

Parent engagement in children’s learning: a systematic rapid review protocol

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2. Background

Parent engagement refers to parents’ participation in supporting their child’s learning (academic attainment,² related learning outcomes³ and behaviour), whether at home, in school or via home-school connections and wider community collaborations (Harris and Goodall 2007). The importance of parent engagement in children’s learning is widely acknowledged, with evidence on benefits in terms of literacy and maths skills (Van Voorhis et al. 2013), school attendance (McConnell and Kubina 2014) and closure of the achievement gap (Goodall 2017). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) concluded that parental involvement at home had a significant positive effect on children’s achievement after adjusting for other factors that influence attainment.

Meanwhile, research on the home learning environment (HLE), which includes the physical home environment and interactions with family members in and around the home (Smees and Sammons 2016), shows that the quality of the HLE before children attend school not only predicts school readiness outcomes, including language and communication and social-emotional skills, but also has a continuing effect on educational performance in primary and secondary school (up to age 18 years) (e.g. Sylva et al. 2004; Melhuish et al. 2008; Melhuish 2010; Sammons et al. 2015a). In addition, some aspects of the HLE in middle childhood and adolescence contribute to outcomes in secondary school, including GCSE performance (Sammons et al. 2015b). Importantly, these effects are net of predictors such as income, family socio-economic status (SES) and parents’ own qualification levels.

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² Referring to formal test, exams, grades or other measures of knowledge or skills.

³ Including attendance, engagement with school, motivation and attitude to learning.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of parent engagement in children's learning, systematic reviews of evidence on interventions to improve attainment and other learning outcomes via supporting parent engagement have shown mixed results (e.g. See and Gorard 2015). Moreover, the most recent systematic reviews in this respect were conducted over five years ago (e.g. Jeynes 2012; Gorard and See 2013), suggesting a need to update the evidence base by quality appraising and synthesising evidence from the main reviews with newer studies of intervention impact.

This undertaking is of particular interest from a policy and practice perspective in the light of the Schools White Paper for England (Department for Education 2010), which outlined the Government's strategy to raise the attainment of disadvantaged children and narrow the achievement gap. Parents from low socio-economic status backgrounds face many barriers to involvement in their children's learning (Harris and Goodall 2007), but equally there is evidence that disadvantaged parents *can* become more engaged with their children with support and that this engagement leads to better outcomes (Van Voorhis et al. 2013). Further evidence on the extent to which strengthening the involvement of disadvantaged parents in their children's education contributes to reducing the achievement gap is clearly needed.

The review outlined in this protocol is part of a larger study, which additionally seeks to understand what schools in England do currently to support parents' engagement in their children's learning. The aim is to draw on both a review of the evidence on parent engagement and an analysis of existing practice in this regard in schools in England in order to present actionable recommendations for practice.

3. Objectives

The review will synthesise the best available international evidence on parental engagement in children's learning, focusing on:

- (a) effective parenting practices (including styles and activities) associated with positive learning outcomes at different stages of children's development
- (b) how the activities (including programmes, practices, structures and processes) delivered in or by schools and early years settings can promote and support these practices, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The review will address the following specific research questions:

- 1a. What parenting practices are associated with children's academic attainment, related learning outcomes (e.g. attendance, engagement with school, motivation, attitude to learning) and behaviour?
- 1b. Does the impact of parenting practices on these outcomes vary across different socio-economic groups?
- 2a. What school-based or school-led activities are effective in supporting parents' engagement in their children's learning?
- 2b. Do they improve children's academic attainment, related learning outcomes and behaviour and reduce the achievement gap?

2c. What factors are associated with the effectiveness of parent engagement interventions?

Studies will be selected and synthesised for two sub-reviews. One will address research questions 1a and 1b and focus on parenting practices that are associated with academic attainment and other learning outcomes. The other will address research questions 2a-2c and assess which activities delivered in or by schools and early years settings can promote these parenting practices and children's academic attainment, related learning outcomes and behaviour. The findings of this review will inform a survey of >100 schools in England about activities they undertake to promote parents' engagement in their children's learning. The survey will be complemented by interviews with a selection of school leaders (c.15) who completed the survey and international experts (c.5) in the subject. Together, the reviews, survey and interviews will inform the development of guidance produced by the Education Endowment Foundation for schools in England.

4. Methods

This rapid review will use defined systematic review methods and will follow recommendations laid out in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement (Moher et al. 2009).

4.1 Eligibility criteria

Documents meeting the following criteria will be included.

Population

Parents or caregivers of children aged 3-16.

Interventions

Any interventions delivered in or by preschools or schools that are designed to promote parental engagement or support parenting practices associated with positive learning outcomes in the school or home setting (research questions 2a-2c). The review will also consider evidence that demonstrates the impact of parenting practices on learning outcomes that may be measured outside of intervention studies seeking to improve such practices (research questions 1a and 1b).

Outcomes

Any learning outcomes including school readiness, academic attainment (e.g. formal tests, exams, grades and other measures of knowledge and skills), related learning outcomes (e.g. attendance, engagement with school life, motivation, attitudes to learning) or behaviour. Parent engagement outcomes (e.g. communicating with children, creating a positive home learning environment, attending school activities) will also be included for studies relevant to research questions 2a-2c.

Study type

Systematic reviews for all research questions, supplemented with randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and quasi-experimental design (QED) studies that (i) focus on the impact of activities and interventions (research questions 2a-2c) and (ii) are not found in the included systematic reviews.

4.2 Identifying the evidence

The databases ERIC, Education Research Complete and the British Education Index (via EBSCOhost), the Australian Education Index and ASSIA (via ProQuest), Scopus, PsycINFO (via OvidSp), Social Policy and Practice (via OvidSp), Social Science Citation Index (via Web of Science) and ProQuest dissertations will be searched. The database searches will be designed and run by an information specialist. The search will be limited by publication date from 2013, which is when the most recent extensive systematic reviews in this area were carried out. The search will combine terms for parents, parental involvement, education/school, and learning/learning activities. If necessary, search filters for study design (systematic reviews and controlled trials) will also be used.

Citation searching will be carried out for key systematic reviews and primary studies found during the database searches. Key journals identified during the searches as being particularly pertinent in this topic area will be hand-searched.

Grey literature will be sought initially through databases. However, websites of pertinent organisations, such as the Education Endowment Foundation, Special Schools and Academy Trust, National College for Teaching and Leadership and PTA UK will also be searched for relevant documents.

4.3. Study selection

References will be uploaded to reference management software (Endnote X8.2) and duplicate studies will be removed. Two reviewers will screen the titles and abstracts independently. Full texts will be retrieved for included titles and these will also be screened by two reviewers. Discrepancies will be resolved by a third reviewer if necessary. A PRISMA-style flowchart will be produced with the reason for exclusion of each full-text paper reported (Liberati et al. 2009).

4.4 Data extraction

Data extraction forms will be developed separately for the systematic reviews and the randomised controlled trials/QED studies.

For the systematic reviews focusing on *effective parenting practices associated with positive learning outcomes* (questions 1a and 1b), data will be collected on: the type and aim of the review; inclusion and exclusion criteria (study type, target group); the number and type of studies included; the countries in which they took place; the type of parent activity; child academic attainment outcomes; child related learning outcomes; child behaviour outcomes; how parent engagement was defined and measured; author conclusions; and author research recommendations.

For the systematic reviews focusing on *the activities delivered in or by schools and early years settings to promote and support effective parenting practices associated with positive learning outcomes* (questions 2a-2c), data will be collected on: the type and aim of the review; inclusion and exclusion criteria (e.g. study type, target group, intervention type); the number and type of studies included; the countries in which they took place; the nature of the interventions reviewed (e.g. setting, duration, implementer); their theoretical

underpinning; their educational phase; their fit in the Epstein typology⁴; child academic attainment outcomes; child related learning outcomes; child behaviour outcomes; parent engagement outcomes; the point at which outcomes were measured; messages on how best to engage families with particular needs; messages on effective implementation; messages on context; author conclusions; and author research recommendations.

Data extraction for the RCTs and QEDs (questions 2a-2c) will include: recruitment setting; target group and age range; the unit of allocation; the number of participants in each study condition; the gender and ethnicity of children in the study; the primary outcome; whether there was follow-up beyond the end of the intervention; the nature of the intervention (e.g. aim, setting, number and frequency of sessions / contacts; implementer (including expertise and training); fit in the Epstein typology; child academic attainment outcomes; child related learning outcomes; child behaviour outcomes; parent engagement outcomes; moderator results; fidelity results; messages on how best to engage families with particular needs; messages on effective implementation; messages on context; author conclusions; and author research recommendations..

Data extraction will be undertaken by one reviewer and checked by another independent reviewer. Disagreements will be resolved with a third independent reviewer where necessary.

4.5 Quality assessment

The quality of included studies will be assessed using a tool that complements the Education Endowment Foundation approach to grading evidence.

In the case of the systematic reviews, key criteria will include: addresses a clearly focused question; a priori design reported; comprehensive literature search performed; duplicate study selection and data extraction; includes studies regardless of publication type; provides a list of studies (included and excluded); provides characteristics of included studies; assesses the scientific quality of included studies assessed; scientific quality of included studies used appropriately in formulating conclusions; methods used to combine the findings were appropriate; and assesses the likelihood of publication bias.

In the case of the primary studies, key criteria will include: addresses a clearly focused issue; adequately powered to detect difference in primary outcome; randomisation method specified and valid; allocation concealment adequate; baseline data collected before random allocation; baseline equal or differences in baseline accounted for; all participants accounted for; groups treated equally apart from intervention; participants blind to treatment; implementers blind to treatment; data collectors blind to treatment; precision of estimate of effect; can results be applied in England; intention to treat (ITT) analysis; total attrition; and differential attrition.

⁴ These are: parenting; communicating; volunteering; learning at home; decision-making; and collaborating with the community (Epstein 2001).

4.6 Synthesis

Data from included systematic reviews and primary studies will be synthesised narratively. In the case of the primary studies, individual study effect sizes will be provided and, if data allow, a meta-analysis will be used to calculate summary measures of impact on attainment.

5. Sources of funding

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www.educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk.

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