



Learning in Families: A review of research evidence and the current landscape of Learning in Families with digital technologies

General Educators Report

Lyndsay Grant
Learning researcher, Futurelab

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This report, a "scenarios" poster, and further information about this project are available at:

www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/learning-in-families

Executive Summary

This document reports on the 'Learning in Families with Digital Technologies' research project carried out by Futurelab in 2008-9 and commissioned by Becta.

Within this report, we explore and analyse the landscape of learning in families with a particular focus on the role and potential of digital technologies to support and enhance the benefits of such learning.

In order to ensure that a wide range of significant and innovative activity was included within this scope of this project, we have used a broad and inclusive definition of learning in families and included learning in which adults are helping children learn, are learning from children, are learning together with children or learning themselves in order to be able to help their children learn.

In order to further understand the purposes, needs and aspirations of those learning in families, a nationally representative survey was commissioned to gather parents' views on learning in the family. The overwhelming majority of parents agreed that learning in the family was important, and beneficial both to children and themselves and their family as a whole. Parents participated in a wide range of learning activities within the family, from helping with homework to everyday activities such as cooking and learning to fix a bike. The benefits of learning in families were also broad: while supporting children's attainment at school was seen as an important benefit, further perceived benefits of family learning for families included the family becoming stronger and closer and, for children, allowing children to be happy, healthy individuals. Technology was important, with most parents reporting they used at least one technology when learning in the family; and over three in five reporting that they would like to make more use of technologies to learn in the family. However, there are significant differences between groups, with parents with no formal qualifications, those from lower social grades, parents from Black and minority ethnic groups, and fathers reporting lower levels of participation in some types of family learning activities than average.

Family learning has received increased attention from policymakers in recent years, and is implicated in a wide range of political agendas from raising standards in schools to tackling social exclusion and raising the skill level of UK plc. Within education, the parental engagement agenda has recently particularly come to the forefront, allied to the use of digital technologies to improve communication between home and school. Within this context, the Home Access initiative aims to extend the learning benefits of home computer and internet access to all families with school-aged children, opening up further opportunities for family learning in the home as well as linking learning in the home to learning at school. The use of family learning to support such diverse policy agendas brings with it an opportunity to create joined up policy across government around this subject; however, it also points to potential tensions in the different aims of family learning to serve different policy agendas.

A typology of learning in the family was derived from our empirical survey data and an analysis of current research literature that serves to illustrate the wide range of learning within this field. The six main types of learning in families identified are:

1. Supporting children's formal learning
2. Family engagement in learning for pleasure
3. Supporting children's life skills
4. Participation and acculturation in family life
5. Developing adult basic skills
6. Enhancing family relationships

Learning in these six areas is diverse and complex. However, it is clear that learning in families has the potential to provide benefits for children, families and the wider community, from supporting children's educational attainment to contributing to families' participation in local communities and wider society. Across all the forms of learning in families there are, however a few common themes. From the perspective of parents and children, families are primarily relationships of intimacy and love rather than educational institutions and successful family learning starts with and builds on this relationship rather than attempting to adapt it to formal educational purposes. Learning in families is as diverse as the relationships within and between families, and any family learning programme needs to allow the voices of parents and children to be heard, and to respect the forms of learning that already occur within families.

Evidence of technologies supporting learning in families is presented and analysed in relation to the six categories of learning in families and provides suggestions for ways in which technologies may support learning and overcome barriers to engaging in learning. Given the diversity and complexity of learning in families, there is no one technology, or use of technology, that best supports learning in families. The potential opportunities of digital technologies for learning in families therefore need to be considered in relation to the whole context in which learning is happening, including the aims of that learning experience and the needs and aspirations of families themselves.

We have used the available evidence to further the policy debate on learning in families, providing longer-term recommendations for policy-makers. Recommendations for strategies to support family learning using digital technologies are also provided for practitioners, and further directions for research are identified.

Two directories have been compiled the first listing key stakeholders and providers, and the second detailing digital tools, resources and services designed to support family learning.

1. Introduction and background to the project

The aim of this project is to provide a greater understanding of the learning that happens in families, and to explore the potential of and issues surrounding digital technologies to support this learning.

Learning in families is currently a policy priority, underpinning many educational strategies, as well as initiatives to tackle social exclusion, promote health and wellbeing and develop community cohesion. Family learning is claimed to have many benefits, from raising children's achievement in school to parents gaining employment; from supporting families to be resilient in the face of challenging circumstances to children and adults becoming active citizens and having their say on matters of political importance.

Learning in families is a broad and diverse domain, spanning our entire lifecourse and the whole spectrum from formal, organised, accredited learning to informal and implicit learning that happens as part of daily family life. This research project explored this broad landscape, with a particular focus on the current and potential role of digital technologies to support, challenge and provide new opportunities for learning in families. A range of methods were used to gather and analyse evidence to inform this report.

Futurelab commissioned Ipsos MORI to conduct a representative survey of parents' engagement in learning in the family, and their views of the relation between learning in the family and children's learning in school. The findings from this survey are presented in Chapter 3.

An online group discussion was held on www.mumset.com to more deeply explore parents' views about learning in the family. This data is not representative of the overall population, and is likely to over represent mothers of younger children and those with home internet access. Parents in this discussion chose to interpret learning in the family almost exclusively as helping their children learn. Evidence from this discussion is interspersed throughout this report.

A comprehensive programme of desk research was undertaken, reviewing, analysing and interpreting literature from academic peer-reviewed journals, books and chapters, government research, policy reports and guidance, industry evidence and reports from practice. A workshop was held with providers of family learning to explore and contextualise emerging findings from the empirical and desk research and feed in to development of recommendations for policy, practice and research.

Interviews and informal discussions were held with key stakeholders from practice, research, policy and non-governmental organisations in order to canvas a wide range of views about the current and future importance of learning in families.

Futurelab held a seminar for policy-makers in which findings from this project, as well as a number of related current research projects, in which recommendations and findings were discussed with policy-makers.

This report is intended to inform the practice and understanding of family learning practitioners and educators, and inform those for whom learning in the family is an important context for their work, such as social workers, teachers and those involved in community-based education. It aims to present the 'big picture' of learning in families in order to develop a shared understanding of the wider landscape, the main ideas and issues around learning in families, the ways in which digital technologies are used to support learning in families and make recommendations for how learning in families could be enhanced in the future.

The potential role of technologies to support learning in families is still an under-researched area. Learning in families is a complex and diverse field, involving a very wide range of activities, in which very different groups of people learn in different ways, with different aims, needs and aspirations. The effectiveness of any particular use of technology in overcoming barriers to learning will depend on the particular barriers and the people experiencing that barrier. Not all people experiencing barriers or disadvantage have the same needs, and they should therefore be offered the same wide range of experiences as their more privileged peers. There is therefore unlikely to be a 'one size fits all' model of using technology to support learning in the family, or overcoming barriers to participation in such learning. Instead, involving and consulting with families is important in order to develop support and provision that meets the needs of particular groups of learners¹.

This report presents and analyses the available evidence of technologies supporting learning in families and overcoming barriers. Evidence is largely from case studies, and therefore suggests potential opportunities where digital technologies may support learning in families in different contexts. Further robust research is still needed in order to explore and understand issues and opportunities in the use of technologies to support learning in families in different contexts and for diverse purposes.

Accompanying this report is a poster illustrating six 'scenarios' of learning in families with digital technologies. Further information and free downloads of this report and the posters can be found at www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/learning-in-families.

¹ For background and practical guidance on involving users in the process of designing technology-enhanced projects, see Grant 2008.

2. What do we mean by ‘learning in families’?

There is no universally agreed definition of ‘family learning’. Various different groups emphasise different aspects of the learning that happens within families.

This research project reported here was designed to examine the landscape of learning in families, and so a wide definition of family learning was taken in order to keep a broad view of research, activities and policies within the scope of this project.

For the purposes of this research the following is used as a descriptive definition of learning in families.

- Learning that involves two or more people related by kinship or similar roles. This includes step parents and carers and extended families.
- Learning that is intergenerational, involving both adults and children
- Learning can be formal, non-formal or informal
- Learning may be intentional, where the activity is primarily about learning, or it may be implicit or tacit, as a by-product of other activities, and not even be recognised as learning

In some definitions of family learning, only when adults and children are both learning is this considered family learning. In this project we have taken a wider view of the relationships between family members when learning in the family. This includes:

- Adults and children learning together (e.g. at a museum exhibition)
- Adults helping children learn (e.g. helping children with homework)

- Adults learning from their children (e.g. how to do an internet search)
- Adults learning skills in order to help their children learn (e.g. parenting books, maths courses)

The word parent is used throughout this report to include carers, step parents, and other adults in a parenting role.

Our definition of ‘family’ is intended to be read as inclusive, referring to all types of family groups, including single parent families, adoptive and foster families, step-families and separated families where parents and children do not live together.

3. Parents' views on learning in the family

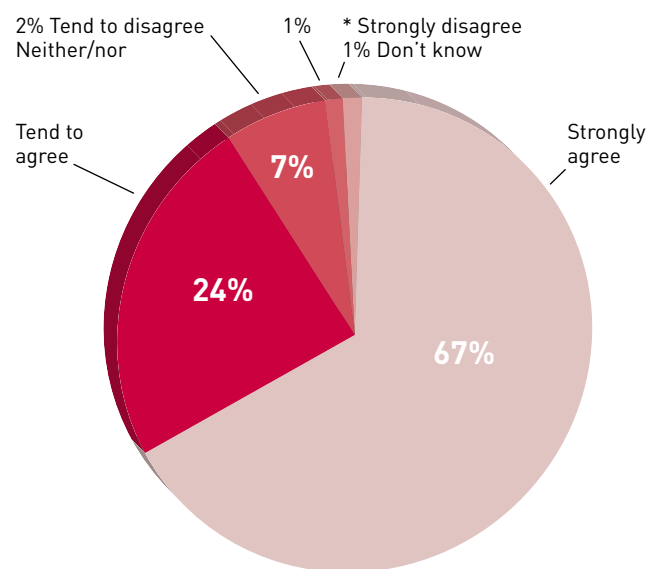
In order to understand the learning that is currently happening in families, including families' views about this learning. Ipsos MORI were commissioned to conduct a national survey of parents. Children's views about learning in the family are also important, however, within this project we were only able to include parents within the sample. From a nationally representative group of adults, questions were asked of parents of at least one child under 16 years old including parents who do not live with their child/children but who see them at least once every two weeks. Full details of methodology along with all data collected can be found in the full report at: www.futurelab.org.uk/learning-in-families

Parents' attitudes towards learning in the family

The overwhelming majority of parents (91%) agree that it is important to do learning activities as a family, whilst only 2% disagree (Figure 1).

Importance of learning activities within the family

To what extent do you agree or disagree that it is important to do learning activities within the family?



Base: All parents/guardians of at least one child under 16 (611)

Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008

Ipsos MORI

Figure 1

Parents with formal educational qualifications are significantly more likely than those without qualifications to strongly agree that family learning is important (66% of GCSE level, 73% of A-level and 72% of degree level and above compared with 52% of those with no formal qualifications).

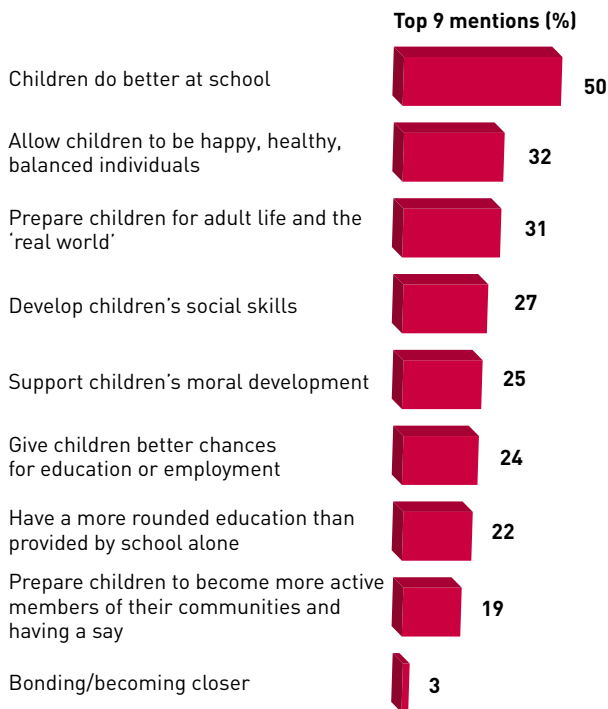
Benefits of learning as a family

The majority of parents perceived benefits to children and the family as a whole, with 92% of parents able to name a way in which learning as a family is beneficial to their children and 93% naming benefits for the family as a whole.

While 'doing better at school' is the most frequently cited benefit for children (mentioned by 50%), many cite more holistic benefits including being happy and healthy (Figure 2). Parents from social grades AB and C1C2 are significantly more likely to cite increased chances for children's education and employment than parents from social grades DE (33% and 24% versus 13%), as are parents with degree level qualifications and above (34% compared with 20% for those with GCSEs and 17% for those with no formal qualifications).

Benefits of learning as a family for children

What do you think are the benefits, if any, of learning as a family for your children?



Base: All parents/guardians of at least one child under 16 (611)
Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008

Ipsos MORI

Figure 2

The most commonly cited benefit of family learning for the family as a whole is 'becoming stronger and closer as a family' (mentioned by 69%) (Figure 3). Education and employment benefits for the individual parent ranked far lower than benefits for the whole family, including developing parenting skills (33%) and life skills (23%). Women are significantly more likely than men to cite developing parenting skills than men (42% versus 23%).

Benefits of learning as a family for parent and family as a whole

What do you think are the benefits, if any, of learning as a family for you and your family as a whole?



Base: All parents/guardians of at least one child under 16 (611)
Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008

Ipsos MORI

Figure 3

Parents' own involvement in learning appears to influence their attitudes towards family learning. Parents who participate in informal learning more frequently (5+ activities in the last three months) are significantly more likely to see family learning as beneficial to their children (97% compared with 84%) and to themselves and the family as a whole (97% versus 87%) than those who have learnt learn informally themselves only once or twice in the last three months.

The extent of learning in the family

In line with the approach taken throughout this project, family learning activities were broadly defined, including helping with homework, family learning courses, reading, self-directed learning, visits and trips, learning to use the computer, learning sports or religious study. Parents were asked whether they had engaged in any family learning activities in the last 12 months in which:

- They helped their children to learn (90%)
- They and their children learned together (78%)
- Parents had learnt from their children (76%)
- Parents had learned skills in order to help their children learn (68%)

The most frequently cited activities that parents have done with their children to help them learn are helping with homework (64%) and reading (62%). Parents do a wide range of activities to help their children learn – 59% of parents have done four or more different activities in the last 12 months. So while homework is a common activity, for many it is not the only activity. The fact that nine per cent of parents have not done any activities to help their children learn does not mean that 9% of children are not being helped to learn by their parents, but this may be because this task is delegated to the other parent within the family – it.

The three most common parents learned together with their child are the same as those when parents helped their children learn: helping with homework (41%), visits or trips (32%) and reading (29%).

Technology appears to play a role in learning activities where parents learn from their children. Parents who have internet access (at work or home), and families that use technologies for family learning, are significantly more likely to have learnt from their children. In particular, parents with internet access at home are twice as likely to say that they have learnt to use computers,

mobile phones, TV, DVDs, games consoles, etc. from their child as those without internet access (28% versus 14%). Families with internet access are also more likely to have participated in a wider range (four types or more) of activities to help children learn than those without (63% versus 32%).

The most frequently cited activity in which parents learn skills in order to help their children learn are skills to help children with their homework (31%). Parenting skills learnt from books, TV programmes, Internet resources or courses are also mentioned by nearly three in ten (28%).

There is a link between parents' engagement in their own learning and learning as a family. Parents who have engaged in at least five types of adult informal learning in the last three months are significantly more likely to have engaged in family learning than those who have engaged in only one or two adult informal learning activities. Added to this, parents who do a wider variety of adult learning activities also do a wider variety of family learning activities.

Differences between groups

Women and men

Women are significantly more likely than men (80% versus 71%) to have learnt from children, including learning to use computers, mobile phones, TV, DVDs, games consoles etc (30% versus 21%). Women are also more likely than men to have helped their children learn to read (68% versus 54%), learned skills to help their child learn (72% versus 62%) or learned from their child (80% versus 71%).

Differences between ethnic backgrounds

Parents from Black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds are less likely to have participated in many activities to help their children learn, but participate more than average in religious study (34%) and family learning courses (20%). They are also less likely to have learned with their children on visits or trips.

Level of qualifications

Parents with no formal qualifications are less likely to have done activities to help their children learn and are more likely not to have learnt skills in order to help their children learn (39% versus 21% with GCSE level or equivalent qualifications). They are also less likely to have learned with their child than those with GCSE/NVQ level qualifications (66% vs 79%).

Differences in social grades

Parents in social grades DE are less likely to have done any activity to help their children learn, and participate in a narrower range of activities to help their children learn than social grades AB.

Age of child

Parents with school-aged children (aged four and above) are generally more likely to report engaging in family learning than those with pre school-aged children.

Barriers to learning in the family

Encouragingly, two in five (40%) parents say there are no barriers to them learning (or learning more) as a family.

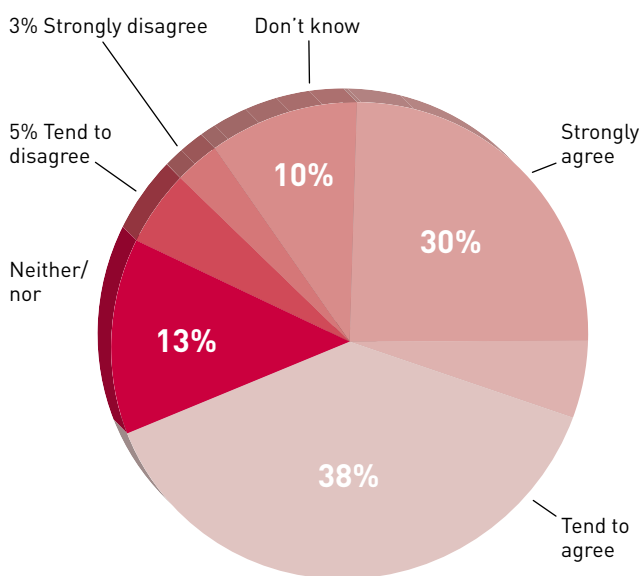
By far the most commonly cited barrier to family learning is lack of time (43%). Cost or lack of money is the next most frequently cited barrier, mentioned by only 7% of parents overall, but increasing to 12% among social grades DE. Parents aged between 18 and 24 are significantly more likely to say that practical considerations and unsuitable or unavailable opportunities, resources or guidance form barriers than their older counterparts. Although only three percent of parents overall cite lack of confidence as a barrier to family learning, this increases to 7% among parents from BME groups.

Relationship between learning in the family and learning at school

Nearly seven in ten (69%) parents agree they have a good understanding of what their child is learning in school (Figure 4). Parents with internet access are more likely to agree with this than those without (71% compared with 59%) as are parents who use technology for family learning (74% compared with 46%), suggesting that the internet may be playing a role in helping parents understand their children's learning in school.

Understanding of learning in schools

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree, if at all, with the statement "I feel that I have a good understanding of what my child is learning in school"



Base: All parents/guardians of at least one child under 16 (610)
Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008

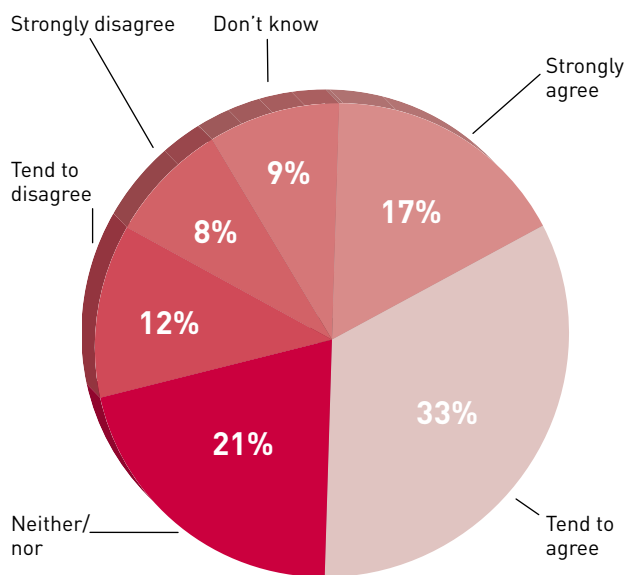
Ipsos MORI

Figure 4

Half of parents (50%) who learn as a family agree that their child's school builds on this learning (20% disagree) (Figure 5).

Understanding of learning in schools

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree, if at all, with the statement “My child’s school builds upon the learning that we do as a family”



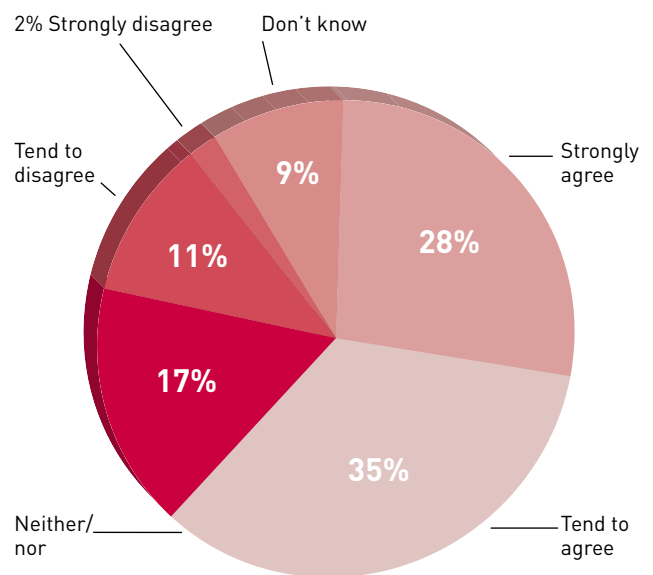
Base: All who do family learning (569)
 Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008
Ipsos MORI

Figure 5

However, a larger proportion of parents (63%) agree that their child’s school should build upon learning done as a family, suggesting that expectations are not being fulfilled (Figure 6).

Understanding of learning in schools

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree, if at all, with the statement “My child’s school SHOULD build upon the learning that we do as a family”



Base: All who do family learning (569)
 Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008
Ipsos MORI

Figure 6

Parents who do a wider range of learning activities themselves (5 or more activities) are more likely to disagree that the school knows about their family learning (30% compared to 17% of those who do only one or two types of family learning activities).

Uses of technology for learning in the family

The majority (90%) of families use at least one type of technology when learning as a family, with two-thirds (66%) citing the internet (Figure 7). Parents who do more informal learning activities, and use technologies to learn themselves are significantly more likely to use technologies for learning in the family:

- 93% parents who do 5 or more informal adult learning activities versus 81% who do one or two activities
- 93% parents who themselves use technology when learning in their leisure time compared with 74% who do not

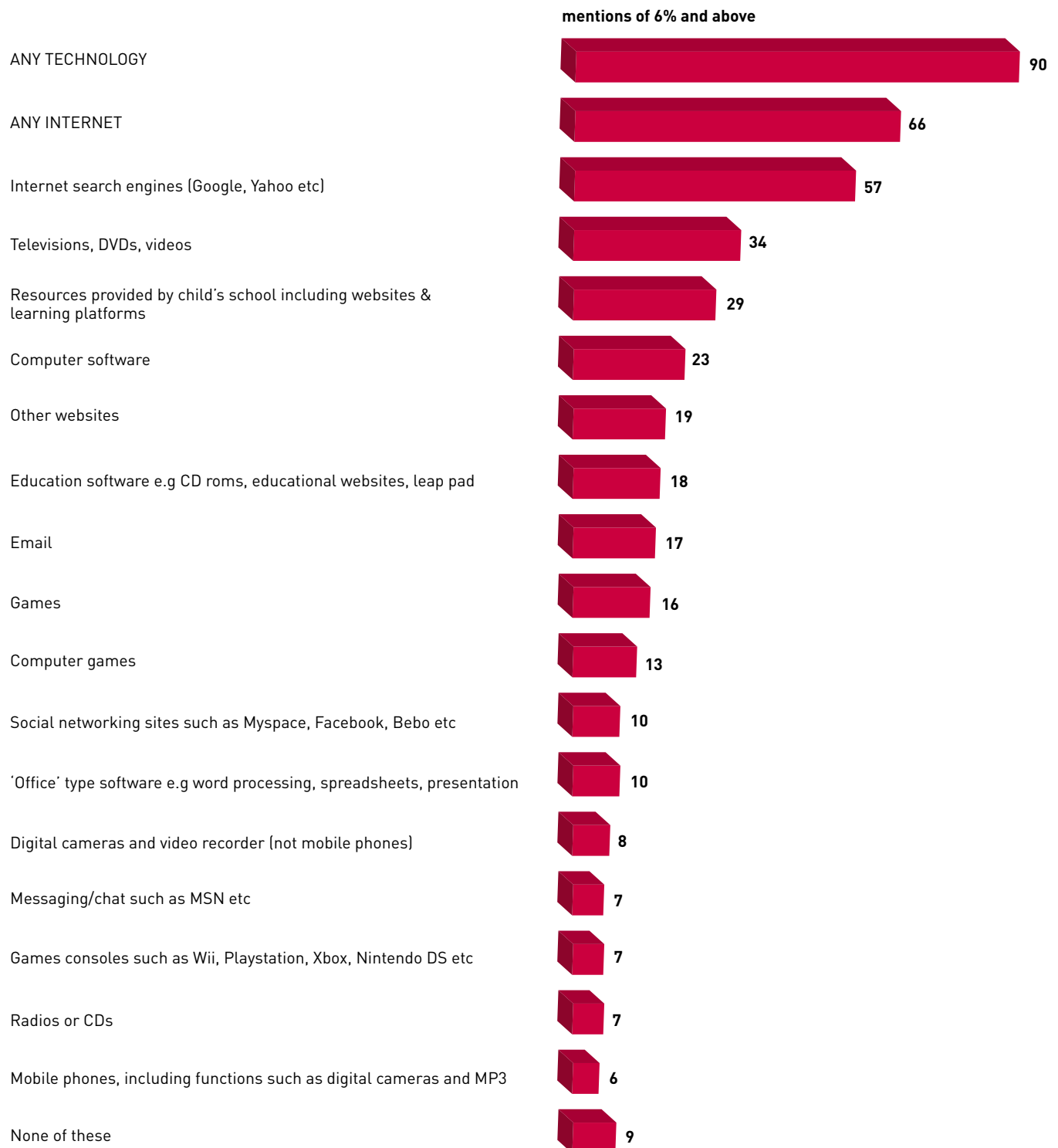
There are predictable inequalities in the use of technologies for learning in the family, with parents in social grades AB significantly more likely to use technologies for learning (98%) than C2 or DE parents (85% and 87%). Parents from social grades AB are also more likely to use a wider range of technologies than their DE counterparts, including:

- Internet search engines (68% AB compared to 38% DE possibly explained by higher internet access in AB households)
- Resources provided by child's school including websites and learning platforms (41% AB compared to 20% DE)
- Educational software (36% AB compared to 11% DE)
- 'Office' type software (21% AB compared to 4% DE)

However, there is no variation by social grade in the use of televisions, DVDs and videos, games consoles, computer games and radios or CDs and almost half (49%) of parents without internet access use televisions, DVDs and videos for family learning, suggesting these technologies may be more accessible for some.

Technology used for family learning

Which technologies, if any, do you use when you learn as a family?



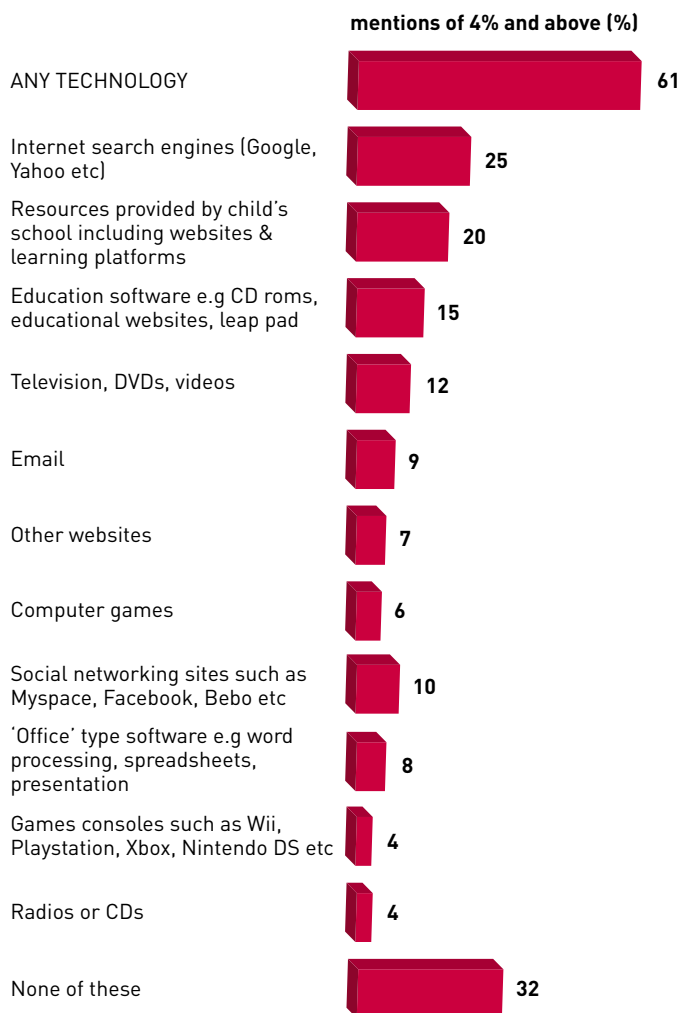
Base: All who do family learning (570) Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008 Ipsos MORI

Figure 7

Around three in five (61%) parents say they would like to use technologies for learning (if they don't use them already), or use them more (if they do use technologies already) (Figure 8). This is particularly true for parents from BME groups, 75% of whom say they would like to make greater use of technologies for family learning.

Technologies people would like to use or use more in family learning?

Which, if any, of these technologies would you like to use more, to support learning as a family?



Base: All who do family learning (570)
 Fieldwork dates: 26th September - 2nd October 2008
 Ipsos MORI

Figure 8

Conclusions

As with much data of this nature, this survey raises many further questions.

It highlights an important link between parents' own learning and the learning they do in their families, perhaps suggesting that learning may be an integral part of some families' repertoire of activities, carrying through from parents' learning to family learning, and possibly also to children's learning.

It also draws our attention to the role of technology in supporting learning in families, with parents who use technologies for family learning more likely to learn with their children, learn new skills to help their children and learn from their children. Internet access and the use of technologies to learn in the family are also strongly correlated with parents' understanding of children's learning at school and participation in a wider range of family learning activities. This may be explained by further external factors, such as socio-economic status, but may point to a possibility that the internet is playing a role in connecting home and school learning and inspiring or providing access to a family learning activities.

This survey provides us with insights into families' learning activities, and parents' perceptions about learning in families. Data of this nature cannot, however, tell us how we might better support learning in families, how we might address the inequalities and barriers faced by families, or how we might best harness the use of technologies to enhance families' learning. In order to begin to answer these questions and understand the wider landscape of learning in families, this data needs to be placed in a broader context of the current policy agendas that relate to learning in families, and an analysis of research and practice. This is the subject of the following two chapters.

4. Policy context

This chapter identifies the main policy initiatives and themes relating to learning in families with digital technologies. A focus on families, and family learning, has become a high priority across government departments and initiatives. The current raft of policies focused on learning in families provides a context for understanding the intense focus and profusion of strategies surrounding family learning, but also raises questions about how and what kinds of family learning might meet these policy agendas.

The most important policy context for learning in families is found within the DCSF's two key strategies: Every Child Matters and The Children's Plan. These are briefly summarised below. Relevant cross-government agendas are then summarised.

Every Child Matters and The Children's Plan

Every Child Matters: Change for Children (ECM) was published in 2004 and ushered in a move for local services to work together around the needs of children and families. The ECM outcomes framework presents a holistic view of children's lives that recognises the influence and significance of families to outcomes for children, and aims to ensure that children experience a positive childhood as well as preparation for a successful adult life.

The Children's Plan builds on the Every Child Matters agenda, and aims to "make this the best place in the world for our children and young people to grow up". One of the underlying principles of The Children's Plan is that "parents bring up children, not government". Government's role is therefore cast as supporting and working in partnership with parents to ensure success and wellbeing for children. This theme of 'partnership' with parents carries through a number of policy initiatives, including giving parents greater access to information, and a having more of a say within children's schools. In line with the 'joined-up' approach of ECM, The Children's Plan has put in place plans for greater co-location of family services through Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools, including adult learning, employment services, health services, police, and social services.

Parental engagement and home-school partnerships

One of The Children's Plan progress report's priorities for 2009 includes improving parental involvement in children's learning².

Initiatives in this area include supporting parents' peer networks, online and through Children's Centres, and developing parents' literacy, numeracy and parenting skills to support their children's learning. Families with more serious needs will be supported through Parenting Early Intervention Programmes (PEIP). Guidance on engaging parents will be issued to schools, children's centres, early years and childcare providers to help them meet the needs and aspirations of all parents.

Fathers' involvement

In practice, parental involvement often equates to mothers' involvement. There is therefore a specific policy priority to involve fathers and schools are exhorted to adopt a "whole school approach and cohesive framework for father-school relationships as part of a parental involvement or home-school strategy"³.

Online Reporting

Parents are to be given access to information about children's education in order to enable them to support their children's education. By 2010 (for secondary) and 2012 (for primary) all schools will be required to report online to parents about children's attendance, attainment, special educational needs and behaviour.

Parent Held Records

'Parent Held Records' are being developed and trialled that will place information about children's education in a wider context, linking to further information about local and extended services and providing suggestions of further learning activities to carry out in the home. Parents will also be able to add their own information about their children's learning activities and achievements, and the record cards will be available both on and offline⁴.

² DCSF 2008a

³ DfES, 2004: 3

⁴ DCSF 2008a

Home-school agreements (HSAs)

All maintained schools are legally required to establish home-school agreements. They are intended to develop partnerships between parents and teachers to raise standards and contribute to school effectiveness. Home-school agreements have yet to reach their potential, according to DCSF and guidance on the use of HSAs is due to be revised in 2009⁵.

Standards and narrowing the achievement gap

Enhancing parents' support for their children's learning and improving partnerships between home and school are seen as key factors in meeting DCSF's overarching policy priorities of raising educational standards in schools and narrowing the gap in educational achievement between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers⁶.

Social inclusion

The Social Exclusion Task Force (SETF) describe social exclusion as "what can happen when people or areas have a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime and family breakdown"⁷ that include but go beyond poverty.

Much emphasis is placed on 'breaking the cycle' of social exclusion, preventing exclusion being passed on from parents to children, which is why one of the SETF's current priorities is to support parenting in the early years and is behind aims to provide free early years and childcare provision, family learning opportunities, and extended services in school.

Think Family

The Think Family paper is the result of the SETF's Families at Risk review into the 2% of families experiencing complex or multiple problems⁸. In this paper, families are seen as a potential source of both risk and resilience for children, and so family-based approaches such as Family Intervention Projects⁹ are recommended to ensure that a range of support services

and sanctions are brought to bear on families to tackle poor outcomes for children.

Think Family advocates a whole family approach in which an individual's problems need to be addressed in the family context both to minimise impact on other family members, especially children, and to use the family as a source of strength for overcoming problems.

Digital inclusion

Social and digital exclusion are in a reciprocal relationship; social exclusion is an additional barrier to closing the digital divide and low ICT use is a further marker of social exclusion. Seventy-five per cent of those experiencing multiple disadvantages do not use the internet and internet use falls as social exclusion deepens. Tackling digital exclusion is seen as also tackling social exclusion; further, digital technologies are seen as offering additional opportunities for social inclusion¹⁰.

Community cohesion

Community cohesion strategies are closely linked to the social inclusion agenda. Community Cohesion is "what must happen in all communities to enable different groups of people to get on well together"¹¹. Cohesive communities are characterised by a sense of belonging, valuing diversity, equal life opportunities for all and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds¹². Families are characterised as the 'basic building block' of communities, and so community cohesion strategies tends to engage with families rather than individuals.

Schools have a duty to promote community cohesion, by taking a stronger role in the local community, identifying children's and families' needs for further support and early intervention and providing extended services for families on the school premises¹³.

⁵ DCSF 2008a

⁶ DCSF 2008a

⁷ www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/context.aspx

⁸ SETF 2007

⁹ www.respect.gov.uk/members/article.aspx?id=8678

¹⁰ digitalinclusion.pbwiki.com/FrontPage

¹¹ www.communities.gov.uk/communities/racecohesionfaith/communitycohesion

¹² www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=519

¹³ DCSF 2008b

Wellbeing

There is an increasing recognition that policy needs to promote positive aspects of wellbeing as well as tackle social, educational and economic problems. Wellbeing is at the heart of Every Child Matters and The Children's Plan, recognising that children need to enjoy their childhood as much as they need to achieve and prepare for adult life. Equally, the Adult Informal Learning consultation being undertaken by DIUS recognises the importance of lifelong and informal learning in contributing to "quality of life, health and well-being in individuals, neighbourhoods and wider society"¹⁴.

Skills

The Skills agenda, embodied by the Leitch review emphasised the need for the UK population to develop high levels of skills to fuel economic growth, meet the demand from business, drive innovation and give individuals opportunities for social mobility through employment¹⁵.

Skills and education are seen as key factors in ensuring the continued competitiveness of 'UK plc' in the global 'knowledge economy'¹⁶. Investing in skills and innovation is seen as not only providing opportunities for social mobility and social inclusion for individuals, but as an important aspect of riding out the current economic downturn. Many family learning courses focus on improving both adults' and children's basic skills, as well as adults' ability to help their children further develop their skills.

Digital Britain, the Byron report and digital media literacy

The Digital Britain interim report set out plans for the future success of the UK digital information and communications sector, its role in supporting the national economy, public services and leisure, and ensuring that everyone is able to benefit from the 'digital revolution'¹⁷. Digital Britain identifies a need for universal availability to broadband as well as education in 'digital life skills', 'digital work skills' and media literacy to allow everyone fair access to participation in the digital society and

digital economy. The development of "great content and services" and greater public awareness of the benefits of internet technology are called for in order to drive take-up of broadband.

Byron's review of the risks around children's exposure to potentially harmful or inappropriate material on the internet and in video games concluded that two twin approaches were needed in order to minimise risks and maximise opportunities¹⁸. On one hand, industry needs to provide consistent information about content in order for children and parents to make informed choices and for parents to restrict children's access to inappropriate content. Byron also calls for further media literacy education to empower parents and children to make informed choices about their own use, and so requires a sophisticated public understanding of the potential risks and benefits of the internet and video games. Digital Britain echoes this call for media literacy, recommending that Ofcom and the BBC create a National Media Literacy Plan. This largely focuses on aspects of media literacy that allow people to stay safe online, particularly parental and individual responsibility to safely and effectively reap the benefits of the online world.

Home Access

The Home Access initiative supports a number of the agendas outlined described above¹⁹. Home Access is seen as improving parental engagement and strengthening home-school links, through providing parental access to school learning platforms and the ability to monitor children's attendance, behaviour and achievement. Home access is also seen as addressing social and digital exclusion by removing the financial barriers to using digital technologies for the poorest families, and by enabling parents to develop their ICT skills, participate in online learning, and use the computer to access government services and job-related websites.

¹⁴ DIUS 2008a

¹⁵ Leitch 2006

¹⁶ DIUS 2008c

¹⁷ BERR/DCMS 2009

¹⁸ Byron 2008a

¹⁹ Becta 2008a

The Home Access initiative also aims to increase the perceived value of computers for learning to encourage those families who, can afford access, but do not use computers for learning, to buy and use them for learning. It also aims to maximise the benefits of home access for all learners – both adults and children – by ensuring that support is available for schools and families for most effective use of home technologies for learning.

Conclusions

This policy review provides some of the wider context of learning in families. This interest in family learning reflects a general move in policy towards a focus on families and communities rather than individuals, as well as an attempt to make government more 'joined up', linking education to social services, employment, health, and linking children's services to adult services. Family learning appears to offer some form of answer to a wide range of policy questions – however it may well be that the forms of family learning implied by different policy agendas are quite different.

In order to further explore the tensions between different types of family learning, understand the mechanisms by which it may contribute to various policy, educational and social agendas and understand how family learning operates in practice we also need to review and analyse the current research evidence of learning in families, which is the subject of the following chapter. The research review and analysis contextualises the empirical data, and is used to further the debate with a range of policy recommendations in Chapter 6.

5. Research review

There is a huge range of diverse activities that could be described as learning in families. In order to discuss this range, a typology of different types of learning in families has been developed, drawing on an analysis of research literature as well as empirical data from our national survey and online discussion. Previous typologies of parental involvement have informed this work, but a somewhat different approach is taken here by starting from the learners' objective, and going beyond parental involvement to include a wider range of learning in families²⁰. Starting from an objective clearly raises the question 'whose objective?'; here, we have largely focused on the objectives of learners themselves, though sometimes in the case of family learning, different family members may have different learning intentions. As well as considering the objective of the learning activity, we have also considered the following elements in generating the categories within this typology:

- Who is learning? Children's, adults', or both?
- What is the learning relationship? Are children learning from parents? Are parents learning from children? Are they both learning together?
- Is the learning intentional or implicit? These are not discrete categories, but a continuum describing whether learning is an intended outcome or a side effect.
- Is the learning formal, non-formal or informal? This is seen as a continuum of activity from accredited learning activities in school, to self-directed and ad hoc learning.

As with all typologies, and with an activity as complex as learning, many real-world activities have characteristics of more than one category, and the edges of one category occasionally blur into another. Dividing learning activities in categories in this way allows us to consider common

attributes, similarities and differences between different types of activities. It also draws our attention to a broader range of activities than are often considered as family learning. Scenarios illustrating a learning journey for each category in the form of a poster can be found at www.futurelab.org.uk/learnng-in-families.

It should also be noted that this is a typology of learning, not of learners. Individuals and families are likely to encounter many of these types of learning over the course of their lives.

Some categories have attracted greater attention from research and policy than others, with parents' impact on children's formal education attracting the majority of research and policy attention.

1. Supporting children's formal learning

This category focuses on parents' role in supporting their children's learning and achievement in school. It also includes schools' efforts to engage with families to enhance children's achievement. It includes explicit attempts by parents, as well as the more spontaneous activities in the home, that support children's achievement in schools. Learning in this category is largely toward the formal end of the spectrum though there are also a range of more informal activities that support children's formal learning outcomes.

Overall, nine in ten parents have engaged in at least one activity to help their children learn in the last twelve months, however this drops to 82% from social grades DE and BME groups and 79% amongst parents with no formal qualifications. The most frequent activities are helping with homework (64%) and reading (62%)²¹.

²⁰ For example, see Epstein's (1995) typology of parental involvement

²¹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning survey 2008

The following are all types of learning in families that are primarily driven by a desire to support children's formal learning:

Parental engagement in and support for children's school learning

1. Parents helping with children's homework and general schoolwork
 - Parents learning about how their children learn
 - School resources for learning at home e.g. via school learning platform
2. Parental involvement with children's school
 - Parental involvement in school activities and decisions e.g. volunteering in classroom, joining PTA,
3. At-home parenting and provision of home learning environment
 - Contributing to development of positive dispositions to learning
 - Modelling high educational aspirations
4. Home-school communication
 - Communicating information about school to home e.g. online reporting, letters, Learning Platforms, home-school agreements
 - Communication from home to school e.g. parents and children informing school about life and learning outside schools
5. Providing home-learning resources
 - parents providing resources e.g. books, CD-ROMs, computers, online resources, private tutors or materials
6. Home educating
 - Children educated by parents rather than through local authority provision

The impact of parents and home life on children's achievement

Social class, or socio-economic status (SES) is strongly correlated with children's achievement at school and 'narrowing the gap' in achievement is one of DCSF's highest priorities²². However, there continues to be debate

²² Feinstein et al 2008

about whether the key factor in children's success is 'who you are or what you do'²³.

Many research studies have sought to identify how children's parents and home life support their school achievement. In an influential major review of the evidence on parents' impact on children's achievement and behaviour, Charles Desforges concluded that:

"Research consistently shows that what parents do with their children at home is far more important to their achievement than their social class or level of education."²⁴

Thus, rather than SES being an insurmountable factor, Desforges sees an opportunity for working class parents to improve their children's school achievement prospects by changing their parenting practices.

While the majority of research, policy and initiatives have focused on parental impact, in practice this has often meant mothers. However, evidence shows that fathers' involvement has an additional impact on children's exam results, attendance and behaviour, regardless of mothers' involvement and whether or not fathers live with their children²⁵. This research has given rise to a more targeted focus on securing fathers' as well as mothers' engagement, and the recent announcement by minister for families Beverley Hughes that family policies would be "dad-proofed"²⁶.

What types of family, home and parental activities enhance children's school attainment?

The evidence for many family learning and parental involvement activities improving children's school achievement was patchy at best²⁷. There was, however, strong evidence for the impact of 'good at-home parenting' on children's school attainment, in contrast to parental involvement through volunteering or taking part in the PTA, which had almost no effect on children's achievement.

²³ MacLeod 2008

²⁴ Desforges 2003: 87

²⁵ Goldman 2005

²⁶ The Guardian 2009

²⁷ Desforges 2003, Brooks et al 2008, Harris and Goodall 2008

'Good at-home parenting' describes a warm and authoritative parenting style and parents who continuously exhibit pro-learning values and high educational aspirations in the home. These values are internalised by children, boosting their motivation to learn, their educational aspirations, their belief in their own ability to learn and their perception of themselves as learners.

The importance of parents' role in valuing learning in the home was confirmed by our online discussion:

"I think a home environment where learning and inquisitiveness are fostered is more important than trying to be a 'formal' teacher."

The EPRA study distinguished between parental 'engagement' and 'involvement', with engagement being activities directly related to children's learning such as helping with homework and discussing schoolwork, and involvement describing more general activities such as attending parent-teacher evenings. They found that higher levels of parental engagement were strongly correlated with children's achievement, especially in 'challenging areas' while mere 'involvement' appeared to confer few benefits.

However, there is not necessarily clear water between 'involvement' and 'engagement'. Demonstrating that learning is important and valued, passing these attitudes on and inculcating the motivation to learn are seen by many as the chief ways in which parents influence their children's achievement, and so 'involvement' activities may in some cases be ways in which parents pass on their educational values and aspirations. Also in some cases involvement may be a first step towards or a prerequisite for engagement, so involvement should not necessarily be dismissed as inconsequential.

Computers and digital technologies in the home can be a site of involvement with the school through, for example, checking term times, engagement through working with children on particular learning activities, as well as representing parents' aspirations about education, with many parents buying a home computer specifically to support their children's education.

Home-school relationships and communication

Closely related to notions of parental engagement in children's learning are attempts to facilitate closer relationships and communication between homes and schools in order to:

- help parents support their children's school learning
- extend learning into the home
- bridge gaps between school and at home

Boundaries between home and school

Home is not only a physical place, but is a social construct that encompasses the family's routines, structures and continuity. So home-school relationships are not just about linking one geographic setting with another, but about negotiating the different social constructs of home and school.

Children's lives have become increasingly 'scholarised', that is, time spent on school work has increased while time spent on leisure has decreased and the home is increasingly cast as a site of education²⁸. Parents therefore have a role to play in negotiating how far to help children engage with school agendas and how far to protect them from its incursions in the home. As one parent in our online discussion said:

"I try to minimise any learning he does at home because I want his childhood to be about more than this [...]"

Blurring the boundaries between home and school may not always be a positive move. Emerging research suggested that children were reluctant to email teachers from home and feared teachers replying and having a conversation²⁹. Children themselves often see home as a space of 'freedoms' as opposed to the constraints of school³⁰. Technologies in this context may be used for and represent either 'school work' or 'free time', presenting a tension in negotiating boundaries between home and school.

²⁸ Qvortrup 2001 in Mayall 2007, Edwards and Alldred 2000

²⁹ Conversation with Dr. Chris Davies referencing the ongoing 'The Learner and Their Context' research programme

³⁰ Mayall 2007

Two-way communication?

The Home School Knowledge Exchange project found that much communication between home and school was 'one-way traffic', with few mechanisms to discover parents' concerns³¹. However, there is much that school can gain from understanding how learning in children's families can inform and support learning in school³². Parents themselves agree that school should know about and build on the learning that happens in families, with 63% of parents in our survey agreeing with this. However, only 50% agree that it currently does so, suggesting a degree of unfulfilled expectations. Those parents who actively engage in learning themselves are more likely to strongly agree that their children's school should build on the learning they do as a family, suggesting that families with a strong learning culture highly value schools' recognition of the learning they do as a family³³.

Children's role in home-school relationships and parental involvement

Much recent sociological research sees children as active agents in their own lives, yet much research on parental involvement and home-school relationships positions children as passive beings who are purely the product of parents' and teachers' actions³⁴. If improving children's learning is the goal, then children's own active role in their learning and in their relationships with parents and teachers needs to be considered.

One of the few studies to investigate children's role in parental involvement in school distinguished between children's active or passive strategies for involving their parents, or keeping them uninvolved³⁵. Children who actively involved their parents were motivated by a desire for intimacy rather than to improve their educational achievement, reminding us that parenting is a relationship rather than a profession³⁶. Girls were more active in involving parents, particularly their mothers. Working class children were more likely to take an active stance towards involving or preventing their parents' involvement, whereas middle class children were more likely to passively 'go along with' parents' involvement or

uninvolvement. Strategies to involve parents therefore need to focus on encouraging children, as well as their parents, to initiate parental involvement.

Parents', children's and teachers' perceptions of parental engagement

With 90% of parents engaging in activities to help their children learn, and 50% of parents seeing family learning as helping their children do better at school, our survey appears to show that parents' see engaging in children's learning as important, but not necessarily only because it may lead to gains in children's performance at school, with other more holistic benefits also cited (e.g. allow children to be happy and healthy: 32%, developing children's social skills 27%)³⁷.

In the EPRA study, parents, students and teachers all valued parental engagement, but had different ideas about what it constituted and why it was valuable.

- Teachers valued support for school policies, particularly behaviour
- Parents focused on homework

Students focused on parents showing an interest in and encouraging their learning

There was a relationship between parents' interest in children's learning and the value students' placed on their own learning, confirming findings that show parents' influence on children's attainment is largely about encouraging positive attitudes towards learning. This is further confirmed by parents' and teachers' views that the value of parental engagement in homework is in opening up deeper discussions between children and parents about their learning and school³⁸. Our survey showed that a majority of parents (64%) had helped their children with homework in the last twelve months. While that leaves 36% who had not helped with homework, this may well be due to this duty being divided up between parents.

³¹ Hughes and Greenhough 2006

³² Moll and Greenberg 1990

³³ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning survey 2008

³⁴ See, for example of research stressing children's agency see Jones and Prout (1990)

³⁵ Edwards and Allred 2000

³⁶ MacLeod 2008

³⁷ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning survey 2008

³⁸ Harris and Goodall 2008

Barriers and issues enhancing home-school relationships and parental engagement

Research has indicated a number of barriers to parents' engagement with their children's learning.

Practical issues

Limitations on parents' time are consistently a major barrier, with 43% stating this as a barrier³⁹. Working parents in particular, who have limited time to spend with children, may want to spend that time playing or talking rather than teaching or helping with homework. Fathers, working parents and lone parents also found it more difficult to find the time for informal contact with teachers⁴⁰.

Further practical barriers include cost of child care and transport. A lack of suitable opportunities, including addressing communication difficulties, can also prevent parental engagement. Our survey found that younger parents (18-25) in particular were more likely to cite a lack of suitable opportunities and practical barriers as a barrier to engaging in family learning. Money/cost/lack of funding was the second most frequently cited barrier, with 7% of parents referencing this, rising to 12% amongst social grades DE.

Child factors

Children's age also affects parental involvement in their learning: older children expect, and are expected to be, more autonomous. Parents support children with homework less, and parents' relationships with teachers tend to become more restricted to formal occasions such as parents' evenings.

School factors

Parents often perceived teachers' attitudes to be negative, which made them reluctant to communicate with their children's teachers. Working class parents may see teachers as superior and distant, engaging with parents only on their own terms, which can discourage parents from being proactive in their partnership with teachers and encourage a fatalistic view that they have no influence⁴¹.

Communication difficulties with teachers included difficulties for speakers of languages other than English, but also for those who felt that they did not have the 'right' language to speak to teachers, and who found it difficult to understand the way that information was communicated to them⁴². Schools need to take a whole-community, strategic approach that is sensitive to local cultures and embed parental involvement in teaching and learning, if they are to see any benefits from efforts to involve parents⁴³.

Parents' attitudes and skills

Not all parents feel able, or see it as their role, to directly engage with children's education but a lack of involvement with school does not necessarily equate to lack of interest in children's learning⁴⁴. Parents also recognise potential downsides to engagement, including beliefs that children's lives should not be dominated by school, a fear that the parent-child relationship could suffer, and children being embarrassed or ridiculed if parents were seen in school⁴⁵.

Parents' bad experiences of education can hamper their involvement although perception is more important than actual education level achieved, suggesting confidence in abilities to help is also important. Parents from black and minority ethnic groups are more likely to cite lack of confidence as a barrier to family learning (7% compared to 3% overall)⁴⁶. This can lead to reluctance to engage in learning, which can signal to children that education is not highly valued. Parents with low basic skills levels are also likely to face more practical challenges to supporting their children's homework.

Fathers are less likely to get involved with their children's education than mothers. In our survey 68% of mothers read with children compared to 54% of fathers⁴⁷. However, targeting fathers specifically through designing materials for fathers rather than just for 'parents' and encouraging children to directly invite fathers to be involved have been successful in raising fathers' involvement.

⁴² Harris and Goodall 2008

⁴³ Epstein 2002

⁴⁴ Edwards and Alldred 2000, Harris and Goodall 2007, Owen et al 2009

⁴⁵ Owen et al 2009

⁴⁶ Desforges 2003; Harris and Goodall 2007, Gilby et al 2008, Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁴⁷ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

³⁹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning survey 2008

⁴⁰ Owen et al 2008

⁴¹ Hallgarten 2000, Reynolds 2005

For non-resident fathers, including those in prison, creating audio or video-taped stories to share with children can help keep fathers engaged with their children's learning as well as maintaining relationships during periods of separation⁴⁸.

Cultural and class differences

Socio-economic status is a major factor mediating parental engagement as well as being a strong predictor of children's achievement. Differences between cultures of home and school may make it easier for some children to 'get on' in school than others. This is seen particularly in language; children come to school with varying languages and linguistic styles that may clash with those of school⁴⁹. Further cultural differences are seen in the example of Bangladeshi parents, who told their children to sit quietly and be obedient at school, which clashed with the teacher's plans for children to act as autonomous investigators; teachers interpreted this as these children being less ready for school than their peers, children were confused, parents devalued school practices, and children achieved less well than their peers⁵⁰.

While much research has explored how to raise parents' engagement and improve home-school relationships, there has been less research on how schools can understand and build on children's home learning, despite 63% of parents agreeing that schools should do this⁵¹. There are particular opportunities here for schools to build on children's knowledge of digital technologies, which is often in some ways in advance of their teachers'.

Parents as teachers?

As teachers are judged on pupils' performance, there is a danger that they can understandably be "enticed by a view which places responsibility for poor performance on differences in values between homes and school"⁵². Rather than sharing responsibility as the notion of partnership would suggest, it becomes an opportunity for parents and teachers to refuse responsibility⁵³. Schools' attempts to leverage parents' involvement have required parents to act in a 'teaching' role in the

home. However, parents can be uneasy about working in teacherly ways, and schools' expectations that parents could take on such teaching roles underestimate the professional skills required in teaching⁵⁴. In our online discussion, many parents did not see their role as to explicitly teach their children:

"I see my role as a parent as being someone who tries to impart an interest in the world and a love of the process of acquiring knowledge rather than as a 'technical' teacher"

Parents as consumers, partners and problems

Policy and practice adopt sometimes conflicting views of parents in relation to their children's education. Policy from the 1980s onwards has positioned parents as 'consumers', making choices about the education they want for their children in an educational market place.

In more recent times, parents have been cast as 'partners' in their children's education, working alongside teachers to ensure children's achievement. However the extent to which parents are involved as genuine partners rather than as 'external props' has been strongly questioned⁵⁵. Many parental involvement initiatives are characterised by efforts to transform homes to more closely align with school values in ways that can appear more "a form of colonisation rather than collaboration"⁵⁶. Genuine partnership between parents and schools would require a radical rebalancing of power between parents and teachers and for school to take seriously how diverse home cultures can support children's learning.

Technologies supporting parental involvement and home-school communication

Overall, nine in ten parents use at least one type of technology when learning in the family, with internet search engines by far the most popular, being used by 57% of parents. Just over three in five (61%) parents would like to use a technology that they don't currently use, or use a technology more than they currently use

⁴⁸ Goldman 2005

⁴⁹ Bernstein 1971

⁵⁰ Brooker 2002 in Mayall 2007

⁵¹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁵² Edwards and Warin 1999: 326

⁵³ See Ball, 2008 for further discussion about 'responsibilization'.

⁵⁴ Edwards and Warin 1999

⁵⁵ Bastiani 1995, Hallgarten 2000

⁵⁶ Edwards and Warin 1999: 332

it, however this rises to 75% amongst parents from BME groups⁵⁷. Parents from social groups AB are far more likely than those from DE to use digital technologies in general (98% compared to 87%) and internet search engines in particular (68% compared to 38%), although there is no difference in use of TV, videos and DVDs⁵⁸. Home Access may go some way to addressing this inequity, but there is clearly also an opportunity to provide learning resources via iDTV, which may more easily fit in with family life than using internet via a PC, as TVs are already an integral part of daily life for many families, are usually located in family space such as the lounge, and have a larger screen size enabling more people to view. Projects such as LearningSTREAM have early indications that personalised provision via IPTV (Internet Protocol Television) can help engage parents who were seen as 'hard to reach'⁵⁹.

Parents in the online discussion group broadly supported the use of technology to support their children's learning, but were clear that it was not the most important factor:

"It's not 'all about' computers and definitely agree that time and parental support is the most important factor BUT I am a huge fan of computers."

The research in the use of technologies in relation to supporting children's formal learning has largely focused on two areas:

- Facilitating communication and linking learning between home and school
- Extending learning into the home

Facilitating communication and linking learning between home and school

Recent initiatives to improve communication between home and school include web-based text-messaging systems that alert parents to their children's absence

from school, which has been shown to improve attendance rates as well as form part of wider home-school communication strategies⁶⁰.

Parents have expressed a preference for more feedback from schools about children's performance, with two-thirds wanting schools to use text messaging and the internet to communicate this information⁶¹. All schools will be required to make information available online to parents about children's attendance, behaviour, progress and special needs by 2010 (secondary) and 2012 (primary). At this stage, online reporting emphasises providing information that schools already record, although this may only be a first step towards more meaningful two-way dialogue.

Similarly, the EPRA study found that parents were often positioned as passive receptors of information rather than as active agents in their children's learning, with no channels for parents to respond⁶². This one-way 'closed' model of communication was unlikely to engage parents in their children's learning.

Parents and teachers need to have a shared understanding of how parents are intended to make use of information provided in order for it to have any beneficial effect on children's learning. There is also a danger that information recorded about attendance, behaviour, and progress tends to focus on negative aspects; providing a diet of negative information may present an inaccurate picture and in fact be counterproductive. One school in Cambridge has addressed this by ensuring that they provide at least three positive messages for every negative message⁶³. Extending the range of information provided, and opening up channels for a two-way dialogue will be important next steps for online reporting; however this needs to be balanced with demands on teachers' workloads.

⁵⁷ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁵⁸ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁵⁹ www.streamonline.co.uk/learning; www.futurelab.org.uk/themes/digital-inclusion/project-showcase/learning-stream

⁶⁰ Becta 2008e

⁶¹ Becta 2008d

⁶² Harris and Goodall 2008

⁶³ Personal conversation with Gaynor Sharp, Becta Research Manager

Extending learning into the home

Many parents used technologies to support children's formal learning, although there is a big difference in use between social grades, with 41% of AB social grades using resources provided by child's school compared to 20% of DE⁶⁴. This may be partly explained by lower access to internet-based resources in lower SES households. Overall, 20% of parents wanted to make more use of resources provided by child's school.

In a large scale review in 2001, some schools were using technologies to support a seamless approach to learning in which students accessed curriculum materials via a secure sign-on, even getting feedback from teachers at fixed times outside normal school hours⁶⁵. However, not all children, parents or teachers necessarily welcome such a 'seamless' approach to learning; maintaining differences between home and school is important for all concerned⁶⁶. One parent in the online discussion highlighted how using technology for learning in the home can give rise to tensions about who is in charge:

"Not allowing extra home learning to be administered to the child by another authority through technology"

Using computers to extend learning to the home also has to contend with the strong discontinuities in computer use between home and school⁶⁷. It is not just differential access to technologies that causes inequalities in home technology use, but differences in families' use of those technologies⁶⁸. Difference in families' attitudes, skills and experience of using technologies for learning mediate the use made, potentially thereby deepening existing educational inequalities

The Home Access initiative, due to be launched in September 2009, is intended to enable schools and parents to maximise the benefits of technology for learning in both home and school⁶⁹. The Digital Britain interim report also suggests that the benefits of broadband to support public services such as education will inform the minimum universal service

commitment⁷⁰. It remains to be seen how support and guidance will be made available to families and teachers so that they are empowered to use these technologies in ways that are beneficial for their own contexts and circumstances. Parents in our online discussion had mixed opinions on the use of technology for learning, recognising the benefits, but also aware that it brings new challenges and is not necessarily a substitute for other supportive factors:

"We are pretty fortunate that we are able to provide our kids with computers etc. but there is a lot more than just chucking money and posh learning aids into supporting your child. More about showing interest, helping them to manage their time and supporting them by providing a decent quiet place and time to do their hmwk."

Learning in the home

Many parents support their children's formal learning independently of school, particularly before they start formal education. Eighteen per cent of parents reported using educational technologies such as CD-ROMs, educational websites or leap pad systems when learning as a family. However, this is much more prevalent amongst social grades AB (36%) than DE (11%)⁷¹. It has become a common place assumption that part of a parent's role is to prepare children for schooling, including providing them with educational resources⁷². This is illustrated by the quote from our online discussion below:

"I think pre-school learning is so important. I have covered phonics with both at a pre-school stage so they are aware of the sounds the letters make - this helps with reading skills."

⁶⁴ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁶⁵ Somekh et al 2001

⁶⁶ See section above on Home-school relationships and communication for further discussion of this issue

⁶⁷ Kerawalla and Crook 2002 in Muschamp et al 2007

⁶⁸ Somekh et al 2001, Facer et al 2003

⁶⁹ Becta 2008a

⁷⁰ BERR/DCMS 2009

⁷¹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁷² Eagle et al 2008

Parents may support their children's formal learning independently of school by providing private tutors, engaging in explicit learning and teaching activities in the home and buying and using educational materials, including software and internet resources. For example, the CBeebies website provides online games and ideas for offline activities for parents and children to complete together, supporting children's early numeracy, literacy, ICT, music and other skills for young children⁷³.

A range of commercial electronic products are marketed at parents of early years children to improve their chances at school⁷⁴, including toys and 'learning systems' such as Vtech and Leapfrog. DVDs and CD-ROMs are also produced to teach early years children literacy and numeracy skills⁷⁵. While 15% of parents wanted to use educational software more, this was mostly by parents who did not currently use such software (11%). Only 3% of parents who already used educational software wanted to use it more, possibly suggesting that it is not as popular with those who are already using it⁷⁶.

The process of sharing picture and story books with young children involves children and parents constructing the meaning of texts together, with parents helping to make stories relevant to children's life⁷⁷. Decades of studies have shown the value of play and playfulness for children's social and cognitive development, and how technology can enable this play in both physical and virtual worlds⁷⁸. However, few educational technology resources for children's early learning explicitly encourage shared meaning-making and playfulness in the way picture and story books do. Early years technologies for learning need to emphasise playfulness and conversation in their marketing; encourage shared rather than solo use in design, and appeal to both adults and children⁷⁹.

There are similarly many digital resources provided to support older children's formal learning in the home, BBC Bitesize being a particularly popular free resource⁸⁰. However, these are largely designed and marketed with the intention that they will be used independently by children, with parents' playing a limited role largely restricted to providing equipment and resources.

Home educated children

There are no official statistics on the numbers of children who are educated at home, as local authorities are currently not required to measure this. However, some put it as high as 50,000, or 0.5% of the total population of school-age children⁸¹.

Parents may choose to opt out of the school system for a variety of reasons: including philosophical or religious beliefs, dissatisfaction with state provision, because they feel they can cater for their child's particular needs better, or simply because they feel it is their responsibility and right to educate their own children. Given the wide range of motivations for choosing to home educate and the corresponding diversity of methods of education, it is difficult to make generalisations about the experiences of families who home educate their children.

The internet, however, has long been used to create support networks for families who choose to home educate, with websites providing advice on legal matters, teaching methods and content. Social networks such as Facebook are used to create online groups of home educators, and there are many websites and online forums supporting this approach⁸². Many who home educate make extra efforts to ensure that children are able to socialise with people outside the immediate family; using the internet to connect and learn with others is one way in which this can happen.

⁷³ www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/familytime/games

⁷⁴ For example, VTech toys are marketed as "introducing your child to early computer skills, which are also useful for school" www.elc.co.uk/toys/learning-books/vtech-learning-toys/?filter=filter&category=1122

⁷⁵ For example, Jolly Phonics CD-ROMs

⁷⁶ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

⁷⁷ Eagle et al 2008

⁷⁸ Strommen 2004

⁷⁹ Eagle et al 2008

⁸⁰ www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize

⁸¹ www.education-otherwise.org/abouteo.htm

⁸² For example www.education-otherwise.org/abouteo.htm; www.facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=3558390037

2. Family engagement in learning for pleasure

This type of learning focuses on families learning primarily because it is an enjoyable thing to do in and of itself. It is largely intentional and includes a range of non-formal and informal activities.

It includes adults and children learning together, adults supporting children's engagement with such experiences, and adults learning from children. Some families may see this type of learning as providing a more well-rounded education than provided by school alone, as one parent in our online discussion put it:

"Although school is important it should not be their sole life experience. I have always tried to ensure that my kids encounter a wide range of experiences so they can see that there is a big wide world out there, full of different people doing different things. They also get the skills that a lot of schools no longer give: music, sport, a channel for competitiveness, how to deal gracefully with losing, etc."

Seventy-six per cent of parents engaged in at least one activity where they and their child learned together, with 32% going on visits or trips (to museums, zoos, science centres, etc), 29% reading, 20% learning together on the computer and a further 20% learning about a subject being studied in school (see Figures 2 and 3). This final activity may suggest that school plays a role in inspiring further learning within the family. The importance of learning for pleasure for families is also emphasised by findings that 32% of parents think learning as a family helps children be happy, healthy and balanced individuals, and 22% think it gives them a more rounded education than provided by school alone, while just under one in five (18%) think learning as a family provides benefits for the whole family through developing knowledge, skills and understanding for their own personal interest.

Parents who engage in more informal learning themselves are more likely to see family learning as beneficial to their children, themselves, and their family as a whole, to agree that family learning is important, and to participate in more types of family learning, suggesting a strong link between parents' personal learning and their role in instigating and valuing learning in the family⁸³.

The following learning activities are examples in which the primary objective is learning for pleasure:

- a. Hobbies and interests that family members pursue together
 - collecting, participating in sports, arts & crafts, photography, programming
- b. Visits to cultural, historical and scientific venues and participation in learning events
 - museums, zoos, community events, theatre, cinema, galleries, etc.
- c. Parents providing access to opportunities and material resources for learning for pleasure
 - transport to events and clubs
 - private tuition and classes
 - suggestions and encouragement to try new learning experiences
 - equipment including technologies, instruments, art materials, sport equipment,
 - connectivity via internet connection, mobile phone subscription
 - learning resources e.g. online resources, books, TV

Taking part in learning for pleasure is an indicator of 'wellbeing' in and of itself, whether or not it leads to particular outcomes or progression opportunities. However, such learning for pleasure can have further outcomes including a commitment to lifelong learning, increasing individuals' confidence in themselves as learners, and contributing to a family culture of learning in which family members support and encourage one another's learning. Engaging in learning for pleasure is also seen as supporting community cohesion as people engage in learning within their local communities⁸⁴.

⁸³ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning survey

⁸⁴ NAGCELL 2008

Self-directed learning

It is difficult to research and measure self-directed learning, due to the fact that much of it takes place in the home, and much is done without reference to any external agency or authority beyond the family⁸⁵. However, there are indications that in many cases technology plays an important role in supporting such self-directed learning.

A recent Futurelab survey found that adults with children in their house are more likely to use technologies to learn in their leisure time than adults without children (86% compared to 76%)⁸⁶. This reflects the fact that households with children are more likely to have an internet-connected computer, but also indicates a link between parents' engagement in informal learning and the use of technologies to learn in the family. Digital technologies play an important role in adult learning, with the internet inspiring 24% of adults to begin learning⁸⁷. This appears to follow through to children's and family learning. In the "Learner and their Context" study, children were seen to be using the internet to find out information about interests, some of which were shared with parents, ranging from ice-skating to religion⁸⁸.

While learning may start with children's interests, involvement with children's pleasures and achievements can also rekindle or ignite parents' and others family members' interest in learning⁸⁹. Digital Britain sees the provision of "great content and services" as key to driving take-up of broadband, with the BBC invited to play a key role in this activity. This suggests there may be a significant opportunity for the BBC to continue to develop content that engages both children and their parents via broadband and iDTV⁹⁰.

Learning in scientific, cultural and historical venues and public spaces

Museums, science centres, art galleries and historical buildings are popular venues for family days out, with 50% of parents reporting they had taken such visits or trips in the last 12 months, although this falls to only

23% amongst families from BME groups⁹¹. Parents in our online discussion valued going to cultural venues and events, but the costs of entrance and transport could be prohibitive:

"I quite often do not have the money to take him [son] to the theatre or to watch concerts or to have trips out though so it can be hard. He would really benefit from this so I have to save for a long time to be able to do this."

Museums often provide 'family learning' events or trails for families to complete as they visit exhibitions. One of the challenges for museums is in devising activities that support both adults' and children's learning, rather than simply using adults to support children's learning⁹².

Museums, galleries and science centres often augment their exhibitions with digital information in the form of fixed interactive screens that visitors can use to find out about exhibits or themes, or handheld guides that provide additional information. At the SS Great Britain museum, visitors can choose tour guides told from by different characters. When a family group chooses different characters, this can prompt conversations between them as each has access to different information. In this way, they are engaged together in learning about different aspects of the steamship, and each has an opportunity to take on 'expert' as well as 'novice' roles⁹³.

Libraries are often located alongside UK Online Centres, so there would appear to be opportunity to develop more technology-enhanced learning provision in libraries, however at present there appears to be little digital activity in this area. According to Natasha Innocent, Policy Director of the Museums, Libraries and Archives council, the changing role of libraries and the fact they are closely embedded in local communities, mean that some are becoming very successful at engaging with families in disadvantaged communities⁹⁴.

⁸⁵ Sefton-Green 2004

⁸⁶ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Adult Informal Learning Survey 2008 www.futurelab.org.uk/adult-informal-learning

⁸⁷ Ipsos MORI 2008

⁸⁸ Unpublished Phase 1 report from Learner and their Context project

⁸⁹ NAGCELL 2008

⁹⁰ BERR/DCMS 2009

⁹¹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey 2008

⁹² Lamb 2008

⁹³ www.ssgreatbritain.org/FamilyDayOut.aspx

⁹⁴ Personal conversation with Natasha Innocent, August 2008

Public spaces such as parks and city squares are also venues where families spend time with each other and other families from the community. These spaces may also provide opportunities for learning together. One example is the 'Space Signpost', a scientific sculpture in Bristol's Millennium Square which can be pointed at objects in space in real time including planets, stars and comets⁹⁵. Intended as a starting point for thinking about our position in a planetary system, it provokes further conversations within families.

Intergenerational learning

Intergenerational learning (IGL), in which younger people and older people both learn from one another, may feature in any one of the six categories presented in this typology. However, it is perhaps most common within activities in which families learn together for pleasure.

Anywhere can be a space for intergenerational learning, but spaces such as museums, community centres and parks that are clearly separate from work and home spaces work well. Bringing different generations together can promote lifelong learning, foster active citizenship and broaden people's views by bringing them into contact with different life experiences. In an ageing society, in which the young and old seem to fear and mistrust one another, intergenerational learning offers opportunities for people to understand and appreciate one another's viewpoint.

In a recent study exploring the use of technology to enhance intergenerational learning in public spaces, it was found that participants' age was less important than having common interests. While being careful not to stereotype older people as having limited understanding of technologies and younger people as highly knowledgeable in this area, the domain of technologies brought the different experiences of younger and older people together in complementary ways. Intergenerational learning may also offer particular benefits for older immigrants, who can take a long time to feel at home in a new location, by connecting them with other people within their new community.

3. Supporting children's life skills including personal, social and emotional development

This objective describes activities that support children's development in a more holistic sense, including activities that might be seen as part of childrearing. It includes activities that are intended to help children learn the essential skills that they need in order to be independent adults and participate in day to day life, from learning to walk and talk, to knowing how to stay safe, to learning to share and interact with other people.

Forty-seven per cent of parents engaged in everyday activities where children had learned something new, such as cooking, gardening, using money, looking after pets, etc. with parents seeing family learning as helping children prepare for the real world (31%), develop social skills (27%) and becoming active members of their community (19%)⁹⁶. Activities that support children's development of life skills include:

- a. Learning to stay safe and looking after yourself
- b. Social and emotional skills
- c. Mentoring and teaching by family members – practical life skills
 - learning to ride a bike
 - to care for a pet
 - using technologies
 - playing sports
 - using technologies

One of parents' key roles is to help children learn the skills they will need to be independent adults later in life, from learning how to interact with other people to being able to take care of themselves. Children actively seek out opportunities for learning about the world around them, but parents play an important role in introducing children to new skills and areas of life. This was particularly important for parents of younger children in our online discussion:

“before school age I think learning through play and developing social skills are much more important [than explicitly teaching reading or writing]”

⁹⁵ www.spacesignpost.com

⁹⁶ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey 2008

The Children's Plan and Every Child Matters framework recognises these wider aspects of children's development in its aims, emphasising outcomes encompassing health, enjoyment, safety and making a contribution as well as educational achievement and financial security.

Using digital technologies is seen by many as an increasingly important life skill; they have become a key feature of family life, with mobile phone, IM and email used to keep in touch with family members throughout the day⁹⁷. A significant minority of parents reported the use of such everyday technologies as part of their family learning, with 17% using email, 13% using computer games, and 10% using social networking sites⁹⁸. Being able to use new digital technologies is increasingly seen as an essential aspect of citizenship, being able to fully participate in society, as well as being important skills for employment⁹⁹. This includes the functional ability to operate digital technologies, but also to regulate one's own use, for example making decisions about safe and effective use. It also includes being able to identify and manage potential benefits and risks of using different technologies, and developing the skills to use technologies in sophisticated ways that facilitate broader engagement with culture and society, particularly through the use of social media.

Parents are seen as having an important role to play in ensuring that children's use of digital technologies takes account of the benefits and risks of new technologies. However, in Byron's report on the risks of video games and internet use, she found that "there is a generational digital divide which means that parents do not necessarily feel equipped to help their children in this space"¹⁰⁰. The Digital Britain report also emphasises the need for media literacy education to "protect" children and "empower parents" to use online technologies confidently, safely and effectively. However, avoiding harm is emphasised more than identifying and engaging with the benefits, or critiquing online technologies. In the context of technology use, children are often seen as the 'pioneers' within their families, learning to use digital technologies in new ways that are unfamiliar to adults. Guidance suggests that in these cases parents get children to teach them what

they are doing, and that while children might know a lot about technologies, parents still need to help children understand the wider context of what they are doing, and learn to take safe decisions. In this way, both adults and children may have much to learn from one another in a conversation about safe use of new technologies. Guidance is available for parents from a range of formal and informal sources, including from children's schools and websites such as Think U Know¹⁰¹, however these are not always easy to find with a simple internet search, and parents with limited ICT skills are likely to find advice via schools, TV or printed leaflets easier to access.

The family context is also important in supporting and mediating the use that children make of technologies. Parents help with technical issues, provide encouragement and introduce children to more sophisticated forms of use. Many parents see it as particularly important that children learn to use the internet, due to its relevance and importance in society. Children learn skills including typing, using email, searching the internet, downloading and uploading content, using programmes and playing online games and online safety from parents¹⁰².

The constraints and expectations that families place on internet use in the home conveys their values and beliefs about the purpose of technologies and strongly influence children's use, potentially reinforce existing social and educational inequalities in the use of technology in children's lives¹⁰³.

4. Participation and acculturation in family life

While usually not explicitly or intentionally learning-directed activities, these are the everyday family activities in which both children and adults learn implicitly. These could be described as processes of acculturation in which adults and children develop and reaffirm their cultural belonging to families and communities.

⁹⁷ Kennedy et al 2008

⁹⁸ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey 2008

⁹⁹ Jenkins et al 2006, BERR/DCMS 2009

¹⁰⁰ Byron 2008a

¹⁰¹ www.thinkuknow.co.uk/Default.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1

¹⁰² Hart et al 2008

¹⁰³ Facer et al 2003

These implicit activities score low on surveys as specific activities may often not be recognised as learning by parents, although 47% mentioned taking part in everyday activities where children learned something new. However, the importance of this aspect of learning can be seen by the number of parents who say that learning in families benefits their children's social skills (27%), moral development (25%), and helps the whole family become stronger and closer (69%). Examples of activities facilitating acculturation in family life include:

a. Leisure activities

- watching TV
- playing computer games
- attending sporting / cultural events e.g. football matches, cinema, concerts

b. Participation in daily life activities

- shopping
- cooking
- using technologies
- play

Simply being part of a family is a process of learning; for babies and young children learning is a constant feature of their lives. This kind of learning is often not explicit or intentional – but rather is a by-product of participation in family life. Children enthusiastically participate in many of the activities of the home and neighbourhood, joining in with cooking, shopping and visiting friends and relatives¹⁰⁴.

Children learn 'local knowledge' through a process similar to apprenticeship, observing, imitating and getting involved with the life of the family and community, participating in and acquiring the cultural and moral norms and practices of their local environment¹⁰⁵. Indeed, by the age of five years old, most children have acquired skills such as speech that allow them to participate in their family, are morally and socially competent in their family context and see themselves as a member of their family group. Indeed, even beyond the early years, most of the learning that happens at home is not homework set

by school, but acquiring the general knowledge needed to participate in family and society through activities including shopping, watching television, living with babies, looking out of the window and talking¹⁰⁶. Not all children have such enabling homes – those in bad housing, those who are looked after by the local authority and those whose parents are unable to care for them are likely to have difficulties acquiring these social competences¹⁰⁷.

For many families, using digital technologies is a part of this daily participation in family life. Indeed, by the time children start primary school, many will have played on computer games with parents or siblings and continue to use computers in the home throughout primary school and secondary school¹⁰⁸. Recent research shows that 61% of parents see games as a positive social experience for children and eight out of ten game-playing parents play games with their children. A significant proportion of game-playing parents play with their children because they see it as a family-friendly activity (29%) and because it allows them to spend time with their children (22%)¹⁰⁹. Playing games in the family allows families to simply spend time interacting with one another, as well as helping children learn important social and cultural skills including taking turns, patience, and dealing with competition¹¹⁰.

Computer activities should be seen as taking their place alongside, rather than displacing, other family practices. Emerging research from the 'Learner and their Context' research programme also suggests that parents and children often spend 'quality time' together around a family computer¹¹¹. As some parents spend an increasing amount of time working with computers in home, some children become adept at inserting themselves into the relationship between parent and computer by showing interest and getting involved in activities around the computer. The computer thus becomes an important artefact in children's home life that they learn to use as part of their relationship with other family members.

¹⁰⁶ Tizard and Hughes 1984

¹⁰⁷ Mayall 2007

¹⁰⁸ Marsh and Millard 2000

¹⁰⁹ Microsoft 2009, TNS 2008, Nielsen 2008

¹¹⁰ www.cottontimer.com/2007/07/27/top-10-things-my-four-year-old-has-learned-from-nintendo-wii

¹¹¹ Personal conversation with Dr. Chris Davies at Oxford University.

¹⁰⁴ Mayall 2008

¹⁰⁵ Rogoff 2005

5. Developing adult basic skills

The emphasis here is on adults developing their basic skills alongside children and in order to support their children's learning, often through organised courses but also through accessing online resources, TV, books, etc.

Sixty-eight per cent of parents had learnt skills in order to help their children learn. After homework and parenting skills, the most frequent skill learnt was to use technologies such as computers and mobile phones (28%). A similar pattern is seen for parents learning skills from their children, with 26% learning to use computers and mobile phones etc.¹¹². Examples of family learning developing adult basic skills includes:

- a. Family Learning courses provided by the local authority, adult education services, schools and voluntary sector
 - Family Literacy Language and Numeracy (FLLN)
 - Wider Family Learning (WFL)
 - Extended schools Family Learning provision
 - LearnDirect
- b. Self-directed basic skills family learning
 - Books, websites, TV resources e.g. BBC RaW

In the UK, Family Learning focusing on adults' basic skills is generally divided into Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) and Wider Family Learning (WFL), with local authorities receiving funding to commission local provision in these two areas. In our survey, 8% of parents had participated in a family course where they and their children learn together. But many more had learned skills in order to help their children learn, or learned from their children, suggesting that skills are also learned in more self-directed and non-organised activities¹¹³. There are a number of voluntary, third sector and private organisations delivering family learning initiatives that do not necessarily align themselves with either FLLN or WFL. For example, the BBC's Read and Write (RaW) campaign to improve adults' literacy skills includes a significant family learning element. The 'new' RaW currently in development has also been extended to include ICT skills and financial literacy. The rationale

for taking a family-based approach is primarily driven by attempts to break an intergenerational cycle of low skills, as children of parents with low basic skills often have low skills themselves¹¹⁴.

Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy and Wider Family Learning

FLLN is intended to contribute directly to the government's national targets for adult basic skills as set out in the Skills for Life strategy. WFL also has broader aims of widening participation in learning, developing community capacity and contributing towards neighbourhood renewal and regeneration.

Local authorities can commission courses from an approved 'menu' and are strongly steered towards commissioning longer courses which are seen as offering greater potential for progression. Longer courses are also seen as necessary to cater for the fact that the most disadvantaged and reluctant learners need a long period of preparatory work in order to develop sufficient confidence to progress to external certification¹¹⁵.

It is important to use a wide definition of skills that builds on the literacy, language and numeracy practices of families' home and community cultures, which is not always the case in FLLN¹¹⁶. For example, in the Home School Knowledge Exchange project, a Bangladeshi family had their own effective methods of finger counting using knuckles that were unknown to school teachers who were unable to use this as part of their numeracy teaching¹¹⁷. The family context of learning means that teaching in FLLN and WFL is necessarily about families as much as it is about 'skills'; it cannot be separated from the intimate relationships within families or their more generalised needs¹¹⁸. Indeed, becoming stronger and closer as a family is by far the most cited benefit for parents and families as a whole for family learning, followed by developing parenting skills, with gaining qualifications and developing skills leading to further education or employment only the 5th and 6th most frequently cited benefit¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁴ Carpentieri 2008

¹¹⁵ LSC 2008b, Ofsted 2000

¹¹⁶ DfES/LSC 2004

¹¹⁷ Hughes et al 2009

¹¹⁸ Lochrie 2004

¹¹⁹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI family learning survey

¹¹² Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey 2008

¹¹³ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey 2008

Benefits of family learning

Most basic skills family learning programmes have three related aims:

1. To improve parents' basic skills
2. To improve children's basic skills
3. To enhance parents' capacity to support their children's learning

These three aims are underpinned by broader aims to promote social and economic inclusion for disadvantaged families and to promote community cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration.

The evidence for the effectiveness of Family Learning is still somewhat 'patchy', partly due to a lack of long term and robust evaluation studies, although parents themselves are generally positive¹²⁰. In 2008, a review of international evidence found reasonably strong evidence that FLLN courses improved children's skills and parents' abilities to support their children's learning and that parents experienced wider benefits including improvement in parenting practices, employment status and self-confidence. However, there was "only just enough evidence to suggest that parents' own skills benefit"¹²¹. No research as yet exists that compares the effectiveness of any one FLLN approach with any other, or to suggest that adults make better progress in FLLN than with straightforward adult basic education programmes.

The NIACE Benefits of Family Learning Model places enhanced confidence and self-esteem as 'core benefits', with other benefits such as parenting skills, basic skills, understanding of children's learning needs, and employment as stemming from those core benefits. Self-confidence can be associated with enhanced 'self-efficacy', that is, a sense of agency in one's own life. Programmes that are inclusive, deliver on participants' needs in terms of content and delivery, and emphasise group solidarity may be particularly effective in enhancing these aspects of self-efficacy¹²².

Community-based family learning

The wider benefits of family learning are not achieved by a narrow focus on improving participants' basic skills, but by placing family learning in a context in which it is embedded within and informed by local communities and local cultures¹²³. Focusing on the community elements of family learning also recognises that families are essential to community development and vibrant social capital.

This kind of community-focused provision doesn't think of learners as hard-to-reach, but considers how provision may seem hard-to-reach, unwelcoming or inaccessible to learners. It takes a holistic approach to learning with progression determined by the learner with basic skills integral but not dominant¹²⁴.

Social inclusion

A key aim behind basic skills Family Learning programmes is to enhance social inclusion and contribute towards community cohesion and neighbourhood regeneration agendas. This is seen as happening through increasing individuals' skills and therefore employment, encouraging adults' participation in their own and their children's education, volunteering in the local community and increasing trust and sociability. While many family learning programmes have a wider aim to 'empower' participants, there is no coherent methodology that links classroom experiences to transforming lives¹²⁵.

Family Learning Impact Funding

Family Learning Impact Funding (FLIF) is a targeted funding stream for FLLN and WFL programmes in the most deprived areas. It is intended to increase the number of family learners, specifically those from families identified as being 'at risk' and male family members, who are underrepresented.

¹²⁰ Brasset-Grundy and Hammond 2000

¹²¹ Brooks et al 2008: 62

¹²² Lochrie 2004

¹²³ Brooks et al 2008

¹²⁴ Lochrie 2004

¹²⁵ Lochrie 2004

FLIF funded programmes include literacy, numeracy and financial capability courses, courses aimed at enabling parents to understand how schools work and to support their children's learning, and a range of wider family learning courses in partnership with BBC RaW and community libraries¹²⁶. Family numeracy and schools courses specifically include online learning materials and opportunities.

Digital technologies and ICT in FLLN, FLIF and WFL

While it is possible to take an entry-level Skills for Life ICT qualification, there are no national ICT Skills for Life targets, which may explain why there is no explicit requirement or encouragement for using ICT within with FLLN or WFL, although there are some online elements to some FLIF-funded programmes. There are, however, areas where individual practitioners and co-ordinators are exploring ways of using ICT in their provision. The bigger picture appears to suggest that use of digital technologies in FLLN or WFL is patchy and driven by individual enthusiastic practitioners, rather than being supported across the sector¹²⁷. Given the importance of ICT skills to employment and social participation, given recent emphasis by the Digital Britain interim report, there is a strong case to be made for including ICT more formally within the Family Learning framework¹²⁸.

FLLN employs a narrow definition of literacy that excludes digital literacies. However, "literacy is changing, and home literacy practices are changing with new technologies", and family literacy therefore needs to take account of the multiple literacies in popular cultural forms such as text messaging, TV, games and instant messaging¹²⁹.

Part of the reticence to use technologies may stem from the belief that disadvantaged families are less likely to have access to technologies in the home. However, courses situated in libraries and community centres may be able to use existing facilities. As Home Access rolls out, parents of school age children will find it easier to purchase computers and get connected to the internet,

and indeed may need support from family learning courses to get the most of this provision. Further, iDTV offers opportunities for accessing learning resources via set top boxes, which may provide access for some families than computers. Use of TV for family learning is also less differentiated by social grade than use of computers¹³⁰.

Overcoming barriers to participation

Recruiting those in need is a challenge. A lack of will power, anxiety, fear of looking stupid in front of strangers and practical and financial issues can all be barriers to participation in family learning courses¹³¹. Many adults with low basic skills had bad experiences of education themselves and are not necessarily keen to return. Letters sent home from school are often not read, especially where parents have low literacy levels. Instead, the 'personal touch' of a professional who is sensitive to local cultural issues can be more persuasive. 'Learning champions', former learners who can speak firsthand about the experience of participation can also be effective¹³². Children themselves are a motivator to returning to learning, with parents' main reason for participating in family learning courses being "to help the children"¹³³.

Most participants beginning a course are not interested in being assessed or gaining accreditation as many have failed educational assessments in the past. Baseline assessments can therefore be a sensitive issue, although handled informally, these assessments may be less intimidating¹³⁴. It is important that people are allowed to choose whether and when to take assessments and not feel coerced, as such pressures can form substantial barriers to retention. In Cornwall, practitioners used handheld voting devices to anonymously gather the responses of a group which allowed tutors to conduct baseline assessments and raise issues for discussion without singling out any individuals and help to establish a positive group dynamic¹³⁵.

¹²⁶ LSC 2008b

¹²⁷ Personal communication with Sarah Worne, Family Learning Coordinator, Cornwall Adult And Family Education

¹²⁸ BERR/DCMS 2009

¹²⁹ Brooks et al 2008: 60

¹³⁰ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey 2008

¹³¹ Brassett-Grundy and Hammond 2003

¹³² Carpentieri 2008

¹³³ Lochrie 2004

¹³⁴ Carpentieri 2008

¹³⁵ Personal communication with Sarah Worne, Family Learning Coordinator, Cornwall Adult and Family Education

A broader and more holistic curriculum has also been found to be more effective at attracting participants from disadvantaged and under-represented groups and developing a lasting change in attitudes towards learning than tightly-focused literacy or numeracy courses¹³⁶.

Far fewer men than women take part in Family Learning courses – with different studies finding between 3% and 5% of participants are fathers¹³⁷. Male family members are therefore a priority target group for family literacy, and there are an increasing number of courses specifically targeted towards fathers. Courses that specifically target fathers have had some success, as have courses that focus on subjects such as technology and engineering. For example in Northumberland, the family service offer 'Robot Olympics' days, in the style of TV's Robot Wars. Parents (predominantly fathers) and children construct radio controlled robots from a simple kit and then compete as individuals and as teams, adapting their robot design to meet the different challenges¹³⁸.

6. Enhancing family relationships

This objective focuses on learning that supports family relationships, such as parenting skills and therapeutic interventions that address problems and challenges within the family such as mental health problems or anti-social behaviour. Rather than learning as a family, this category describes activities in which people learn to be a family. In practice, this largely focuses on improving parenting practices.

Thirty-three per cent of parents see developing their own parenting skills as a benefit of learning as a family, both through using books, TV, internet resources and courses (28%) and from their interaction with children (32%). Even in family learning not directly focused on parenting skills, family relationships are at the fore, as shown by the main benefit cited by parents for themselves and families

as a whole being becoming stronger and closer as a family (69%)¹³⁹. Learning supporting family relationships includes:

a. Parenting courses

- Courses at Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools
- Family-centred therapeutic and behavioural approaches
- social services involving whole family to address individual needs (Think Family approach)

b. Accessing and using parenting resources

- TV, books, online information resources and advice
- Parent Know-How

c. Informal peer parenting support

- social networks (family, friends, 'school gate' networks)
- online social networks and forums

Parents' needs

There is increasing diversity in family structure, with a corresponding increase in diversity of parenting practices. More children experience care shared across different locations and contexts, often with separated parents or spending time with grandparents while parents work¹⁴⁰.

There is an increased demand for parenting education¹⁴¹. Requiring support for parenting and experiencing stress within the family is not restricted to disadvantaged families, with 45% of all parents acknowledging that parenting can be a frustrating business, and nearly seven in ten parents agreeing parenting is something you have to learn rather than something that comes naturally¹⁴². However, more privileged families have greater resources to draw upon to provide respite from stressful family situations, and their family problems are not exacerbated by other problems such as debt or poor housing.

¹³⁶ Ofsted 2000, DfES/LSC 2004, Brassett-Grundy and Hammond 2003

¹³⁷ Brooks et al 2008

¹³⁸ Personal e-mail communication with Tim Smith, design and technology teacher at Prudhoe Community High School, Northumberland

¹³⁹ Futurelab and Ipsos MORI Family Learning Survey

¹⁴⁰ Muschamp et al 2007

¹⁴¹ Desforges 2003

¹⁴² Gilby et al 2008, FPI 2006a

Families experiencing social exclusion may have additional needs for support or intervention, but it is important to recognise that it not all 'socially excluded' families have the same needs and aspirations as one another. The 'Think Family' strategy (see description in Chapter 3) advocates a 'whole family' approach to ensure that when, for example, a parent has a problem, the whole family is engaged with to minimise adverse effects on children, and to build on the family as a source of strength and support¹⁴³. For example, the presence of children can be a motivating factor that spur adults to seek help or curb risk-taking behaviour.

Formal parenting programmes

A number of organised parenting programmes are available through a range of providers including Sure Start Children's Centres and Extended Schools. Parenting support offered in Extended Schools can take the form of drop-ins, one-to-one advice sessions, structured parenting courses and more informal family learning approaches such as sport and cookery, which can be less intimidating ways of providing parenting support¹⁴⁴. The most common type of course supports parents to manage their children's behaviour. There is strong evidence of effectiveness of such courses, and the majority of parents and practitioners are happy with the provision, and claim to have gained benefits¹⁴⁵.

The EPRA study found that the most successful courses for parents' learning were those that focused on the family dynamic itself. These courses provided expert advice as well as opportunities to discuss family and learning issues with peers. Parents who engaged in these activities, and children of these parents, reported that they held more conversations and that stress in the home was reduced following participation in these courses¹⁴⁶.

Most parenting courses make some attempts to avoid a 'deficit' model of parenting, instead building on families' strengths and needs and taking a non-judgemental approach, which can help to overcome parents' fears that such courses are stigmatising or intrusive¹⁴⁷.

Parenting resources

As well as more formal, organised parenting courses, many parents access resources independently. The anonymity of self-accessed resources may be more suitable for parents who feel stigmatised by mainstream forms of support or who resent the intrusion into private family life¹⁴⁸.

Parenting TV programmes are particularly popular, with 82% of parents regularly watching such programmes, with a large proportion of parents reporting that their confidence as parents had improved and they had changed their parenting strategies with resulting improvements in children's behaviour and communication in their family¹⁴⁹. There is therefore clearly a demand for resources to support parenting, with TV programmes as one suitable resource for many parents' needs.

Responding to this demand, the DCSF have launched 'Parent Know-How', a range of advice, support and signposting services delivered across multiple channels. The Innovation Fund strand of Parent Know-How focuses on using technologies such as social media, SMS and instant messaging in order to reach the parents most in need of such services, although recent research from the DCSF cautions against the assumption that parents who need support are necessarily 'disadvantaged' in other ways¹⁵⁰.

Many of the Parent Know-How services delivered through the Innovation Fund are particularly targeted at fathers, reflecting the fact that fathers are underrepresented in parenting courses and unlikely to contact support services. It is hoped that services provided via social media, SMS and syndicated content will overcome some of the barriers of embarrassment at sharing problems with strangers and professionals in face to face situations for fathers.

¹⁴³ SETF 2008

¹⁴⁴ FPI 2007

¹⁴⁵ Desforges 2003

¹⁴⁶ Harris and Goodall 2007

¹⁴⁷ FPI 2006a and 2006b

¹⁴⁸ FPI 2006a and 2006b

¹⁴⁹ FPI 2006a, 2006b

¹⁵⁰ Gilby et al 2008

Informal support

Parents report that friends and family provide the biggest influence and greatest support for parenting and parents with low levels of social support are more likely to feel discontented with their parenting role¹⁵¹. Post and ante-natal groups, and groups of parents meeting at primary school gates, have traditionally offered such informal sources of support, particularly for mothers of younger children.

Many people are increasingly using social media such as social networking sites and online forums, and parents' networks such as mumsnet.com and netmums.com have been established to provide social support online. Both netmums.com and mumsnet.com have given rise to the formation of local groups of parents who meet up in real life, often co-ordinating their activities via online social networking sites such as Facebook.

However, as the names of these sites suggest, they are primarily targeted at mothers rather than fathers. To address this imbalance, there have recently been several similar sites launched that are aimed specifically at fathers, particularly fathers who are separated from their children, such as Dad's Space¹⁵².

¹⁵¹ FPI 2006a, Gilby et al 2008

¹⁵² www.dads-space.com

6. Recommendations and challenges for policy, practice and research

Policy

Supporting local and informal learning for parenting and family relationships

Developing parenting skills and strengthening intra-family relationships to create strong, resilient families is a key part of creating cohesive communities and provides a positive, stable environment that supports children's health and wellbeing and there is a growing demand for parenting education and resources¹⁵³. However, there are many practical (time, money, childcare) and social/emotional (anxiety, embarrassment) barriers to attending parenting classes and many parents are turning to more informal resources such as TV, internet resources and books instead, which parents report as being helpful and helping them to improve their children's behaviour¹⁵⁴. This highlights a continued need for resources to support parenting and family relationships via a range of media and digital channels. Progress is being made in this area with DCSF's Parent Know-How initiative via a range of channels including social media, helplines and text messaging, however it is still too early to provide evidence of their effectiveness¹⁵⁵.

Informal peer networks are particularly valuable and most successful when operated from a 'grass roots' level, but there is currently less support for this approach¹⁵⁶. Parenting is not something that happens in isolation from the wider world and informal peer networks offer an opportunity to embed support for parenting and family relationships within families' local contexts. Digital technologies offer opportunities for such informal peer support using online forums and social networking technologies that can be created and managed from a local grass roots level. As well as providing centralised resources, Parent Know-How services should support such local, informal peer networks by providing disaggregated digital tools, resources and content that can be included in developing ad hoc networks. They

¹⁵³ This supports PSA 12 (Improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people). Supporting parenting in the early years is a priority for the social exclusion task force (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/context.aspx); see FPI (2006) for demand for parenting resources and education.

¹⁵⁴ Ipsos MORI 2008 Report on Family Learning for Futurelab

¹⁵⁵ www.dcsf.gov.uk/parentknowhow

¹⁵⁶ FPI (2006)

should also explore the possibility of giving customisable tools and training resources to local groups to create and develop their own networks.

Enhancing communication and partnerships between learning in the family and learning at school

Parental engagement in the form of engaging with children's learning, encouraging high aspirations and instilling a positive disposition towards learning supports children's school achievement by building on what parents do as part of their day-to-day parenting role in the home¹⁵⁷.

Schools can play a role in supporting parents to engage with their children's learning in the home, and are moving towards developing communication and partnership strategies that help parents support their children. In order to maximise the benefits of parental engagement for school achievement, schools need to understand, support and build on the learning that already happens in children's families, which currently receives less attention and is more of a challenge¹⁵⁸. Genuine two-way communication and partnership strategies need to involve children themselves as active and valued participants in conversations, respect parents' roles as parents rather than requiring them to take on teaching roles they may be unwilling or unable to perform, and respect boundaries and differences between home and school. Communication and partnership strategies also need to achieve this without making additional demands' on teachers' workloads – by reducing workload in other areas, providing additional staff to manage communication and partnership strategies and by using technologies to manage information efficiently.

Building on the opportunities afforded by Home Access, and treating the Online Reporting requirement as a

¹⁵⁷ Desforges (2003) and Melhuish et al (2007); Parental engagement is thus one of the Children's Plan priorities in 2009, supporting PSA 10 (Raise the education achievement of all children and young people) and the Every Child Matters outcome 'Enjoy and Achieve'. Parental engagement is also seen as a critical factor in narrowing the gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers (PSA 11).

¹⁵⁸ The Ipsos MORI survey found that while 50% of parents agree that their child's school builds on the learning that they do as a family, 63% of parents think that their child's school should build on the learning that they do as a family, suggesting that the expectations of some parents are not being met.

starting point, schools should be supported to use technologies to enable parents, teachers and children to make connections between their learning in and out of school. Further research is required to provide schools with detailed guidance on how to make best use of technologies to support such communication and partnership strategies in their own circumstances. However, research and developments in digital technologies suggest some fruitful possibilities including parents and children using mobile phones, digital cameras and internet technologies to capture evidence of out-of-school learning, feeding it in to schools' learning platforms, or customised social networking platforms. Teachers could also feed in and comment on content and conversations. Social media and mobile technologies allow many-to-many communication which could support a lightweight flow of multimedia information and conversation between teachers, children and parents. Schools should fully consult with parents and children in developing partnership and communication strategies, using internet and mobile communication methods to increase responses and allow parents and children to contribute ideas as well as respond to plans.

Maximising diverse family learning benefits of Home Access

The potential benefits to families of home access are broad and diverse and are likely to go well beyond the core goals of raising children's educational attainment. Activities that may at first appear tangential, such as chatting on online forums or participating in social network sites, may in fact constitute important learning experiences, developing social capital and providing sources of family advice and support.

Both desired and realised benefits are likely to differ for families who have diverse needs and aspirations; good and effective use for one family may not be the same as for another family. The challenge is to provide ongoing support and guidance for families in making decisions about the opportunities within their own context. An awareness raising campaign as part of Next Generation Learning and building on trusted sources of information via schools and TV should highlight the range of possible benefits of Home Access including both educational and wider benefits such as leisure, entertainment, financial, employment and social benefits. Contextualised, local support should also be provided, via schools and other avenues such as libraries and community centres, linking new users to existing expertise amongst local peer networks, and creating new networks where new users can support one another and share learning.

Harnessing the potential of technologies in Family Learning courses

Many traditional family learning courses, e.g. Family Language, Literacy and Numeracy (FLLN) make limited uses of digital technologies. FLLN, including courses funded through Family Learning Impact Funding (FLIF) focuses on the government's 'Skills for Life' (literacy, numeracy and language), yet in schools, ICT joins literacy and numeracy as part of the core curriculum of skills seen as necessary for participation in modern life. Courses involving technologies have also been seen to be particularly effective at engaging male family members in their own and their children's learning.

There is an opportunity to harness the potential of digital technologies in Family Learning courses, both as a tool to enable learning, and as a set of skills worthy of study in its own right. The vision of technology as an essential tool for learning, enabling flexible and customised learning as well as supporting leisure and informal learning, as set out in the Harnessing Technology strategy¹⁵⁹, should be extended to FLLN and Wider Family Learning (WFL) provision. ICT skills should be given greater prominence within both FLLN and WFL courses and mobile and

¹⁵⁹ Becta 2008

internet technologies should be used to support learning in between face-to-face classes and after courses have finished. This is likely to require training for family learning practitioners. Mobile and internet should also be used to extend access Family Learning courses to those who cannot attend classes, making it easier for people to participate in learning at times and places that suit them, and avoid the initial anxiety and embarrassment over attending basic skills courses.

Recognising the diverse ecology of learning in families and overcoming barriers to participation

There is broad agreement amongst parents that it is important to do learning activities within the family¹⁶⁰. However, there are significant demographic differences in the types and amount of family learning that parents report they engage in. Parents from social grades DE, parents with no formal qualifications and parents from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds report lower participation in many types of family learning activities¹⁶¹. These are groups who are already disproportionately likely to be experiencing disadvantage in other areas of their lives. Barriers to family learning include lack of time cost and access barriers¹⁶².

There is therefore an urgent need to make provision for the diverse and specific family learning needs and aspirations for under-represented groups of learners. Marketing and signposting from other services should be improved to promote existing available opportunities. Good and effective provision is likely to be different for diverse groups of learners, and therefore needs to be designed more specifically for particular groups' needs. Families from groups who are under-represented should be involved in consultation at a local level to ascertain their needs and aspirations and work with them to develop new solutions – working with intermediaries who already engage with these groups in order to gain access to and trust from groups labelled as 'hard to reach'.

¹⁶⁰ Futurelab's Ipsos MORI survey found that 90% of parents agree that it is important to do learning activities within the family.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. However, Black and ethnic minority parents report higher than average participation in religious learning as a family.

¹⁶² Overcoming these barriers to learning in the family is likely to support narrowing the achievement gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers (PSA 11) as well as supporting Every Child Matters outcomes 'Enjoy and Achieve'

Families themselves should be brought into the early stages of the commissioning process to ensure provision genuinely engages and meets their needs by making sure that providers understand their needs and aspirations and build this into provision from the outset.

Family learning providers should use mobile and internet technologies to extend access to family learning opportunities to the home, overcoming some of the barriers of time, access, transport and involving separated and divided families who have less opportunity to learn with and from one another in shared spaces.

Embedding digital literacy and participation

Digital literacy is not just about functional ICT skills, it is about accessing, creating and communicating using ICT and being able to critique and evaluate the impact of media and technologies that pervade our lives. Digital literacy is also therefore about digital participation; about having the skills and competencies to use digital technologies to communicate, collaborate and be active citizens participating in local communities and wider society¹⁶³. The family can be seen as the foundation of how we learn to participate in society, therefore it is also provides an important context for how we develop the skills and competencies of digital literacy and participation. It is argued that being able to engage with the digital 'participatory culture' is crucial to wider participation in society in the 21st century; those without the skills and attitudes to do so may find themselves disadvantaged¹⁶⁴.

Education programmes that aim to enhance digital literacy should build on the role and influence of families in developing such skills. For example, school literacy programmes should include discussion of children's literacy practices in the family, including their use of digital technologies, enabling them to apply critical skills to a range of literacies, both traditional and digital. Equally, family learning courses such as FLLN should include such critical 'digital literacy' skills alongside their offering to support operational literacy.

¹⁶³ It therefore supports the community cohesion agenda, and can play a role in supporting participation in positive activities (PSA 14).

¹⁶⁴ Jenkins et al (2007)

Developing home family learning digital content and software

Educational content and software producers see the home learning market as an area of growth¹⁶⁵. They are developing plans to create further materials for children's learning at home and to support parents in helping their children learn, to be supplied directly to parents. Given the extent of computer and internet access in families of school-aged children and the impact of Home Access in extending these opportunities, there is a specific market for internet and software-based home learning materials. Suppliers involved in the Home Access pilot are already responding to this demand, but the challenge will be to ensure that quality resources get into the hands of parents and children learning at home.

There are extensive opportunities for using technologies to create and support engaging and creative learning opportunities in the home environment. Such creative and engaging resources should build on family practices and the relationship between parents and children, allow for open-ended, playful interaction, fit in with daily routines, and be flexible, portable and durable. Using such learning resources can support children's learning both at home and at school, and facilitate parental engagement in children's learning¹⁶⁶. However, many commercially available educational technologies marketed for learning in the home environment do not meet these criteria, and instead use designs that emphasise more didactic modes of learning.

Guidance should be produced and promoted to enable families to choose appropriate content and software for their needs as part of the Next General Learning campaign, and for suppliers themselves to produce more creative and engaging software. The Next Generation Learning campaign should also consider the extent to which opening up the home to such learning resources risks bringing further commercial interests into the home environment, and contain guidance for how families can deal with these issues.

¹⁶⁵ Many content providers are submitting resources to be used in the Home Access initiative; this view is also supported by personal conversation with two major UK educational publishers and public sector broadcasters.

¹⁶⁶ They can thereby contribute to raising children's educational achievement (PSA10) and enhance children's and parents' emotional wellbeing (PSA 12) by building on family relationships.

Connecting and valuing the wide range of outcomes and progression opportunities

Learning in families can offer a wide range of benefits; from children's educational achievement and adults gaining employment to developing confidence and enabling more cohesive communities. Progression therefore needs to be widely understood to include not only formal accredited qualifications and completed courses, but also to include more informal, holistic and practical outcomes such as engaging in cultural activities, increased family resilience and access to public services. With such a wide range of outcomes, not all of which can be objectively measured and compared, tracking the outcomes of family learning opportunities is a challenge.

Tracking outcomes and progression is important to ensure that participation in family learning activities is not a 'one-off' experience from which learners do not benefit. Tracking allows learners to reflect on a cumulative learning journey and make connections between different episodes of learning. This reflection can aid learners to recognise their own achievements, and identify directions in which they may want to or need to progress further, thereby contributing to raising children's achievement, and connecting measures to increase participation in positive activities with more formal learning activities¹⁶⁷. It is difficult if not impossible for any central provider or service to track such diverse learning journeys. Family members themselves are in a much better position to do this. Digital records owned by family members themselves could allow family members to track outcomes and connections between different episodes of learning, and between family members. Enabling family members (including children) to take personal ownership of such records, while also allowing them to connect with friends and family in a social context would allow a more personalised and holistic approach to individuals' and families' learning journeys. The Parent Held Record pilot is already exploring ways for parents to take on some of this responsibility on behalf of their children. The Parent Held Record pilot should be extended to enable the record to include the learning of the whole family rather than just children, and allow children to input into their own

¹⁶⁷ Thereby supporting PSA 10 and PSA 14

records as well as parents. It should also allow families to track connections between the learning journeys of different family members, which would enable families to support one another's learning more effectively.

Creating spaces and opportunities for intergenerational learning

We live in an ageing society. Despite longer working lives, there is likely to be an increase in the population of older adults who are retired from full time working, yet are still active members of their families and communities. Many public and private spaces are segregated by age and there are limited opportunities for people from different generations to interact with each other. This can lead to fragmented communities and contribute towards a fear of and negative attitudes towards each other from younger and older people. Many older adults are not as familiar with the opportunities for learning and participation offered by new technologies as younger people who routinely encounter new technologies at work, home and school. Older adults may also have more time to offer younger people to support and encourage them in their learning. Intergenerational learning therefore provides an opportunity for the young and old to learn from one another, with technologies providing a potentially ideal domain for such intergenerational learning. Intergenerational learning also supports community cohesion by fostering participation in positive activities that improve relationships across generations¹⁶⁸.

Research suggests that technologies can support intergenerational learning in which older and younger people mutually generate and share cultural artefacts by providing an important context in which both younger and older people are interested but are likely to have different experiences, and as a tool to support the capture, creation and sharing of content¹⁶⁹. Intergenerational family learning highlights the importance of spaces beyond home and school for learning throughout the community, making use of the wide range of public spaces available such as parks, libraries and even supermarkets and cafes. Local authorities should work with existing agencies, providers and public services such as libraries, sports centres, cultural venues to promote and build in opportunities for

family learning in new developments, and existing events such as local festivals.

Practice

Two-way communication between home and school

Taking online reporting and Home Access as a starting point, schools can support parents' engagement in children's learning and improve home school relationships by ensuring that parents do not just receive information, but are also able to reply, and to initiate communication with the school using a range of digital and non-digital channels.

Development and support for teachers

Teachers may need further professional development in order to understand parents' role in children's learning as well as develop approaches for supporting parents to engage in their children's learning. Developing a genuine partnership necessitates a rebalance of power between teachers and parents; teachers may well need training to negotiate this change of relationship. Specialised designated teachers to lead and co-ordinate parental engagement and home-school relationships may improve schools' abilities to engage with parents. Schools and teachers will also need more resources, including intelligent use of digital technologies, to ensure that new relationships with parents can be accommodated in practice without increasing workload.

Involve children in parental engagement

Children have a strong influence on whether and how their parents engage with their learning, both as it relates to school and in their wider lives. Schools need to develop policies that involve children in the process of engaging parents in their learning. Sometimes this engagement may not be visible to schools, but the focus should be in engaging parents where it matters most: in children's lives. Children are not merely the educational products of their parents and teachers. In enhancing home-school communication, children's voices need to be included as distinct from their parents' and teachers' voices.

¹⁶⁸ Thereby supporting PSA 14

¹⁶⁹ Barajas Frutos (2006)

Understand and build on learning in the home

To build bridges between the learning that happens at home and at school, schools need to develop a greater understanding of what and how children are learning at home, and use this within school learning activities. This respects the fact that children are already learning within their families rather than simply extending school learning into the home, and avoids a deficit model that assumes that only one type of learning matters. Parents, children and extended family can become experts within the school. Taking time to understand how children learn at home can also allow schools to value and build upon diverse out-of-school cultures and connect the learning that happens in school with children's real experiences in their families and communities.

Parenting is a relationship, not a profession

The greatest benefit that parents' offer to their children is through their parenting, not through taking on more formal 'teaching' roles. Family learning, including engaging in children's education, needs to start from an understanding of this intimate relationship. Parents are motivated to learn 'for the sake of their children', and children are motivated to engage parents in their learning from a desire for sharing their lives with their parents rather than more instrumental notions of attainment and qualifications.

Include ICT and digital literacy within family learning

Family learning focusing on basic skills could make far more explicit use of ICT. There is a strong argument for seeing the skills to use digital technologies as essential to full participation in society and the labour market, as well as facilitating digital inclusion, and deserves to be considered as an important skill alongside literacy, language and numeracy, as it is in schools. As digital technologies play an increasingly important role in our communication and culture, there is also a strong demand for including critical digital literacies within family literacy learning courses. Also as with schools, technologies could be used to extend and enhance both family learning basic skills courses, through using familiar as well as innovative technologies.

Research

Exploring the boundaries between home and school

Research is needed to explore how communication between home and school can be developed in ways that respect the need for boundaries between different spaces of home and school, in ways that take account of the different views held by parents, teachers and children. Digital technologies provide opportunities for both breaking down and managing privacy, which need to be further explored in real settings.

How can schools understand and build on the learning that children do at home?

Building on projects such as the Home School Knowledge Exchange, research needs to further explore how schools can discover, understand and use the learning that children engage in within their families, and how this can inform the learning that children do within school, in order to bridge the gap between children's learning in and out of school and connect learning in school to children's local communities and global economies.

How can the benefits of Home Access be maximised for families?

The benefits of home access are likely to be broad and diverse for different families. Further research is needed to discover how families can be given support and advice so that they can make their own informed decisions about the opportunities offered by technologies, and how to make the most of these to fulfil their own needs and aspirations.

How can parental support for children's learning be enhanced?

There is still limited research evidence on how parents engagement with children's learning can be enhanced, particularly in the form of 'good at-home parenting'. Such research would need to include not just an acknowledgement that parental engagement impacts on children's achievement, but to start from families' current situation and practices rather than from a deficit model and acknowledging the diversity of possible approaches to parental engagement in learning.

Long term and comparative evaluation of family learning

While there is evidence that family learning is successful and viewed favourably by participants, there is little longitudinal research of the benefits and impact of such courses. There is also a need for comparative evaluations of various different approaches to basic skills family learning, including comparison with adult-only and child-only provision.

How are technologies implicated in daily family practices?

As technologies mediate more and more of our daily lives, including everyday learning, we need to more fully understand the role of technologies including mobile phones, computer games and internet resources within family life. How do such technologies mediate family relationships and learning in the home, and in what ways do differences in such uses map onto existing inequalities?

Appendices

Directory of stakeholders and providers

This directory lists and briefly describes the main national providers and stakeholders in the family learning landscape in the UK in both public, private and third sector. It does not include individual schools or local authorities, or government departments.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for the arts in England, distributing public money from Government and the National Lottery. It provides advice, guidance and support on how arts organisations can develop family friendly services that contribute to family life through shared entertainment, leisure and learning, supporting lifelong participation in the arts.

www.artscouncil.org.uk/index.php

www.artscouncil.org.uk/aboutus/project_detail.php?rid=0&sid=&browse=recent&id=979

BBC

The BBC's remit includes a responsibility to public service broadcasting that informs, educates and entertains, including providing educational programmes supporting both formal and informal learning. Through its TV broadcasting, digital TV services, online offering and events, the BBC supports learning in families through parenting and family history TV programmes, programmes and online resources for parents and young children through CBeebies, and events, online resources and signposting for adult basic skills family learning through BBC RaW. 'Learning parents', a BBC parents' portal has recently been launched, providing links to BBC and external online information and guidance on parenting and helping children learn.

www.bbc.co.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies

www.bbc.co.uk/raw

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents

Becta

Becta is the government agency leading the national drive to ensure the effective and innovative use of technology throughout learning. Becta's 'Next Generation Learning' campaign aims to promote the use of technologies for learning in school and home. The campaign

directly targets parents with information, advice and encouragement to support their children's learning.

Becta are the key agency delivering the Home Access initiative that aims to ensure all families of children between 7 and 18 reap the benefits of home access to an internet-connected computer

Becta provides evidence and guidance to schools and local authorities on how to use technologies to improve parental engagement in order to raise achievement, including online reporting. A discussion forum is also provided where educationalists can discuss progress and issues relating to home access, online reporting and parental engagement (amongst other subjects).

Parental engagement:

www.becta.org.uk/engaging.php

Home Access:

www.becta.org.uk/homeaccess

Next Generation Learning:

www.nextgenerationlearning.org.uk

Discussion forums:

collaboration.becta.org.uk/index.jspa

BIG Lottery Fund

The BIG Lottery Fund awards funds from the National Lottery to 'good causes'. From 2006-2008 they accepted applications for projects supporting children and parents to learn together with the following aims:

- families take part in and enjoy education more
- families increase their skills and knowledge
- parents and carers communicate better with their children and give more support to their education

This funding is now over, but details of successful projects and evaluations are available on the website.

www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/prog_family_learning?tab=5&fromsearch=-uk

Campaign for Learning

The Campaign for Learning is a national charity which aims to create a passion for learning that sustains people for life. It works to build motivation, create opportunities and provide support for learning in families. They co-ordinate the national Family Learning Festival, carry out advocacy work, produce publications, carry out research and deliver family learning projects. In partnership with ContinYou and NIACE they run the National Family Learning Network, which supports Family Learning practitioners.

www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/cfl/fl/index.asp

Connexions

Connexions provides information, advice and guidance for young people considering career and further education and training options. It is now organised by local authorities so services vary between different areas. Many connexions services also offer adult career advice and advice for parents and carers on supporting young people to make decisions about education, training and employment.

www.connexions-direct.com

ContinYou

ContinYou helps parents to support their children's learning by:

- training teachers and other practitioners to work with parents to help them understand more about how children learn and how parents can help their children at home
- offering parents opportunities to learn, and to have their learning accredited
- providing resources to support family learning.

ContinYou works with schools and other agencies to encourage greater involvement by parents, especially parents that services may find 'hard to reach', including fathers. It aims to help parents reflect on how they carry out their role as parents, and to enable them to find positive ways of dealing with their children's behaviour.

www.contin角度.org.uk/what_we_do/parents_and_family_learning

Creative Partnerships

Creative Partnerships is the Government's flagship creative learning programme, designed to develop the skills of young people across England, raising their aspirations and equipping them for their futures. It works with schools to develop creative approaches to education and develop creative projects, including using digital technologies and media. Many of their projects involve parents and the wider family as part of a creative approach to education.

www.creative-partnerships.com/how-we-work/about-cp

Family and Parenting Institute (FPI)

The FPI's mission is to achieve wellbeing for families and children, and support families to bring up children. They carry out and publish research about families and parents in order to influence policymakers, foster public debate, improve family services and the environment in which children grow up. They run events including a national parenting conference, seminars and campaigns and publish research and practical guidance for parents and practitioners. Their 'Family Voice' initiative aims to take the voice of parents to policy makers and the media, through online consultation and regular 'meet the parents' events that allow senior politicians to directly hear parents' views on policy matters.

www.familyandparenting.org

Fatherhood Institute

The Fatherhood Institute is the 'UK's fatherhood think-tank'. It campaigns for a society that gives all children a strong and positive relationship with their father. It collates and publishes international research on fathers and fatherhood and helps shape national and local policies to ensure a father-inclusive approach to family policy. It lobbies for changes in law, policy and practice to dismantle barriers to fathers' care of children and influences the public debate on fatherhood and parenting. It also provides training, consultancy and publications on father-inclusive practice for public and third sector agencies and employers.

www.fatherhoodinstitute.org

Innovation Unit

The Innovation Unit was initially established as part of the DfES, but since 2006 has been an independent, not-for-profit organisation. They are an 'innovation intermediary', working in partnerships to develop innovation in public services that delivers better outcomes for lower costs. One of their core strands for work is in education and children's services, in which they aim to influence government policy and create better conditions for innovation to flourish. They are developing products aimed at parents/carers to help them engage with children's learning.

www.innovation-unit.co.uk

learndirect

learndirect is an e-teaching organisation set up by 'Ufi' (University for Industry) to provide learning for over 16s. It targets people with few skills and qualifications who are unlikely to take part in traditional forms of learning and provides online courses that people complete at home, work, at learndirect centres or wherever they have access to the internet, e.g. libraries. Learners register at learndirect centres where tutors provide guidance on suitable courses and progression opportunities. Courses include literacy, numeracy, ICT and life skills courses and include parenting courses and courses improving literacy and numeracy in order to help children's learning. The LSC subsidises learners who meet their criteria to take learndirect courses as well as some basic Maths and English (including Life Skills) courses.

www.learndirect.co.uk

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

The Learning and Skills Council is a non-departmental public body which aims to improve the skills of England's young people and adults to ensure we have a workforce of world-class standard. They are responsible for planning and funding education and training for everyone in England other than those in universities. They aim to raise participation and achievement in learning, increase demand for learning from adults, support more equal opportunities and improve the quality of educational provision. The LSC manages the funding for Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) and Wider Family Learning (WFL).

www.lsc.gov.uk

Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)

LLUK represents employers, stakeholders and staff working in community based settings across the UK, including those working in Family Learning and with parents, where many practitioners are volunteers. They represent the interests of over one million individuals and are the voice of employers in this sector on skills issues. It provides a strategic perspective for workforce planning and is licensed by the UK governments to set standards for occupational competence in the delivery and support of learning. They also work with partners and key stakeholders to improve the dialogue between their employers and those who look to the lifelong learning sector to meet their own skills needs.

www.lluk.org

Museums Libraries and Archives Council (MLA)

The MLA is a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) that exists to promote best practice in museums, libraries and archives, to inspire innovative, integrated and sustainable services for all. It sees learning as being at the heart of museums, libraries and archives and works with the sector to increase opportunities for adult, child and family learners to progress, achieve creativity and unlock their potential. They see museums, libraries and archives as well placed to support families and early years children as they are based in the community and offer accessible learning opportunities for inter-generational groups.

They produce guidance for the museums, libraries and archives sector on promoting family learning.

www.mla.gov.uk/what/policy_development/learning

National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP)

The National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) was set up 2007 as part of the 'Respect' agenda and works to improve the quality and size of the parenting workforce so parents get the help they need to raise their children. They carry out research to inform training and policy, offer training, develop curricula and link practitioners to ongoing supervision and support. The Academy also has a team of regional outreach staff, who offer practical advice, support and contacts to meet the needs of parenting practitioners at all levels.

www.parentingacademy.org

National Family Learning Network (NFLN)

The National Family Learning Network (NFLN) is a partnership venture between Campaign for Learning, ContinYou and NIACE to provide free information and support to Family Learning practitioners, facilitate the sharing of good practice and provide a central website where practitioners can share resources and information. www.campaignforlearning.org.uk/familylearningnetwork/AboutUs/about_us.asp

National Institute for Adult and Continuing Education (NIACE)

The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) aims to encourage all adults to engage in learning of all kinds. NIACE conduct research and development projects into family learning, focusing on activities in which both adults and children are learning together, and co-ordinate a national family learning research conference. They provide resources for family learning practitioners and local authorities as well as informing policy and planning of family and adult learning.

NIACE also co-ordinate the Family Learning Local Authority Group (FLLAG)

www.niace.org.uk/development-and-research/programmes-of-work/family-learning

National Literacy Trust

The National Literacy Trust is an independent charity that changes lives through literacy. It aims to link home, school and the wider community to create opportunities for everyone and support those who work with learners programmes, information and research. They focus on empowering learners, supporting professionals and influencing policy and practice.

The National Literacy Trust brings together information and research on family literacy issues and policy, and provides guidance and resources for schools, family learning practitioners and parents.

www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/parentindex.html

Parenting UK

Parenting UK is a membership organisation for those who offer parenting services. They inform, advise and support the sector, maintain a network of agencies and practitioners and act as a voice for service providers. They provide access to a parenting reference library, an enquiry service, publications, and a discussion forum for parenting professionals to network and share experience. They have also developed the National Occupational Standards for parenting professionals.

www.parentinguk.org

Pre-school Learning Alliance

The Pre-school Learning Alliance is a leading educational charity specialising in the early years providing practical support to early years settings and actively involving parents and families in their work.

Their products and services include specialist publications, childcare services, quality assurance, campaigning, research, training and family programmes. They offer a range of independent professional information, advice, support and guidance tailored especially to meet the needs of young children and their families, students, early years practitioners and professionals.

www.pre-school.org.uk

The ICT Register

The ICT Register is a web resource for sharing the ICT and e-learning expertise in cutting edge schools and learning centres around the world in which schools can offer their knowledge and expertise to other schools. Parental engagement is currently one of four themes, with over 50 ICT Register schools with expertise in this area offering advice and support to other schools. Schools wanting to develop their parental engagement strategies can contact these schools directly, or ask questions to all ICT Register schools via the website, as well as request to join a closed social networking site focused on parental engagement.

www.ict-register.net/pe.php

Workers Education Association (WEA)

The WEA is a charity and the largest voluntary provider of adult education in the UK. They are a democratic, voluntary adult education movement, committed to widening participation and to enabling people to realise their full potential through learning.

Over half of the WEA's courses are developed to meet the needs and interests of particular groups of people. In partnership with local community organisations they provide learning opportunities for adults with little previous educational background. Their courses are run in some of the most disadvantaged urban and rural communities, local venues such as community centres, schools and health centres. The choice of subject and method of learning are often negotiated and agreed between tutor and students at the outset of a course. Popular subjects include arts and crafts, family learning, health and personal development, literacy and numeracy and information technology.

www.wea.org.uk

Directory of family learning tools, resources and services

BBC RaW

BBC RaW has developed from BBC 'Read and Write' and now includes a broader focus on 'everyday skills'. New topics introduced include ICT skills and financial skills. As well as online resources, RaW hosts events within local communities, often with a family learning focus.

www.bbc.co.uk/raw

Nintendo Wii

The Wii is a gaming console that allows multiple players to play together. Rather than controllers with a number of buttons, the Wii uses a range of wireless remote controllers that can sense where they are in 3D space to control the games, including handheld 'nunchucks' and Wii boards. The Wii is marketed as a "unique social gaming experience for the whole family" and can also be used to play with others via an internet connection.

BBC CBeebies

CBeebies TV programmes and website are designed for early years children and their parents. Programmes are intended to be shared by parents and children, and the website provides ideas for activities for parents and children to do together as well as online games to play.

www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies

Facebook and other social networking sites

Social networking sites can be used to set up grass roots groups from small groups of friends to larger and more formal organisations with shared interests.

www.facebook.com

Club Penguin

A snow-covered, virtual world where children play games and interact with friends in the guise of colourful penguin avatars. It is free to play, but special features need to be paid for. While Club Penguin is primarily designed for use by children, some distant relatives use it to interact with each other.

www.clubpenguin.com

Netmums

Netmums is a family of local websites set up and run by mums providing advice, access to local information, and an online 'coffee house' for chat and advice. It also campaigns on issues around parenting. It is sponsored by BT, Nick Jr and the Early Learning Centre.

www.netmums.com

Mumsnet

A social enterprise website providing advice and online forums with a mission to make parents' lives easier by pooling knowledge and sharing experience.

www.mumsnet.com

Family !mpact

An online survey for schools to test parents' knowledge of a range of scenarios relating to Every Child Matters outcomes, designed by The Innovation Unit (DCSF) and Cognisco. It is designed to allow schools to take decisions about their parental involvement strategy.

www.innovation-unit.co.uk/service-offers/service-offers/family-mpact.html

Contact a Family Online

Website and social networking that aims to help parents of disabled children to get information and advice that supports them to look after their child

www.cafamily.org.uk

One Space

Website giving advice and including online forum for single parents

www.onespace.org.uk

Dad Talk

Website, 'by dads, for dads' including news, articles and online forum for fathers, also aims to provide a voice for fathers in policy and society

www.dadtalk.co.uk

School Together Now

An online social networking site for parents, children, grandparent and teachers – membership is authenticated via schools.

www.schooltogethernow.com/index.html

SuperClubsPlus and GoldStarCafe from Intuitive Media

Two protected online learning communities in which log in from either home or school; many children involve parents in their learning via such activities.

www.intuitivemedia.com

Dad Info

In association (but separate from) The Fatherhood Institute this website provides information to fathers on a range of subjects, as well as a shop selling items such as changing backpacks.

www.dad.info

Dad's Space and Dad's Space 1-2-1

Dads-Space provides information and advice to all fathers through content on the website, online forums and through the Help Desk service.

Dad's Space 1-2-1 is a 'Virtual Child Contact Centre' where non-resident fathers can keep in contact with their children via communication tools, sharing images and playing games. Dad's Space 1-2-1 is currently only available by referral.

www.dads-space.com

Got a Teenager

A social networking and advice website giving parents of teenagers a space to support each other through the challenges and successes of bringing up teens.

www.gotateenager.org.uk

Parentline Plus

Parentline Plus is a national charity that works for, and with, parents and provides a range of services including Parentline, a telephone helpline, email advice, local support groups and information.

www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Parents Centre

From direct.gov, information and support for parents on how to help with children's learning, including advice on choosing a school and finding childcare.

www.parentscentre.gov.uk

Time for a Story

An add-on for Windows Live Messenger instant messaging service that allows parents or others to share stories, which are embedded within the software. With a webcam and microphone, people can see and hear one another as well as the book that is being shared. Currently five 'Noddy' books are included, with plans for more to be added.

www.timeforastory.com

MyGuide Understanding family education online course

This course provides an overview of the UK education system and how this relates to your family.

www.myguide.gov.uk/myguide/RunCourse.do?submitAction=viewCourseDescription&key=/html/learning/learning/coursedescriptions/understandingfamilyeducationa.html

Break out!

An online guide to ideas and activities for parents to do with their children after school, for days out and in the holidays, including activities at libraries and museums, provided by DCMS.

www.culture.gov.uk/breakout/index.html

Commissioning Toolkit of Parenting Programmes

The Commissioning Toolkit of Parenting Programmes is an online database containing descriptions of parenting programmes available for commission to allow commissioners to make informed choices about how suitable a particular programme may be in meeting the needs of specific parents.

www.commissioningtoolkit.org

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About Futurelab

Futurelab is passionate about transforming the way people learn. Tapping into the huge potential offered by digital and other technologies, we are developing innovative learning resources and practices that support new approaches to education for the 21st century.

Working in partnership with industry, policy and practice, Futurelab:

- incubates new ideas, taking them from the lab to the classroom
- offers hard evidence and practical advice to support the design and use of innovative learning tools
- communicates the latest thinking and practice in educational ICT
- provides the space for experimentation and the exchange of ideas between the creative, technology and education sectors.

A not-for-profit organisation, Futurelab is committed to sharing the lessons learnt from our research and development in order to inform positive change to educational policy and practice.

Futurelab
1 Canons Road
Harbourside
Bristol BS1 5UH
United Kingdom

tel: +44 (0)117 915 8200
fax: +44 (0)117 915 8201
e-mail: info@futurelab.org.uk
blog: flux.futurelab.org.uk
www.futurelab.org.uk

Registered charity 1113051

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