



National Research and Development Centre  
for adult literacy and numeracy

# Family learning: a review of the research literature

A report prepared for *NIACE* by the *National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy, Institute of Education, University of London*

June 2012

For more information about this report please contact:

JD Carpentieri

[j.carpentieri@ioe.ac.uk](mailto:j.carpentieri@ioe.ac.uk)

## Contents

Introduction .....	3
The structure of this review .....	5
1 Key issues and concepts.....	5
1.1 Progression.....	6
1.2 Confidence and self-esteem.....	7
1.3 Motivation and self-efficacy.....	9
1.4 Aspirations and ambitions.....	10
1.5 Parenting practices.....	10
1.6 Human capital (skills) .....	11
1.7 Social capital.....	12
1.8 Cultural capital .....	13
1.9 Competing priorities: parents versus policymakers?.....	14
2 Impacts on parents .....	14
2.1 Skills gains.....	14
2.2 Progression: personal, social, educational and economic.....	16
2.3 Confidence, self-esteem, motivation and self-efficacy.....	19
2.4 Social and cultural capital.....	21
2.5 Parenting skills and practices .....	22
3 Impacts on children.....	28
3.1 Skills.....	28
3.2 Non-cognitive impacts: motivation, behaviour and confidence.....	30
4 Gaps and weaknesses in the research evidence .....	31
4.1 What has not been measured?.....	31
4.2 What should we measure? .....	32
4.3 How should we measure? .....	34
4.4 When should we measure?.....	36
References and selected bibliography.....	36
Appendix: Impacts of family literacy programmes on child literacy .....	42

# Introduction

This is a rapid review of the research evidence on family learning. In particular, this review summarises the evidence on one key question: “What is the impact of family learning?”

This paper looks at the evidence in the UK and internationally, and also looks at impacts across a range of domains. After summarising the evidence on family learning’s impacts on parents, we summarise the evidence on its impacts on children. We also look outcomes at wider levels, such as the family unit, the community and society as a whole. This paper highlights many of the key findings in earlier NIACE evidence reviews, but seeks to build on rather than repeat the evidence from recent NIACE reports such as Lamb et al’s “Providing the evidence: the impact of wider family learning” (2009). For example, that report does an excellent job of highlighting the many ways in which family learning contributes to a broad range of policy objectives across a number of government departments. We will not repeat that information here, but will instead commend it to our readers.

Family learning emphasises the family as the most important learning environment, and draws on a broad range of educational and non-educational interventions and approaches, including parental involvement, parental education, adult literacy, early learning, support for children's learning, and school improvement. Family learning builds on and seeks to contribute to families’ home cultures and experiences.

As Lamb (2009, p. 5) writes, “Family Learning has at its heart the welfare and advancement of the child set in the context of learning for the whole family. It acknowledges that each family member is an individual with individual needs and aspirations but is affected by the behaviour and attitudes of the other family members across different generations.” Family learning “encourages participatory learning, promotes family relationships as supporting well-being and readiness to learn, promotes a culture of aspirations in adults and children, and provides opportunities to build confidence, try out new skills and ideas” (ibid). A basic assumption of family learning programmes is that reaching both generations simultaneously can help break the “cycle of disadvantage” (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). In this regard, such programmes are an excellent example of “joined-up” policymaking, in which it is understood that children's cognitive and non-cognitive development cannot be addressed in isolation, by focusing on the child alone. Such programmes also take account of the parents’ strong motivation to help their children.

Family learning programmes are generally divided into two types: 1) programmes concentrating on Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN); and 2) those utilising a wider curriculum and focusing on Wider Family Learning (WFL). Wider Family Learning includes all forms of family learning other than Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy. In both types of family learning, interventions focus on children and parents learning together,

with both groups improving their skills and parents improving their capacity to support their children's learning and development (Lamb, 2009).

In this review, our primary focus is Wider Family Learning (WFL). Wider family learning (WFL) is not synonymous with "wider benefits of family learning". In principle, "wider benefits" are all measured outcomes of family learning programmes other than those which are their principal aims. For example, FLLN programmes have as their principal aims benefits to parents' own skills, and/or benefits to parents' ability to assist their children's development, and/or benefit to children's developing skills. However, achieving a first aid certificate, which would be the intended principal aim of a Family First Aid course, may also be a wider benefit of an FLLN course (as in the Basic Skills Agency's Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes). In this review, we are interested in all benefits, whether they be "principal aims" or wider benefits. As Buffton (1999, pp. 189-90) observed, the potential benefits of family learning interventions are wide ranging: "Family learning supports efforts to raise children's achievement levels, raises expectations and aspirations of both children and adults, promotes active citizenship and, as the family group is the microcosm of the community, is community capacity building at its best."

While the benefits of family learning may be wide ranging, the research evidence is not. Buffton (1999) has argued that family learning will only bring about lasting change in attitudes to learning if its curriculum moves beyond literacy courses to a broad and balanced curriculum, introducing a wide range of new and familiar subjects. However, literacy, because of direct policy importance, is the focus of most family learning programmes. While there is a growing body of research on family literacy programmes, there is much less evidence on other forms of family learning. Much of the recent evidence on family literacy programmes' impacts is summarised in two recent reviews: Brooks et al's 2008 "meta-study" of family literacy programmes in the UK and internationally, and Carpentieri et al's 2011 review of family literacy programmes throughout Europe. It should be noted, however, that most of the evidence on the impacts of family literacy programmes focuses on outcomes for children only. In our current review, we provide a summary of Carpentieri et al's overview of six meta-analyses of family literacy interventions. Because these meta-analyses focus only on child literacy outcomes, we provide this summary in an appendix rather than in the main body of the report. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no meta-analyses of family literacy programmes with a focus on outcomes for children and parents.

In contrast to the small but growing body of research on family literacy programmes, there is very little research on family numeracy programmes. There is also little stand-alone research on family language programmes; most of the research in this area appears to be subsumed into the field of family literacy. To the best of our knowledge, there have been no meta-analyses of family numeracy or language programmes.

There is also very little research on wider family learning programmes. In particular, there is a lack of high-quality research relying on more robust measures than parent, tutor and child self-reports of impacts. We discuss this and other research gaps in Section 4.

## The structure of this review

This review is organised not by the type or focus of different Family Learning programmes, but by outcomes of those programmes. There is too little evidence on different types of programmes to make the former approach a viable structure.

One option when structuring this review was to report quantitative and qualitative evidence in separate chapters. This was the approach taken by Carpentieri et al (2011) in their review of European evidence on the effectiveness of family literacy programmes. That approach was driven by a European policy context in which funders place greater value on quantitative evidence. While such a policy context also exists in the UK, there is insufficient quantitative evidence on family learning to justify such a structure. We have therefore adopted the following approach:

- Section 1 provides an overview of key issues and concepts that must be taken into account when analysing the impacts of family learning.
- Section 2 looks at the evidence on the impacts of family learning on parents.
- Section 3 summarises the evidence on the impacts for children.
- Section 4 offers a discussion of gaps and weaknesses in the research evidence.
- The Appendix provides an overview of meta-analytic evidence on the impacts of family literacy programmes on child literacy.

# 1 Key issues and concepts

Before summarising the evidence on the impacts of Family Learning programmes on parents, children, families and the broader community, we will provide a brief overview of some of the key conceptual issues related to the benefits of family learning. These issues and concepts are:

- progression
- self-confidence and self-esteem
- motivation and self-efficacy
- aspirations and ambitions
- parenting practices
- skills, also referred to as human capital
- social capital
- cultural capital

- competing priorities: parents versus policymakers.

Some of these issues relate to differing conceptions of the core benefits of family learning, and the “knock-on” benefits that arise as a product of achieving those core impacts. Given the lack of high quality research in this field, it is likely that differing conceptions are driven at least as much by policy developments as by new evidence.

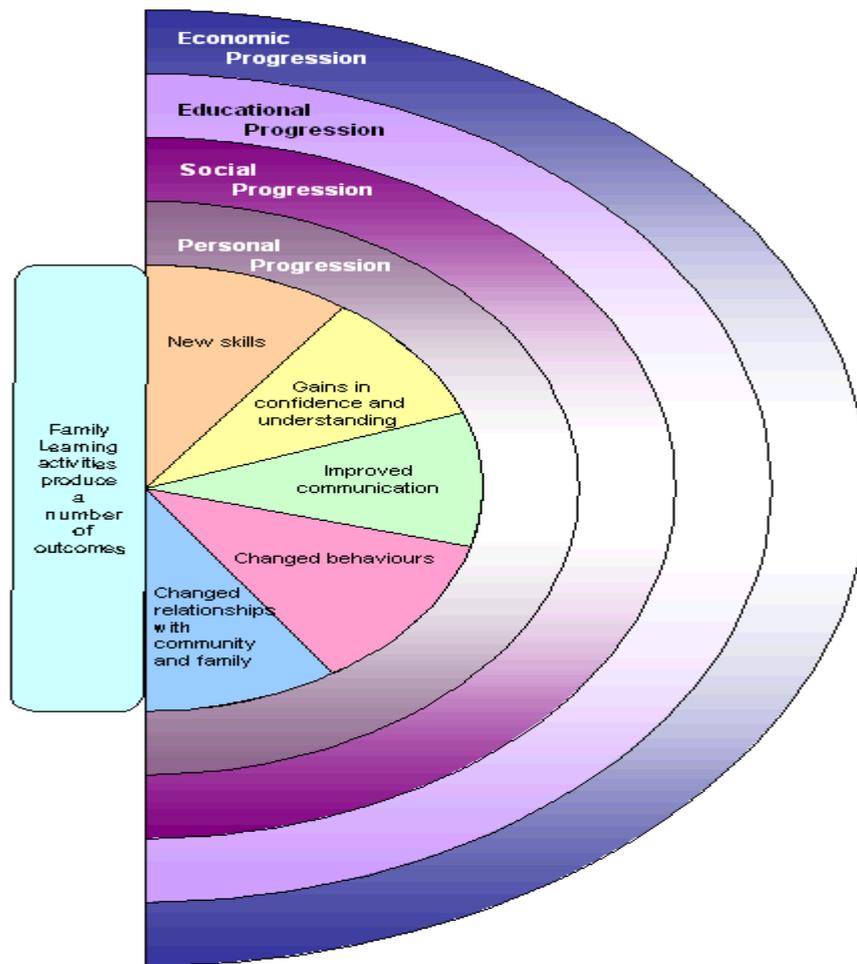
## 1.1 Progression

Lamb (2009) highlighted **five core outcomes of family learning**: new skills, gains in confidence and understanding, improved communication, changed behaviours and changed relationships with family and community. Arguing that “increased confidence, raised aspirations [and better] understanding of and motivation for learning [form] the foundation of all categories of progression”, Lamb then links these five broad outcomes to **four domains of progression**:

- **personal progression** - e.g. increased confidence, changes in attitude, increased choices, increased tolerance and understanding, changes in attitude, improved health, improved sense of well-being;
- **social progression** - e.g. volunteering, joining groups, engaging with community activities, feeling included, better relationships with family;
- **educational progression** – e.g. other courses, other family learning, learning at home, supporting children’s learning, raised aspirations;
- **economic progression** – e.g. skills, employment, qualifications, placements, increased confidence, more effective communications, improved budgeting.

Illustration 1.1 provides a graphic illustration of Lamb’s model of family learning outcomes.

Illustration 1.1 Lamb's model of family learning outcomes (Lamb, 2009)

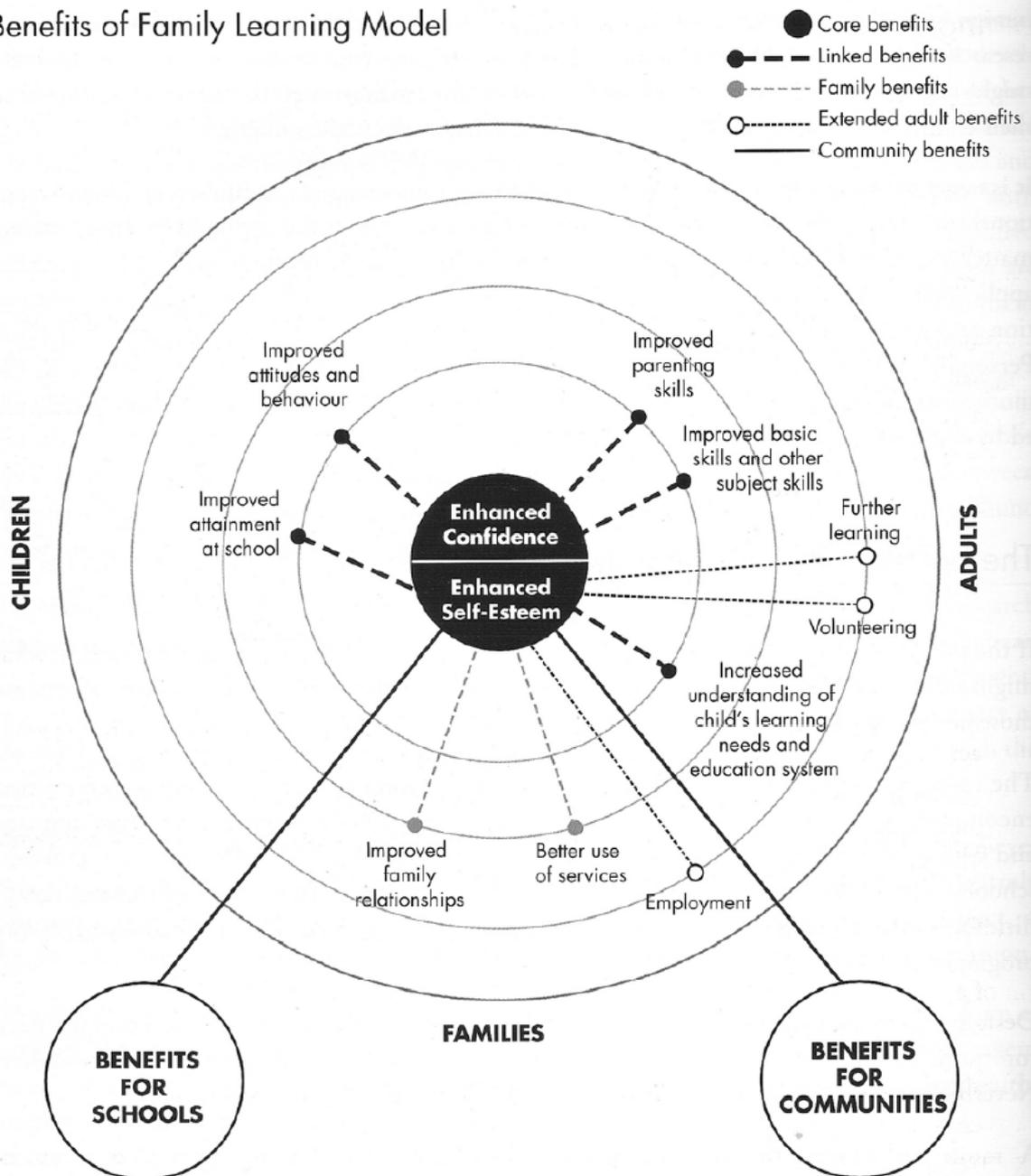


## 1.2 Confidence and self-esteem

NIACE's 2009 model of the benefits of family learning (Lamb, 2009) pointed to "gains in confidence and understanding" as a core outcome of family learning. In an earlier model of family learning's impacts, Lochrie (2004) allowed confidence to stand on its own as a core impact, establishing improved confidence and self-esteem as the two core outcomes of family learning. Other benefits, such as improved parenting skills, better literacy and numeracy, and improved employment outcomes, were seen as growing out of enhanced confidence and self-esteem. Illustration 1.2 provides a graphical representation of Lochrie's model.

Illustration 1.2 Lochrie's model of family learning outcomes (Lochrie, 2004)

## Benefits of Family Learning Model



Source: Lochrie, M. (2004) Family Learning: Building all our Futures, p.6. NIACE

Horne and Haggart (2004) argue that improved confidence can play a crucial role in helping individuals and families to overcome what McGivney (1993) called the dispositional barriers further learning. These **dispositional barriers** are related to learners' attitudes, perceptions, motivations and beliefs about learning and themselves. Researchers suggest that dispositional barriers to learning are potentially the most important factors influencing adult literacy motivation, and can be even more difficult to overcome than situational or institutional barriers (Porter et al, 2005). Whereas situational or institutional obstacles can

be overcome by making changes to the world outside the individual or family, dispositional barriers can only be overcome by addressing issues internal to an individual's psyche and/or family dynamics.

### 1.3 Motivation and self-efficacy

Related to self-confidence and self-esteem is the concept of **self-efficacy**, which relates to individuals' belief in their own ability to deal with tasks, including difficult ones (Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2011; Dweck, 1999). Unless people believe they can achieve positive results in a particular domain, they have little incentive to persist in the face of difficulties. One term for such persistence is "**hurdle motivation**" – are hurdles viewed as stopping points, or spurs to additional action? For many adults, the education system has been a barrier to motivation and self-efficacy, rather than a source. Successful family learning programmes can serve as stepping stones which help adults develop educational motivation and self-efficacy. However, developing self-efficacy takes time. Learning is a process, not something that happens in one great burst of motivation and effort. Education and training require patience, persistence, and the constant renewal of motivation, as an extended series of hurdles are encountered and (hopefully) overcome.

A key contributor to the persistence required to overcome these hurdles is "**self-concept**", which refers to belief in oneself as competent and capable, and which is closely tied to **identity**: do you see yourself as someone who is capable of learning (Dweck, 1999)?

While increased motivation is not cited as a key outcome of family learning in the above models, much educational and developmental research indicates that motivation is a core requirement for participation and progression in learning, and that successful learning stimulates motivation. Motivation is the driving force behind most learning, encouraging effort and engagement (Artelt et al, 2003). **Motivation is not about brainpower, nor should it be understood as willpower.** Neither should motivation be understood just as something that "comes before" skills gain. Improvements in skills increase motivation, with increased motivation in turn leading to improvements in skill (Cox and Guthrie, 2001). This virtuous circle can be initiated and stimulated family learning programmes (Carpentieri et al, 2011).

Many parents, particularly those who have had negative experiences of the education system, report being more motivated to participate and learn when they are provided with a context in which they feel confident and secure, and when the objectives of the course or meaningful to them. Successful family learning programmes provide secure environments; and for most learners, learning within a family context adds an additional sense of security (Hammond and Gough, 2000). With regard to course objectives, there is substantial evidence that parents are highly motivated to help their children develop, both socio-emotionally and cognitively (Swain et al, 2009; Carpentieri et al, 2011).

## 1.4 Aspirations and ambitions

Much recent government policy has focused on raising aspirations within disadvantaged families. The theory underlying this policy is that poor attainment in education, employment and other areas of life is driven at least in part by low aspirations.

A recent Joseph Rowntree Foundation review of the evidence (Carter-Wall and Whitfield, 2012) found that **focusing primarily on aspirations and ambitions was not only insufficient but potentially misguided**. The review found that disadvantaged families, e.g. those with low incomes, already have high aspirations for their children. The review also concluded that policymakers and educationalists alike tend to underestimate the ambitions and aspirations of disadvantaged families. Lack of success in education and other domains is not primarily a product of lack of ambition, but of the fact that the aspirations of the disadvantaged are frequently stymied by a range of barriers.

The review found that the most effective way of helping low income children to achieve their ambitions was not by focusing on aspirations; it was focusing on some of the key objectives of family learning: **engaging parents in their children's learning, engaging parents in their own learning**, and providing a range of support for children. Interventions that helped parents feel more confident and competent at being involved with their children's learning produced better outcomes, as did those that helped parents better understand how the education system works and how they can work with teachers and schools to help their children reach their full potential.

## 1.5 Parenting practices

Heckman (2011, p. 3) argues that “the true measure of child advantage and disadvantage is the quality of parenting received”. Improving parenting practices through “voluntary, culturally sensitive support” is not only essential, he argues, but is “a politically and economically palatable strategy” for reducing educational gaps.

When it comes to supporting learning, the most important aspects of parental practices are some of the most subtle (Jeynes, 2005). For example, Desforges and Aaboucher (2003) concluded that the most obvious manifestations of parental involvement in a child's learning, e.g. participation in school functions and checking homework, were not the most important in determining child academic outcomes. Instead, these researchers pointed to a more nebulous collection of parental attitudes and behaviours, which they characterised as "**good at-home parenting**". Desforges and Abouchar concluded that the most effective programmes for supporting child academic development were those which focused not on improving parents' cognitive skills but on improving general parenting skills.

Likewise, Jeynes (2005), summarising the research literature on disadvantaged families, observed that it was not particular parental actions or activities that were most closely associated with children's academic achievement, it was **parental expectations and style**.

These, he argued, created an orientation to education that served children in a range of positive ways. Family learning interventions which help to inculcate such orientations, attitudes and behaviours in parents may produce greater long-term gains for children, even if those gains are not quantifiably apparent in the short term.

Such an approach is evident in programmes such as those which adopt the **ORIM framework**, which focuses on parental practices and behaviours. In this framework, parents are encouraged and supported to provide **O**pportunities for learning, show **R**ecognition of their children's learning development, **I**nteract with their children through learning activities, and serve as a good **M**odel of learning (Hannon et al, 2006). The ORIM framework was developed for family literacy programmes, but is also widely used in wider family learning interventions (Lamb, 2009).

Diane Reay of Cambridge University has written extensively on the educational challenges faced by disadvantaged families. Reay's evidence concurs with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's research on aspirations and ambition: the vast majority of disadvantaged parents want to help their children succeed academically, and are very anxious to find ways of doing so (Reay, 1998). What separates these parents from more advantaged parents is not attitudes or aspirations. Instead, it is human, social and cultural capital.

## 1.6 Human capital (skills)

In England, most government education policy is focused on skills gains. Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) programmes aim to improve basic skills, and broader family learning programmes aim to give parents a more general range of vital skills.

Many of the key conflicts and debates about family learning's objectives and impacts revolve around the issue of capital. Traditionally, capital has been defined as that which is or has been invested, and until the 1960s the concept was generally limited to physical capital (Schuller et al, 2004). Beginning in the 1960s, however, the notion of human capital became central to economic and social analysis. It is now central to policy-making, particularly in the field of adult education and skills. Becker, who popularised the concept of human capital in the 1960s, originally conceived of it in broad terms, i.e. including but not limited to economic skills and outcomes. Education, he wrote, should aim to influence "future monetary and psychic income by increasing the resources in people" (Becker 1993, p. 11). This was despite being an economist himself. Another broad definition has been advanced by the OECD, which has argued that human capital is "the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (CERI/OECD, 2001, p. 18). For many policymakers, though, **human capital is often conceived of in much more limited terms, with the focus almost exclusively on the development of skills for the economy.** For example, writing on human capital and

government policy, Husz (1998, p. 9) defined the former as "the time, experience, knowledge and abilities ... which can be used in the production process".

Whatever the definition, it is clear that knowledge and skills are increasingly important to success in modern societies, both economically and in terms of health, personal development, and social and civic engagement. Because of the rising importance of skills such as literacy and numeracy, policy efforts have, often justifiably, focused on improving such skills. However, some policymakers have mistakenly sought to measure and understand the impacts of human capital improvement in the relatively simple and straightforward ways that physical capital investments and improvements can be understood. This can be extremely problematic, as human capital is far less tangible, and far more socially influenced, than physical capital. Falk (2001) argues that **policymakers have a tendency to engage in simplistic equations** based on the belief that investments in human capital inevitably *and directly* lead to better, *measurable* outcomes for individuals or families in the way that improved physical capital stocks should lead to improved outcomes for manufacturing plants. In adopting this approach, policymakers overlook and underestimate the **complex, interrelated and often difficult to measure gains** associated with participation in family learning – gains which, as Lamb et al (2009) have demonstrated, occur across a range of policy fields and public service targets.

## 1.7 Social capital

A more robust understanding of family learning policy and human capital development depends on understanding the interdependence between human capital and social capital (Balatti and Falk, 2002). St Clair (2008, p. 92) argues that just because family learning programmes contribute to human capital development does not mean that human capital should be their only focus: "To understand the impact of family literacy programs, it is necessary to go beyond human capital-based models of benefit and look at social capital and other potential areas of support." St Clair also argues that an overemphasis on human capital can blind us to other important programme outcomes. "What [a human capital focused] approach to evaluation does not capture is the wider impact of the programs, and whether those programs that fail to achieve their [skills] objectives might be contributing in other ways. To understand these issues," he argues, "we have to turn to social capital" (p. 89).

While human capital pertains to individuals, their attributes and characteristics, social capital relates to connections between people and what these connections can potentially offer to enable people to improve their lives through cooperation with others (Field, 2005). Key elements of social capital include shared networks, norms, values and understandings (CERI/OECD, 2001). These are based on and serve to further promote a range of positive outcomes and processes, including trust, goodwill and reciprocity (Centre for Literacy of Québec, 2010).

The development of human capital in the form of skills and knowledge is essential, but without improved social capital those skills and knowledge can neither be developed nor shared for the benefit of families, communities and society. Social capital development can be seen as the first, necessary function of educational provision for the disadvantaged because a lack of social capital erects generally insurmountable barriers to successful and/or further participation and progression in learning. That is, **human capital development requires social capital development** (Balatti et al, 2006). Looked at this way, family learning policy and provision succeeds not just when it improves measurable skills. Indeed, this can be seen as an important but secondary outcome of provision. The primary outcome is seen as improving social capital. By doing so, provision will not only improve skills, it will also influence individuals, families and societies in a range of positive ways, improving health, psychological well-being, and social and civic engagement.

## 1.8 Cultural capital

In comparing advantaged and disadvantaged parents in England, Diane Reay (1998) found that the key difference between the two groups was the former's much better understanding of how to relate to schools and school staff in ways that would benefit their children's educational development. For example, Reay found that disadvantaged parents tended to lack confidence when meeting with teachers. In such meetings, poorly educated parents were less likely to be assertive about their child's needs. For example, they were less likely to demand extra help when their children were struggling with reading or maths. Reay found that such parents viewed themselves as the experts regarding non-educational issues, but lacked self-confidence and self-efficacy when it came to dealing with their children's education.

One of the key objectives of family learning programmes is to help parents develop the skills, networks and confidence to help their children overcome barriers. A key component of this process is cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital can be understood as the accumulated cultural knowledge possessed by individuals and families, and does not primarily refer to "high culture", e.g. knowledge of fine art, theatre or opera. Rather, it more commonly refers to the **cultural understandings and skills that confer social and educational advantage** on families. Parents provide their children with cultural capital primarily by transmitting the **attitudes and knowledge needed to succeed in the educational system**.

Cultural capital is closely related to what Bourdieu Passeron (1990) termed **habitus**. Briefly, habitus can be thought of as a set or system of **dispositions** inculcated in individuals throughout the course of their lives. Such dispositions tend to be strongly influenced by class and educational background, and as has been reported by a number of researchers in a

range of countries **disadvantaged parents are less likely to possess an education-focused habitus** (Reay, 1998; Lareau, 2003). As has been noted repeatedly in research from around the world, well educated parents tend to be very aware of the importance of early educational development – e.g. with regard to literacy and numeracy – and to engage in a wide range of behaviours designed to encourage it. Family learning programmes can help disadvantaged parents develop their cultural capital and a more education-focused habitus. In many cases, these may be the first, most essential steps in a longer learning journey that only later leads to quantitatively measurable gains in skills such as literacy and numeracy (Carpentieri et al, 2011).

### 1.9 Competing priorities: parents versus policymakers?

In family literacy courses, Swain et al (2009) found that parents’ motivations for attending often differed greatly from the policy rationale for the course. While the funding streams and explicit policy targets for these programmes were centred on improving parents’ skills and qualifications, parents said they took the courses to benefit their children.

## 2 Impacts on parents

In this section, we summarise the research evidence on the impacts of family learning programmes on parents. Because of the dearth of high-quality evidence on family learning, we also include findings from selected studies of family literacy, language or numeracy interventions.

### 2.1 Skills gains

Horne and Haggart (2004, p. 15), observe that, “despite the main motivation for many adults’ participation in family learning being the support of their children’s learning and development, parents often go on to address their own learning needs when attending family learning.” However, there is limited evidence on the success with which parents improve their skills in family learning programmes. In large part this is because Wider Family Learning (WFL) **programmes do not focus on readily measured skills** – in contrast, for example, to family literacy programmes, which often employ pre- and post-tests of literacy skills. Moreover, focusing on measurable skills gains would be inappropriate for the vast majority of WFL programmes.

The skills-focused evidence that does exist for the field of family learning tends to be based on **evaluations** and **parental self-reports**, rather than research evidence. In Section 4, we discussed some of the weaknesses of this evidence, while also highlighting its value.

Since the turn of the century, **Ofsted** has conducted two reviews of family learning programmes. A 2009 review covering 23 local authorities found that family learning programmes had “**considerable impact**” (p. 5) on the achievement of children and adults. In almost all programmes surveyed, Ofsted concluded, participating adults were developing good or very good skills.

In 2000, Ofsted surveyed Family Learning programmes in 28 local authorities, and judged two-thirds of the provision to be good. Ofsted found that high-quality family learning led to a range of benefits for parents and children. While our focus in this section is on parental skills gains, we will list the full range of benefits found, discussing non-parental skills gains further in other sections of this paper:

- faster development of oracy and pre-literacy skills
- positive attitudinal changes
- enhanced confidence and self-esteem on the part of children
- additional support offered by parents
- parents' greater interest in their children's learning
- a view of learning as a lifelong activity undertaken by "normal" adults, not just academically minded ones
- greater appreciation of collaborative learning activities and approaches
- improved parental understanding of child development and child learning
- **improved parental literacy and numeracy skills**
- better parenting practices
- increase parental confidence when is it is meeting or talking with educationalists
- progression to further education and training.

The field of **family literacy** has generated some high-quality quantitative evidence regarding parental skills gains. However, even this evidence base is limited, in part because of the varying nature of FLLN provision around the world. In many countries, FLLN seeks to improve children's literacy skills but does not concern itself with improving adults' skills; the focus for adults is on improving their ability to support their children's literacy, language or numeracy development (Carpentieri et al, 2011). In the UK and Ireland, however, government-funded family literacy programmes are "three-pronged": in addition to improving child LLN skills and parental support skills, they also seek to improve parents' LLN skills. (These are also known as “dual track” programmes.)

In 2009, Swain et al (2009) assessed the impacts and effectiveness of three-pronged (dual track) government-funded family literacy programmes in England. The research evaluated the impact of short (30-49 hours) and long (72-96 hours) family literacy courses, finding that, on both types of courses, parents (and children) made progress in reading and writing. In writing the improvements were small but statistically significant; in reading there was a small amount of progress, but this was not statistically significant.

In reading, there seems to have been a ceiling effect at work: the average scores of some parents were already high at the beginning of the courses, leaving little room for further improvement within the range of the assessment instruments used in the research. The amount of progress on standard (i.e. longer) courses was not significantly different from that on short courses.

England's **Family Literacy and Numeracy Demonstration Programmes** were evaluated by Brooks et al in 1994–95. These evaluations found that the programmes were associated with statistically significant improvements in literacy skills for parents (and children) (Brooks et al, 1996). In a follow-up study, two years later, all these specific and many wider gains were being sustained (Brooks et al, 1997). However, summarising the state of FLLN research nearly 15 years later, Brooks et al (2008) concluded that the **evidence on benefits to parents' skills was mixed**. Some research has found gains for parents, while other studies have found otherwise. Brooks et al also observed that there is no solid evidence about the benefits to parents of family literacy courses as compared to adult literacy courses. However, Brooks et al concluded that there was good, consistent evidence of improved parental ability to help their children's education, of increased parental self-confidence and of improved child-rearing practices. These benefits will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2.5.

Brooks et al (2008) found (limited) quantitative evidence on benefit to parents' computer skills.

## 2.2 Progression: personal, social, educational and economic

One of the primary policy objectives of family learning programmes is to provide parents with a low-pressure step back into formal adult learning, taking advantage of parents' strong desire to support their children. Progression from family learning courses onto further learning opportunities is not easy to measure, as it requires tracking learners after they leave family learning courses. However, in contrast to measuring skills gains, progression does provide a clear criterion for assessing impact: do learners move on to other courses, or into (or upwards in) employment?

Brooks et al (2008) found limited quantitative evidence on benefit to parents' employment and further study. Ofsted's 2009 evaluation of family learning programmes found that in many providers **most adults progressed on to "longer courses where Skills for Life was more central to the programme"** (p. 5), and that some parents were gaining qualifications. Ofsted (p. 6) also found that "those who took external qualifications were highly successful and many progressed through the national test levels in literacy and numeracy at levels 1 and 2. Successful adults progressed to further learning or vocational qualifications, most commonly in childcare and support work in schools. Many became more active in their child's school or in their local community."

Ofsted's 2000 survey of family learning programmes found that, in more than 50% of cases, parents progressed to further education (FE) or further training, or onto a better job. Once adults from family learning programmes progressed onto adult literacy, language and numeracy courses, those learners had **high rates of success in achieving Skills for Life qualifications**.

These findings highlight the role of family learning programmes as a vital **stepping-stone** into more instrumental, skills-focused learning.

In Horne and Haggart's 2004 analysis of the outcomes of family learning programmes in Lancashire, the researchers surveyed two groups of parents: those who were just at the end of their course, and those who had completed their course anywhere from one to four years previously. In this study, the authors looked at outcomes for parents, but also those affecting children, schools and the wider community. Three-quarters of parents just completing their family learning courses indicated that they planned to progress onto further learning, voluntary activities or work-related activities following the course. Horne and Haggart attribute this high percentage to the **increased confidence** experienced by family learning participants. The course gave many participants the confidence they needed to "take one step up", whether into further learning, employment or other challenges.

There is strong evidence to suggest that these parents' plans would be realised. Surveying parents who had participated in family learning programs 1 to 4 years prior to their study, Horne and Haggart found that **80% had gone on to do at least one of the above activities following their participation in family learning**. A third of these had gone on to do further learning or had undertaken training for a job. Approximately one-fifth had volunteered at their child's school or in the wider community, while one in seven had gone on to become paid classroom assistants. A handful (less than 5%) said they had obtained a job (if unemployed) or a better job (if already employed).

45% of participants had gone on to do two or more of the above activities after leaving family learning. Around one-third of these (17% of the total number of parents surveyed) said that all of their "next step activities" were a result of their participation in family learning. The remaining two-thirds (28% of all parents surveyed) said that at least one of their following activities was the result of participation in family learning. Most parents said that the majority of **their "next step" activities would not have happened had they not participated in a family learning course**. However, as Horne and Haggart note, their study had no way (beyond parental self-report) of more accurately assessing what percentage of parents would have moved on to another activity without having taken a family learning course.

However, **further participation was distributed unequally, based on parental skill levels**. 45% of parents with Level 2 qualifications had gone on to do another activity, compared to

only 16% of those with no qualifications. Similarly, Ofsted (2009) found that adults were less likely to progress directly onto Skills for Life courses if their most immediate learning need was identified as **personal development** as opposed to improving their literacy, language or numeracy skills. This should not be surprising: many adults need a more gradual approach into skills-focused learning; only by using family learning as a stepping stone will they become ready for literacy, language or numeracy courses. Family learning plays a vital role not just in offering parents a "first step" into learning, but in **broadening the adult education offer** so that it meets the needs of more parents, including those whose first priority or need falls under the rubric of personal development rather than skills improvement.

In **Wales**, government assessments in 2004 and 2005 found many learners **progressing from family learning programmes onto Further Education, Higher Education and employment** (Estyn, 2004; Estyn, 2005; Estyn, 2005a).

Looking only at **family literacy**, Swain et al (2009) found that the average **proportion of parents achieving a qualification was 56% on short courses and 71% on standard courses**. Parents attending standard courses also showed a greater amount of individual change in their perceptions of their children's literacy activities, and in their perceptions of themselves and their children as learners, on average, than parents on short courses.

In Swain et al's study, 55% of parents reported that they **had been on another course** since the family literacy course, and 84% said that they were thinking of taking another one. They had a generally positive view of taking a national accredited qualification. Seeking **employment** was not often quoted as a reason for joining a family literacy course, but many said afterwards that they thought the course had improved their options for finding work. However, many were also reluctant to seek employment until their children were older and more established at school.

In an unpublished evaluation of family learning programmes targeted at **teenage parents**, NRDC found that young mothers' main reason for being on the course was to complete their GCSEs in an alternative setting, to progress to further education and/or get a job so that they could become economically independent and support their babies. These young parents said that their main concern was to do their best for their children, something which was more important to them than any benefits they might derive purely for themselves by attending the courses, although they also valued the social contact with other adults. Other research (Dawson and Hosie, 2005) has shown that, for many teen mothers, their sense of alienation from school is a key factor in the pregnancy. However, the need to take on responsibility for a baby can provide a powerful incentive to re-engage with education. We found this to be the case with the young parents in this study.

## 2.3 Confidence, self-esteem, motivation and self-efficacy

There is clear, consistent evidence regarding family learning's impact on parents' development of a range of competencies which better enable them to **support their children's cognitive and non-cognitive development** (Brooks et al, 2008; Carpentieri et al, 2011). These benefits include: improved confidence (in general, and specific to educational domains); improved self-efficacy and self-concept as a learner, and as a supporter of other learners, e.g. their children; and greater understanding of the importance of shared learning activities, such as parent-child reading.

Ofsted's 2000 survey of family learning programmes found that participating **parents gained in confidence and developed better relations with their children's schools**. In addition, parents developed a deeper understanding of their children's cognitive and non-cognitive development, and improved their parenting skills. In 2009, Ofsted (p. 6) reported that "all the parents interviewed during the survey were very positive about how their confidence, communication and interpersonal skills had improved considerably since attending family learning [sic]".

Horne and Haggart's 2004 analysis of the outcomes of family learning programmes in Lancashire found that a **large percentage of parents reported improved confidence**. Horne and Haggart surveyed parents who were at the end of their family learning course, and also surveyed parents who had participated in family learning between one and four years earlier. By surveying parents not just at the end of the course but some years later, Horne and Haggart were able to assess the rate of "**washout**" – i.e. the **fading of programme effects** over time.

At the end of their course, **85% of parents reported an increase in confidence in at least one aspect of their lives**. More than 55% said they felt **higher levels of confidence with regard to participating in further learning**. These parents drew clear links between the work they had done in the family learning course and their increased educational confidence – for example, one said she had learned "not to fear to learn new things". In many cases this confidence was the product of skills gains. As we noted in Section 1.3, confidence and competence go hand in hand. Parents who improve their skills are more likely to become confident enough to go onto further learning, which can lead to additional skills improvements and additional confidence. This process can also lead to the formation of a new self-concept, and the development of one's identity (Swain, 2007), so that one comes to see oneself as "a learner" and/or "someone who loves to learn".

In Horne and Haggart's study, approximately 40% of parents who were just completing their course said that they felt **more confident as a parent**, while a similar percentage of parents said they felt more confident **talking to their child's teachers**. More than a third of parents said they felt more confident "**as a person** in their own right". Approximately 10% said they felt more confident dealing with **bills, paperwork**, letters and similar materials. A smaller percentage reported that they felt more confident in specific skills such as **literacy or numeracy**.

According to Horne and Haggart, parental increases in confidence in one domain of this study often seemed to spill over into other domains. For example, when a parent improved her confidence with regard to learning new numeracy skills, this could also improve her confidence as a parent. As one mother said, she felt more confident as a person because she could now "actively use [new] skills to help my family". Another mother, who had completed her course several years prior to the study, reported that, after the course, if her children had problems in school, she would immediately go to talk to their teachers in order to address the problem. This mother said that prior to the family learning course, she would not have done this, as she would have been too nervous. Improved confidence when talking to teachers had improved her confidence and skills as a parent. Note the **inter-related nature** here of improved confidence, more cultural capital (having the skills and know-how to help her children, a more education-focused habitus, and, through interacting more often with her children's teachers, increased levels of social capital.

Lamb et al (2009, p. 3) found similar evidence of "impact overlap" in a set of case studies taken from Family Learning programmes. Lamb and colleagues found that the programmes led to "many outcomes, including gains in confidence, journeys to employment, increases in social cohesion and changes in aspirations. The underpinning skills developed as part of family learning activities transfer into other areas of family life and provide opportunities for learner progression in educational, economic, social and personal terms."

Turning specifically to **parents who participated in family learning 1-4 years prior to the study**, Horne and Haggart found that **60% of parents reported being more confident** in one or more of the following domains: parenting; doing more learning/training; dealing with teachers; or generally. **Twenty percent said they felt more confidence dealing with paperwork, bills, letters and similar materials – double the rate for those just completing their courses**. These better results may be simply a cohort effect: the parents and/or children who were currently taking part in family learning courses may have differed in meaningful ways from those who had taken the courses 1-4 years earlier, thus affecting the results. On the other hand, it may be that family learning gives some parents the confidence and skills to devote more time to these practices, and that, over the years, increased practice leads to greater confidence. This hypothesis fits with an American analysis of the short- and long-term impacts of adult literacy courses. In a nine-year longitudinal study of adult learners in Portland, Oregon, USA, Reder (2008) found that the **primary short-term**

**impact of participation in adult learning courses was not a change in measurable skill levels;** it was a change (or a number of changes) in adults' learning-related practices and behaviours. Over the long term, Reder found that these **changes in adults' practices led to improvements in their skills. Practice bred proficiency.**

**Horne and Haggart hypothesised that practice may also have bred proficiency in their study.** On the whole, parents who had participated in family learning 1 to 4 years prior to the study reported higher levels of confidence than parents who were just coming to the end of the course. Horne and Haggart suggest that family learning may serve as a catalyst for confidence, by giving parents the skills and confidence they needed to engage in practices (such as talking with teachers or calculating their own bills) that, in turn, help them to further develop their competences and confidence. Family learning may play a catalytic role in **kickstarting this virtuous circle.**

There is evidence of this cycle of empowerment in **Malta**, where family literacy programmes have been targeted at disadvantaged mothers, many of whom are from vulnerable communities. These Maltese family literacy programme did not have parental empowerment as a core objective, focusing instead on parents' capacity to directly support their children, but such **empowerment** – for example, through gains in self-esteem and self-efficacy – was a widespread and somewhat unexpected outcome of the initiative (Spiteri and Camilleri, 2003).

In Swain et al's study, 76% of parents said that they had **changed as a person** since taking the family literacy course. This was generally expressed in terms of greater confidence, but it also meant that parents felt more capable across a range of areas.

## 2.4 Social and cultural capital

In Section 2.3, we highlighted the overlapping, closely inter-related nature of improvements in confidence, competence and capital – whether social or cultural. (Competence is of course a form of human capital.)

Ofsted (2009) found that participation in family learning programmes led to a range of **social and cultural capital gains** for adults, including **increased involvement in their children's schools** and improved **social networks.**

In England, the government's Family Literacy programme seeks to improve children's literacy skills while also improving adults' literacy and literacy support skills. An evaluation of the programme found that most parents participated in the programme because they were seeking a way to be more involved in their child's academic activities, and to contribute to their child's educational development (Swain et al, 2009). While the

intervention was making only a limited contribution to the development of parental literacy skills and parents' achievement of qualifications, it was providing disadvantaged parents with a mechanism through which they could develop a range of valuable competencies and capabilities. Among these were improved social and cultural capital. For example, parents felt more able to speak with teachers and other school staff about problems their children were having, and felt more knowledgeable about their children's schools and the learning they did there. This greatly reduced the sense of fear and alienation many poorly educated parents said they had traditionally felt towards schools, and **helped parents feel that they too could be "experts" in their children's education**. Through school-based family literacy programmes, parents' social capital expanded as they got to know – and feel on more equal footing with – teachers and other school staff. In these programmes, parents' human capital – in terms of literacy skills – may or may not have grown, but their cultural and social capital clearly did increase, and it was these latter forms of capital which most helped them support their children's literacy development.

## 2.5 Parenting skills and practices

Horne and Haggart (2004, p. 14) have observed that “through participation in family learning, parents have learnt skills that enable them to develop more effective parenting strategies. Parents gained greater knowledge and more confidence to tackle family situations through increasing their understanding of children's development and improving their capacity to communicate with their children. Participating in family learning has also enabled some parents to go on to access information and further knowledge to help them in their parenting role.”

Despite the many research gaps plaguing the field of family learning, there is a growing body of methodologically robust evidence demonstrating gains such as those highlighted by Horne and Haggart. For example, quantitative research on the **Turkish Early Enrichment Project** (TEEP) and the **Mother-Child Education Programme** (MOCEP) has demonstrated the added value family learning programmes which strive to improve parenting skills, not just children's and/or adult's cognitive skills. Such programmes aim to help parents develop the competencies, attitudes and practices needed to **make the family a learning environment**. Such an environment makes a large difference to the educational trajectories of children and young people. For example, Gorard et al (1998), investigating learning trajectories over the lifecourse, concluded that long-term learning identities are formed within families. And there is ample evidence that growing up in a home which offers a rich variety of opportunities and materials for reading and writing improves literacy skills. The same is true for having parents who regularly engage in shared story reading and other literacy activities. Home environment and parental behaviours contribute not just to children's reading skills, but to their motivation and engagement (Klauda, 2008). Motivation and engagement, in turn, shape skills.

This process is not just about resources (e.g. the number of books in the home); it is primarily about parental practices. Research indicates that for dedicated teenage readers, the key influence is the home: the reading habit is **inculcated and maintained not by school but by the family** (Strommen and Mates, 2004). Teenagers who read for pleasure are more likely to grow up in homes where parents or other family members read for recreation and in which reading is modelled not just as a means of academic success but as an innately pleasurable activity. In these families, reading is seen as a **social activity**: parents and children share books and conversations about stories and the characters in them, adding to the sense of reading as a pleasurable, shareable pastime. In contrast, non-readers tend to be encouraged to read by their parents, but for instrumental reasons, e.g. to do better in school. And while parents of non-readers encourage reading, they often do not read for pleasure themselves. **Actions speak louder than words**. Because of this, the most successful approaches to improving child literacy will go beyond changing children's practices and parents' attitudes, they will change parents' practices. This includes encouraging parents to read more, both on their own and with their children. But it also includes encouraging parents to adapt a range of practices that make the home a learning environment, cognitively and socio-emotionally.

Research on TEEP and MOCEP has shown that improving parents' capacity to provide **socio-emotional support** to their children is correlated with **sustained, child long-term gains in literacy, numeracy, and socio-emotional well-being** (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2001, 2005). By the time children reach adulthood, these gains translate into **improved educational outcomes and better employment**.

This concurs with the findings of Desforges and Abouchar (2003), who, in their review of parenting interventions, concluded that programmes which encourage "**good at-home parenting**" are most likely to produce **lasting cognitive benefits**. Good at-home parenting establishes a child's self-concept as a learner, enabling the development of **key non-cognitive qualities which support learning** (Heckman et al, 2009). Desforges and Abouchar (2003) concluded that **the most effective programmes** aimed at supporting child academic development **were those which focused not on improving parents' cognitive skills but on improving general parenting skills**.

Kağıtçıbaşı et al (2001) highlight various impacts of parenting on the development of children's academic and cognitive competencies, including their literacy skills. For example, **low levels of emotional support and cognitive stimulation from parents have been found to account for one-third to one-half of the disadvantage** their children experience in verbal and maths skills.

In a meta-analysis, Blok et al (2005) concluded that training in parenting skills led to significantly larger cognitive gains for children. Blok and colleagues found that parental support programmes which focused not just on academic outcomes, but which also included training in parenting skills, led to markedly larger positive effects in children's cognitive gains, with the benefits being equivalent to an improvement of 0.7 standard deviations. This is a large gain in general social science terms, and could be considered a very large improvement in educational terms. Drawing on previous literature, Blok and colleagues discussed potential mechanisms for the effect of improved parenting skills on children's cognitive outcomes. In particular, they pointed to the likely **importance of an emotionally supportive home environment in encouraging and supporting cognitive gains**. As van Tuijl and Leseman (2004) have hypothesised, embedding parenting skills training in cognitively focused programmes may improve parental emotional support, with positive knock-on effects for academic outcomes.

Another possible mechanism is **implementation quality**. Bok et al hypothesised that the inclusion of parenting coaching in cognitively-focused programmes may increase the attractiveness of such programmes for disadvantaged parents, improving parental commitment, interest and attendance. While Blok et al found a large positive effect for training in parenting skills, they found no such effect for other forms of family support, including economic, social and health-related interventions.

OFSTED's 2009 review of family learning programmes concluded that parents were developing good or very good **behaviours** and parenting **attitudes** as a result of family learning. Ofsted (p. 6) observed that "parenting skills improved along with wider learning. Parents commented on how they were better able to manage their children's behaviour, communicate with them and support their learning at home effectively."

OFSTED's 2000 family learning review found that participating parents:

- 1) were engaging in **better parenting** practices
- 2) were offering more and **better support** to their children
- 3) were taking **greater interest** in their children's learning
- 4) had improved their understanding of child development and child learning
- 5) had a greater appreciation of collaborative learning activities and approaches, and
- 6) had developed more positive attitudes to learning.

In addition to directly observed improvements in parenting practices, as noted in bullets 1 and 2 above, we can see from these results that parents became more likely to adopt **attitudes which are associated with better parenting**. Parents became more involved in their children's education, and also were better able to serve as **educational role models** for their children. Another finding of Ofsted's 2000 study was that many parents who took part in family learning programmes developed a view of learning as a lifelong activity undertaken

by "typical" adults (like themselves), not just academically-minded ones. In the Turkish Early Enrichment Project (TEEP) and the Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP), mothers become better able to serve as **positive educational and socio-emotional role models** for their children.

In the UK, the **SPOKES programme** (Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools) was targeted at children just beginning primary school, and aimed to address two issues in one intervention: children's reading difficulties and behavioural problems (Sylva et al, 2008). The programme was implemented in "a community characterised by marked social disadvantage to parents whose children were at further risk of poor outcomes and social exclusion due to their tendencies to disruptive behaviour" (pp. 449-50). Significantly, the intervention was a true **randomised controlled trial** with pre- and post-measurements designed to evaluate effectiveness. In addition to benefits for children, which will be discussed in Section 3, the programme led to **measurable improvements in parents' use of reading strategies** with their children.

Powell (2004) concluded that children and parents both benefit from programmes which devote time and resources to addressing parents' practices and attitudes; this is because these practices and attitudes have both direct and indirect effects on parents' ability to positively influence their children's educational and socio-emotional development. According to Powell, one of the key messages arising from research is that programmes can benefit from focusing on parents' beliefs about child development processes and their own role in supporting children's learning.

In Brooks et al's 2008 global review of family literacy, language and numeracy initiatives, a number of programme studies reported that parents had improved their child rearing practices, self-confidence and involvement in their children's schools. Brooks and colleagues noted particularly impressive results reported by programmes which worked with mothers in **"traditional" family settings**. Programmes such as Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP) and FLAME in Chicago, USA, aimed to improve children's educational performance, but incorporated these academic aims into a broader vision of effective parenting.

In more traditional families, suggested Brooks et al (p. 29), "a broadly conceived and well structured programme could benefit [mothers], giving them contact with their peers in a situation that enables them to build self-esteem by developing parenting skills and [participating] more fully in everyday life." In a study of Turkey's MOCEP, for example, mothers participating in the initiative reported increased self-esteem, while those in the control group reported a decline. MOCEP participants also reported being better, stronger parents, and more confident in their relationships with their husbands and other family members (see e.g. Bekman and Kocak, 2010). Brooks et al (2008) suggest that the increase self-esteem in the intervention group is likely the product of the aspects of the programme

which aimed to improve **general rather than academically-focused parenting skills**. Again, this highlights the overlapping and interdependent nature of family learning's impacts, both on adults and children.

Horne and Haggart (2004) analysed the impacts of adults' participation in family learning programmes in **Lancashire**. Horne and Haggart surveyed parents who were at the end of their family learning course, and also surveyed parents who had participated in family learning between one and four years earlier. Among parents who were at the end of their course, **more than 80% reported that they had changed their attitudes or practices** as a result of family learning. A further 5% were unsure, meaning that only 15% felt the course had not had an impact on attitudes or behaviour. Among those who had participated in family learning 1 to 4 years earlier, **70% felt that the course had changed their attitudes and/or practices**, with 10% being unsure.

Approximately **45% of parents surveyed near the end of the course said that they talked and read more often with their children** as a result of participation in family learning. A similar percentage said they had become **more involved in helping their children with their homework**. There was also evidence that the **quality of the help** that parents were able to give had improved. Among parents who had participated in family learning 1-4 years ago, an **even higher percentage** said that they talked and read more often with the children, and that they were more involved in their homework. This may indicate the development of a **virtuous circle** in which improved confidence and skills leads to **increased practice**, which contributes to improved confidence and skills, and so on.

Horne and Haggart (2004) also found significant changes in **family dynamics**. Just under half of the parents who were just coming to the end of their family learning course said that the programme had made some difference to their family's relationships and/or behaviour. One-quarter of parents said they **talked more as a family** and/or had better family relationships. Such changes are likely to improve the level of socio-emotional support in the home; as we noted earlier, such support is correlated with a broad range of long-lasting cognitive and non-cognitive gains for children and young people (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2001, 2005). Among parents saying that the family learning programme had changed their family dynamics, 40% said they did more activities together as a family and a similar percentage reported that other family members or the family as a whole had become more interested in learning. Slightly higher percentages of parents who had participated in family learning 1-4 years earlier said that these changes had occurred in their families.

In Swain et al's 2009 study of English family literacy provision, the authors found that the majority of parents participated in the programme primarily because they wanted spend quality time with their children and supporting their children's learning, rather than developing their own literacy skills. Note here that, **by providing a vehicle through which parents could spend educationally-focused quality time with their children, family**

**learning provision served a vital function**, allowing parents to engage in valuable practices that they might not otherwise feel the confidence or competence to engage in. At the same time, family learning gave parents the skills and knowledge they needed to improve those practices.

In Swain et al's study of family literacy programmes, 64% of parents reported that since taking a family literacy course they had become **more involved** in their child's pre-school or school. Seventy-six per cent of parents said that they had **changed as a person** since taking the family literacy course. This was generally expressed in terms of greater confidence, but it also meant that parents felt more capable across a range of areas. According to Swain et al's findings, **course length matters**: parents attending standard courses also showed a greater amount of individual change in their perceptions of their children's literacy activities, and in their perceptions of themselves and their children as learners, on average, than parents on short courses.

Some family learning programmes target **fathers**. In Turkey, Father Support Programme has been running since 1996, serving a yearly target of 6,000 fathers and children. The programme aims to increase fathers' awareness of their importance to their child's academic and socio-emotional development (Koçak, 2004), and has been positively evaluated. In the most recent evaluation of the programme, significant differences were found between fathers who had participated in the programme and those who had not, particularly in terms of open communication.

Parents are not the only carers who can be affected by family learning courses. In an unpublished evaluation of family learning programmes targeted at **grandparents**, NRDC found that grandparents attended these courses because they wanted the best for their grandchildren and wanted to keep up with modern teaching methods. Grandparents hoped that the courses would benefit their grandchildren and deepen their relationship. Because of the courses, grandparents felt they were gaining new understandings and were getting good ideas they could try out with their grandchildren. They also said they enjoyed being in school and being part of the school community. Several commented on the value of being able to share their grandchildren's educational experiences and being able to have "meaningful conversations" with their grandchildren about what they were feeling and doing. These grandparents also developed their ideas about how best to promote their grandchildren's learning. In the richest examples seen, this was based both on the tutor's knowledge and experience and on the grandparents' trying out of the ideas and practice they were gaining, at home with their grandchildren. Activities and experiences that modelled for grandparents how to communicate, relate and behave with their grandchildren were particularly valued; transferring tried and tested professional practice from the classroom to the home.

## 3 Impacts on children

In this section, we summarise the research evidence on the impacts of family learning programmes on children, dividing that evidence into two categories: 1) cognitive skills and 2) non-cognitive impacts, e.g. motivation, behaviour and confidence.

Because of the dearth of high-quality evidence on family learning, we also include findings from selected studies of family literacy, language or numeracy interventions.

### 3.1 Skills

Ofsted's 2009 review of family learning programmes judged that these programmes had a "**considerable impact**" (p. 5) on the achievement of children: "most children surveyed made good progress in their learning". Teachers reported that pupils improved their **attainment in the classroom**, as well as their concentration and behaviour.

An earlier Ofsted review of family learning programmes (2000) produced similar evidence, concluding that young children participating in family learning programmes had **improved oracy and pre-literacy skills**, and that **schoolchildren had improved numeracy and literacy**.

Horne and Haggart (2004) analysed the impacts of family learning programmes in **Lancashire**. Just under **one-third** of parents who were near the end of their family learning course said that their **child was doing better at school** as a result of the programme. Interestingly, when Horne and Haggart asked the same question of parents who had participated in a family learning programme 1 to 4 years prior to the study, **half** of parents said the children were doing better at school as a result of the course.

Horne and Haggart also surveyed **headteachers**, 39% of whom agreed that family learning programmes lead to improved academic performance for children.

A **Welsh** evaluation of family learning programmes (Estyn, 2003) reported **positive impacts of family learning on children's achievement in Key Stages 1, 2 and 3**. However, this evaluation raised concerns about the quality of the monitoring of programme outcomes, particularly with regard to children's school attendance, truancy, motivation and attitudes.

Brooks et al (2008) looked at family literacy, language and numeracy programmes throughout the world. In this study, the authors found **good quantitative evidence of benefits to children's literacy, language and numeracy skills**. 12 of the 19 studies in their review had test-based data showing evidence of child literacy improvements; eight studies

had test-based data showing child language improvements; and six studies had test-based data showing child numeracy improvements. In each subject, only a small handful of programmes reported no improvement.

Importantly, there was evidence that children's literacy, language and numeracy **skills gains persisted long after the courses had completed**. Five studies gathered follow-up data. Of those five, four studies found evidence that the gains from the programmes were sustained - and in the one case where they were not, the losses were only partial. This suggests that FLLN programmes are capable of delivering both short and long term results.

England's **Family Literacy and Numeracy Demonstration Programmes** were evaluated in the mid-1990s by Brooks and colleagues. These evaluations found **literacy gains** which the researchers judged to be greater than would have been expected from normal progress. These gains were evident for children and parents (Brooks et al, 1996). In a follow-up study two years later, all these specific and many wider **gains were being sustained** (Brooks et al, 1997).

Swain et al (2009) assessed the impacts and effectiveness of government-funded **family literacy programmes in England**. The research evaluated the impact of short (30-49 hours) and long (72-96 hours) family literacy courses, finding that despite the short length of these programmes **children (and parents) made substantial progress in reading and writing**. The courses appeared to work equally well for **boys and girls**, and for children who did not have English as their first language.

Swain and colleagues found that the amount of **progress on standard courses was not significantly different from that on short courses**. Brooks (2002) had earlier reached a similar conclusion, observing that courses longer than three months did not show proportionally greater effect than those up to three months in length.

The UK's **SPOKES programme** (Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools) was targeted at children just beginning primary school, and **aimed to address two issues in one intervention: children's reading difficulties and behavioural problems**. Sylva and colleagues (2008) point to research suggesting that the best way of addressing "co-morbid" situations in which children have both reading difficulties and behaviour problems is to develop interventions in which both issues are tackled together.

The programme was important for a variety of reasons, including its focus on urban families and children with multiple high risk factors. This programme was specifically implemented in "a community characterised by marked social disadvantage to parents whose children were at further risk of poor outcomes and social exclusion due to their tendencies to disruptive behaviour" (pp. 449-50). Significantly, the intervention was a true **randomised controlled trial** with pre- and post-measurements designed to evaluate effectiveness. The behavioural

intervention consisted of the “Incredible Years” group parenting programme combined with a new programme designed to train parents to support their children's reading at home. The programme reduced behavioural problems and improved children's reading and writing skills. In one year the intervention group showed an **average reading improvement equivalent to 6 months of reading age**; children also improved their writing skills and behaviour. Parents improved their use of reading strategies with their children. Despite the success of this programme, it does not appear to have been taken up widely.

### 3.2 Non-cognitive impacts: motivation, behaviour and confidence

**Surveying the teachers** of children participating in family learning courses, Ofsted (2009) found children had experienced a **range of positive benefits**. They had settled better in class, had improved their relationships with their peers, and had improved their relationships with the teachers. Teachers also felt that children participating in family learning had become more self-confident and had improved the communication and interpersonal skills.

In an earlier report, Ofsted (2000) similarly concluded that **children of all ages improved their attitudes and behaviours** after attending family learning courses. As in the 2009 report, this conclusion was based on **teachers' reports**. Children were also reported to have developed **better self-esteem and self-confidence**. Likewise, Lamb *et al.* (2009) pointed to better motivation and behaviour by children in school.

Horne and Haggart (2004) also looked at child behaviour. Among parents just about to complete their family learning course, **slightly less than 20%** said that their **child's behaviour had improved** as a result of the course. Among parents who had taken a course in 1-4 years prior to the study, nearly **one-third** said their child's behaviour had improved. This follows the same pattern as that for skills development, with parents who had taken the course 1-4 years earlier being more likely to cite gains for their children. This may be a result of children's improved practices and attitudes leading to better long-term gains. However, caution must be exercised when making this assertion, as the differing results may be simply a cohort effect: the parents and/or children who were currently taking part in family learning courses may have differed in meaningful ways from those who had taken the courses 1-4 years earlier, thus affecting the results.

# 4 Gaps and weaknesses in the research evidence

In thinking about the many research gaps in the field of family learning, four key questions arise:

- What has not been measured?
- What should we measure?
- How should we measure?
- When should we measure?

This section will address each of those questions in turn.

## 4.1 What has not been measured?

While there is a growing body of evidence on family literacy programmes (see e.g. Carpentieri et al, 2011), there appear to be **no recent studies of family language or family numeracy, or of Wider Family Learning**. There is very limited robust quantitative data on the benefits of wider family learning programmes. In large part, this is due to the nature of such programmes: because they do not have a direct, targeted focus on improving skills such as literacy, language or numeracy, they do not produce readily quantifiable outcomes. This should not be interpreted as meaning that they do not produce benefits, only that the benefits are not easily measured.

Another cause of the lack of robust data on family learning programmes is the general lack of resources and systems for reliable data collection and comparison. As Ofsted (2009, p. 5) observed: "Almost all of the providers visited had difficulty in systematically monitoring and accurately recording wider progression outcomes, and in just over half of the providers, the systems to monitor on-course progress for adults or children or both were not effective." A **Welsh** evaluation of family learning programmes reported similar problems, raising **concerns about the quality of the monitoring** of programme outcomes, particularly with regard to children's school attendance, truancy, motivation and attitudes (Estyn, 2003).

Providers are often under-resourced; when this is the case, they justifiably focus their energies not on data collection but on delivering provision. Providers will only be able to collect more and better data if more resources are provided to them.

Looking at family literacy, language and numeracy, the review conducted by Brooks et al (2008) concluded that research has been **unable to provide definitive answers to the following three questions**:

- Do two-generation FLLN programmes benefit both parents and children?

- Do parents in FLLN programmes make better progress than they would in discrete or stand-alone adult literacy or numeracy courses
- Are particular pedagogic approaches to FLLN more effective than others?

In terms of collecting evidence, **FLLN has largely focused on the impacts of programmes on children's skills**. This had been a primary driver of the gaps cited by Brooks and colleagues, and is also a cause of gaps in our knowledge about the wider benefits of FLLN. Brooks *et al.* (2008) found little evidence on wider benefits for children, because data on this had not been gathered. Several international reviews of family literacy have appeared in the last five years (and are analysed and updated in Carpentieri *et al.*, 2011) but **have not reported evidence on the wider benefits of learning even where such evidence is known to exist**. Lamb *et al.* (2009) derived their evidence on wider benefits solely from England, and presented it in qualitative case-study fashion.

**We recommend that the review** undertaken by Carpentieri *et al.* (2011) on family literacy programmes throughout **European** should be updated and broadened to seek international (not just European) evidence on wider benefits, and that parallel searches on family language, family numeracy and WFL be conducted.

## 4.2 What should we measure?

As discussed in sections 1.7 and 1.8 of this review, policymakers tend to emphasise the value of human capital development, while overlooking or underestimating the importance of gains in **social and cultural capital**. St Clair (2008, p. 89) argues that policymakers are often blind to important programme benefits. "What [a human capital-focused] approach to evaluation does not capture is the wider impact of the programs, and whether those programs that fail to achieve their [skills] objectives might be contributing in other ways." In his own research, St Clair has found that "many of the programs that did not attain their proposed objectives still managed to contribute substantially to the social capital of their participants." However, the value of these social capital developments is often underrated by programme funders.

St Clair (p. 92) argues that family learning programmes must be assessed on their "potential to contribute both to human development and **community development**. If only human capital elements are considered in program evaluation, sufficient critical elements of the program are missed to render evaluation misleading and to under-represent the contribution" of these programmes.

There is also a tendency to overlook the **indirect and difficult to measure** nature of many benefits from family learning programmes (Carpentieri *et al.*, 2011). For example, when seeking to achieve literacy improvements in disadvantaged families, the route to success is

rarely as simple and straightforward as applying an intervention that leads directly to improved literacy skills. For many disadvantaged families, a necessary first step of any intervention is to help parents and children develop new perspectives, understandings and practices.

**Soft skills are hard to measure, and easy to overlook.** In their review of family literacy programmes in Europe, Carpentieri et al (2011) found that many family literacy programmes were evaluated only on a very small number of quantitatively measured “hard” outcomes. In particular, funders focused on child literacy gains as measured immediately after programme completion, while a range of wider benefits were viewed as unimportant – or as insufficient for maintaining funding. This meant that policymakers overlooked: 1) how difficult it is for disadvantaged families to achieve quantitatively measured skills gains in the short-term; and 2) other positive outcomes of family literacy programmes, such as improved parent and child orientation to reading, improved motivation, improved parent-child bonding and other “soft” outcomes which may contribute to long-term academic success. Because wider family learning programmes are more likely to produce these “soft” (and difficult to measure) outcomes than to produce measurable gains in particular skills, there is a danger of such programmes being undervalued. This is ironic, given our expanding knowledge of the importance of hard-to-measure concepts such as parental practices and behaviours, and “soft skills” such as motivation and self-regulation (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). As Heckman (2011, p. 5) observes: “The skills needed for success in life are multiple in nature. Success requires more than cognition and smarts. **Soft skills are important.** Conscientiousness, perseverance, sociability, and other character traits matter a lot, even though they are largely neglected in devising policies to reduce inequality.”

Another overlooked issue is that of implementation quality. We need a better understanding of why and how programmes work, not just whether or not they do. Few studies still have looked at the **mechanisms for benefits**. In particular, there has been very little attention paid to **implementation quality** and its potential impact on programme outcomes. As van Steensel et al (2011) observe, even though implementation quality likely plays a central role in determining whether or not programmes are successful, information about it is only very rarely provided. This is a serious methodological weakness. The manner in which parents and children carry out programme activities remains a matter of speculation -- a **black box** -- and needs much more research.

The little research that exists in this area has indicated that disadvantaged families often find it difficult to implement family literacy programmes as intended by programme developers (McElvaney and van Steensel, 2009). Carpentieri et al (2011) suggested that disadvantaged families benefited from family literacy programmes with more highly structured educational models: the increased structure ensured that parents had clear guidelines about tasks and techniques, and could readily understand how to perform the

parent-child literacy tasks required of them.

### 4.3 How should we measure?

As argued in Section 4.2, policymakers tend to focus on human capital development, to the detriment of social and cultural capital. One reason for this, as St Clair observes (2008, p. 92), is that “human capital tends to be a great deal easier to measure than social capital. There is no universally agreed approach to understanding how social capital can be measured in order to capture increases.” Successfully measuring social (and cultural) capital development will require intelligent blending of qualitative and quantitative evidence, and a more long-term approach to the assessment of programme impacts. While it is beyond the scope of our review to discuss the **ways in which social and cultural capital might better be measured**, a recent Canadian review does tackle this issue, albeit only in the field of adult learning (Centre for Literacy, 2010).

Whatever outcomes are being assessed, there is a clear tension between quantitative and qualitative evidence. Quantitative evidence tends to be more valued by policymakers, as it better enables them to show adequate return on investment. This is particularly important during periods of reduced funding. However, it must be remembered that the numerically-based presentation of quantitative data tends to mask a great deal of interpretation. As has been observed by more than one social scientist, perhaps the key difference between qualitative and quantitative data is that with the former the researchers' interpretation is made overt, while with the latter it is hidden. Numbers are not necessarily facts.

A challenge faced by family learning programmes is that, while outcomes such as parental confidence, practices and attitudes are often measured, they are generally measured in ways that are not considered robust. For example, a number of the reports cited in this review base their analyses on **parental self-reports** on issues such as motivation, confidence, practices, skills gain and progression. In addition, the Ofsted reviews include teacher reports. No researcher who has interviewed adult learners can be in doubt as to the emotional impact and resonance of learner self-reports. Researchers in the UK and elsewhere have talked to countless learners who tell convincing and true tales of the ways in which their courses have improved their lives. However, in a primarily positivist policy context, such self-reports, however true they may be, are not seen to constitute robust evidence. In some ways, this is a product of the gradual shift towards a more **evidence-based model of educational policy-making**, which is itself influenced by the growth of evidence-based medicine. However, unlike many medical interventions, educational interventions happen not along biological pathways but along social ones. Benefits from family learning programmes are more diffuse and indirect than, for example, the benefits of taking a particular medication – and they may take much longer to become apparent. Thus they are much harder to measure.

To address these challenges, at least partially, the field of family learning needs to take several strides forward in its capacity to understand the impacts of changes in learner practice, for example parenting practices and/or reading practices. In particular, it needs to be able to **describe and quantify the relationship between short-term changes in practice and long-term changes in the competencies** (such as literacy, language and numeracy skills) that policymakers are particularly interested in. In the US, the Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) has had some success in this area. Following adult literacy and numeracy learners over a nine-year period, this study found little evidence of short-term (i.e. post-course) skills gains (Reder, 2008). However, they did find that **if learners changed their literacy and numeracy practices as a result of the courses, these changes were correlated with long-term skills gains**. This study offers compelling evidence of the need to focus less on short-term skills gains – what has been termed "the tyranny of effect size" (Carpentieri et al, 2011) - and devote more of our attention to understanding what sorts of changes in practice lead to long-term benefits, including improvements in proficiency.

**Quantitative evidence is not always collected in a robust manner.** The review conducted by Brooks et al (2008) found that very few studies used a controlled trial. Most studies used matched-group and one-group pre-and post-test designs, which means that much of the evidence from the studies must be treated with caution. Very few studies in the field of family learning have used a control group. This is highly problematic, as it does not allow researchers to compare gains from the family learning intervention to gains that might have occurred in the absence of the intervention. For example, Ofsted (2000, 2009) concluded that participation in family learning programmes led to improvements in children's literacy and numeracy skills. However, it may be the case that these gains would have occurred anyway; after all, these children were engaged in other activities that could have led to improvements – most obviously school. Likewise, Ofsted concluded that parents participating in family learning programmes improved their employment. This may well be the case – however, we do not know if these parents improved their employment in comparison to parents who did not participate in family learning programmes.

In order to answer these questions, studies need **control groups**. However, very few family learning evaluations benefit from this level of robustness. One exception is Turkey's Mother-Child Education Programme (MOCEP). In addition to assessing the progress of parents and children participating in the programme, researchers assessed similar families who did not participate in MOCEP. The findings showed that the programme produced extensive benefits that would not have otherwise occurred. For example, mothers participating in MOCEP had increased self-esteem, while those in the control group declined (Bekman and Kocak, 2010). Children participating in the programme experienced a range of educational, socio-emotional and (eventually) employment gains not experienced by non-participants (Kağıtçıbaşı et al, 2005). The field of family learning needs more experimental research comparing intervention and control groups.

#### 4.4 When should we measure?

There is a compelling need for more longitudinal research. Few studies have collected robust evidence on anything other than short-term gains for children and parents. There are two primary weaknesses to a focus on the short-term. The first is that such a focus may overlook other important benefits that play a key role in shaping long-term practices and competencies. The second is that a focus on short-term gains does not show us the long-term impacts of programmes. There is a desperate need for more longitudinal research of the sort carried out on family learning programmes in Turkey, and on some Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) interventions in the US (e.g. Heckman et al, 2009; Schweinhart et al, 2005).

The American Longitudinal Study of Adult Learning (LSAL) has had some success in this area. Following adult literacy and numeracy learners over a nine-year period, this study found little evidence of short-term (i.e. post-course) skills gains (Reder, 2008). However, researchers did find that **if learners changed their literacy and numeracy practices as a result of the courses, these changes were correlated with long-term skills gains**. This study offers compelling evidence of the need to focus less on short-term skills gains – what has been termed "the tyranny of effect size" (Carpentieri et al, 2011) - and devote more of our attention to understanding what sorts of changes in practice lead to long-term benefits, including improvements in proficiency.

## References and selected bibliography

Balatti, J., S. Black, et al. (2006). Reframing adult literacy and numeracy: a social capital perspective.

Becker G S (1993 [1964]) *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, 3rd ed., Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press

Bekman, S. and Koçak, A. (2010) *Mothers Reporting: the Mother-Child Education Programme in Five Countries*. Istanbul: Mother-Child Education Foundation.

Blok, H., Fukkink, R. G., Gebhardt, E. C., & Leseman, P. P. M. (2005). The relevance of delivery mode and other programme characteristics for the effectiveness of early childhood intervention. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 29(1), 35-47.

Booth, Alan and Crouter, Ann (eds.) (2008) *Disparities in school readiness: How families contribute to transitions into school*. New York: Taylor and Francis Group.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1986) *"The Forms of Capital"*, in JG Richardson's *Handbook for Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, pp. 241–258.

Bourdieu, Pierre and Passeron, Jean Claude (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Sage Publications Inc.

Brooks, G., T. Gorman, et al. (1996). *Family literacy works The NFER evaluation of Basic Skills Agency's demonstration programmes*. London, Basic Skills Agency

Brooks, G., T. Gorman, et al. (1997). *Family literacy lasts The NFER follow-up study of the Basic Skills Agency's Demonstration Programmes*. London, Basic Skills Agency

Brooks, G., J. Harman, et al. (1999). "Family Literacy for New Groups: The National Foundation for Educational Research Evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency's Programmes for Linguistic Minorities, Year 4 and Year 7." London: Basic Skills Agency

Brooks, G., P. Cole, et al. (2002). *Keeping up with the Children: evaluation for the Basic Skills Agency by the University of Sheffield and the National Foundation for Educational Research*, London: Basic Skills Agency

Buffton, J. (1999) 'Family Learning: Taking the Work Forward.' Working Paper. *Second report of the National Advisory Group for Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning*.

Carter-Wall, Charlotte and Whitfield, Grahame (2012) *The role of aspirations, attitudes and behaviour in closing the educational attainment gap*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. (2001). *The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital*. Paris: OECD.

Centre for Literacy (2010) *Social Capital Outcomes of Adult Learning and Literacy Initiatives: How Do We Measure Them? Literature review*. The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, 2010

Cox, K. E. and J. T. Guthrie (2001). "Motivational and Cognitive Contributions to Students' Amount of Reading." *Contemporary Educational Psychology* **26**(1): 116-131.

Dawson N. and Hosie A. (2005) *The Education of pregnant young women and young mothers in England*, University of Bristol, Bristol.

Desforges, C., Abouchaar, A., & Britain, G. (2003). *The impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment: A literature review*: DfES Publications.

Dörnyei, Z. and Ushioda, E. (2011) *Teaching and Researching Motivation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Harlow: Longman.

- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Self Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*. Hove: Psychology Press, Taylor and Francis Group.
- Estyn (2004) A Report on the Quality of Adult Community Based Learning in Caerphilly. Estyn.
- Estyn (2005) A Report on the Quality of Adult Community Based Learning in Conwy. Estyn.
- Estyn (2005a) A Report on the Quality of Adult Community Based Learning in Rhondda Cynon Taf. Estyn.
- Field J (2005) *Social Capital and Lifelong Learning* Bristol: Policy Press
- Goleman, D. (1996) *Emotional Intelligence*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.
- Gorard, S., Rees, G., Fevre, R., & Furlong, J. (1998) Learning trajectories: travelling towards a learning society? 1. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 17(6), 400–410.
- Hammond, Cathie and Gough, Martin (2000) A note on family learning. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning.
- Hannon, P., A. Morgan, et al. (2006). "Parents' Experiences of a Family Literacy Programme." *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 4(1): 19-44
- Harker, R., (1990) "Education and Cultural Capital" in Harker, R., Mahar, C., & Wilkes, C., (eds) (1990) *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: the practice of theory*, Macmillan Press, London.
- Heckman, J. J. (2011) The American Family in Black and White: A Post-Racial Strategy for Improving Skills to Promote Equality. *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series, No. 16841*. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w16841>
- Heckman, J.J., Moon, S., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. & Yavitz, A. (2009). The rate of return to the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program. IZA Discussion Paper No. 4533.
- Horne, J. and Haggart, J. (2004) The Impact of Adults' Participation in Family Learning –A Study Based in Lancashire. Leicester: NIACE.
- Husz, Martin (1998) Human capital, endogenous growth, and government policy. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Jeynes, W. H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 40(3), 237.
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., Bekman, S., & Göksel, A. (1995). Multipurpose model of nonformal education: The Mother-Child Education Programme. *Coordinators' Notebook*, 17, 24-32

- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., (1997). Parent education and child development. In M.E. Young (Ed.), Early child development: Investing in our children's future (pp. 243-272).New York: Elsevier
- Kağıtçıbaşı, C., D. Sunar, et al. (2001). "Long-term effects of early intervention: Turkish low-income mothers and children." *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology* 22(4): 333-361.
- Kağıtçıbaşı, Ç., Sunar, D., Bekman, S., Cemalcılar, Z. (2005). Continuing effects of early intervention in adult life: Preliminary findings of Turkish early enrichment project second follow up study. Istanbul: Mother Child Education Foundation Publications.
- Karoly, L.A., Greenwood, P.W., Everingham, S.S., Houbé, J., Kilburn, M.R., Rydell, C.P., Sanders, M. and Chiesa, J. (1998). Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don't Know about the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions. Santa Monica, CA: Rand.
- Klauda, S. L. L. (2008). "The relations of children's perceived support for recreational reading from parents and friends to their motivation for reading." Unpublished PhD thesis.
- Koçak, A. (2004): Evaluation report of the Father-Support Programme. Retrieved February 28, 2006 from <http://www.acev.org>
- Lamb, Penny (2009) The impact of learning for the family: a model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. IFL Sector Paper 9. Leicester: NIACE.
- Lamb, P., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K. and Evans, S. (2009) Providing the evidence: the impact of wider family learning. Leicester: NIACE.
- Lareau, A. (2003). Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life. University of California Press.
- Lochrie, Margaret (2004) Family Learning: building all our futures. Leicester: NIACE
- Mallows, D. (2008) Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: Family literacy, language and numeracy - A practitioner handbook.Reading: CfBT.
- McElvany, N., & Artelt, C. (2009). Systematic reading training in the family: Development, implementation, and initial evaluation of the Berlin Parent-Child Reading Programme. *Learning and Instruction*, 19(1), 79-95.
- McElvany, N., & van Steensel, R. (2009). Potentials and Challenges of Family Literacy Interventions: The Question of Implementation Quality. *European Educational Research Journal*, 8(3), 418-433.
- McGivney, V. (1993) Participation and Non-Participation: A Review of the Literature; in Edwards, R., Sieminski, S. & Zeldin, D (eds), *Adult Learners, Education and Training*, Routledge/Open University Press, London.

Morgan, A., C. Nutbrown, et al. (2009). "Fathers' involvement in young children's literacy development: implications for family literacy programmes." *British Educational Research Journal* 35(2): 167-185

Porter, Kristin E, Sondra Cuban, John P Comings with Valerie Chase. (2005) *"One Day I Will Make It": A Study of Adult Student Persistence in Library Literacy Programs*. MDRC

Reay, Diane (1998) *Class work: mothers' involvement in their children's primary schooling*. London: Routledge.

Reder, S. (2008). The development of literacy and numeracy in adult life. In S. Reder & J. Bynner, (Eds.),

*Tracking adult literacy and numeracy: Findings from longitudinal research*. New York and London: Routledge. 59-84.

Schuller, T. Bynner, J. and Feinstein, L. (2004). *Capitals and capabilities*. London: Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education.

Schweinhart, L. J., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W. S., Belfield, C. R., & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: The HighScope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.

Spiteri, S., & Camilleri, J. (2003). *Family Literacy in Malta—An Effective Strategy for Enhanced Literacy, Parental Involvement and Lifelong Learning*.

St Clair, Ralf (2008) *Reading, writing and relationships: Human and Social Capital in Family Literacy Programs*. *Adult Basic Education in Literacy Journal*. Volume 2, Number 2, Summer, pp. 84-93.

St. Clair, Ralf (2010) *Why literacy matters: understanding the effects of literacy education for adults*. Leicester: NIACE.

Strommen, L. T. and B. F. Mates (2004). "Learning to love reading: Interviews with older children and teens." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 48(3): 188-200. Swain, Jon (2007) *Identity and Exclusion: motivations, dispositions and identities on adult numeracy courses*. *Journal of Access Policy and Practice*, 4(2), 91–107.

Sylva, K., Scott, S., Totsika, V., Ereky-Stevens, K., & Crook, C. (2008) *Training parents to help their children read: A randomized control trial*. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 78(3), 435–455.

Tett L and Maclachlan K (2007) *Adult literacy and numeracy, social capital, learner identities and self-confidence*, *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39, 2, 150-67.

Van Steensel, R., McElvany, N., Kurvers, J., & Herppich, S. (2011). How effective are family literacy programs? Results of a meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research*.

# Appendix: Impacts of family literacy programmes on child literacy

Carpentieri et al (2011) summarised a number of meta-analyses of family literacy programmes throughout the world. These meta-analyses focused on child literacy outcomes only. Because of this, we have not included these findings in the main body of this paper. However, as the findings may be of some use to NIACE, we have included a summary in this appendix. We have also included an introductory explanation of some key issues related to meta-analyses.

While there have been a number of meta-analyses of family literacy programmes, to the best of our knowledge there has never been a meta-analysis of broader family learning programmes. A primary barrier to conducting such a meta-analysis is the fact that family learning programmes generally do not produce an easily quantifiable outcome which can be used as the basis for analysis. Many family literacy programmes, in contrast, produced quantifiable measures of literacy gains, based on tests administered before and immediately after the intervention.

## *What are meta-analyses, and why are they valuable?*

One of the primary challenges associated with evidence-based policy making is the fact that research studies often arrive at conflicting conclusions. Moreover, such studies often vary significantly in quality and methodological rigour. These facts, when combined, can encourage decision-makers to “cherry pick” findings, choosing the research evidence that best fits their preconceived notions about programme effectiveness. For example, policymakers in favour of investing in family learning interventions can readily point to studies showing evidence of success. On the other hand, policymakers who would prefer not to invest in such interventions can likewise point to research supporting their stance.

Meta-analysis provides a tool for overcoming many of the challenges associated with conflicting research evidence and variable study quality. Meta-analyses systematically combine the results of a number of primary research studies in order to arrive at a more robust conclusion about the effectiveness of particular types of interventions (Coe, 2002). Instead of looking at just one study on an intervention such as family literacy, meta-analyses can combine the results of a number of studies of family literacy, to enable policymakers to draw a more robust conclusion about the value of family literacy interventions. Meta-analyses also assess the quality of primary research, filtering out or giving less weight to lower quality evidence. Because they pool studies and thus produce a larger sample size, meta-analyses may also provide more reliable evidence about participant and programme characteristics affecting intervention outcomes.

### *Measuring programme impact: effect size*

In quantifying programme effectiveness, meta-analyses use a measure known as effect size. An effect size is a numerical estimate of the magnitude of an intervention's impact. Expressing impacts in effect size allows for the quantitative comparison of the relative impacts of two or more different interventions, or an intervention compared to a control group (Coe, 2002).

An effect size of 1.0 indicates an increase of one standard deviation. In educational terms, this is typically associated with advancing a child's achievement by two to three years or improving the rate of learning by 50% (Hattie, 2009). Effect sizes in the social sciences have traditionally been classified as small, medium and large, with small generally being seen as any effect size under 0.5, medium being anything between 0.5 and 0.79, and large being 0.8 and above. However, these are generalisations for the social sciences as a whole, and may not be particularly useful when seeking to determine the value of educational interventions, as interventions in education typically have smaller effect sizes than in other areas of the social sciences.

As Coe (2002) emphasises, the effectiveness of a particular intervention must be assessed not in comparison to all of the social sciences, but in comparison to the effectiveness of other interventions that seek to produce the same effect. And as Hattie (2009) observes, outputs should be judged in terms of their required inputs: programmes that produce relatively small effect sizes but which require minimal resources may be judged to be more effective than more expensive interventions which produce large impacts. Furthermore, interventions must be assessed in relation to their relative return on investment, both in the short-and long-term. For example, reducing class sizes from 23 to 15 is associated with an effect size of 0.30 (Hattie, 1999). As William (1998) has argued, this is a relatively small gain in relation to the cost of the intervention.

### *Comparing effect sizes for educational interventions*

In education, the average effect size is 0.4 (Hattie 1999, 2009). As Hattie (2009, p. 15) emphasises, meta-analysis of educational interventions turns up a remarkable fact: almost everything works. In fact, "ninety percent of all effect sizes in education are positive". What matters, therefore, is how much an intervention works in comparison to another intervention that could be undertaken.

The most common effect size for educational interventions and other education-related variables is 0.3, with the second most common effect size being 0.2 (Hattie, 1999, p. 5). This is followed by 0.4, then 0.1. Hattie (2009) argues that the key number in this discussion is 0.4: intervention types producing an effect larger than this are better than average, while those producing a smaller effect can and should be replaced by other types of programmes.

Being aware of these figures is useful for our analysis of family literacy interventions, as it helps us to determine not just how much impact such interventions have, but how much

impact they have in comparison to school-based interventions. To provide relevant context, we list here effect sizes associated with 12 common educational interventions (Hattie 1999, 2009).

Table A1 Selected educational intervention effect sizes (adapted from Hattie 1999, 2009)

Intervention type	Effect size
Repeated reading programmes	0.67
Vocabulary programmes	0.67
Phonics instruction	0.60
Participation in pre-school programmes	0.45
Computer-assisted instruction	0.37
Reducing class sizes from 23 to 15	0.30
Individualised instruction	0.23
Teaching test taking skills	0.22
Sentence combining programmes	0.15
Homework (at primary school level)	0.15
Whole language programmes	0.06
Retention (i.e. children repeating a school year)	-0.16

In their review, Carpentieri et al followed Hattie (2009) in establishing an effect size of 0.40 or above as a desirable benchmark. However, they noted that given the reduced resource requirements required by many family literacy programmes as compared to in-school interventions, lower effectiveness from the former may still prove cost-effective.

Carpentieri et al also noted the issue of opportunity cost. While school-based interventions tend to be “either-or” propositions– if one intervention is being implemented in a classroom, others cannot be – family-based interventions (the vast majority of which occur outside of school hours) are more likely to complement than to compete with school-based interventions.

The following paragraphs summarise the meta-analyses looked at in Carpentieri et al's review.

Meta-analysis 1: Manz et al (2011) undertook a descriptive review of 31 studies of family literacy interventions targeted at children ages 2-6, coupled with a meta-analysis of a subset of 14 of those studies. Their meta-analysis focused in particular on the impact of family literacy interventions on low income, ethnic minority and/or linguistically diverse children. These researchers found an effect size of 0.33, but found smaller gains for socio-economically disadvantaged children.

Meta-analysis 2: Van Steensel et al (2011) analysed the effectiveness of a range of family literacy programmes, investigating whether intervention impacts were different for comprehension-and code-related measures, and seeking to identify programme, sample and study characteristics that influenced outcomes. These researchers found an effect size of 0.25; however, in randomised studies this effect disappeared.

Meta-analysis 3: Mol et al (2008) conducted a meta-analysis of a specific type of family literacy intervention: dialogic parent-child book reading. The aim of this review was to examine the added value of dialogic parent-child book reading in comparison to more typical, less interactive forms of parent-child reading. A further objective was to investigate whether disadvantaged children benefited more or less from dialogic reading interventions than non-disadvantaged children. Mol et al found an effect size of 0.59, but found that dialogic reading programmes were far less effective for disadvantaged children and those over the age of three.

Meta-analysis 4: Sénéchal and Young (2008) analysed the effects of three types of parental involvement interventions: 1) those in which parents read to children; 2) those in which parents listened to their children read; and 3) those in which parents were trained to teach specific literacy skills to their children. These researchers found an overall effect size of 0.68, with outcomes for disadvantaged children being just as good as those of other children. Sénéchal and Young found significant variation depending on intervention type: programmes in which parents taught reading skills to their children produced a very large effect size: 1.15. This was somewhat more than double the effect size for interventions in which parents were trained to listen to their children read: 0.51. Parents reading to children produced the smallest effect size: 0.18.

Meta-analysis 5: Nye et al (2006) synthesised findings from randomised controlled trials (RCTs) investigating the effects of parental involvement intervention programmes on the academic performance of primary school-age children. This review included studies looking at the effects of parental involvement not just on reading achievement, but also on maths and science. However, reading was the primary focus of most of the studies. The

researchers found an effect size for all three academic areas combined of 0.43. Looking at reading outcomes only, they found an effect size of 0.42.

Meta-analysis 6: Erion (2006) synthesised research on a range of parental support programmes designed to enhance children's performance in a range of academic areas. While this review did not limit itself to interventions targeting reading, literacy was the focus of most programmes studied. Synthesising 14 studies that included measures of reading comprehension, Erion found an effect size of 0.57.

All six of these meta-analyses concluded that family literacy programmes produce positive effects on quantitatively measured child literacy outcomes, although van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011) found negligible impacts in randomised studies.

On the whole, these effects are greater than those produced by the majority of educational interventions, as measured in meta-analyses and summarised by Hattie, (1999, 2009). In four of the six meta-analyses, the effect size exceeds Hattie's target of 0.4. This is an impressive result, particularly given that parent-focused child literacy interventions face considerable obstacles not encountered by classroom interventions. For example, altering many parents' educational knowledge, habits and behaviours is likely to be more challenging than altering classroom variables.

The result is made even more impressive by the fact that family literacy programmes are likely to complement rather than compete with school-based literacy interventions. This suggests that gains from family literacy programmes have a higher added value, as they are not associated with opportunity costs. The evidence suggests that successful family literacy interventions can serve as valuable compliments to in-school interventions.

What do these effect sizes mean, in terms of relative gains? One way of interpreting an effect size is to compare the percentage of a control group who would score below the average person in an experimental group boasting that particular effect size (Coe, 2002). Another way of interpreting effect size is to compare the rank of a person in a control group of 25 to the average score in an experimental group of 25 (ibid).

Table A2 illustrates the relative gains that would be expected based on the effect sizes of the meta-analyses included in our review.

**Table A2 Relative gains expected from meta-analytic effect sizes**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Effect size</b>	<b>Approximate percentage of control group who would be below the average person in the experimental group</b>	<b>Approximate rank of person in a control group of 25 who would be equivalent to the average person in the experimental group</b>

van Steensel et al (forthcoming 2011)	0.25	60%	11th
Manz et al (2010)	0.33	63%	10th
Nye et al (2006)	0.42	66%	9th
Erion (2006)	0.55	71%	8th
Mol et al (2008)	0.59	73%	7th
Sénéchal and Young (2008)	0.68	75%	6th

*(NB: Van Steensel et al found no positive effect in randomised studies. In contrast, Nye et al found an effect size of 0.42, even though their review included only randomised studies.)*

For example, with an effect size of 0.68, as found by one of the meta-analyses discussed in this chapter (Sénéchal and Young, 2008), approximately 75% of the control group would score below the average child receiving one of the interventions included in this meta-analysis. That is, the effect is the equivalent of moving an individual from the 50th percentile to the 76th.

In Sénéchal and Young's meta-analysis, the average intervention group score (i.e. the 13th highest score) would be equivalent to the sixth highest score in a comparable control group. In Mol et al's, the average score in the intervention group would be roughly equivalent to the seventh best score in the control group.