

# The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review

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with  
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**Research Report  
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**THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT,  
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A LITERATURE REVIEW**

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## Executive Summary

- i A review of English language literature was conducted to establish research findings on the relationship between parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment in schools
- ii Two distinct bodies of literature were discerned. One focussed on describing and understanding the nature, extent, determinants and impact of spontaneously occurring parental involvement on children's educational outcomes. The second body of work is concerned with describing and evaluating attempts to intervene to enhance spontaneous levels of involvement.
- iii Recent research on spontaneous levels of parental involvement is generally of a very high quality using advanced statistical techniques to describe the scope and scale of involvement and to discern its unique impact on pupil achievement.
- iv This research consistently shows that
  - Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance.
  - The extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity.
  - The extent of parental involvement diminishes as the child gets older and is strongly influenced at all ages by the child characteristically taking a very active mediating role.
  - Parental involvement is strongly positively influenced by the child's level of attainment: the higher the level of attainment, the more parents get involved.
  - The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different

levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

- Other forms of parental involvement do not appear to contribute to the scale of the impact of ‘at-home’ parenting.
  - Differences between parents in their level of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health, and also with parental perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it. Some parents are put off by feeling put down by schools and teachers.
  - Research affords a clear model of how parental involvement works. This model is described in the report. In essence parenting has its influence indirectly through shaping the child’s self concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations.
- v Research on interventions to promote parental involvement reveals a large number of approaches ranging from parent training programmes, through initiatives to enhance home school links and on to programmes of family and community education.
- vi Evaluations of this very extensive activity reveal
- There is a perceived increased need and an evident increase in demand for such support
  - High levels of creativity and commitment are evident amongst providers and high levels of appreciation are recorded by clients.
- vii Unfortunately the evaluations of interventions are so technically weak that it is impossible on the basis of publicly available evidence to describe the scale of the impact on pupils’ achievement. This is not to say the activity does not work.
- viii The research base from intervention studies is too weak to answer some of the review questions. It is not possible to rate the relative effectiveness of work in different key stages or to import lessons from abroad where the evidence base suffers from the same faults.
- ix The review concludes by arguing that
- We have a good enough knowledge base to understand how spontaneous parental involvement works in promoting achievement.
  - Current interventions, whilst promising, have yet to deliver convincingly the achievement bonus that might be expected.

- The achievement of working class pupils could be significantly enhanced if we systematically apply all that is known about parental involvement. A programme of parental involvement development initiatives taking the form of multi dimensional intervention programmes, targeted on selected post code areas and steered by a design research process is implicated.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1 Background

- 1.1 It is widely recognised that if pupils are to maximise their potential from schooling they will need the full support of their parents. Attempts to enhance parental involvement in education occupy governments, administrators, educators and parents' organisations across North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK. It is anticipated that parents should play a role not only in the promotion of their own children's achievements but more broadly in school improvement and the democratisation of school governance. The European Commission, for example, holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling.
- 1.2 In England, the Government's strategy for securing parental involvement was first set out in the 1997 White Paper, 'Excellence in Schools'. The strategy described there included three elements (a) providing parents with information, (b) giving parents a voice and (c) encouraging parental partnerships with schools. This strategy has since been played out through a wide range of activities including
- the enhancement of parent governor roles
  - involvement in inspection processes
  - provision of annual reports and prospectuses
  - the requirement for home-school agreements
  - the provision of increasing amounts of information about the curriculum and school performance for example
- 1.3 Regardless of government policies, some parents have always been actively involved in enhancing their children's development and educational progress. This spontaneous activity has taken a number of forms including 'good parenting' in the home pre-school (which provides a good foundation of skills, values, attitudes and self concept); visits to school to gather relevant information and establish good relationships; discussions with teachers to keep abreast of the child's progress or to discuss emergent problems; and assisting more broadly in the practical activities and governance of the school.



- 1.4 This spontaneous activity of many parents has been seen as a valuable contribution to children's educational progress and attempts to enhance the involvement of all parents are now widespread. Provision is extensive and involves large numbers of voluntary bodies, research organisations, national initiatives, LEA initiatives and vast numbers of one-school projects.
- 1.5 This work is proceeding in parallel with a significant number of educational strategies installed since 1997 and brought to bear on the reform of school organisation, administration, management and finance, the curriculum, examinations and qualifications and on teaching and learning. The overwhelming strategy is guided by the standards and inclusion agenda. The aim is to increase levels of attainment broadly conceived to include the acquisition of skills, concepts and bodies of knowledge in the curriculum subjects together with the acquisition of skills, attitudes and values conducive to self –fulfilment and good citizenship.
- 1.6 Whilst standards of attainment in academic subjects have increased notably there remains a significant gap in the relative levels of attainment between children in different social classes. The gap is associated with different levels of parental involvement broadly conceived. This literature review was commissioned and funded by the Department for Education and Skills in the light of the above considerations and with particular regard to informing the development of policy intended to close the social class gap in achievement.
- 1.7 **The aims of the review** are to investigate the impact of:
- parental support (e.g. the provision of parenting skills training, advice and guidance for parents) on pupil achievement/engagement;
  - family learning (i.e. as a Parent Governor, reading to children, encouragement and help with homework) on pupil achievement/engagement; and
  - parents' level of education, e.g. the impact of parents with university-level education on children's achievement.

The main aim of the proposed project is to produce a comprehensive literature review of reliable research evidence on the relationship between parents/parenting and pupil achievement/engagement. The review attempts to answer the following research questions:

- What are the main findings/conclusions of research that has investigated the relationship between parenting (in terms of parental support, family learning, parental involvement and parents' level of education) and pupil achievement/engagement.

- On what issues are the research findings in agreement? On what issues are the research findings inconsistent? Where are the gaps in the current research evidence?
- What elements of parental support, family learning, parental involvement and parents' level of education impact positively on pupil achievement/engagement? Does the effectiveness of these elements change according to: (a) pupil age; (b) the gender of pupils; (c) whether parents participate on a voluntary – rather than required – basis; (d) socio-economic group; and (e) the way in which schools interact with parents?
- What strategies/interventions have been successfully used (nationally and internationally – especially in the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA) to enable parental support, family learning, parental involvement and parents' level of education to have a positive impact on pupil achievement/engagement? To what extent can these strategies/interventions be successfully implemented in present-day England?
- To what extent can those strategies/interventions, which effectively enable parental support, family learning and parental involvement to have a positive impact on pupil achievement, be deliberately targeted to address the achievement gap – particularly towards hard-to-reach parents?
- To what extent does the timing of interventions impact positively or negatively? For example, what is the evidence for/against intervention from birth? What evidence is there that later interventions (e.g. at KS1, 2 or 3) have equal/lesser/greater impact?

## 1.8 **The structure of the report**

- 1.8.1 Parental involvement refers to a broad range of activities as indicated earlier. Understanding the impact of various forms of spontaneous involvement and of the large range of intervention studies on achievement and adjustment must proceed in recognition of all the many factors which impinge on school outcomes. Research in the field necessitates some definition of what kind of involvement is at issue; some specification of which school outcomes are expected to be generated; some means of measuring or evaluating these desired outcomes and some means of analysis which affords warrantable conclusions about the impact of involvement on outcomes. These conceptual and methodological issues are explored in Chapter 2 where some exemplary projects researching spontaneous involvement are described.

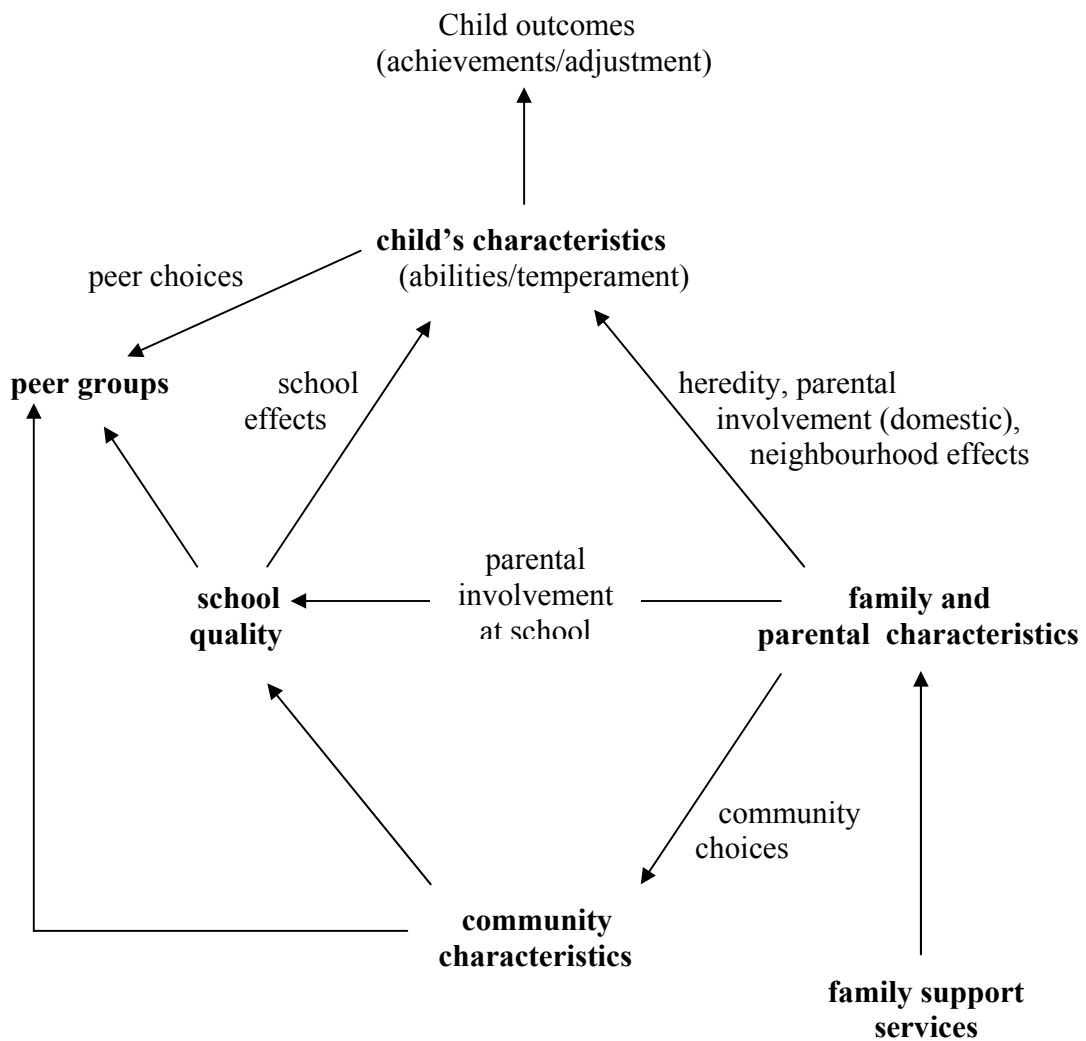
- 1.8.2 Chapter 3 contains a report of research on spontaneous levels of parental involvement. This research shows that a form of parental involvement, specifically ‘at-home’ good parenting, has a major impact on school outcomes even after all other forces (e.g. the effect of prior attainment or of social class) have been factored out. Some of the major dimensions of this impact are described.
- 1.8.3 Chapter 3 examines research on how spontaneous parental involvement has its effect on achievement. The effect is shown to be indirect and to operate, in the main, through the promotion of attitudes, values and aspirations which are pro-learning.
- 1.8.4 Chapter 5 reports findings from research on the effect of ethnic differences on parental involvement. Here it is shown that scale of the effect of parental involvement on school outcomes is apparent across all ethnic groups studied. The precise details of values and the way they are modelled in the home are somewhat different in different cultures but the general link between parental involvement and achievement is common across cultures.
- 1.8.5 In Chapter 6 research is reported which explores the question as to why different parents evince different levels of parental involvement. The effects of poverty, psycho-social illness, social class, parental attitudes and values, and of the dynamic influence of children are described as are the effects of schools’ approaches to parents. This chapter concludes with a description of a research based model of spontaneous parental involvement which fits the findings of all the research reported this far.
- 1.8.6 Chapters 7 and 8 contain reviews of research and evaluations of a wide range of interventions intended to enhance parental involvement. These cover interventions taking the form of home/school links, of adult, community and family education and of parent training programmes. Research on interventions is drastically less well designed than research on parents’ spontaneous behaviour. Considerable caution is exercised in identifying lessons to be learned here.
- 1.8.7 Chapter 9 draws together the conclusions to be drawn from the review and considers their implications for policies intended to close the social class gap in educational achievement.
- 1.8.8 The processes by which the review was conducted are described in appendix A.
- 1.8.9 To meet the needs of an anticipated lay readership of the report, statistical content has been kept to a minimum in the main body of the text. Appendix B reports, in table form, the scale of the impact of parental involvement as revealed by the studies described non-technically in chapters 2 and 3.

- 1.9 It should be emphasised that whilst this report was commissioned and funded by the Department for Education and Skills, the conclusions and implications drawn from the research are the sole responsibility of the author.

## Chapter 2

### Researching parental involvement: some conceptual and methodological issues

- 2.1 *In this chapter, some of the complexities of researching the impact of parental involvement are introduced and examined. Parental involvement is a catch-all term for many different activities including 'at home' good parenting, helping with homework, talking to teachers, attending school functions, through to taking part in school governance. It is relatively easy to describe what parents do in the name of involvement. It is much more difficult to establish whether this activity makes a difference to school outcomes particularly since school outcomes are influenced by so many factors. Some of the problems of measurement and analysis are examined and illustrated by reference to state-of-the-art studies in the field. Conclusions from these studies indicate that parental involvement in children's education has a powerful impact on their attainment and adjustment.*
- 2.2 Pupils' achievement and adjustment are influenced by many people, processes and institutions. Parents, the broader family, peer groups, neighbourhood influences, schools and other bodies (e.g. churches, clubs) are all implicated in shaping children's progress towards their self fulfilment and citizenship. The children themselves, of course, with their unique abilities, temperaments and propensities play a central role in forming and reforming their behaviour, aspirations and achievements.
- 2.3 In the face of this complexity, attempts to ascertain the impact of any singular force in shaping achievement must proceed with some conception of how the many forces and actors might interact with each other. Fig 1 is an attempt to show some of the processes implicated. It should be emphasised that 'child outcomes' is broadly conceived. It includes attainment as accredited in public examinations and National tests. It also refers to a wide range of attitudes, values and knowledge which, taken together, help sustain a commitment to lifelong learning and good citizenship.



**Fig 1. Some forces shaping educational outcomes (achievement and adjustment) Adapted from Nechyba et al (1999)**

2.4 The diagram is necessarily simplified. For the sake of clarity, some agencies have been omitted (e.g. clubs and associations) and there are no doubt multiple interactions between the elements which are not shown in the diagram. It might be anticipated, for example, that the quality of a school will influence the type of peer group experience a pupil might meet. At the same time, the individual pupil will influence the peer group as well as the peer group influencing the individual.

2.5 Whilst Figure 1 shows key players and potential processes in shaping pupil achievement, it leaves unpacked many of the details. What is

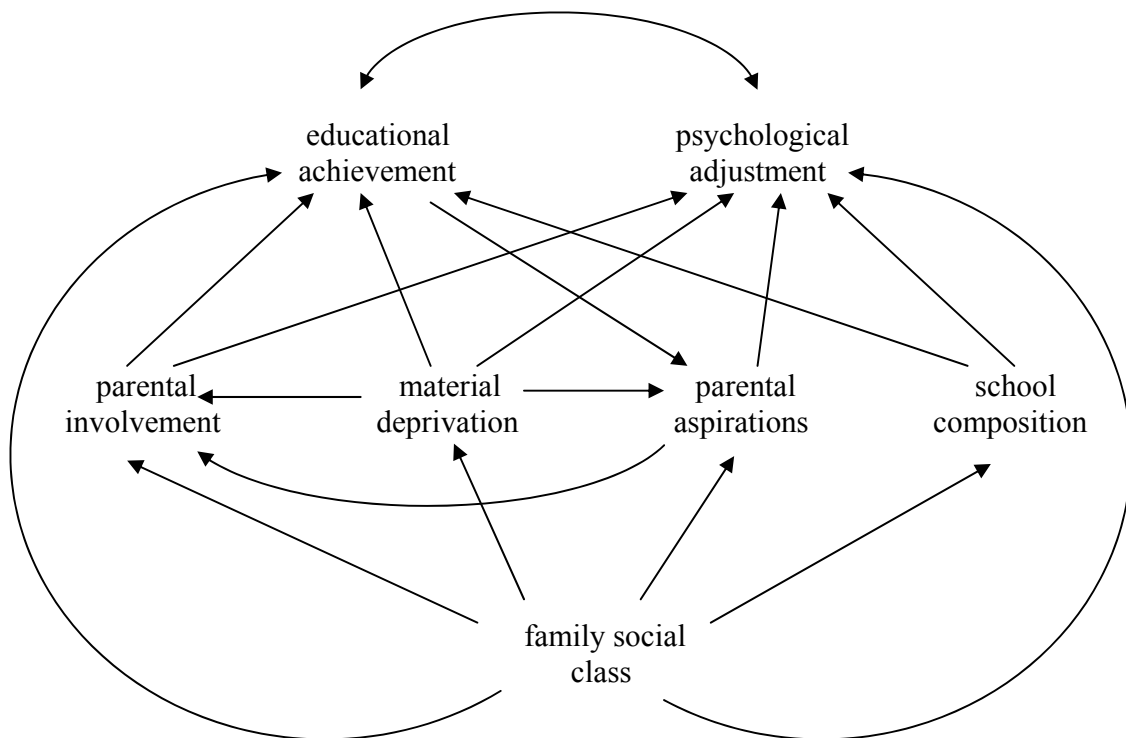
referred to, for example, by the term ‘family and parental characteristics’? Family, size, structure, income and employment pattern have all been implicated as bearing on educational achievement and personal adjustment. The attempt to identify the impact of parental involvement and family education on educational outcomes must proceed with the clear recognition that these processes will be influenced by a wide range of other factors and at the same time will work through a range of intervening processes.

- 2.6 Early research in the field showed a variety of inconsistent and conflicting findings. Some studies found that parental involvement had no effect whatsoever on pupil achievement or adjustment, others found striking, positive effects whilst yet other studies found a negative relationship. Parental involvement, it seemed, diminished pupil achievement under some circumstances. These inconsistencies are relatively easy to explain. First, different researchers used different definitions of parent involvement. Some took it to be ‘good parenting’ which went on in the home. Others took it to be ‘talking to teachers’ whilst yet others defined parental involvement as a thoroughgoing participation in school functions and school governance. At the same time, different researchers used different measures of parental involvement even for a given definition. For example, parental involvement in the home has been measured using teachers’ judgements, parents’ judgements, pupil judgements or researchers’ observations. A similar range of metrics has been used for pupils’ achievements and adjustment running from subjective self ratings through to the use of public examinations and on to the completion of psychometric tests. Measuring different ‘things’ under the same name and measuring the same ‘thing’ with different metrics was bound to lead to apparent inconsistencies.
- 2.7 In further explaining the inconsistencies of early studies, there has been an evident naivety in interpreting correlation coefficients. It is frequently found, for example, that the rate at which parents talk to teachers about their child’s behaviour and progress is negatively correlated with both these ‘outputs’. Research showed that the more parents talked to teachers, the less well their children seemed to be progressing. It was concluded on this basis that parental involvement was a detriment to pupil progress. But which is cause and which effect? Common sense says that parents talk more to teachers when a problem emerges. The talk is a response to rather than a cause of the problem. Yet this is not the whole story. Most parents talk to teachers to some degree about their child’s progress and this, quite properly is an index of parental involvement. It reminds us that the relationship between parental involvement and achievement is probably not linear (doubling parental involvement will not double achievement), and that it is proactive as well as reactive. Parents take the level of interest and involvement appropriate to the scene as they see it. Some aspects of involvement are played out in the home long before the

child starts school whilst others are in response to problems or opportunities generated in the school.

- 2.8 Early studies often showed strong positive links between parental involvement in school and pupil progress. It was concluded that in-school involvement helped cause this progress. Yet such parental involvement is itself strongly related to socio-economic status which in turn is even more strongly linked with pupil progress. The design of most early studies did not allow these complex relations amongst variables to be unpicked to identify their unique effects. Without this control, conclusions about the effect of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment were premature.
- 2.9 Understanding how any one part of a complex interacting system impacts on the desired outcomes is clearly very challenging. The ideal scientific approach to such questions would be to conduct a programme of carefully designed experiments in which all factors except the variable in question are controlled in order to observe the impact on the system. In complex human systems this is impossible, and indeed, may be unethical. The modern alternative to the experiment is to use statistical techniques on large data sets which allow the researcher to exercise a degree of statistical control over many variables in order to test theories about how the system works. The scientifically most sound studies of parental involvement adopt just such an approach. Recent studies in this vein have provided a consistent picture of how parental involvement influences pupil achievement and adjustment and the degree to which this influence operates.
- 2.10 The following sections set out an analysis of two major studies in the field to illustrate the data sets and forms of scientific procedure commonly used in quantitative research in the field aiming to identify the unique impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment
- 2.11 Sacker et al (2002) set out to examine how inequalities in educational achievement and adjustment come about. It has been well known for decades that pupils' educational achievement is related to parents' social class yet the mechanisms that form this relationship are not well understood. How does social class influence school achievement? Sacker and her colleagues set out to test the model shown in Fig 2.





**Fig 2. Sacker et al (2002) model of the relationship between family social class, and pupil achievement and adjustment**

- 2.11.1 The present interest in this model is the presumed role for parental involvement. Involvement is assumed to be a working link between social class and pupil achievement and adjustment. In this process, involvement is assumed to be influenced by material deprivation and parental aspiration. The poorer are people's circumstances the more difficult it is assumed to be to support a child's educational development. The latter, parental aspiration, is in turn influenced by the child's evident achievement. The more the child achieves, the greater is the parental expectation. The arrows in the diagram indicate presumed directions of influence, showing the anticipated direction of causes to effects. It is assumed here that social class has its influence through the four intervening variables (parental involvement, material deprivation, parental aspiration and school composition). Additionally, it is assumed that social class influences achievement and adjustment in ways not specified in the model, hence the direct arrows from class to achievement and adjustment.
- 2.11.2 Data from the National Child Development Study were used to test the model. This study followed 98% of all births in England, Scotland and Wales in week 3 – 9 March 1958. Some 17,400 individuals have been followed up at ages 7, 11, 16, 23 and 33 years. The cohort has been

supplemented by immigrants to the UK born in the same week. Sacker et al used the data from this cohort study when members were 7, 11 and 16 years old (data being collected in 1965, 1969 and 1974 respectively).

- 2.11.3 Testing the model necessitates that each variable is quantified or measured in some way. The social class of each parent was assessed using the Registrar General's index of occupations. School composition was assessed as a mixture of (a) the percentage of the school judged above average educational standard, (b) the percentage of children from non-manual homes. Material deprivation was indexed by (a) the degree of overcrowding, (b) the use of facilities (bathroom, indoor toilet, hot water supply), (c) housing tenure (owner occupier or tenant), (d) type of accommodation (e.g. house, flat, rooms), (e) claiming benefits. Parental involvement was indexed by head teachers' assessments of (a) apparent parental interest in the child scored on a four-point scale, (b) parental initiative in talking with teacher, (c) time spent with child in reading and on outings, picnics and visits. Parental aspiration was rated on the basis of the parental desire for the child to stay on at school (when the child was 7 or 11) and hopes for further education/first job when the child was 16. Achievement was assessed using standardised tests of reading and mathematics and personal adjustment was measured using the British Social Adjustment Guide.
- 2.11.4 The data were analysed using techniques which allow the researcher to identify the relationships between the variables in the model and to ascertain how much each contributes in explaining the link between the 'inputs' (in this case, social class) and 'outputs' (in this case pupil achievement and adjustment). Characteristically, family social class was significantly related to pupil achievement and adjustment at all ages. Children from higher social classes had higher levels of attainment and better scores on scales of personal adjustment than children from lower social classes. Throughout there was a strong relationship between achievement and adjustment. Higher attainers were better adjusted than lower attainers. The processes through which social class worked however, changed according to the age of the child. At age 7 pupil achievement and adjustment was mainly influenced positively by parental involvement and negatively by material deprivation. By far the strongest positive influence was parental involvement. This factor was far stronger than the effect of social class or school composition.
- 2.11.5 At 16 years of age parental involvement continued to have a significant effect but school composition had become a more powerful determinant of achievement and adjustment.
- 2.11.6 Material deprivation had a strong, negative effect on parental involvement. As material deprivation worsened, parental involvement decreased markedly. Material deprivation was notably worse for families in the lower social classes. The deprivation factor accounted for a great deal of

the differences in parental involvement between the social classes. At age 16 the effect of material deprivation on pupil achievement and adjustment was twice that of parental involvement, ‘significantly undermining the positive effects of parental involvement on children’ (Sacker et al, 2002, p 871).

2.11.7 It is necessary to be cautious about these strong findings. The data were collected in the 1960s and 70s. The ‘measure’ of parental involvement was head teacher’s ratings which certainly contain a subjective if not a biased element. It will be shown however, that the pattern of results in the National Child Development Study is extensively replicated.

2.12 Most of the large-scale and technically sound studies on the impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment have been conducted in the USA. The following is an example of a typical U.S. study in the field. The purpose in presenting it here is to illustrate the main elements of the research process.

2.12.1 Much contemporary research on parental involvement in the US has drawn on the work of Joyce Epstein. Epstein has drawn up a typology of forms of parental involvement. This is shown in Figure 3 below. This framework is not based on the empirical evidence of what parents actually do in the name of supporting their children. Rather, it is based on reflection about the general sort of things parents could or might do.

<b>Type of involvement</b>	<b>Definition</b>
parenting	providing housing, health, nutrition, safety; parenting skills in parent-child interactions; home conditions to support study; information to help schools know child
communicating	school-home/home-school communication
volunteering	in school help in classrooms/events
teaching at home	help with homework, help with educational choices/options
decision making	membership of PTA/governors
collaborating with the community	contributions to school

**Fig 3. Epstein’s conceptual framework for family-school-community involvement (adapted from Kreider, 2000)**

- 2.12.2 In the study reported below (Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996) the researchers set out to describe what parents said they did to support their child's school progress. The researchers then analysed to what extent such activities influenced educational achievement and the degree to which parental involvement was associated with different family backgrounds in terms of ethnicity and social class.
- 2.12.3 Sui-Chu and Willms drew their data from the US National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) which was based on a sample of approximately 24,600 8<sup>th</sup> grade students (i.e. aged approximately 14 years) in a stratified sample drawn from 1500 schools. A great deal of evidence was collected from student and parent questionnaires completed in 1988. Achievement was measured using standardised attainment tests in mathematics and reading.

Table 1 below, gives examples of the sorts of items related to parental involvement that were presented in the questionnaire together with an indication of how these were scored.

Talk with mother	How often have you talked [to your mother or female guardian] about planning your high school program? (0 = not at all, 1 = once or twice, 2 = three or more times)
Talk with father	How often have you talked to [your father or male guardian] about planning your high school program? (0 = not at all, 1 = once or twice, 2 = three or more times)
Discuss school Programme	Since the beginning of the school year, how often have you discussed the .... selecting courses or programs at school. (0 = not at all, 1 = once or twice, 2 = three or more times)
Discuss Activities	... school activities or events of particular interest to you (0 = not at all, 1 = once or twice, 2 = three or more times)
Monitor Homework	How often do your parents or guardians ... check on whether you have done your homework? (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often)

Limit TV Time	... limit the amount of time you can spend watching TV? (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often)
Limit Going Out	... limit the amount of time for going out with friends on school nights? (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often)
Home after School	(is your mother or father) ... at home when you return home from school? (0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = usually)
School Contacts Parents	Since your eighth grader's school opened last fall, how many times <i>have you been contacted by the school</i> about .... your eighth grader's (a) academic performance, (b) academic program for this year, (c) course selection for high school, (d) placement decisions ....., and (e) behaviour in school? (0 = none, 1 = once or twice, 2 = three or four times, 3 = more than four times)
Volunteer at School	Do you or your spouse or partner ... act as a volunteer at the school (0 = no, 1 = yes)
PTO	... (a) belong to PTO, (b) attend meetings of a PTO, and (c) take part in the activities of a PTO? (0 = no, 1 = yes)

**Table 1 Selected Items indexing Parent-Involvement Variables (Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996)**

2.12.4 Responses to these items were scored and the scores analysed to look for major patterns. Four main factors were found to describe most parental involvement activity. There were two types of home involvement, one associated with discussing school activities (home discussion) and the other with monitoring the child's out-of-school activities (home supervision). Then there were two types of school involvement, one describing contacts between parents and school personnel (school communication) and the other involving volunteering for school activities and attending school functions (school participation).

2.12.5 The researchers examined the variation of the four types of involvement activity across the 1000 + schools in the sample. It was found that

approximately 90% of the variation in involvement was within schools rather than between schools. The distribution was relatively uniform across schools. When the four parental involvement factors are taken together it was difficult to identify schools with particularly high or low levels of parental involvement. This suggests that relatively few schools had a strong influence on the learning climate in the home or on levels of parental involvement generally.

- 2.12.6 The data were then analysed to investigate the relationship between the forms of parental involvement and the social class of the families. In confirmation of previous research there was a strong relationship between social class and parental involvement. The higher the social class, the more parental involvement was evident.
- 2.12.7 Achievement in both maths and reading was also significantly related to family social class. The researchers used statistical techniques to factor out this effect and then examined the residual impact of parental involvement factors. They concluded that, 'parental involvement made a significant unique contribution to explaining the variation in children's academic achievement over and above the effects associated with family background' (p.138). To be precise, the most significant factor was 'home discussion'. Regardless of social class, the more parents and children conversed with each other in the home, the more the pupils achieved in school.
- 2.12.8 It is worth pausing to underline the trend of these results. First, a great deal of the variation in students' achievement is outside of the schools' influence. Family social class, for example, accounts for about one third of such variance. Second, parental involvement in the form of home discussion has, nonetheless, a major impact on achievement. Other forms of involvement have insignificant effects. Unlike social class, this form of parental involvement might be open to the educative impact of schools. That being said, it seems that the schools in this sample had very little impact on home discussion as a form of parental involvement.
- 2.12.9 Since this study reveals home discussion to be a significant force on student achievement it is worth noting some of the factors associated with this form of parental involvement. First there is a strong gender effect. Females report considerably more home discussion than males. Second, children with behavioural problems get less home discussion but significantly more school communication. Third, there are ethnic differences in the degree of home discussion. Asian and Pacific Island families engage significantly less than white families in home discussion.
- 2.13 A comparison of the NCDS of Britain in the 70s with the NELS study of the US in the 90s shows some remarkable correspondences. First, achievement is shaped to a major degree by forces outside the control of schools. Social class factors play a large role. That being said, parental

involvement has a significant effect. This is evident whether the ratings of involvement are made by head teachers (as in the UK study) or by parents and students (as in the US study). It should be cautioned that although both research reports are recent, the studies' data collection is dated.

- 2.14 In **summary**, the above discussion records the number of radically different forms of activity encompassed by the term 'parental involvement'. It was shown that parental involvement is played out in complex settings. It is only one of many factors which have impact on pupil achievement and adjustment. Furthermore, it is influenced by many other factors including family social class, parents' level of education and the family's level of material deprivation. Some of the difficulties in isolating the unique effect of parental involvement on school outcomes were illustrated.
- 2.14.1 Research confronting these difficulties was used to illustrate how researchers have measured involvement and school outcomes and how they have linked these in analysis. In interpreting research in this, as in any other field, it is necessary to pay close attention to these modes of measurement.
- 2.14.2 The technically high quality studies cited here showed that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home' interest and support is a major force in shaping pupils' educational outcomes.

## Chapter 3

### The impact of parental involvement on achievement and adjustment

- 3.1 *The previous chapter revealed some of the complexities of isolating the impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment. It was shown that involvement can take many forms, that it is difficult to measure, and that it interacts with many other factors. Two studies were described in some detail to show how these difficulties can be tackled by researchers attempting to understand the processes involved. Each study showed (amongst other things) that parental involvement conceived as parental interest in the child in the UK study and conceived as home discussion in the US study was associated to a major degree with pupil attainment after all other factors have been taken into account.*
- 3.2 *The studies reported in this chapter will show how extensively these findings have been confirmed. Several of the studies have tested various views as to how parental involvement exerts its influence on achievement. These studies are described later.*
- 3.3 The effect of parental involvement (in terms of providing a home learning environment) on achievement and cognitive development has been explored in recent studies of English pre schoolers (Sylva, et al, 1999; Melhuish et al, 2001). Sylva et al (1999) ran a longitudinal study (The Effective Provision of Pre School Education Project, EPPE) to assess the attainment and development of children between the ages 3 to 7 years. More than three thousand children were recruited to the sample which investigated provision in more than 100 centres. A wide range of methods were used to explore the effects of provision on children's attainment and adjustment. Of particular interest here is the impact of parental involvement in interaction with professional provision. The idea of a 'home learning environment' (HLE) was devised to describe a range of learning related provision in the home as reported by parents. HLE included reading, library visits, playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing, teaching (through play) the letters of the alphabet, playing with numbers and shapes, teaching nursery rhymes and singing. Melhuish et al (2001) concluded that, 'higher home learning environment was associated with increased levels of cooperation and conformity, peer sociability and confidence, ... lower anti-social and worried or upset behaviour and higher cognitive development scores ... after age it was the variable with the strongest effect on cognitive development' (p.ii) And, 'Its (HLE) effect is stronger than that of either socio-economic status or mothers' qualifications' (p26). Whilst HLE scores were generally higher in homes in the upper social classes, ' ... there are parents high on SES and qualifications who provide a home environment low on the HLE index ... there are parents low on SES and qualifications who provide a home environment high on the HLE index'. (p.9).



- 3.4 In a study which flowed from the ongoing EPPE project, Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) set out to identify the most effective teaching strategies in the Foundation Stage. Intensive case studies were made of 14 sites rated in the EPPE project as offering ‘good practice’. In essence, the aim of the case studies was to explain the statistical relationships established previously.
- 3.4.1 Again, the key point of interest here was to ascertain the impact of parental involvement. The case studies suggested that when a special relationship between parents and professional educators obtained, in terms of shared aims, good learning progress could take place even in the absence of good practice in the pre-school. ‘Our findings show that it is the (parental) involvement of learning activities in the home that is most closely associated with better cognitive attainment in the early years’. This was shown to be especially beneficial when parents and professionals negotiated a continuity of experience for the children.
- 3.5 Some children seem to succeed in school despite living in materially unpromising circumstances whilst others do less well despite a comfortable material environment. Schoon and Parsons (2002) have explored the factors which seem to promote resilience or vulnerability. Once again, parental involvement in education in the home is implicated. Schoon and Parsons drew samples of children from the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the British Cohort Study (BCS). For each child they calculated a Social Index (SI) taking into consideration parental social class and material deprivation, and a Competence Index (CI) taking into account academic attainment and behavioural adjustment. Each child was then located in a matrix as above or below the mean on SI and on CI as show in Figure 4.

		Social Index	
		low	high
Competence Index	low	vulnerable	under achievers
	high	resilient	multiple advantaged

**Fig. 4 Classification of social/competence advantage/disadvantage (Schoon and Parsons, 2002)**

- 3.5.1 Youngsters who were below the mean on SI but above the mean on CI were classed as ‘resilient’ whilst those low on both indices were described

as 'vulnerable'. It was possible to identify the factors which seemed to promote resilience or protect from vulnerability. Protective factors for the NCDS sample were having an educated mother, a helpful father and parental involvement in support of schooling. In the sample from the BCS, parental involvement was not implicated as a protective factor. A sensible comparison between the two samples is difficult to make because attainment was assessed at 7 years for the NCDS and at 5 years for the BCS. In both cases however, the impact of early resilience was long term. 'For the NCDS sample ... resilient young people are (subsequently) doing as well as the socially advantaged under-achievers and are as likely to obtain a degree' (p. 267). For this sample at least, the effects of parental involvement in the primary school are far reaching. The picture is less impressive, albeit still positive for the BCS sample. Resilient individuals still perform, long term, better than the vulnerables but they do not achieve to the same levels as the socially advantaged.

3.6 Several studies have used the same US National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) data base as Sui-Chu and Willms (1996) (cited above) because it is particularly rich in information relevant to parental involvement. The data affords many different conceptions of PI to be explored. Singh et al (1995) explored the effect of different components of parental involvement on the achievement of 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Singh et al identified four components of parental involvement namely; parental aspirations for children's education, parent-child communication about school; home-structure and parental participation in school related activities. It should be emphasised that 'parental aspiration' refers to the parents' hopes and expectations for the child's continuing education, 'parent-child communication' refers specifically to school related matters, 'home structure' refers to the degree of discipline exerted by the parents to insist on homework completion and to limit potentially distracting activities (e.g. watching T.V.) whilst 'parental participation in school' more self evidently refers to parent support for and participation in school and class functions. Singh et al showed that parental involvement in school activities had no effect on achievement whilst home structure had a slight negative association. Parental involvement in the form of parent-child discussions had a moderate impact. Parental aspiration had a powerful influence on achievement both directly and indirectly through discussion. To give some idea of the scale of this influence it can be compared to the influence of prior achievement. Prior achievement is usually the best predictor of pupils' present achievement. It is a good measure of all the previous effects of family background and the child's abilities. Singh et al showed that parental aspiration was the factor that had the biggest impact on pupil achievement once social class factors had been taken into account.

3.6.1 The surprise finding is the slight negative effect of 'home structure' on achievement. It has generally been considered that a degree of organisation and discipline related to the use of out-of-school time would

support school achievement. The negative result here runs counter to that sentiment. It merits cautious interpretation. It could be that the best discipline is self discipline. Attempts to impose discipline on adolescents might be indicative of problem behaviour, i.e. the parents are reacting to a problem rather than causing it. Another result to emphasise from this study, replicating that of Sui-Chu and Willms (above) is that parental involvement which takes the form of in-school parental activity has little effect on individual's attainment.

- 3.7 Catsambis (2001) analysed data from the NELS: 88 study and its second, follow-up (NELS: 92). This gave access to extensive data collected by questionnaire from parents, students, teachers, principals and administrators on achievement and parental involvement. Catsambis used Epstein's conception of involvement (see Figure 3) and searched the data base to find evidence with which to assess the 6 types of involvement, relating them to measures of student achievement. Once again, background variables such as family socio-economic status and previous attainment, were factored out before examining the impact of parental involvement on student achievement, in this case in the age range 14 – 18 years. The first main result of this study was that none of the 6 modes of involvement was associated with academic progression in this age range. This replicates Sacker et al's (2002) findings from the UK NCDS for adolescents. However, parental involvement was positively associated with what in England would be termed 'staying on rates' and with increased likelihood of making challenging course options. High levels of parental expectation, consistent encouragement and actions to enhance learning opportunities in the home were all positively associated with students' high aspirations and college enrolments – this regardless of students SES or ethnic background.
- 3.8 George and Kaplan (1998) used the NELS: 88 data to focus more narrowly on parental involvement and its relationship to students' attitudes to science. Again, key background variables were factored out. The researchers concluded, 'One of the important effects seen in the present study is the influence of parental involvement on science attitudes.' The more the parents showed a positive attitude to science the better the pupils achieve in science. The parental effect works through discussion of school experiences and through arranging or supporting activities in libraries and museums.
- 3.9 McNeal (1999; 2001) used the NELS: 88 data base to examine the effects of parental involvement on science achievement and truancy and drop out rates. This involved taking samples from NELS: 88, NELS: 90 and NELS: 92 data collections phases. One sample (assessed in NELS: 88 and NELS 90) of 12,000+ cases was recruited to assess the impact of parental involvement on achievement. The second sample (NELS: 90 and NELS: 92) was used to assess the impact of earlier involvement on subsequent drop out rates. As usual in these studies, the effect of background

variables such as SES, and previous achievement were factored out to reveal the residual impact of parental involvement on achievement. But McNeal went on to study the interaction of involvement with a number of background factors including SES and ethnicity. Some of these results will be discussed later. For this present section the main conclusion was that, 'the only dimension of parental involvement that is remotely consistent in terms of improving achievement and reducing problematic behaviour is parent-child discussion ...' (p 131).

- 3.9.1 Other aspects of parental involvement were not without impact but such effects were inconsistent. Involvement in the school and parental monitoring of students' behaviour both had effects on moderating discrepant behaviour but less on achievement in science. McNeal went on to demonstrate that the patterns of relationship showed strong interactions between involvement and different categories of student. The positive effects of parental involvement operate only for white, middle class students in two-parent families. This result is entirely consistent with Sacker et al's (2002) study using the BCDS data. Together they show that parental involvement is much less influential on the achievement of adolescent pupils. The circumstances associated with lower SES work against the effects of parental involvement in ways not evident with younger pupils.
- 3.10 There are at least two published studies however which contradict these findings and which find that the positive effects of parental involvement continue strongly into adolescence. Gonzalez-Pienda et al (2002) explored the effects of parental involvement on achievement for a sample of 261 Spanish adolescents. Standardised attainment tests were used to measure achievement, psychometric tests to appraise self concept and related personal attributes and parental involvement was rated by the students. Characteristically, student aptitude accounted for a significant portion of the variance in academic achievement. Following that, parental involvement as rated by the students themselves and taking the form of interest and encouragement, was a major causal factor of achievement. The effect of parental involvement on achievement however was not direct. Rather it made its contribution through the shaping of the adolescents' self concept. The researchers concluded, 'the results ... clearly support the thesis that parental involvement behaviours significantly affect children's academic achievement ... however, this influence is not direct ....' (p276).
- 3.11 Feinstein and Symons (1999) also conclude that PI continues to have significant effects on achievement into adolescence. This conclusion is drawn from an analysis of the same data set as that used by Sacker et al (2002) who reached the opposite conclusion. Feinstein and Symons analysed the data from the NCDS (58) to explore the effect of parent, peer and schooling inputs on achievement at age 16. Feinstein and Symons examined the impact of certain factors (parental involvement, peer group

influence, schooling inputs) on the production of 'educational goods' – in this case, achievement. Achievement at age 16 was measured by (a) the highest grade attained in any national examination for English, (b) the NCDS mathematics achievement score and (c) the average grade in all public examinations taken. Parental involvement was indexed using the NCDS head teachers' impressions of parental interest at ages 7,11, and 16. Four measures of peer group effects were used: the proportion of children in the class with fathers in non-manual occupations; the proportion of children taking only GCE examinations; the proportion of children in the class taking only CSE exams and the proportion of children in the class from the previous year's class who stayed on in education after the minimum leaving age. School effects were indexed by pupil teacher ratios. This index was justified on the grounds that it is a choice variable for parents. The analysis relating peer, family and school 'inputs' to educational 'outputs' provided clear results, 'Of the family inputs, only parental interest has a consistently strong impact. In contrast to what is usually found, social class, family size, and parental education ... have relatively small effects ... the combined advantage of coming from a high social class with parents who stayed on at school after 16 is only 5.98 percentage points in the All Exams index, compared to an effect of 24.4 from moving from no parental interest to the highest level of interest'. (1997, p.15). The peer group effect is about 10 percentage points on the All Exams index. It seems that socio-economic variables work their effect through parental interest.

- 3.12 The contrast of these findings with those of Sacker et al (2002) using the same data base is quite striking but, in the event, reconcilable. The differences between the two studies lie in the researchers' choice of intervening variables to account for the links between SES and achievement. Sacker et al used parental involvement, parental aspiration, material deprivation and school composition. Feinstein and Symons used family variables (size for example), parental interest, peer groups and school inputs. Perplexingly perhaps, Sacker et al used the same metric for school composition as Feinstein and Symons used for peer group effects. The upshot is that both studies reached the same conclusion but called it different names. Each found a significant role for parental involvement and each found a significant role for school (albeit Feinstein and Symons attributes it to peer group effects) in the formation of achievement.
- 3.13 In summary, taken collectively the above studies using contemporary techniques of data analysis from large data sets have safely established that parental involvement in the form of interest in the child and manifest in the home as parent-child discussions can have a significant positive effect on children's behaviour and achievement even when the influence of background factors such as social class or family size have been factored out. This is not to say that parental involvement always does have such effects but the research shows what is routinely possible in the normal actions of parents in interaction with their school age youngsters.

There is some indication that parental involvement activities and effects diminish as the child gets older but even for school leavers the effects are strong albeit perhaps less so on achievement and more so on staying on rates specifically and pupils' educational aspirations more generally.

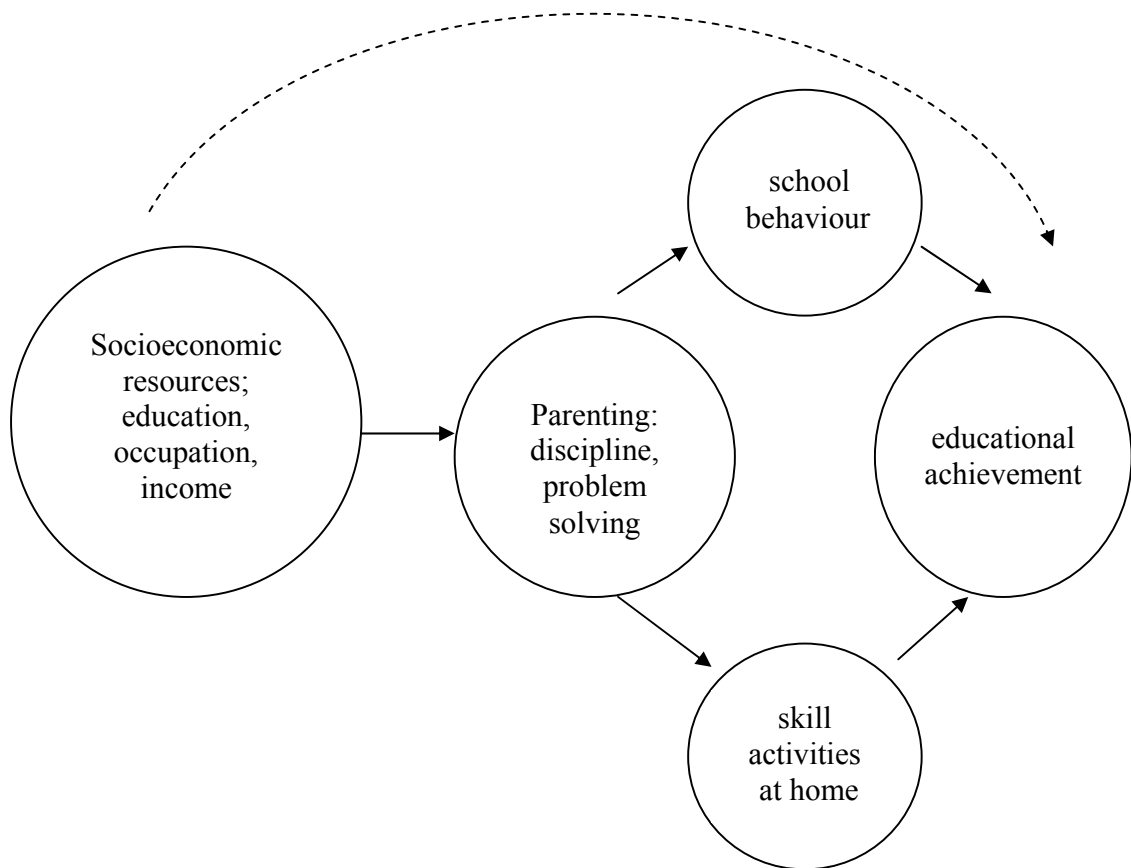
## Chapter 4

### How does parental involvement work?

- 4.1 *The previous chapter showed that parental involvement is a major force in shaping pupils' school outcomes. This raises the question of how parental involvement works. What are the links between parental involvement and pupils' achievement? The research reported in this chapter attempts to answer that question.*
- 4.2 Most of the studies already quoted show that parental involvement acted out in the school confers little or no benefit on the individual child. This is a strong finding. It is replicated extensively in the research. Okpala et al (2001) investigated the relationship between involvement (in terms of hours of volunteered in-school help), school spend (in terms of dollars per child spent on instructional supplies), parental SES and school achievement in one school district in North Carolina. 8 high schools, 12 middle schools and 50 elementary schools in an economically impoverished area of the State were involved. Mathematics test scores were used to measure attainment. Analysis showed that family social class was the only factor associated with attainment. Neither dollars spent nor, less yet, parental hours spent helping in the school, were related to pupil achievement. Similar results were found by Zellman and Waterman (1998) in a study of 193 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade children. An important attribute of this study was that it contained, amongst other data collection techniques, a direct observation component so that parental involvement was indexed not only by various reports and ratings but by observations made by independent researchers. Amongst many findings (which will be reported later) it was evident that in-school manifestations of parental involvement were not related to pupil achievement. There are many possible reasons for having parents working in schools. It might be very good for the parents. It has the potential to help schools link better with the community. It could contribute to the openness and accountability of the school. These potential benefits have yet to show themselves as making a salient contribution to children's attainment.
- 4.3 In another take on the study of parental involvement, Izzo et al (1999) studied 1205 US children from kindergarten through to grade 3 in a 3 year longitudinal research programme. Teachers rated four forms of involvement; frequency of parent-teacher contact; quality of parent-teacher interaction; participation in educational activities in the home; and participation in school activities. These factors, as well as family background variables were examined to find any relationship they might have with school achievement as indexed by school grades. Consistent with other studies, Izzo et al showed that all forms of parental involvement declined with child's age and that involvement in the home 'predicted the widest range of performance variance'. In another longitudinal study,

Dubois et al (1994) showed that family support and the quality of parent-child relationships significantly predicted school adjustment in a sample of 159 young US adolescents (aged 10 –12) followed in a two year longitudinal study. At-home parental involvement clearly and consistently has significant effects on pupil achievement and adjustment which far outweigh other forms of involvement. Why is ‘at-home’ involvement so significant? How does it work in promoting achievement and adjustment?

- 4.4 The broad answer to this question seems to be that it depends on the age of the child. For younger pupils parenting provides the child with a context in which to acquire school related skills and to develop psychological qualities of motivation and self worth. For older children the specific skills component seems to be less salient and the motivational component assumes increasing importance.
- 4.5 De Garmo et al (1999) found support for the model of parental influence on to educational achievement for young children shown in Fig 5.



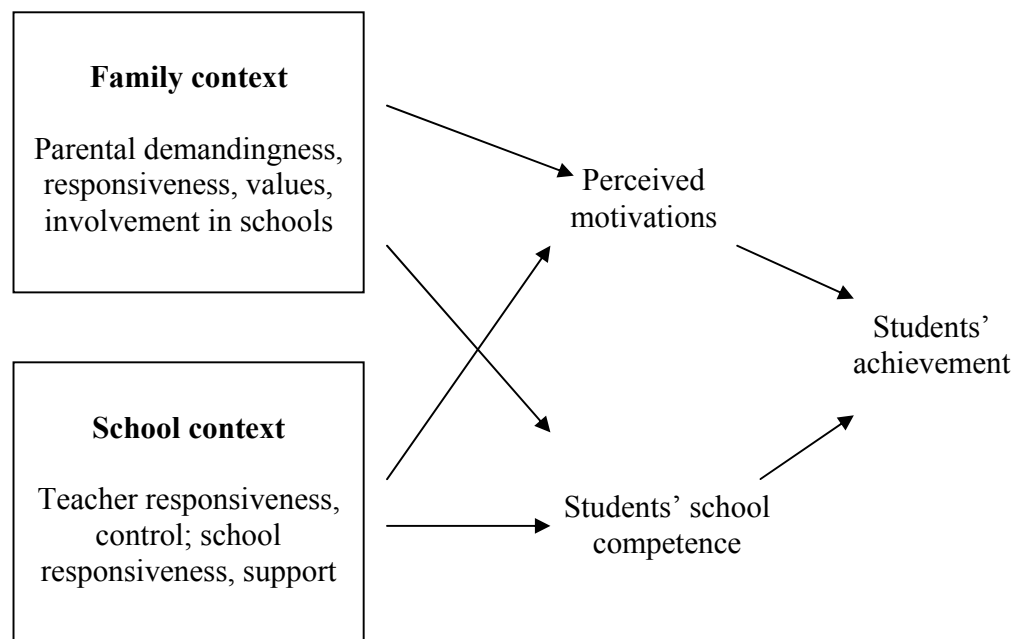
**Fig 5. Parenting practices as mediators of educational achievement (De Garmo et al, 1999, p.1233)**



- 4.5.1 The model starts with the observation that educational achievement is strongly related to socio economic status. So too is parental involvement in education. The study asked the question, how do these influences work? The researchers recruited a sample of 238 divorced or recently separated mothers of boys aged 6 – 9 years. The sample covered the range of SES categories. Data on school performance of the children was obtained from teachers. It comprised school records in reading and mathematics and teachers' ratings of the child's adjustment to school. Family background data were collected from the mothers. In particular, maternal occupation, income and maternal education were ascertained. Aspects of parent-child interaction were obtained partly from self report and partly from observation on a set of interaction tasks designed to explore parental support for cognitive skill building and discipline. Predictably, higher quality parenting (in the terms of this study) were strongly associated with maternal level of education (but not income). The impact of mothers' education was largely worked through the way they provided opportunities for intellectual skill building in the home, i.e. by the cognitive quality of the parent/child interactions in problem solving. This replicates the conclusions drawn by Melhuish et al (2001) regarding the significant impact of the home learning environment.
- 4.6 Zellman and Waterman (1998) observed the interactions between 193 mothers and their children who were in 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade at school. Children's achievements were measured using school grades for maths and reading and using an IQ test. Their adjustment to schooling was assessed using a behaviour rating schedule completed by their teachers. Parenting style was rated following the analysis of a video recording of a parent-child discussion of an issue they both agreed was 'problematic'. Four dimensions were rated; clarity of communication, warmth, negative communication and emotionality. Parental enthusiasm was rated from responses to questions asked in an interview in which the mother was asked to discuss, amongst other things, the rewards of being a parent and self rating of effectiveness as a parent. Parental involvement was self-assessed by parents in two components; what did they do on the school site and what did they do at home to support educational progress? Several findings were consistent with most studies in the field. For example, all aspects of parental involvement were strongly associated with SES. This effect however was strongly influenced by 'parent enthusiasm' (for the general role of parent) and 'positive parental style'. 'Although family background characteristics seem at first glance to be important predictors of parent school involvement ... (they) become far less important when we include more pervasive parenting processes in the equation' (p.376). Parent enthusiasm and parenting style generates, amongst other things, parent involvement to the degree that 'parenting style' was a better predictor of children's reading achievement than was parental involvement. The results suggest that 'how parents interact with their children is more important in predicting child academic outcomes than the extent to which they are involved in school' (p.379).

Furthermore, ‘the essential independence of the parenting processes ... from family background characteristics such as SES and ethnicity suggest that parenting style is not enmeshed in a social context defined by poverty ... or ethnic background ... and suggests that it might be both teachable and changeable’. (p.379). In other words, good, enthusiastic parenting can be found amongst mothers of all social classes and ethnic backgrounds and where it is not found it can probably be taught.

4.7 In examining the mechanism of the impact of parental involvement on school achievement, Marchant et al (2001) studied a sample of Canadian adolescents to test the model shown in Fig 6.



**Fig 6. Proposed relations between family and school context variables and students' achievement. From Marchant et al (2001)**

4.7.1 The closest determinants of student achievement are assumed here to be (a) their competence and (b) their perceptions of various school and family motivational forces. These forces in turn are assumed to be shaped by the processes shown in the boxes in Fig 6. To test the model data were collected for a sample of 230, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. Students rated their families and schools on questionnaires designed to assess the variables in the model. Students also rated their academic competencies and performances (i.e. achievement), these ratings being validated through their class teachers. Various analyses were used to examine the relations between the factors shown in the diagram.

- 4.7.2 Family and school factors alone did not predict any variance in achievement not accounted for by the factors of perceived motivation and competence. These in turn were shaped to a significant degree by parental values as perceived by the students. Parental values were thus shown to be a major factor influencing their child's achievement in school.
- 4.8 The significance of parental values as perceived by students as a mechanism for both manifesting and explaining the impact of parental involvement has been validated in a number of studies. Examples include Fan (2001) who established the significant impact of parental aspirations on the general academic achievement of US adolescents; Ma (2001) who showed a strong impact of parental expectation on achievement in advanced mathematics; Carr and Hussey (1999) who showed that 'parents were the most influential social agents on children's task orientations ..., intrinsic motivation and physical competence' in a study of English adolescents' competence at and commitment to physical education; Lynch (2002) who showed that mothers' beliefs in their ability to help their children (age range 8 – 9 years) learn to read had a positive effect on their children's self beliefs as a learner-reader; and Garg et al (2002) who showed that the impact of family factors had their influence on shaping students' educational aspirations through their impact on extracurricular reading, attitudes towards school and homework and students' perceptions of their parents' educational aspirations. Garg et al considered this to be an important part of the students' 'educational self-schema' and showed that 'the parental involvement factor was found to be of greater importance (than SES) as a predictor of adolescent educational self schema'. The schema as such was a powerful predictor of achievement.
- 4.9 How does parental involvement in the home compare with parental involvement in the school? It is broadly held that parental involvement in schooling might have both a 'private' and a 'public' benefit. The direct beneficiary of parental involvement might be the parent's own child. This benefit might flow from the parent's involvement focussing their child on school work or through focussing the teacher on their child. In addition to whatever the parent gets out of school involvement (pleasure, self-fulfilment and so on) this would be a 'private' benefit directly accruing to the participating parents and their children. But it might also be the case that there are broader more distributed, i.e. 'public', effects. Given parental investment in the classroom activities, school activities and functions, and in governance and advice, it could be the case that all the children in the school benefit. Parental involvement at this level could properly be thought of as a 'school input'.
- 4.10 The evidence in support of the public effect of parental involvement is, at best, unpromising. It has already been shown that whilst the effects of involvement manifest in the home can be significant, parental involvement manifest in school is much less strongly associated with private let alone

public benefit. Rigorous studies attempting to isolate the public benefit effect are few in number and open to the charge that they do not take into account family social class effects. Nechyba et al (1999) have recently reviewed the available research in the field and the argument here draws heavily on their work. First, Nechyba et al re-iterate how strongly parental involvement is correlated with SES. SES also strongly influences pupils' school achievement. This emphasises the necessity of factoring out SES as a background variable if the effects of parental involvement as such are to be understood. Nechyba et al identified 10 studies which can be brought to bear on the question of the public benefits of parental involvement between schools in contrast to the private benefits within schools. It is concluded that, 'the results indicate a large private component to parental involvement in schools ... that is, the effects of each parent's involvement mainly accrue to their own children, rather than those of others. Individual benefits for children might even come out a cost to others in the same classroom; for instance, one parent's pressure may encourage a teacher to devote additional time to one child and less to others. From a policy perspective, this provides good reason for caution. Policies that encourage involvement of some parents (but inevitably fall short of reaching every parent) might have unintended distributional consequence within the classroom or school.' Nechyba et al, 1999. p.42.

- 4.11 To **summarise** this section on research on the processes of parental involvement it can be said that the impact of parental involvement arises from parental values and educational aspirations and that these are exhibited continuously through parental enthusiasm and positive parenting style. These in turn are perceived by the student and, at best, internalised by them. This has its impact on the student's self perception as a learner and on their motivation, self esteem and educational aspirations. By this route parental involvement frames how students perceive education and school work and bolsters their motivation to succeed. For younger children, this motivational and values mechanism is supplemented by parental promotion of skills acquisition (e.g. in respect of early literacy).
- 4.11.1 Parental behaviours which manifest parental involvement change across the age range. With younger children, direct help with school relevant skills is appropriate and foundational. With older students, activities which promote independence and autonomy more generally become more relevant. This tentative outline model explains why parental involvement in the home is significantly more effective than parental involvement in the school. The former is more enduring, pervasive and direct. The latter is less so. It should perhaps be said that whilst research shows that parental involvement in the school has little if any impact on pupil achievement it is not without significance. The relationship between parental involvement (of any kind) and pupil achievement is probably not linear. A little parental involvement in school might go a very long way as a conduit of information (about curriculum, courses, school rules, assessments for example) through which teachers and parents alike can

work to support the child. The effect of this basic level of in-school parental involvement might be as an essential lubricant for at-home involvement. There may, of course, be other reasons for parents working in schools which have more to do with the needs of schools or parents and which are not expected to have an impact on pupils individually. As such they are beyond the remit of this review.

## Chapter 5

### Ethnicity, parental involvement and pupil achievement

- 5.1 *In this chapter the research on ethnic differences in the nature and impact of parental involvement is reviewed. It shows that whilst there are important differences between ethnic minority parents in how they express their support and involvement, the basic mechanism and the scale of impact is constant across all ethnic groups studied.*
- 5.2 There are pronounced differences in levels of average attainment between different ethnic groups. This observation has attracted a great deal of research and analysis. What are the origins of this difference? The particular point of interest here is the question of whether parental involvement (in all or any of its forms) is implicated. Systematic research on this focal issue is almost entirely American in origin. As with the general research on parental involvement, much, if not most, of the research on this question is technically flawed. There has been a characteristic failure to take account of the many influences on achievement. Parental involvement is strongly related to socio-economic status (especially as measured by maternal education). Ethnicity is also strongly correlated with SES. For example, Phillips et al (1998) studied the impact of a range of factors (including parenting practices) on the differences in test scores between Black Americans and White Americans. The researchers drew their data from the Children of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (CNLSY). This sample has its origins in an earlier sample (the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, NLSY) which over sampled low income and minority youth. Even within this biased sampling there were very large differences in average family income between Blacks and Whites, 'Using average family income we find the typical Black child ... is at the 16<sup>th</sup> percentile of the White income distribution' (Phillips et al, p. 115). If, as Sacker et al (2002) showed in the UK, income is associated with material deprivation which in turn influences the effect of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment, any attempt to understand ethnic differences in the involvement/achievement link must first take into account the influence of socio-economic status. Few studies meet this criterion.
- 5.3 This failure does not render such studies entirely useless but it limits their relevance to providing hints only at the nature and scale of effects. Fan and Chen (2001), for example have recently published a commentary on more than 2,000 reports of research exploring the link between parental involvement and pupil achievement and adjustment. Only 25 of the research reports gathered met the authors' criterion for their analysis, that of reporting statistical links between an index of parental involvement and an index of pupil achievement. Fan and Chen identified 92 such correlations ranging from 0 to 0.9. They then calculated the percentage of

variation in achievement which could be attributed to differences in parental involvement. They found that different types of involvement and different areas of achievement (e.g. mathematics/reading etc) each had eight times the impact of ethnicity. Ethnicity as such had a very small effect on achievement.

- 5.4 Amongst the forms of parental involvement, that with the strongest relationship with achievement was ‘parents aspiration and expectation’. This is in line with studies reported earlier. The practical implications, according to Fan and Chen are that the findings about the effects of parental involvement on achievement apply equally to all ethnic groups. The limit is that the studies reviewed did not consistently control for SES. As noted above, ethnicity, SES and pupil achievement are complexly interrelated. In consequence, it is likely that meta analysis reflects, to some degree, the relationship between SES and students’ academic achievement.
- 5.5 Studies which have factored out SES report findings which are, at first sight, contradictory. Fan (2001) researched the impact of parental involvement on scores on a battery of achievement tests taken by the students in the NELS cohorts, 1988, 1990 and 1992. He found comparable levels of parental involvement with comparable effects on attainment across different ethnic groups. In contrast, using the same data source McNeal (1999, 2001) found parental involvement had significant impact on attainment only for white, middle-class youngsters in two parent families. A key difference between these studies is that McNeal focussed on science attainment whilst Fan studied ‘general attainment’, and, as the Fan and Chen (2001) meta analysis showed, the academic subject makes a difference to the degree of impact of parental involvement. Parental involvement has markedly different impacts on different areas of the curriculum.
- 5.6 With younger children (aged 8 – 13 years), Zellman and Waterman (1998) observed differences in the forms of parental involvement across ethnic groups but the impact of these on student achievement was mediated by parenting style. Once this was factored out, no ethnically based, achievement-related differences were evident. In similar vein, Smith and Hausafus (1998) studied the impact of parental involvement and ethnicity on science and maths achievement using an intervention study. A sample of 8<sup>th</sup> grade (14 year olds) ‘at risk, minority’ students and their families were invited to participate in courses intended to enhance achievement through working with families. Across all groups, students did better if their parents helped them to see the importance of taking advanced science and maths courses and took them to exhibitions, science fairs and the like. No ethnic differences were reported.
- 5.7 Other approaches to exploring the relationship between ethnicity, parental involvement and student achievement have involved both ‘within-group’

and 'between-group' studies. Keith and Lichtman (1994) focussed on within-group differences in a sample of 1200 Mexican-American students drawn from the NELS (88) cohort. A range of types of parental involvement were assessed (involvement in home-based activities, home structure (rules about, for example, watching TV), and involvement at school (talking with teachers for example). It was hypothesised that the parents' language competence and whether they were born in Mexico or the US would influence the content and form of parental involvement. These hypotheses were not supported. In common with the now familiar trend of results, parental involvement had a moderate, positive effect on student achievement. Unpredicted, the degree of involvement and the scale of its impact were not related to parental proficiency with English.

5.8 Yan (1999) reported a between-group study of parental involvement comparing three samples drawn from the NELS (88) cohort, the groups comprised (a) successful Afro-American students, (b) successful Euro-American students and (c) unsuccessful Afro-American students. Once the background variable of social class was factored out, parental involvement became a significant discriminating factor between groups. Successful Afro-Americans were found to have levels of parental involvement which were equal to or higher than those of successful Euro-Americans and significantly higher than those of unsuccessful Afro-American students. Bogenschneider (1999) reported results consistent with the 'pan-ethnic' effects of parental involvement. Drawing relationships between involvement and achievement in a sample of 10,000 high school students, she concluded that parental involvement was a force on achievement as a, '... process with considerable validity across the contexts of the child's and parents' gender, parents' education, family structure and ethnicity .... Parents who are more involved in their adolescents' schooling, regardless of parents' gender or educational level, have offspring who do better in school, irrespective of the child's gender, ethnicity or family structure' (p.729). Parental involvement works for everyone.

5.9 This ubiquitous pattern is, at first sight, challenged by Mau (1997). In this study the processes of involvement and their impact on student achievement were compared across samples of Asian Americans (Asian origin students whose first language was English); Asian Immigrants (with English not as their first language) and White Americans. The samples were drawn from the NELS (88) cohort. Achievement was indexed using a battery of attainment tests in maths and reading. Parental involvement was indexed using student reports. In addition, the amount of time spent on homework was appraised as was the amount of time spent on various out-of-school activities such as extra-curricular reading and watching T.V. Several important findings were reported. First, the American Asians (AA) achieved test scores significantly better than the Asian Immigrants (AI) who in turn outperformed White Americans (W). Second, White



Americans reported significantly more academic help and more in-school participation than did Asian students.

- 5.9.1 Family social class was then factored out prior to an examination of the effect of parental involvement alone on achievement. For supportive involvement the relationship with achievement was positive for White Americans but negative for Asian Americans. For the AI group the relationship was not significantly different from zero. For parental involvement manifest in school, again, the relationship was negative for the Asian American sample.
- 5.9.2 The study revealed a complex relationship between achievement and parental involvement across the groups. Achievement amongst Asian students was negatively associated with both forms of parental involvement (support at home and participation in school). For these students the more involved were the parents the less the students achieved. White students were more influenced than Asians by perceived parental expectation. Asian groups evinced a stronger relationship than the White group between homework and achievement. Mau contends that it is a significant element of Asian culture to attribute success to personal effort. He interprets these results as consistent with this ethic and notes that parental involvement of various kinds stands to weaken the impact of self effort – hence the negative effects.
- 5.9.3 The salutary lesson, perhaps, from this study, is that parents must not be seen as having a cultural blank slate. All studies report that parents are keen for their youngsters to ‘do well’. If parental support is offered it is offered in good faith according to parental beliefs. The practical point here is that, if Mau’s finding proved substantive, it would be disastrous to engage the parents of highly successful pupils in involvement activities counterproductive in their culture.
- 5.10 In **summary**, the general impact of parental involvement seems to work in support of pupil attainment across all ethnic groups so far studied. Parental involvement, especially in the form of parental values and aspirations modelled in the home, is a major force shaping pupils’ achievement and adjustment. The precise details of how values are conceived and expressed are located in the ethnic culture of the family.

## Chapter 6

### Differences between parents in levels of involvement.

- 6.1 *In this chapter research is reported which attempts to describe and explain the large differences between parents in their level of involvement in their children's education. Levels of involvement are positively related to social class and to maternal levels of education. Parental involvement decreases as the child gets older. Single parent status and problems with maternal psycho-social health (especially depression) have a negative impact on involvement. Material poverty also has a powerful negative impact.*
- 6.1.2 *It is shown that there are large differences between parents in the degree to which they see a role for themselves in their child's education and in the degree to which they feel confident in being able to help. It is demonstrated that many parents feel put off from involvement by the way some teachers treat them. Finally, the children themselves are shown to have a significant influence on the degree to which their parents get involved.*
- 6.1.3 *The chapter concludes with a research based model of parental involvement showing the key factors involved in facilitating or inhibiting parental involvement, and indicating how these factors might be influenced by educational processes.*
- 6.2 Williams et al (2002) surveyed parents of children aged 5 – 16 attending schools in England to establish their degree of involvement in their children's education. A telephone survey was used to contact 2019 households in order to conduct interviews to establish parental levels of practical help in schools, their relationship with their child's teacher(s) and parents' involvement with homework. 29% of parents felt very involved – the more so in primary than in secondary schools. Mothers felt more involved than fathers. 35% strongly agreed that they wanted to be more involved whilst around three quarters of parents wanted to be at least somewhat more involved. 94% found school 'welcoming' and 84% reported that the school was willing to involve them. Despite this level of satisfaction, 16% felt they might be seen as trouble makers if they talked too much.
- 6.2.1 Parents describing themselves as 'very involved' reported providing more practical help in school than other parents and they were the keenest to be yet more involved. 21% of parents claimed to have helped in class at some point and 9% claimed to do so at every opportunity.

- 6.2.2 In regard to homework, parents were much more involved in the early years. 71% with year 1 children claimed to help with every piece of homework. This dropped to 5% by year 11. As their children got older, parents lost confidence in their ability to help.
- 6.2.3 58% of parents claimed to speak regularly with their child's teacher, in the main about progress but not infrequently about behaviour (27%).
- 6.2.4 Whilst many parents wanted to increase their involvement, to include, for example, supporting extra-curricular initiatives, they felt that the main barriers to further involvement were the limitations on their own time.
- 6.2.5 In the present context the interesting findings in the survey are (a) there is a high absolute level of parental involvement and a desire for more (b) there are considerable differences between parents in levels of involvement. An important issue not reported on is the level of parental support for education and learning outside of schooling matters. This was, interestingly, not part of the brief of the survey and yet, as has been shown extensively above, it is this form of parental involvement which is most strongly related to achievement.
- 6.3 Why do some parents get involved more than others? As has been noted above, a major factor mediating parental involvement is parental socio-economic status whether indexed by occupational class or parental (especially maternal) level of education. SES mediates both parental involvement and pupil achievement. Sacker et al (2002) showed that SES had its impact in part negatively through material deprivation and in part positively through parental involvement and aspiration.
- 6.4 Nechyba et al (1999) summarised three possible mechanisms through which social class might operate. One suggestion is that there is a 'culture of poverty' in which working class families place less value on education than middle class parents and hence are less disposed to participate. A second proposed mechanism is that working class families have less 'social capital' in terms of social networks and skills. They do not know the 'right sort of people'. In consequence, regardless of disposition, working class parents either are, or feel they are, less well equipped to negotiate and deliver on the demands of schooling. The third proposal implicates institutional barriers. Schools are, in this view, taken to be middle class institutions with their own values. Schools accept involvement only on their own terms which are non-negotiable. Those parents not conforming to these values are quickly 'put in their place'. These theories are virtually impossible to test. Each is entirely consistent with all the available data and each has a common limitation. The common limitation is that none of these explanations can account for why many working class parents are fully involved and why many middle class parents are not involved. Since the within class differences in parental

involvement are bigger than the between class differences this is a fatal flaw in the utility of these theories.

- 6.5 This being said, there is an extensive empirical literature on parental experience of school involvement illustrating starkly the sorts of barriers met by working class parents in their exchanges with teachers, schools and school administrations (Reay, 1996) , Crozier, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001; Tett, 2001; Vincent, 2001; Vincent and Martin, 2000).
- 6.6 Williams et al (2002) reported that 16% of parents were wary of overstepping some unwritten mark in their relations with teachers. Parents' evenings are a particularly well documented site for creating parental frustration and confusion (Power and Clark, 2000; Cullingford and Morrison, 1999). In the latter study, 'there was not so much marked antipathy (between parents and teachers) as mutual fear' (p.259). Crozier (1999) interviewed in depth a sample of parents (71% working class) on the experience of home-school relations and found (a) many working class parents have perceptions of teachers as superior and distant (b) these perceptions are reinforced by the teachers' stance (c) teachers engage with parents only on their own terms (d) this does not encourage parents to be proactive in partnership, rather it encourages parental fatalism in regard to their children's schooling.
- 6.7 The barriers evident in interpersonal exchanges are relatively subtle compared to those created by the material circumstances experienced by some parents. Britt (1998) studied the differential parental involvement in a US home based pre-school education programme. He distinguished between 'low' and 'high' risk families. The latter had a low socio-economic status compounded by problems associated with drugs, alcohol, overcrowding and debt. He found that 'low risk families would be highly involved no matter what level of additional family support was provided ... high risk families, on the other hand, would be highly involved only if the programmers were able to provide additional support for the problems of living with which they were coping' (p.179).
- 6.8 The above reports are entirely case study based and offer largely anecdotal evidence. Nevertheless they provide rich, coherent and cogent illustrations of the details of some parent-teacher exchanges which stand to inform explanations of different levels of parent involvement.
- 6.9 Whilst there is a broadly held desire amongst parents for more involvement in schooling there are clearly material (time and money) and psychological barriers which operate differentially (and discriminatingly) across the social classes and individual differences amongst parents that operate within social classes.
- 6.10 In exploring these differences, Kohl et al (2000) reported a study of family factors which potentially put parental involvement at risk. They studied

the effect of parental education level, maternal depression and single parent status on general involvement. It was argued that parent's views of their role as a teacher and their degree of comfort in communicating with teachers might in part be a reflection on their own education experience. A poor or limited personal education might leave the parent lacking in vision or confidence or competence in supporting their own child. Single parent status might place limits, especially in respect of time available, to support the child educationally. Maternal depression was explored as a risk factor because depression is associated with a general lack of motivation, energy and confidence and depressed people elicit negative responses from others (Kohl et al, p. 503). In their exploration of the impact on these factors on involvement, Kohl et al developed a conception which attempted to go beyond the common 'quantity' models reported heretofore and to index the quality of the involvement. In consequence they assessed the degree of parent-teacher contact, the extent of parental involvement in school, the quality of the parent-teacher relationship, teacher's perception of the parent, the extent of parental involvement at home and the parent's endorsement of the school.

- 6.10.1 The participants in the study were parents, teachers and children taking part in a longitudinal investigation of the development and prevention of conduct disorders in young people. Approximately 350 children were in the sample. Family and social data were collected through parent interviews. Parental involvement was rated by teachers and parents separately using a purpose designed instrument. Relationships between the 3 risk factors and the 6 forms of parental involvement were then explored. The different risk factors interacted differently with the various forms of involvement. Maternal depression was negatively related to every form of parental involvement except direct parent-teacher contact. It seems, 'A depressed mother may be able to master the energy to contact her child's teacher if there is a problem (but) may lack the energy to be further involved' (p.518).
- 6.10.2 Parental education was positively related to parent-teacher contact. The more educated the parent, the greater was their involvement in their child's education. A lack of extended personal educational experience has, argues Kohl et al, rendered some parents lacking in relevant skills or appropriate conception of 'parents as co-educator'.
- 6.10.3 Single parent status was negatively related to parental involvement at school, the teacher's perception of the parent and the quality of the parent-teacher relationship. Notably, single parents seem to focus their energies in the home. Given the run of research results this is where these parents can expect their biggest return on effort but, not present in school, they run the risk of teachers' negative perceptions.
- 6.11 Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Hoover-Dempsey et al (2001) took a different approach to explaining why some parents get involved in

their child's education more than others. They reviewed psychological theory and related educational research on role construction. Theory in this field attempts to explain how and why we conduct ourselves in various facets (roles) in our lives (e.g. as 'parent', as 'employee'). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler suggest that parents are likely to get involved in their child's education to the extent that they see it as part of their role or 'job' as it were. In regard to parents in England, Williams et al (2002) found that 2% of parents felt the responsibility for education belonged wholly to the school whilst 58% believed that they had at least equal responsibility. Presumably the remaining 40% were distributed somewhere between these values. The attribution of responsibility for education is a key factor in shaping parents' views about what they feel is important or necessary or even permissible for them to do. Role definitions are complexly shaped by family and cultural experiences and are subject to potential internal conflict (is the parent a housekeeper/breadwinner/nurse/teacher for example)? Ethnic differences in role definitions in regard to school progress were reported earlier. Sub-cultural differences (in terms of socio-economic class) are also evident (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997, p. 13).

- 6.11.1 Parental role construction in regard to their child's education is not the only determinant of their involvement. Their 'sense of personal efficacy' is also implicated. This refers to the degree to which one feels able to make a difference. This in turn depends on a number of related beliefs, attitudes and skills. If it is believed that achievement is a matter of luck or innate ability there would seem little sense in expending effort in promoting it. Again, if it were felt that achievement were determined by 'who you know' rather than 'what you do', efforts to promote it would be worthwhile only to the degree that one's child could be put in the way of useful relationships. Lacking such connections but holding such beliefs, parents would hardly bother to be involved. Beliefs about achievement, ability, luck, intelligence and social interaction are all implicated in one's sense of efficacy. This foundation of beliefs interacts with a sense of personal competence. It could be that parents believe that coaching is a crucial teaching process but feel wholly incompetent to engage in this practice. If they have the resources they might buy coaching. If not, their involvement is materially truncated at least in this respect. Parental involvement, argue Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, varies to the degree that such beliefs and competences are distributed as individual differences amongst parents. Those who have 'can do' attitudes and beliefs that personal efforts create abilities will, at least potentially, be at the forefront in parental involvement. Those parents who hold contrary beliefs might be expected to be fatalistic about their child's educational progress.
- 6.11.2 An appropriate role construct and a strong sense of personal efficacy will, of course, come to nothing if the opportunity to be involved is absent. The realisation of a willingness to be involved depends on the invitations, demands and opportunities generated by the school and by the child.

Schools can be more or less proactive in this respect. The most recent English survey (Williams et al) shows schools evincing a high degree of perceived openness and warmth. Most parents see the major limits to further involvement to arise from their own limitations, especially in respect of time available. Lone parents feel particularly restricted in this way (Anning, 2000; Standing, 1999).

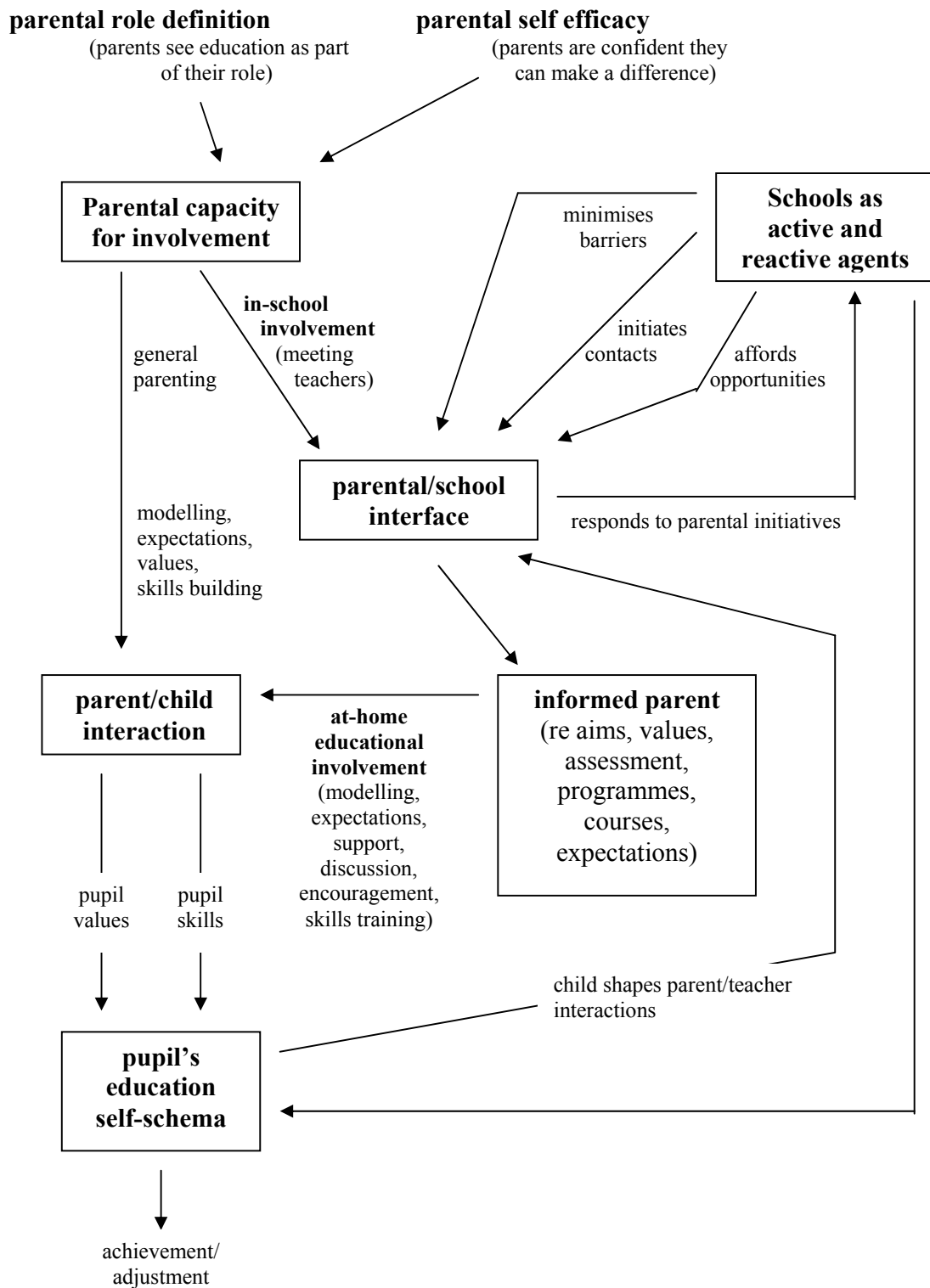
- 6.12 But parental time limits are not the whole story. Crozier (op cit), Reay (op cit) and Vincent (op cit) have shown that, notwithstanding the espoused commitment to parental involvement and parent-teacher partnership, there are communication barriers starkly experienced by some parents – and especially those from the working class. This is more evident in secondary schools than primary schools, a finding replicated in other countries. Harry (1992) for example reported that many low SES parents in the US found home-school contacts empty, contrived, insubstantial and awkward.
- 6.13 Schools and their teachers are not the only sources with a potential to nurture or inhibit fruitful connections between parents and teachers. Children could well play a dynamic role in this process as they are known to do in all other aspects of their experience and development. Interestingly, the dynamic role of pupils in mediating home-school relations has not been the subject of much research. Recent studies, however, tell a significant story. Deslandes and Cloutier (2002) reported the views of a sample (n = 872) of Canadian students (aged 14/15 years), of parental involvement in schooling. The students attended high schools in French-speaking Quebec and were involved in a longitudinal study of parent-adolescent interactions in relation to school achievement and psychosocial maturity. Background measures of family structure, parental educational levels, gender and students' reports of their own level of autonomy were taken. The students then completed a 14 item questionnaire assessing whether or not they would agree to their parents' involvement in school in various ways. Example items include, 'would you take home notices or newsletters?'; 'Would you ask your parent to help you with school work/listen to you read something you wrote?'; 'Would you discuss next year's courses?'; 'Would you invite your parents to a school outing?'. The students were generally positive about most activities (girls more so than boys). 60% would have their parent listen to them read; 86% would invite parental assistance with ideas for a project; 71% would discuss T.V.; and 66% would work with parents to improve grades. There were, however, two exceptions to this pattern. 67% would not invite parents to visit their class and 65% would not have parents come on a class trip. The responses were not correlated with either levels of parental education or family structure. The results 'suggest that adolescents view parental involvement in school as a private matter that should not be mixed with peers or teachers', (Deslandes and Cloutier, 2002, p.226).

- 6.14 Edwards and Alldred (2000) talked to 70 children in years 6 and 9 (i.e. 10 and 14 year olds) across a broad range of backgrounds in three contrasting locations including an inner-city area and a suburb. The discussions covered a wide range of pupils' perceptions and experiences in regard to curriculum subjects and school and home-based activities. The pupils were asked, for example, about the school day, doing homework, parents helping in the classroom, school outings, talking to teachers, parents evenings, school and option choices, family outings and family based educational possessions and activities.
- 6.14.1 On the basis of the children's comments, Edwards and Alldred constructed a typology of parental involvement in interaction with the child as active agent. Children could be seen as active or passive in mediating either parent involvement or parent uninvolvement. The categories were by no means hard and fast. In regard to the child as active in parental involvement, they might, for example, spontaneously tell the parent about the school day or invite parental assistance with school work. The motives amongst the children seemed less to do with advancing their achievement than to do with the pleasure of the parents' company and intimacy. This form of activity mainly took place in the home. There were few examples of children actively ensuring parents' involvement in the school setting. In regard to children being passive with respect to parental involvement, this took the form of 'going along with' parental activity. They 'did not mind' parents offering to help or buying them books or talking informally to teachers. They responded when asked about the school day. The child's active/passive dimension seemed to contain many shades. For example, children would offer parents news about the school day because they knew their parents expected to be kept in the picture – a 'passive' form of 'active' engagement done more for the parents' sake than their own direct interest.
- 6.14.2 Children were just as active in discouraging, evading and obstructing their parents' involvement, as they were in its promotion. Pupils saw themselves as autonomous and with a right to some privacy. They saw it as their own responsibility to do their homework for example. They did not want or need parental involvement. Further, on occasions pupils actively evaded or blocked home-school connections by dumping notes or newsletters or censuring discussions of 'bad days at school'. This activity did not imply alienation between pupil and parent. It was often done to save parental stress. Notices about expensive school trips, for example, might be 'lost' to save the parent stress or guilt about something they could not afford. Equally, pupils say they find the school day boring and do not want to inflict accounts of it on their parents.
- 6.14.3 A passive stance on parental uninvolvement was often evident as a recognition of parental restriction of time or of legitimate parental taste. Rarely did children see their parents as wilfully uninvolved: they were seen rather, as 'too busy' or 'not the type'.



- 6.14.4 Children adopting a passive stance to parental uninvolvement felt that responsibility lay largely with the parents themselves to get involved according to their tastes or resources.
- 6.14.5 There were apparently, strong gender differences amongst the children with girls much more actively in support of parental involvement and that in their home especially. There was also an age effect with secondary school children less comfortable with parental involvement – especially in school.
- 6.14.6 There were evident social class differences too. Middle class children were more inclined to ‘go along with the idea of parental involvement’ than those from the working class who were either more likely to initiate involvement (mainly girls) or block it (mainly boys). In the latter cases there seemed to be a desire to resist institutional incursions into family life. ‘... working-class children ... seemed to be more active in taking and/or being given more control over their parents’ involvement in their education. (Edwards and Alldred, 2000, p.450).
- 6.15 The studies of Deslandes and Cloutier (2002) and Edwards and Alldred (2000) analysed what children say they do (or prefer). They are not studies of actual action. They do however open a window on how the child might play a salient role between parents and schools. When the question, ‘why do parents differ in their degree of involvement in their children’s schooling?’ is raised, at least part of the answers must refer to the child’s role. This in turn, it seems, is influenced by the child’s age, gender, and personal tastes.
- 6.16 Parents engage differentially in their child’s schooling then for a variety of reasons. Some factors are strongly associated with SES and its far reaching ramifications. Others are a result of the parent’s construction of their role and their perceptions of self efficacy whilst yet others are influenced by the opportunities and barriers afforded by school teachers. Last, but by no means least, children play a dynamic role in mediating between parents and schools. All these factors interact with each other.
- 6.17 On the basis of the research cited so far in this report, the following model of effective parental involvement has been drawn (Figure 7). The model acts as a summary of the research on naturally occurring parental involvement.
- 6.17.1 The model attempts to show the factors in parental involvement in schooling that meet two criteria. First, these factors are known to make a positive difference to school outcomes. Second, they are, in principle at least, modifiable by educational process, i.e. by the process of learning and teaching.

- 6.17.2 Different parents evince difference capacities for parental involvement in the education of their children. Capacity here refers to an amalgam of skills, values, motivations and opportunities. Some aspects of capacity are shaped by personal attributes whilst others are shaped by social structures (SES for example). Of course, there are interactions between these. Structural factors are not show, not because they are not important but because they are not modifiable by educational processes in the school tenure of individual pupils (say 10/12 years).
- 6.17.3 Parents will be involved to the degree that they see that supporting and enhancing their child's school achievement is part of their 'job' as a parent. Likewise, parents will get involved to the degree that they feel they have the capacity to make a difference. People can learn new roles and skills. The desire and capacity to be involved will be enhanced or limited to some degree by the barriers or opportunities afforded by schools and by individual teachers. The parent/teacher interface is a critical meeting ground for mutual support and understanding or for mutual distrust.
- 6.17.4 A basic level of teacher-parent interaction is necessary to afford the transfer of information and to effect mutual support and shared values. Information about programmes, courses, expectations, assessment processes and the like is crucial to the parents' role. Information about the child is crucial to the teacher's role. Home/school communication is an important conduit but it soon reaches a sufficiency level. Supportive interaction skills can be learned.
- 6.17.5 Parental involvement in classrooms, trips, school governance and the like seem to confer little advantage (public or private) in terms of pupil achievement and/or adjustment. In-school parental involvement is therefore not depicted in this model. This is not to dismiss this sort of activity. Parental involvement in governance is crucial to the democratic process whilst parental involvement in trips, functions and the like surely help enhance pupils' safety. There is simply no evidence that it influences pupils in the terms of this review.
- 6.17.6 Teacher/parent interactions are shaped and influenced by pupils who see themselves as playing a significant mediating role here. This role is rarely recognised. It could be enhanced.



**Fig 7 A research based model of effective parental involvement in schooling**

- 6.17.7 The key context for parental impact on school outputs is in the home. Depending on the age or developmental level of the child parents can and do provide for the acquisition of skills (e.g. the foundations of literacy and numeracy through playing word and number games). This skills component might endure for children with special needs. Throughout the age range however, parental involvement seems to have its major impact on children through the modelling of values and expectations, through encouragement and through interest in and respect for the child-as-learner. It seems that pupils internalise aspects of parental values and expectations as they form an image of themselves as a learner – their so-called ‘educational self schema’. These influences are played out through discussions about and beyond schooling. All aspects of these exchanges can be enhanced through learning.
- 6.17.8 In the last analysis, it is the pupil who must do the learning and achieving. Across the age range, support for schooling must be support for independent learning. Idealised parental/child exchanges change under mutually interacting influence as the child gets older.
- 6.18 Parental involvement associated with pupil progress has its major effect in the home. Other forces, such as information from schools, might be an essential lubricant. But the key processes of positive and respectful parenting can at least in principle be learned. The question is, can they be learned in practice? The research drawn on so far has examined spontaneous levels of parental involvement as these vary under common circumstances. Can common circumstances be altered to enhance levels of parental involvement in ways which have an impact on pupils’ achievement and adjustment?

## Chapter 7

### Enhancing parental involvement in practice: focus on parent/school links

- 7.1 *Attempts to promote parental participation in education may usefully be organised into three categories. First, there are those activities which focus on the immediate connectivity between schools and parents. Secondly, there are activities which cast the issue of involvement more broadly into family and community education programmes. Thirdly, there are parent training programmes aimed at promoting parental psycho-social health and/or relationship skills which are known to be foundational to parental involvement. There are important distinctions between these approaches. At the same time there are significant connections and overlaps. Some programmes fall across all these categories. They are distinguished here for the sake of ease of exposition. In this section of the present report the focus is on activities of the first type – programmes which focus on the immediate connectivity of schools and parents. A subsequent section will examine family and community education and parent training programmes.*
- 7.1.1 *In this chapter it is shown that there is a huge level of activity in promoting school-home links. Work from Canada, the USA and the UK is described. There is extensive professional commitment to and investment in this work. Yet much of it is evaluated in ways which are technically so weak that it is impossible to draw objective judgements as to the quality of the provision and its impact. These subjective evaluations nonetheless indicate a coherent and consistent picture. Provision is rated very highly by all concerned and teachers and parents generally agree that the attempts to enhance parental involvement described here have been rich fruit in terms of pupils' behaviour and adjustment.*
- 7.1.2 *The chapter concludes with a set of principles to be followed if these subjective judgements are to be put on a better foundation of evidence and if the activity in the field is to be in a position to capitalise on the potential for parental involvement more fully.*
- 7.2 Attempts to enhance parental involvement in education occupy governments, administrators, educators and parents' organisations across North America, Australasia, continental Europe, Scandinavia and the UK. It is anticipated that parents should play a role not only in the promotion of their own children's achievements but more broadly in school improvement and the democratisation of school governance. The European commission, for example, holds that the degree of parental participation is a significant indicator of the quality of schooling which might take place through:

- Statutory advisory and decision making bodies
- Evaluation of their schools
- Voluntary associations
- Voluntary involvement in after school activities
- Voluntary involvement in classroom activities
- Communications with the school

7.3 The English Government has promoted parent involvement through a wide range of activities including:

- the enhancement of parent governor roles
- involvement in inspection processes
- provision of annual reports and prospectuses
- the requirement for home/school agreements
- provision of increasing amounts of information about the curriculum, school performance and other matters

7.3.1 The business of enhancing parental participation is widespread, lively and intensely active. In England, every LEA has policies and programmes in the field. It is impossible to document all this material. In any event, such an attempt would be futile since the activity is constantly changing. Up-to-date provisions can be examined through LEA web-sites. At the same time there are large numbers of voluntary bodies, charitable bodies, academic research organisations, major national initiatives and vast numbers of one-school projects operating in pursuit of the objectives of parental involvement. In addition there is an enormous literature, especially of the rhetorical kind consisting of ‘how to do it’ guides. Entering the phrase ‘parents in education’ or its synonyms into any search engine produces an indigestible response. The BBC search facility, for example, locates in excess of 3 million sites for the term ‘parents in education’.

7.3.2 Perhaps the best attempt to organise this field and to keep abreast of developments is the, ‘Parents in Education’ website run by the University of Dundee ([www.dundee.ac.uk/psychology/ParentsinEducation/](http://www.dundee.ac.uk/psychology/ParentsinEducation/)). For those wishing to get a sense of what is going on, at least in the UK and mainland Europe, this site offers the most useful resource in regard to policies, activities and research.

7.3.3 From the point of view of this report, the question is not so much ‘what is going on?’ but ‘what works?’ and ‘what lessons are being learned?’ The evidence base on which answers to the questions can be mounted is at best threadbare.

7.4 McKenna and Willms (1998) published an extensive review of ‘What works in Canada’ in regard to home-school cooperation. The review is data-free in terms of impact on pupils’ achievement and adjustment. The authors were able to report extensive developments in policies in parental

participation at the level of parental involvement in school governance. They also present evidence on the rapid growth of parental engagement at this level. Developments in information technology have increased the capacity of parents and schools to exchange messages with each other. There is an extensive and well documented level of parental voluntary work in schools. The importance of schools helping parents to enhance home learning environments is widely recognised. Unfortunately, ‘evidence of action in this area is sparse’ (McKenna and Willms, 1998, p.30). If evidence of action in the area is sparse, evidence of impact in the terms of the present review is non-existent. The authors recognise that, ‘movement towards greater parental participation has proceeded without strong legislation, and could be described as haphazard ...’ (p.20).

- 7.5 In the United States of America, attempts to enhance parental involvement programmatically have been much more systematic than is evident in Canada. Parental involvement programmes have been featured in federal, state and local education policies (Epstein, 1991). Parent involvement is one of the six targeted areas in the ‘No Child left Behind Act’ of 2001. Schools receiving Federal, Title 1, funding are required to spend part of the money on parent participation programmes.
- 7.6 Reviews of these programmes show that most are not independently evaluated (Henderson, 1987; Lennon et al, 1997). Where conducted, evaluations are extremely flawed in regard to questions of impact on educational outcomes. Where sound evaluations have been conducted there seems to be little evidence that the programmes are effective in improving student achievement or in changing the behaviour of parents, pupils or teachers. White, Taylor and Moss (1992) analysed 172 studies of the impact of parental involvement programmes in U.S. pre-kindergarten and concluded that there was, ‘no convincing evidence that the ways in which parents have been involved in previous early intervention research studies result in more effective outcomes’ (p.91).
- 7.7 More recently, Mattingly et al (2002) reviewed 41 studies that evaluated parental involvement programmes to assess the claim that they made a positive impact on pupil learning. They found, ‘little empirical support for the widespread claim that parental involvement programmes are an effective means of improving student achievement or changing parent, teacher and student behaviour’ (p.549).
- 7.7.1 Mattingly et al hasten to add that this does not mean that the programmes are ineffective. It means that there is little evidence that they are effective. The main problem presenting reviewers in the field is the poor quality of the evaluations. There is a huge level of industry in the field. Mattingly et al found hundreds of reports of parent involvement programmes but only 41 of these reported the outcomes of the interventions. Amongst even these studies there were ‘glaring flaws’ including a failure to report crucial information on processes and participants, lack of comparison groups to

account for maturation effects, a reliance on highly subjective indicators of effectiveness, and a lack of control of the effects of socio-economic status. In the light of their review the authors concluded that, 'there is no substantial evidence to indicate a causal relationship between interventions designed to increase parent involvement and improvements in student learning. This, of course, does not imply that the evaluated programmes were ineffective. Rather, it cautions that the evidence of their success does not justify the claims made about parental involvement.' (p.572).

7.8 Perhaps in the light of such finding in the United States, the need for strategic planning has been seen as essential to the initiation and maintenance of parental involvement especially in regard to disadvantaged or otherwise 'hard to reach' families. Decades of US experience in home-school collaboration have recently been reviewed by Raffaele and Knoff (1999). These authors conclude that successful engagement programmes require both strategic planning and organisational change, '... we must recognise the organisational climate that exists within our schools and the (often covert) messages about involvement that we send ... this is particularly important for parents who have had negative school experiences themselves.' (p.449). Drawing lessons from 'best practice' projects in the US, Raffaele and Knoff claim that work on home-school collaboration should build on a foundation of core beliefs which they see as follows:

1. Collaboration should be pro-active rather than reactive; the engagement of all parents should be worked for
2. Collaboration involves sensitivity to the wide ranging circumstances of all students and families
3. Collaboration recognises and values the contributions parents have to make to the educational process
4. Collaboration must engender parental empowerment; all parents must be given a voice and that voice must be heard.

(Raffaele and Knoff, 1999, p.452)

7.8.1 Once a school has decided on a home-school collaboration programme, experience from successful programmes suggests that strategic planning, running for at least three years, is essential. The plan should conform to the general principles of management paying heed to role clarification, resource allocation, target setting, training, monitoring, evaluation and review. Specifically with respect to seeking to build collaboration with disadvantaged families, 4 preliminary phases of sequenced action were suggested as follows:

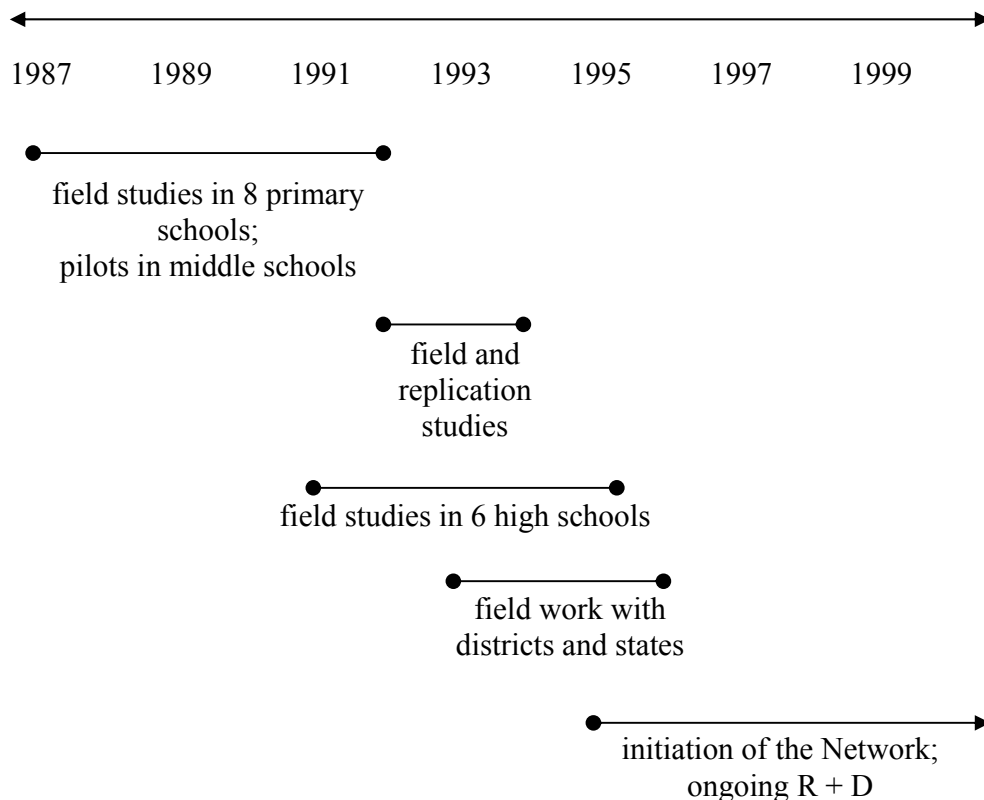


1. an external scan and analysis must be conducted to analyse the community's human and material resources and existing links, together with the identification of current and possible local demographic trends;
2. an analysis of all stakeholders' perceptions and expectations must be completed; in this way, mutual priorities can be established;
3. an internal organisational (i.e. school) scan must then be conducted to identify resources and necessary organisational adjustments.
4. a public awareness process must be enacted to help parents and teachers understand the need for the strategic plan.

7.8.2 In important respects this preliminary work is a comprehensive and mutual needs assessment. It is presumed to maximise commitment and enhance momentum for a plan of action and to help maximise everyone's use of resources. The needs analysis is then fed into an action planning process devised and managed by a team representing all stakeholders. The guiding principle is that successful programmes are, 'planned and not merely a collection of random or disorganised activities' (Raffaele and Knoff, 1999, p.461). Research, suggests these authors, shows that successful projects for home-school collaboration require clear foundational principles, mutual respect between all stakeholders and extensive strategic and operational planning. Extensive time scales for installation are implicated.

7.9 These attributes are well illustrated in the most extensive US home-school networks built over decades and culminating in The National Network of Partnership Schools (Kreider, 2000; Sanders and Epstein, 2000). This comprises more than 1,000 schools across 14 states operating with research based tools and strategies for implementing home-school partnership activities. The Network provides training and technical support as well as a website, newsletters, a handbook and other information services.

7.9.1 The network was built on almost two decades of research and development recently described by Sanders and Epstein (2000) the latter author being the founder and lead researcher throughout. Figure 8 shows the time line for development.



**Fig 8. Timeline of research and development leading to the National Network of Partnership schools (from Sanders and Epstein, 2000)**

7.9.2 Initial studies in the 1980s showed that, ‘if schools reached out, more parents became involved’ and that ‘subject specific involvement influenced subject specific results ... if families were frequently involved in reading activities students gained in reading scores more than uninvolved families, ... but this did not influence achievement in maths’ (Sanders and Epstein, 2000, p.63). Another important lesson was to change the typical ‘research’ project with a project director into an ‘action team’ with key stakeholders represented. This required the community to share responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating partnership practices. The ‘Action Term for Partnership’ ensures distributed responsibility and continuity across the time scales necessary (years) to initiate, sustain and integrate all aspects of the plan.

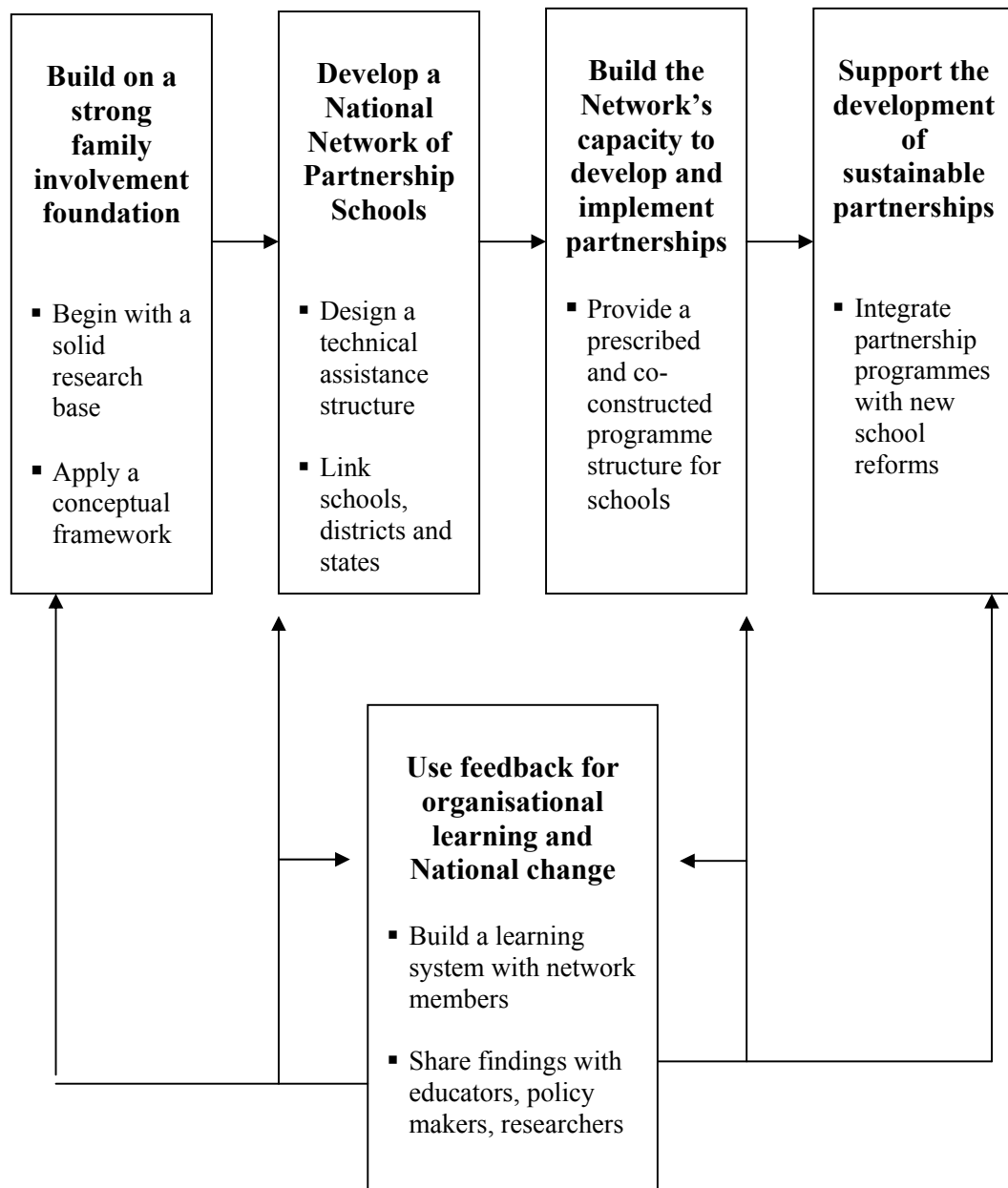
7.9.3 A feature of successful ventures was that action plans were drawn up in a form integrated with the school’s general development plan and activities were designed in pursuit of each of Epstein’s six categories of involvement. These categories were referred to earlier and shown again here in Fig 9.

<b>Type of involvement</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Parenting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ providing housing, health, nutrition, safety;</li> <li>▪ parenting skills for all ages;</li> <li>▪ home conditions to support learning;</li> <li>▪ information to help schools know child and family</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ school-home</li> <li>▪ home-school</li> </ul>
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ in school help in classrooms; or as audiences</li> </ul>
Learning at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ help with homework, subject skills, other skills and talents</li> </ul>
Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ membership of PTA or other committees and advisory groups</li> </ul>
Collaborating with the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community contributions to schools and families; family and school contributions to the community</li> </ul>

**Fig 9. Epstein’s framework for involvement (from Kreider, 2000)**

7.9.4 The three innovations (the broad conceptual framework, the Action Team, the involvement strategic plan as part of the school development plan) were thoroughly tested in the second phase of development and research work in the early 1990s. Extensive support and training was offered to all participants and the developments were thoroughly evaluated. The R and D programme was extended to high schools where it was found that when schools were pro-active in involvement families were very positive. They became intensively engaged and their opinion of the schools was enhanced. Impact however was, perhaps predictably, patchy. Success was seen to hinge not only on strategic planning but on the quality of the activities under the six headings of involvement. Further development work at this level was pursued over three years.

7.9.5 The next challenging issue was the question of how to scale up the activity from an R and D project into a major, going concern. The earlier work had led to a better understanding of the dynamics of parental and community involvement. The next phase of work explored the issues of leadership, organisational development and wider scale planning and administration. A theory of organisational development was constructed to inform the scaling up process. This theory is shown in Figure 10.



**Fig. 10 Organisational development theory of the National Network of Partnership Schools (Kreider, 2000)**

- 7.9.6 The theory shown is intensely practical. Each element has been worked through at the level of practical detail. Each is essential to establish and sustain the productive work of involvement. It is a model for sustained practical action. The theory and its implication are described in detail in Epstein (2001). It will suffice here to emphasise three points. First, it is clear that the network is based on an extensive R and D platform. All aspects of early pilot phases were thoroughly researched with a view to deepening understanding of involvement. And, clearly, the pilots did not work unless the individual involvement activities were of high quality practicality. Second, the programme is committed to learning and development systematically. No one joins unless they sign up to participating in continuous R and D feed-back work. Third, and most important here, there are two kinds of evidence that the Network has had impact. In the first instance, despite demanding joining-criteria, membership has grown rapidly from about 200 schools in 1996 to more than 1,000 in 2000. 60% of these are amongst the most economically disadvantaged in the US.
- 7.9.7 The work of the National Network of Partnership Schools has had impact on policy and practice beyond its immediate orbit. Most state administrations it seems, are looking to extend school-parent and/or school/community involvement and are in active connection with the Network to seek to use their experience. The Network in turn is committed to a process of knowledge transfer to export, as it were, their material artefacts, conceptual tools, leadership training and management experience.
- 7.9.8 Perhaps most importantly to the present remit, the Network lays claim to having an impact on student achievement and adjustment. Each year schools in the partnership are invited to report in detail on a specified aspect of achievement. In 2003 for example, the Network will report on the language arts and reading. Previous reports have covered mathematics, attendance and discipline. In regard to mathematics, data were collected from 18 schools (elementary and high schools) on school characteristics, involvement practices, grades and achievement test scores. After controlling for prior levels of achievement some activities for family involvement in maths at home and at school predicted higher student performance (Sheldon and Epstein, 2001a). Assigning homework that involved families and offering lending libraries with maths related activities were particularly strongly associated with better grades. Other effective activities included, information to parents on how to contact the maths teacher; workshops on maths skills and school expectations and inviting parents to assemblies celebrating maths achievement.
- 7.9.9 Forty-seven schools participated in an evaluation of the effect of partnership on discipline. Regardless of prior levels of indiscipline, schools that improved the quality of partnership activity from one year to the next reported lower levels of students involved in disciplinary action.

After accounting for prior levels of indiscipline, schools that used more practices to involve families in school reported lower levels of students receiving detention (Sheldon and Epstein, 2001b). Similar effects were found for attendance in a study involving 12 elementary schools (Epstein and Sheldon, 2000). Three partnership activities seemed to be particularly effective in increasing daily attendance rates and reducing chronic absenteeism: rewarding attendance; providing parents with a contact person at school to call as needed; and communicating with all families about school expectations.

- 7.9.10 Several issues are noteworthy about these results. First, the preponderance of schools in the network are in areas of serious economic deprivation. Good results here are both striking and potentially far reaching. Second, the analyses allow the identification of the specific practices most clearly linked to success in the judgement of professionals on the ground. Third, the results can immediately be circulated throughout the network together with a rich description of the characteristics of the schools. This allows other schools to identify the practices most likely to succeed in their circumstances. At the same time, caution is warranted. Only a small fraction of schools took part in the surveys and those on a voluntary basis. The data are all from self reports. The format of the data does not seem to make it easy to attribute cause and effects. This is not to dismiss the available evidence out-of-hand. Nor should the difficulties of evaluating complex interventions be underestimated. The terms ‘pupil achievement’ and ‘pupil adjustment’ refer to very broad aspirations which have far reaching ramifications. To evaluate the impact of interventions, of whatever kind, on school outcomes necessitates clear definitions of those outcomes and agreed measurement instruments which are accepted as relevant and authentic to the range of stakeholders. Earlier research has used standardised tests and teachers’ grades as proxy measures for achievement and adjustment but such research was after-the-event. Were such measures used up-front, as it were, the danger arises of everyone working to the tests. This is well known to distort teaching and learning activities.
- 7.9.11 Further problems of evaluation become evident when it is recognised that schools which become engaged in parental involvement schemes are characteristically participating in a range of school improvement activities. As and when schools improve it will always be difficult to identify the unique contribution of each initiative to the overall benefits. It might even be considered foolish – somewhat akin to attempting to ascertain the unique contributions of the gin and the tonic to a gin and tonic. This observation is particularly relevant to the educational scene in England where, in the last few years schools have been engaged with a large and multi-faceted programme of reform. Attempts to identify the unique contribution of single elements of the reform programme are bound to face challenging problems of research design. All these issues are as evident in UK home/school projects as they are in the US.

- 7.10 In many respects the scene in England reflects that in the U S A . A great deal of work is evident in encouraging all aspects of parental involvement in education. There is a strong commitment to the rhetoric of parental involvement particularly so in primary schools and increasingly in secondary schools. Schools are investing time, energy, creativity and material resources (money, space, equipment) in encouraging and supporting parental participation in schools and in the home. That being said, evaluations in the field, particularly in terms of the impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment are, for the most part, short term, technically weak and based on subjective judgements of participants. Following Mattingley et als' (2002) comments on US evaluations, it cannot be and must not be concluded that this industry does not work. The conclusion to be drawn is that without systematic, good quality evaluations, few lessons can be learned from the effort invested and it seems unlikely that the potential of parental involvement will be fully realised.
- 7.11 The best evaluations in the field in England can be found in several Ofsted reports referring either to individual schools or to special, country-wide issues (e.g. the Ofsted evaluations of special initiatives or Ofsted commentaries on good practice in nominated areas of special challenge). In these reports it is characteristic that Ofsted inspectors use their national data bases to distinguish between good practice provision and the ordinary or less good provision in terms of pupil achievement and behaviour. They then identify the characteristics of good provision which seem to distinguish it from the ordinary. This invariably involves reference to a whole school focus on achievement, clear and firm leadership, high quality teaching, a curriculum finessed to capitalise on learners' interests and community and parental involvement. Parental involvement is thus cast as a key ingredient of an indivisible cocktail of factors promoting achievement. Causal links in this analysis are assumed.
- 7.11.1 For example, in reporting on good practice in secondary schools promoting the achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils (Ofsted, 2002, report No. 448), Ofsted inspectors concluded that relatively successful schools evinced (amongst other things), 'close links with parents ... based on shared values and expectations of behaviour, attitudes and habits of work. These schools listen to parents' concerns, are open with them and work with them at resolving differences. Parents' understanding of their children's progress is founded on rigorous discussion, honest reporting and swift contact when important information needs to be shared.' (p.4).
- 7.11.2 Identical conclusions are drawn in reports on the Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils in the primary school (Ofsted, 2002); Improving Attendance and Behaviour in Secondary Schools (Ofsted, 2001); Lessons Learned from Special Measures (Ofsted, 1999); Improving City Schools (Ofsted, 2000); New Start Partnerships (Ofsted, 2001); Managing Support for the Attainment of Pupils from Ethnic Minority Groups (Ofsted, 2001)

and on Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic pupils' Schools and LEAs Responses (Ofsted, 1999).

7.11.3 Ofsted inspectors go on to identify the component parts of good practice in the pursuit of parental involvement. Good practice institutions, in the Ofsted view, commit a great deal of sustained energy and resource to this work. In some schools posts of special responsibility are dedicated to parental involvement. Extensive programmes of meetings with parents are arranged, some to explain the curriculum and schools' practice, some to report progress, some to consider individual pupils and some to celebrate success. Some schools provide courses for parents on curriculum relevant topics, others take special measures such as arranging transport to school to meet particular parents' needs. Above all, good schools in this respect are on the one hand dedicated to constructive listening and on the other to the forthright pursuit of increased educational standards.

7.11.4 At the core of good practice is a commitment to communication. Key features of working with parents as set out in 'Improving city Schools' (Ofsted, 2000) are:

- Accessible literature covering all parents want to know
- Frequent communication
- Consultations which are timely, flexible and planned to maximise attendance

7.12 This pattern of good practice is extensively illustrated on the DfES Standards website. A section is devoted to Parental Involvement which contains examples from across the age range of compulsory schooling ([www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/](http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/parentalinvolvement/))

7.12.1 For example, the AMBER project, described on the site, aims to help ethnic minority families in the City and County of Nottingham. The objectives are to:

- Empower and encourage parents to become involved in their children's education
- Provide the opportunity for school based adult learning
- Train support workers to facilitate these goals

Success is claimed in the following terms:

- Community rooms and facilities have been established in schools
- There has been increased parental take up of parent governor vacancies
- Parents feel more valued
- Communications with ethnic minority parents has become more effective



- Individual support has been provided for parents wishing to re-enter education or employment.

These noteworthy achievements all help to lay the foundations of good relationships between schools and parents but the key bonus – the impact on pupil achievement and adjustment in terms of this review – has yet to be evaluated.

- 7.12.2 On the same website, Cadbury Heath Primary School is nominated as a beacon of good practice in parental involvement. The school devotes a great deal of creativity energy and resource to this facet of its educational provision. They run a state of the art induction programme, local evaluations of which show it to be greatly appreciated by parents. This is followed through in the SPECS campaign (Supportive Parents Enabling Children's Success). The core aims of SPECS is to increase parental involvement in their children's education to impact on achievement and to support parents in this direction. The SPECS programme provides parents' evenings focussing on literacy, ICT and numeracy. There is an 'even better parenting' course. Quality speakers are invited to address parents and discuss issues with them. The programme has been regularly evaluated using a questionnaire over a number of years (Mitchell, 2000, personal communication, 2003). Questions invite parents to rate whether the programme has achieved its aim and whether it has made a difference to what parents do to promote their child's achievement. The programme attracts the overwhelming endorsement of the parents who respond. Effectiveness is rated positively by in excess of 90% of respondents whilst the impact of SPECS on school ethos attracts a 100% appreciation rating.
- 7.13 Few evaluations of home-school links work are published for general circulation. Exceptions include Hardie and Alcorn (2000), who report the experience of promoting parental involvement in one high school in Edinburgh. In the early 90s the school had an imploding school roll, a bad reputation in the borough and was facing closure. It was also facing the consequences of extreme economic deprivation in local families. Through titanic efforts the school was turned around. Morale amongst staff, pupils and parents became very positive. Examination results rose by significant degrees. From near closure, the school moved to prize winning status in a few years. Amongst the many initiatives implicated in this impressive success story, Hardie and Alcorn describe the 'INSTEP' project which was a programme dedicated to enhancing home-school links. At a strategic level the school was committed to working with and through the parents. Parents were consulted at all turns on policies and practices. There was a recognition that local parents, for whatever reason, had poor educational aspirations for their children. There was, on the part of the school, a determination to make a step-wise change here and more broadly in home/school links.

- 7.13.1 A special team was installed. Cast as a resource to the whole school, it was dedicated to working with parents. The team mediated at many levels between parents and the school's teaching and learning activities. Hardie and Alcorn acknowledge that the impact of this intervention is not easily measured. In fact it is probably impossible to measure. It was, with four full time staff and additional support workers, an expensive undertaking and, by Hardie and Alcorn's account, its operation was not without problems and tensions – especially between the INSTEP team and other support agencies in the school. Yet in attempting to evaluate INSTEP the cocktail metaphor seems to apply. It is difficult to imagine that the INSTEP programme played little or no part in the success story. At the same time it is difficult to pin down the cost/benefit analysis. Lessons were learned it seems. Hardie and Alcorn note that, '... approaches have evolved considerably ... the emphasis has shifted away from trying to encourage more involvement of parents in the school itself to one which encourages more active interest in their children's education from the perspective of the home environment' (p.110). But with a post hoc evaluation it is impossible to establish lessons on the basis of evidence.
- 7.14 Scaling up slightly, Bawa (2000) reported a parental involvement project as part of a LEA wide 'Action for Achievement Project' in Newham. The parent project ran across 2 nursery schools, 7 primary schools and a Special School. Each school had a nominated link teacher and developed its school improvement policies with parents. Evaluations over the years showed considerable enthusiasm for working together on the part of parents and staff. Teachers felt that parents' expectations had been raised. There was no evidence reported which related the initiatives to impact on pupils' achievement.
- 7.14.1 In a quantum leap increase in scale, Birmingham LEA ran an authority wide programme of parental involvement dedicated to enhancing achievement in literacy and mathematics. The programme (called INSPIRE) was, 'offered purely as an opportunity for parents and carers to work with their child alongside the teachers and be involved in activities'. (Bateson, 2000, p.56). Whilst schools were not given prescribed lessons or materials to deliver they were given induction training in the principles and practice of working alongside parents, initial exemplar materials and funding for supporting staff in the extra work.
- 7.14.2 The practical focus in INSPIRE (as reported by Bateson, 2000; personal communication 2003) was to target one class per school. In this class the children would each bring a 'special' adult from home to work alongside the teacher and themselves on activities carefully designed to attend to the maths curriculum and to collaborative work. In the 'best cases', the child was prepared for this work before the event. 140 schools and in excess of 8,000 families, many in the most straightened economic circumstances, have become involved. Impact has, as is the case of most schemes in the field, been assessed by self report. Teachers feel that the activity has had a

notable positive effect on parents' attitudes to schooling. Staff and parents report a 70%+ increase in educational activity in the home. 60% of teachers reported increased achievement amongst involved pupils. Everyone involved (children, teachers, parents) report feeling more confidence in working together and in maths. Those teachers not reporting advanced levels of achievement as such, caution that it is simply too early in the life of the project or too complex to tell. Given the welter of initiatives that these schools must have been engaged in at the same time as the INSPIRE project, this is a wise note of caution.

- 7.15 Moving beyond the LEA scale of project, Capper (2000, 2003) reports on a national venture into parental involvement, the SHARE project. As of February 2003 this was running in 1000+ schools across 200 LEAs/EAZs. Originally designed for and piloted in KS1 it has been developed to include KS2 and further work is in progress to involve KS3. In many respects SHARE resembles Epstein's, National Network of Partnership Schools. It has a thoroughgoing, principled rationale; it was piloted and carefully worked up; involved schools have access to training, project materials and network support. In important respects, SHARE is more ambitious than the US National Network. Its aims are more far reaching. Not only is it committed to improving pupil attainment, it also aims to motivate parents in regard to their own education. Furthermore, SHARE aims to develop effective management of parental involvement in schools.
- 7.15.1 Independent evaluations have been reported both for the pilot (Bastiani, 1997) and for 2 years of the substantive programme (Bastiani, 1999). Specific SHARE activities at the school and LEA level have been evaluated by Universities and local inspectors, and schools conduct their own annual evaluations. The enthusiasm of all concerned is well documented. Evidence of the impact on pupil achievement comes in the form of anecdote, case study, teachers' records and vignettes from parents. It is impossible to evaluate this evidence, to give any sense of the scale or significance of the impact or to begin to relate this impact to specific activities or sets of activities in the SHARE initiative. This is not to claim that SHARE does not work. The professionals who complete local evaluations are clearly convinced that they are getting a significant return in terms of parent involvement and pupil achievement on their extensive commitment of time, energy and money. The claim here is simply that publicly available evidence does not afford these conclusions on an objective basis.
- 7.16 It is in the nature of these programmes to offer participants freedom to be creative in the details of their interactions whilst operating within a principled management framework. Creativity inevitably means that there is no set kit of activities. This adds to the difficulties of evaluation. But it does not make evaluation impossible.

- 7.17 That evidence can be collected in complex settings in ways that have meaning beyond the unique circumstances of individual participants is demonstrated in an early evaluation of the RSA based, Parents in a Learning Society, Project (Bastiani, 1995). This project was dedicated to enhancing home-school links with a view of benefiting all stakeholders and to do so with the objective of sustaining links through the age range of compulsory schooling. 10 schools were involved from nursery to 6<sup>th</sup> form in a 'recce in depth' project. The aims were to promote parents as co-educators, parents as learners and to explore the potential to share ideas with a national audience. The focus of this present report is on the project's impact on pupil achievement and adjustment. In common with other projects it seems that everyone enjoyed the experience and, it seems, attitudes were positively shaped. As ever, evidence of impact on attainment takes the form of illustration and anecdote. Selective self report is the only source of evidence. There is, however, an important exception which is in regard to bullying. As the evaluator puts it, '... there is now a growing body of evidence that a shared approach to bullying in schools actually works ... it is one of the areas of school life ... where professionals seem disposed to collect evidence of outcomes and effects ... there are a growing number of striking examples of 'before and after' (Bastiani, 1995, p.49). We might conclude that where there is a will to evidence based practice, there is a way.
- 7.18 This will is perhaps best exemplified in a project reported by Hannon and Nutbrown (2001). This venture built on more than a decade of working on the question, 'How can early educators collaborate with parents to promote pre-school literacy development?' (p.1). Their project (Raising Early Achievement in Literacy, REAL) was mounted in areas of social need in Sheffield and focussed on children with literacy attainments significantly below national norms. 10 schools engaged in the work taking the form of a 12 – 18 month pre-school entry programme. It is especially noteworthy that parents volunteered on the understanding that they had a 50/50 chance of being allocated to a control group.
- 7.18.1 Programme activities took the form of home visits by teachers, provision of literacy resources, centre based group activities, special events and postal communications. Adult education opportunities were offered in the form of an accredited Open College Network course for parents and of bridging opportunities into local provision.
- 7.18.2 There was 100% take up and no drop out through the programme which worked to four key questions
- How can parents be helped to provide more opportunities for literacy development?
  - How can parents' recognition of early achievement be enhanced?
  - How can parents interaction with their children be enhanced?
  - How can parents be supported as models of written language use?

These questions were pursued with parents.

- 7.18.3 The parents were extremely positive about the programme and teachers rated parental engagement highly. But perhaps most particularly striking is that the programme children made more literacy progress than comparable group children not in the study as measured on a purpose designed test of early literacy development. This is a remarkable achievement given that the programme did not set out to teach children directly. 'The gains did not result from a teaching or training programme as normally understood ... we (provided) parents with ways of thinking about their roles ... the differences (between programme and control children) reflect *socio cultural change in family* literacy produced through teacher-parent interaction and parent child interaction.' (Hannnon and Nutbrown, 2001 p.12).
- 7.18.4 This programme was modest in scale and, in the UK, unique in its use of an experimental design. It worked its impact through and with parents. Its connectivity to the schools the children attend bodes well for the prospects of early gains to be built on.
- 7.19 Not all parental partnership schemes are aimed directly at pupil achievement and adjustment. Some are designed to provide for or improve what might be called, the infrastructure to achievement.
- 7.20 In regard to children with special educational needs, resources were made available in the mid 90s for projects which would encourage partnership between LEAs, parents, schools and other bodies in the work of assessing and providing for these pupils. In these schemes, particular attention was expected to be given to reducing conflict and to minimising the number of statutory SEN appeals. These schemes have been the subject of two evaluations funded by the DfES (Wolfendale and Cook, 1999, Vernon, 1999). The two evaluations had almost identical briefs. Neither was expected to trace the impact of the schemes through to their effects on the children.
- 7.20.1 Appraisals of infrastructure however, are not irrelevant to the present ask. Both reviews show that, in providing for SEN children, designated 'Parent Partnership Officers' (PPOs) have played a key role in linking the various parties to the task. Good work has been done and both evaluators are confident that the Parent Partnership schemes have generally made a difference.
- 7.20.2 At the same time they note the stress and, in some cases, fault lines in the system. Some challenging issues were identified as follows: not all parental needs were being met; the term 'partnership' was subject to many different interpretations not all of which were readily compatible; working with schools was not straightforward for the PPOs; there was a perceived

need for further thinking at a strategic level if partnerships were to become genuinely collective concerns. Although these comments refer to services for SEN children they raise the same questions in regard to all children. If there are tensions between the several constituencies in providing for these vulnerable children they are unlikely to disappear in regard to the broader pupil profile.

7.21 A different approach to the examination of infrastructure on linking home and school has explored the impact of ICT (Becta, 2000). The objectives of this study were to identify the types of technologies being used and the various models of use and to identify particular benefits and how these related to teaching and learning and to the way schools are managed. The interest to hand here is, of course, the degree to which parents were involved and the degree to which the technologies, used through home-school links, had an impact on pupil achievement.

7.21.1 Evidence was gathered using, amongst other techniques, interviews with 'key informants' including representatives of the DfES, BECTA, QCA, Ofsted and the TTA; a questionnaire survey of 200+ schools and case studies of 8 schools. A predictable conclusion of the research for the present purpose is that, 'At this early stage ... it is not possible to make claims about major gains in the transformation of pupils' learning and improved communications with parents' (BECTA, 2000, p.13/14). At the time of the report schools were only just beginning to appraise the possibilities. It is noteworthy however, that the parental role is barely mentioned.

7.22 In **summarising** this section, the following points are worth noting:

- the business of linking parents and schools is exceedingly busy; there is a significant range and scale of activity
- the rate of voluntary uptake of schemes attests to the levels of spontaneous interest amongst the stakeholders
- evaluations invariably report high levels of enthusiasm amongst parents and teachers; self reports underscore the sense of achievement and confidence in working together
- at the same time, the evidence of impact on pupils' achievement and attainment is patchy, ad hoc, mainly subjective and impossible to relate to the parent/teacher/child activities
- detailed examination of the infrastructure of partnership schemes for SEN children, whilst recognising much good work, reveals nonetheless limitations in strategic planning towards sustainable collectivity, problems in meeting some 'difficult to reach parents' and tensions between the different constituencies.

7.22.1 This chapter started with an observation and two questions. It was observed that spontaneous or 'natural' differences in levels of parental involvement in children's education (especially in those forms worked through out of school) were associated with significant differences in children's attainment even when all other factors (such as SES) were taken into account. The questions raised were (a) 'can levels of parental involvement be raised beyond spontaneous activities and, if so, (b) does this make a difference to pupils' attainment?'

7.22.2 The available evidence on the questions would seem to suggest that levels of involvement can be raised. The jury is out on whether this makes a difference to pupil achievement. Evidence from the US and from provision for SEN children in England would suggest that if a difference is to be made for all children (and especially those in families difficult to reach) and if that difference is to be sustained, the following conditions beyond goodwill and endeavour would have to obtain.

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

Evaluation of current activity in direct linkages between parents and schools suggests that all initiatives lack some of these element and most lack most of them.

## Chapter 8

### Adult and community education and parent training programmes

- 8.1 *In this chapter research is reported that focuses on the evaluation of adult and community family education and parent training programmes. Whilst these are somewhat more loosely connected to pupils' achievement and adjustment than initiatives reported in Chapter 7, they are nonetheless expected to have an impact on pupils' development and educational progress.*
- 8.1.2 *Once again it is reported that evaluations are, in the main technically very weak. Too often they afford few safe objective conclusions in regard to learning outcomes.*
- 8.1.3 *There is however increasing evidence to show that the programmes reviewed here have positive impacts on parents and parenting and, where programmes are specifically designed and managed to influence children's behaviour and learning they do so. The scale of the effects is however, difficult to estimate from available evidence.*
- 8.2 **Adult and community education** has recently been specified as taking place in 'certain types of community based settings, often outside the framework of educational institutions', focussed on, 'priority client groups for widening participation', and 'not usually focused on a job-specific vocational purpose' (Callaghan et al, 2001, p.1/2). It is intended to have an impact on neighbourhood renewal and regeneration at the individual and community level. The community aspect is pivotal, 'where learning really engages people's interests it can have a pivotal role in helping communities cohere ...' (Callaghan et al, 2001, p.vii). Provision in this domain has been extensively reviewed recently in general (Callaghan et al, 2001) and in its relationship to schools in particular (Ball, 1998; Dyson and Robson, 1999). Aspects of changing wants and needs of potential participants have been described (Brassett-Grundy, 2002; Blackwell and Bynner, 2002).
- 8.3 Reviews indicate that there is mass take up of Adult and Community Education with estimates of annual participation between 1.6 and 2.5 million in LEA provision alone. Participants claim social and personal benefits including enhanced, 'health, active ageing, self esteem, communication skills and improvement in family relationships'. (Callaghan et al, 2001, p.vii). From the point of view of the present review such impacts might be expected to work their way through enhanced confidence and higher educational expectations into better parenting and a strengthened capacity for parental involvement in schooling. It might be anticipated that successful engagement in Adult and Community Education would promote parental capacity for



involvement as depicted in the model in Figure 8. Such a prediction would have to be an act of faith. There is no data to hand which allows the link between Adult Education (as specified above), parental participation and pupil achievement.

- 8.4 Engagement in adult education is skewed. Economic deprivation, the severity of unemployment history, and masculinity are all negative indications of low engagement. Engagement is low precisely where parental involvement is low and possibly for much the same reasons. Conceived in its most general terms, Adult Education has yet to achieve an impact on these relationships.
- 8.5 Conceived more narrowly however, a more promising picture emerges. Community education is frequently managed by and located in schools. Ball (1998) described the forms of relationship schools establish with their communities. The vision of this activity is the 'holistic school' offering resources to the whole community. The actual picture (at least as of 1998) was significantly less than that. At best, some schools were operating as a community provider. Many were providing services and support to the families of children on roll. Most were more narrowly engaged in community activity to promote the school's ends. Ball's survey revealed a busy and creative field as schools engaged with their communities but it did not attempt to identify the impact of programmes, projects and actions on pupil achievement.
- 8.6 Dyson and Robinson (1999) attempted to fill this gap. In a systematic review of the empirical literature of the impact of school/community links on school objectives (in particular that of inclusion) they found the field dominated by small scale local studies. As illustrated already, these are generally technically weak, lacking in control groups or before/after measures or objective evidence. In summarising the trends in the literature, Dyson and Robinson concluded, '... the evidence base regarding school-family-community links is ... less substantial and trustworthy than we might wish. Nonetheless, it does allow us to describe some features of the field with a fair degree of confidence ... there are significant benefits to schools ... their approaches are likely to be welcomed by many parents and community members and are likely to generate positive attitudes amongst both adults and the school's pupils. Where links are targeted on raising attainment there is a reasonable probability that they will be successful.' (p.30).
- 8.7 Given the evidence deployed earlier, the level of caution in this conclusion is sensible. But the question to hand here is not, 'do school/community links enhance pupil achievement?' We have already seen that if these links are focussed on attainment there is a strong likelihood of positive effects. The question is, 'can schools reach out to alter and develop spontaneous levels of parental involvement and thereby enhance pupil achievement?' The emerging response to this question is that 'it depends

on the degree of focus in the linking activities.’ The more the focus is on specific attainment, the more likely it is to procure attainment. This is evident in programmes cast under the heading of ‘Family Learning’.

- 8.8 **Family learning** has recently been defined as that which, ‘concentrates on learning which brings together different family members to work on a common theme for some, if not for the whole, of a planned programme ... the focus is on planned activity in which adults and children come together, to work and learn collaboratively’. (Ofsted, 2000, p.5).
- 8.9 The best known and most widely practiced variants of family learning are the literacy and numeracy schemes set up by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) in the mid 90s. (ALBSU was subsequently re-configured and re-named as the Basic Skills Agency (BSA.) ALBSU determined to provide programmes comprising 1. accredited basic skills instruction for parents; 2. early literacy development for young children; and 3. joint parent/child sessions on supporting pre-reading, early reading and reading skills. The programmes were designed to encourage maximum integration amongst the component parts and hence add value over ‘single service’ programmes. Programmes were also expected to recruit those families most difficult to reach. One informing assumption in the approach was that illiterate or semi literate parents were compounding the educational difficulties of their children (part of the ‘cycle of disadvantage’). Reaching both generations with composite educational programmes was expected to help break this cycle.
- 8.10 In its pilot variant the ALBSU/BSA Family Literacy Scheme was a 96 hour course spread over 12 weeks. It was designed for the joint engagement of parents and their children in the age range 3 – 6 years. The programme was targeted on at-risk children and parents with ‘very low entry characteristics’. The children were given intensive teaching. The parents worked on their own literacy and learned to help their children. A numeracy programme followed the same design principles. The demonstration programmes in the literacy and numeracy field were subject to internal evaluation (Brooks et al, 1996; Basic Skills Agency, 1998). Follow-up evaluations were also independently conducted (Brooks et al, 1997; Brooks et al, 2002). In all cases the evaluations collected evidence on achievement before and after the courses. In the case of the literacy evaluations, this involved collecting data on the achievement of both parents and children at the end of the course, and at 3 and 9 months later.
- 8.11 Completion of the programme was associated with statistically significant advances in achievement in reading and writing for both parents and children. These gains were sustained 9 months later. There was no evidence of ‘wash out’. 67% of the children’s groups in the early literacy programmes entered with levels of achievement that would have them ‘struggling’ at school. This fell to 35% by the end of the programme. There were significant boosts to parental achievement, to their confidence

and to their competence in helping their child (Brooks et al, 1998). In a follow-up study two years later, all these gains were sustained. Furthermore, teachers rated 'Family Literacy children' superior to their peers in classroom behaviour and support received from their families. They were rated equal to their peers in other academic and motivational respects (Brooks et al, 1997). These outcomes are striking for cohorts whose attainment on entering the programmes was significantly less than average. Similar results obtained for the impact of numeracy schemes (Brooks et al, 2002). Initial evaluations of literacy schemes for ethnic minority families give positive indications (Brooks et al, 1999).

- 8.12 It seems that these highly focussed, intergenerational programmes had both specific and wider effects. Specifically, significant gains in literacy and numeracy were achieved, sustained and transferred to school. More broadly, it was reported that communications between parents and children improved markedly, and parents reported being more able and confident in helping their child at home and communicating with the teacher in school.
- 8.13 The valuations do not afford the identification of elements of the programmes implicated in the achievements. No control groups were run. The evaluators make play of the intergenerational element deemed essential in the design brief but since all participants received this component it is difficult to establish what its unique or 'value-added' impact was. The BSA is confident that success rested, amongst other things, on a clear purpose, a focus on achievement, excellent teaching and, subsequently, the confidence which achievement engendered amongst parents. In rhetorical terms it is difficult to gainsay these claims. They do not, however, rest on any evidence available in the published evaluations.
- 8.14 The BSA programmes have had widespread impact on Family Learning provision. For the Ofsted (2000) report on this topic, 28 LEAs were surveyed. Family Learning programmes were targeted at areas of economic deprivation. The majority of provision aimed to improve literacy skills using models derived from the BSA (above). 'The development of family numeracy strategies is still at an early stage' (Ofsted, 2000, p.16).
- 8.14.1 Two thirds of the provision for family literacy was judged to be good and resulted, on the part of the parents, in a greater understanding of child development and children's learning, improved skills in literacy, numeracy and parenting, increased confidence in school contacts and progression, in over 50% of cases, to FE or further training, or a better job. For children, success was evident in accelerated development in early oracy and literary skills, positive attitudinal and behaviour changes, and enhanced confidence. All this was achieved despite the Ofsted view that resourcing was poor and fragile, that strategic thinking on the part of

providers was weak and that, ‘... in the majority of cases the work has either survived, or sprung up in a policy vacuum; (p.23).

- 8.15 According to this report at least, the limits of success in the field seem to be at the National level (in securing sustained and adequate funding) and at the LEA level (in strategic thinking to expand the Family Learning curriculum beyond literacy and in linking Family Learning systematically to schooling).
- 8.15.1 These conclusions are remarkable given the recognition in the report that there was a ‘failure to track immediate or short term gains systematically over time; an evaluation of the long-term impact of family learning is long overdue’ (Ofsted, 2000, p.7). This raises questions about the evidence base on which the optimistic conclusions reported in earlier paragraphs was based.
- 8.15.2 This in turn raises related questions. The key feature of family learning is the joint, intergenerational component in which different family members are brought together. This, it will be recalled, was part of the original design specification of ALBSU/BSA. This design specification arose from two basic assumptions (a) that illiterate parents compounded the cycle of educational deprivation of their children and that (b) teaching the two generations together would help break the cycle. The key question is, what part does the intergenerational teaching component play in the effectiveness of the programmes of family education given that they are definitional?
- 8.16 Valuations of the demonstration programmes or their follow-up studies were not designed to address this central question. Ofsted found ‘In general ... the teaching was more effective and relevant in the parent only or children only sessions. Since the central focus of this work is joint activity, this is a matter which requires urgent attention. In joint sessions, teachers found it increasingly difficult to respond adequately or consistently to the disparate needs of the two very different groups involved ... joint planning for team teaching frequently lacked a clear focus on attainable and measurable objectives for both groups of learners ... evaluations of effectiveness ... were largely absent at the classroom level’. (Ofsted, 2000, p.8). If family learning works it does not appear to do so on the basis of family learning. It could be that the benefits perceived could be had more easily and less expensively.
- 8.17 Evidence from the US gives credence to this speculation. St Pierre et al (1995) reported the evaluation of the Even Start family literacy programme (from which, it seems, UK family literacy programmes took their inspiration). This was a comprehensive evaluation of 270 projects, nationwide involving 16,000 families in projects run in 1992-3. One component of the evaluation had 200 families allocated at random to control or programme conditions. There were no significant gains for the

parents in terms of scores on an adult reading test. Whilst the children involved did well in the early stages, they were no better in the longer run than the control group on measures of emergent literacy, vocabulary or school readiness.

- 8.18 Of course it could be that lessons have been learned from these earlier US studies and that the design and delivery of provision has moved on since then. A more sensible position however, given the available evidence, is that we do not know if family education programmes have any added value over other programmes or approaches. There is enough evidence to raise doubts, especially in regard to the effectiveness of the core design feature of family education – that of inter-generational teaching. There is, however, insufficient evidence to learn lessons. Echoing Ofsted and repeating the conclusion of other sections, high quality evaluations are urgently called for.
- 8.19 **Parenting education programmes.** Parenting education has been conceived as falling in three broad areas: preparation about parenthood and family for school-age children; preparation for parenthood for young people and education on relationships and parenting skills for parents and carers. (Lloyd, 1999). It is the third category which is of most relevance to this review.
- 8.20 Parenting education takes many forms. It can take the form of parent training programmes offered in the form of a medical approach, as a ‘treatment’, to help parents cope better with psychosocial illnesses and/or with their children (Scott, 2002). It also takes the form of more broadly based home/school/family support. This is less a medical model of treatment and more a broad educational approach intended to help people understand and shape their relationships and self adjustment.
- 8.21 Parenting education is a growth industry. Barlow (1999) reports estimates that 4% of the parent population in the UK have at some time attended a parent education programme. 28,000 parents a year are involved.
- 8.22 There is more recent evidence of extensive need and demand. The Department of Health estimate that 4 million out of the 11 million children in England are at risk of failing to meet normal developmental goals because of stresses in the family caused by parental mental illness, domestic violence, parental abuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances or by material and social conditions creating stresses and chaos. In regard to demand, Patterson et al (2002) reported a survey of parents of children aged 3 – 8 years in three general medical practices. 20% were experiencing difficulties with their children’s behaviour. A similar fraction had attended a parenting programme. 58% expressed an interest in attending such a programme in the future.

- 8.23 The scale of the primary literature describing present provision is very extensive. The commentary that follows has drawn heavily on systematic reviews of those studies in the field which have attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of provision in terms of impacts on parent and children (Barlow, J, 1998, 1999; Barlow and Coren, 2002; Barlow and Parsons, 2002; Dimond and Hyde, 2000; Serketich and Duman, 1996; Todres and Bunston, 1993).
- 8.24 The first observation of reviewers is that systematic evaluations are rare and particularly so in respect of UK programmes. Few programmes publish evaluation reports. Most evidence presented takes the form of anecdotes. Where more objective evidence is presented it is difficult if not impossible to relate the results of a course to any aspect of the provision.
- 8.25 The difficulties of evaluating provision in the field should not be underestimated. The definition of appropriate outcomes for parents from a parenting programme are value laden and contested. There are extreme measurement difficulties not only in determining appropriate 'measurement instruments' but in collecting data in valid yet unobtrusive ways. 'Good parenting' – whatever it is taken to mean – does not take place on the course. It takes place in domestic settings which are difficult to access by independent observers under normal conditions. Self report techniques are open to bias. Reports from those who provide the course are open to the same charge.
- 8.25.1 It is methodologically and ethically difficult to run control groups. In addition, parenting programmes are expected to have long-term effects and getting data in follow-up studies is even more difficult than getting data on immediate impact. Selective drop out rates of course members add further difficulties to the challenge of analysis.
- 8.25.2 Programmes have many components and provide support in a range of settings through a variety of media and relationships. Attempts to identify the 'active ingredients' in the provision present further problems.
- 8.25.3 All that being said, evaluations are becoming more rigorous and reviewers are finding sufficient numbers of technically sound evaluations to see patterns in the evidence of impact. There is a sufficient degree of replication across well conducted studies to afford increasing confidence in their results.
- 8.26 Barlow (1999) identified 255 studies of parent education programmes run between 1970 and 1990 and which met the following criteria. They had to include randomised allocation of participants to an experimental group or a control group (a placebo or no treatment or waiting list group); they were targeted to influence children in the age-range 3 – 10 years; the children had conduct disorders with at least one externalising problem

(e.g. tantrums); there had to be at least one standardised child behaviour outcome measure.

- 8.26.1 In the event, 18 studies met these criteria. From these, conclusions could be drawn about the impact of various group-based parent training programmes on child behaviour outcomes.
- 8.26.2 Barlow concluded that, 'parent education programmes are markedly effective in improving the behaviour of pre-adolescent children.' (1999, p.72/73). Parent reports to this effect were, save in two studies, confirmed by independent observers. Several of the studies showed improvements to be sustained from 6 months to, in the best cases, 3 years.
- 8.26.3 Barlow distinguished between 'behavioural' and 'relationship' programmes. The former draw on social learning theory and focus on observable behaviour with the intent of diminishing the incidence of undesirable behaviour and enhancing the production of desired behaviour. The parenting programme provides parents with the skills for behaviour shaping. 'Relationship' programmes are based on a range of humanistic or transactional or psychodynamic theories which stress the importance of intersubjectivity in the definition and resolution of interpersonal problems. Many programmes contain elements of both types of approach.
- 8.26.4 Barlow's review indicated that, 'Overall, behavioural parent education programmes produced the biggest changes in children's behaviour.' (p.73). An example course involved six 90 minute sessions at weekly intervals. Social workers trained parents in the use of behavioural techniques. The teaching and learning techniques involved role play and practice. The clients came through social service referrals. Parents were single mothers on low incomes or state benefits. Following the course there was a reduction in the number and intensity of children's behaviour problems and in parental depression. Improved child behaviour was still evident six months after the course.
- 8.27 Broadly similar results have been established in evaluations of programmes aimed specifically at teenage mothers and their children. In a systematic review of such programmes, Coren et al (2001) concluded that, '... parenting programmes ... which are directed specifically at teenage parents, can be effective in improving important infant outcomes such as the infant's response to the parent, ..., and the infant's ability to understand and respond to language' (p.31). This is a particularly important finding given that, as shown earlier, having a teenage mother is a risk factor in children's vulnerability in educational terms.
- 8.28 It was shown earlier that maternal depression impedes mothers' engagement in parental involvement. Parenting programmes as defined in 8.20 above, have been shown to improve maternal psychosocial health. Barlow et al (2002) report a systematic review of studies of programmes

in this field. They concluded that, ‘ .. parenting programmes can make a significant contribution to the short-term psychosocial health of mothers ...’ (p.223)

- 8.29 There are far fewer studies of the effectiveness of ‘relationship’ approaches to enhancing parenting skills and those available lack the technical rigor characteristic of the behavioural studies.
- 8.30 Barlow cautions against generalising from the positive results of many of the review studies in the field. Little evidence is provided about the personal or demographic characteristics of the clients. Many of the studies were run for volunteers. Many of the clients were from very high risk groups including single parents on benefits suffering from depression or alcoholism for example. Drop out rates are large. The evaluations reviewed were not designed to analyse the relationships between the different kinds of programme and different patterns of client need. Finally, few studies reviewed referred to the UK. Barlow concludes that, ‘In the absence of rigorous evidence concerning the benefits of many programmes being run in this country ... the provision of parent education programmes in the UK may well continue to be based on factors such as the personal preferences of programme organisers, the availability of funding and the differential power and ideology of interest groups wishing to provide such programmes.’ (1999, p.84).
- 8.30.1 In addition to these important cautions, a number of unintended consequences of parent training programmes have been reported (Mockford and Barlow, 2003). Follow-up interviews of female participants in some programmes revealed some experienced difficulties when trying to apply at home the techniques they had learned in the programmes. These difficulties included problems in gaining the support of partners, changing established habits and incorporating the techniques into an already busy life. These problems resulted in some instances in increased parental conflict.
- 8.31 It is perhaps encouraging to note that a UK version of the most successful and carefully evaluated US parenting programme (Webster-Stratton, 1999) is being run in this country on a large scale and with a thoroughgoing evaluation plan complete with before and after objective measures and appropriate comparison groups. (Scott and Sylva, 2001). Participants received an intensive parenting programme whilst the comparison group obtained a helpline consultation service. Early analysis shows significant positive effects for the programme group over the comparison group in terms of the reduction of children’s anti-social behaviour, child’s hyperactivity, and in terms of the child’s acquisition of early literacy skills. Researchers concluded that parenting programmes can improve antisocial behaviour in the family by a substantial amount and parents can be taught to enhance reading skills (Scott, 2003).



- 8.32 Dimond and Hyde (2000) set out to extend Barlow's (1999) review of parent programmes in at least two dimensions. First, they examined impact studies over the intermediate and longer term – to 3 years. Second, they extended the age range of children involved to 16 years.
- 8.32.1 Dimond and Hyde searched data bases where a formal parent training programme was contrasted with a comparison group with samples of not less than 10 parents. Any study which did not have objective before and after measures of child and parent outcomes which had been externally validated (i.e. went beyond self report) was excluded. Worldwide, from 1960-2000, 19 studies which met the criteria were included in the review. Almost all were US based.
- 8.32.2 The run of results across these studies was entirely positive for both parents and children, for all child age groups and with effects lasting at least three years. Children's dysfunctional behaviour declined and parents' well being was enhanced.
- 8.32.3 The authors could not say more than this from the studies. The data collected and the design of the studies did not allow the scale of the effects to be calculated in more than a handful of cases; few of the outcome measures were validated on a 'blind' basis by independent observers; the varied nature of the interventions made it impossible to generalise across studies; the variety of the methods made it impossible to identify which parts of the experience were associated with which aspects of the outcomes. All that said, there were strong replications across all studies and the technically best practice studies confirmed the positive effects.
- 8.33 Some interventions aimed at supporting parents and developing their parenting capacities go beyond the focus of the above training programmes to encompass all the parties involved in the child's schooling. These include head teachers, school staff (including the support workers), children and parents. The thinking behind this approach is that all these people are part of the indivisible context shaping the child's self concept and this is taken to be the engine room of the child's educational progress.
- 8.34 This wholistic approach sometimes takes the form of enduring support structures with lead responsibility in the hands of a home/school links worker (HSLW). In other cases, purpose designed intervention studies are involved.
- 8.35 It appears that HSLWs are being increasingly employed by schools across the UK (Hallgarten, 2003). According to Hallgarten, key tasks for HSLWs include, establishing contact and building relationships with families; working to improve attendance; and promoting and supporting parental involvement in their children's learning. Characteristic of work in the field, evaluations of HSLW operations are difficult to come by. Where they exist they consist of anecdotal evidence in the form of

participants extolling the virtues of the provision. Measured impacts on attainment or adjustment are not evident. No 'before' and 'after' measures or comparison group data are available. That being said, there is comprehensive endorsement from participants and providers of the positive impact of provision on participants. (Walthamstow, 2003; Howard, 2003).

- 8.36 Another approach to parent education involves embedding a training programme in the broader context of home/school links. An example of this approach is provided in the 'Nurturing Programme' offered by Family Links (Hunt, 2003). In this Programme, all groups involved in the child's education (teachers and school support staff, other professionals working with the families), parents and the children themselves receive full training and follow-up support. The training nurtures appropriate expectations of children, empathy, positive discipline techniques and self-awareness and self-esteem. The programme has been adopted from an American model (Bavelock, 1990) and has been revised to fit the National Curriculum requirements on language, literacy and learning. The emphasis is on 'improved emotional literacy, and health, moral and social responsibility, increased self esteem and empathy, improved behaviour, relationship and citizenship skills'.
- 8.36.1 The programme receives strong endorsement from head teachers who have used it (Hudson, 2003; Carnan, 2003). These heads feel that the programme has, as part of a general strategy of school improvement, played a significant part in improving the schools' ethos and it has enhanced the emotional stability of all concerned. Further endorsement is manifest in the heads' willingness to invest time, money and energy in buying and sustaining the programme and to further invest in capitalising on its perceived benefits through the recruitment of home-school link workers. Heads proselytise for the Programme. Furthermore, they are increasingly confident that they are involving previously hard to reach parents. Strikingly, heads report observing participant parents recruiting other parents to the ways of thinking and action promoted in the Programme.
- 8.36.2 Uncharacteristically, the Programme has been evaluated by independent observers whose report is published in a refereed journal (Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2001). The researchers found that 11% of those parents eligible had actually taken part and that there had been a drop out rate of 13%, which compares well with the average drop out rate from such programmes of 28%. There was a 'clear consensus' amongst the 11 parents interviewed that the programme had been 'brilliant'. Parents had valued support from other parents and the opportunity to mirror their concerns amongst a peer group. They appreciated 'not being taught how to be a parent'. Rather they felt they had been supported in the parenting role. The Programme had helped them 'regain feelings of control' and to 'think about matters calmly'.

- 8.36.3 Neither the head teachers nor the researchers felt in a position to identify the impact of the Programme on manifest enhancement in children's achievement. Whilst establishing the necessary conditions for learning and achievement, it was not claimed that these were the sufficient conditions.
- 8.37 Some parent education programmes are targeted only tangentially at educational achievement and adjustment. A case in point is the Youth Justice Board's Parenting Programme recently evaluated by Ghate and Ramella (2002). Although this programme deals with some of the after effects associated with educational failure, there are lessons to be learned for educators from the review.
- 8.37.1 The programme was set up for parents of young people who were at risk of or known to be engaged in offending and who were failing to attend school. Youth Offending Teams were required to provide support for parents either under a court 'Parenting Order' or otherwise referred by social or justice services.
- 8.37.2 Following relevant Parenting Order legislation, 42 parents' programmes were set up. Ghate and Ramella evaluated 34 of these. 800 parents, 500 young people and approximately 800 project workers gave evidence and provided information on parents' progress. The evaluation suffers from the now familiar technical limitations. All data were collected by self-report from involved or interested parties. There were no control or comparison groups. The Programmes varied enormously in scope, scale, methods, rationales and the scale and severity of caseloads. All conclusions have to be seen in this light.
- 8.37.3 In regard to impact on the parents, they attended three quarters of the sessions required of them; they reported, amongst other things, improved communications with their children, a reduction in parent/child conflict; and feeling more competent in the role of parent. Although some had had negative expectations at the outset (this being especially the case with parents subject to a Parenting Order) nine out of ten said they would recommend the experience to people in a similar situation. There was no difference in the level of benefit reported between those referred voluntarily and those referred by a Parenting Order.
- 8.37.4 Positive effects were reported for young people. 10% of the relevant group were under 10 years of age whilst 50% were aged between 12 and 14. Most were engaged in other interventions ('change programmes') provided by YOTs. The young people were a 'very high need group ... 72% had ... difficulties that would probably be rated as 'abnormal' by a clinician. They were also prolific offenders.' (Ghate and Ramella, 2002, p.iii).

- 8.37.5 There was some evidence, albeit statistically non-significant, of improved relationships with parents, a reduction of conflict and improved temper control. There was also a marked reduction (of 30%) of reconviction.
- 8.37.6 Whilst, as Ghate and Ramella acknowledge, these changes cannot be attributed solely to the parenting programmes they do afford optimism that ‘programmes of short duration, coming comparatively late in young people’s lives ... might have helped ‘apply the brakes’ on a sharp downward course’ (p.iii).
- 8.38 In summarising the evidence of impact of parenting education on pupil achievement and adjustment it can be said that
- Most programmes are offered to people in dire straights
  - Most provision is either not evaluated at all or evaluated in such a way that no conclusions can be drawn about impact and no lessons can be learned
  - Even best current evaluation practice in the field falls far short of affording lessons about how programmes work or what the best ‘treatments’ for particular groups or problems might be
  - Some evaluations of parent education programmes are good enough however to show that some programmes, mostly of short duration and mostly using behavioural techniques, have positive long term impacts on the well being of parents and on the behaviour of children across the school age range.
  - It is an open question as to whether these benefits transfer to the school setting.
- 8.39 In **summarising** this chapter it can be said that there is an increasing perceived need and demand for community, family and parent education programmes. Evaluations of programmes already available show considerable commitment on the part of providers and extensive satisfaction on the part of clients. The impact of the programmes on pupil achievement and behaviour varies. Where this is part of the aims of the programme (as in family education) and is assessed, there are indications of positive outcomes. In other cases (e.g. parent training) there is evidence to show positive benefits for parents which should lay the foundations for enhanced parental involvement in their child’s education. Evaluations rarely follow through on this link. Once again, conclusions in this field are limited by weak evaluations.

## Chapter 9

### Conclusions

- 9.1 In identifying the main conclusions from this research review it is necessary for a number of reasons to distinguish between research on spontaneously occurring parental involvement in their children's education and research on attempts to intervene to enhance such involvement. Spontaneous activity and induced activity are very different phenomena. The former is entirely voluntary whilst the latter might not be, at least initially. Spontaneous activity is quintessentially 'bottom up'; it is grass roots in origin, self motivated and self sustained. Intervention programmes are, almost by definition, initiated by some non-parental source. They are, at least initially, 'top down'. They are played out characteristically to solve some problem (in this case a perceived insufficiency of parental involvement).
- 9.1.2 The research traditions in these fields are also very different. Research on spontaneously occurring parental involvement has recently been of a very high technical quality affording valid descriptions of modes of involvement and their impact on the people involved. Researchers have been able to examine large data sets involving extensive samples of parents, children and their schools. Objective measures of involvement and impact have been available. Using statistical techniques it has been possible to test assumptions about the relationship of causes and effects between the process of involvement and their educational impacts to reveal a consistent and persuasive account of the processes operating and the scale of impact. That being said, most of the data sets are rather dated, having been collected at least a decade ago. Additionally, most of these studies are located in the American educational context. It should be emphasised however, that where similar large scale UK studies have been conducted they replicate American conclusions.
- 9.1.3 In contrast to research on spontaneous parental involvement, research on intervention programmes is technically much weaker. Samples are typically very small and research characteristically has taken the form of after the event, subjective evaluations without reference to comparison groups. Whilst there are good records of forms of involvement and of participants' appreciation, it is rare to find objective records of impact in terms of achievement. Where these exist, the design of the studies does not allow safe conclusions to be drawn either about the scale of impact or about the relationship between the intervention activities and the professed impact. On the other hand, many if not most of the studies of intervention programmes are recent and it is possible to find a broad corpus of work in the English context. Additionally, as will be shown, the studies tell a consistent story. If the old research adage 'a gramme of replication is

worth a tonne of significance' has any merit, evaluation of interventions in parental involvement offer some important lessons.

9.2 **Research on spontaneous parental involvement** has revealed a range of activities in which parents engage to promote their children's educational progress. These include:

- at home pre-school good parenting providing for security, intellectual stimulation and a good self concept
- at home enduring modelling of constructive social and educational aspirations and values relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship
- contacting the child's teacher to learn about the school's rules and procedures, the curriculum, homework, assessment and the like
- visits to school to discuss issues and concerns as these arise
- participation in school events such as fêtes
- working in the school in support of teachers (for example in preparing lesson materials, supervising sports activities) and otherwise promoting the school in the community
- taking part in school management and governance

9.2.1 Examining the nature and impact of these forms of parental involvement has consistently revealed that the degree of parental involvement is:

- strongly related to family social class: the higher the class the more the involvement
- strongly related to the level of mothers' education: the higher the level of maternal educational qualification the greater the extent of involvement
- diminished by material deprivation, maternal psychosocial ill health, and single parent status
- diminishes and changes form as children get older
- strongly influenced by the child's attainment: the greater the attainment, the greater the degree of involvement
- strongly influenced by the child: children take a very active role in mediating between parents and schools

- influenced to some degree by the ethnic culture of the family
- 9.2.2. Research also establishes that parental involvement has a significant effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors (such as social class, maternal education and poverty) have been taken out of the equation between children's aptitudes and their achievement. Differences in parental involvement have a much bigger impact on achievement than differences associated with the effects of school in the primary age range. Parental involvement continues to have a significant effect through the age range although the impact for older children becomes more evident in staying on rates and educational aspirations than as measured achievement.
- 9.2.3. Of the many forms of parental involvement, it is the 'at-home' relationships and modelling of aspirations which play the major part in impact on school outcomes. Involvement works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build a pro-social, pro-learning self concept and high educational aspirations.
- 9.2.4. Research reveals large differences between parents in their levels of involvement. Some of the dimensions of these differences were set out in paragraph 9.2.1 and are associated with social class or aspects of poverty or health. Other differences are associated with the parents values or feelings of self confidence or effectiveness. Some parents do not see it as the part of their 'role' to be a partner in education. Others would like to participate but do not feel up to it. Yet others are put off involvement by memories of their own school experience or by their interactions with their children's teachers or by a combination of both.
- 9.2.5. The scale of the impact of parental involvement is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups studies. There are however, important differences across ethnic groups in how parents model values and support their children.
- 9.2.6. The research suggests a clear model of the impact of parental involvement on children's educational achievement. Every element of the model is open in principle to educational influence. On the surface it would appear that parental involvement could be developed through educational processes to effect radical enhancements of school outcomes.
- 9.3 **Research on attempts to intervene to enhance parental involvement** reveals a number of approaches ranging from parent training programmes to promote the psycho-social health necessary for good parenting, through initiatives to enhance home-school links and on in scale to programmes of family or community education aimed to increase levels of human and social capital.

- 9.3.1. Evaluation studies of these initiatives show a consistent general pattern. It is clear that there is both a perceived increase in need for this provision and an evident increase in demand. Programmes are becoming more effective in engaging 'hard to reach' parents including those in extreme poverty, those deemed depressed, and those with erstwhile negative attitudes.
- 9.3.2. Where evaluations are available, they consistently show high levels of commitment, enthusiasm and appreciation amongst providers and clients for the provision and considerable appreciation for its effects.
- 9.3.3. That being said, it is impossible from an objective research standpoint to describe the scale of the impacts on pupils' achievement and adjustment on the basis of the evidence available. This is not to say that they do not work. It does however raise the questions of whether current activity is getting a good return on extensive effort and to what degree current provision is tapping the vast potential revealed in the basic research.
- 9.3.4. The research base referring to intervention studies is too weak to answer questions about the **relative effectiveness of work in different key stages**. From the subjective view of participants at all stages everything seems to work equally well. If this is the case, then from the point of view of individual pupils, every stage is a worthwhile target. From the point of view of return on investment, the earlier the intervention, the longer the run of return. The preponderance of intervention activity is directed at the early stages of education.
- 9.3.5. From the perspective of research, the scene in regard to interventions to enhance parental involvement in England is very similar to that in other countries. The weak evidence base places serious limits on the sorts of conclusions that can be drawn and the lessons that can be learned from abroad. There is perhaps one exception to this pattern. This is manifest in the USA in the form of the national Network led by Epstein. This will be returned to in a subsequent section.
- 9.4 In regard to using parental involvement research to inform attempts to close the social class achievement gap several lines of thinking commend themselves. The first is the very clear and consistent finding that when all other factors bearing on pupil attainment are taken out of the equation, parental involvement in the terms described earlier has a large and positive effect on the outcomes of schooling. This effect is bigger than that of schooling itself. 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. It would seem that if the parenting involvement practices of most working class parents could be raised to the levels of the best working class parents in these terms, very significant advances in school achievement might reasonably be expected. This inference from research cannot be said too often. Additionally, models of



how parental involvement works suggest that every element in the process is, at least in principle, open to the influences of teaching and learning. The policy challenge reflects that of turning average schools into the best schools except that the return on effort if successful would be far greater.

9.5 The challenge however, is multidimensional. The research reveals a number of different barriers to high quality parental involvement each of which will need a different response. A comprehensive initiative to enhance parental involvement would have to expect to provide services to ameliorate the following problems facing some parents

- the effects of extreme poverty and of social chaos and threat in some neighbourhoods
- the effects of substance abuse and of domestic violence
- the effects of psychosocial illness, notably depression
- the impact of a difficult child
- the effect of barriers set up by schools
- the impact of inappropriate values and beliefs underlying a fatalistic view of education
- parental lack of confidence in or knowledge about how to be appropriately involved

9.6 Some parents will need help with all of these issues whilst others will need only very selective support. Taken collectively there are current initiatives which deal with each of these challenges separately but there seems to be no initiative managing the whole-set approach necessary to capitalise on potential. Developments of such a wholistic approach are called for.

9.7 Even if such a scheme were in place however, it would not necessarily lead to educational gains. As has been shown, there are many programmes and interventions working, to the evident satisfaction of participants, to alleviate some of the above difficulties. Yet there is a consistent lack of evidence showing the delivery of the 'achievement bonus'. The link between getting parents in a position to be pro-schooling and getting children to make quantum leaps in achievement seems to be missing.

9.7.1 This observation would come as no surprise to leading edge American practitioners in the field. As Raffaele and Knoff (1999) and Epstein (2002) have shown, unless a whole-community, strategic approach to parental involvement is undertaken, and unless this work is embedded in the school's teaching and learning strategy and development plan, little

return on effort can be expected. Outside this strategic approach, parental involvement activities tend to be ad-hoc, short term and to lack follow-through.

9.7.2 Given the multi faceted nature of the challenge, US experience based on their distinction between more and less successful interventions, commends several principles to guide action. These include

- Collaboration should be pro-active rather than reactive
- The engagement of all parents should be worked for
- Collaboration involves sensitivity to the wide ranging circumstances of all families
- Collaboration recognises and values the contributions parents have to make to the educational process

9.7.3 Planning for intervention should build on

- A comprehensive needs analysis
- The establishment of mutual priorities
- Whole school evaluation of resources and necessary organisational adjustments
- A public awareness process to help parents and teachers understand and commit to the strategic plan (Raffaele and Knoff, 1999)

9.7.4 Epstein's National Programme of Parent/School Partnerships (Kreider, 2000) showed that best effects were obtained when parental involvement planning was integrated fully into the schools development plan, and when an 'action team' comprising teachers and members of the community had responsibility for delivery of the plan.

9.8 The language of these ideas might not travel well across the Atlantic and into the English culture of schooling but the management lessons remain central and simple. They are

- Promoting parental involvement is a whole school/community issue
- It must be worked for in a multi-dimensional programme
- It will bring an achievement bonus only if the intervention is followed through in the school's development plan for enhanced achievement goals. Basic research in the field offers a clear framework for intervention. In it there is little or no place for

programmes of ad-hoc activities, for training which merely makes children biddable or for any intervention which lacks follow-through. Nor is there any place for bolt-on roles (mentor, home-school link workers) which threaten to distribute the responsibility for parental involvement and support and weaken its connection to the school's teaching and learning plan.

- 9.9 What further knowledge do we need to promote achievement through parental involvement? Where are the gaps in the research? In responding to these questions judgement takes over entirely from evidence. It would seem that we know enough about how good parenting works in propitious circumstances in favour of educational achievement. We also know that there is an extensive need and demand for support and direction to promote these skills. We have programmes in the field that satisfy many clients at least in their immediate impacts. We seem to know as much in principle about parental involvement and its impact on pupil achievement as Newton knew about the physics of motion in the 17th. Century. What we seem to lack is the 'engineering' science that helps us put our knowledge into practice. By 1650 Newton knew in theory how to put a missile on the moon. It took more than 300 years to learn how to do this in practice. The scientists who did this used Newton's physics with modern engineering knowledge. We must not wait 300 years to promote stellar advances in pupils' achievement. We need urgently to learn how to apply the knowledge we already have in the field.
- 9.10 What is implicated is not more basic research in how parenting works or how children learn. We have a good-enough knowledge base to hand on these matters. (Bransford et al, 1999). Rather, what is called for is a number of competing development studies modelled on engineering design research. We know what we want – quantum leaps in pupil achievement broadly conceived. We have key principles and a good-enough knowledge base to guide us. We are not short of commitment, creativity and good starter ideas. What we lack is sufficient knowledge to take us from where we are to where we want to be. We need a programme of carefully researched multi-dimensional developments in parental involvement for pupil achievement. These developments should not be evaluated in the current mode. Such evaluations come too late and teach us too little. We do not need to learn, too late, what worked. We need to learn how to get things to work.
- 9.10.1 From this perspective the development studies should have a research component run on design-research principles to learn lessons from work in progress which feeds into continuous improvement of approaches. Recent advances in educational research methods are well up to the specification and management of such programme of development (Kelly, 2003). We have a foundation of relevant knowledge to be confident and to learn as we go in closing to some degree the social class gap in educational achievement.

- 9.10.2 It is well known that the great majority of children at risk of relative school failure live in a relatively small number of post code districts. Strategic targeting of development projects could focus on schools in these districts.
- 9.11 In **summary** it is worth emphasising that research on spontaneous levels of parental involvement in children's education confirms the long held view that the impact is large and the processes are well understood. What parents do with their children at home through the age range, is much more significant than any other factor open to educational influence. Notwithstanding the poor quality of research and evaluations in intervention studies a clear picture of need, want, commitment and readiness is evident. What seems to be lacking is an effort to put these two bodies of knowledge together in a development format likely to deliver the achievement bonus from enhanced parenting.

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## APPENDIX A : the review process

1. The review was conducted in the period October-November 2002. The time scale did not permit a thorough-going exhaustive systematic approach as exemplified in the work of EPPI or Cochrane. The basic strategy was to build on previous reviews of the field where available.
2. The following data bases were searched: British Education Index; Education-Line; ERIC; National Research Register; REGARD; ISI citation index; CERUK; EPPI; Australian Education Index; Psychlit.
3. The following websites were searched: DfES, NFER, 30% of LEA websites in England; Bids education service; University of Exeter Electronic Journals service; Cochrane; Database of Reviews of Effectiveness.
4. Search terms used were:
  - parent (or parental or parenting or family)
  - involvement (or interest or engagement or support)
  - pupil (or student or child or youth)
  - achievement (or progress or adjustment or development)
  - community (or family)
  - education (or training or development)
  - programme (or scheme or partnership or intervention)
5. **Other sources** High profile workers in the field in the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Scandinavia were contacted for guidance on work in progress, work in press and names of other lead researchers and practitioners. Most of these contacts were pursued using e-mails and telephone messages with the request for evidence linking parent/family/community involvement support with pupil (or synonyms) achievement or adjustment.

It became evident that the field of 'parent training' programmes is highly specialised and subject to extensive reviewing following interest in fields related to medicine (mental health for example) using medical models. It seemed both pointless (and given the resource limitations, impossible) to replicate these reviews. The extant reviews in this field have been drawn on extensively in relevant sections of this report.

5. **Outputs.** The term 'parent(al) involvement' generated tens of thousands of citations and more than ten thousand for the period 1995 - 2002. When juxtaposed with 'pupil achievement or its synonyms and related terms the number of citations was reduced but was still far too extensive to access and categorise with the resources available. Accessing abstracts of 2% of this material suggested it to be predominantly rhetorical. Papers

presenting evidence relating various manifestations of input in terms of parental/family/community involvement to forms of output in terms of pupil achievement and adjustment were rare.

In this light it was decided to focus the search on two forms of literature (a) material published in academic journals reporting evidence based links relevant to the aims of the review and (b) material recommended by experts in the field (whether published or in 'grey' literature) examining the effects of intervention studies. All this material was accessed and all of it is cited in this report.

This inclusion strategy suffers from two biases. First, it is possible that it omits useful work 'in the margins'. There might be studies unpublished and unknown to the international community of experts in the field. Second, it could be that the report suffers from 'publication bias' – that tendency of journals and experts to focus on those studies reporting positive effects. There is a tendency for studies supporting the null hypothesis (no effect) to disappear from view. This bias can only be avoided by using the time and resources to conduct an exhaustive, systematic review.

The manifestation of this bias in the report is that any study in the context of the English educational system which (published or not) reported evidence of the form of parental involvement and gave some indication of impact on pupil learning outcome is included here.

## **APPENDIX B: Effect sizes of parental involvement on school outcomes**

The table below shows effect sizes in terms of regression coefficients of the impact of parental involvement on pupil learning outcomes. It requires an explanatory comment.

The studies cited in the report characteristically address several questions involved in exploring the relationships between parental involvement and school performance. In each study, many variables were assessed using a variety of measures. In drawing conclusions about the relationships between variables it is usual to distinguish between background variables (e.g. social class, parental level of education) and other variables (e.g. forms of parental involvement). Each study reports the many interacting relationships between these independent variables and the dependent variables representing school performance (e.g. attainment in its various forms or truancy as an index of adjustment).

As explained in Chapter 2 of the report, it is challenging to isolate the effect of any one independent variable on the dependent variables because of the complex interactions between all the factors. Researchers do this by first postulating a model or models of how the variables work. They then use statistical techniques to remove the variables from the equation or model to establish estimates of the degree of effect of each independent variable on the dependent variables. The table below is an attempt to show the scale of the effect of the key variables of interest to this report as manifest in some of the research studies cited here. The table shows selected regression coefficients of the effect of parental involvement on achievement or adjustment when all other factors have been taken out of the equation. It has not been possible to do this for all the studies.

The regression coefficients are shown in the right hand column. Each is highly statistically significant. These coefficients cannot be averaged out across the studies. The pattern however shows consistently that parental involvement is a significant factor in shaping educational outcomes. In these studies parental involvement accounts for at least 10% of the variance in achievement net of social class. This makes parental involvement a much bigger factor than school effects in shaping achievement.

<i>Study</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Effect size</i>
Catsambis, 2001	To explore the relationship between parental involvement and students' achievement in US high schools	NELS, 88	high school involvement	parental encouragement and expectations	0.12
De Garmo et al, 1999	To identify how SES impacts on pupils' achievement	238 mothers of 6-9 year old sons	achievement in maths and reading	mothers' nurturance of skill building	0.25
Fan, 2001	To assess the effect of parental involvement on high school students' achievement	NELS, 88	academic achievement	parental aspiration	0.2
Feinstein and Symons, 1999	Identifying factors determining achievement at age 16	NCDS, 58	academic achievement at age 16	parental interest	4 x the effect of parental SES
Garg et al, 2002	To identify factors shaping adolescents' educational aspirations	4,034 Canadian adolescents	educational aspirations	parental expectation	0.4
George and Kaplan, 1999	Modelling effects of parents and teachers on students' attitudes to science	NELS, 88	student attitudes to science	parental involvement	0.22
Izzo et al, 199	To explore the effect of parental involvement on school performance	1205, US K/3 grades	reading achievement maths achievement	at-home parental involvement at-home parental involvement	0.40 0.25
Ma, 2001	To explore the effect of parental expectation on students' aspiration in mathematics	US students (N = 3116) aged 13-16	level of maths enrolment	parent expectation SES	0.22 0.29
McNeal, 2001	To explore the effect of parental involvement on student behaviour and achievement in science	NELS, 88	achievement in science truancy	parent-child discussion	0.15 0.08
Marchant et al, 2001	To examine the effects of family and school contexts on academic achievement	250, US 5/6 graders	academic achievement	parental involvement	0.28

<i>Study</i>	<i>Aim</i>	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Dependent Variable</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Effect size</i>
Mau, 1997	To explore ethnic differences in the effect of parent influence on high school achievement	White Americans (WA); Asian immigrants (AI) and Asian Americans (AA) from NELS, 88	academic achievement	parental expectation	0.26 (WA) 0.26 (AI) 0.23 (AA)
Gonzalez-Pienda et al, 2002	To explore the effect of parental involvement on academic achievement	261 Spanish adolescents	academic self concept achievement	parental involvement academic self concept	0.75 0.57
Sacker et al, 2002	To explain social inequality in education	NCDS, 58	achievement at age 7  achievement at age 11  achievement at age 16	social class parental involvement school effects social class parental involvement school effects social class parental involvement school effects	0.45 0.29 0.05 0.58 0.27 0.21 0.61 0.14 0.51
Sui-Chu and Willms, 1996	To explore the impact of parental involvement on 8 <sup>th</sup> graders achievement	NELS, 88	academic achievement	SES home discussion	0.25 0.12

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