

Background to the project

There is overwhelming research evidence that parent and family support for early learning makes the biggest difference in the effective outcomes for children. The most important influences on children's early development are those that come from home. For all children, the quality of the home learning environment is more important for intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. What parents do is more important than who parents are. For example:

- the effect of the early home learning environment on age 5 outcomes has an effect over and above parental background factors such as socio-economic status, maternal education and family income¹.
- parental interest in their child's education has four times more influence on attainment by the age of 16 than socio-economic background².

- parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be the most important determinant of language and emergent literacy³.

Early Education was awarded funding from the Walcot Foundation to support practitioners to work effectively with parents in the London Borough of Lambeth in order to:

- identify 'what works' in supporting parental involvement in children's early childhood education and
- inform its future early years education grant making decisions.



¹ Sylva, K., et al (eds). (2010). *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education project*.

² Feinstein, L., and Symonds J., (1999). 'Attainment in Secondary School'. *Oxford Economic Papers* 51(2): 300-321

³ National Literacy Trust (2007). *Why it is important to involve parents in their children's literacy*.

Executive Summary

Parents and practitioners have a lot to learn from each other. There is overwhelming research evidence that parent and family support for early learning makes the biggest difference in the effective outcomes for children. The most important influences on children's early development are those that come from home.

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- identify 'what works' in supporting parental involvement in children's early childhood education and
- inform its future early years education grant making decisions.

The 'P for Partnership' project ran from March 2010 to April 2011. Four of the five nursery schools and children's centres in Lambeth participated in the project in partnership with the Lambeth local authority early years team.

The 'P for Partnership' project had two aims:

1. To support parents' involvement in their children's early learning to develop communication, language and literacy and mathematical thinking in their children, as well as promoting personal, social and emotional development through improved motivation, self confidence and self-esteem in both their child and themselves.
2. To support practitioners to work with parents to enable them to understand the importance of play and exploration in supporting their child's developing communication, language and literacy as well as their mathematical knowledge and understanding and to show them how they can use simple resources to do this outside the formal education setting.

The project was designed to both challenge and support the practice of schools in the ways in which they work with parents to enhance the early learning of their children as well as to encourage the ongoing learning of their parents. Diverse programmes of work, carefully planned to meet the needs of the practitioners, the schools in which they worked and

the communities of children, parents and families with whom they worked with were developed. These programmes of work supported practitioners with additional skills and expertise to work with those children at risk of underachievement, with additional support through an inclusive programme of culturally responsive activities. The programme was underpinned by the principles of the Early Years Foundation Stage with a particular focus on:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- problem solving, reasoning and numeracy.

The work of the 'P for Partnership' project in essence, built on and added value to the existing work of the four nursery schools and children's centres.

In the course of the year that the P for Partnership project has been working in Lambeth, there have been a range of national developments which have and will continue to shape and impact on the roles of both practitioners and parents in the early learning of their children.

We have had the privilege of capturing learning stories from the children and families involved in the P for Partnership project. These feature throughout this publication. Names have been changed and the photographs that accompany the stories do not feature the individuals whose stories are being told.



The P for Partnership project identified the following themes across the range of programmes of work that contributed to the ongoing successful engagement of and effective working with parents.

- Children and their families were identified by the school, who already had knowledge of and a relationship with them to ensure that participation in the project had maximum impact.
- Each nursery school and children's centre identified up to 15 families for each project to ensure that the support was intense and effectively focused.
- The project was able to allocate funds to each nursery school and children's centre to support their approach in line with their agreed action plan.
- When working with parents, practitioners must consider how it will benefit parents as well as how it will support the approach of the school.
- Clear and detailed action planning with targets set, individuals named and budgets allocated are vital to ensure that best laid plans don't drift. The best intervention programmes are always 'live' across a school, monitored and challenged as the projects evolve.
- Effective leadership and management of the project is the key to success. Where projects are successful the headteacher truly believes in partnership with parents and the community and is a key driver of the project.
- Where there is an inspiring and enthusiastic lead practitioner to take forward the project on a day-to-day basis, the project is a success and practice is more likely to be embedded in the ongoing practice of the school.
- Where there are effective partnerships established and a peer mentoring approach adopted, the improvements are sustained and built upon.
- Projects are successful where there is commitment from the whole school and children's centre. All practitioners are excited by the work with parents and it is seen as integral to the work of the school.
- Projects are successful where the school routines and approaches respond to the children and the families, and are not just convenient for the staff. Where this happens the families join in and feel valued.

P for Partnership

- Where the projects are integral to the curriculum and the planning is shared with the parents, the children's learning and progress improves.
- Visits are integral to family learning. They offer the opportunity to build relationships, introduce families to outdoor learning, build children's and adult's confidence in their own community and most of all bring fun and enjoyment into learning.
- Food is always a key component to success!
- Building on existing projects and utilising different funding streams enabled project work to start quickly using the infrastructure already in place.
- A different start and end to the school day in reception classes where parents have been encouraged into the classroom has enabled them to be involved in their children's learning.
- Projects are successful when programme times accommodate the daily patterns of the parents and families of the community.
- Where schools have done things differently and have taken risks the project has inspired staff teams. These schools have not kept doing the same things with parents if they haven't worked the first time!

Above all, key to the successful working in partnership with parents is to ensure that any programme of work is developed and tailored to meet the individual's needs and circumstances of the children, parents and families. This is reflected in the diverse range of approaches, programmes and activities that were engaged with each nursery school and children's centre, and primary school throughout the course of the project and which are summarised in this document.

