How can family learning promote educational resilience In

children and young people?

(A report by Lisa Coulson for a development partnership in Birmingham)

Introduction

One of the most compelling priorities on the current national educational agenda is to close the achievement gap between those pupils who are academically successful and those who are at risk of failure. Pupils at risk of academic failure often live in socio-economic conditions that have made it difficult for them to succeed in school. Identifying interventions that will promote educational success has become increasingly important in the attempt to improve the life chances of children and young people living in disadvantaged circumstances.

One area of research that has significant implications for the educational improvement of pupils at risk of academic failure is focused on educational resilience - "the capacity of students to attain academic and social success in school despite exposure to personal and environmental adversities" (Wang, Haertel & Walberg,1998)

The construct of "educational resilience" is not viewed as a fixed attribute but as something that can be promoted by focusing on "alterable" factors that impact on an individual's success in school. Research identifies particular personal attributes, and features of families, schools and communities, which can be viewed as "protective". These features promote the development of beliefs and behaviours in pupils that result in positive educational outcomes and foster educational resilience.

This report will focus on the context of the family, how services can work in partnership with parents and families to promote these 'protective' features and thereby encourage the development of educational resilience in children and young people. It will:

- Provide an overview of the research and evidence around what works
- Identify models of good practice in Birmingham settings
- Outline key factors that seem to facilitate good practice

It is intended to be a guide to practitioners developing their work with parents at a time when the impetus to extend and integrate services to families is gaining momentum.

Policy Context

The 2003 Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' announced the ambition of government to radically reshape and integrate services to children and families in order to improve outcomes for children and young people in five key areas: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being. The green paper also recognised that only by putting parents and families at the heart of its reforms could the five desired outcomes for children be achieved, and stated in its aims that parents, carers and families must be enabled to promote healthy choices, provide safe homes and stability, support learning, promote positive behaviour and be supported to be economically active.

The green paper emphasised the interdependence of educational achievement and well-being, advocating that educational achievement is the most effective way to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children, and that children learn and thrive when healthy, safe and engaged. Promoting educational resilience can therefore be viewed as central to achieving the aims of 'Every Child Matters'.

It is also now widely accepted that there is a significant gap in the relative levels of attainment between children in different social classes and that this gap can be linked to different levels of parental involvement. This assumption is implicit in 'Every Child Matters', and complemented by a raft of educational strategies and policies.

The Government is consequently looking to children's centres and extended schools to develop a coherent set of services both to support parents and to involve them properly at all stages of a child's learning and development. A key function of these new services will be to support parents to develop the understanding, skills and values that will be necessary to underpin the five desired outcomes. Over time it is expected that all schools will provide a core offer of extended services, that will include family learning, either on site or across a cluster of local schools. Family learning programmes are highlighted in the green paper in the section on universal services as a useful intervention stating that "these programmes focus on engaging parents in their children's development and offer opportunities to increase involvement in

learning, to break down the barriers between school and parents and act as a link to targeted help and support"(p.46)**.**

New inspection arrangements mean that schools will soon be assessed against their ability to fulfill these new roles and responsibilities, and the extent to which they contribute to the well-being of the pupils and parents they serve in the context of the five outcomes of "Every Child Matters". All settings working with children and families will therefore need to review their practices around working in partnership with parents.

What The Research Says

This section will review the evidence around the nature and impact of parental involvement, what the barriers and obstacles are, and what the evidence says about the impact of family learning as an intervention used to promote parental involvement. It intends to demonstrate that implementing and embedding family learning can make a significant contribution to the achievement of the five desired outcomes.

In 2003 Professor Charles Desforges was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills to conduct a literature review of research findings, **The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment**. He found that recent research into the nature of parental involvement and its impact on pupil achievement is generally of a very high quality. This section draws on, amongst others, the work of Professor Desforges, as well as the **Review of Research on Educational Resilience** (2003) by Waxman, Gray and Padrón for CREDE (Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence) and J.L.Epstein's **Fact sheet on Parental Involvement** (2002) produced for the Michigan Education Department.

What parental involvement is:

"good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance."[1]

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[1] Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003, The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Review ofLiterature, DfES Research Report 433, DfES, Sheffield.

Impact of Parental Involvement:

Decades of research show that when parents are involved students have[2]:

Higher attainment in the classroom and in test results

Better school attendance

Increased motivation, better self-esteem

Decreased use of drugs and alcohol

Better social adjustment in schools

Families whose children are doing well in school exhibit the following characteristics[3]:

- Establish a daily family routine, i.e. providing time and a quiet place to study, being firm about bedtime and having dinner together.

- Monitor out-of-school activities, i.e. setting limits on TV watching, arranging for after-school activities.

- Model the value of learning, self-discipline, and hard work.

- Express high but realistic expectations for achievement, i.e. setting goals and standards that are appropriate for children's age and maturity, recognizing and encouraging special talents, informing friends and family about successes.

- Encourage children's development/ progress in school, i.e. showing interest in children's progress at school, helping with homework, staying in touch with teachers and school staff.

- Encourage reading, writing, and discussions among family members, i.e. reading, listening to children read and talking about what is being read.

The most effective forms of parent involvement are those that engage parents in working directly with their children on learning activities at home[4].

'At-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's attainment and adjustment even after all the other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the

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[2] Epstein, J.L., 2002, What Research Says About Parent Involvement In Children's Education In Relation To Academic Achievement , Michigan Education Dept. (unpublished).

[3] Henderson, A.T. (ed) (1987) *The evidence continues to grow: parents involvement improves student achievement.* Colombia, MD: National Committee for citizens in Education. Arizona Centre for Educational Research and Development. University of Arizona

[4] Cotton, K., Wikelund, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In Parent Involvement in Education.

equation[5]. Family participation in education has been demonstrated to be *twice* as predictive of students' academic success as family socio-economic status. In some of the more intensive programmes studied, family participation was shown to have effects that were 10 times greater than other factors[6].

Other forms of parental involvement do not appear to contribute to the scale of the impact of 'at-home' parenting[7]. The earlier in a child's educational process parent involvement begins, the more powerful the effects[8]. The more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects[9].

Research indicates that 25% of a child's achievement in school relates to parental involvement in their learning[10]. When parents come to school regularly, it reinforces the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected and that school is an integral part of the whole family's life, and consequently increases the likelihood of successful educational outcomes[11].

Parental involvement brings a number of benefits to the school:
- Improves teacher morale
- Higher ratings of teachers by parents
- More support from families
- Higher student achievement
- Better reputations in the community [12]

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[5] [5] Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003, The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Review ofLiterature, DfES Research Report 433, DfES, Sheffield.
[6] Walberg, H. (1984). "Families as Partners in Educational Productivity," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 65, 397-400.
[7] Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003, The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Review ofLiterature, DfES Research Report 433, DfES, Sheffield.
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[9] Cotton, K., Wikelund, K., Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, School Improvement Research Series. In Parent Involvement in Education.
[10] Horne, J & Haggart, J., 2004, The Impact Of Adults' Participation In Family Learning – A Study Based In Lancashire, NIACE, Leicester.
[11] Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1998). Educational resilience (Laboratory for Student Success Publication Series No. 11). Philadelphia: Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education.)
[12] A New Generation of Evidence: The Family is Critical to Student Achievement, edited by Anne T. Henderson and Nancy Berla, Center for Law and Education, Washington, D.C., 1994 (third printing, 1996

Major Factors Affecting Parent Involvement

Differences between parents in their level of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health and also with parental perceptions of their roles and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it, including:

- Parents' beliefs about what is important, necessary and permissible for them to do with and on behalf of their children;

- The extent to which parents believe that they can have a positive influence on their children's education; and

- Parents' perceptions that their children and school want them to be involved. Some parents are put off by feeling put down by schools and teachers.[13]

How does the research support family learning as an intervention that promotes parental involvement?

Most of the research into interventions designed to promote parental involvement has been descriptive, comparative, or correlational. There have been few experimental and longitudinal studies in this area. Still, Professor Desforges concluded that while the research was technically much weaker, the findings were still promising. Family Learning fosters many of the experiences and qualities that research has identified as beneficial, as outlined below.

Parents need specific information on how to help and what to do. Although most parents do not know how to help their children with their education, with guidance and support, they may become increasingly involved in home learning activities and find themselves with opportunities to teach, to be models for and to guide their children[14].

When schools encourage children to practice reading at home with parents, the children make significant gains in reading achievement compared to those who only practice at school[15].

Parents, who read to their children, have books available, take trips, guide TV watching, and provide stimulating experiences contribute to student achievement[16].

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[13] Desforges, C. & Abouchaar, A., 2003, The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment: A Review ofLiterature, DfES Research Report 433, DfES, Sheffield.

[14] Epstein, J.L., 2002, What Research Says About Parent Involvement In Children's Education In Relation To Academic Achievement , Michigan Education Dept. (unpublished).

[15] Epstein, J.L., 2002, What Research Says About Parent Involvement In Children's Education In Relation To Academic Achievement , Michigan Education Dept. (unpublished).

School initiated activities to help parents change the home environment can have a strong influence on children's school performance.[17]

The OFSTED (2000) report on family learning surveyed 28 Local Education Authorities and found that successful family learning programmes resulted in the following benefits for children: accelerated development of oracy and pre-literacy skills, improved standards in literacy and numeracy, positive behavioural and attitudinal changes, enhanced confidence and self-esteem, awareness that learning is a normal activity throughout life, and pleasure from collaborative learning. Benefits for parents included: improved competence in literacy and numeracy, progression for over 50% participants to Further Education and training or more challenging jobs, increased confidence in contacts with schools, teachers, and the education system leading to becoming more active partners with schools, a greater understanding of child development and of the strategies that can be used to help children to learn at key points in development, improved parenting, and better relationships with their children.

A study in Lancashire into the impact of adults' participation in family learning involving 188 parents and 18 Head Teachers shared many of the same key findings. Eighty per cent of parents who had previously participated in family learning (between one and four years ago) had either gone on to further learning, volunteering, or an employment-related activity. Of these parents, two-thirds indicated this was directly attributable to their participation in family learning. A fifth of parents volunteered within their child's school or wider community, fifteen per cent became paid classroom assistants, and five per cent obtained a job (if unemployed) or a better job. In addition, adult participation in family learning resulted in benefits to the family; around half of parents stated that they talked more as a family and/or did more activities as a family as a result of their participation in family learning; that their interest /involvement in their children's learning had increased and their child was doing better at school.

Headteachers also recognised the benefits of parents' participation in family learning to schools. They believed that as a result of their participation in family learning around half of parents

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[16] Epstein, J.L., 2002, What Research Says About Parent Involvement In Children's Education In Relation To Academic Achievement , Michigan Education Dept. (unpublished).
[17] Epstein, J.L., 2002, What Research Says About Parent Involvement In Children's Education In Relation To Academic Achievement , Michigan Education Dept. (unpublished).

communicated with their children's teachers more and/or had a greater level of involvement in their child's school.

Key Indicators of Success

This section is divided into two parts; the first considers the ethos and values that underpin the work of successful settings, the second will offer more practical pointers, and will be structured according to Joyce Epstein's framework of six types of family involvement (1995).

Underpinning Values

- Successful settings have made a shift from seeing parents as peripheral to education, and as deficient, to seeing them as valuable resources that have a shared responsibility and equal capacity to contribute to the education of their children.
- They believe that all parents want their children to be safe, successful, happy and well, and that a key role of their service to families is to transfer the skills and knowledge that enables them to achieve this.
- They embrace a philosophy of partnership and are willing to share power.
- They focus on developing trusting and respectful relationships.
- They seek the active participation and contribution of their users.
- They are staffed by individuals who can be viewed as 'champions', who are passionate about the aims and potential benefits of family learning and can inspire both parents and colleagues
- These settings have adopted family-centred practices that emphasise support to families as an important goal in and of itself, not just as a means of supporting the child. Families are viewed as the primary decision-makers for their children, and their needs beyond the education of the child are also considered.

Indicators of Quality, as related to Epstein's Six Types of Involvement

This section builds on the six types of parent involvement identified by Joyce L. Epstein of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University (1995). The most successful settings seem to involve and offer opportunities to parents within each of the six areas, and in addition they view partnerships with parents as core activity and therefore commit long term resources and support.

1. Communicating - Communication is regular, two-way, and meaningful:

- All settings aim to improve communication and dialogue between parents/carers and children, between partners, and between families and services.
- They actively promote open dialogue with parents - listening respectfully, valuing each others opinions and respecting diverse views.
- They use a variety of communication tools on a regular basis, i.e. meetings, letters, phone calls, home visits, workshops, seeking to facilitate two-way interaction through each type of medium.
- Language translators are utilised to assist families as needed.
- Parents are communicated with regarding their child's positive behaviour and achievement, not just regarding difficulties or failure.
- Informal activities at which parents, staff, and community members can interact are promoted.

2. Parenting - Parenting skills are promoted and supported

- Settings communicate the importance of positive relationships between parents and their children, and demonstrate respect for the family's primary role in the rearing of their children.
- They link parents to resources within the community that provide support services to families, including specialist advice and guidance.
- They provide an accessible place where parents can come to meet with other parents, access relevant resources and information, attend training, and have parent group meetings.
- They offer or have close links with providers of parent education and family learning programmes, including health and nutrition.

3. Pupil Learning - Parents play an integral role in assisting the learning of their children.

- Successful settings ensure that parents and staff understand that the responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative venture.
- They link efforts to engage families explicitly to pupil learning.
- They provide information and ideas to families about how to help their children at home.
- They regularly assign interactive activities that will require children to discuss their learning with their parents, or give parents an opportunity to trial new strategies for better supporting their children.

4. Volunteering - The support and assistance of parents is actively sought.

- Successful settings actively recruit parent help and support.
- They are flexible to individual wants, needs and abilities, allowing for progression
- They ensure that all interactions with parents communicate to parents that they are valued and welcome.
- They create opportunities for those with limited time and resources to participate by welcoming different levels of involvement, and by addressing child care, work schedule and other specific needs.
- They demonstrate clear appreciation for all contributions.

5. Decision Making and Advocacy - Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.

- Successful settings work to support and develop parent leaders and representatives.
- They establish and support networks to link all families to parent representatives.
- They encourage the formation of parent groups to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.
- They treat parental concerns and preferences with respect and demonstrate genuine interest in developing solutions in partnership.

6. Collaborating with Community - Community resources are used to strengthen settings, families, and children's learning.

- Successful settings develop a range of partnerships that make health, social and educational resources more available to children and families. They link parents to other family support services and adult learning opportunities, enabling parents to more fully participate in activities that support the development of their children.
- These partnerships are designed to meet local needs and address risks prevalent in the lives of families served.

Recommendations and Conclusions

There is clearly a need for more evaluation and longitudinal studies into the efficacy of family learning as an intervention to promote educational resilience, and this report would wholeheartedly support the recommendation of Professor Charles Desforges for a programme

of parental involvement development initiatives, in the form of multi-dimensional intervention programmes, steered by a design research brief.

It would also be useful to develop a self-evaluation framework, informed by Epstein's six identified forms of parental involvement and the indicators of quality highlighted in this report. This would enable settings to consider their own practice and the quality of their partnerships with parents, and to plan practical steps they might be able to take in order to develop a more family centred approach to their work.

Initial findings should nevertheless be a source of encouragement and inspiration to all professionals working with children and families. Clear insights have been offered into how children and young people can be supported to overcome endemic difficulties and become successful, motivated individuals. It has been demonstrated that when settings engage with parents in ways that are linked to improving the learning and development of their children, and support parental involvement at home and school, that pupils achieve greater attainment.

The next challenge is to expand the information and guidance available for teachers, parents and other professionals on how to create environments that advance the academic and social abilities of the most vulnerable.

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