the effect size of particular programs, but also the positive and negative effects of each of the intervention characteristics, and how strong these effects are.

Erion 2006 suggests that it should be a priority to include quantifiable checks on how well parents assimilate tutoring skills prior to the start of any parent tutoring

programme. More attention should be given to what happens in the home in practice rather than in theory. There should be a greater focus on ‘the integrity with which parents implement tutoring’ as well as on the ‘quantity of tutoring that actually occurs’ (Erion 2006). It is important, therefore, to gather evidence (and devise instruments for this purpose) on how well parents implement programme aims in order better to understand why programs do and do not work.

Parent training: quality

It was difficult for reviewers to analyse the impact of the quality of training received by parents, as few primary studies provided any information on this program characteristic. Erion 2006 notes that many of the studies included in his meta-analysis reported that parents were provided with corrective feedback during training. However, only three studies reported that parents achieved some level of mastery in the techniques required by their intervention. As he observes, ‘noting a training feature was implemented does not mean parents benefited from the training’ (Erion 2006).

Most primary studies do not appear to evaluate the quality of the ‘training dose’ given to parents, concerning themselves more with the size (and in particular the length) of that dose. A rare exception is van Steensel 2009 who provides an analysis of implementation quality in family literacy programs.

Lack of high-quality primary studies

Primary studies are frequently found to be of poor quality. Mattingly 2002 observes that the evaluation design quality of many of the studies they found was too weak to allow researchers or other program evaluators to measure programs' efficacy. Other reviewers, (eg., Fishel and Ramirez 2005), reach the same conclusion, noting that methodological weaknesses in the studies they were able to access made it impossible to draw robust conclusions.

Fishel and Ramirez 2005 conducted a meta-analysis of parent engagement interventions with school-aged children, using criteria proposed by the American Psychosocial Association Task Force on Evidence-Based Interventions in School

Psychology. They selected 24 studies, 14 of which used a between-subject group design, 8 of which used single participant design, and 2 of which used mixed designs. Fishel and Ramirez conclude that there are too many methodological weaknesses in the literature base to allow conclusive analysis of the effects of interventions.

While a number of the studies included in this review present effect sizes and other statistical information, many do not clearly report significant intervention and participant characteristics which might otherwise provide insight into the reasons why some programs succeed in some contexts and others do not.

Family Literacy: lack of high-quality European research

All but one of the meta-analyses of family literacy interventions were conducted by researchers based in the United States - the exception being the Netherlands-based review conducted by van Steensel. However, even in this Europe-based meta-analysis, almost all the primary studies included were undertaken outside Europe. The lack of European primary studies in meta-analyses suggests that there is a dearth of high-quality, outcome-focused quantitative research on European parental intervention programs designed to improve children's literacy outcomes. Notable exceptions include the large body of research conducted on various Turkish programs, including the Mother-Child Education Program, and Dutch research on the Opstap program in related interventions.

This apparent lack of high-quality European quantitative research is of some importance given the significantly different policy environment found in the United States, where the welfare state generally offers less overall support to impoverished families and where African-Americans make up a large percentage of the urban, disadvantaged poor. Because of these and other important policy differences, any conclusions about programme efficacy in the US should be treated with caution before being taken up by policymakers in England.

9. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence base

Overview

Many of the most impressive programmes included in this review are family learning programmes and, of these, the evidence of the impact of literacy interventions is particularly robust. There are also notable examples of effective interventions to support home-school links and to provide training to parents on how to support their children's learning - The Manchester Transition Project, and the SPOKES, FAST and SAAF programmes are four of many. The evidence warrants justified confidence in recommending that schools, or clusters of schools and children's centres, should select from existing evidence-based good practices and trial those best suited to their circumstances, or include these as a resource for their own programme of development and research.

Evidence gaps

At the same time, there are numerous gaps in the evidence base. Much of the evidence is weak, or based on poor quality research. There is little robust evidence on many academic and learning related outcomes, and on many of the specific activities schools and services should undertake in pursuit of the general features of an effective parental engagement strategy. The evidence will not yet allow reliable and fine grained assessment of the relative effectiveness of interventions at different key stages of children's development.

Most of the robust evidence applies to literacy; there is some, but less, evidence on numeracy and on behavioural outcomes. There is very little subject-based evidence in relation to most of the rest of the curriculum.

In relation to interventions, there is limited evidence on:

- academic and social progress. Literacy is a notable exception.
- How far the results of one intervention can be generalised to other contexts.
- The costs of interventions, and evidence from cost-benefit analyses.
- The sustainability of interventions, and in particular the resources required to sustain pupils' progress over time.
- Programme 'fidelity' – the extent to which the intervention was implemented as intended, either by trainers or by parents.
- Quality assurance – evidence from monitoring and evaluating the processes and outcomes of interventions, including staff development processes.

Many of the most robust studies have been undertaken in the United States. The scarcity of high-quality European quantitative research is of some importance given the significantly different US policy environment. Any conclusions about programme efficacy in the US should be treated with caution before being taken up by policymakers in England.

An agenda for future research and development

There are few robust studies on interventions that are both focussed on the impact of the intervention on children's academic outcomes, and demonstrate a relationship between the intervention and the outcome. It should be a priority to increase knowledge of parental engagement strategies on the basis of studies that incorporate a robust research design.

Many general features of parental engagement strategies are the subject of extensive and high quality research, and are often strongly supported by the evidence. Examples include strong leadership, targeted approaches, and effectively involving parents in school-home links.

Each general feature is associated with a set of specific actions and practices. For example, effectively involving parents in school home links will include activities such as offering flexible arrangements for parents' evenings and encouraging parents to

ensure that homework diaries are completed. The evidence on specific activities is much less robust than it tends to be for the general features of good practice.

Whilst the evidence is less robust in relation to many of the specific activities required of parents, schools and other services, studies often reach similar conclusions on what is effective, and there is now a sufficient body of information to provide a focus for ongoing development and research. The activities described in the practitioner summary are offered as examples of good or promising practice, to be pursued in the context of trialling, testing, evaluating and building on the best evidence we have.

A parental engagement strategy

The evidence included in this review points towards the following as key features of an effective parental engagement strategy.

Planning

Parental engagement must be planned for and embedded in a whole school or service strategy. The planning cycle will include a comprehensive needs analysis; the establishment of mutual priorities; ongoing monitoring and evaluation of interventions; and a public awareness process to help parents and teachers understand and commit to a strategic plan. A needs analysis should be designed to identify parents' needs in relation to supporting their children's learning, taking account of parental profiles in respect of socio-economic status, language, prior school experience and working patterns.

Collaboration and engagement

Parental engagement requires the engagement of all parents, and collaboration should be pro-active rather than reactive, sensitive to the circumstances of all families, recognise the contributions parents can make, and aim to empower parents. Staff should have a good understanding of parents' needs, backgrounds and cultural norms and expectations. The evidence shows the value of parental and

community involvement at all levels: parents should not be merely consulted but included in the planning, presentation and evaluation of engagement programmes.

Sustained improvement

A parental engagement strategy should be the subject of ongoing support, monitoring and development. This will include strategic planning which embeds parental engagement in whole-school development plans, sustained support, resourcing and training, community involvement at all levels of management, and a continuous system of evidence based development and review.

Staff often lack experience and training in working with parents to support their children's learning. Training should be included in the context of initial teacher education, or continuing professional development. On the basis of a clear understanding of the value and nature of parental engagement, teachers should receive training in teaching and learning in a family learning setting, working with adults and children, and in implementing the parental engagement activity

A broad understanding of parental engagement

Schools are often unaware of how parents engage with their children's learning and either undervalue this engagement or do not respond positively. Providers should recognise that parental engagement includes a wide range of activities, including learning at home, school-home and home-school communication, in-school activities, decision making (for example, membership of Parent Teacher Associations) and collaboration with the community.

The agency of children is significant, and the efforts of children and parents is often reciprocal; if children become more engaged in their learning then this tends to encourage parents to do the same (and vice versa).

Clear and specific advice and guidance

Parents want easily accessible information about what their children are learning in school and the progress they are making. Yet information is often given to parents without adequate understanding on the part of either parents or school as to how the information should be used, and what response is required from parents. Information for parents should be clear, both in respect of content and in respect of what is expected of parents. Information should be clearly targeted at specific groups of parents.

Models of good practice: family learning

Family learning projects have been shown to have a positive impact on children's attainment, behaviour in and out of school, motivation to learn and relationships within the family. Outstanding examples of projects in this field, many of which have been the subject of a robust evaluation, should serve as models of good practice.

Leadership

Effective leadership of parental engagement is essential to the success of programmes and strategies. A parental engagement programme is often led by a senior leader, although leadership may also be distributed in the context of a programme or cluster of schools and services working to a clear strategic direction.

Challenges

Parents can perceive the school as presenting obstacles in the form of lack of encouragement, not informing parents of what they can do, and having too little scope for fitting around busy working and family lives. Many schools acknowledge the need to go out and meet parents in the community instead of relying on the expectation that they will come into the school.

Parents face numerous barriers to engagement, including costs, time and transportation, language (for some parents for whom English is not a first language), low levels of literacy and numeracy, and a lack of confidence in supporting children's

learning or engaging with a school. Solutions include: arranging meetings at times that are convenient for parents, and not only at school, but also at places in which parents are known to feel safe and comfortable; providing translators for parents where necessary; low-cost means of bringing home learning into school and school learning into home (using disposable cameras for example); and making use of parents already engaged with the school as ambassadors for other members of the community. Home visits by teachers or other members of staff are particularly important in building home school links.

A significant challenge is sustainability, and in particular retaining committed and inspiring senior leaders, high levels of commitment across staff teams, and access to the funding streams and resources that successful programmes require.

There remains the long standing difficulty of reaching and involving parents who have chosen not to engage either with their children's school or with their children's learning. A related challenge is finding the most appropriate methods for identifying what parents want and need. Many staff lack experience and knowledge of working to support parents in engaging with their children's learning.

Information is not always shared across partners, or communicated at points of transition from one location or school to another. It is a priority for local authorities to share their data and knowledge of local communities more systematically, and for schools and children's centres to explore how best to transfer information between locations.

Summary

An increasing number of the general features of parental engagement strategies are supported by evidence derived from high quality research. Whilst many of the specific activities required of parents and schools are less well supported, studies often agree on what is effective. There is now a sufficient body of information to provide a firm basis for a programme of ongoing development and research - trialling, testing, evaluating and building on the best evidence we have.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Practitioners' Summary

Appendix 2: Sources of evidence

Appendix 3: References

Appendix 4: Glossary

APPENDIX 1: PRACTITIONERS' SUMMARY

“Review of best practice in parental engagement: Practitioners summary”

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1. INTRODUCTION

Benefits of parental engagement

Parental engagement has a large and positive impact on children's learning. This was the single most important finding from a recent and authoritative review of the evidence:

> Parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups (Desforges 2003).

It is therefore a priority for schools to identify interventions that are effective in supporting parental engagement, particularly for those parents who are not significantly involved in their children's education.

Aim and scope of this summary

This summary covers research on parents of children aged 5-19, and includes evidence-based messages on interventions to support parental engagement in their children's learning. Whilst some evidence refers to primary education it is included here because the principles and behaviours referred to also apply to older children. All messages are aimed at schools, service leaders, practitioners and policymakers.

There is distinction between the types of evidence and interventions summarised here:

- The general features of parental engagement strategies are the subject of extensive and high quality research; many are strongly supported by the evidence. Examples include strong leadership, targeted approaches, and effectively involving parents in school-home links.

- Each general feature is associated with a set of specific actions and practices. For example, effectively involving parents in school home links will include activities such as offering flexible arrangements for parents' evenings and encouraging parents to ensure that homework diaries are completed. The evidence on specific activities is much less robust than it tends to be for the general features of good practice.

Whilst the evidence is less robust in relation to many of the specific activities required of parents, schools and other services, studies often reach similar conclusions on what is effective, and there is now a sufficient body of information to provide a focus for ongoing development and research. The activities included in this summary are, therefore, offered as examples of good or promising practice that warrant further trialling and experimentation.

The **context** for this research is described in section 2, and in section 3 the **evidence** is presented in three categories:

- School – home links.
- Support and training for parents.
- Family and community based interventions.

The summary concludes (section 4) with a **model of effective practice** comprising four elements:

- Planning
- Leadership
- Collaboration and engagement
- Sustained improvement

2. CONTEXT

The Schools White Paper (Department for Education 2010) sets out how the Coalition Government will improve the outcomes and life chances of all children. Schools will be increasingly accountable to parents for the progress and achievement of pupils. The White Paper presents the Government's strategy for raising achievement levels, improving pupils' behaviour, and lowering the attainment gap. The Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances (Field 2010) identifies a central role for parents in meeting each of these goals, particularly in the early years. The White Paper and the Field Review reinforce the need to involve parents in education, and to create a good home learning environment.

In recent years, schools have increasingly recognised the importance of involving parents in their children's learning. This has been supported by developments such as the emergence of online technology and Parent Support Advisors. Since September 2009 Ofsted has been considering how effectively schools engage with parents. The focus has been on building positive relationships with parents, the quality of communications, reporting to parents on progress, and the mechanisms for helping parents to support their children's learning. Evidence from Ofsted suggests that a critical dimension of effective teaching and learning is the relationship between the teacher, their pupils and their parents. Just as the quality of teaching and leadership in schools is the key determinant of educational attainment, so the degree and quality of engagement that parents have with their child's learning is a crucial factor outside the school environment.

The more engaged parents are in the education of their children the more likely their children are to succeed in the education system. School improvement and school effectiveness research consistently shows that parental engagement is one of the key factors in securing higher student achievement. Schools that improve and sustain improvement engage the community and build strong links with parents. Where schools build positive relationships with parents and work actively to embrace racial, religious, and ethnic and language differences, evidence of sustained school improvement can be found.

3. SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE

School Home Links

Whole school approach

- Attempts by schools to engage parents in their children's learning are unlikely to be successful if they represent a 'bolt-on' to mainstream activities.

- A parental engagement strategy should be integrated into a whole school approach to parental engagement.

- Interventions should be informed by an ongoing parental needs assessment in the context of a school improvement strategy.

- School based family and parent support activities should have the improvement of children's learning as a clear and consistent goal.

Staff needs

- To engage effectively with parents staff require training and coaching, particularly when working with parents whose backgrounds are very different to their own.

- School staff should receive parental engagement training through initial teacher training or continuing professional development.

Parents' needs

- Parental engagement with children's learning is effectively supported when parents receive clear, specific and targeted information from schools.

- Schools which successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parental engagement, and their parental engagement strategies accord with the interpretations and values of the parents they are aimed at.

An outward facing strategy

- A parental engagement strategy should be outward facing, involving not only the views of parents, but the evidence and expertise of other schools and services in the community.

- The transfer of knowledge and understanding should be part of a two way process: not only from school to home but from home to school.

- Building home-school links through out of hours' clubs, parenting classes, extended schools and outreach work can lead to improvements in completion of homework, learning behaviours and improved attendance.

Barriers to engagement

- Parental engagement strategies should consider barriers that inhibit parental involvement, including the practical barriers of cost, time and transport.

- Solution to these problems include car-pools, involving children in school based parental activities, and taking account of parental work schedules when organising programmes and activities like meetings with teachers.

- More parents believe that they have a responsibility for their children's education at a time when their confidence to help with homework is declining. This presents schools with an opportunity to support parents by improving home-school links.

Information and communication technology

- ICT can contribute to improved parental engagement by: providing a convenient means for parents to access up-to-date information about their child's learning; enabling parents to be more engaged with their child's learning; supporting more flexible working arrangements for staff.

- In a Becta study only 25 per cent of parents received information about their child's learning via online tools; 84 per cent of parents reported that their child's school provided them with little or no resources to help support their child's learning at home.

- Levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning.

Challenges

- Teachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to work with parents, and schools do not always recognise or value the ways in which parents are already engaged with children's learning.

- Engagement strategies often lack a clear, consistent focus on raising children's achievement.

- There are numerous logistical barriers to improving parental engagement and effective interventions are often resource intensive.

- Schools generally do not collect sufficient data on their own interventions, particularly relating to the impact on academic outcomes.

Support and Training for Parents

Benefits

- Significant outcomes of parental support programmes include: parents' acknowledging that a problem exists; gaining knowledge and skills to manage children's behaviour, and the confidence and empathy to use these skills effectively.

- Programmes can have an impact on how well children bond with school staff, and how involved they become with the school. Parents report a reduction in parent-teenager conflict and an improvement in parenting styles.

- Interventions for parents targeting children's reading outcomes bring significant benefits. Training parents to teach their children reading skills can be more than twice as effective as encouraging parents to listen to their children read.

Literacy and other curriculum areas

- There is extensive evidence on the positive impact of parental engagement programmes on children's literacy.

- Effort focused on some aspects of literacy – for example, training parents to teach specific reading skills to their children – is more likely to be effective than effort focused on other aspects – for example, encouraging parents to listen to their children to read.

- With the partial exception of numeracy, very little is known about whether interventions have an impact on outcomes relating to other parts of the curriculum.

Approaches

- Effective programmes and interventions are informed by a needs analysis and targeted at particular types of parents – for example, minority ethnic parents, disadvantaged parents and fathers.

- Parental support programmes which focus on both academic outcomes and training in parenting skills are more effective than interventions that do not include such training.

- A supportive, non-judgemental attitude is most likely to lead to parents internalising and using tools provided by a programme aimed at supporting parenting skills.

- Parents need specific, detailed guidance on programmes and on their expected contribution.

Understanding parents

- The evidence confirms the importance of a parental needs analysis, along with understanding what parents already do with their children and how they are most likely to respond positively to attempts to engage them (further) in their children's learning.

- Programmes should be targeted at particular groups of parents and show sensitivity to their cultural norms and expectations. Examples: the Supporting Parents on Kids Education programme (SPOKES) which has been shown to yield a benefit for children equivalent to six months of reading age; the Strong African American Families Programme (SAAF) includes an emphasis on communicative parenting, which reduces the likelihood of young people using alcohol and engaging in early sexual activity.

- Effective resources include specific, detailed and directive advice and guidance, produced in ways that motivate parents to become involved, and include parents as partners in a respectful and collaborative endeavour.

Costs

- There is very little information about the costs of interventions.
- Interventions are unlikely to be sustained over time if their costs are largely unknown or likely to prove prohibitively expensive.

- A value-for-money assessment of two or more programmes cannot be completed without a clear profile of costs.

Family and Community Based Interventions

Benefits

- The evidence of the impact of family literacy, language and numeracy programmes on children's academic and learning related outcomes is extensive and robust, particularly in the case of literacy, but also numeracy and other learning related outcomes including motivation and achievement.

- Family literacy and numeracy programmes can have a positive impact on the most disadvantaged families, including the academic outcomes of the children. The benefits have been shown to last beyond the duration of the intervention.

Literacy

- The evidence on family programmes, particularly for literacy, is sufficiently robust that these should be considered as a priority.

- Whilst it is desirable that interventions should generally form part of a whole school engagement strategy, family literacy interventions in particular may be effective even if offered as a discrete programme.

Approaches

- Strategic leadership, monitoring and sharing data, and pro-actively going out to meet and work with parents, families and community leaders are elements of a successful model.

- An evidence-based model that looks to build relationships across the family, the school, and the community can improve outcomes for low-income, culturally marginalised families.

Partnership and multi-agency arrangements

- Partnership and multi-agency arrangements are an essential component of a comprehensive strategy for parental engagement.

- Multi-agency arrangements enable schools to share information with partners, including the police, social services and the voluntary sector, and to draw on external expertise from agencies specialising in mental health, nursing and community activities.

- Sustaining partnerships and parental engagement in partnership activities requires not only monitoring and investment but initiatives that will sometimes extend beyond the involvement of schools and children's services.

Sharing information

- Schools are in a stronger position to respond to their communities when they receive data on how their performance compares with other schools and services.

- Information needs to be shared between schools and other services when learners move from one stage or location to another.

- In the best practice local authorities and individual educational settings shared information effectively.

- Giving parents written information containing simple, specific techniques for helping their children's reading yields greater benefits than providing parents with more general information.

Challenges

- Partnerships present challenges in the way of gaining access to and sharing data on parents and children.

- Information was not always shared across partners, or communicated at points of transition from one location or school to another.

- Data on the impact on children’s academic outcomes is largely absent.

4. MODEL OF EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

A model of effective practice will include, as a minimum, the following four features: planning; leadership; collaboration and engagement; and sustained improvement.

Planning

Parental engagement must be planned for and embedded in a whole school or service strategy. The planning cycle will include:

- a comprehensive needs analysis
- the establishment of mutual priorities
- ongoing monitoring and evaluation of interventions
- a public awareness process to help parents and teachers understand and commit to a strategic plan.

Parental engagement interventions are more likely to be effective if they are informed by a **comprehensive needs analysis** and are **targeted at particular groups of parents.** A needs assessment is particularly important for minority ethnic parents, disadvantaged parents and fathers. The assessment should be informed by information on **barriers to engagement**.

Estyn 2009 reports that, where there is good practice in planning parental involvement, schools understand that parents:

- like to be involved in their child's school
- want the school to know them personally as individuals and be kept well informed about the progress made by their children
- need clear information about day-to-day matters that affect their children
- feel more confident if they know the staff and have a basic understanding of the curriculum
- are willing to support school events and provide practical help but are less likely to join a committee
- become more supportive the more that they are involved, particularly if they have attended training events
- like to have clear rules for their children that are applied consistently.

Planning also includes the effective **co-ordination of roles and services**. This requires:

- effective communication with staff, parents and families
- clear expectations of staff and parents as to their role and contribution to a parent engagement programme
- models of good practice to inform and guide programme participants

The National College 2010 concludes that the critical factor is **clarity of roles:** where leadership and operational roles are clear and well understood by staff, parents and

members of the community, the structure is more likely to support the development of trusting relationships and effective practice.

Challenges

The most effective school based programmes have a **clear focus on raising children's achievement** and this goal should feature in the planning and design of a parental engagement strategy.

Parents can perceive the **school as presenting obstacles** in the form of: lack of encouragement; not informing parents of what they can do; having too little scope for fitting around busy working and family lives. Many schools acknowledge the need to **go out and meet parents in the community** instead of relying on the expectation that they will come into the school.

Parents face numerous **logistic barriers**: lack of transport, lack of child care, competing family demands, work schedules, lack of time and the programme placing too great a demand on parents. Solutions included organising car-pools, inviting children to the diabetes sessions, taking work schedules of parents into account when setting times for programmes, and reducing the number of programme inputs across the year.

Leadership

Effective leadership of parental engagement is essential to the success of programmes and strategies. This applies to:

- Schools
- Services
- Local authorities

A parental engagement programme is often led by a **senior leader**, usually but not always the head teacher. Leadership may also be distributed in the context of a programme or cluster of schools and services working to a clear strategic direction, articulated and pursued by a strong leader who continues to shape the vision as the work progresses. In this context leaders may include not only head teachers but also cluster strategy managers and cluster co-ordinators.

In a 2010 National College study of leadership for effective engagement all effective leaders shared a set of common attributes. The leaders were:

- driven by a strong sense that children and families matter
- focussed on people – able to develop relationships built on trust and integrity
- effective role models – doing what they say they will do and setting standards for others in how they conduct themselves
- passionate about what they do
- focussed on outcomes

- highly effective networkers who engage support and commitment from a wide range of stakeholders (National College 2010).

Effective leaders articulate and promote a clear vision and set of values that underpin the programme, and which are communicated to and shared by all staff. A vision for an effective parental engagement strategy will vary from one school and community to another but critical features include:

- a strong leader who drives the vision
- a clear belief that engaging parents will make a difference to the achievement and learning outcomes of children
- a vision that is shared by all staff who are committed to supporting it
- a focus on evaluating the impact and identifying what difference the programme is making
- involving parents in decision making and not only consulting them (National College 2010).

Local authorities also have a leadership role, and a responsibility for creating strong partnerships and a clear strategic direction. In the context of understanding and supporting local communities Ofsted finds that local authorities have a pivotal role in:

Challenges

A significant challenge is sustainability, and in particular retaining:

- committed and inspiring senior leaders
- high levels of commitment across distributed leaders and staff teams
- access to the funding streams and resources that successful programmes require.

Collaboration and engagement

Parental engagement requires the engagement of all parents, and collaboration should:

- be pro-active rather than reactive
- sensitive to the circumstances of all families
- recognise the contributions parents can make
- aim to empower parents.

Estyn 2009 reports on good practice in **parental involvement in primary schools.** Schools that involve parents in supporting achievement:

- offer flexible arrangements for parents' evenings
- provide translators for parents who do not speak English
- provide enough information on homework so that parents know how to help

- choose topics for school work where parents could help easily

Ofsted 2008 undertook a survey of 29 secondary schools to identify good practice in **re-engaging disaffected students in their learning.** A close partnership with parents or carers was fundamental to re-engaging students. Schools were flexible about the timing of meetings to allow students to attend with their parents or carers. All schools had home–school liaison teams; the most effective focused on specific families and visited homes and other places where the community met regularly.

The Manchester Transition project (Dyson 2007) demonstrates the importance of a **whole school approach to parental engagement.** The aim was to increase the capacity of staff in schools in Manchester to support parents, particularly during transition stages. Features of schools reporting the largest impact included:

- head teacher commitment
- staff member responsible for parental involvement with the skills and commitment to make contact with disengaged families
- training for the staff in school
- networking between schools
- formalisation of effective practice.

Schools which effectively engage parents operate with **broad definitions of parental engagement and parental involvement**, including:

- learning at home: help with homework, skills, attitudes, values, behaviour
- communication: school-home; home-school
- in-school activities: volunteering; helping in classrooms, parents' evenings
- decision making: membership of Parent Teacher Associations or other committees and advisory groups
- collaborating with the community: community contributions to schools and families; family and school contributions to the community

Home-school knowledge activities are effective if they are the result of a two-way process – from home to school as well as from school to home – and are supported by school home support practitioners, Parent Support Advisors or learning support assistants providing targeted support.

A parental engagement strategy often extends beyond schools. The National College describes 10 services clusters in England, including schools and children's centres. All clusters engage with stakeholders beyond the schools and children's centres, and:

- share data with partners including the police, social services and voluntary sector
- draw on external expertise from agencies engaged in mental health, nursing and community activities
- employ staff whose expertise is different from teaching – including counsellors and community support workers.

Ofsted 2010 reports on a survey to evaluate how a sample of **local authorities and education providers knew and understood their local communities**. Extended services, children's centres and family learning were found to be central to local provision, designed to engage the wider community and bring together different generations.

Challenges

A significant challenge is reaching and involving **parents who have chosen not to engage** either with their children's school or with their children's learning. A related challenge is finding the most appropriate **methods for identifying what parents want and need**. Some home-school activities can be **resource intensive.** Feiler 2006 describes a project that made use of disposable cameras and videos as a cost effective means of sharing information between school and home.

Sustained improvement

A parental engagement strategy should be the subject of ongoing support, monitoring and development:

- strategic planning which embeds parental engagement in whole-school development plans
- sustained support, resourcing and training
- community involvement at all levels of management, from initial needs analysis through to monitoring, evaluation and review
- a continuous system of evidence based development and review
- a supportive networked system that promotes objectivity and shared experiences.

Schools and children's services that **continuously monitor and evaluate data** on their interventions are thereby able to assess the effectiveness of their activities and the outcomes they lead to. They can also build an evidence base to inform an ongoing programme of development and research.

Data collection and monitoring should include the following features of interventions:

- children's attainment and learning related outcomes
- children's behavioural outcomes
- parents' demographic profile
- parental attitudes to education and parental attendance
- barriers to parental engagement

Data collection should also give priority to what parents spontaneously do to support their children's learning in the home. Schools require data on these activities if they

are to recognise and value existing parental efforts to support their children, and to use information about these activities to inform their own interventions.

Ofsted 2010 reports that schools were in a stronger position to respond to their communities when they received **information and data identifying how their performance compared with other schools and services**. In the best practice local authorities and individual educational settings shared information effectively.

Many staff do not have the knowledge and confidence to work with parents, particularly parents from deprived communities (Dyson 2007). There is a need for **teacher training**, in the context of initial teacher training or continuous professional development. Built on a clear understanding of parental engagement, this will include:

- Information about parents served by the school
- Teaching and learning in a family learning setting
- Working with adults and children
- Implementing the parental engagement activity

Teacher and staff training should be monitored, evaluated and up-dated following changes to the parent group or the content of the parental engagement programme.

Challenges

There are two areas on which the evidence is generally poor:

- **the outcomes of interventions** – academic and other learning related outcomes such as motivation and achievement. Too little is known about the impact of interventions on children's attainment.
- **How effectively staff and parents implement or follow activities prescribed by an intervention**. Too little is known about how faithfully staff and parents carry out the activities prescribed by a parental engagement programme, and about the impact on the success of the programme.

Partnerships present challenges to sharing data. **Information was not always shared across partners**, or communicated at points of transition from one location or school to another. It is a priority for local authorities to share their data and knowledge of local communities more systematically, and for schools and children's centres to explore how best to transfer information between locations.

APPENDIX 2: SOURCES OF EVIDENCE[1]

BALANSKAT, A., BLAMIRE, R., et al. (2006), The ICT Impact Report: A review of studies of ICT impact on Schools in Europe, European Schoolnet.

Overview

This study examines the impact of ICT investment and integration in schools in two areas: learning outcomes and learners, and teaching methodologies and teachers.

The aims of this review are to:

- Establish a comprehensive picture of ICT impact studies and their impact areas at national and European level
- Provide a framework for describing impact

Review

The review draws on evidence from 17 recent impact studies carried out at national, European and international level. They fall into seven categories:

- Large scale impact studies: e.g. elearning Nordic, Ramboll Management (2006), Impact 2, Harrison (2002); New Technology in School: Is There a Payoff, Machin (2006).

- Evaluations of national ICT programmes or initiatives: e.g. Evaluation of ITMF, Ramboll Management (2005), Tiger in Focus, Toots (2004), ICT and school development, ITU (2004).

- National inspection reports: 8 Years Education and ICT, ICT Monitor, Kessel (2005).
- Evaluation of specific national interventions- large and small scale: e.g. The ICT test bed evaluation, Underwood (2006), e.g. Interactive Whiteboard evaluation, Higgins (2005).

- National research reviews: The Becta Review, Becta (2006).

- International and European comparisons: e.g. Are students ready for a technology rich world, OECD (2004), Benchmarking Access and Use of ICT in European Schools, Empirica (2006), Key Data on ICT in Europe, Eurydice (2005).

- European case studies: (Innovative learning environments for schools, Ramboll Management (2004), Ernist ICT school portraits (European Schoolnet (2004).

[1] Some entries in this Appendix comprise extracts from source material.

Only three studies - Harrison (2002), Ramboll Management (2006), Machin (2006) - consider the question of 'impact' as such. Impact is seen as an effect on a wider educational policy target caused by an intervention related to ICT.

Key Findings

Impact on learning and learners

Six studies analysed the statistical relationship between use of ICT and students' results in exams or tests. Conclusions include:

- ICT impacts positively on educational performance in primary schools, particular in English and less so on science and not in mathematics.
- Use of ICT improves attainment levels of school children in English, Science and Design and technology, particularly in primary schools.
- Schools with higher levels of e-maturity demonstrate a more rapid increase in performance scores than those with lower levels.
- Schools with good ICT resources achieve better results than those that are poorly equipped.
- Broadband access in classrooms results in significant improvements in pupils' performance in national tests taken at age 16.
- Introducing interactive whiteboards results in pupils' performance in national tests in English (particularly for low-achieving pupils and for writing), mathematics and science, improving more than that of pupils in schools without interactive whiteboards.

Other studies explore the impact of ICT on learning outcomes on the basis of the opinions of teachers, students and parents:

- Pupils, teachers and parents consider that ICT has a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- Pupils' subject-related performance and basic skills (calculation, reading and writing) improve with ICT.
- Teachers are becoming increasingly convinced that the educational achievements of pupils improve through the use of ICT.
- Academically strong students benefit more from ICT use, but ICT serves also weak students.

Barriers

Teacher-level barriers

Teachers' poor ICT competence, low motivation and lack of confidence in using new technologies in teaching are significant determinants of their levels of engagement in ICT. These are directly related to the quality and quantity of teacher training programmes.

School level barriers

Limited access to ICT (due to a lack or poor organisation of ICT resources), poor quality and inadequate maintenance of hardware as well as unsuitable educational software are also defining elements in teachers' levels of ICT use.

BAYLEY, J., WALLACE, L., et al., (2009), 'Fathers and parenting programmes: barriers and best practice', Community Practitioner 82(4): 28-31.

Overview

Qualitative study on barriers to fathers' involvement with parenting support services, and on best practice for recruitment of fathers.

Study participants

Parenting experts; fathers.

Intervention

Literature review.

Focus groups: 14 fathers, recruited through existing father child groups in Warwickshire.

Questionnaires: self selected, available to fathers through three local children's centres and online. 29 respondents.

Expert interviews: 9 experts interviewed.

Qualitative and thematic analysis of data.

Outcomes: impacts of study characteristics

Literature is scarce, broad and found in such varied sources that some documents are likely to have been omitted from this review.

Samples are small and may not reflect the heterogeneity of father figures and related attitudes.

There is a high level of agreement between data sources.

Key messages

Successful engagement of fathers in parenting programmes requires:

- long-term organisational commitment and staff training,
- targeted advertising materials and a flexibility of approach.

Barriers to fathers accessing services:

- lack of awareness
- work commitments
- female-orientated services
- lack of organisational support
- concerns over programme content.
-

Best practice in recruiting fathers:

- active targeted promotion
- alternative forms of provision
- prioritising fathers within organisations
- varied cultural and ethnic perspectives.

BECTA, 2010, I'm stuck – can you help me? A report into parents' involvement in school work at home, BECTA.

Overview

Becta 2010 conducted an online survey with 2000 children aged between 9 - 13 and 2000 parents of children belonging to the same age range. The survey explored how children and parents approached learning and school work outside the classroom, and how they made use of technology in learning.

Key findings

84% of parents reported that their children ask for help and advice with school work and revision at least once a week, and 53% reporting being asked for help most days or every day. However, 22% of parents reported that they frequently find themselves unable to help children with homework because they don't understand the topic being learned in class.

81 per cent of parents would welcome support and guidance on how best to support their child's learning at home, and 79 per cent of children report that they would like their parents to know more about what they are learning in class so they can provide more support outside the classroom.

Although the evidence suggests that many parents are keen to engage in their children's learning, many schools appear not to engage parents by using technology

to enhance at-home learning. Only 25 per cent of parents received information about their child's learning via online tools and 84 per cent of parents reported that their child's school provided them with little or no resources to help support their child's learning at home. At the same time, 67 per cent of parents reported already using the internet informally as a research tool to help them better understand what their child is learning at school. In general the evidence suggests that levels of parental engagement could be improved if schools made more use of the potential of technology to support at-home learning.

BECTA, 2003, Secondary Schools - ICT and Standards: An Analysis of National Data from Ofsted and QCA, BECTA.

Overview

This report examines the relationship between ICT and standards in secondary schools, based on data obtained on schools from Ofsted inspections for the 2000 - 01 academic year, and further supplemented by test and examinations data from QCA for the same period.

The question asked in this report is: is there a relationship between good ICT learning opportunities and higher standards of achievement? The analysis is conducted at the 'whole school' level, and uses data from Ofsted inspections and QCA test results.

Sample

Data were obtained from Ofsted and from QCA on all of the 4,043 schools inspected in the 2000-01 academic year.

Of these 2,816 were primary schools with pupils taking Key Stage 2 tests, and 599 were secondary schools, the rest were schools outside the parameters of this research.

Of schools within the parameters of the research, 2,582 primary schools and 430 secondary schools were given a full inspection, including ICT grades, and these schools therefore form the basis of the current research.

Data were obtained from QCA on the national tests at Key Stages 2 and 3, and GCSE examinations taken in the summer of 2001.

The attainment targets used were: Level 4 or above at Key Stage 2; Level 5 or above at Key Stage 3; 5 or more GCSEs (grade C or above) at Key Stage 4.

Key Messages

There is a clear and positive relationship between good ICT learning opportunities and higher pupil achievement in secondary education.

In schools that provide good ICT learning opportunities, pupils achieve higher results

in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE level in general. In the overwhelming majority of cases, as the quality of ICT learning opportunities improves so does pupil achievement, in particular when ICT learning opportunities are judged to be good or very good.

Similarly, schools that make good use of ICT within subjects at Key Stage 3 and GCSE level achieve better results than those who do not, especially where such schools have access to good ICT resources.

These findings suggest that where secondary school pupils have good ICT learning opportunities, they are able to apply and develop their ICT capability in subject specific work, and this in turn can have a positive impact on their achievements in other areas.

The report also identifies a number of additional positive relationships between ICT learning opportunities and other measures such as pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance, and the views of their parents about the school.

Previous reports in this series have identified five factors as 'ICT enablers' - those of ICT resources, school leadership, ICT leadership, general teaching and ICT teaching. This analysis confirms these factors play a vital role in supporting the effective use of ICT in schools and in particular ensuring the provision of good ICT learning opportunities. It also reaffirms that the provision of good ICT learning opportunities is not dependent on the socio-economic background of schools and the prior attainment of pupils.

Pupil achievement is higher where ICT learning opportunities are good or better, supported by good school and ICT leadership, and by good teaching.

The quality of ICT learning opportunities is positively related to the attitudes and behaviour of pupils in secondary schools.

There is no notable difference in ICT resources in schools in different socio-economic circumstances. However, schools in higher social grades are able to offer better ICT learning opportunities, although this may be attributable in part to general standards of teaching which tend to be higher in those schools in higher socio-economic grades.

BRODY, G. H., BROWN, A.C., et al., (2004), 'The strong African American families program: translating research into prevention programming', Child development 75(3): 900-917.

Overview

A randomized prevention trial contrasted families who took part in the Strong African American Families Program (SAAF), a preventive intervention for rural African American mothers and their 11-year-olds, with control families.

SAAF is based on a model positing that regulated, communicative parenting causes changes in factors protecting youths from early alcohol use and sexual activity.

Parenting variables included involvement-vigilance, racial socialization, communication about sex, and clear expectations for alcohol use.

Youth protective factors included negative attitudes about early alcohol use and sexual activity, negative images of drinking youths, resistance efficacy, a goal-directed future orientation, and acceptance of parental influence.

Intervention-induced changes in parenting mediated the effect of intervention group influences on changes in protective factors over a 7-month period.

Country/area: Georgia, United States.

Study participants

African American mothers and their 11 year old children.

The primary caregivers in the sample work an average of 39.4 hr per week.

46.3% of the participants live below federal poverty standards; 50.4% live within 150% of the poverty threshold.

Intervention

SAAF aims to prevent or limit early onset of sexual activity and alcohol use, particularly among African American youth in the rural areas of the southern United States.

11 year old children and their families in a rural area were randomly assigned to either the SAAF programme or to a control group, after initial contact by members of the Center for Family Research at the University of Georgia and follow up contacts by community liaisons. Families were paid £100 at both pre and post test stages of the research.

Eight county groupings: four assigned to the intervention group, four to the control group. All families given a pre and post test surrounding the intervention; tests administered verbally by trained staff, alone with each respondent. Both tests were collected from family homes; all families who completed the tests received $100 after each test.

The participants included 150 families in the control counties and 172 families in the intervention counties.

Pre and post tests were administered by African American students and community members. The instruments and procedures were developed with a focus group of 40 African American community members, representative of the sample population. Both pre and post test data collection visits were 2 hours long per family. There was an average of 7 months between pre and post tests.

The program consists of seven consecutive weekly meetings held at community facilities, with separate parent and child skill-building curricula and a family curriculum. Each of the seven meetings includes separate, concurrent training sessions for parents and children, followed by a joint parent – child session during which the families practice the skills they learned in their separate sessions.

Concurrent and family sessions each last 1 hour and parents and youths receive 14 hours of prevention training. At the same times that the intervention families participate in the seven prevention sessions, the control families receive three leaflets via postal mail: one describes aspects of development in early adolescence, another deals with stress management, and the other provides suggestions for encouraging children to exercise.

Parents in the prevention condition are taught involved-vigilant parenting, which includes the consistent use of nurturant-involved parenting practices along with high levels of monitoring and control, adaptive racial socialization strategies, strategies for communication about sex, and the establishment of clear expectations about alcohol use.

Children learn the importance of having and abiding by household rules, adaptive behaviours to use when encountering racism, the importance of forming goals for the future and making plans to attain them, the similarities and differences between themselves and their agemates who use alcohol, realistic estimates of the prevalence of alcohol and other substance use, and resistance efficacy strategies. Together, family members practice communication skills and engage in activities designed to increase family cohesion and the youth's positive involvement in the family.

Outcomes

Rural African American families who participated in prevention programming experienced increases in regulated, communicative parenting practices and youth protective factors.

In control families, both the parent and youth outcome constructs declined. These changes were assessed 3 months after the prevention programming concluded to provide time for any transitory immediate effects to dissipate.

Compared with control-group families, parents and youths in intervention- group families reported greater changes from pre-test to post-test in regulated, communicative parenting and youth protective factors. The significant and positive coefficients indicate that, with pre-test levels of the parent and youth intervention targeted behaviors controlled, exposure to SAAF caused the changes in the intervention group to be greater than the changes in the control group.

Additional analyses were conducted to determine whether comparisons of the control group with only those families actually attending at least one intervention session produced results similar to those of the intent-to-treat analyses on which this report primarily focused. The SEM and multilevel ANCOVA yielded the same significant results as did the primary analyses presented previously. The effect size

of the SAAF intervention increased from .49 to .56 for changes in regulated, communicative parenting.

These analyses support the hypothesis that changes in youth protective factors are mediated through intervention- induced changes in regulated, communicative parenting.

BROOKS, G., PAHL, K., et al., 2008, Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: a review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally, CfBT Education Trust.

Overview

A UK-wide and international review of family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes and practice, designed to develop an international perspective on effective practices in FLLN, looking both at how literacy, language and numeracy are enhanced by programmes, and also at how families' wider outcomes are enabled, The study also sought to identify criteria for promising practice and models of inclusive and diverse FLLN delivery for wide dissemination.

Country/area: national and international literature included in the review.

The study

A meta-study that included analysis of quantitative evidence from evaluations conducted around the world, and a complementary qualitative commentary on a overlapping set of studies.

Literature was identified through researcher's prior knowledge and their reference trails. Programmes only included if they had gathered quantitative data about literacy, language or numeracy for parents or children. Projects were not limited to English speaking countries. All studies involved programmes aimed at families in particular need, both economically and in relation to issues of literacy, language or numeracy.

Half of the studies involved a comparison group; of these, none included alternative treatment. Very few fathers took part in any of the studies reported (typically ≤ 5%).

Summary of interventions

Name	Literacy, language or numeracy	Country (and area)	Numbers of parents	Numbers of children	Research design
Bookstart – 2 studies	literacy, with some language and numeracy data	England(1A Birmingham)	Age 2-3: 28 + 29 Ages 5 and 7: n/a	Age 2–3: 28 + 29 Ages 5 and 7: 41 + 41	Matched groups, post-test only
		England(1B Sheffield)	n/a	23 + 23	Matched groups, post-test only
Boots Books for Babies	Literacy	England (Nottingham City and County)	n/a	c.1700 + c.600	Unmatched groups, 'post-test' only
Child-to-child programme	literacy, language and numeracy	South Africa(Mpumalanga district, KwaZulu-Natal)	n/a	20 + 12	One group pre/post study, with opportunistic comparison group at post-test study
Dialogic reading	literacy and language	England (Sheffield)	n/a	20 + 20 reducing to14–17 + 14–17	Matched groups RCT
Early Start (Basic Skills Agency)	language	England	2001/02: 5922003: 435, of whom 213 returned qres	(2001/02: n/a) 2003: not stated but presumably 435	One group pre/post study
Even Start – 2 studies	literacy and language	USA (6A – In-Depth Study)	101 + 98 reducing to 84 + 75	?	RCT
		USA (6B – National Study)	?		One group pre/post study
Family literacy demonstration programmes (Basic Skills	Literacy	England and Wales(Cardiff, Liverpool, Norfolk,	361	392	One group pre/post study, with comparison group only at 3-

Agency)		North Tyneside)			year follow-up
Family literacy for new groups(Basic Skills Agency)	literacy and language	England and Wales	349	316	One group pre/post study
Family literacy and numeracy in prisons (Basic Skills Agency)	literacy and numeracy	England	43	44	One group pre/post Study
Family numeracy pilot programmes (Basic Skills Agency)	numeracy	England	517	215 overall; 148 + 144 in matched groups	Mainly one group pre/post study, with matched group subsamples of children
FLAME – Family Literacy – Aprendiendo, Mejorando Educando (Learning, Improving,, Educating)	literacy and language	USA(Chicago)	189	120	One group pre/post study
Hilti clubs	literacy and language	Malta	257	365	One group, post-test only
MOCEP (Mother-Child Education Program)	literacy, language and numeracy	Turkey	102 + 115	102 + 115	Matched-groups, pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental studies
PEEP (Peers Early Education Partnership) – 2 studies	literacy, language and numeracy	England (Oxford) (14A –Foundation PEEP)	n/a	64 + 83	Matched-groups pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental studies
		England (Oxford) (14B –Birth To School Study)	294 +297 reducing to210 + 225	301 + 303 reducing to215 + 230	
PEFaL (Parent Empowerment through Family Literacy)	Literacy	Malta	46 + 21	54 + 40	Quasi-RCT

REAL (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy)	literacy, language	England (Sheffield)	88 + 88	88 + 88	RCT

Outcomes

Most family programmes aim to improve the ability of parents to help their children's education. Eight studies report these benefits:

- Family numeracy pilot programmes
- Bookstart in Birmingham
- Family literacy demonstration programmes
- Early Start
- Family literacy for new groups
- Family literacy and numeracy in prisons
- FLAME
- Hilti clubs

12 studies reported benefits to literacy from test data: REAL at age 5, MOCEP, Foundation PEEP, the PEEP Birth To School Study, Bookstart in Birmingham at ages 5 and 7, Bookstart in Sheffield, Boots Books for Babies, Child-to-Child programme, Family literacy demonstration programmes, Family literacy for new groups, Family literacy and numeracy in prisons, FLAME.

In the REAL programme the effect on literacy had been removed by age 7 except for children of mothers with no formal qualifications, and the other three RCT reported no advantage for children involved over controls.

In relation to language, there were benefits reported from tests for eight programmes (MOCEP, Foundation PEEP, the PEEP Birth To School Study, Child-to-Child programme, Family literacy demonstration programmes, Family literacy for new groups, Early Start, Family literacy and numeracy in prisons).

The study with the strongest design, REAL, showed no advantage over the control group.

For numeracy, there were test reported benefits from six programmes: MOCEP, Foundation PEEP, Family numeracy pilot programmes, both Bookstart studies, Child-to-Child programme. However, for the PEEP Birth to School study, the main finding on numeracy was a negative one, in that children from the comparison group made better progress.

Projects reporting a significant impact included:

Name of project	Long term benefits	Long term benefits
	For parents	**For children**
REAL (Raising early attainment in literacy)	n/a	Age 7: Benefit to literacy of children whose mothers had no educational qualifications, but not overall
MOCEP (Mother Child education programme)	Age 7: Benefit to mothers' child-rearing practices maintained, and mothers reported as more involved with their children's schools	Age 7: Benefits for literacy and numeracy maintained End of schooling: higher average grade University: higher proportion attending
PEEP(Foundation) Peers Early Education Partnership	n/a	Ages 5: Benefits for literacy, language and numeracy maintained
Family numeracy pilot programmes	3-year follow-up: Parents rated by their children's teachers as more involved than comparison group with their children's schools	3-year follow-up: Participating children rated by their teachers somewhat better in school than comparison group
Family literacy demonstration programmes	3- and 9-month follow-ups: Continuing improvement in benefits to literacy and ability to help their children 2 1/2.-year follow-up: Continuing improvement in above benefits, plus majority had done further study, some had gained employment, and participating parents were rated by their children's teachers as more involved with their children's schools than comparison group	3-month follow-up: Further benefit 9-month and 2.-year follow-ups: Benefits sustained 2 ½ .-year follow-up: Participating children rated by their teachers somewhat better in school than comparison group

Raising Early Achievement in Literacy: REAL

The REAL project was developed and implemented by teachers at 11 schools in Sheffield. It was of long duration (12–18 months) and low intensity (mainly one home visit per month). It adopted a broad concept of literacy involving not only books but environmental print, writing and aspects of oral language. It was designed to build on families' existing practices, using the ORIM conceptual framework: in this, parents

are seen as providing their children with literacy Opportunities, Recognition of their achievements, Interaction with them around literacy activities, and a Model of literacy.

Teachers at the 11 schools were funded for release for half a day a week to work with eight families each, and given professional training. Besides the monthly home visit, the programme provided: literacy resources, especially books but also writing materials, scrapbooks, games, etc.; centre-based activities, where groups of parents met their teacher; special events, e.g. group visits, including to libraries; and postal communication, including birthday cards, postcards and reminder notes. There was also an optional adult education component for the parents, involving provision of information about local adult education opportunities, and an accredited course about learning to support children's literacy; rather few parents took up this option and the data are not analysed here.

The programme was offered to 176 families, all of whom agreed to be randomly allocated to receive it or not. There were 88 families in the intervention group and 88 in the control group. All lived in areas of multiple deprivation.

Information

Date when programme implemented: 1995–98

What data are analysed in this table? Children's pre- and post-test language and literacy data.

Age range of participants: 2–3 at the beginning.

Type of participants: children living in areas of multiple deprivation in Sheffield.

N of experimental group: 88 at pre-test.

N of control group: 88 at pre-test.

Equivalence of groups: allocated at random; no differences on pre-test

Length of intervention in weeks: 52–78 (12–18 months)

Instruments used Pre-test: Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile (SELDP); British Picture Vocabulary Scale – revised (BPVS-II). Post-test: as pre-test, plus letter recognition test.

Study design: Randomised controlled trial (RCT)

Focus of study: Literacy and language

What impact data are reported? Direct evidence of benefits to children's skills (test data)

What data, if any, are reported on wider benefits of learning? None quantified

What follow-up data, if any, are reported? Data on children's attainment at age 7

What data, if any, are reported on control group? Direct evidence of benefits to children's skills (test data)

What impact measures, if any, can be calculated? Effect sizes

If the programme appears to have been effective, what insights into *why* it was effective can be derived from the report? Principally the dedication of the teachers, the long duration, and the ability to overcome disadvantage for children whose mothers had no educational qualifications.

Other comments: most rigorous study in the field.

Results: the results appear to show that the programme had a strong impact while it was running, that is until the children entered school at 5, but that the main effect had washed out by the time the children were 7 – *except for the particular subgroup of children whose mothers had no educational qualifications*. For that group the programme appeared to have had a countervailing effect to their mothers' lack of qualifications.

PEEP (Foundation) Peers Early Education Partnership

PEEP is a birth-to-five intervention programme which aims to raise educational attainment (particularly literacy, but also numeracy, self esteem and readiness to learn) by supporting parents; it was first implemented in areas of economic disadvantage in Oxford in 1995. The programme offers materials, group sessions at local venues and home visits to parents. One of the aims was for parents to know and use ORIM to support children's learning.

The aim of the Birth To School Study evaluation was to investigate the effects of PEEP on parents and children within the area it served. The study lasted for seven years, and aimed to determine whether the programme had an effect on the community as a whole, and also families who attended a group session before their child was three years old. The evaluation was conducted using a quasi-experimental design, comparing a sample of families from the PEEP catchment area (regardless of whether they attended the groups or not) with a sample of families from a similar area elsewhere. The team followed a cohort of (initially) 300 children in the PEEP area, and a comparison group of equal size in another town in Oxfordshire, from birth in 1998/99 to school entry in 2003/04.

Findings included evidence about the effect of PEEP on parents, on children's cognitive development and on the socio-emotional development of the children. The findings for children showed that those in the PEEP area fell significantly behind the comparison group at age two, but by age five had caught up a lot. The study concluded that early interventions lead to cognitive and social benefits for children, particularly those at risk of low educational achievement.

Family Numeracy Programmes

An evaluation (Basic Skills Agency 1998) found that the children who took part in the family numeracy pilot programmes made significantly more progress than the children in a comparison group. Parents became more involved with school activities and supporting in class.

The programme adhered to a clear model: a minimum of 1-hour weekly joint sessions, a minimum of 2 hours weekly of separate sessions for the parents, a minimum of 1 hours for the children, and a minimum of 40–45 hours for the programme. Over 500 families took part in the pilot programme.

The evaluation examined: progress of the participating children and of a comparison group of children; changes in numeracy-focused home activity; and other areas of progress and progression. The participating children's progress on both the number scale and the mathematical language scale was statistically significantly greater than that of the comparison children.

In a subsequent study, *Family Numeracy Adds On*, by Brooks and Hutchison (2002), teachers who were then teaching some of the children who had participated were interviewed. Data were collected on 60 participants, and on 60 comparison children. Family numeracy children were rated more highly in relation to their numeracy skills than comparison children, and the support they received from their families was superior. Family numeracy children also had higher motivation and their parents were twice as likely as those of comparison children to be involved with their child's school.

Family literacy demonstration programmes (Basic Skills Agency)

These Basic Skills Agency programmes came into operation in early 1994. There were originally five – one in Wales (Cardiff) and the rest in England: Liverpool, London Borough of Newham, Norfolk, and North Tyneside. The Newham programme, the only one based in an area with a significant linguistic minority population, ceased after a few months. The others were evaluated in 1994–95 by a team from the National Foundation for Educational Research with a further follow-up in 1997 (Brooks *et al.* 1997). Except for a comparison group of children in the 1997 follow-up, the evaluation had a one-group pre-test/post-test design.

The programmes were mainly based in primary schools, but were jointly staffed by early years teachers and adult literacy tutors. Families were eligible to attend if they had at least one child aged between 3 and 6 at the start of the course, and provided parent and child attended together. In addition, a crèche was provided for any other children in the family aged under 3 who accompanied the family. The programmes ran for 12 weeks, and provided three sessions a week: two of three hours, with parents and children in separate rooms, plus one joint session of about two hours. In their separate sessions, the parents worked on their own literacy, as well as learning more about how to help their children's language and literacy development, and preparing an activity to undertake with them in the joint session. Meanwhile, the children received high-quality early years provision appropriate to their ages and stages of development: they always had a wide range of activities to choose from.

Basic information

Date when programme implemented: 1994–95

What data are analysed in this table? Children's pre- and post-test language and literacy data.

Age range of participants 3:00–6:11 (at beginning of course)

Type of participants: Children in disadvantaged areas in Cardiff, Liverpool, Norfolk and North Tyneside; 50% female; 92% white; 97% monolingual English-speaking.

Study design: One-group pre-test/post-test study

Focus of study: Literacy (parents and children); Language (children)

Number of experimental group: 392 at pre-test.

Number of comparison group: No comparison group

Equivalence of groups: n/a

Length of intervention in weeks: 12

Instruments used: (Language) Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (British standardisation); (Reading) Peabody Individual Achievement Tests, reading subtest (British standardisation); (Writing) prompts devised by research team;

Ratio gains: were not stated and could not be calculated

What impact data are reported? Direct evidence of benefits to parents' skills (test data); Direct evidence of benefits to children's skills (test data); Indirect evidence of benefits to parents' ability to help their children (written accounts, interviews, questionnaires).

What follow-up data, if any, are reported? Parents' skills continuing to improve Children's skills at least maintained; Parents having gone on to further study; Parents having gained new or better job; Parents more involved with children's schools.

What data, if any, are reported on control/comparison groups? Only some statistical comparisons with unseen control groups during the programmes, and teachers' reports on some family literacy and comparison children at 1997 follow-up

If the programme appears to have been effective, what insights into why it was effective can be derived from the report? A range of factors: joint staffing, detailed planning, responsiveness to parents' needs and wishes, and, above all, the joint sessions.

Any other comments: The absence of an explicit control group is a limitation.

Follow-ups

Data were gathered at the beginning and end of the courses from four cohorts of families: those which participated in the summer and autumn terms of 1994, and the spring and summer terms of 1995. Follow-up data were gathered on the first three cohorts 12 weeks after the end of the courses, on the first two cohorts nine months after the end of the courses, and in early 1997 on all the parents and children from all four cohorts who could be traced. Also in 1997, interviews were carried out with

the teachers of a sub-sample of the children who were traced.

The findings from the first two follow-ups can be summarised as follows:

- at the 12-week follow-up the children had made further gains in vocabulary and reading
- at the 9-month follow-up the children had maintained those gains
- in writing, they continued to make gains on each occasion.

The 1997 findings can be summarised as follows:

The 237 children re-contacted had on average maintained the gains in vocabulary, reading and writing made during the courses.

Interviews were carried out with the class teachers of 99 former family literacy children. The teachers were asked to give ratings of these children and of a comparison child for each of them. The comparison child was the child of the same sex from the same class who had the nearest date of birth to the family literacy child. The ratings were on eight indicators of educational performance and inclination. On five items there was no significant difference on average between the two groups, but on three items the family literacy children were rated significantly higher: support from family, classroom behaviour, and probable success in school. The teachers were also asked about the involvement with school of the parents of both groups of children: the family literacy parents were rated twice as likely to be involved with the school.

Mother-Child Education Program, Turkey

The Mother-Child Education Program (MOCEP) developed out of the 'Turkish Early Enrichment Project. The duration was 25 weeks, and it was targeted at five-year-olds and their mothers, in order to reach children in the year before they started school. The programme was delivered via four or five home visits and weekly group meetings lasting three hours for mothers, who then implemented pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities at home with their children by means of worksheets intended to be used every day for 30 minutes; the mothers also received information about child development, and about reproductive health and family planning. The families targeted were those where the children were thought to be at risk of educational failure because of their environment. The programme also expanded: between 1991 and 1998 it reached just over 21 000 families (in 1996 the population of Turkey was 62 million), and by 2004 had reached over 180,000 mothers and children, at an average cost of US$30 per family. In the early 2000s the yearly intake was 30,000 families.

Evaluation of the MOCEP began in 1986, using a pre-test/post-test matched-groups quasi experimental design.

Basic information

Study design: Matched-groups pre-test/post-test quasi-experiment

Focus of study: Literacy, language and numeracy

What impact data are reported? Direct evidence of benefits to children's skills (test data).

What follow-up data, if any, are reported? Children's attainments after one year of school

What data, if any, are reported on the comparison group? As for intervention group

If the programme appears to have been effective, what insights into why it was effective can be derived from the report? Given that there was no direct input to the children, the significant factors must have been within the provision for mothers, and appear to have been the integration for them of ideas on how children develop, how to help their children, and how to modify their child-rearing practices to best effect.

Any other comments: this was a well designed and implemented and highly effective programme.

Follow-ups

(1) One year after the end of the programme, and therefore at the end of the children's first year in school, 92 experimental group and 85 comparison group families were reassessed. Children were again tested on literacy and numeracy using experimenter-devised instruments, and the end-of- year scores awarded by their teachers were gathered.

The intervention group children had a higher average score than the comparison group for literacy (84.7 vs 73.7, p=0.003), for numeracy (94.9 vs 82.8, p=0.002), and for end-of-year grades (4.8 vs 4.6, p=0.023), and their mothers reported them as having started reading earlier on average. Every mother in the intervention group described her child as having been ready for school, whereas only 28% of comparison group mothers (N=24) did so.

The teachers rated the intervention group children more favourably than the comparison group on several aspects of readiness for school, and reported the intervention group mothers as more interested in their children's schooling and as attending more school meetings. Intervention group mothers continued to be less likely to beat or shout at their children, and more likely to explain, divert attention, and allow messy play.

(2) Both participating children and members of the comparison group were followed up at the end of their schooling. The MOCEP participants' average grade was 11.21, while that of the comparison group was 10.26. No statistical test of this difference was reported, but it was claimed to be significant.

(3) Participants and controls were again followed up at age 24: 44.7% of participants were attending university, whereas only 30.6% of controls were. The participants had an average vocabulary test score of 14.11; the controls' average score was 12.22. As with the previous data, no statistical tests were reported, but the differences were claimed to be significant.

Overall, the data support the interpretation that this was a highly effective and well-designed programme. It is also notable that this longitudinal study kept track of the students for 19 years.

BURKE, M. A. AND KING-BERG, Y., 2005, Social Contexts of Educational Praxis: Ecologies of Latino Parents' Engagement and Community Development, American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.

Overview

Parent engagement outcomes are analyzed using the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework and Epstein's framework of parent participation types on a five year Project GRAD School Reform Project targeting 15 K-12 schools with over 20,000 students. The Graduation Really Achieves Dreams Project (GRAD) focuses on academic success for all students who receive the proper preparation. The study explores how the parent education component has evolved to support parents' engagement in the academics of urban education. It considers parents' engagement as mediation in relation to various forms of capital and space. The results indicate that the value of training parents also adds capital to the community's overall academic and economic development.

Parent engagement outcomes are analyzed using the Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework and Epstein's (2001) framework of six types of participation on a five year Project GRAD School Reform Project. Project GRAD Los Angeles is an innovative early college outreach program that works with K-16 teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders, and businesses to increase student achievement in measurable ways, through state administrated and nationally-normed test scores, high school graduation rates, and college attendance and completion.

The project ran from 1999-2004.

Country/area: USA (Los Angeles).

Study participants

The Project targeted 15 K-12 Los Angeles Unified School District schools with a total student population of over 20,000. More than 93.2 percent of the project's students are Latino, 3.8 percent are African American, 60 percent are Limited English Proficient, and 90.6 percent qualify for free and reduced lunches.

The total number of parents that received Epstein's Type 1 parent education support in the first project year was 800. A total of 908 parents received this support in year two.

1,600 Parents As Tutors parent participants received program surveys and a convenience sample of 400 parents were invited to participate in monthly follow-up focus groups to determine if the Parents As Tutors Program component contributed to parents' increased participation in educational activities for career development .

Intervention

Based on the EPE framework and Epstein's six types of parent participation, the study identifies effective engagement strategies used with Latino parents to support their children's academic achievement in an urban school community by answering the following questions:

1. What key concepts helped parents support their children's academic growth, college preparation, application, and admission into colleges?

2. What was the increase of parent engagement types of curricular involvement and/or college awareness activities during the five project years?

3. What forms of capital and kinds of spaces supported the engagement of parents in their child's academic success during the five project years?

4. How did parents' engagement experiences impact their own educational growth or career development that may contribute to their own and the community's economic development?

The following methods were used to address each research question:

1. An analysis of parent engagement activities in relation to curricular content and student achievement were compared to parent and teacher survey results and follow-up interviews. Key concepts were identified that helped Latino parents adequately support their children's college preparation, application, and admission into colleges.

2. The increase of parent engagement types of curricular involvement and/or college awareness activities were categorized in a table using Epstein's (2001) framework of six types of participation.

3. Results of parent, teacher, and student surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant observations were coded to identify engaged parents' human, social, and material capital in relation to school-based academic, school-based non-academic, and community / home-based spaces used to support their child's academic success.

4. Parent engagement experiences that impact a parent's own educational growth or career development and that may contribute to their own or the community's economic development survey and focus group responses were categorized to identify their impact on own economic needs and the needs of their community. For example, Pacoima Beautiful, a community group, annually organizes a four week field programme that integrates scientific research with service learning. Project activities have included monitoring air quality that brings community leaders together to discuss environmental problems on commercial development near a local dam. Parents are recruited to support their children in the field study along with college professors and other specialists.

A culturally diverse evaluation team was assembled to collectively review all research results to ensure that the coded responses were not filtered by one's own culture.

Outcomes

Schools can compensate for the problems associated with Latino parents living in economically depressed areas by providing adequate academic support training that will increase the human, social, and material capital required and the variation of activities required for an equitable education for all program students.

100% of the participating elementary schools exceeded their Academic Performance Index (API) targets with gains of 196 points from 1999 to 2003 for Project GRAD, compared to the State's average gain of 98 points.

On the California Standards Test (CST), gains for Project GRAD during the 2001 to 2003 time period increased by 12.9 percentile points compared to a state average gain of 6.3 percentile points.

Students whose parents consistently participated in the Parents As Tutors Program made the highest achievement gains.

Parents as tutors programme: parental report included raised confidence in working with the school to gain school resources, working with community groups, working in partnership with school leaders with external agencies.

An analysis of the parent engagement data from this study indicates that nearly 70% of parents who participated in the Parents As Tutors program component reported that their training had a positive impact in their understanding of their own educational growth.

Although most parents' earnings have not significantly increased since the inception of the Parents As Tutors Program three years ago, over 50% of the survey and focus group participating parents reported that they have taken classes to increase their job skills including classes in reading, math, and child development discipline.

C4EO, 2010, Improving children's and young people's achievement, behavioural and emotional outcomes through effective support and intervention with mothers, fathers and carers of 7-19 year olds.

Overview

This summary is taken from the research review which identifies what works when it comes to delivering support and intervention with mothers, fathers and carers of seven to19-year olds in order to improve children's and young people's attainment, behaviour, and emotional outcomes. Based on a rapid review of the research, involving systematic searching of literature and presentation of key data, the review summarises the best available evidence to enable strategic managers to improve

practice and outcomes for children and young people.

The four research questions:

- What are the family support needs of parents and carers of children aged seven to 19 years?
- What is the impact of school-based initiatives and community-based initiatives that support parents in improving their children's outcomes?
- What works in engaging parents and carers in interventions to improve child outcomes?
- Are interventions which target parents cost-effective in improving children's outcomes?

Matrix Evidence carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted the data work.

The study

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, through recommendations from a group of experts on policy, research and practice on families, parents and carers, and by considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting').

The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. A systematic approach was used to critically appraise the evidence.

The methods used attempt to reduce bias in the selection of literature and the information extracted from the evidence, to ensure that the review's findings are as objective as possible. Data contained within the data annexe was obtained by a combination of search methods but primarily via online access to known government publications and access to data published by the Office for National Statistics.

Outcomes

School-based programmes that work with parents and carers improve key outcomes including child behaviour, educational attainment, school attendance and substance misuse, as well as family relationships and stability.

Fear of stigmatisation is a significant barrier to the uptake of services.

The review found few cost-effectiveness studies. Some evidence suggests effective programmes for child conduct disorders and full service extended schools can be delivered at a low cost.

The review did not find robust evidence of direct causal links between policy

interventions designed to address family income (for example, financial incentives extended to parents to enter or increase employment) and improved child outcomes.

School-based programmes are likely to minimise the fear of stigmatisation which is more often associated with referrals to specialist services.

The most commonly reported needs of parents and carers are advice and emotional support. Because these needs can often be met without referral to specialist services, delivering support through schools may be more cost-effective than alternative service delivery models.

Community-based programmes can work in improving child behaviour, improving child welfare, and reducing time spent in care and juvenile crime.

Interventions are more likely to be effective when they are informed by the views of parents identified through a thorough needs assessment at the outset. This is particularly true of interventions with groups such as fathers (both resident and non-resident) and minority ethnic parents.

The evidence base

The review identified a number of key gaps in our understanding of parent and carer-focused support:

- A clear understanding of the needs of fathers and minority ethnic parents.
- Comparisons across intervention types to determine relative effectiveness of different service offerings.
- Evidence of child outcomes, measured using standardised questionnaires so that results from different studies can be compared more easily, or reporting outcomes from the child's point of view.
- Studies reporting costs and evaluating programme effectiveness, so that high quality economic analysis can accurately assess the cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit of the different interventions.

Key messages

More evidence is needed on the cost-effectiveness of interventions. A greater focus on the systematic collection of robust cost and outcome data would enable policymakers to ensure resources are spent only on parental interventions with demonstrable efficacy.

Interventions that include support for parents and carers are often effective in improving outcomes for children, although rigorous evaluations are not common.

The range of support on offer to parents is diverse. It includes counselling, education, vocational training, parenting skills training, helplines and other information provision services, and financial support.

Key ingredients for effective practice in supporting families in community settings are:

- using joined-up multi-agency approaches
- having a well-trained workforce
- using media to engage hard-to-reach people
- using both practical and therapeutic interventions simultaneously.

Elements of effective school-based practice in supporting families include:

- offering a one-to-one approach to parents
- providing face-to-face support
- offering a range of services in one location
- maintaining the effects of the intervention in the long-term by, for example, running 'reunion' sessions for attendees at interventions.

C4EO, 2010, Improving the safety, health and wellbeing of children through improving the physical and mental health of mothers, fathers and carers.

Overview

This summary is taken from the research review which tells us what works in improving the safety, health and wellbeing of children through improving the physical and mental health of mothers, fathers and carers. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching of literature and presentation of key data.

King's College London carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted the data work.

Key messages

- A range of central and local government departments shares responsibility for maximising the safety, health and wellbeing of children through improving the physical and mental health of mothers, fathers and carers. Implementation at the local level is by a wide group of professional and non-professional staff in the community.

- Adult services can provide valuable examples of providing a personalised approach to problems in order to produce personalised outcomes, so that targeted support is not seen as stigmatising by parents, children and young people.

- It is important to offer the opportunity for parents and carers to access services at different points in time over a sustained period, so that early access to services can be made possible, at whatever stage of the problem.

- There is a positive association between early intervention and better outcomes, but late intervention is better than no intervention at all.

- There is an association between parental health difficulties and children's safety, health and wellbeing, but the exact mechanisms involved are only partially understood. As causal relationships are difficult to establish, it cannot be said that negative outcomes are inevitable and care needs to be taken in assessing the impact on children of parental health difficulties. Both the characteristics of the parents/carers and the characteristics of children/young people themselves can play a role in determining outcomes. Resilience in children has been identified as a key factor in mediating poor outcomes for them even in what might appear to be adverse circumstances.

- The Think Family Pathfinders and the related Family Intervention Projects have begun to show some encouraging results. The flexible personalised way in which they respond to both children's and adults' needs is viewed extremely positively by families and the professionals working with them. Evaluations of the programmes stress the value of flexible working from adult services, information sharing and joint commissioning in delivering a more cohesive service for vulnerable families.

- An evaluation of Family Action projects – which offer a mixture of practical, therapeutic and emotional support to families – has identified some very encouraging results in terms of outcomes. The quality of the relationship between professionals and the families they supported was found to be a crucial lever for change.

C4EO, 2010, Improving children's outcomes by supporting parental and carer couple relationships and reducing conflict within families, including domestic violence.

Overview

This summary is taken from the research review which tells us what works in improving children's outcomes by supporting parental and carer-couple relationships and reducing conflict within families, including domestic violence. It is based on a rapid review of the research literature involving systematic searching of literature and presentation of key data.

Researchers based at the Family and Parenting Institute and at the University of Newcastle carried out this review on behalf of the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO). The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) conducted the data work.

Key messages

- More negative outcomes for children, including lower educational attainment, conduct problems and emotional difficulties, are associated with the

experience of parental divorce. However, the majority of children with this experience develop well.

- There is a lack of relevant research and large gaps in the evidence base concerning which interventions work best in the UK for individual families affected by violence, conflict and relationship breakdown.

- Teaching children about relationships, from an early age, may be the best way to effect change. According to user feedback, services that facilitate anonymous access to information and advice are very popular, for example, web- and media based services. More research is needed to assess the role and effect of these services.

CARPENTIER, V. AND LALL, M., 2005, Review of successful parental involvement practice for 'hard to reach' parents, London, Institution of Education, University of London.

Overview

A review of parental engagement projects in London, focussing on 'hard to reach' parents.

Country/area: London, England.

Study participants

Ocean Maths project, Tower Hamlets. Aimed to increase achievement in maths through parent and student workshops along with planned parental involvement in homework.

Mother tongue GCSE (TGCSE), Islington and Hackney. Hour-long, weekly lessons for parents and pupils offered in Turkish for those who spoke this as their mother tongue, leading to a GSCE exam.

Black Parents Group, Hillingdon. Termly discussions between parents and staff, aimed at raising the achievement of African and African-Caribbean students (particularly boys), especially through improving their behaviour, by means of listening to parents' voices.

Gypsy Roma Support Group, Hammersmith and Fulham. Small-scale project aimed at supporting local Roma and Traveller families, eventually including 12 'core' parents.

The study

Research based on a comprehensive literature review, questionnaires sent to all London local authorities (15), and case study visits to four projects in London focused on 'hard-to-reach' parents of children in secondary schools.

38 semi-structured interviews across four projects, including teachers, parents and students.

19 schools took part, 8 of which were primary schools. All schools located in areas of economic deprivation.

Projects visited were selected on the basis of evidence from the literature review: studies identified cultural and socio-economic barriers for home parenting that exacerbate differentials in terms of achievement'.

Selection criteria for case study projects:

- To involve parents (preferably in their children's learning)
- To prioritise hard to reach parents
- To operate in secondary schools

Outcomes

Ocean Maths Project: increased rates of completion and quality of homework, and a rise in pupil attainment. All results monitored by the project staff and the school. Progress observed not only in maths but also in other subjects. Completion rates increased by at least 22%. Results in KS3 maths increased: 10% in one school, 12% in another.

The main lesson from this intervention is the need for any family/parent support intervention to be focused on improving learning and to be fully integrated within the school and shared across schools in the locality.

Mother tongue GCSE: promising GCSE attainment rates (83% of pupils gained an 'A' grade). The net effect of this intervention was to improve parent–school relations and to create better links with the wider community. Bridging between parents and school thought to lead to improved levels of confidence amongst pupils.

Gypsy Roma Support Group: improved attainment; two pupils experienced a significant improvement in their grades, thought to be owing in part to mentoring support and greater parental involvement. Punctuality and discipline reported to have improved for children.

Black Parents Group: the project has had a positive impact on behaviour and on achievement. feedback from parents, children and management staff suggest fewer incidences of miscommunication, and that this will boost the confidence of the pupils and improve the schools' atmosphere.

The parents led the discussion group and were proactive in seeking ways of influencing and modifying behaviour.

Key messages

The central message from all these successful interventions is the need for family and parent support to be carefully targeted to meet a real need, and for parents to be

actively involved in shaping and leading activities.

CATSAMBIS, S., 2001, Expanding knowledge of parental involvement in children's secondary education: connections with high school seniors' academic success, Social Psychology of Education 5: 149-177.

Overview

This paper analyzes data from the parent and student components of the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to investigate family educational involvement in secondary education. It examines connections between parental involvement practices and the educational outcomes of high school seniors.

Country/area: USA.

Study participants

The Base-Year NELS:88 survey is based on a representative sample of USA 8th graders (13-14 years of age) in 1988, and consists of student, parent, teacher, and school administrator surveys.

Longitudinal data were collected at 2-year intervals from 1990 to 1994. The paper is based on the Base-Year (1988) and the Second Follow up (1992) studies, the only 2 years that included surveys from parents.

Analyses for this study use data from 13,580 parents and their children who were surveyed in 1988 and 1992. Students who dropped out of school and their parents are not included in this study.

Outcomes

The variable most strongly related to achievement growth by 12^{th} grade students are indicators of prior test scores during middle school, and socioeconomic background.

Parental involvement indicators have a weak association with pupil achievement growth in high school.

Utilizing multiple involvement indicators for the 8th and 12th grades, the study concludes that the nature of relationships between parental involvement and 12th grade educational outcomes depends on the type of parental practices and educational outcomes considered.

Once student background and achievement characteristics have been controlled for, academic and behavioural supervision have a small positive association with achievement growth. Participating in activities that support the school has a small negative coefficient. College encouragement (raising aspirations) has positive coefficients for achievement, which, although very small (betas ranging between /.06 and .04) are some of the strongest ones found.

In relation to credits earned, parental encouragement is strong, with indicators betas of .20 for math and science and .16 for English. In relation to eighth graders, parental expectations are also important, having the strongest association with high school credits completed, and is stronger for maths than for science or English (betas of .12 for maths credits and .09 for both science and English). These coefficients are almost equal to those for socioeconomic status.

However, a number of parental involvement indicators are associated with seniors' enrolment in an academic high school program and with their coursework in core academic subjects. Second to prior test scores, the second most important variables are indicators of parental involvement.

The frequency of parental/teen communication has a small negative association with the number of credits completed for 12th graders, but it has a slight positive effect for 8th graders. Parental contact with the school, even at 8th grade level, is negatively linked to the number of high school credits completed in the three subjects.

The most important parental factor in terms of completion of credits, for all groups of families, is parental knowledge of coursework – parents to closely monitor school work tend to have students who complete more credits in science and English (betas of .03, ,05, and ,08 for math, science and English credits).

Parental contact with the school has a moderate negative coefficient to courses completed, however, parental support of school has some positive associations with the number of credits that 12th graders completed in maths, science and English. Parental peer contacts have a very small positive coefficient for credits completed in science and English.

High levels of educational expectations, consistent encouragement, and actions that enhance the learning opportunities of children are the family practices that are positively associated with the above educational experiences of high school seniors.

The relationships between parental involvement and educational outcomes exist regardless of students' socioeconomic or race/ethnic background and regardless of whether parental practices are measured in the middle grades or in high school.

COX, M., ABBOTT, C., et al., 2004, A Review of the Research Literature Relating to ICT and Attainment, BECTA.

Overview

The literature review was commissioned by the British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (Becta), on behalf of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), to investigate the effects of ICT on attainment, based on evidence from the published research literature.

Key Messages

The evidence from the literature shows a positive effect of specific uses of ICT on pupils' attainment in almost all the National Curriculum subjects, the most substantial

positive effects being in mathematics, science and English at all key stages.

There is a strong relationship between the ways in which ICT has been used and the resulting attainment outcomes. This suggests that the crucial component in the use of ICT within education is the teacher and their pedagogical approaches.

The positive impact on attainment is greatest for ICT resources which are embedded in teachers' practices for a prolonged period.

Using ICT at home or after school can contribute to the learning experiences of pupils, but not many pupils have integrated this use of ICT into their school experiences. One reason could be that teachers do not have direct control over what pupils do outside school hours. It may be beneficial if teachers were able to set homework tasks that involved the use of ICT in ways that connect to the home use of technology.

The review confirms that the use of ICT can have a positive impact on pupils' learning, where usage is closely related to learning objectives, and when the choice of how to use ICT is relevant to teaching and learning purposes.

DYSON, A., F. GALLANNAUGH, et al., 2010, Closing the Gap in Educational Achievement and Improving Emotional Resilience for Children and Young People with Additional Needs, C4EO.

Overview

The review addresses five questions which were set by the C4EO Theme Advisory Group (TAG), a group of experts in schools and communities policy, research and practice. These questions are:

- What are the challenges for schools of working with children with additional needs? In what ways do they work with other services to address these challenges?

- What does the evidence tell us about what works best in narrowing the achievement gap for those with additional needs, including strategies for maximising learning and re-engaging children and young people in learning?

- What does the evidence tell us about what works best in improving the emotional resilience of those with additional needs?

- Are schools and their partners focusing on early intervention? If so, is integrated working across children's services helping to deliver early intervention? How is the CAF being used to support this? What evidence is there to link this with improved outcomes for children with additional needs?

- What are the implications of providing services for children with additional needs at a local level (for example, for governance, strategy, and frontline delivery)?

Review

This review is based on 60 key sources, chosen because they focus on generic issues to do with service organisation and delivery. These are a mixture of intervention studies, research reviews, and other studies that explore the additional needs context or the relationships between a range of factors and outcomes for children and young people. Just under half of these were drawn from 1,417 sources assessed by the initial scoping review, of which 533 sources were identified as likely to be relevant to the review questions. The others were identified through 'reference harvesting' from the first group of studies, or were recommended to us by the Theme Advisory Group. Eight of these recommendations were added after the research review at the knowledge review stage. All of the 533 sources identified by the scoping review were screened by reading abstracts or full texts in order to identify the studies that seemed to us most likely to be useful in addressing the review questions.

There is relatively little robust research of this kind. What there is points to what works under particular circumstances, rather than what will reliably work anywhere. There is, therefore, a good deal of deal of work for strategic managers to do in 'translating' findings into their own context.

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, recommendations from the C4EO Thematic Advisory Group, and considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting'). The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review.

The review also contains examples of local practice sent in from the sector, which have been assessed and validated by specialists in the schools and communities field using agreed criteria. Evidence was gathered from service providers during discussion groups at C4EO knowledge workshops. Evidence from parents and carers was collected via C4EO's Parents and Carers Panel and children and young people's views have also been included. These came from C4EO's children and young people's networks. C4EO also carried out a survey of children and young people. Service users and providers are also contributors to published studies included within the review.

Key messages

There is evidence that some broadly targeted interventions involving schools can help to overcome barriers to learning and improve emotional resilience. They include full-service extended schools, multi-agency teams working with schools, alternative curriculum programmes and wide-ranging social and emotional programmes, such as SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning). Impacts on attainment may emerge in the longer term.

Strong strategic leadership is needed to guide schools and services in developing their own approaches, which need to be tailored to local circumstances and build on local research, evaluation and analysis.

Promising interventions are likely to:

- address several goals simultaneously and work at multiple levels (child or young person, family, school and community)
- offer group work and individual support, linked into schools' universal approaches to the environment, the curriculum, teaching and learning
- build on the strengths and interests of children and young people
- involve partnership working between schools and other services
- focus on early intervention
- involve careful identification and assessment of needs, supported by tools such as the Common Assessment Framework (CAF).

There is promising evidence that some programmes and interventions have achieved positive outcomes for children and young people with additional needs:

- Full-service extended schools, multi-agency teams working with schools and alternative curriculum programmes can all address barriers to learning and help to improve emotional wellbeing. As well as impacts on outcomes for children and young people, they can impact variously on family functioning and circumstances and, in some cases, on community relationships and opportunities for local people.
- Small-group work, one-to-one approaches and out-of-hours programmes can improve children's emotional functioning, social skills and relationships. Individual interventions are likely to be most effective if they are part of whole-school approaches to social and emotional wellbeing, such as the SEAL programme.

DYSON, A., E. BERESFORD, et al., (2007), The Manchester Transition Project: Implications for the Development of Parental Involvement in Primary Schools, DfES.

Overview

The purpose of the report is to evaluate the Manchester Transition project, which aims to increase the capacity of school staff through building up confidence and skills to support parents, particularly at the transition into foundation stage and then from foundation stage into year one.

Country/area: UK - Manchester

Study participants

8 schools participated in the project, all from areas of high disadvantage

Interviews generally undertaken with the head, the TA and any other trained staff, the parent involvement coordinator, the year one teacher, and sometimes with parents nominated by the school.

Intervention

The project works over two years to train staff – two in nursery and then two in year one; nursery staff receive 3 ½ days training, year one staff, 2 ½ days; both have access to coaching sessions. These staff are encouraged to share what they are learning with others in the school through staff meetings and meetings with heads and governors.

In relation to parents, within the foundations stage, there is a home visit or a one on one interview between staff and parents, a class meeting where parents meet other staff and other parents, booklets and other day to day means of communication, a stay and play session, a parenting workshop and a focus group used to consult with parents. There is also further support available through a teaching assistant.
In the year one phase, there is a class meeting to give parents information, a pack of activities to use at home before the children arrive at school, workshops on literacy and numeracy and a celebratory assembly. The focus in both strands is on building trust and relationships between parents and schools.

Outcomes

The evidence suggests that the Project generates its effects by:

- encouraging schools to systematise and extend their parental involvement activities;
- acting as a catalyst for the development of staff skills and school action;
- supporting the practical implementation of well trialled and sustainable strategies and resources;
- building the confidence of participating staff;
- developing staff's awareness of and contacts with other agencies; and
- short term investment which then convinced schools of the benefits of the work and often led them to find the capacity and funding to embed strategies.

All the participating schools could identify new practices stimulated by the Project which had become embedded in the school**.** Where this was most evident, a number of facilitators seem to be at work. These include head teacher commitment, the identification of a staff member responsible for parental involvement and with appropriate qualities, skills and commitment to make contact with disengaged families, opportunities for supportive interaction between staff in school, training followed by coaching for the staff in school, networking between schools, the involvement of teaching assistants, experimentation with new practices in the early stages of participation, and the eventual formalisation of practices. In general terms, inhibiting factors were the obverse of these. In addition, failures to find ways of sustaining some practices without funding, distractions because of other initiatives and imperatives, a sense of being unable to cope with the extent of parents' problems, and problems in linking with other agencies might act as inhibitors.

Key messages

Parental involvement initiatives cannot rest on the assumption that school staff feel comfortable or confident in working with parents, and also have to take into account the barriers to involvement – particularly in deprived communities- which need to be actively overcome.

Training and coaching for teachers can have a considerable impact on school practice. There is some scope for strengthening initial teacher training standards in this respect, though school-focused continuing professional development is perhaps a more powerful route and this project offers a cost effective model of how this can be done.

The role of teaching assistants has proved powerful, though they need adequate training to play a significant role in working with parents. This could be better reflected in national guidelines.

The Project suggests that school improvement strategies in respect of parental involvement are important. There are implications for strengthening the place of parental involvement in both head teacher standards and the Ofsted framework.

The Project suggests that the local authority may have a key role to play in promoting parental involvement work, perhaps within a broader parenting strategy.

Training existing school staff to embed basic opportunities for parents in school practice and to signpost parents to further help can make a contribution to the Extended School and Sure Start agendas on parenting support, family learning and transition.

Parental engagement works best when it takes place within the context of whole school development

ERION, R. J., 2006, Parent tutoring: A meta-analysis. Education and Treatment of Children, 29 (1), 79-106.

Overview

The aims of this study were to provide a synthesis of research on programs in which parents provided academic instruction to their own children. While this review did not limit itself to interventions targeting improved reading, this was the objective of most programs studied. Other interventions included those focused on spelling, written expression and maths.

20 group design studies provided 32 experimental comparisons. Of these comparisons:

- Only 5 did not include some measure of literacy. All five of these measured mathematical skills.

- 27 included some measure of literacy:
    - 14 measured reading comprehension alone
    - 2 measured word recognition alone
    - 4 measured reading fluency alone

- 7 measured some combination of the above outcomes. All studies measuring more than one outcome included at least one literacy outcome.

Included studies were conducted between 1971 and February 2004. The geographical range is unclear.

Study participants

The combined number of families participating in the 20 studies is 1408 (781 experimental, 627 control). However, this includes double counting of participants involved in more than one experiment. We estimate that approximately 1015 unique participants were involved in the 20 group design studies. (The exact number was not given in the report.) Of these, an estimated 875 participated in studies which measured literacy outcomes.

Studies included pupils ranging from kindergarten to grade 6 (ages 5-12).

Intervention characteristics

Erion does not provide a definition of "parent tutoring", noting only that his focus was on interventions based around parental involvement in "learning activities at home" (p. 80).

In addition to measuring the general effectiveness of parent tutoring programs, this review tested the impact of a variety of intervention characteristics and study characteristics. These were:

- Length of treatment
- Modelling of treatment
- Supervised practice
- Length of training
- availability of consultation
- Availability of written instructions
- Monitoring.

Outcomes

Looking only at literacy outcomes, the review found the following combined weighted effect sizes:

- Reading comprehension (14 comparisons): 0.57
- Reading fluency (3 studies): -0.8
- Word recognition (2 studies): 0.43.

The 95% confidence intervals for those outcomes are as follows:

- Reading comprehension: 0.32 to 0.81
- Reading fluency: -0.73 to 0.56
- Word recognition: -0.45 to 1.31.

Because the 95% confidence intervals for reading fluency and word recognition programs include both negative and positive outcomes, in neither category are we able to express a confident opinion about the impacts of these types of interventions which were included in this review.

Looking only at reading comprehension, the combined weighted effect size was 0.57. This is generally considered a moderate outcome. Looking at the impact of this effect size, we would expect to find that the average score in an intervention group boasting this effect size would be higher than approximately 72% of scores in a control group. That is, the effect is the equivalent of moving an individual from the 50th percentile to the 73rd. Comparing hypothetical intervention and control groups of 25, the average score in the intervention group would be roughly equivalent to the seventh best score in the control group.

Outcomes

Among the numerous intervention characteristics investigated in this review, the author concluded that only one appeared to moderate outcomes: longer training sessions for parents appeared to improve outcome somewhat.

Key messages

The results of this review suggest that parent tutoring interventions are an effective means of improving children's literacy skills.

Despite investigating a range of intervention characteristics, the authors found very little evidence of differential impact.

However, reviews of this size may struggle to find a sufficient number of programs and differing in the right combination of intervention characteristics to draw conclusions from.

ESTYN, 2009, Good Practice in Parental Involvement in Primary Schools, Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales.

Overview

This report arises from mainly qualitative work in Wales, to examine good practice in parental engagement; there is little statistical report of impact (other than attendance) but there is much anecdotal report of improvement arising from the good practice cited. The evidence arises from a survey of all LAs in Wales, seeking to identify good practice in parental engagement in primary schools, visits to a

representative sample of 17 primaries (in 7 LAs), interviews with stakeholders (headteachers, teachers, parent governors, other groups of parent representatives). Some of the primary schools involved in the project were also involved in the School Effectiveness Fieldwork Pilot, receiving RAISE funding, involved in the Basic Skills Agency's Family Learning initiative, or working to reach "hard to reach" families. Documentary evidence, including Estyn inspection reports from the 2007 – 8 academic year was also examined. The report provides examples of good practice throughout, under the headings of: Standards of achievement and behaviour, attendance, improving adult learning, induction and nurture groups, the extent of parental involvement, open door policies, governance, meeting parental needs and resources and provision.

Outcomes

In the schools visited, the nature and scope of parental involvement are very varied. There does not seem to be any clear pattern in how schools involve parents and neither is there any formal monitoring of the extent of parental involvement. There is a lack of a consistent approach to parental engagement, as well as a lack of focus on involving fathers.

Where there is particularly effective parental involvement, the single most important driver is the enthusiasm of the headteacher.

The planning and implementation of positive policies to involve parents can have significant impact in improving pupils' wellbeing, behaviour and attendance. Involving the community and acting as a hub for the community can have good results.

Successful schools often provide refreshments as incentives for "hard to reach" parents.

Good practice seemed to arise when schools were proactive, when they listened to their parents and refined their work on the basis of parental suggestions and built on already successful practice.

Where there is good practice in planning parental involvement, schools understand that parents:

- like to be involved in their child's school and want to feel they are in partnership;
- want the school to know them personally as individuals and be kept well informed about the progress made by their children;
- need to receive clear information about induction and day-to-day matters that affect their children;
- feel more confident if they know the staff and have a basic understanding of the curriculum;
- are very willing to support school events and provide practical help but are less likely to join a committee;
- become more supportive, the more they are involved, particularly if they have attended training events; and

- like to have clear rules for their children that are applied consistently and are followed up appropriately, for example regarding behaviour in the playground or expectations for completing homework.

FEILER, A., GREENHOUGH, P., WINTER, JAN., SALWAY, L., SCANLAN, M., 2006, Getting engaged: possibilities and problems for home-school knowledge exchange, Educational Review, Vol. 58, No. 4, pp.451-469.

Overview

This paper reports on some of the literacy and numeracy actions developed on the Home School Knowledge Exchange (HSKE) project and examines these in relation to the engagement of participants. The exchanges of knowledge included two-way processes where aspects of children's out-of-school worlds informed teaching and learning in the classroom as well as the more usual sharing of knowledge about school with children's families. The authors comment on patterns of parental engagement and on the development of actions that built not only on parental knowledge but also on the agency of the child.

One implication of this work is that 'one size does not fit all'—more successful actions include different family members at different times and in different ways.

The focus of the project was the exchange of knowledge between school and home and home and school rather than parental involvement as such which can include a wide variety of parental roles.

Intervention

Sample

There were three strands to the project:

- supporting literacy learning at Key Stage 1;
- supporting numeracy learning at Key Stage 2;
- supporting transfer from primary to secondary school.

This paper focuses on the literacy and numeracy strands. In each of these, four primary schools were actively involved in the project, with one class of students being followed over a 2 year period as home–school knowledge exchange activities were developed. At the beginning of the project, the children had just started in Year 1 (age 5–6) in the literacy strand and Year 4 (age 8–9) in the numeracy strand. In each strand, two of the schools had higher proportions of students eligible for free school meals (HFSM) with the other two schools having lower proportions (LFSM). Broadly speaking, the SES range represented in the LFSM schools was generally mixed but included a majority of middle-class families whilst the HFSM schools represented fairly uniform working-class or low SES populations. The eight schools were located in Bristol and Cardiff and the school intakes reflected the ethnic diversity present in the two cities.

Initial mapping

A teacher was seconded to each strand to work with the research team to develop and support the implementation of knowledge exchange activities. Before initiating any action, these teacher–researchers carried out mappings of the home–school landscape in each school and the preferences of participants for future action relating to the focus of the strand.

Target data

A window on the knowledge exchange activities was provided by 'target' families. In each class, six children were selected by a process of stratified random selection (giving a higher attaining boy and girl, a middle attaining boy and girl and a lower attaining boy and girl). These children's families became the targets. Interviews with the parents and children were used to explore thoughts and feelings about literacy and mathematics and to monitor responses to the knowledge exchange actions retrospectively.

Outcomes

Promoting formats that do not rely on the written word.

Using print to communicate can prove problematic for some parents. Even where parents are able to read English, they may be disinclined to access information through this medium. For some of the knowledge exchange activities, the team developed strategies that did not rely solely on the written word. A prime example was the use of video.

The literacy videos were edited versions of complete lessons. A different format was used for the numeracy videos. Children were shown working in small groups, with one child in each group playing the teacher's role (explaining procedures and asking questions) and the other children playing the role of pupils.

English was an additional language for several children, and therefore some sequences were recorded in home languages, with Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage students working together in groups.

Targeting

In a different numeracy school with a significant proportion of Bangladeshi heritage families, a targeted approach was adopted. The teacher–researcher and a Bengali-speaking learning support assistant (LSA) visited almost all the homes of the children supported by EMAS in the action classes. They invited them to a meeting with other mothers, the LSA and the EMAS teacher, to discuss ideas. The personal approach with an interpreter present was an extremely successful way of contacting these parents and five of the six mothers visited attended the meeting.

Moving away from the school location

As a result of negative experiences during their own schooling some parents can

experience feelings of insecurity and discomfort just from being in a school. The authors report an exploratory activity undertaken in one HFSM literacy school where they moved away from the school site and set up a knowledge exchange exhibition in a nearby supermarket. The authors note how much freer things can be when parents are on their own ground and expectations regarding school ways of doing things are less evident; where members of the extended family and next door neighbours can also take an interest in a child's education.

Building on home knowledge

Photographs were used as one of the means whereby out-of-school worlds were brought into the classroom. In the literacy strand, all children were given a disposable camera to use at home over a holiday period. The teachers were very positive about the activities. Many children and parents enjoyed the activity. However, they also found it challenging.

Key messages

This paper reports on a number of activities undertaken on the project to encourage home–school knowledge exchange. In each activity, strategies were used that we hoped would support the engagement of participants. Although different in form, these activities were perhaps characterized by the attempt to see things from the parental or home point of view.

This endeavour does present difficulties, however, since there may be no common parental viewpoint. Something that suits one family may not suit another.

An implication of heterogeneity is that schools need to put effort into finding out from parents what kind of activities and support may be appropriate or helpful.

A further implication of heterogeneity is that in terms of activities one size does not fit all, nor can it be made to fit all. Perhaps the best that can be aimed for is to put in place a range of actions that will include different participants at different times in different ways.

Our experience during the project was that parents from a wide range of social backgrounds were interested in knowing more about how to help their children learn, including those who could be described as disadvantaged.

Using a variety of approaches to communicate with parents was important for fuller family engagement. An example of such variety was the use of video to show parents how literacy and numeracy were taught at school (rather than relying on conventional means such as school-based meetings); providing families with copies; ensuring that some video clips were recorded in children's home languages; and organizing showings at different times of the school day.

Where communication between homes and schools was effective, the contribution that parents made to their child's learning was often rich and extensive. This occurred when children were given disposable cameras and parents helped at home.

To support home-school activities schools may need to find alternative sources of funding, possibly from sponsorship by local companies, and government funding for the provision of interpreters. Teachers need time to respond and take account of new knowledge, and home visiting and flexible timings for meetings both during day and in the evening require the teacher's working day to be viewed and structured differently.

FISHEL, M. and L. RAMIREZ (2005), 'Evidence-Based Parent Involvement Interventions with School-Aged Children', School Psychology Quarterly 20(4): 371-402.

Overview

This study sets out to evaluate parent involvement interventions with school-aged children, using evaluation criteria as proposed by the American Psychological Association Task Force on Evidence-Based Interventions in School Psychology. This review covered a range of academic outcomes.
The review includes 24 studies undertaken between 1980 and 2002, fourteen of which utilised between-subject group design, 8 of which used single participant design, and 2 of which he utilised mixed designs.

Of the 14 group design studies, 12 measured child literacy outcomes. 20 studies were undertaken in the US, 3 in Canada and 1 in Puerto Rico. 14 of the 24 studies involved interventions for children with ongoing school problems. Of the 12 group design studies which measured literacy outcomes, 11 focused on primary school aged children. One focused on children in kindergarten.

The 12 group design studies which measured literacy outcomes looked at the following intervention types:

- Parent training and involvement: 8 studies
- Parent involvement: 1
- Peer and parent involvement: 1
- Paraprofessional and parent involvement: 2

Key messages

Fishel and Ramirez's review placed a strong emphasis on programs targeting disadvantaged children: 14 of their 24 included studies involved interventions for children with ongoing school problems.

The authors of this review found good evidence for the effectiveness of family literacy interventions in the home, particularly those focused on a single academic problem, such as reading.

However, the authors argue that despite this promising evidence, the methodological weaknesses that characterise primary research on family literacy mean that it was

impossible to draw conclusions about program effectiveness. This is a conclusion that was also drawn by a number of earlier meta-analyses in this field, including Mattingly et al (2002).

More recent meta-analyses have also highlighted the limited availability of methodologically robust quantitative family literacy research, but have been able to access enough high-quality studies to draw some conclusions about program outcomes. This suggests that the quality of primary research in this field is improving. However, there is still insufficient research for meta-analysts to draw robust conclusions about the impact of intervention and participant characteristics.

FRAJA, G., OLIVEIRA, T., LUISA ZANCHI, L., Must Try Harder: Evaluating the Role of Effort in Educational Attainment, Review of Economics and Statistics August 2010, Vol. 92, No. 3: 577

Overview

This paper is based on the hypothesis that the effort exerted by children, parents and schools affects the outcome of the education process. This hypothesis is tested using the National Child Development Study (NCDS). The theoretical model suggests that the effort exerted by the three groups of agents is simultaneously determined as a Nash equilibrium, and is therefore endogenous in the estimation of the education production function. The results are claimed to support this, and to indicate which factors affect examination results directly and which indirectly via effort. They also suggest that affecting effort directly has an impact on results.

The study

The authors have built a model of the factors that bear on pupil achievement especially that of 'effort' on the part of schools, parents and pupils. The model is then run with data from the NCDS study which comprises a cohort of children born in early March 1958. The study analyses the children's achievement at age 7, 11 and 16 – i.e., achievement in the years 1965, 1969 and 1974.

Key messages

Strong endorsement for policies which strengthen parental effort:

- Pupil effort, parental effort and school effort each separately have a positive impact on achievement
- Parental effort and pupil effort complement each other; more effort from parents induces more effort from children and vice versa
- But: school effort is not complementary in this way. More effort by schools induces less effort by pupils whilst inducing more effort by parents. Schools respond positively to pupils' effort but not to parents' effort
- Parental effort is more important than school or children's efforts
- Many socio economic factors work their influence indirectly through parental effort.

Limitations

Parental, pupil, and school effort is understood in terms set out in table 1 on p.583, which includes the items from the data set pertaining to the cohort that the authors have used to operationalise effort. Questions may be asked about both the items included and the items not included and about how the included items are constructed. One example: 'mother reads to child age 7' would appear to call for an index of parental effort but instead has an all or nothing tick in the box. Suppose two mothers tick this box, and that one is not in work, is a wealthy graduate with a house full of books whilst the other is barely literate, works 8 hours a day for a less than living wage and has no reading materials to hand. Who made more effort in this ticked box?

Whilst, therefore, there is valuable evidence in this study, there are questions remaining about how the idea of 'effort' is operationalised.

GREENHOUGH, P., HUGHES, M., et al., 2007, What effect does involving parents in knowledge exchange activities during transfer from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 have on children's attainment and learning dispositions? Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Institute of Education, University of London, 5-8 September 2007

Overview

This project examined ways in which progress in children's attainment and dispositions for learning can be brought about through knowledge exchange between school and home and home and school. The research concentrated on three areas: literacy learning at KS1, numeracy learning at KS2 and transfer between KS 2 and 3.

Country/area: UK – Bristol, Cardiff

Intervention

The research was carried out in the cities of Bristol and Cardiff. Four primary schools were involved in the action side of the project, two in Bristol and two in Cardiff. In each city, one primary school had a high proportion of students eligible for free school meals while the other primary school had a low proportion of eligible students. The major receiving secondary school for each action primary school was also recruited to the research.

During the first year, the emphasis was on building relationships with and between parties and on identifying areas where home-school links could be strengthened and the role of parents could be developed. During the subsequent year, activities were conducted with the new cohort of Year 6 students (10-11 year olds) and their families, which built on the work of the previous period.

Students from four primary comparison schools were also involved in the research. The comparison schools were identified as being similar to the action primary

schools based on advice from the local education authority (LEA) staff. In each city, one comparison primary school had a low proportion of students eligible for free school meals while the other school had a high proportion. Students from these schools were assessed on the same instruments as students from the action schools but did not take part in the knowledge exchange activities. Both sets of students (action and comparison) were tested prior to transfer using the PIPS. End of Year 6 assessments of verbal and non-verbal intelligence and literacy and mathematics attainment. All these students were assessed again after transfer to their new schools, mostly towards the end of the Spring term. Preliminary analysis of the pre-transfer scores indicated that whilst no child was at ceiling, a number were close. After transfer, therefore, the End of Year 6 tests were supplemented with additional material from CEM which was developed for older students but compatible with the Pips materials. The assessment of higher achieving students was not, therefore, unduly restricted or capped. Internal reliability levels for the combined sections were acceptable (Cronbach's alpha >.9 for both literacy and mathematics).

Changes to students' learning dispositions were monitored through the administration of the full version of the Effective Lifelong Learning Inventory (ELLI) before and after transfer. The team also assessed student attitudes and acclimatisation to life in their new schools using a questionnaire devised by the project.

A small number of students from each primary action school and their families were followed more closely through transfer. A process of stratified random assignment was used to select these target students (giving a higher, medium and lower attaining boy and girl in each action school). The parents and students were interviewed before and after transfer. This allowed us to explore the participants' feelings about transfer and change and the development of these over time. The students' primary teachers were interviewed prior to transfer and the children were observed in their primary schools. Their tutors and secondary maths and English teachers were interviewed post transfer.

Activities

A teacher was seconded part-time to work with school staff to develop the knowledge exchange activities. The detailed format of these activities varied across each primary-secondary pairing, depending on the affordances and constraints present in the different schools. The actions were all designed, however, to address similar underpinning features, particularly relating to the themes of preparation, support and relationships.

Outcomes

Students who were involved in the interventions made significantly greater progress in literacy from Y6 to Y7 than those who did not. There was no discernable effect for city in which children lived, proportion of FSM, gender or ethnicity.

Attendance at action school	Pre transfer score		Post transfer Score	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD

Primary and secondary	66.59	19.27	83.47	23.79
Primary	70.19	19.79	86.62	21.87
Secondary	58.04	17.35	74.00	21.07
Neither	70.87	18.65	82.75	23.57

The results for mathematics were not statistically significant.

These scores were analysed non-parametrically due to the nature of the data. In some respects, students who attended an action primary school appeared to adjust more quickly to secondary school, compared with students who had not. These students scored significantly more positively on the question 'Before you started did you know what to expect?', and on questions concerned with how quickly they found their way around and how quickly they got used to other students. Surprisingly, the action students also reported getting a detention or punishment significantly more quickly than the comparison students. The median for action students was a month whereas the median for comparison students was a term.

All students experienced a fall in scores for learning disposition factors between Y6 and Y7, but the fall was less among those who attended intervention primary schools. Interventions which deal with personal, social and emotional issues related to transfer can have an impact on attainment and academic progress.

HALLAM, S., ROGERS, L., SHAW, J., 2004, Improving children's behaviour and attendance through the use of parenting programmes: an examination of good practice, Department for Education and Skills, London, UK.

Overview

The purpose of this research was to examine when parenting programmes were most effective in the context of improving attendance and behaviour in school and to identify good practice.

The research explored who provided programmes, how they were funded, how they were quality assured and how effectiveness was evaluated.

A range of factors were examined, including the curriculum, the organisation of programmes and the mechanism of referral to programmes to explore the relative effectiveness of different types of programmes on parents' attitudes and behaviour and the impact of any changes in parenting on children.

Country/area: UK

Study participants

After an initial trawl of local authorities, 23 parenting programmes were selected for investigation. 142 parents from 20 programmes responded to a pre-programme questionnaire, and 73 from 17 programmes responded to the post-programme

questionnaire.

Interviews took place with 33 providers, 52 parents, 12 children and 20 members of staff (teachers or LEA)

Outcomes

LA arrangements for parenting programmes were generally fragile and inadequate; there was a lack of organisation at a local level and a lack of clear links between LA's and providers.

There was more demand for parenting programmes than provision.

Funding was insecure for programmes in the long and short term.

Although there were a wide variety of parenting programmes available, few were designed to address issues related to education – most programmes were more general.

Providing support for self-referred, agency referred and compulsory attending parents together seemed to be most successful when the latter group were offered individual support before the programme and when facilitators were skilled in supporting parents.

Parents appeared to perceive attendance at parenting programmes as an admission of inadequacy (a deficit model) – this requires a change in culture so that it can become normal practice for parents to attend such programmes.

97% of responding parents said that the programmes in which they were involved were enjoyable and helpful, leading to increased confidence with their children, reductions of conflict in the home and a calmer, happier family life.

Parents' self esteem and confidence improved, support networks were established Almost all parents reported improvements in children's behaviour at home.

There was limited data to show that there was an improvement in behaviour at school and attendance.

HARRIS, A. AND J. GOODALL, 2007, Engaging Parents in Raising Achievement. Do Parents Know They Matter? Department for Children, Schools and Families

Overview

A study to explore the relationship between parental engagement and children's achievement.

Country/area: UK.

Study participants

Schools chosen for inclusion from a pool of over 100 schools responding to a programme offered by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust.

Schools selected on the basis of two criteria: type of project they were undertaking; strand of the project they were addressing.

Schools also selected with a view to having a broad range of schools involved. The first phase included 30 schools, the second, a smaller sample of 20 schools; these schools were selected on the basis of innovative practice in parental engagement.

Intervention

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with a range of school staff, parents and students in secondary schools; 95 staff were interviewed, 81 parents, 124 students and 14 others (LA personnel, etc.).

Case studies are also reported from a range of schools involved in the project.

Documentary analysis was undertaken of school documents.

Outcomes

Qualitative research

Parents, school staff and students had different views of parental engagement; staff views related to parents supporting the school, parental and student views related to parents supporting children.

Staff did not recognise parental engagement in children's learning in the home as the focus of parental engagement activities but rather concentrated on relationships between parents and school.

Parents reported they were more likely to be involved in their children's learning when such involvement formed part of their view of what it means to be a caring parent.

Students saw the value of parental engagement to be parental valuing of education.

Students reported a direct relationship between parental influence and children's behaviour – lack of parental sanctions for bad behaviour meant that such behaviour would continue.

Students reported that bad behaviour on the part of their friends stemmed from lack of parental engagement or sanction for poor behaviour.

Parents reported engagement to be easier in primary schools, due to easier access, a friendlier feel to the physical plant and to understanding the lay out and systems of primary schools more fully than those of secondary schools.

Schools often involve parents in activities that have little relationship to their children's learning – these activities are unlikely to support achievement, yet schools often see the success of these programmes as success in relation to parental engagement – because schools are focusing on the relationship between parents and the school.
Schools that successfully engage parents constantly reinforce the message that parents matter.

There is a positive relationship between increased parental engagement and improved student behaviour, attendance and outcome.

Case studies

Parenting classes: positive evaluations from seven parents, commenting on being able to deal with disputes better and keeping calm.

Dads and kids: two Saturday sessions, structured around family (father and child) learning. Feedback from children suggested a link between the sessions and parental engagement. Students were more confident about asking for help with school work. Both parents and children experienced an increase in confidence.

Employment of a Parental Engagement Officer: after working with feeder schools, the PEO set up an Easter Football school to help overcome anxiety about coming to secondary school. In terms of outcomes, this had an immediate beneficial effect on behaviour in the primary schools, and presented the PEO to the parents of incoming children – over half of the appointments made by parents to speak to the PEO were from parents of the targeted group of children.

Key messages

Embed parental engagement within the overall life of the school.

Schools must be clear about the aims of all communications with parents.

Schools should support the efforts of parents who are already involved as well as reaching out to those labelled "hard to reach".

Consider training for staff working most closely with parents.

Clarity about the nature of parental engagement being with the learning of the child, rather than involvement with the school.

HARRIS, A. AND J. GOODALL, J., 2009, Helping Families Support Children's Success at School, London, Save the Children

Overview

To provide a summary of the most effective forms of support for families and

parents, which make a difference to achievement particularly in low-income communities.
Based on this evidence, to suggest components of an intervention strategy.

Country/area: anglophone literature.

The study

Systematic search of academic databases, supplemented with suggestions from experts in the field.

26 studies were originally identified, of which 15 were finally used in the construction of the recommendations.

Literature categorised according to: robustness of design, reliability of research methods, sample characteristics, evidence of impact.

Key messages

Chang et al evaluated the Home-Start programme on three families with a fourth as a control group. Group socialisation and parenting classes increased the amount of stimulation parents provided for their children at home; in particular, parent support groups increased supportive rather than intrusive parenting. Parental stimulation for cognitive and language development had a clear impact on children's development.

Evanelou and Sylva reported on the PEEP programme (see above). Weekly sessions concentrated on listening, talking and playing, to support parents as the first educators of their children. There were, after two years of participation in the project, clear gains for children in relation to language, literacy, numeracy and self esteem.

Melhuish et al reported on the effects of preschool education at the end of KS1, for a sample of over 800 children. In relation to parental engagement, the environment in the home was more important for all children than parental occupation, education or income.

Orchard reported on the results of a parenting programme for children in year 7 at one school (over three years). Compared to a control group, there were qualitatively reported improvements in parenting and child behaviour from the group who received the programme.

Reynolds et al investigated the effects of participation in Child Parent Centres through the use a dataset of over 1400 children in a deprived area of the US. Although parental engagement is only one part of the larger, overall programme investigated, there was support for the theory that family and school support are vital for children's educational attainment and for reducing delinquent behaviours.

Sanders et al report on the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme, in a controlled trial of the media based intervention for mothers and children from 2 – 8 years of age, as well as an intervention group. Mothers in the TV and printed programme

group reported a reduction in behavioural difficulties and an improved sense of their ability to parents. Mothers from the intervention group displayed a reduction in dysfunctional parenting; both results come from four to six months after the intervention.

Smith reports on the outcomes of working with members of a local community to set up a new school. Engaging parents included learning in the home and shifting attitudes toward learning in the home. Parents reported after the process that they had a greater sense of confidence, and more of a dedication to homework. Increased academic achievement on the part of the pupils was attributed to parental engagement.

Sylva et al found that, in investigating the impact of preschool, formalised experiences for 3000 young children, that the beneficial effects of such experiences could still be seen at the end of KS1. They found that the quality of the "home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are".

Sylva, Scott et al investigated a programme aimed at supporting parents to support the reading of 5 and 6 year old children, all of whom were judged to be at risk of exclusion due to antisocial behaviour. The quality of parental interaction with children, particularly around reading, improved. The multipart nature of the programme may have been beneficial in supporting parents who are often not supported by the system.

Wigfall reported on Families in Focus, which aims to support people to form communities. The programme begins by working with young people and then moves on to work with families. Although not aimed at raising achievement, the programme did have reported outcomes of increased self confidence among young people. The earlier an intervention takes place, the better and more durable the results. Support at transition periods is important.

Strong benefits were shown from targeting resources for low income groups.
For all children, the quality of the home learning environment at preschool stage is more important than parental occupation, education or income.

HINGLE, M. D., O'CONNER, T., JAYNA M., BARONOWSKI, D.T., 2010, Parental involvement in interventions to improve dietary intake: a systematic review Preventive Medicine 51, 103-111

Overview

A high quality systematic review of the effect of adding a parent dimensions to programmes to improve childrens' dietary intake.

1774 articles found in the initial search but only 24 articles met the review criteria.

Key messages

Not enough studies to adequately answer whether parental involvement enhanced programme effectiveness.

The researchers looked for patterns amongst the studies and made a distinction between direct and indirect methods of parental involvement.

Indirect methods of parental involvement included, for example, giving information about diets, invitations to 'fun' activities and communications directed at child to involve parents.

Direct methods included, for example, requesting parents to attend nutrition education sessions, and requesting parents to attend training or counselling sessions.

Indirect methods of parental involvement were most common, but direct methods more likely to be effective.

The most effective indirect method was getting children to involve parents in activities. This is an example of the importance of the child, and his or her preferences and activities, as an influence on parental involvement.

HARRISON, C., COMBER, C., et al., 2003, The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Pupil Learning and Attainment, Becta

Overview

ImpaCT2 is one of a number of projects commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills and managed by Becta with the aim of evaluating the progress of the ICT in Schools Programme. It is a major study carried out between 1999 and 2002 involving 60 schools in England and is one of the most comprehensive investigations into the impact of information and communications technology (ICT) on educational attainment so far conducted in the United Kingdom.

ImpaCT2 was designed to identify the impact of networked technologies on the school and out of school environment and to find out the degree to which these networked technologies effect the educational attainments of pupils at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4.

The study involved three related strands:

Strand 1: to develop and apply appropriate methods for evaluating the use of ICT in school and out of school, and to analyse the statistical relationship between the effective implementation of ICT and standards of performance in National Tests and GCSEs.

Strand 2: to develop and apply a variety of methods to establish *how* pupils use ICT, in particular out of school, and what is gained from such use.

Strand 3: to explore the nature of teaching and learning involving ICT in various settings, with a focus on the views of pupils, teachers, and parents.

Key Messages

Strand 1

- Differences in attainment associated with the greater use of ICT were clearly present in more than a third of all comparisons made between pupils' expected and actual scores in National Tests or GCSEs, though these were not large.
- In none of the comparisons was there a statistically significant advantage to groups with lower ICT use.

Strand 2

- For most pupils the amount of time spent on ICT at home greatly exceeds the time spent on ICT at school.
- Many pupils have sustained access to powerful ICT equipment and resources at home to support a wide variety of leisure pursuits. They are discriminating in use of the Internet, which is enabling them to develop skills and literacies in networked ICT, confidence in its use, and a range of on-line social and communication skills.
- Home ownership of computers and home access to the Internet are increasing. However, at the time of carrying out the study, over a quarter of pupils did not have access to the Internet at home.
- Pupils' perceptions of what learning is are shaped by their experience in school settings. They associate 'learning' with school-related use and typically describe all ICT use at home as 'games'. When the meaning of 'games' is probed, it is clear that much learning is taking place through their use of ICT for leisure pursuits, including learning of factual knowledge and conceptual understanding.
- The arrival of networked ICT placed great demands on schools and teachers and it is taking time to embed it in teaching and learning practices.

Strand 3

- Networked technologies are becoming a feature of pupils' education, and whilst valued by teachers as an educational tool, strategies for their effective use are still developing.
- Home use of technologies is developing, but issues such as equality of home access, lack of clear guidance from schools, and pupils' ability to evaluate resources all have an impact in this area. As home computers are frequently more advanced than those available in the school environment, pupils are engaging in innovative use of the technology, which will need to be acknowledged by schools as they develop their own practice.

Recommendations

- Schools need to develop strategies for 'bridging the gap' for those pupils who do not have access to ICT resources, including the Internet, at home.
- Parents need to be made more aware of the importance of home access to ICT

and the learning that results from leisure use, including some of the stimulating activities that younger pupils categorise under the broad heading of 'games'.

- There is recognition among teachers that a more flexible approach is required if ICT is to be effective. Further good practice should also be developed in facilitating greater links between home and school use of ICT.

HOLLINGWORTH, S., ALLEN, K., KUYOK, K., MANSARAY, A., ROSE, A., 2009, <u>An exploration of parents' engagement with their children's learning involving technologies and the impact of this in their family learning experiences</u>, Becta.

Overview

This research examined parents' views and experiences of schools' and local authorities' technology practices to support parental engagement in their children's education. It also explored the impact of this on learning in the family.

Intervention

Focus groups were carried out with parents, with particular emphasis on parents who were less engaged or had less contact with schools; this was done through use of networks outside of school. Effort was also made to involve diverse groups of parents in terms of income, ethnicity, marital status and age.

The discussions with parents were contrasted with interviews with relevant staff in schools and with relevant representatives from the local authorities.

To develop an understanding of the success of different methods in different contexts a typology of 'thick' and 'thin' communication was constructed. Differences in types of communication experienced by the parents were analysed according to four key factors:

- the direction of information flows
- the complexity of the message
- the extent to which the communication is personalised or universal
- the extent to which a medium allows for immediate real-time interaction or not (synchronicity).

Sample

Parents of children in Key Stage 2 (primary aged 8-11years) and Key Stage 3 (secondary aged 11-14 years), in five local authorities: Croydon, Brighton and Hove, Hampshire, Luton, Leicester City.

Key messages

Parental agency is essential as the mechanism for strong parental engagement in children's learning.

Online reporting and learning platforms have the potential to offer thick communication to parents.

On the whole, parents welcomed their introduction. However, parents' experiences were found to be fairly limited and there was evidence that such platforms were not used to their full potential.

As one local authority representative pointed out, if the relationship between schools and parents is not there already, no amount of technology is going to engage parents.

The report presents a series of comments about good practice:

- Allow thick communication by email. Open up the flow of information, allowing parents to email the school, teachers and each other.
- Set up email or internet groups, based around common interests (such as different year and form groups or specific after-school activities), where parents (and pupils) are able to join the group and communicate with all within.
- Appoint a member of staff responsible for parent liaison, who also manages the communication systems.
- Link the learning platform to the front end of the school website that is seen by the public. Make the back end more interactive by using email, instant messaging or blogs to communicate with parents.
- Set up a user forum on the learning platform to share ideas, knowledge and teaching resources between different schools and staff. Give specific attention to parental engagement.
- Hold demonstrations on using the learning platform for staff, pupils and parents.

JENYNES, W.H., 2005, A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement urban elementary school student academic achievement, Urban Education, 40 (3), 237-269.

Overview

Jeynes synthesised studies of the relationships between parental involvement and the academic achievement of urban primary school children. The review looked both at correlational studies and at studies of parent involvement programs.

The fact that most of these programs proved to have a positive impact on these children's academic achievement 'suggest parental involvement can be a means of reducing the achievement gap between these students and those more advanced scholastically' (p. 261).

Jeynes included 41 studies in his review, 23 of which were correlational and 18 of which analysed the effects of parent involvement programs. Studies were conducted in the years 1969-2000 in the United States.

Study participants

The average sample size for all 41 studies was 559, and all participants were urban. In the American context, this suggests that a high percentage of participants were likely to be socio-economically disadvantaged and/or from minority ethnic groups. However, the review does not provide numerical breakdowns for these characteristics.

All participating children were in primary school.

Outcomes

The combined weighted effect size for studies of the impact of parental involvement programmes on pupils' academic achievement were:

- 0.31 (studies without sophisticated controls)
- 0.19 (studies with sophisticated controls)

Analysis of program impacts suggested that positive impacts were found for all types of participant groups, a potentially important finding given the 100% urban, predominately disadvantaged make-up of program participants.

Looking at a combination of correlational and intervention studies, Jeynes found:

- No statistically significant relationship between study quality and effect size
- No apparent relationship between randomisation and effect size
- No apparent impact of year of study on the effect size.

He also found that studies with the smallest samples produced the most extreme effect sizes, consistent with what we would expect to find.

Key messages

The review provides evidence on whether parental involvement programs focused specifically on struggling urban pupils produce positive impacts, suggesting that they do and that such programmes can be a means of reducing the achievement gap.

KANE, G. A., V. A. WOOD, et al., 2007, Parenting programmes: a systematic review and synthesis of qualitative research, Child Care Health And Development 33(6): 784 - 793.

Overview

The aim of this paper was to examine parents' experience and perceptions of parenting programmes using the meta-ethnographic method, in order to sensitize policymakers and practitioners to the key factors that parents perceive to be of value.

The authors suggest that the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding,

together with feelings of acceptance and support from other parents in the parenting group, enabled parents to regain control and feel more able to cope. This led to a reduction in feelings of guilt and social isolation, increased empathy with their children and confidence in dealing with their behaviour.

This evaluation provides an indication of the components that parents perceive to be necessary in the provision of parenting programmes, independent of the particular type of programme being provided.

The study

Systematic searches of a number of electronic databases were undertaken using key search terms. Critical appraisal of included studies was conducted using standardized criteria, and the reports were synthesized using meta-ethnographic methods.

Searching and selection of papers

An electronic search of electronic databases was undertaken up to and including 2004; biomedical, social science, educational and general reference journals were included.

Non-published studies were identified by searching reference lists and through direct contact with key authors in the field.

Qualitative papers were purposefully selected using predetermined inclusion criteria.

A total of 367 references were identified and the titles and abstracts of each scanned. Only 40 of these appeared to be relevant. Following a review of full papers, four studies were identified that met all the inclusion criteria.

Description of included studies

All papers were assessed by two reviewers independently, using criteria based on the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme's (CASP) 10 questions for qualitative research.

Meta-ethnographic methods were employed to analyse and synthesize the reports.

Four papers were included in the synthesis (Spitzer et al. 1991; Kilgour & Fleming 2000; Barlow & Stewart-Brown 2001; Stewart-Brown et al. 2004).

In one study, the parents had attended the Family Links programme (Barlow & Stewart-Brown 2001) and in the remaining three papers, parents had attended the Webster-Stratton programme. Two were delivered by health visitors (HVs) (Kilgour & Fleming 2000; Stewart-Brown et al. 2004), one in a school and the other in general practice; the Family Links programme was school-based and was delivered by Family Links nurturing programme facilitators (Barlow & Stewart-Brown 2001); and the fourth study was based on the Webster-Stratton videotape modelling programme, and was delivered by individual therapist consultations (Spitzer et al.

1991).

Key messages

Prior to taking part in a parenting programme many parents experienced feelings of powerlessness and felt that they had inadequate knowledge in relation to their children's behaviour. The programmes aided the acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding, and together with feelings of acceptance and support from other parents in the parenting group, enabled them to regain control and feel more able to cope. This led to a reduction in feelings of guilt and social isolation, increased empathy with their children and confidence in dealing with their behaviour. This information may be important for policymakers and practitioners in the decision-making process about which of the many available parenting programmes to provide. It identifies the components of parenting programmes that parents perceive to be necessary to help them to change their parenting practices, and may thereby increase parental engagement and the acceptability of parenting programmes to a greater number of parents.

It should be noted that, while the findings of the current study may be transferable to traditional or standard parenting programmes, the findings may not be transferable to all parents (e.g. ethnic minority or teenage parents).

LEWIN, C. AND R. LUCKIN, R., 2010, Technology to Support Parental Engagement in Elementary Education: Lessons Learned from the UK, Computers & education 54(3): 749-758.

Overview

This paper compares two projects with a view to understanding the issues surrounding the use of technology to support parental involvement with schools and their children's learning.

The Becta-funded ICT Test Bed evaluation (2002–2006) had the intention of 'saturating' schools (in three areas of social deprivation) with a range of technologies.

The ESRC/EPSRC/DTI-funded Homework project (2003–2006) used participatory design methods to develop and evaluate technology to link home and school in a elementary school in the South East.

Study Participants

The ICT Test Bed evaluation involved 28 schools, of which 23 were elementary schools, and 3 colleges of further education, organised as three separate clusters.

The initial implementation phase included technologies in all classrooms (interactive whiteboards, data projectors, visualisers, graphics tablets) and management

information systems.

This paper covers phases 5 and 6 of the project. In phase 5 of the Homework project a class of 30 children and their families acted as participants for 4 weeks, in phase six 32 children and their families were involved for 2 weeks. Across both these phases, the tablet PCs were used at home for an average session length of 31 min (phase 5) and 25 min (phase 6).

Interventions

The ICT Test Bed evaluation (funding: £34 million) explored the issues of implementation and benefits of saturating schools with technology.

The Homework project used participatory human-centred design methods to develop an interactive Maths education system for children aged 5–7 years. The Homework project was developed at a much lower cost (£700k). The interactive solution used a combination of interactive whiteboards, tablet PC's and bespoke software. Children who took part in the study were each provided with a tablet PC together with resources for home use to support classroom activities. The final two phases of this design process involved a class of children and their teacher using the system at school and at home over one 4-week period and one 2-week period, respectively.

The Homework project was an intervention study that involved teachers, parents (and carers) and children in the development of an exemplar system to test out the Broadband Learner Model (BLM) framework to ground an adaptive, interactive Maths education system for children aged 5–7 years in school and at home.

The system that was developed in the Homework project through this iterative process was an interactive Maths education system for children aged 5–7 years that consisted of lesson planning, control and home use components. The system contained a set of multimedia and associated interactive numeracy resources.

One cluster of the ICT Test Bed Evaluation decided to provide a computer for every home together with internet provision. Approximately 1600 machines were distributed and about half of the homes were eventually provided with internet access. One of the seven elementary schools implemented a learning platform before the others and purchased educational content from the same provider for the learners to access at home. In this cluster, parents were provided with information about the learning platform and courses when they collected the computer. The learning platform provided access to skills for life training resources such as English for speakers of other languages courses from the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and other direct links, for example local job centre vacancies.

With regards to involvement in their children's education, the learning platform (tailored for each school) offered general news, school newsletters and other school information, information about individual children, and an easy means of communicating with the school. In one of the elementary schools the learning platform was used to showcase pupils work and show photos of events.

In the second cluster two elementary schools (an infant and a junior feeder school)

which were linked with a secondary school also undertook a similar project but on a smaller scale and with no attempt to provide connectivity. This cluster included three secondary schools and the scale of providing home access and connectivity proved impossible to finance. In the third cluster there was a greater emphasis on laptop loan schemes in the participating elementary schools, partly because it served a rural area with less developed infrastructure.

A number of schools across the three clusters also invested in community drop-in centres both to provide access to the internet and to host a range of training courses for parents and others. Schools also invested in mobile technologies such as digital cameras which in some cases were sent home with children to capture images from outside school, providing a focus for discussion. In order to better support home-school communication, many schools invested in technical staff to develop and maintain school websites. In addition, the management information systems facilitated remote access by parents (offering access to attendance, attainment and behaviour information) and this was introduced in a number of schools, although largely towards the end of the project. Some schools developed email use between school and home, and one or two experimented with text messaging structure. This was managed on a school-by-school basis

Outcomes

Barriers to parental take-up of home computers for their children included concerns about safety and costs (although there were none), being monitored in the home and the growth of mobile telephony replacing landlines. Parents' lack of ICT skills and confidence was also perceived to be a barrier as were technical faults, losing passwords and language barriers. Teaching staff intended to address skills and confidence through training and courses but of course this relied on parental attendance.

A perceived successful strategy in relation to parental support for this initiative was to identify and employ 'learning champions'. In the ICT Test Bed project three were appointed in one of the clusters, two of whom were parents. These champions talked to parents when they came to collect their computer from schools or in the library or at the school gates, dealt with problems, encouraged parents to enrol on courses and visit schools.

Short-term laptop loans in elementary schools in ICT Test Bed brought parents in regularly initially but in many schools commitment waned and it was difficult to sustain this type of initiative. This could have been due to perceptions of the lack of purposeful use and perhaps losing the novelty element:

In ICT Test Bed there was a tension between linking home and school electronically facilitating 'remote' engagement in school life, and a desire to get parents onto elementary school premises. One school in particular only supported access to resources and training from school premises to ensure that this occurred. More generally, in most cases families were expected to attend onsite training courses before collecting technology for home use.

There was evidence of increasingly sophisticated uses of school websites to support

parental engagement with their children's learning (as described above), partly because technology had become easier to manage and operate. This was seen as a quick win – something that did not require too much effort but that had the potential to maximise impact. School websites were also used to disseminate information such as newsletters, letters, and calendars of events.

Key messages

Findings suggest that technologies with readily accessible and interactive resources that are flexible can help develop parental engagement. However, simpler and less resource hungry solutions such as the use of websites and email can provide opportunities for quick wins.

In relation to transporting technology between home and school, there are issues for both staff and parents. Without purposeful use, these challenges act as a barrier once they outweigh the novelty effect. Parental needs are complex and engagement needs to be sensitively scaffolded rather than focussing on the technology.

Participatory design offers an effective means of addressing this and should be the starting point. The technology should facilitate independence and mediate access to a shared space for collaborative activity. The content and guidance needs to be purposeful and relevant, offering a means to integrate learning across the learner's broader context, including school and home seamlessly.

Both the ICT Test Bed and the Homework project demonstrate that when introduced, supported and used appropriately, technology can improve links between home and school learning and close the gap between parents, teachers and learners. However, providing technology and connectivity will not of itself lead to improved parental engagement. Parents require support and effective communication with regards to the best ways in which they can engage with their children's learning in the home.

In order to engender parental involvement, parents need clear guidance about how to help their child and activities need to be designed in a manner that encourages collaboration. The technology needs to provide continuity across locations: the appropriate contextualization of activities across school and home contexts is a key design principle. Parents who took part in the Homework project valued information about the National Curriculum and what their child was doing at school: information that was specifically targeted at them. They also appreciated knowing more about what their child was doing at school. Increased parental involvement was linked to increased parental enjoyment of working with their child

Additional resources, in terms of personnel (managers, champions) and in terms of finance are needed to develop links between home and school. The most progress was achieved in ICT Test Bed schools with enthusiastic members of staff with effective management and leadership skills driving the innovation.

With regards to sustainability, there was clear evidence in ICT Test Bed that short-term laptop loans were more successful than long-term initiatives.

LEXMOND, J., L. BAZALGETTE, ET AL. (2010), The Home Front, Demos, London

Overview

The Home Front provides an up to date understanding of the pressures and influences on parents, and makes recommendations to policy makers for developing parent-focused policy.

Families and Schools Together (FAST)

The report includes an evaluation of Families and Schools Together (FAST), piloted by Save the Children in five primary schools in Ealing, Manchester, West Belfast, West Dunbartonshire and Caerphilly.

Lexmond reports on an independent evaluation by Middlesex University of the outcomes achieved by the Save the Children FAST pilot across the five different primary school sites. Statistically significant outcomes include:

Improved family functioning

- Parent–child relationships improved by 19 per cent
- Nearly four-fifths (78 per cent) of parents had a better understanding of their children and less conflict in the home
- On a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ – a clinically verified behavioural screening tool) pro-social behaviour increased by 12 per cent
- SDQ emotional symptoms reduced by 40 per cent
- SDQ conduct problems reduced by 39 per cent

Reduced risk of educational failure

- 88 per cent of parents reported that they felt more able to support their child's education
- The impact of emotional and behavioural difficulties in the classroom as measured by the SDQ had reduced by 46 per cent

Strengthening parents' social networks and informal support

- 74 per cent of parents reported they had more friends and more local support
- Support provided to others increased by 45 per cent
- Support received from others increased by 70 per cent
- Total reciprocal support increased by 56 per cent
- During FAST 26 per cent of parents had attended more parent teacher association meetings
- During FAST 25 per cent had attended more community centre activities (Lexmond 2011).

Recommendations

Recommendations are organised according to five key policy aims:

- build the parenting skills base
- target parenting support according to need
- apply the early intervention principle beyond the early years
- make shared parenting a reality
- support social networks and collective efficacy.

LINDSAY, G., DAVIS, H., et al., 2009, Parent Support Advisor Pilot Evaluation Final Report, London: DCSF.

Overview

Evaluation of the Parent Support Advisor Pilot.

Country/area: UK.

Study participants

Data collected from 20 Local Authorities (LAs); a sample of 12 LAs selected for case study work, aiming at a mix of urban/rural and geographic location.

Interviewed all strategic leads with had responsibility for policy leading to the implementation of the pilot.

The operational leads (PSA co-ordinators) were senior LA officers responsible for implementing the pilot. All operational leads were interviewed at the end of the pilot (N = 24 as some LAs had more than one in this role).

Each PSA coordinator in the 12 case study LAs was asked to identify 5-10 PSAs, at a time when the PSAs had either not started to work or had just begun. LAs' PSA coordinators were asked to select the sample from across the LA so as to reflect the models of delivery. These PSAs provided the sample for later phases.

105 parents were also interviewed. Each PSA was asked to select a sample of parents across three ranges –where the work had gone well, where it had been ok, where it had not gone so well. In the ranges, there were 69 parents in the first, 26 in the second and 10 in the third.

The study

The study included:

- a database designed to collect data on all parents supported by PSAs

- interviews with LA strategic leads (N = 20 interviews), PSA co-ordinators (N = 24), PSAs (N = 245 in total over three phases), line managers (144 at two

phases), other professionals (23) and parents (N = 105

- a survey of line managers during the final phase (N = 603, a response rate of 51.8%)

- data on attendance and number of pupils identified as having behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) were used to compare schools with a PSA and those without this support.

Evidence for the impact of the work of PSAs is taken from the survey of line managers, interview with parents, PSAs and PSA coordinators, and analyses of the National Pupil Database (2005/6).

Outcomes

PSAs recorded working with over 20,000 parents.

One of the main benefits of the PSAs is that parents were able to access them easily.

Line managers generally had a very positive perception of their PSA's impact, judging it to have:

- Improved parents' engagement with their child's learning: 88.5% of line managers
- Improved pupil attendance: 84.9%
- Improved relationships between parents and the school: 90.3%
- Improved the situation for pupils 'at risk' because of their own and/or parents' behaviour / attitudes: 88.6%
- Made effective referrals to specialist services as appropriate: 89.0%.

There were no statistically significant differences in ratings of PSAs' impact by school phase (primary vs secondary) or type of PSA work (single school vs cluster).

There was substantial qualitative evidence from parents, line managers and PSA Co-ordinators about the PSAs' positive impact on parents and/or children.

To compare the relative impact of schools with PSAs as compared with non-PSA schools the study compared each school against its own baseline to measure improvement over the three years:

- The decrease in persistent absentees in PSA secondary schools was substantial, down from 8.5% in 2005/06 to 6.6% in 2007/08 - a drop of 1.9.percentage points representing a reduction of almost a quarter (22.3%).

- The drop in non-PSA schools was smaller, from 7.0% to 5.4% - a drop of 1.6 percentage points. As a result the absolute gap in percentage of persistent absentees between PSA and non-PSA secondary schools reduced from 1.5 to 1.2 percentage points.

- Absence rates decreased for both primary schools (6.4% to 6.2%) and more particularly secondary schools (9.3% to 8.3%); however, similar reductions were found for non-PSA schools (5.9% to 5.6% primary; 8.5% to 7.5% secondary).

PSAs worked mainly with mothers (86.1%). Most referrals (68%) came from schools, but 22% were self referrals by parents.
55% of children supported by PSAs were eligible for free school meals 79.3% were White British.

The most common activity for PSAs was one to one work with parents

Parents were positive about the experience of working with PSAs: they felt listened to (99%); understood and respected (100%), more confident to deal with problems (95%) and better about themselves (94%).

LOPEZ, G. R., SCRIBNER, J.D., et al., 2001, Redefining Parental Involvement: Lessons from High-Performing Migrant-Impacted Schools, American Educational Research Journal 38(2): 253-288.

Overview

A project designed to assess what was effective in working with a severely disenfranchised set of parents and children, and to investigate effective parental engagement with groups of migrant workers.

Country/area: Texas and Illinois, USA.

Sample details

School districts were selected that had at least an 80% migrant graduation rate, 80% migrant promotion rate and a 94% migrant school attendance rate. From those districts, schools were selected according to data on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) gleaned from the 1995/6 Public Education Information Management Database. From this, 15 exceptional schools were found in five commended school districts, schools in which migrant students had at least a 79% pass rate on all areas of the TAAS (math, reading and writing). From this, and in conjunction with advice from the Migrant Education Office, a purposive sample of four districts was obtained - three in Texas, one in Illinois.

Respondents included parents, building-level administrators (principal or assistant principal), school councillor or social worker, parent involvement coordinator or community liaison for the school.

The study

17 interviews (12 group and five individual) were conducted over five months, along with extensive observations.

There was no intervention; the priority was to glean information from extant and successful programmes.

Key messages

Schools need to be aware of the needs of families – social, economic and physical; this awareness has to be followed by staff commitment to address those needs.

Commitment to meeting family needs – in terms of food, housing, etc. – was a top priority for successful schools.

Home visits were a top priority for the schools with highly effective programmes for parents.

Continuous interaction with families is needed, as families' needs change. Once the needs of families are addressed, parents have more time and confidence to engage with the learning of their children.

A welcoming atmosphere in the school is important, which allows parents to feel at ease and respected when they come into school.

Schools which were successful in relation to parental engagement operated with a broad definition of parental engagement: this included work with the child at home, interest in the learning of the child, rather than just interaction with the school. They also spent time making parents aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to their children's education.

MANZ, P. H., C. HUGHES, et al., 2010, A descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions: To what extent is the research applicable to low-income, ethnic-minority or linguistically-diverse young children?' Early Childhood Research Quarterly.

Overview

This research review consists of two components:

1. a descriptive review of 31 academically published articles about family literacy interventions targeted at children ages 2-6
2. a meta-analysis of a subset of the 14 of those 31 studies. These 14 studies utilised experimental research designs (12 studies) or quasi-experimental (2 studies).

The focus of the review was the impact of family literacy interventions on families who were ethnic minority, low income or not speakers of the official language of the school system. The review therefore sought to compare impacts for families falling into one, two or three of those categories with families not doing so.

In addition to investigating the impact of participant characteristics, the review also sought to investigate intervention characteristics, in particular intervention location

(home, centre-based, or combined) and the extent of training provided to families.

The meta-analysis consisted of 14 studies undertaken between 1994 – July 2007.

Participant characteristics

The review sought to determine whether or not family literacy interventions were working as well for "at risk" families as for more advantaged families. Key variables investigated included socio-economic status and ethnicity.

Of the 14 studies included in the meta-analyses, nine reported race/ethnicity information for the child participants. Seven studies specified participant socio-economic status.

Studies included children aged 2-6.

Dialogic reading interventions were investigated in 10 of the 14 studies.
8 studies investigated interventions implemented only at home, while 6 studies investigated interventions implemented both at home and in at an early childhood education and care centre.

The studies also examined: the extent of training received by parents; the timing of training received by parents – i.e. prior to the intervention only (6 studies), or prior to and during the intervention (8 studies).

Key messages

Manz et al find that ethnic minority and/or low income children did not receive as much qualitatively measured benefit from family literacy interventions as did White and/or middle-to-high income children. According to the authors, there are likely to be two primary reasons for this outcome. One is the relative lack of educational experience and engagement of disadvantaged parents. The other is the lack of interventions which were ‘culturally valid’ for low income and/or ethnic minority families. By cultural validity, the authors mean the extent to which intervention methods are consistent with disadvantaged families' values and normative behaviours, as well as the extent to which interventions benefit these groups.

The authors suggest that a “one size fits all” approach to family literacy program development is unlikely to produce programmes that produce substantial benefits for educationally disadvantaged children.

The authors of this study argue that family literacy interventions tend to suffer from a lack of cultural validity, in that they tend to be designed for and piloted on more advantaged families, as opposed to the families who are most in need of additional educational assistance.

Manz et al argue that family literacy programs need to be specifically designed to understand and meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged families. They further argue that measures of success need to be developed which are both reliable and valid for disadvantaged children. This is likely to require greater use of mixed

methods and partnership-based research designs in order to develop interventions which ‘balance intimate awareness of stakeholders' perceptions, values and routines with scientific rigour’.

MATTINGLY, D., et al., 2002, Evaluating evaluations: the case of parent involvement programs, Review of Educational Research Vol. 72, No. 4, pp. 549–576.

Overview

The authors analysed 41 American evaluations of intervention programs targeting parents of kindergarten, primary and secondary school children. The focus of this study was less on synthesising quantitative data to estimate a mean effect size for parental support programs, than on assessing the quality of evaluations of such programs.

One reason for including this study is that it is frequently cited in later reviews, with more than one paper citing it as not providing support for the hypothesis that parental support programs improve outcomes (for example Nye et al.) Mattingly et al state that there is a lack of evidence in favour of parental involvement interventions, not because there is extensive evidence indicating that such interventions do not work, but because of the paucity of robust evidence indicating either positive or negative outcomes. Drawing conclusions about efficacy from the studies included in the review, at least in the domain of academic achievement, would mean depending on data from only four of those studies, which Mattingly and colleagues do not seek to do. Rather, they observe that their analysis corroborates the findings from a decade before of White, Taylor and Moss (1992) regarding the lack of conclusive evidence for or against the effectiveness of parental support programs.

Study participants

Inconsistent reporting in the studies reported on in this review meant that it was impossible to say exactly how many children, parents and families were involved. In the 34 studies reporting participant numbers, the number of participating families ranged from 1 to 11,000, with a median of 114. Studies included pupils in kindergarten up to grade 12 (i.e. through secondary school). Because the primary value of Mattingly et al’s review is as a critique of study quality, and because the review does not seek to provide a combined weighted effect size, we have not sought to disaggregate outcomes for programs aimed only at pre-primary and primary schoolchildren.

Regarding disadvantage, 49% of studies reported the ethnicity of program participants. Only 14% reported parental education levels. Among studies providing information on family income and ethnicity, the majority of participants were low income and non-white.

Mattingly and co-authors were highly critical of the absence of relevant data regarding pupil disadvantage, arguing that this lack of data "undermines efforts to provide evidence of a programme success" (p. 564).

Intervention characteristics

78.6% of the interventions included in this review included components to help parents support their child's learning at home. 61% had some focus on parenting skills.

Of the 34 evaluations containing data on how long programs had been running, 85% had been going for less than a year when the evaluation was carried out, and 59% had been in existence for six months or fewer.

39 of 41 evaluations indicated who originated the programs. 49% were originated by school districts and 39% by university researchers. 15% were initiated by local schools.

Teachers participated in the development of 10 of the 34 programs for which relevant data were available, with parents participating in the development of 5.

With regard to the variables measured in the included studies, this was a broad review of academic outcomes and behaviours.

Outcomes

This was a general review of academic outcomes and behaviours. 28 of the 41 included studies assessed some measure of ‘student academic achievement; of those 28, 19 (67.9%) showed improvement.

Looking only at included studies which assist academic achievement (20 studies), 15 showed positive impacts of parental support programs. However, only five of these studies used a control group, and only four used a design consisting of matched controls, a pre-test and a post test. Of these four, two found improvements in people outcomes, and two did not. That is to say, of the only four studies considered sufficiently rigorous to draw conclusions from, two supported the hypothesis that parental support interventions improve child academic outcomes, and two did not.

Key messages

The conclusions of the study are sometimes cited as suggesting that parental involvement programs do not provide quantifiable benefits; such a statement is *not* an accurate representation of the study's findings. The authors do observe that they found little empirical evidence that parent involvement programs improve student achievement or alter the behaviour of parents, teachers or students. However, they also did not find much empirical evidence suggesting that such programs do not produce these benefits. Rather, according to Mattingly, the vast majority of studies available at the time (2002) suffer from serious methodological issues, and reliable conclusions cannot be drawn from them.

The key message to take from this frequently cited review is that the quality of primary studies in the field of parental intervention programs needs to be greatly improved.

MCDONALD, L., D. MOBERG, D., et al., 2006, After-School Multifamily Groups: A Randomized Controlled Trial Involving Low-Income, Urban, Latino Children, Children & Schools 28 (1): 25-34.

Overview

This randomized controlled trial evaluated a culturally representative parent engagement strategy with Latino parents of elementary school children. Ten urban schools serving low-income children from mixed cultural backgrounds participated in a large study. Classrooms were randomly assigned either to an after- school, multifamily support group (FAST: Families and Schools Together) or to receive eight behavioral parenting pamphlets with active follow-up (FAME: Family Education). Of 180 Latino parents assigned to FAST, 90 percent came once and 85 percent graduated. Two- year follow-up teacher data were collected for 130 Latino children. The teachers, blind to condition, evaluated the children's classroom functioning. Data were analyzed with hierarchical linear modelling, using a conservative, intent-to-treat model. On standardized mental health instruments (Teacher's Report Form of the Child Behavior Checklist; Social Skills Rating System), statistically significant differences favored assignment to FAST rather than to FAME on academic performance and classroom behaviors, including aggression and social skills.

Country/area: Milwaukee, USA

Study participants

A total of 473 Milwaukee study children and their families were involved at the baseline data collection of the larger study (FAST = 272; FAME = 201).Of the original 180 Latino families who participated in this research study, 87 percent of the parents were successfully followed up two years later. The Latino subsample with two year follow-up data by teachers was similar to the original sample of Latino children at baseline except on gender and grade. More boys were assigned to FAST (54 percent) compared with FAME (28 percent) and more third-graders were in FAST (51 percent) compared with FAME (38 percent).These group differences were adjusted for in the multivariate analysis described later.

The Latino families in the subsample were from very low SES bands – more than 70% had incomes of less than $20,000 and a third, of less than $10,000. Almost half of the parents had not completed high school; only 20% had more than a high school education. The average age of children during the baseline phase of the study was 7.

Intervention

In 10 urban primary schools, classrooms were randomly assigned to either the treatment (FAST) programme or to the comparison Family Education (FAME) programme. FAST is an intervention strategy of 8 weekly meetings, FAME is a series of booklets which were followed up by phone calls and an invitation to attend a formal lecture on “parenting”. All families with children in either the treatment or the comparison classrooms were recruited.

The FAST programme has no stated curriculum; about 60% of the processes involved in each iteration of the programme are malleable to fit cultural preferences. The team leads a structured package of processes, based on family stress theory, parent-led play therapy, group work and adult education and community involvement with the aim of enhancing relationships.

During the first hour of each session, families are at their own tables, sharing a meal, singing songs and interacting in other ways. During the second hour, the children play while parents talk in small groups. This is followed by 15 minutes of 'cross generational' time, in which parents and children play together under the auspices of play therapy – no bossing, teaching or directing takes place.

Follow up data was collected for two years after the programme; this review deals with the data for a subsample of Latino children, who came from 6 of the 10 schools involved in the overall project.

Parents who agreed to be part of the study were interviewed before the programme began, just after it was completed, a year after and two years after. Parents were also paid $25 per interview. At the final interview, parents were asked for consent to allow their child's teachers to be contacted for the purposes of evaluation. The teachers were generally unaware of which programme families had been involved with.

Teachers evaluated the children's socio-emotional functioning and academic performance.

All families who agreed to be in the study and were assigned to the FAST programme were included in the dataset. Teachers of children in either group were asked to complete evaluation forms before, three months after the intervention and two years after the intervention.

Hierarchical repeated measures regression models were used to estimate the net effects of the FAST program after two years, on a range of relevant precursors of substance abuse and on child behavior outcomes based on teacher reports . Twelve multifamily group cycles included Latino families, and because the families were assigned to a condition (treatment or comparison), this formed distinctive groupings.

Outcomes

Of the 80 Latino families assigned to the FAST programme, 90% attended once, and of these, 85% attended for at least five sessions and graduated. FAST families attended an average of 9.9 parent-led family support groups over the next two years. Of the 50 Latino families who agreed to be involved in FAME, 100% were contacted with booklets, mailed newsletters and phone calls; only 4% attended the FAME formal lecture.

After evaluation of teacher ratings at the two year follow up, the children from the FAST programme tended to improve their mean scores from pre-test to follow-up, whereas FAME students tended to have more negative means from pre-test to

follow-up. The means of students from FAST on the academic performance scale were significantly higher than the means for students assigned to FAME.
At the two year assessment point, teachers reported that students from the FAST programme had significantly more social skills, less aggressive behaviour in the classroom and better academic skills than those from the FAME programme.

Key messages

The findings from this study suggest that afterschool, multifamily groups can increase parent involvement and may help address the achievement gap.

An evidence-based model that builds relationships across systems-the family, the school, and the community can significantly change outcomes for low-income, culturally marginalized families.This change was achieved in this study through respectful inclusion of the parents in the after- school program, and cultural representation of the child's social ecology in the implementation team.

If schools serving Latino students take responsibility for providing evidence-based parent involvement practices, they can support the federal goals of improved academic achievement for all students.

NATIONAL COLLEGE FOR LEADERSHIP OF SCHOOLS AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES, 2010, Leadership for parental engagement, National College.

Overview

A National College project to explore the leadership of parental engagement practices, and how leaders of schools and children's centres engage parents in working towards improved life chances for children. The findings represent a snapshot of the leadership of parental engagement in 10 extended services clusters across England. The 10 clusters taking part in the project represent a diversity of geography, location, size and context . National College consultants spent time in each of the clusters talking to leaders, parents and other stakeholders, enquiring into the leadership and practice of parental engagement. This report represents the summary of their findings.

Findings

Vision, values, culture and strategic direction underpin successful practice. The schools, children's centres and clusters where these are embedded have developed parental engagement opportunities focused on meeting the needs as perceived by parents. Many of the clusters have sought to create a culture that embeds collaboration. This is evidenced by means of monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and listening to the perceptions of staff, parents and children.

Leadership of parental engagement is critical. It takes many forms, but almost always involves a senior leader – often the head-teacher. There is a strong link between the effectiveness of the leadership and the vision and values that underpin

the work. In many clusters the leadership is widely distributed with multiple opportunities for staff and parents to develop their leadership skills. Sometimes it rests almost exclusively with the head-teacher but in other contexts it is found in the trust and autonomy extended to parent workers.

Parental engagement in practice focuses on both bringing parents into school and on going out to meet them in the community. An important factor is how far parental engagement practice is outward facing and collaborative. Parents often have a much stronger voice in children's centres, and increasingly parents are actively engaged as partners in decision-making and in shaping the offer of extended services. This is especially the case in primary schools, but there are also some strong examples from the secondary sector. Common practice includes creating opportunities for parents to gain skills and confidence themselves as adults and as learners as well as increasing their ability to support their children's learning more effectively. For some, the opportunity to help build social cohesion in areas of deprivation is seen as fundamental to raising aspirations for children and their families. For others it creates opportunities to combat isolation or offer enrichment. A critical element is the identification of local need and the creation of solutions that fit the local context.

The importance of collaborative work beyond the school, centre and cluster: all the clusters involved in this project integrate the work of parental engagement within the wider context – including extended services provision and partnership working. None of the work of the 10 clusters isolated parental engagement activity from wider integrated working practices. Many clusters have multi-agency-based steering groups or forums, with parent representatives sitting alongside representatives from a wide range of agencies and voluntary organisations whose work is focused on supporting children and families. Even where the cluster vision is less strong, individual schools and children's centres value and create collaborative partnerships with a wide range
of partners with the aim of meeting the specific needs of their local communities. The strongest practice develops collaborative relationships based on trust, integrity and commitment.

Sustainability: commitment, passion and a sense of moral purpose were all more important than funding to most clusters and most leaders. And it is this that enhances the likelihood that clusters will find the means to sustain and develop their parental engagement work. Some adopted formal routes to sustainability, either through social enterprise models or trusts. Others adopted less formal routes, developing strong relationships through clusters or families of schools. Involving governors in supporting the work of parental engagement is also an important factor in developing sustainable practice.

NORWOOD, P.M., ATKINSON, S.E., TELLEZ, K., and SALDANA, D.C, 1997, Contextualizing parent education programs in urban schools: The impact on minority parents and students, Urban Education, 32, 411-432.

Overview

The article describes a collaborative effort among a university college of education, its graduate school of social work, and a community school to develop a culturally responsive parent education/involvement program. Program participants indicate they had more knowledge and confidence enabling them to interact more effectively with their children at home, as well as with teachers and others at the school.

Country/area: Texas, USA.

Study participants

Low income elementary schools chosen as community-base site, for several reasons: association with Communities in Schools Houston, designation of high numbers of the school's students being at risk of academic failure; 400 of the 522 students identified as economically disadvantaged, poor academic achievement. 75% of students were African American, 25% Latino.

14 parents and 6 grandparents participated in the programme. There were 19 African Americans and one Anglo mother.

The study

In consultation with the school, and in response to parental surveys, a series of weekly sessions were devised; in the first year of the project these were to support African American parents an in the second, Latino parents.

In the first year, the intervention concentrated on six areas: positive behaviour management, ways to give praise effectively, ways to nurture children, development expectations for children at different ages, promotion of children's self-esteem, and personal stress management. The second hour focussed on developing the academic readiness of parents and children.

Evaluation: several months after the programme, interviews were held with parent participants, key informants, and teachers. Evaluation sheets and letters written by participants were also reviewed.

A two-group, non-equivalent comparison group design was used to test for program effects. Two standardized tests used in the state of Texas served as the dependent variable. Those students whose parents participated in the training served as the treatment group (N = 39). Another group of randomly chosen age cohorts (matched for socioeconomic status) served as the comparison group (N= 40).

Key messages

All parents reported that they felt more able to provide a more nurturing parent child relationship.

Parents reported a positive effect on their feelings of confidence and personal power

in interactions with school staff.

Children of parents participating in the programme scored much higher on standardised tests in math and reading than did those in the control group.

NYE, C., TURNER, H. M., and SCHWARTZ, J. B., 2006, Approaches to parental involvement for improving the academic performance of elementary school children in grades K–6, London: The Campbell Collaboration.

Overview

In this 2006 systematic review, Nye, Turner and Schwartz synthesised the outcomes of 18 randomised controlled trials investigating the effects of parental involvement intervention programs on the academic performance of primary school-age children. The review included studies looking at the effects of parental involvement on reading, maths and science.

The included studies were undertaken between 1964 and 2000, with seven of the studies conducted between 1964 in 1982 and 11 conducted between 1993 and 2000. 15 studies were conducted in the US. Two were conducted in the UK and one in Canada.

Study participants

In studies reporting the socio-economic status of the families, 18% were from lower SES groups and 73% were from mixed SES groups. 9% were from middle SES. Nye et al do not give an indication whether or not any programs were specifically targeted at disadvantaged groups.

Participating children were in primary school. 47% of programs involved a mix of primary school ages, 21% looked only at children in grade two, 11% focused on children in grade one, 11% looked at children in kindergarten, and the remaining studies did not report an age/grade breakdown.

Intervention characteristics

The review was limited to studies which included at least two groups and which used random assignment -- i.e. randomised controlled trial designs.

The duration of interventions ranged from 4 to 104 weeks with a mean of 23.2 weeks and a median of 10.5 weeks. As the difference between the median and mean suggests, the intervention lasting 104 weeks was an outlier.

Outcomes

Looking at the 12 programs which sought to improve child reading, the authors found a combine mean weighted effect size of 0.42. This was almost identical to the overall effect size for all 18 academic interventions: 0.43. The 95% confidence interval range for literacy outcomes was 0.18 to 0.66.

An effect size of 0.42 is generally considered moderate. It equates to just over 2/5 of a standard deviation improvement. 66% of a control group would be expected to score below the average scorer in an intervention group boasting this effect size. That is, the effect is the equivalent of moving an individual from the 50th percentile to the 67th. Looked at another way, the average person in an experimental group of 25 would be expected to achieve a reading score equivalent to the ninth best score in a comparable control group.

The authors found that interventions in which parents were provided with education and training to improve their child's general academic performance produced the second largest effect size (0.61).The size of this effect was higher than that for interventions based on maths games, and was second only to that for a maths-only intervention.

The authors found no relationship between duration of intervention and effect size, but stressed that the data available to them did not permit them to draw conclusions about this relationship.

All studies included in this systematic review were randomised controlled trials, limiting the potential for study bias. However, the review included two different types of studies: those published in academic journals and those classified as grey literature. In the latter category, we include dissertations and unpublished reports. In this systematic review, grey literature accounted for 12 of the 18 studies, and yielded a combined weighted effect size of 0.36, compared to a much larger effect size for journal publications: 0.63.

Nye et al observe that, if the authors had retrieved studies from academic journals only, "we would have overestimated the effect of parental involvement on children's academic performance by approximately 100%. Conversely, if we had retrieved studies from the grey literature only, we would have underestimated the effect of parent involvement on children's academic performance by approximately 50%".

Key messages

Results from randomised controlled trials indicate that parental support interventions targeting child reading outcomes appear to have a moderate but meaningful effect on those outcomes. However, this study did not seek to investigate the key participant and program characteristics contributing to reading improvements.

OFSTED, 2008, Good Practice in Re-Engaging Disaffected and Reluctant Students in Secondary Schools.

Overview

This report is on the qualitative survey work done by Ofsted between 2007 and 2008. Inspectors surveyed (it would seem that this means interviewed) headteachers, teachers, support staff, parents and carers, students and governors of 29 secondary

schools (including one academy and one PRU). The focus of the report is on good practice shown in re-engagement of young people who are or have been disaffected with learning.

Study participants

There were 29 schools involved in the survey, all at secondary level; this included one academy and one Pupil Referral Unit. These schools between them had 32,987 students, of which 13% had been disaffected with their learning at one time or another; of these, the schools had been successful in re-engaging 78% (3,404) of these young people. Disaffection was defined as displaying one or more of the following: regular non-compliance, (but not aggressive or threatening behaviour), regular disruption, leading to recurrent entries in schools' incident logs, recurring fixed term exclusions, as well as absence of 20% or more of the school year, and generally quiet and withdrawn with little interest in lessons.

Key Messages

The factors which were most successful in helping these students to enjoy learning included:

- a commitment from all staff to meeting the students' needs
- effective monitoring systems to identify students at risk
- close collaboration between primary and secondary schools to prevent students' disengagement at transition
- the involvement of a wide variety of adults within the school and the community to support the students
- regular and effective communication with parents and carers, including involving them closely in determining the strategies to be used to support their children
- modifying the curriculum and drawing on educational providers beyond the school
- close working relationships with local agencies responsible for supporting children and young people.

The schools visited perceived three common factors that worked against the re-engagement of disaffected students: unwillingness on the part of parents to work with the school and, in some cases, collusion with the students against the school; external influences and attractions that were more compelling for the students than school, such as gangs, criminal activity and drug-taking; and weaknesses in the provision made by the schools and other services for their students.

Common features to schools that were successful in re-engaging young people:

- The staff shared a commitment to helping the students succeed, which they expressed clearly to students and their families. The school ethos valued and respected the needs of individuals.
- Robust monitoring of academic, personal and social progress, and close collaboration with primary schools and other services for children and young people ensured that students who were likely to become disaffected were

identified early.
- Teaching assistants provided vital support for individuals, helping them to maintain their interest and cope successfully with any crises. This allowed teachers to focus on teaching the whole class.
- Pastoral support was managed by assigned support staff. They acted as the first point of contact for all parents and carers and they directed them to the most appropriate member of staff if they could not deal with the issue themselves.
- Communication with students and their families was very effective.

Some of the schools surveyed felt that significant delays from specialist services, such as child and adolescent mental health services, had contributed to students' continuing disengagement.

OFSTED, 2010, Learning Together: How Education Providers Promote Social Responsibility and Community Cohesion.

Overview

The aim of this report was to evaluate how a purposive sample of local authorities and education providers knew and understood their local communities and how they supported young people to become responsible citizens and to make a positive contribution to society, in response to the requirement for schools to promote social cohesion (judged in school inspections by Ofsted since 2008).

The report details the import of strategic leadership in promoting community cohesion and highlights the importance of interagency working. It then describes the opportunities given to learners to develop skills and knowledge needed to be effective members of communities, and then details the barriers to such citizenship.

Study participants

Seven local authorities were involved in the research between June and December 2008. The sample of authorities was purposive, selected to provide a range of geographic positions, sizes and types of provision. Visits to the sites were one week long, and involved visits to a total of 47 settings – 9 colleges, 14 secondary schools (including a PRU and a residential centre), 15 primary schools and 9 children's centres.

Settings were selected on the basis of recommendations from senior leaders in the LAs, on the basis of identified good practice in promoting social cohesion. In February 2009, additional visits were made to supplement the original information; 20 post-16 providers were visited. During visits, inspectors met (interviewed?) young people, other learners (in adult settings), support staff, teachers, senior leaders and parents, LA leaders and officers, and representatives from partner agencies. Observations also took place where possible.

Key findings

Strategic leadership was strong in five of the seven local authorities. Their successful coordinating role helped to bring communities together.

In the best practice observed, local authorities and individual educational settings shared information effectively and worked together to support transition for learners.

Expert nurturing of learners and their families in early years settings was not always built on and, as learners moved on, there was often a failure, particularly between secondary schools and colleges, to forward information about them.

Successful strategic, multi-agency partnerships brought improved support for learners. These partnerships had extensive knowledge of their communities and were able to allocate expertise promptly. However, the monitoring and evaluation of the impact of such focused support were often insufficiently developed.

Despite good international and local links, very few providers had developed links with other schools in the United Kingdom that were different from their own. As a result, learners sometimes held limited or stereotyped views of other parts of the country.
Initiatives to bring different groups of learners together to break down barriers often changed learners' views and challenged entrenched prejudices. However, providers did not evaluate these initiatives systematically.

The best providers offered explicit training in advocacy skills to enable children, young people and adults to participate better in the world of work, their local community and democratic processes, but such training was not provided universally.

Teachers in some of the settings visited undertook training to develop their self-confidence in tackling sensitive and controversial issues and in challenging learners' entrenched views. However, in settings where such training had not been provided, staff were less confident or skilled, and so learners missed out. The quality of training for governors in relation to community cohesion also varied.

Two priorities emerging for providers were to improve relationships between younger and older people and to work with transport agencies to overcome barriers to travel beyond the immediate neighbourhood.

PASSEY, D., C. ROGERS, et al., 2004, The Motivational Effect of ICT on Pupils, London: DfES/University of Lancaster.

Overview

This study was designed to investigate the impacts of information and communication technologies (ICT) on pupil motivation. The aim was to quantify impacts where possible, and to relate impacts to aspects such as learning outcomes, behaviour, school attendance, truancy, wider issues such as crime and anti-social behaviour, and uses of digital content. The study was intended to consider the ways

in which teachers could enhance motivational impacts for pupils, especially for those disaffected with traditional forms of learning.

Sample

A sample of 17 schools from across England - where positive motivational impacts of ICT had been identified by external observers - were selected for detailed study. This included 5 primary, 8 secondary, 2 special schools and 2 Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). The sample was selected in order to cover a range of school phases and types, geographical locations, locality, socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds of pupils, and ICT facilities deployed.

Data collection took place during the spring and summer terms 2003. Interviews were undertaken with a total of 121 head teachers, teachers and classroom assistants, 22 parents, and 126 pupils, as well as 24 youth and community workers, health workers, careers officers and police officers.

Observations were undertaken in 33 classrooms, and documentary evidence was collected. Questionnaires were completed by a representative sample of 1,206 pupils on their attitudes to school, learning and motivation. Subsequently, qualitative and quantitative forms of analysis were completed.

Methods

The measures of motivation formed the basis of the pupil questionnaire. Pupils were asked to reflect on recent experiences of using ICT in class and to answer questions about their experience. These answers provided scales corresponding to each of the eight motivational measures. The relative strengths of the different type of measure were then analysed to draw conclusions about the types of motivation associated with ICT use.

Key findings

- ICT use by pupils and teachers in the case study schools led to positive motivational outcomes, supporting a focus upon learning and the tackling of learning tasks.
- More positive motivation resulted when ICT use was focused on both teaching and learning, than when ICT was used to support teaching alone.
- Boys and girls were both motivated by uses of ICT. There was evidence that motivation from ICT use positively affected the work patterns of boys so that they worked in similar ways to the persistent pattern of girls.
- Motivation appeared to be independent of ethnic background, but socio-economic background impacted on occasions in terms of limited access or out of school support.
- Motivational aspects of ICT are being used to support learning through out-of-hours initiatives in a range of contexts. Computer clubs are the most common

form of out-of hours initiative in this school sample, but most out-of-hours initiatives that involve ICT are found to be popular with pupils and young people.

- Out-of-hours access has been an important support for some young people who are disaffected or at risk. Pupils have gained qualifications from access to out of school facilities in some instances.
- There is evidence from the study that skills developed in out-of-school situations have a positive bearing upon motivation and confidence within in-school settings.
- ICT has been used in some cases to support strong partnerships between schools and external agencies or groups. However, there is more potential for this area of development.
- ICT has been used in only limited ways so far to enable those working in youth and community settings to support and be involved with education through the ICT medium. Those working in this field are sometimes unaware of the potential that ICT can offer, or not able to access funding or resources to develop partnerships further.

RALPH, A. and SANDERS, M.R., 2003, Preliminary evaluation of the Group Teen Triple P program for parents of teenagers making the transition to high school, Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health 2(3): 1-10.

Overview

Group Teen Triple P is a brief group parenting program for parents of teenagers. It is based on the successful Triple P - Positive Parenting Program for parents of children aged from 0 to 12, with a focus on helping parents manage the transition from late childhood to early adolescence.

The paper describes the initial evaluation of a universal trial of the program offered to all parents of students entering their first year of high school at age 12 in a regional north Queensland school. Twenty-seven parents completed a battery of self-report questionnaires immediately before and after participating in the 8-week program. Participating parents reported significant reductions in conflict with their teenager, and on measures of laxness, over-reactivity, and disagreements with their partner over parenting issues. These are well-established parenting risk factors. In addition, parents reported significant improvements on measures of self-regulation, including self-efficacy, self-sufficiency, and self-management, and reductions on measures of depression, anxiety, and stress.

It was concluded that a preliminary evaluation of the Group Teen Triple P program achieved its goals of reducing targeted risk factors associated with the development of behavioural and emotional problems in teenagers. The paper concludes with an examination of issues around parent recruitment and engagement which are crucial for the successful provision of effective and timely advice and support for parents of teenagers.

Country/area: Australia.

Study participants

Potential participants for this study were 771 parents with 12- to 13-year-old children from four schools in two Queensland locations (one northern; one southern). Both were low socioeconomic areas with high juvenile crime rates. In both locations, one school was randomly assigned to receive the initial group program, and the other to receive it one year later. All participation by parents and children was entirely voluntary.

At the beginning of 2000, letters were mailed to the parents of all newly enrolled year 8 students.

In the northern location, of the 169 families who were contacted, 68 parents indicated they were interested in attending a group, 37 attended at least one group session, and 26 completed the program. In three quarters of cases only one parent from a family attended, with the remaining quarter of cases being both parents, although they did not always attend all sessions together. Of the 37 parents who attended at least one session, only two were fathers attending without the mother. Four couples attended, and the remainder were mothers.

In the southern location, of the 165 families who were contacted, 70 parents indicated they were interested in attending a group, 41 attended at least one group session and 30 completed the program. In three quarters of cases, only one parent from a family attended with the remainder being both parents, although they did not always attend all sessions together. Of the 41 parents who attended at least one session, only three were fathers attending without the mother. Seven couples attended, and the remainder were mothers. Groups comprised between three and 13 parents.

Intervention

Group Teen Triple P is a variant of the Triple P Parenting programme. It addresses parenting risk factors, such as harsh discipline styles, parent teenager conflict and communication difficulties, parental monitoring of teen activities, parental depression and marital conflict. The programme aims to supply parents with assertive discipline skills.

It is a behavioural family intervention programme over 8 hours (generally a two hour session once a week, for four weeks), delivered in a group setting. Through an active skills training process, parents acquire new knowledge and skills through observation (practitioner modelling and video), discussion, practice in small groups and emotionally supportive feedback. The sessions cover child (teen) development, the likely causes of behavioural difficulties, strategies for encouraging development and for managing undesirable teenage behaviour. Meetings are accompanied by homework, parent workbooks and video screenings, and individual phone consultations after the end of the programme, up to 30 minutes, once per week for four weeks, leading to a total of about 10 hours' contact per family.

Research methods

Parents were surveyed by means of a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) at the University of Queensland.

Interviews lasted about 18 minutes and comprised verification that the person was the parent or guardian of the child on the school's enrolment list, and telephone adaptations of two established questionnaires: the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) which asks parents to describe their children's behaviour; and the Family Background Questionnaire (FBQ) which asks parents about their family structure, composition and resources.

At the end of each interview, parents were asked if they had received the consent form for their child to complete the Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Survey. Parents were encouraged to sign and return the form, and a replacement was sent to any parent who had mislaid or not received the form. A second series of telephone interviews was conducted 12 months later. The aim was to re-interview all parents in order to ascertain changes that had occurred between time 1 and time 2. However, it was only possible to interview 280 of the original 602 parents.

The Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Survey was administered during school time to all first year students at all four participating schools for whom consent had been obtained. Completed questionnaires were obtained from 453 students (59%). When the survey was repeated 12 months later, completed questionnaires were obtained from 360 of these students.

Outcomes

Parents in the treatment groups reported significant improvement.

Parent-teenager conflict reduced from a mean of 7.0 to 4.5.

Parenting styles improved, with reductions on the laxness score from 17.3 to 13.5 and a reduction on over-reactivity from 20.5 to 17.1.

Parental self efficacy improved, as did self sufficiency and self management.

Personal agency on the part of parents did not improve.

Parental conflict over parenting strategies improved from 5.3 to 3.1.

Parental satisfaction with the programme, measured at the end of the programme, was generally high.

Parents from the treatment group reported significantly less difficult behaviour than the control group, reported higher confidence.

REDDING, S., and LANGDON, J, et al., 2004,The Effects of Comprehensive Parent Engagement On Student Learning Outcomes, American Educational Research Association, San Diego.

Overview

This study examined the school-level effects on tested student achievement in 129 high poverty elementary schools that implemented a common set of comprehensive parent-engagement strategies over a 2-year period. The strategies included

- Parent participation in decision making at the school
- Alignment of the school's policies and procedures regarding homework and parent-teacher conferences with rubrics of research-based practices
- Explicit discussion of the roles of parents, teachers, and students around compacts, learning standards, and homework policies
- Reading school-home links aligned with state standards and in-class instruction
- Parent education focused on home reading and study habits
- Outreach through home visits, family nights, and a family resource library

Because the set of strategies was successfully implemented with little variability among the subject schools, comparison of effects on student learning outcomes (state assessment tests) were made with the state as a whole and with a series of multiple, statistical matches with control groups of schools with identical beginning test scores. The project schools demonstrated average gains on state assessment tests that significantly exceeded the average gains of all schools in the state and of multiple, statistical matches with schools with identical beginning test scores.

The study was designed to answer three questions:

1. Was implementation of the program acceptably uniform across the 129 schools to make this set of schools distinct?

2. Did this set of schools demonstrate significant gains on the Illinois Standards Assessment Test (composite score) between 2001 and 2003?

3. Did this set of schools demonstrate gains on the Illinois Standards Assessment Test (composite score) between 2001 and 2003 that were significantly greater than (a) all elementary schools in the state, and (b) 1,000 statistical control groups, each generated by a random query of the state database that found schools with 2001 composite ISAT scores matching those of the experimental group.

Study participants

The 129 schools in this study became part of the Solid Foundation programme

because their districts were included on the Illinois State Board of Education lists' Illinois State Board of Education's list of districts with low assessment scores in reading.

Typically, the schools were in urban or remote rural settings.

The students served by these schools were disproportionately poor and were members of ethnic minorities.

Intervention

The study examined the school-level effects on tested student achievement in 129 high poverty elementary schools that implemented a common set of comprehensive parent-engagement strategies over a 2-year period. The strategies included:

- Parent participation in decision making at the school
- Alignment of the school s policies and procedures regarding homework and parent-teacher conferences with rubrics of research-based practices
- Explicit discussion of the roles of parents, teachers, and students around compacts, learning standards, and homework policies
- Reading school-home links aligned with state standards and in-class instruction
- Parent education focused on home reading and study habits
- Outreach through home visits, family nights, and a family resource library.

A statistical control group of non-implementing schools was created by conducting a computer search of the database of all schools in the state and matching each project school with a school with an identical base-year composite assessment score. This random match was conducted 1,000 times, and the group mean of the 2-year gain on the ISAT was compared with that of the mean for project schools.

Outcomes

Students in the Solid Foundations schools went from 51.3% in 2001 to 55.8% in 2003 of students meeting state expectations.

This gain was significantly greater than the overall gain for all schools in the state – 4.5% for the project schools opposed to .1% for all schools, and 2.5% for the control group (1000 random statistical matches).

From 2001 to 2003, the 129 Solid Foundation schools realized a larger average increase in the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state expectations on the ISAT than 99.99% of 1,000 control groups generated by the random, statistical match with beginning-year ISAT scores.

While the Solid Foundation schools enjoyed a 4.5% increase in test scores, the control group moved from 51.3% to 53.8% during the same period, while all elementary schools in the state moved from 63.8% to 63.9%.

The Solid Foundation programme effect seems to come from the overall impact of a number of interventions, rather than just individual activities. The effects of the ongoing provision of parental engagement activities had a two way effect: on parents and on schools.

Family attention to learning increases, and as teachers interact with parents over learning, teachers are reminded of parental importance, and the child's learning increasingly becomes the focus of parent-teacher interactions. This leads to better, more frequent interactions between parents and teachers, greater social capital for children and a school community which is more supportive of children's successes.

Key messages

Community organisations and schools will be most effective in engaging families if their efforts are focused, coherent and comprehensive.

Schools should be clear about what they expect of parents, and communicate regularly with them about what children are learning, with suggestions about parental involvement.

Schools can provide opportunities for parents to interact with staff about parental roles in children's learning.

An ongoing conversation between parents and teachers about the role of each in children's learning is central to building the relationship and understanding that enhances school performance.

REID, J.M., WEBSTER-STRATTON, C., and HAMMOND, M., 2007, Enhancing a classroom social competence and problem solving curriculum by offering parent training to families of moderate- to high-risk elementary school children, Journal of clinical child and adolescent psychology, 36, 4, 605-620.

Overview

The Incredible Years parent and classroom interventions were evaluated for the first time in elementary schools. Culturally diverse, socioeconomically disadvantaged schools were randomly assigned to intervention or control (CON). In intervention schools, all children received a 2-year classroom intervention beginning in kindergarten. In addition, indicated children were randomly assigned to also receive parent training (PT +CR) or only the classroom intervention (CR). PT + CR mothers reported that, following intervention, children showed fewer externalizing problems and more emotion regulation than CR or CON children. Observations showed that child–mother bonding was stronger in the PT + CR condition than in the CON condition, and PT + CR mothers were significantly more supportive and less critical than CR or CON mothers. Teachers reported that PT + CR mothers were significantly more involved in school and that children in the PT + CR and the CR conditions had significantly fewer externalizing problems than in the CON condition.

Study participants

Fourteen elementary schools in the Seattle area were selected for the project based on higher percentages of free and reduced lunch. These schools were matched on variables such as size, geographic location, and demographics of the children, and matched pairs were randomly assigned to intervention or control conditions. Parents of all children in kindergarten classes were invited to participate in the project, and 77% (N ¼ 1,152) of possible families signed consent forms indicating that they were willing to participate. Data were collected only on children whose parents had consented, but all children in the intervention classrooms received the classroom intervention.

From the 1,152 children enrolled in the study, a moderate- to high-risk group of indicated students from each kindergarten classroom was selected based on parent or teacher reports of elevated levels of behavior problems.

In intervention schools half of the indicated sample from each classroom was randomly assigned to receive the CR intervention; the other half also received the PT + CR intervention. In the control schools, the indicated sample received assessments but no additional parent or classroom intervention. Intervention and CON schools and
participants were comparable on most demographic variables. At the school level, there were no significant differences on key demographic variables.

Students were on average 67 months old, and 59% were male. The sample was diverse (20% Latino, 14% African American, 14% Asian, 38% Caucasian,14% other minority), and 23% of the children did not speak English as their first language. In addition a high proportion of families were living in poverty (51% of families were receiving financial aid). Thirty-four percent of the mothers in the sample were unpartnered, 26% had not completed high school, and 14% were unemployed.

Intervention

The overall study design randomly assigned matched pairs of schools to intervention or control conditions. In intervention schools, all children received a 2-year classroom intervention (CR) spanning kindergarten and first grade that consisted of the Dinosaur Social Skills classroom prevention program. CON schools followed their usual school curriculum. In intervention schools a group of moderately high-risk children were identified, and these children were randomly assigned to receive only the CR intervention or receive a 2-year PT + CR condition. This design allowed for testing the added effects of combining parent training with the classroom intervention (PT + CR) compared to CR intervention and to the regular school program (CON).

Outcomes

The results are significant but do not include an assessment of the impact on children’s achievements.

The parenting programme together with the school curriculum had the largest impact on children’s behaviour, who also bonded much better with school staff becoming significantly more involved with the school. The effect sizes, however, were small

(but see below).

The attendance rates of mothers were typically low for this type of intervention (half the mothers attended less than half the sessions despite intensive efforts to remove barriers (child care, meals, transport provided) and encourage participation (reminders, buddies from class, small gift certificate bonus).

In the analysis the researchers included all mothers regardless of attendance with the result that the effect sizes were bound to be diminished because significant numbers did not get the 'treatment'.

ROGERS, L., HALLAM, S., LONG, M., 2010, Evaluation of the Impact of 'Unlocking Potential' Pilot on Children, Young People and Families Year 1 Interim Report, Institute of Education, University of London.

Overview

Unlocking Potential: the National Pilot Programme Children, Young People and Families offers an added dimension to Every Child Counts (ECC) and Every Child a Reader (ECaR) in schools that run both programmes specifically targeted at those children who are not achieving maximum benefit from the programmes due to poor attendance and/or poor parental support. Over the three year project School Home Support Practitioners (SHSPs) will be placed in twenty schools in the pilot areas of Bradford, Bristol, Hackney, Islington and Tower Hamlets. Following specialist training in delivering early intervention parenting programmes, SHSPs will put in place a number of interventions to address parenting skills and children's social development to support and reinforce the specialist numeracy and literacy provision the children are receiving at school.

The focus during the first year of the pilot has been on the following research questions:

- Does the alignment of School Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions improve the percentage of children who can fully catch up with their peers?
- Does the alignment of School Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions impact on the speed with which children go through the programme?
- Does the alignment of School Home Support with early literacy and numeracy interventions improve the maintenance of gains made on the programmes?
- What are the key features of success?
- What are the barriers to success?

Intervention

Visits were made to the schools involved in the pilot of Unlocking Potential. Individual semi-structured interviews were undertaken with two Delivery Service Managers, 16 Head teachers, three Deputy head teachers, one SENCO, 12 ECC teachers, 17

ECaR teachers and 19 SHSPs. Focus group interviews were undertaken with 34 class teachers, 48 parents and 106 children. Drawings were used in the focus groups with pupils, to enable all pupils to have their voice heard within the research. Pupils were asked to draw a picture of themselves as readers and/or mathematicians. Pro formas to collect data on attendance, behaviour and parental involvement have been provided to the research team from School Home Support.

ECC and ECaR have shared data to track progress including gains in numeracy and literacy with the research team.

A comparison group of schools, involved with Reading Recovery and Numbers Count similar to the project schools, has been identified. Data from the comparator schools has been compared with that from the project schools in order to assess the impact of Unlocking Potential.

Outcomes

School circumstances

The pilot schools were all situated within areas of relative social deprivation but they varied in relation to levels of community cohesion and links with the wider community and whether they were currently or had recently been in special measures.

The role of SHSPs

At the start of Unlocking Potential some head teachers were unclear about the role of the SHSPs: this mainly through a lack of communication. Some head teachers were concerned about the perceived narrow role of SHSPs especially in relation to the high level of resourcing that would be offered to the limited number of children on the programmes. Instances where the SHSP and the ECaR or ECC teachers worked closely together appeared to occur in schools where the practitioner felt confident about the exact remit of the role.

Community cohesion

Community cohesion emerged as an important theme in terms of the SHSP's contribution to the agency of the school in the community. Community learning in schools was seen by many head teachers as key for empowering parents in terms of teaching them skills and also in terms of promoting greater confidence towards learning.

Learning behaviours

There was clear evidence of improvement in learning behaviours for children participating in Unlocking Potential. There were statistically significant reported changes in behaviour in class in relation to the completion of homework, staying on task, having the equipment for the lesson, being able to follow routines, working through a problem and the completion of work.

Emotional well-being

Teacher's perceived that children had made positive progress in developing their emotional well-being. Statistically significant changes were found in relation to how confident the children felt, how well they controlled their anger, their willingness to interact with peers, to participate in class and how well they responded to rewards and sanctions.

Attendance

There was clear evidence of improvements in attendance and punctuality for children participating in Unlocking Potential. Where baseline attendance data and complete attendance data were available, the attendance for this group of children increased from 91.2% to 94.27% the difference was statistically significant. Pupils with poor attendance (below 85%) also improved. ECaR and ECC practitioners and parents were positive about the impact of SHSP in improving attendance.

Where improvements in attendance were less positive, these tended to arise when the parents were not integrated into the school community and when they did not work. Childcare was a problem for parents in low paid work.

Engagement with parents

There was strong evidence to support the role of SHSP in encouraging greater levels of parental involvement in children's learning and school. This included some marginalised families who engaged with the school community for the first time. SHSPs were positive about the support received from the parents. Teacher perceptions were that parental/carer engagement was significantly higher after the programme as was the extent to which they supported their child's learning. After the programme, those parents completing questionnaires indicated that there were more involved with their child's school and that they were more involved in their child's learning. In considering the benefits for children and family as a result of using the SHS service parents and carers felt the greatest benefits had been in relation to improved attendance of their child at school and a general increase in enjoyment at school. In some instances there was evidence of the practical positive impact on family life where financial support has been provided for families in crisis.

Progress made on ECC and ECaR

There were no significant differences between the Unlocking Potential schools and the comparator schools for numeracy gains. There were very few significant differences between the Unlocking Potential schools and the comparator schools for literacy gains.

Given that the children participating in Unlocking Potential had been identified as having difficulties, these findings could be regarded as positive. That the children in the pilot progressed and maintained their progress following the ECC and/or ECaR interventions may suggest that Unlocking Potential is having an impact in enabling these children to make progress.

Important to success/best practice

Important to the success of Unlocking Potential were the workshops to engage parents; the one to one casework with families with complex lives; the high level of support given to parents/carers and the high level of face to face regular contact. Also important was the clear understanding of the role and remit of the SHSPs by the school, head teacher, teachers and the practitioners.

Key messages

Unlocking Potential has been effective in engaging parents/carers and their pupils in ECC and ECaR and with the SHSPs.

Evidence from parents/carers, teachers and SHSPs shows that elements of Unlocking Potential are having an impact in promoting positive behaviour and attendance among the pupils, enabling pupils to develop their self-confidence, their self-esteem and their emotional well-being.

Parents have become more engaged with the children's school and the learning of their children.

Pupils in Unlocking Potential have made positive gains in numeracy and literacy.

For the future, the following may present challenges to Unlocking Potential:

- Ensure that communication is effective with all those involved in Unlocking Potential.
- School facilities and resources need to be the same for all.
- Establish mechanisms to share best practice.
- One of the challenges for the Unlocking Potential Project is for SHSPs to establish contact with parents in a short space of time.
- How to maintain gains made on ECC and ECaR after the programmes have finished. This involves the continued role of SHSP. Indeed, some head teachers, parents and carers expressed concern about what would happen when the ECC and ECaR programmes finished.

RUSSELL, K. AND S. GRANVILLE, S., 2005, Parents' views on improving parental involvement in children's education, Scottish Executive.

Overview

The research aimed to consult all types of parents across Scotland in order to establish the range of views and opinions on the issue of parental involvement. A key aim of the research was to speak to a wide range of parent stakeholders, particularly those who would not normally express an opinion on this type of issue. Hence the sample targeted parents from a variety of cultural and social backgrounds including parents with disabilities, low formal educational levels, foster carers and so on.

Study participants

The Silent Majority

It was proposed at the outset that the larger number of focus groups should be conducted with parents who do not have a heightened level of interest or involvement in the related areas. The reason for this was to reflect the majority parent population, who do not have a heightened involvement. Additionally, these parents tend not to seek opportunities to voice their opinions and, therefore, are likely to be overlooked in the research if not specifically targeted.

Eighteen focus groups were conducted with silent majority parents and these were recruited across four local authority areas covering city, urban and rural environments. The sample also included parents with children at different stages in the education system ranging from children aged 4 (attending local authority pre-school establishments) up to young people aged 19 (who had just left school) and all age groups in between. The age groups were classified as follows:

Non silent minority

Four groups were also conducted with parents who have some form of active involvement as defined earlier. These groups were intended to balance the sample for comparative purposes, in order to access the views of parents who have a more heightened involvement in school affairs. Again, these were recruited across a spread of geographic areas, and consisted of a range of parents according to the same criteria listed above.

Specifically targeted groups

The research also aimed to target parents from “specifically targeted communities” who can be overlooked in research, as they suffer social exclusion or because they tend not to have the opportunities to voice their opinion. The specifically targeted groups covered the following types of parents: Parents with low levels of formal education; Parents from minority ethnic backgrounds; Parents with disabilities
• Foster carers; Asylum seekers and refugees; Gypsies/Travellers.

Twelve sessions were conducted with specifically targeted groups. In most instances these took the form of face to face interviews with two individuals together. Again, these were recruited from different local authority areas in Scotland, covering some additional areas to further broaden the geographic coverage.

Intervention

The research process consisted of two main phases. Phase one: Primary research using focus groups, and face to face interviews and paired depths. Phase two: Monitoring, collating and analysing the findings from phase one, resulting in the production of the final report.

Each focus group consisted of between 7 to 10 participants and was moderated by an experienced researcher. The specifically targeted participants were interviewed in pairs, except for parents with low levels of formal education (who participated in a

focus group).

Key messages

Current perceptions and expectations of involvement

Most parents recognise that they are required to offer some fundamental support and input into their children's learning, for example to help them be punctual, behave well and respect others.

Many parents hold fixed assumptions about the division of labour between home and school and it may be challenging to overcome these.

Forms and patterns of parental involvement

Pressure of time, due to work or family commitments was the most quoted reason for any lack of involvement.

Parents are also primarily concerned for the welfare of their own child. The concern to keep track of their own child's educational experience is what motivates parents to participate in school events or formal bodies.

In any marketing or promotional campaign directed at parents, the Scottish Executive Education Department (SEED) should note that parents are more likely to participate if they perceive a direct positive impact on their own child as a consequence of their involvement.

Patterns of communication

In general, the channels of communication work most effectively at the earlier educational stages (pre-school and primary) when children are young and parents have more opportunities to communicate with the school and teachers on an informal basis.

As pupils progress to secondary school, communication becomes less effective and is also more formalised. Children become increasingly independent and try to distance their parents.

Information requirements

Parents' most important requirements are ongoing feedback about their child throughout the school year, feedback about performance and behaviour on a more regular basis, and immediate contact if there is a problem.

Parents take notice of facts demonstrating that parent/child support activities can have a significant impact on learning and achievement. By helping parents to better understand how critical their actions can be, and what they need to do, they will be more likely to take steps to be more actively involved in their children's education.

There is a need for a more flexible approach to communication by using different mediums. Communication works best when it meets local expectations.

Barriers to parental involvement

Parents perceive the school to present a number of obstacles such as lack of encouragement, not informing parents of what they can do and too few flexible forms of involvement to fit in around busy working and family lives.

Parents are reluctant to participate in formal bodies such as the PTA and School Board because they perceive these to be formal and closed, and they do not identify with the other parents who are members of such groupings.

Parents would benefit from advice and support that show them different ways of getting involved. Some families would appreciate services to overcome personal obstacles and enable them to attend events.

Improving parental involvement

A first step to bringing about change is to inform parents of the importance of improved involvement, explaining the particular benefits that involvement will have, and ensuring they have help in giving their children practical support.

A campaign should aim to challenge the existing assumptions that are held by parents by using key messages which detail the ways that involvement impacts on the progress of their own child.

SCOTT, S., O'CONNOR, T.G., et al, 2010, Impact of a parenting programme in a high-risk, multi-ethnic community: the pals trial, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry 51:12 (2010), 1331–1341.

Overview

Parenting programs have been shown to work when delivered to motivated ethnic majority parents in demonstration projects, but comparatively little is known about their impact when delivered to high-risk, multi-ethnic populations by routine local services.

Intervention

The Primary Age Learning Skills (PALS) trial was a randomized controlled trial of an evidence-based parenting-group program that targeted the parent–child relationship and child literacy. Parents of 174 children were selected from a population of 672 5- and 6-year-olds attending four primary schools in a high-risk, ethnically diverse, inner-city area. Eighty-eight children were allocated to the Incredible Years preventive program plus a shortened six-week version of the SPOKES literacy program, delivered by local services; 86 to usual community services; 152/174 (87%) of families were successfully followed up. Parent–child relationship quality and child behavior were measured using direct observation and parent interview; child reading was assessed psychometrically.

Outcomes

Two-thirds (58/89) of those offered the parenting program attended at least one session, with similar enrolment rates across the Black African, African-Caribbean, White-British and Other ethnic groups. Mean attendance was four relationship-building sessions and one literacy-development session.

Satisfaction questionnaires were completed by 43/58 starters; 93% said they were well or extremely satisfied, with equally high rates across ethnic groups.

At follow-up after one year, those allocated to the intervention showed significant improvements in the parent–child relationship on observation and at interview compared to controls; effects were similar across all ethnic groups.

However, child behavior problems and reading did not improve.

The cost was £1,343 ($2,100) per child.

Key messages

Programs can be organized to be engaging and effective in improving parenting among high-risk, multi-ethnic communities, which is of considerable value. To also be cost-effective in achieving child changes may require a set-up that enables parents to attend more sessions and/or an exclusive focus on children with clinically significant behavior problems.

Questions for further research

It proved difficult to sustain attendance of the parents in the programme; what further needs to be done to achieve this? What further needs to be known to convert satisfaction of parents into impact on children in these circumstances? This is an issue for school Heads, amongst others.

SCOTT, S., SYLVA, K., et al., 2009, Randomised control trial of parent groups for child antisocial behaviour targeting multiple risk factors: the SPOKES project, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry.

Overview

The aim of this trial was to change four risk factors that predict poor outcome: ineffective parenting, conduct problems, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) symptoms, and low reading ability.

Intervention

A randomised controlled trial was carried out in eight schools in London, England. Nine hundred and thirty-six (936) 6-year-old children were screened for antisocial behaviour, then parents of 112 high scorers were randomised to parenting groups

held in schools or control; 109 were followed up a year later. The intervention lasted 28 weeks and was novel as it had components to address both child behaviour (through the Incredible Years programme) and child literacy (through a new 'SPOKES' programme to help parents read with their children). Fidelity of implementation was emphasised by careful training of therapists and weekly supervision. Controls received an information helpline. Assessment of conduct problems was by parent interview, parenting by direct observation and child reading by psychometric testing.

Outcomes

At follow-up parents allocated to the intervention used play, praise and rewards, and time out more often than controls, and harsh discipline less; effect sizes ranged from .31 to .59 sd (*p*-values .046 to .005).

Compared to control children, whose behaviour didn't change, intervention children's conduct problems reduced by .52sd, ($p < .001$), dropping from the 80th to the 61st percentile; oppositional-defiant disorder (ODD) halved from 60% to 31% ($p = .003$).

ADHD symptoms reduced by .44sd ($p = .002$), and reading age improved by six months (.36sd, $p = .027$).

Teacher-rated behaviour didn't change.

The programme cost £2,380 ($3,800) per child.

SENECHAL, M., and YOUNG, L., 2008, The effect of family literacy interventions on children's acquisition of reading: from kindergarten to grade 3. A meta-analytic review; Review of Educational Research 78 (4): 880-907

Overview

In this 2008 meta-analysis of the effect of family literacy interventions on children's acquisition of reading, Sénéchal reviewed 14 studies analysing the impact of programmes in which researchers tested whether or not parental involvement improved child literacy. These studies were carried out between 1970 and 2001, and programmes including children ranging in age from kindergarten to Year 3, i.e. ages 5-9. Because of the wider range of years looked at, and to test whether or not earlier studies tended to find greater benefits, Sénéchal divided the studies into two groups: six studies published between 1970 and 1989, which were classified as 'older studies', and eight studies published between 1990 and 2001, which were classified as 'recent'. Of the 14 studies, eight were carried out in the US. The other 6 were divided among either England, Australia or New Zealand.

Study participants

The 14 studies included a total of 1174 families. Four studies were conducted with children experiencing reading problems or who were classified as at risk for reading problems. Five studies focused on low income families. Families in three studies

ranged from middle to high income. The remaining studies did not provide sufficient information about socio-economic status.

Children were aged 5-9. Four studies were of children in kindergarten (aged 5-6), five studies included only children in primary grades 1 to 3 (aged 6-9), and five studies included children from kindergarten up to grade 3.

Intervention characteristics

Sénéchal's meta-analysis included studies of three types of parental involvement interventions:

- Parents reading to child (2 studies)
- Parents listening to children read (5 studies)
- Parents teaching literacy skills to children (7 studies).

Whereas early meta-analyses in a range of policy areas tended to focus almost exclusively on measurement of outcomes as determined through effect sizes, Sénéchal sought to investigate the reasons underlying differences in programme outcomes. To this end, she investigated the impact of three key intervention characteristics: length of intervention, provision of supportive feedback, and amount of parent training.

Intervention length followed a bell shaped distribution: three interventions lasted 1.5 months or less. Seven lasted between 2.5-5 months. Three lasted 10 months or longer. One study was excluded as an outlier.

In eight studies, parents were given supportive feedback during the intervention. In six, they were not given such feedback.

Data about the amount of parental training were available for 10 studies. In six of these, parent training lasted 1-2 hours; in the other four, it lasted between three and eight hours.

Sénéchal also looked at the impact of selected study characteristics, in particular randomisation. In eight studies included in her meta-analysis, participants were randomly assigned to intervention and control groups. This was not the case in the remaining six studies.

The included studies measured a range of reading outcomes. Two studies measured early literacy exclusively, three assessed reading exclusively, two tested reading comprehension exclusively, and six studies included a combination of these measures.

Outcomes

Sénéchal found a combined weighted effect size of 0.68, i.e. an improvement of slightly more than two-thirds of a standard deviation. The 95% confidence interval range for these studies was 0.56 to 0.81.One way of interpreting an effect size of 0.68 is to compare the percentage of a control group who would score below the

average person in an experimental group boasting this effect size. For example, with an effect size of 0, we could expect 50% of the control group to be below the average person in the experimental group, as there would be no difference between the two groups' outcomes. With an effect size of 0.68, approximately 75% of the control group would score below the average person receiving one of the interventions included in this meta-analysis. That is, the effect is the equivalent of moving an individual from the 50th percentile to the 76th. This can be considered a moderate to large positive benefit.

Participant characteristics

Compared to children with normal literacy levels, intervention impacts were no lower for children experiencing reading problems or considered to be at risk of such problems. Furthermore, socio-economic status did not appear to have an impact on effect sizes: benefits were consistently distributed across SES groups. The impact of interventions included in this analysis was similar for younger and older children.

Intervention characteristics

In contrast to the homogeneity of impacts for participants of different ages and SES backgrounds, Sénéchal found a great deal of outcome heterogeneity associated with intervention type. The two studies in which parents read to their children produced a very small effect size of 0.18. Based on the small number of studies of this type of intervention and the small effect size, the author was unable to conclude that this type of program offered any benefits, at least with regard to the reading outcomes measured in the studies.

In contrast, the five programs in which parents were trained to listen to their children read boasted a combined weighted effect size of 0.51. Even this effect size, however, paled against the positive outcomes associated with interventions in which parents taught specific reading skills to their children: the seven programs utilising this intervention type produced a very large effect size of 1.15. Using the metrics discussed above, such an effect size suggests that approximately 86% percent of a control group would be below the average score in an intervention group boasting this effect size. Put another way, the average outcome in an experimental group of 25 would be roughly equivalent to the third best score in a control group of the same size.

In contrast to intervention type, neither the length of intervention nor the provision of feedback appear to have any impact on outcomes in the programs studied. However, Sénéchal notes that most studies did not provide enough information about the type and amount of supportive feedback given to parents, making it difficult for a reviewer to draw conclusions.

Key messages

The results from this meta-analysis suggest that family literacy programs can have a moderate to large impact on child literacy outcomes, and that these impacts are just as strong for socially disadvantaged children.

Furthermore, this analysis suggests that policymakers and program developers should pay particular attention to the types of programs they offer. Interventions encouraging parents to read to their children showed a small effect size -- although it should be noted that only two such interventions were included in this meta-analysis. Programs in which parents were trained to listen to their children read showed much greater benefits. However, by far the largest positive effects came from programs in which parents were trained to teach specific reading skills to their children. The effect size for these programs was 1.15.

STATHAM, J., HARRIS, GLENN, M., 2010, Strengthening family wellbeing and community cohesion through the role of schools and extended services, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

Overview

This review aims to draw out the key 'what works?' messages on strengthening family wellbeing and community cohesion through the role of schools and extended services.

The study

Research literature was identified through systematic searches of relevant databases and websites, recommendations from a Theme Advisory Group, and by considering studies cited in identified literature ('reference harvesting'). The review team used a 'best evidence' approach to systematically select literature of the greatest relevance and quality to include in the review. Most of the literature is from England.

Tight deadlines limited the ability of the review team to extend and develop the evidence base through reference harvesting and hand searching; the review was limited to English-speaking countries only; and there were limited studies that focused on the impact and outcomes of interventions.

Interventions

Asmussen (2009) found that direct forms of family support are effective in securing greater engagement with schools but only if certain conditions are in place. To be most effective, parenting support programmes need to be appropriate for the group they are intended to support; they need to be able to offer support for early prevention services and to assist children in need of protection. The central point here is that family support needs to be carefully targeted, if it is to be effective (Carpenter 2003). It has to focus on the particular needs of families and young people rather than providing general support (DCSF 2008a). Parenting support programmes need to be carefully planned and, if brought in from outside, need to be appropriately matched to the needs of families and parents.

Demie (2005) reports on the positive outcomes from an initiative aimed at improving the outcomes of individual pupils of Caribbean heritage. A collaborative co-inquiry

approach was adopted and strategies were developed for working with staff, parents, pupils and governors. The key dimensions of the success of this initiative were an inclusive curriculum that met the needs of Black Caribbean children and well-coordinated support to Black Caribbean pupils through the extensive use of both black and white teachers as advocates and role models.

In an earlier C4EO review of evidence about family/parental support in the Early Years, Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford (2009) found a range of effective interventions and programmes. Their review suggests that taking an 'ecological' perspective on parental and family support is particularly important. This perspective means seeing each child not only as an individual but also as an individual who inhabits a certain environment and cannot be dealt with outside of consideration of that environment. This holistic approach takes into account the context in which the child lives and reinforces the need for appropriate forms of parental and family support. The review also highlighted the need for greater training for those involved in inter-agency working, particularly in relation to identifying early evidence of children at risk of underachieving.

Key messages

Providing support for parents to assist their child's learning in the home is the most effective way to raise achievement. Bringing the home and school closer through out-of-hours clubs, parent classes, extended schools and outreach work is a powerful lever in securing improved learning outcomes.

Services and support that are targeted directly at individual children's and parents' needs tend to have better outcomes. There needs to be locally driven provision based on consultation and involvement of parents and local communities.

Family-based multi-agency support that encompasses health, education and children's social care is associated with positive results. Multi-dimensional interventions and delivery models that address more than one facet of children's lives and which meet the needs of a wide range of users tend to be most effective.

Parent up-skilling and focused support for literacy or numeracy is a necessary pre-requisite of raising achievement through parental involvement. Family literacy projects encourage parents to become more involved in their child's education.

The lessons from the research about extended schools are very clear – they strengthen the ability of families and communities to attend to young people's physical, emotional, cognitive and psychological needs through extended provision (Coleman 2006). Parents from high poverty communities and those with low educational levels can support the learning of their children through the support extended schools offer. By helping parents and their children to successfully navigate schooling and by providing support at the point of need, exclusion and truancy rates are lower and engagement with learning is greater.

SULLIVAN, A., JOSHI, H., KETENDE, S., AND OBOLENSKAYA, P., 2010, The consequences at age 7 of early childhood disadvantage in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, Institute of Education, London

Overview

This report presents an analysis of child outcomes at age 7 from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), a longitudinal study tracking children and their families who were born at the turn of the century, in terms of conditions and experiences which precede them as recorded at pre-school sweeps of the survey. In particular the analyses aim to unpack the relationship between child poverty and child outcomes, examining how far the statistical link can be accounted for by background factors and modifiable behaviours. Running through the exercise is a search for any explanatory factor which may be particularly prevalent in Northern Ireland compared to other countries of the UK.

The Millennium Cohort Study is a longitudinal birth cohort study, tracking a cohort of 18, 818 children born in the UK in 2000/01. There is now evidence from four surveys at ages 9 months (MCS1), 3 years (MCS2), 5 years (MCS3) and 7 years (MCS4). The longitudinal design of the study allows us to examine child development over time, and to assess outcomes at a given age in the light of circumstances and characteristics at earlier points in time. The MCS is a major resource for understanding the implications of the social conditions surrounding birth and early childhood for child outcomes.

Outcomes

In both NI and GB, income poverty is associated with: cognitive scores, teacher assessments, behavioural scores, general health, and overweight and obesity.

However, the effect of income poverty is accounted for by the inclusion in our models of associated variables reflecting social background and the home environment.

Social class, based on the highest parental occupation by age 3, is a powerful predictor both of cognitive and educational scores at age 5, and of progress in these scores between the ages of 5 and 7. Social class is a stronger predictor of progress between 5 and 7 than parents' education and a range of parenting variables.

Children with low birth weights and those from lower social class origins, in particular the children of the long term unemployed and semi-routine and routine workers are particularly disadvantaged in terms of cognitive progress between the ages of 5 and 7. These variables stand out as more important than either parental education or our measures of parenting behaviours and the home environment when we examine progression in this period of early schooling.

Although the study is looking at only a two-year period, certain inequalities have been exacerbated during this time. However, the predictors of widening and

narrowing trajectories between the ages of 5 and 7 vary according to which indicator of child progress is being considered. Socio-economic disadvantage structures cognitive and educational outcomes most strongly, followed by behavioural outcomes, and has far less marked a pattern in general health and overweight. Parents' physical and mental health when the child was aged 3 are important predictors of change in child behaviour and child health between the ages of 5 and 7.

SYLVA, K., S. SCOTT, S., et al., 2008, Training parents to help their children read: a randomized controlled trial, British Journal of Educational Psychology 78(3): 435-455.

Overview

This paper reports on a prevention programme which aimed to tackle behaviour and literacy problems in children at the beginning of school, and presents the effects of the intervention on children's literacy. The programme reported on is the SPOKES programme - Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools.

Country/area: UK

Study participants

One hundred and four 5- and 6-year-old children selected from eight schools in an inner city disadvantaged community in London participated in the intervention.

Intervention

A randomized control trial with pre- and post-measurements designed to evaluate the effectiveness of an intervention. The behavioural intervention consisted of the 'Incredible Years' group parenting programme combined with a new programme designed to train parents to support their children's reading at home.

The SPOKES programme is designed to deal with both behavioural and literacy issues for children during the early days of primary school, and involved the emotional understanding and support of parents. This iteration of the programme was delivered over three terms between 2001 and 2002.

Parents were offered 12 sessions in the first term on behaviour management, in the second term, there were 10 sessions around the literacy programme and in the third term, there were 6 sessions combining the two. All sessions lasted about two and a half hours; the programme combined training at a centre with home visits.

The behaviour programme was based around the "Incredible years" programme, which includes short video clips of children and parents, used to model and encourage changes in relationships, as well as offering more specific guidance on behaviour.
The literacy strange was based on the Pause Prompt Praise (PPP) approach to children's reading; it trains parents as tutors to use one to one tuition to increase the child's ability to read independently. Videos were used to model behaviour for

parents, and also received feedback on audio recordings of reading with their children and observations of work with the children in the home. This was combined with a “whole language” strategy, which emphasizes the importance of meaning and making meaning, and situates learning activities in social contexts. They were delivered in a manner based on the Reading Recovery Programme.

The intervention aimed to support parents to teach and to practice multiple ways of supporting their children, through group discussions, role play, and video demonstrations.

Parents in the comparison group were offered support through a phone helpline, and all calls were returned within 24 hours (weekdays) by a member of the team. Parents were not offered direct help with their children but rather were directed to routine LA services. 7 parents from the comparison group used the phone line.

The “alternative treatment” group received a non-intensive service.

Main findings

Analyses demonstrated a significant effect of the intervention on children’s word reading and writing skills, as well as parents’ use of reading strategies with their children.

The main literacy outcome was judged using the British Ability Scales II (BAS) word reading, which is a standardised measure of a child’s ability to read single words. This was combined with the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS) as well as other measures of phonological awareness.

All analyses were done on an intention-to-treat basis, including scores from children whose parents were randomized to the intervention group but did not attend any of the sessions. One hundred and four children took part in the literacy assessments at pre-test (age 5) and post-test (age 6) (N = 58 for the intervention group; N = 46 for the comparison group).

In order to explore the effect of the intervention, regression models were run for children’s literacy outcomes. Controlling for the performance of children at pre-test, the intervention had a significant positive effect on children’s word reading scores.

In order to explore the effect of the intervention on parents’ reading with their children, regression models were run for the reading strategies used by parents, and the average time parents spent reading with their child per week.

Controlling for the amount of time parents spend reading with their children at pre-test, the effect of the intervention on reading time at post-test was near zero. Controlling for the effect of the amount of reading strategies used at pre-test, the effect of the intervention on post-test measurements of reading strategies was highly significant. The intervention explained 15% of the variance in parents’ reading strategies at post-test.

Results suggested that the frequency of attending the literacy programme sessions

were both positively related to parents' use of reading strategies at post-test,

The SPOKES programme evaluation shows that it had been successful in increasing children's word reading and writing skills; this was accompanied by a significant reduction in children's conduct and emotional problems.

The advantage in the intervention group was found to be equivalent to 6 months of reading age.

Parents also reported using significantly more strategies such as praise and prompt when reading with their children.

Parents used more strategies the more they attended the course, whether this was the behaviour of the reading strand of the course.

The programme reached a significant population who would not ordinarily have sought help for these issues at this stage.

Key messages

A structured multicomponent preventive package delivered with attention to fidelity can enable parents to support their children's reading at home and increase their literacy skills.

Together with the improvement in child behaviour, these changes could improve the life chances of children in disadvantaged communities.

VAN STEENSEL, MCELVANY et al, forthcoming, How effective are family literacy programmes? Results of a meta-analysis, Review of Educational Research

Overview

This forthcoming meta-analysis of family literacy programs, van Steensel, McElvany, Kurvers and Herppich synthesises the findings of 26 studies, accounting for 15 different programmes. Six programmes were evaluated in more than one study. These primary studies took place between 1992 and 2006. The geographical range is unspecified in the meta-analysis.

Study participants

The combined number of participating families in the studies was 3453. Studies included children in preschool, kindergarten and primary school, and the meta-analysis investigated the relationship between child age and impacts of family literacy programs

Intervention characteristics

In addition to investigating the overall effect is a family literacy programs, this meta-

analysis sought to investigate whether impacts were different for comprehension-and code-related measures, and to identify intervention characteristics that appeared to moderate outcomes.

Intervention sites included home-based programmes and programmes which combined home and school interventions. Intervention types included shared reading and literacy exercises. Program types were as follows:

- Dialogic reading: 5 studies
- Paired reading: 3 studies
- Even Start: 3 studies
- HIPPY: 2 studies
- Project PRIMER: 2 studies
- Project EASE: 2 studies
- 9 other programs, each associated with one study.

Outcomes

The combined weighted effect size for included family literacy programs was 0.25. However, as will be discussed below, the review authors concluded that this small but significant positive benefit was a product of poor study methodology. In particular, the perceived positive outcomes of family literacy programs were not found in randomised studies.

Impacts of participant characteristics on programme outcomes
Given the above caveat about study design and randomisation, the authors found that programs aimed at children in primary school had a larger combined effect size than those aimed at children in pre-primary.

Impacts of intervention characteristics on programme outcomes

Programs featuring shared reading plus other literacy related activities showed a larger mean effect size than programs featuring only shared reading or literacy exercises.

However, this review found no specific impact of focuses on either comprehension-or code-related interventions. In the case of comprehension-focused programs, effect sizes were roughly the same for comprehension-related measures and code-related measures (0.28, 0.26). In the case of code-focused interventions, effect sizes were much higher for comprehension-related measures (0.43) than for code-related measures (0.10). van Steensel and colleagues suggest that one possible reason for this effect is that while programs may strive to focus on a particular skill, "parents cannot be forced to act accordingly" Parents are encouraged to focus on comprehension might still give feedback on reading mistakes, for example.

This finding may have implications for policy and program design, suggesting that policymakers and programme leaders should avoid overly prescriptive programme aims, giving the limited likelihood that such prescriptions will or even should be adhered to in the home.

Key messages from this meta-analysis

The results of this meta-analysis conflict with more positive findings of other studies, suggesting that positive expectations for family literacy outcomes may be overly optimistic, at least in terms of improving child literacy. However, there are suggestions in this meta-analysis that interventions which combine shared reading with other types of literacy exercises may be more effective than those which focus on only shared reading or literacy exercises alone.

APPENDIX 3: REFERENCES

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APPENDIX 4: GLOSSARY

Effect size

A measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables in a statistical population.

Free School Meals

Free school meals (FSM) are provided to pupils if and when their parents or carers receive qualifying benefits. The proportion of pupils eligible for FSM is often taken by Government as a proxy for deprivation.

Key Stages: England, Wales and Northern Ireland

A Key Stage is a stage of the state education system in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. From the age of 5 (the minimum age of children included in this review) children are taught in a consecutive series of Stages, from 1 at the outset of compulsory schooling through to Key Stage 4 (KS4).

Key Stage	Age	Years
1	5 -7	1 - 2
2	7 – 11	3 – 6
3	11 – 14	7 – 9
4	14 – 16	10 - 11

Random controlled trial (RCT)

An experimental research design which involves random allocation of participants, either to an experimental group which receives some form of ‘treatment’ or intervention, or to a control group which receives no such special treatment or intervention.

School grades in the United States

There is some variation between states on the age for entering kindergarten and first grade, but it is a common requirement that a child should be five years old in order to enter kindergarten.

GRADE	**AGE**
Kindergarten	5
Elementary (Primary) school	
1 - 5	6 – 11
Middle school	
6 – 8	12 – 14
High school	
Freshman year (9th grade)	15
Sophomore (10th grade)	16
Junior (11th grade)	17
Senior (12th grade)	18

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