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Relationship between Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievement and Adjustment in Schools

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Abstract A review of English language literature was conducted to establish research findings on the relationship between parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment in schools. Two distinct bodies of literature were discerned. One focused on describing and understanding the nature, extent, determinants and impact of spontaneously occurring parental involvement on children's educational outcomes. The second body of work is concerned with describing and evaluating attempts to intervene to enhance spontaneous levels of involvement. Recent research on spontaneous levels of parental involvement is generally of a very high quality using advanced statistical techniques to describe the scope and scale of involvement and to discern its unique impact on pupil achievement. This research consistently shows that Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfillment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance.

Keywords: Parental Involvement, Parental Support, Family Education, Pupil Achievement

Introduction

Early research in the field showed a variety of inconsistent and conflicting findings. Some studies found that parental involvement had no effect whatsoever on pupil achievement or adjustment, others found striking, positive effects whilst yet other studies found a negative relationship. Parental involvement, it seemed, diminished pupil achievement under some circumstances. These inconsistencies are relatively easy to explain. First, different researchers used different definitions of parent involvement. Some took it to be 'good parenting' which went on in the home. Others took it to be 'talking to teachers' whilst yet others defined parental involvement as a thoroughgoing participation in school functions and school governance. At the same time, different researchers used different measures of parental involvement even for a given definition. For example, parental involvement in the home has been measured using teachers' judgements, parents' judgements, pupil judgements or researchers' observations. A similar range of metrics has been used for pupils' achievements and adjustment running from subjective self ratings through to the use of public examinations and on to the completion of psychometric tests. Measuring different 'things' under the same name and measuring the same 'thing' with different metrics was bound to lead to apparent inconsistencies.

In further explaining the inconsistencies of early studies, there has been an evident naivety in interpreting correlation coefficients. It is frequently found, for example, that the rate at which parents talk to teachers about their child's behaviour and progress is negatively correlated with both these 'outputs'. Research showed that the more parents talked to teachers, the less well their children seemed to be progressing. It was concluded on this

basis that parental involvement was a detriment to pupil progress. But which is cause and which effect? Common sense says that parents talk more to teachers when a problem emerges. The talk is a response to rather than a cause of the problem. Yet this is not the whole story. Most parents talk to teachers to some degree about their child's progress and this, quite properly is an index of parental involvement. It reminds us that the relationship between parental involvement and achievement is probably not linear (doubling parental involvement will not double achievement), and that it is proactive as well as reactive. Parents take the level of interest and involvement appropriate to the scene as they see it. Some aspects of involvement are played out in the home long before the child starts school whilst others are in response to problems or opportunities generated in the school.

Early studies often showed strong positive links between parental involvement in school and pupil progress. It was concluded that in-school involvement helped cause this progress. Yet such parental involvement is itself strongly related to socio-economic status which in turn is even more strongly linked with pupil progress. The design of most early studies did not allow these complex relations amongst variables to be unpicked to identify their unique effects. Without this control, conclusions about the effect of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment were premature.

Understanding how any one part of a complex interacting system impacts on the desired outcomes is clearly very challenging. The ideal scientific approach to such questions would be to conduct a programme of carefully designed experiments in which all factors except the variable in question are controlled in order to observe the impact on the system. In complex human systems this is impossible, and indeed, may be unethical. The modern alternative to the experiment is to use statistical techniques on large data sets which allow the researcher to exercise a degree of statistical control over many variables in order to test theories about how the system works. The scientifically most sound studies of parental involvement adopt just such an approach. Recent studies in this vein have provided a consistent picture of how parental involvement influences pupil achievement and adjustment and the degree to which this influence operates.

The following sections set out an analysis of two major studies in the field to illustrate the data sets and forms of scientific procedure commonly used in quantitative research in the field aiming to identify the unique impact of parental involvement on pupil achievement and adjustment.

Parental Involvement

The effect of parental involvement (in terms of providing a home learning environment) on achievement and cognitive development has been explored in recent studies of English pre schoolers (Sylva, et al, 1999; Melhuish et al, 2001). Sylva et al (1999) ran a longitudinal study (The Effective Provision of Pre School Education Project, EPPE) to assess the attainment and development of children between the ages 3 to 7 years. More than three thousand children were recruited to the sample which investigated provision in more than 100 centres. A wide range of methods were used to explore the effects of provision on children's attainment and adjustment. Of particular interest here is the impact of parental involvement in interaction with professional provision. The idea of a 'home learning environment' (HLE) was devised to describe a range of learning related provision in the home as reported by parents. HLE included reading, library visits, playing with letters and numbers, painting and drawing, teaching (through play) the letters of the alphabet, playing with numbers and shapes, teaching nursery rhymes and singing. Melhuish et al (2001) concluded that, 'higher home learning environment was associated with increased levels of cooperation and conformity, peer

sociability and confidence, ... lower anti-social and worried or upset behaviour and higher cognitive development scores ... after age it was the variable with the strongest effect on cognitive development' (p.ii) And, 'Its (HLE) effect is stronger than that of either socio-economic status or mothers' qualifications' (p26). Whilst HLE scores were generally higher in homes in the upper social classes, ' ... there are parents high on SES and qualifications who provide a home environment low on the HLE index ... there are parents low on SES and qualifications who provide a home environment high on the HLE index'. (p.9).

In a study which flowed from the ongoing EPPE project, Siraj-Blatchford et al (2002) set out to identify the most effective teaching strategies in the Foundation Stage. Intensive case studies were made of 14 sites rated in the EPPE project as offering 'good practice'. In essence, the aim of the case studies was to explain the statistical relationships established previously.

Again, the key point of interest here was to ascertain the impact of parental involvement. The case studies suggested that when a special relationship between parents and professional educators obtained, in terms of shared aims, good learning progress could take place even in the absence of good practice in the pre-school. 'Our findings show that it is the (parental) involvement of learning activities in the home that is most closely associated with better cognitive attainment in the early years'. This was shown to be especially beneficial when parents and professionals negotiated a continuity of experience for the children.

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

The surprise finding is the slight negative effect of 'home structure' on achievement. It has generally been considered that a degree of organisation and discipline related to the use of out-of-school time would support school achievement. The negative result here runs counter to that sentiment. It merits cautious interpretation. It could be that the best discipline is self discipline. Attempts to impose discipline on adolescents might be indicative of problem behaviour, i.e. the parents are reacting to a problem rather than causing it. Another result to emphasise from this study, replicating that of Sui-Chu and Willms (above) is that parental

involvement which takes the form of in-school parental activity has little effect on individual's attainment.

Catsambis (2001) analysed data from the NELS: 88 study and its second, follow-up (NELS: 92). This gave access to extensive data collected by questionnaire from parents, students, teachers, principals and administrators on achievement and parental involvement. Catsambis used Epstein's conception of involvement (see Figure 3) and searched the data base to find evidence with which to assess the 6 types of involvement, relating them to measures of student achievement. Once again, background variables such as family socio-economic status and previous attainment, were factored out before examining the impact of parental involvement on student achievement, in this case in the age range 14 – 18 years. The first main result of this study was that none of the 6 modes of involvement was associated with academic progression in this age range. This replicates Sacker et al's (2002) findings from the UK NCDS for adolescents. However, parental involvement was positively associated with what in England would be termed 'staying on rates' and with increased likelihood of making challenging course options. High levels of parental expectation, consistent encouragement and actions to enhance learning opportunities in the home were all positively associated with students' high aspirations and college enrolments – this regardless of students SES or ethnic background.

George and Kaplan (1998) used the NELS: 88 data to focus more narrowly on parental involvement and its relationship to students' attitudes to science. Again, key background variables were factored out. The researchers concluded, 'One of the important effects seen in the present study is the influence of parental involvement on science attitudes.' The more the parents showed a positive attitude to science the better the pupils achieve in science. The parental effect works through discussion of school experiences and through arranging or supporting activities in libraries and museums.

McNeal (1999; 2001) used the NELS: 88 data base to examine the effects of parental involvement on science achievement and truancy and drop out rates. This involved taking samples from NELS: 88, NELS: 90 and NELS: 92 data collections phases. One sample (assessed in NELS: 88 and NELS 90) of 12,000+ cases was recruited to assess the impact of parental involvement on achievement. The second sample (NELS: 90 and NELS: 92) was used to assess the impact of earlier involvement on subsequent drop out rates. As usual in these studies, the effect of background variables such as SES, and previous achievement were factored out to reveal the residual impact of parental involvement on achievement. But McNeal went on to study the interaction of involvement with a number of background factors including SES and ethnicity. Some of these results will be discussed later. For this present section the main conclusion was that, 'the only dimension of parental involvement that is remotely consistent in terms of improving achievement and reducing problematic behaviour is parent-child discussion ...' (p 131).

Other aspects of parental involvement were not without impact but such effects were inconsistent. Involvement in the school and parental monitoring of students' behaviour both had effects on moderating discrepant behaviour but less on achievement in science. McNeal went on to demonstrate that the patterns of relationship showed strong interactions between involvement and different categories of student. The positive effects of parental involvement operate only for white, middle class students in two-parent families. This result is entirely consistent with Sacker et al's (2002) study using the BCDS data. Together they show that parental involvement is much less influential on the achievement of adolescent pupils. The circumstances associated with lower SES work against the effects of parental involvement in ways not evident with younger pupils.

There are at least two published studies however which contradict these findings and which find that the positive effects of parental involvement continue strongly into adolescence. Gonzalez-Pienda et al (2002) explored the effects of parental involvement on achievement for a sample of 261 Spanish adolescents. Standardised attainment tests were used to measure achievement, psychometric tests to appraise self concept and related personal attributes and parental involvement was rated by the students. Characteristically, student aptitude accounted for a significant portion of the variance in academic achievement. Following that, parental involvement as rated by the students themselves and taking the form of interest and encouragement, was a major causal factor of achievement. The effect of parental involvement on achievement however was not direct. Rather it made its contribution through the shaping of the adolescents' self concept. The researchers concluded, 'the results ... clearly support the thesis that parental involvement behaviours significantly affect children's academic achievement ... however, this influence is not direct' (p276).

Feinstein and Symons (1999) also conclude that PI continues to have significant effects on achievement into adolescence. This conclusion is drawn from an analysis of the same data set as that used by Sacker et al (2002) who reached the opposite conclusion. Feinstein and Symons analysed the data from the NCDS (58) to explore the effect of parent, peer and schooling inputs on achievement at age 16. Feinstein and Symons examined the impact of certain factors (parental involvement, peer group influence, schooling inputs) on the production of 'educational goods' – in this case, achievement. Achievement at age 16 was measured by (a) the highest grade attained in any national examination for English, (b) the NCDS mathematics achievement score and (c) the average grade in all public examinations taken. Parental involvement was indexed using the NCDS head teachers' impressions of parental interest at ages 7,11, and 16. Four measures of peer group effects were used: the proportion of children in the class with fathers in non-manual occupations; the proportion of children taking only GCE examinations; the proportion of children in the class taking only CSE exams and the proportion of children in the class from the previous year's class who stayed on in education after the minimum leaving age. School effects were indexed by pupil teacher ratios. This index was justified on the grounds that it is a choice variable for parents. The analysis relating peer, family and school 'inputs' to educational 'outputs' provided clear results, 'Of the family inputs, only parental interest has a consistently strong impact. In contrast to what is usually found, social class, family size, and parental education ... have relatively small effects ... the combined advantage of coming from a high social class with parents who stayed on at school after 16 is only 5.98 percentage points in the All Exams index, compared to an effect of 24.4 from moving from no parental interest to the highest level of interest'. (1997, p.15). The peer group effect is about 10 percentage points on the All Exams index. It seems that socio-economic variables work their effect through parental interest.

The contrast of these findings with those of Sacker et al (2002) using the same data base is quite striking but, in the event, reconcilable. The differences between the two studies lie in the researchers' choice of intervening variables to account for the links between SES and achievement. Sacker et al used parental involvement, parental aspiration, material deprivation and school composition. Feinstein and Symons used family variables (size for example), parental interest, peer groups and school inputs. Perplexingly perhaps, Sacker et al used the same metric for school composition as Feinstein and Symons used for peer group effects. The upshot is that both studies reached the same conclusion but called it different names. Each found a significant role for parental involvement and each found a significant

role for school (albeit Feinstein and Symons attributes it to peer group effects) in the formation of achievement.

In summary, taken collectively the above studies using contemporary techniques of data analysis from large data sets have safely established that parental involvement in the form of interest in the child and manifest in the home as parent-child discussions can have a significant positive effect on children's behaviour and achievement even when the influence of background factors such as social class or family size have been factored out. This is not to say that parental involvement always does have such effects but the research shows what is routinely possible in the normal actions of parents in interaction with their school age youngsters. There is some indication that parental involvement activities and effects diminish as the child gets older but even for school leavers the effects are strong albeit perhaps less so on achievement and more so on staying on rates specifically and pupils' educational aspirations more generally.

The significance of parental values as perceived by students as a mechanism for both manifesting and explaining the impact of parental involvement has been validated in a number of studies. Examples include Fan (2001) who established the significant impact of parental aspirations on the general academic achievement of US adolescents; Ma (2001) who showed a strong impact of parental expectation on achievement in advanced mathematics; Carr and Hussey (1999) who showed that 'parents were the most influential social agents on children's task orientations ..., intrinsic motivation and physical competence' in a study of English adolescents' competence at and commitment to physical education; Lynch (2002) who showed that mothers' beliefs in their ability to help their children (age range 8 – 9 years) learn to read had a positive effect on their children's self beliefs as a learner-reader; and Garg et al (2002) who showed that the impact of family factors had their influence on shaping students' educational aspirations through their impact on extracurricular reading, attitudes towards school and homework and students' perceptions of their parents' educational aspirations. Garg et al considered this to be an important part of the students' 'educational self-schema' and showed that 'the parental involvement factor was found to be of greater importance (than SES) as a predictor of adolescent educational self schema'. The schema as such was a powerful predictor of achievement.

How does parental involvement in the home compare with parental involvement in the school?

It is broadly held that parental involvement in schooling might have both a 'private' and a 'public' benefit. The direct beneficiary of parental involvement might be the parent's own child. This benefit might flow from the parent's involvement focussing their child on school work or through focussing the teacher on their child. In addition to whatever the parent gets out of school involvement (pleasure, self-fulfilment and so on) this would be a 'private' benefit directly accruing to the participating parents and their children. But it might also be the case that there are broader more distributed, i.e. 'public', effects. Given parental investment in the classroom activities, school activities and functions, and in governance and advice, it could be the case that all the children in the school benefit. Parental involvement at this level could properly be thought of as a 'school input'.

The evidence in support of the public effect of parental involvement is, at best, unpromising. It has already been shown that whilst the effects of involvement manifest in the home can be significant, parental involvement manifest in school is much less strongly associated with private let alone public benefit. Rigorous studies attempting to isolate the public benefit effect are few in number and open to the charge that they do not take into account family social class

effects. Nechyba et al (1999) have recently reviewed the available research in the field and the argument here draws heavily on their work. First, Nechyba et al re-iterate how strongly parental involvement is correlated with SES. SES also strongly influences pupils' school achievement. This emphasises the necessity of factoring out SES as a background variable if the effects of parental involvement as such are to be understood. Nechyba et al identified 10 studies which can be brought to bear on the question of the public benefits of parental involvement between schools in contrast to the private benefits within schools. It is concluded that, 'the results indicate a large private component to parental involvement in schools ... that is, the effects of each parent's involvement mainly accrue to their own children, rather than those of others. Individual benefits for children might even come out a cost to others in the same classroom; for instance, one parent's pressure may encourage a teacher to devote additional time to one child and less to others. From a policy perspective, this provides good reason for caution. Policies that encourage involvement of some parents (but inevitably fall short of reaching every parent) might have unintended distributional consequence within the classroom or school.' Nechyba et al, 1999. p.42.

To summarise this section on research on the processes of parental involvement it can be said that the impact of parental involvement arises from parental values and educational aspirations and that these are exhibited continuously through parental enthusiasm and positive parenting style. These in turn are perceived by the student and, at best, internalised by them. This has its impact on the student's self perception as a learner and on their motivation, self esteem and educational aspirations. By this route parental involvement frames how students perceive education and school work and bolsters their motivation to succeed. For younger children, this motivational and values mechanism is supplemented by parental promotion of skills acquisition (e.g. in respect of early literacy).

Parental behaviours which manifest parental involvement change across the age range. With younger children, direct help with school relevant skills is appropriate and foundational. With older students, activities which promote independence and autonomy more generally become more relevant. This tentative outline model explains why parental involvement in the home is significantly more effective than parental involvement in the school. The former is more enduring, pervasive and direct. The latter is less so. It should perhaps be said that whilst research shows that parental involvement in the school has little if any impact on pupil achievement it is not without significance. The relationship between parental involvement (of any kind) and pupil achievement is probably not linear. A little parental involvement in school might go a very long way as a conduit of information (about curriculum, courses, school rules, assessments for example) through which teachers and parents alike can work to support the child. The effect of this basic level of in-school parental involvement might be as an essential lubricant for at-home involvement. There may, of course, be other reasons for parents working in schools which have more to do with the needs of schools or parents and which are not expected to have an impact on pupils individually. As such they are beyond the remit of this review.

Most of the studies already quoted show that parental involvement acted out in the school confers little or no benefit on the individual child. This is a strong finding. It is replicated extensively in the research. Okpala et al (2001) investigated the relationship between involvement (in terms of hours of volunteered in-school help), school spend (in terms of dollars per child spent on instructional supplies), parental SES and school achievement in one school district in North Carolina. 8 high schools, 12 middle schools and 50 elementary schools in an economically impoverished area of the State were involved. Mathematics test scores were

used to measure attainment. Analysis showed that family social class was the only factor associated with attainment. Neither dollars spent nor, less yet, parental hours spent helping in the school, were related to pupil achievement. Similar results were found by Zellman and Waterman (1998) in a study of 193 2nd and 5th grade children. An important attribute of this study was that it contained, amongst other data collection techniques, a direct observation component so that parental involvement was indexed not only by various reports and ratings but by observations made by independent researchers. Amongst many findings (which will be reported later) it was evident that in-school manifestations of parental involvement were not related to pupil achievement. There are many possible reasons for having parents working in schools. It might be very good for the parents. It has the potential to help schools link better with the community. It could contribute to the openness and accountability of the school. These potential benefits have yet to show themselves as making a salient contribution to children's attainment.

In another take on the study of parental involvement, Izzo et al (1999) studied 1205 US children from kindergarten through to grade 3 in a 3 year longitudinal research programme. Teachers rated four forms of involvement; frequency of parent-teacher contact; quality of parent-teacher interaction; participation in educational activities in the home; and participation in school activities. These factors, as well as family background variables were examined to find any relationship they might have with school achievement as indexed by school grades. Consistent with other studies, Izzo et al showed that all forms of parental involvement declined with child's age and that involvement in the home 'predicted the widest range of performance variance'. In another longitudinal study, Dubois et al (1994) showed that family support and the quality of parent-child relationships significantly predicted school adjustment in a sample of 159 young US adolescents (aged 10 –12) followed in a two year longitudinal study. At-home parental involvement clearly and consistently has significant effects on pupil achievement and adjustment which far outweigh other forms of involvement. Why is 'at-home' involvement so significant? How does it work in promoting achievement and adjustment?

The broad answer to this question seems to be that it depends on the age of the child. For younger pupils parenting provides the child with a context in which to acquire school related skills and to develop psychological qualities of motivation and self worth. For older children the specific skills component seems to be less salient and the motivational component assumes increasing importance.

Discussion

In regard to using parental involvement research to inform attempts to close the social class achievement gap several lines of thinking commend themselves. The first is the very clear and consistent finding that when all other factors bearing on pupil attainment are taken out of the equation, parental involvement in the terms described earlier has a large and positive effect on the outcomes of schooling. This effect is bigger than that of schooling itself. Research consistently shows that what parents do with their children at home is far more important to their achievement than their social class or level of education. It would seem that if the parenting involvement practices of most working class parents could be raised to the levels of the best working class parents in these terms, very significant advances in school achievement might reasonably be expected. This inference from research cannot be said too often. Additionally, models of how parental involvement works suggest that every element in the process is, at least in principle, open to the influences of teaching and learning. The policy

challenge reflects that of turning average schools into the best schools except that the return on effort if successful would be far greater.

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

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

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

This observation would come as no surprise to leading edge American practitioners in the field. As Raffaele and Knoff (1999) and Epstein (2002) have shown, unless a whole-community, strategic approach to parental involvement is undertaken, and unless this work is embedded in the school's teaching and learning strategy and development plan, little return on effort can be expected. Outside this strategic approach, parental involvement activities tend to be ad-hoc, short term and to lack follow-through.

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

It will bring an achievement bonus only if the intervention is followed through in the school's development plan for enhanced achievement goals. Basic research in the field offers a clear framework for intervention. In it there is little or no place for programmes of ad-hoc activities, for training which merely makes children biddable or for any intervention which lacks follow-through. Nor is there any place for bolt-on roles (mentor, home-school link workers) which threaten to distribute the responsibility for parental involvement and support and weaken its connection to the school's teaching and learning plan.

What further knowledge do we need to promote achievement through parental involvement? Where are the gaps in the research? In responding to these questions judgement takes over entirely from evidence. It would seem that we know enough about how good parenting works in propitious circumstances in favour of educational achievement. We also know that there is an extensive need and demand for support and direction to promote these skills. We have programmes in the field that satisfy many clients at least in their immediate impacts. We seem to know as much in principle about parental involvement and its impact on pupil achievement as Newton knew about the physics of motion in the 17th. Century. What we seem to lack is the 'engineering' science that helps us put our knowledge into practice. By 1650 Newton knew in theory how to put a missile on the moon. It took more than 300 years to learn how to do this in practice. The scientists who did this used Newton's physics with modern engineering knowledge. We must not wait 300 years to promote stellar advances in pupils' achievement. We need urgently to learn how to apply the knowledge we already have in the field.

What is implicated is not more basic research in how parenting works or how children learn. We have a good-enough knowledge base to hand on these matters. (Bransford et al, 1999). Rather, what is called for is a number of competing development studies modelled on engineering design research. We know what we want – quantum leaps in pupil achievement broadly conceived. We have key principles and a good-enough knowledge base to guide us. We are not short of commitment, creativity and good starter ideas. What we lack is sufficient knowledge to take us from where we are to where we want to be. We need a programme of carefully researched multi-dimensional developments in parental involvement for pupil achievement. These developments should not be evaluated in the current mode. Such evaluations come too late and teach us too little. We do not need to learn, too late, what worked. We need to learn how to get things to work.

From this perspective the development studies should have a research component run on design-research principles to learn lessons from work in progress which feeds into continuous improvement of approaches. Recent advances in educational research methods are well up to the specification and management of such programme of development (Kelly, 2003). We have a foundation of relevant knowledge to be confident and to learn as we go in closing to some degree the social class gap in educational achievement.

It is well known that the great majority of children at risk of relative school failure live in a relatively small number of post code districts. Strategic targeting of development projects could focus on schools in these districts.

Conclusion

In summary it is worth emphasising that research on spontaneous levels of parental involvement in children's education confirms the long held view that the impact is large and the processes are well understood. What parents do with their children at home through the age range, is much more significant than any other factor open to educational influence. Notwithstanding the poor quality of research and evaluations in intervention studies a clear picture of need, want, commitment and readiness is evident. What seems to be lacking is an effort to put these two bodies of knowledge together in a development format likely to deliver the achievement bonus from enhanced parenting.

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