



Barnardos

ISSUE 1 • 2017

CHILD *Links*

The **HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect Barnardos policies.

ISSN: 1649-0975

© 2017 Barnardos

ChildLinks is published by Barnardos, Christchurch Square, Dublin 6

T: 01 4530355 E: resources@barnardos.ie / training@barnardos.ie

CONTENTS

Editorial

Sinéad Lawton..... 1

Influence of the Home Learning Environment on Expressive Language Ability Age 3: Evidence from Growing Up in Ireland

Sarah Hourigan, Research Analyst, Health Research Board and Dr. Jean Quigley, School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin..... 2

Adjusting the Starting Line: An Overview of Better Finglas and its support of the Home Learning Environment

Keith Adams, Research Assistant, Better Finglas..... 9

Counting Games Really Count: Making the Most of the Home Numeracy Environment

Dr Frank Niklas, Institute of Psychology, University of Würzburg, Germany, and Dr Caroline Cohrsen, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, Australia..... 16

Engaging and Supporting Fathers in DEIS Schools

Dorothy Keane, Home School Community Liaison Coordinator..... 21

The Parent-Child Home Program: Strengthening the Parent-Child Relationship and Building Literacy-Rich Home Environments

Michele Morrison, Director of Training and Program Support and Cesar Zuniga, Director of Research and Evaluation, Parent-Child Home Program National Center, U.S. 27



Home Learning Environment

Editorial

The home learning environment (HLE) concerns any activities that parents carry out with their children to support learning. This might include interactions that encourage learning opportunities, practices and activities that nurture learning, and the availability of educational materials in the home. The quality of the HLE during a child's first years of life impacts on their school readiness and social-emotional competence, as well as having a long-term impact on their academic attainment, progress and learning behaviour.

Home learning practices and resources are widely recognised as crucial contributing factors to language ability outcomes in infants and children. The first article in this issue of ChildLinks looks at the impact of the HLE on language development and shows how the practices of shared reading, talking to the child, educational play, screen time and the availability of educational resources all contribute to the overall HLE. Also in this issue the home numeracy environment is considered. Children develop early mathematical competencies long before they start school, acquiring mathematical language, such as the names of shapes, positional and directional language, and number words, as part of general language acquisition. The HLE provides many opportunities for parents to support their children's increasing competencies in daily activities such as using recipes, measuring ingredients or counting out cutlery.

Two further articles examine programmes that support the HLE. The first gives an overview of Better Finglas, one of the programmes in Ireland selected to participate in the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, which aims to improve outcomes for children and their families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country. Better Finglas recognises parents as the first educators of their children and has designed its programmes to reflect the essential need for a

positive HLE. The second looks at the Parent-Child Home Program, which works with under-resourced families in the US and several other countries, including Ireland. This programme targets parent-child interaction and the child's social-emotional and language development, with the aim to improve the quality and quantity of verbal interaction between parent and child, and to foster pro-social behaviour in children to improve school readiness and, ultimately, overall functioning in childhood and beyond.

Also in this issue, Dorothy Keane, a Home School Community Liaison Coordinator, outlines a study that aims to gain an understanding of the issues that impact on the involvement of fathers in the education of their children. Some strategies identified that encourage paternal involvement include a strength-based, gendered approach, enlisting the support of mothers and building on fathers' interests together with an overall proactive approach to communication with fathers by all educational professionals.

It is apparent from all of the articles in this issue that the home learning environment is highly influential and that the more involved parents are in their children's learning and development, the better the outcomes for the child.

Sinead Lantieri



Influence of the Home Learning Environment on Expressive Language Ability Age 3: Evidence from Growing Up in Ireland

Sarah Hourigan, Research Analyst, Health Research Board and Dr. Jean Quigley, School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin



Introduction

Language ability is protective in child development and plays a significant role in determining a range of academic (Anders et al., 2012; Niklas & Schneider, 2013; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), socio-emotional (Harrison & McLeod, 2010) and behavioural outcomes (Schmiedeler, Niklas & Schneider, 2014). Learning commences long before infants begin formal school-based education. Through parental support and flexible opportunities that allow infants to explore their independent abilities, their early learning experiences are enhanced (Connor, Son, Hindman & Morrison, 2005). Language development is thus both an individual and a social process. In the context of the home environment, by jointly attending to learning with more knowledgeable individuals, infants develop skills and understanding. These linguistic building blocks are the foundation of future language skills, and predispose infants towards further learning (Son & Morrison, 2010). The home learning environment (HLE) is therefore recognised as being deeply influential in terms of language development.

Parents are an infant's first and most effective motivators for learning. The HLE, in which a child typically spends significant amounts of time in the early years actively interacting with their parents, constitutes a combination of parenting behaviours, practices and activities that nurture learning, and the availability of educational materials in the home (Lukie, Skwarchuk, LeFevre & Sowinski, 2014). Elements of the HLE include shared reading (Saracho & Spodek, 2010), talking to the infant (Hart & Risley, 1995), educational activities such as learning the alphabet, nursery rhymes and playing board games (Hartas, 2011), and the availability of books in the home (Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg & Peters, 2011).

Much research to date has focused on general language development and has been confined to older child populations (Hartas, 2012; Meng, 2015). The relationship between HLE and early language ability has been generally overlooked, creating a blind-spot in terms of the linguistic trajectory. A more targeted exploration of the association between HLE and expressive language ability in infancy may provide a greater insight into the mechanisms behind the broader relationship. Large longitudinal cohort studies, such as The Growing up in Ireland Study (GUI, 2010), have the potential to examine such factors. The present study will consider proximal and distal factors of the HLE that are widely discussed in the literature, namely: home learning practices and resources and their influence on

expressive language ability in infancy. Infant and maternal characteristics and practices identified in the literature as significant in the relationship between HLE and early language ability will also be considered.

Expressive Language Ability

Expressive language ability develops from infancy and is the capacity to employ vocabulary, putting words together forming sentences in order to express oneself. This includes the use of vocabulary, grammar and the motivations behind communication such as to receive attention (Spere, Schmidt, Theall-Honey & Martin-Chang, 2004). Many studies have shown that infants' achievements in expressive language ability provide unique contributions to later increased language and literacy outcomes, including increased vocabulary, academic achievement, metalinguistic awareness and reading comprehension (Harris, Golinkoff & Hirsh-Pasek, 2011; Connor et al., 2005; Hartas, 2011). Vocabulary is often used as a proxy for general language abilities and refers to an individual's knowledge of the lexical meanings of words. Infant's vocabulary development is significantly enhanced when parental practices involve word exposure across home learning opportunities such as mealtimes, shared reading and educational play (Bierman et al., 2008; Hoff, 2006; Meng, 2015).

Socioeconomic Status and Maternal Education

Perhaps the most well-established influence on the HLE is socioeconomic status (SES). SES includes education, occupation and income, and is a significant predictor of language outcomes (Fernald, Marchman & Weisleder, 2013). Higher SES has been associated with a higher quality of HLE resulting in early vocabulary growth and language development (Hart & Risley, 1995; Murray & Egan, 2014).

Maternal educational attainment is an effective index of SES as it is a relatively stable factor and is directly associated with variations in the home environment (Hupp, Munala, Kaffenberger & Hensley Wessell, 2011). The influence of maternal education on early language development has been explained through the allocation of available resources, including money, time and parent-child interactions and educational activities and materials promoted in the home, and the beliefs, values and attitudes parents express towards learning as part of the investment model (Foster et al., 2005; Hoff, Laursen & Tardiff, 2002).

“ Infant's vocabulary development is significantly enhanced when parental practices involve word exposure across home learning opportunities such as mealtimes, shared reading and educational play. ”



Home Learning Environment

The HLE involves a combination of behaviours, practices and resources that allow for an infant's emotional security in order to take risks and explore learning in the home (Son & Morrison, 2010). Through a variety of parenting behaviours and styles that engage the infant in educational activities, all parents can support learning practices in the home.

“*Reading to infants is widely recognised as a crucial precursor to language development.*”

Reading to infants is widely recognised as a crucial precursor to language development, encouraging positive attitudes towards reading, vocabulary advancement, and the formation of a strong emotional bond between the parent and child (Hartas, 2011; Murray & Egan, 2014; Saracho & Spodek, 2010). While reading to their child, the parent may engage them in conversations about the storyline, bringing the child's attention to the words, pictures and meaning of the book. This provides a child with access to new ideas and vocabulary beyond their daily experiences (Law, Rush, Schoon & Parsons, 2009). A link between a higher frequency of book reading sessions and increased expressive vocabulary scores has also been noted (Richman & Colombo, 2007).

The most effective learning derives from simple but versatile materials and environments that stimulate the infant's imagination. These can be adapted to suit their own level of comprehension and learning requirements (Hartas, 2011). Research suggests that home learning plays a pivotal role in establishing an environment that supports informal learning exploration (Melhuish et al., 2008). Literacy-rich environments that allow infants access to books and other educational materials such as arts, crafts, jigsaws and card games, where parents actively engage them in age-appropriate learning activities, positively contributes to later language outcomes (Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple & Peay, 1999). The Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children ($n = 14,000$) found that as part of the infant's home learning resources, the number of books owned at six months of age predicts their expressive language at two years (Roulstone et al., 2011). Parents may also engage their children in singing and reciting rhymes, telling stories, teaching numbers, counting, letters and the alphabet, which collectively contribute to a home environment that actively promotes learning (Hartas, 2011; Watson, 2002).

Many studies investigating the impact of television watching across a variety of outcomes provide little evidence of learning, with some finding negative associations between viewing and expressive language

ability scores and vocabulary growth in infants younger than the age of two years (Anderson & Pempek, 2005; Linebarger & Walker, 2005). In contrast, there is evidence to suggest that as an infant experiences more television, they begin to comprehend its messages and to then translate these into learning (Mumme & Fernald, 2003). The American Academy of Paediatrics (2001) has recommended that infants younger than two years of age not be exposed to electronic screens.

“*The most effective learning derives from simple but versatile materials and environments that stimulate the infant's imagination.*”

Home learning practices and resources are widely recognised as crucial contributing factors to language ability outcomes in infants and children. The practices of shared reading, talking to the infant, educational play, screen time and the availability of educational resources all contribute to the overall home learning environment.

Infant Characteristics

Significant predictors of early language skills and increased verbal ability include the child characteristics of female gender (Conture, Kelly & Walden, 2013), calm temperament (Haapsamo et al., 2013) and higher gestational age (Reilly et al., 2007).

Maternal Characteristics and Practices

Maternal characteristics and practices predictive of increased early language ability include longer periods of breastfeeding (Bromley, 2009), higher maternal age (Sperlich, Arnhold-Kerri & Geyer, 2011) and the absence of depression (Woods et al., 2014).

Purpose and Aims of Study

The present study extends previous work exploring the ways in which the HLE can influence language ability, by focusing on the specific home learning practices and resources of Irish parents and their infants during the first three years of the infant's life. It also takes into account a variety of previously identified home learning characteristics such as shared reading, educational play, screen time, talking to the infant while busy and number of books in the home. The research questions are investigated using a sample taken from *Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) – The National Longitudinal Study of Children in Ireland (2010)*, which allows for a detailed analysis of the HLE and facilitates the estimation of the effects the HLE has on Irish infants' expressive language abilities. It is hypothesised that:



1. Higher maternal educational attainment is associated with an advantaged HLE and increased expressive language ability at three years.
2. The set of early home learning practices (shared reading, talking to the infant, educational play and screen time) and home learning resources (number of books in the home) is predictive of expressive verbal ability development at three years.

“ Significant predictors of early language skills and increased verbal ability include the child characteristics of female gender, calm temperament and higher gestational age. ”

Method

Research Design

The present study is a secondary analysis of the first and second waves of the infant cohort from the GUI study, the objective of which is to track the development of two age cohorts of infants at different time points. The project has been designed and implemented by the joint ESRI-TCD Growing Up in Ireland Study Team.

Sample

Participants were selected from the Irish Child Benefit Register, which had almost universal coverage of the infant population at the time of the study. Infants were chosen on a systematic basis so that at the time of Wave 1 ($n = 11,134$) data collection (2008-2009), they would be in their tenth month (i.e. nine months) and for Wave 2 data collection (2010-2011), they would be in their third year. Wave 2 achieved a total sample of 9,793 (51% male; 49% female) three-year-old infants and their parents living in Ireland. The primary caregiver was the main informant, 99.6% of which were the infants' biological mothers.

Measures

Infant's expressive language ability outcomes were measured by direct assessment of the study child at three years of age using the Naming Vocabulary tests of the Early Years Battery of the British Ability Scales: Second Edition (BAS II; Elliott, 1996). The GUI Primary Caregiver Questionnaire (PCQ, available at www.growingup.ie) measured the explanatory variables of HLE, maternal educational attainment, infant factors and maternal factors.

Analytical Approach

Following bivariate analysis through Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients to explore the association between maternal education and home learning practices and resources, a hierarchical multiple regression model for expressive language ability at three years was created containing three blocks of predictors, based on the pre-existing literature.

In the first block, expressive language ability was regressed on infant gender, gestational age and infant temperament. Maternal age, breastfeeding and maternal depression were added as the second block of predictors followed by the HLE variables of talking to the infant while busy, home learning practices, screen time and practices, and number of books in the home entered in the third block.

The degree of missing data for the GUI study was relatively small. To account for any missing cases, pair-wise deletion methods were employed in order to retain as much information as possible. Due to the differential response rates in the GUI study (individuals with higher education, income and SES were more likely to respond to the study), the final sample (particularly at Wave 2 due to dropout rates) may not be fully representative of the Irish population (Williams, Murray, McCrory & McNally, 2013). Therefore, the data were reweighted prior to analysis to compensate for any imbalances in the sample in order to more accurately reflect the distribution of the population.

Results

Results indicate that the practices and resources constituting the HLE do positively impact on three year olds' expressive language ability outcomes. Specifically, as the frequency and availability of positive home learning practices and resources rises, infant's language abilities significantly increase as a result. The characteristics of the HLE including talking to the infant while busy, home learning practices and number of books in the home all yielded positive significant associations with infant's language outcomes. Additionally, all infant factors with the exception of infant temperament and the maternal factor of age were significantly and positively associated with increased language ability outcomes at three years.

Results indicated that, on average, three year olds in this study scored considerably better ($M = 74.62$, $SD = 19.7$), on the BAS II measure of language ability than the associated average standardised scores ($M = 50$, $SD = 10$). As the data was re-weighted prior to analysis in order to more accurately reflect the distribution of the Irish population, these language ability scores are an



interesting outcome measure to employ in regards to their nationally representative nature.

Hypothesis 1

Maternal education was highly correlated with other HLE variables of interest; talking to the infant while busy, general home learning practices, screen time and practices, and number of books in the home. These results indicate that higher educational attainment disposes a mother towards home learning practices and providing home learning resources for her infant. This naturally leads to the creation of a rich and advantageous HLE in which an infant can explore their independent abilities, enhancing their early learning experiences (Connor et al., 2005).

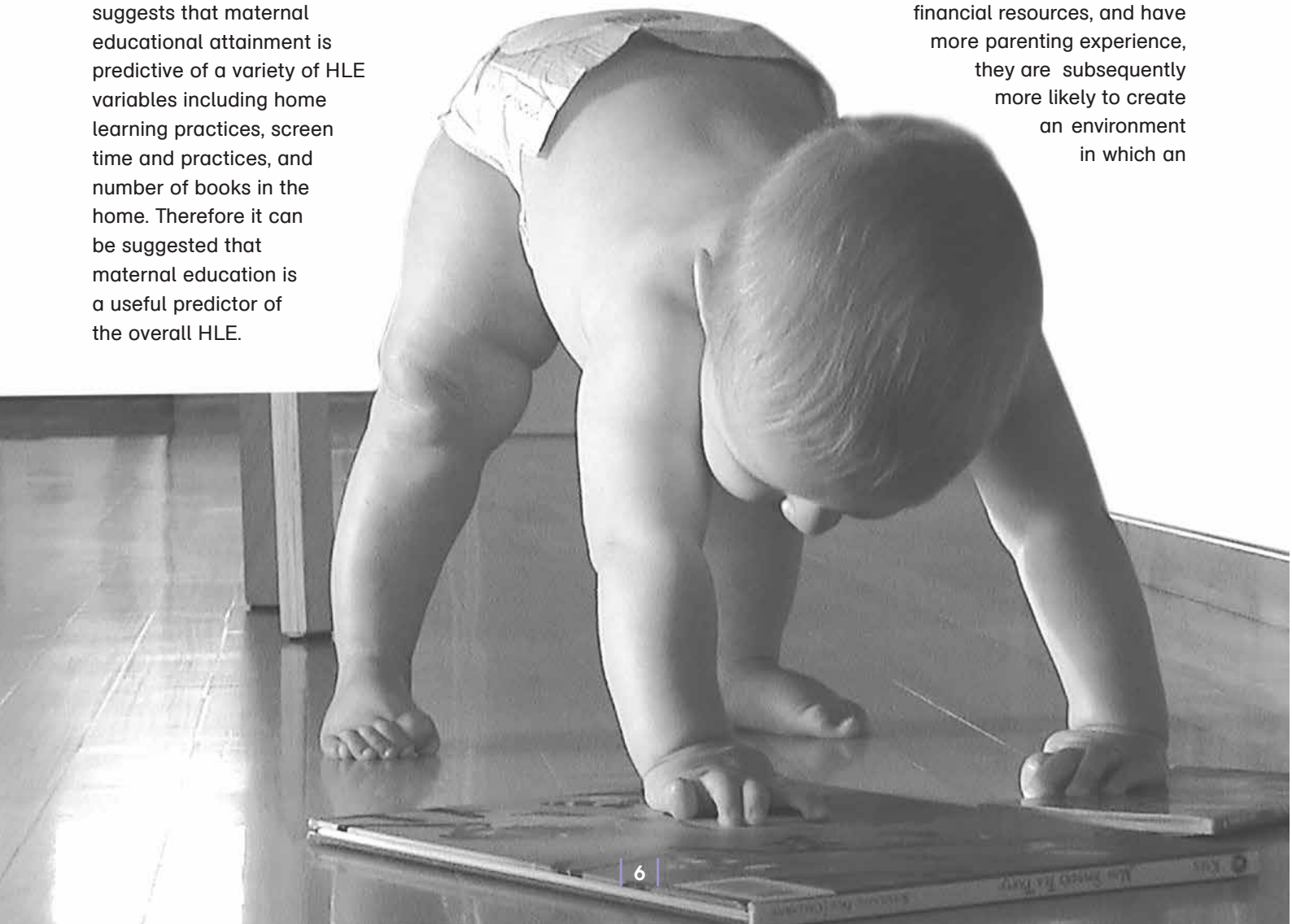
In line with the investment model (Foster et al., 2005), a notable relationship was observed between maternal education and number of books available in the home. There was a non-significant relationship found between maternal education and talking to the infant while busy indicating that, regardless of the level of education achieved, most mothers (90%) will direct speech towards their infants while busy doing other tasks such as housework.

The outcome of hypothesis 1 suggests that maternal educational attainment is predictive of a variety of HLE variables including home learning practices, screen time and practices, and number of books in the home. Therefore it can be suggested that maternal education is a useful predictor of the overall HLE.

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 sought to explore the HLE itself, and its potential to influence expressive language ability at three years. To explore this relationship a hierarchical regression was performed. Model 1 of the regression analysis, containing the infant factors of gender, gestational age and temperament, explained 1.8% of the associations between the HLE and infant language abilities. In line with existing research, a longer gestational period (Woods et al., 2014) and female infants displayed significantly more advanced verbal ability scores in infancy (Haapsamo et al., 2013). A difficult infant temperament was weakly associated with lower expressive language ability scores; this may be due to such infants being less likely to elicit rich and varied responses from their parents, impeding the creation of an optimum environment for language development (Salley & Dixon, 2007).

Model 2 of the regression analysis, containing the maternal factors of age, breastfeeding and depression, explained a further 3.1% of the relationship between the HLE and three year olds language ability outcomes. Results indicated that the infant of an older mother was more likely to achieve higher scores on measures of language ability. It could therefore be suggested that as older mothers are more likely to be educated to a higher level, have more access to financial resources, and have more parenting experience, they are subsequently more likely to create an environment in which an





infant's language development is nurtured as a priority (Bromley, 2009). At this stage of the regression equation, infant temperament was no longer a significant predictor of language outcomes, indicating that the effects of a difficult temperament were mediated by maternal characteristics and practices.

“The number of books in the home is of critical importance for later developmental and language outcomes.”

Model 3 including the HLE variables of talking to the infant while busy, home learning practices and number of books in the home accounted for 9.2% of the variance in expressive language ability scores, in line with predicted results. In keeping with previous findings, results showed that literacy-rich environments allowing infants access to books, in which parents actively engage them in age-appropriate learning activities positively contributed to increased language outcomes (Parker et al., 1999).

Directing talk towards the infant was also identified as a weak predictor. Consistent with previous research, the practices of shared reading, helping the infant to learn the alphabet, counting, songs, poems and rhymes, playing board games, active games and art and craft activities were found to collectively contribute to a home setting that actively promotes learning and is thus an optimal environment for language development (Hartas, 2011; Watson, 2002). The availability of greater number of books in the home was the most influential predictor of expressive language ability at three years. Over half (53%) of homes in this study reported that they had more than thirty books that the infant had direct access to. Research has shown that the number of books in the

home is of critical importance for later developmental and language outcomes (Evans, Kelley, Sikora & Treiman, 2010; Roulstone et al., 2011).

On observation of the results from Model 3, infant temperament, breastfeeding and maternal depression were found to be non-significant predictors of three year olds' language abilities. In order to improve the overall fit of the model, these three variables were removed to create a fourth model. In Model 4, the fit of the model improved considerably and each of the variables in focus made a unique statistically significant contribution to the regression equation, explaining 9.2% of the variance in expressive language ability at three years.

Conclusions

This study has been able to suggest a model that contributes to our understanding of the mechanisms between the HLE and infants' language ability in Ireland. Within this sample, collectively the practices and resources of an advantaged HLE had a positive influence on expressive language ability at three years of age. These findings highlight the importance of nurturing language development in the early years, presenting the HLE as an effective platform for doing so. Interestingly, the number of books available in the home was the most significant predictor and future studies are invited to examine this relationship, whether the type of books available have a specific impact. Future longitudinal research examining the influence of the HLE on the linguistic trajectory, from birth to adolescence, would provide an in depth understanding of the crucial role played by specific home learning practices and resources throughout language development.

For more information on the Growing Up in Ireland study see www.esri.ie/growing-up-in-ireland/

References

- ◆ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2001). Media education. *Pediatrics*, 107, 423-246. doi: 10.1542/peds.107.2.423
- ◆ Anders, Y., Rossbach, H.-G., Weinert, S., Ebert, S., Kuger, S., Lehl, S., & von Maurice, J. (2012). Home and preschool learning environments and their relations to the development of early numeracy skills. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 27, 231– 244. doi: 10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.08.003
- ◆ Anderson, D. R., & Pempek, T. A. (2005). Television and Very Young Children. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(5), 505-522. doi: 10.1177/0002764204271506
- ◆ Bierman, K. L., Domitrovich, C. E., Nix, R. L., Gest, S. D., Welsh, J. A., Greenberg, M. T., ... Gill, S. (2008). Promoting academic and social-emotional school readiness: The Head Start REDI program. *Child Development*, 79, 1802–1817. doi: 10.1111=j.1467- 8624.2008.01227.x
- ◆ Bromley, C. (2009). Growing Up in Scotland: Year 3 – The impact of children's early activities on cognitive development. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Retrieved from: <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/Doc/263956/0079071>
- ◆ Connor, C. M., Son, S., Hindman, A. H., & Morrison, F. J. (2005). Teacher qualifications, classroom practices, family characteristics, and preschool experience: Complex effects on first graders' vocabulary and early reading outcomes. *Journal Of School Psychology*, 43(4), 343-375. doi:10.1016/j.jsp.2005.06.001
- ◆ Conture, E. G., Kelly, E. M., & Walden, T. A. (2013). Temperament, Speech and Language: An Overview. *Journal Of Communication Disorders*, 46(2), 125-142. doi: 10.1016/j.jcomdis.2012.11.002
- ◆ Elliott, C. D. (1996). *The British Ability Scales II*. Windsor, Berkshire: NFER-NELSON Publishing Company.
- ◆ Evans, M.D.R., Kelley, J., Sikora, J., & Treiman, D.J. (2010). Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations. *Journal of Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 28(2), 171-197. doi:10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002
- ◆ Fernald, A., Marchman, V. A., & Weisleder, A. (2013). SES differences in language processing skill and vocabulary are evident at 18 months. *Developmental Science*, 16(2), 234-248. doi:10.1111/desc.12019



- ◆ Foster, M. A., Lambert, R., Abbott-Shim, M., McCarty, F., & Franze, S. (2005). A model of home learning environment and social risk factors in relation to children's emergent literacy and social outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20(1), 13-36. doi:10.1016/j.ecresq.2005.01.006
- ◆ Growing Up in Ireland. (2010). *Infants and Their Families: Main Report*. Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Retrieved from: <http://www.growingup.ie>
- ◆ Haapsamo, H., Kuusikko-Gauffin, S., Ebeling, H., Larinen, K., Penninkilampi-Kerola, V., Soini, H., & Moilanen, I. (2013). Communication Development and Characteristics of Influencing Factors: A Follow-Up Study from 8 to 36 Months. *Early Child Development And Care*, 183(2), 321-334. Retrieved from: <http://www.tandfonline.com.elib.tcd.ie/>
- ◆ Harris, J., Golinkoff, R. M., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (2011). Lessons from the crib for the classroom: How children really learn vocabulary. In S. B. Neuman & D. K. Dickinson (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (3rd ed., pp. 49-65). New York: The Guilford Press.
- ◆ Harrison, L. J., & McLeod, S. (2010). Risk and Protective Factors Associated With Speech and Language Impairment in a Nationally Representative Sample of 4- to 5-Year-Old Children. *Journal of Speech, Language & Hearing Research*, 53(2), 508-529. doi: 10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0086)
- ◆ Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes. Retrieved from: <http://prek.spps.org/>
- ◆ Hartas, D. (2011). Families' social backgrounds matter: socio-economic factors, home learning and young children's language, literacy and social outcomes. *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(6), 893-914. doi:10.1080/01411926.2010.506945
- ◆ Hartas, D. (2012). Inequality and the Home Learning Environment: Predictions about Seven- Year-Olds' Language and Literacy. *British Educational Research Journal*, 38(5), 859- 879. doi: 10.1080/01411926.2011.588315
- ◆ Hoff, E. (2006). How social contexts support and shape language development. *Developmental Review*, 26, 55-88. doi: 10.1016/j.dr.2005.11.002
- ◆ Hoff, E., Laursen, B. & Tardiff, T. (2002). Socioeconomic status and parenting, in: M. H. Bornstein (Ed.) *Handbook of parenting: biology and ecology of parenting* (vol. 2). Washington DC: Psychology Press, 231-252.
- ◆ Hupp, J., Munata, L., Kaffenberger, J., & Hensley Wessell, M. (2011). The Interactive Effect of Parental Education on Language Production. *Current Psychology*, 30(4), 312-323. doi: 10.1007/s12144-011-9118-x
- ◆ Law, J., Rush, R., Schoon, I., & Parsons, S. (2009). Modeling Developmental Language Difficulties from School Entry into Adulthood: Literacy, Mental Health, and Employment Outcomes. *Journal Of Speech, Language & Hearing Research*, 52(6), 1401-1416. doi: 10.1044/1092-4388(2009/08-0142)
- ◆ Linebarger, D. L., & Walker, D. (2005). Infants' and Toddlers' Television Viewing and Language Outcomes. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(5), 624-645. doi: 10.1177/0002764204271505
- ◆ Lukie, I., Skwarchuk, S. s., LeFevre, J., & Sowinski, C. (2014). The Role of Child Interests and Collaborative Parent-Child Interactions in Fostering Numeracy and Literacy Development in Canadian Homes. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 42(4), 251- 259. doi: 10.1007/s10643-013-0604-7
- ◆ Melhuish, E. C., Phan, M. B., Sylva, K., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Taggart, B. (2008). Effects of the Home Learning Environment and Preschool Center Experience upon Literacy and Numeracy Development in Early Primary School. *Journal Of Social Issues*, 64(1), 95-114. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4560.2008.00550.x
- ◆ Meng, C. (2015). Home Literacy Environment and Head Start Children's Language Development: The Role of Approaches to Learning. *Early Education & Development*, 26(1), 106-124. doi: 10.1080/10409289.2015.957614
- ◆ Mumme, D. L., & Fernald, A. (2003). The infant as onlooker: Learning from emotional reactions observed in a television scenario. *Child Development*, 74(1), 221-237. doi:10.1111/1467-8624.00532
- ◆ Murray, A., & Egan, S. M. (2014). Does reading to infants benefit their cognitive development at 9-months-old? An investigation using a large birth cohort survey. *Child Language Teaching & Therapy*, 30(3), 303-315. doi: 10.1177/0265659013513813
- ◆ Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. (2013). Home Literacy Environment and the beginning of reading and writing. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 38, 40-50. doi: 10.1016/j.cedpsych.2012.10.001
- ◆ Parker, F. L., Boak, A. Y., Griffin, K. W., Ripple, C., & Peay, L. (1999). Parent-child relationship, home learning environment, and school readiness. *School Psychology Review*, 28(3), 413-425. Retrieved from: <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.elib.tcd.ie/>
- ◆ Reilly, S., Wake, M., Bavin, E. L., Prior, M., Williams, J., Bretherton, L., & ... Ukoumunne, O. C. (2007). Predicting language at 2 years of age: a prospective community study. *Pediatrics*, 120(6), e1441-e1449. Retrieved from: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org.elib.tcd.ie>
- ◆ Richman, W. A., & Colombo, J. (2007). Joint book reading in the second year and vocabulary outcomes. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21, 242-53. doi: 10.1080/02568540709594592
- ◆ Roulstone, S., Law, J., Rush, R., Clegg, J., & Peters, T. (2011). *Investigating the role of language in children's early educational outcomes: An analysis of data from the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC)*. Nottingham: Department for Education. Retrieved from: www.gov.uk
- ◆ Salley, B. J., & Dixon, W. J. (2007). Temperamental and Joint Attentional Predictors of Language Development. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly: Journal Of Developmental Psychology*, 53(1), 131-154. Retrieved from: <http://web.a.ebscohost.com.elib.tcd.ie/>
- ◆ Saracho, O. N., & Spodek, B. (2010). Parents and children engaging in storybook reading. *Early Child Development & Care*, 180(10), 1379-1389. doi: 10.1080/03004430903135605
- ◆ Schmiedeler, S., Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. (2014). Symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and home learning environment (HLE): Findings from a longitudinal study. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 29(3), 467- 482. doi: 10.1007/s10212-013-0208-z
- ◆ Sénéchal, M., & LeFevre, J.-A. (2002). Parental involvement in the development of children's reading skill: A five-year longitudinal study. *Child Development*, 73(2), 445-460. doi: 10.1111/1467-8624.00417
- ◆ Son, S., & Morrison, F. J. (2010). The nature and impact of changes in home learning environment on development of language and academic skills in preschool children. *Developmental Psychology*, 46(5), 1103-1118. doi: 10.1037/a0020065
- ◆ Spere, K. A., Schmidt, L. A., Theall-Honey, L. A., & Martin-Chang, S. (2004). Expressive and receptive language skills of temperamentally shy preschoolers. *Infant & Child Development*, 13(2), 123-133. doi:10.1002/icd.345
- ◆ Sperlich, S., Arnhold-Kerri, S., & Geyer, S. (2011). What accounts for depressive symptoms among mothers?: the impact of socioeconomic status, family structure and psychosocial stress. *International Journal Of Public Health*, 56(4), 385-396. doi:10.1007/s00038-011-0272-6
- ◆ Watson, R. (2002) Literacy and oral language: implications for early literacy acquisition, in: S. B. Neuman & D.K. Dickinson (Ed.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (pp. 43- 53) New York: The Guilford Press
- ◆ Williams, J., Murray, A., McCrory, C., & McNally, S. (2013). *Growing Up in Ireland - The National Longitudinal Study of Children: Development from birth to three years: Infant Cohort, Report 5*. Dublin: The Stationery Office. Retrieved from: www.growingup.ie
- ◆ Woods, P. L., Rieger, I., Wocadlo, C., & Gordon, A. (2014). Predicting the outcome of specific language impairment at five years of age through early developmental assessment in preterm infants. *Early Human Development*, 90(10), 613-619. doi:10.1016/j.earhumdev.2014.07.010



Adjusting the Starting Line: **An Overview of Better Finglas and its Support of the Home Learning Environment**

Keith Adams, Research Assistant, Better Finglas



“
...the home learning environment in the pre-school period has association with all aspects of children’s cognitive and social development and for much of a child’s life is one of the most powerful influences upon development.
”



Introduction

A nervous anticipation descends on the watching crowd as the athletes, after years of training, settle into their starting blocks before the race begins. This sense of excitement from the supporters soon turns to disbelief, however, as they realise the starting places for the athletes is different. One competitor is starting 30 metres back from the main starting line and another competitor is an entire 50 metres further back. Amid chatter of how unfair it is to expect the competitors to finish the race close together or to fulfil their potential, the starting gun sounds and the race begins regardless.

Nobody would deny that the start to the race described above is unfair to the athletes due to the significant variation in starting places. Similarly, if we take into account socio-economic factors and other potential barriers to a child's development, it is unreasonable to expect all children to finish their early years and arrive at the starting line of school with commensurate levels of social and emotional development, cognitive development and learning abilities. While the metaphor of a race with its connotations of rivalry and competitiveness may not be the most helpful lens to view the development and education of children, a salient point is made about the disadvantageous starting point some children may have compared to their peers. An often used quote observes that 'if the race is already halfway run even before children begin school, then we clearly need to examine what happens in the earliest years' (Esping-Andersen, 2004: 133). We know that the presence of adverse socio-economic conditions in Irish society impacts negatively on a child's readiness for school (Doyle & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team, 2016) and this disadvantage may be compounded as the child ages and moves through school into adult life. The benefits, therefore, of a home learning environment have gained even greater traction in the theoretical and policy arenas of child development and early years education.

The challenge for projects like Better Finglas, which offer prevention and early intervention services to children and families, is to mitigate this disadvantage, which is often the result of factors beyond the control of the parents and the child. Melhuish (2010: 67) argues that 'the home learning environment in the pre-school period has association with all aspects of children's cognitive and social development and for much of a child's life is one of the most powerful influences upon development'. Therefore, the concept of the home learning environment must be added to other causal factors, such as reduced parental capacity, addiction, parental mental

health issues or precarious housing tenure, that can negatively impact upon a child's development. While socio-economic factors are important and must not be minimised, a growing consensus is emerging that the degree to which learning activities are carried out in the home exerts a greater influence on children's cognitive development than any other factor (Sylva et al., 2008; OECD, 2011).

“ A positive home learning environment includes reading to the child, taking the child to the library, teaching nursery rhymes and songs, and encouraging learning through play. ”

The home learning environment can be simply conceived of as measures taken in the home to encourage a child's learning. A positive home learning environment includes reading to the child, taking the child to the library, teaching nursery rhymes and songs, and encouraging learning through play. The simplicity and relatively inexpensive nature of many of these activities is a reason why a positive home learning environment is possible regardless of the socio-economic circumstances of the household. Kluczniok et al. (2013) concluded that although structural characteristics such as maternal education or socio-economic status do have an impact, they do not completely determine the home learning environment during the pre-school years. A parent living under financial pressure may still be able to provide a home learning environment as the absence of means and household resources is not indicative of the absence of a home learning environment. In essence, Better Finglas seeks to adjust the start line for pre-school children in Finglas in Dublin by supporting the home learning environment so that children arrive at the start of primary school having similar experiences of learning, and similar levels of social, emotional and cognitive development as their classmates and friends.

Overview of Better Finglas

A core value inherent in the day-to-day working of Better Finglas is the recognition of parents as the primary caregivers and educators of their children so the concept of a home learning environment is key to the broader work of the project. Better Finglas is one of 13 programmes in Ireland selected to participate in the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) Programme¹, which aims

¹ The Area-Based Childhood Programme is a three year cross-departmental initiative announced in the Programme for Government, jointly funded by the Irish Government, through the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and Atlantic Philanthropies. It is jointly managed by the Centre for Effective Services and Pobal.



to improve outcomes for children and their families in some of the most disadvantaged areas of the country. Better Finglas is still in its early years with the first member of staff employed in December 2014, four more staff joining in April 2015, and the current full staff team of seven in place by June 2016. Much time and energy had been invested in the idea of Better Finglas prior to this, however, with a wide consortium of agencies, organisations, groups and individuals working in the Finglas area meeting since 2012.

Barnardos was selected as the lead agency with responsibility for the management and administration of the Better Finglas project. No doubt influenced by the values of Barnardos, the ABC Programme and the wider consortium members, Better Finglas recognises the benefits of early intervention strategies for children and the main target group for the project is children and their parents, from pregnancy to eight years of age. Similar to the other 12 ABC programmes, Better Finglas provides targeted investment in integrated, effective, and evidence-informed programmes and services to improve the long-term outcomes for children and families. The overarching vision is of a community in Finglas where all services – voluntary, statutory and community – are working together with families to improve the developmental, health and educational outcomes of young children living in the area.

The home learning environment is a recurring concept which can be traced through the work of Better Finglas from pregnancy until the child starts primary school and beyond. The work of Better Finglas is arranged in five distinct yet interwoven strands:

1. Pregnancy and New Parents
2. Parenting
3. Early Years
4. Literacy
5. Interagency

For each of the strands, Better Finglas' activities are guided by logic models that provide a matrix through which programme-based decisions are made. Enhancing the home learning environment is evident across a number of these. The first objective of the Pregnancy and New Parents logic model is to 'provide information and support for prospective and new parents in relation

to healthy pregnancy, being a parent and children's developmental needs'. The Early Years logic model goes further, with two of its five objectives concerned with parental involvement in their child's learning, by stating the aim to 'increase parental knowledge of how to support their child's development' and 'increase parental knowledge of key components of quality early years provision'. The Parenting strand is guided by two objectives pertaining to parental involvement in their child's development, 'increase parental capacity to support their children's development' and 'increase parent's access to information on parenting and child development'.

This article will expand primarily on three strands, Pregnancy and New Parents, Early Years and Parenting, as they provide the most input to support the home learning environment in the pre-school years and give parents an increased understanding of their children's learning and development, ultimately leading to better outcomes for children as they progress through their life stages. Prior to the conclusion, two shorter sections will outline some key learning from the Literacy strand and the evaluation of outcomes in Better Finglas programmes.

Pregnancy and New Parents

A range of services is available to expectant and new parents (both mothers and fathers) with the aim of providing information and support in relation to healthy pregnancy, being a parent, and their child's developmental needs. Better Finglas is conscious to always design and promote their programmes to be open to mothers, fathers and other primary caregivers to the baby or young child to ensure that all those caring for a child have a consistent approach. Chronologically, the first services a parent may avail of are the Preparing for Baby (antenatal) Workshops and the Preparing for Life (PFL) Home Visiting Programme².

The Preparing for Baby (antenatal) Workshops are provided by a Preparing for Life Community Midwife who, even at this early stage, begins the conversation with parents and plants the seeds for parents to understand their responsibility to provide a stimulating environment for their baby. A home environment where the parent

“ A home environment where the parent takes time to have mutual gaze with the baby, talk to the baby and read or sing to the baby will help parents and their baby to develop secure attachments which will, in turn, help babies to feel safe to explore. ”

2 The Preparing for Life Programme, developed through an extensive study in North Dublin, is a home visiting programme for expectant and new parents for children up to school age.



takes time to have mutual gaze with the baby, talk to the baby and read or sing to the baby will help parents and their baby to develop secure attachments which will, in turn, help babies to feel safe to explore. This is consistent with the widely-recognised idea of a baby being an active learner from birth.

The PFL Programme³ provides a more structured intervention of age-specific guidance to parents based on an understanding that the home learning environment is a crucial space for a child to learn and develop, with the primary aim of improving school readiness. PFL was chosen as a service to be provided by Better Finglas because it was projected that a long-term outcome would be an increase in parental knowledge of child development and children's needs. The curriculum is based on tip sheets provided by two full-time PFL mentors in Better Finglas. The mentors assist the parents by discussing the tip sheets⁴ and then demonstrating activities and interactions that encourage the achievement of developmental milestones.

The main topic within the tip sheets relevant to the creation of a home learning environment is the 'Cognitive' section, which gives guidance and support to parents from when their baby is born up to four years of age. The Better Finglas PFL mentors provide each family with resources at various stages of the child's development such as tummy time mats, sensory books and age-appropriate toys like building blocks and stacking cups. These resources serve the dual purpose of both establishing a positive home learning environment and modelling to parents what developmental resources are appropriate for their child. As families may have limited means, they are always encouraged to use resources that they already have within their home. Commonly, for example, PFL mentors will encourage families with children between the ages of one and two to create messy play boxes by putting sand, rice and pasta shells in a box with pouring cups to develop hand eye co-ordination.

Following on from the Preparing for Baby (antenatal) Workshops or in conjunction with the PFL Programme, parents may also avail of two other services – Baby Massage and Baby Stay and Play – which provide a basis for child development and a positive home learning environment. Baby Massage courses are offered to the

community with the explicit benefits of positive time with baby, nurturing touch, communication and stimulation, all of which promote development. The Baby Stay and Play Group is available to parents with children up to a year who are pre-walkers. This collaborative group, co-ordinated by Better Finglas and Tusla – Child and Family Agency, encourages families to create opportunities to play, encourage movement, learn and explore. Staff facilitating the group model talking, singing and play with families, all interactions which can be done at home between the parent and the child.

Early Years

The Better Finglas Early Years Programme supports early years practitioners in the provision of quality early years care and education through on-site mentoring and training by the Better Finglas Early Years Mentor. The Early Years Programme works with existing community childcare settings⁵ to enhance the coordination of services with a focus on quality, curriculum, parental engagement and supporting transitions into primary school. One of the core objectives of the programme is to increase parental knowledge of how to support their children's development and this is achieved by working with early years settings to develop and enhance their processes, policies and procedures for involving parents in their children's learning.

The promotion and support of a positive home learning environment for children involved with early years settings in Finglas have been fostered in a number of ways:

1. Thirty eight early years practitioners in settings in Finglas have completed High Scope curriculum training, which includes a module on building relationships with families.
2. Early years settings have received on-site mentoring to support quality practice. The principles of *Síolta* and *Aistear*⁶, the National Early Years Frameworks, are used to inform and guide the mentoring programme. A core tenet of the mentoring programme is an emphasis on how early years settings must value and support the role of parents.

3 The PFL programme in Better Finglas has a multi-access referral system and endeavours to work in partnership with other agencies that families work with. Any parent can self-refer to the PFL programme or can be referred by another agency but all referrals will be assessed based on level of need before a place is assigned to a family. In 2016, the PFL Mentors delivered the PFL programme to 57 families in the Better Finglas catchment area.

4 Examples of the developmental specific tip sheets include Hand-Eye Co-ordination, Listening and Talking, Reading Together, Movement (0-12 months); Messy Play, Learning Numbers, Learning to Write, Language Development. (1-2 years); and Vocabulary, Maths and Shapes, Playing and Learning Outside, Getting Dressed (2-4 years).

5 At present, the Better Finglas Early Years Mentor provides training, mentoring or a combination of training and mentoring to n19 early years settings, which deliver services to almost 700 pre-school children.

6 There are two national frameworks to support quality in early years settings in Ireland. These are *Síolta*, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education, and *Aistear*, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. The Better Finglas Early Years strand uses the *Aistear Síolta Practice Guide* developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to support providers to continuously develop quality in their settings.



3. Early years settings have been supported to introduce new systems for documenting children's learning with a focus on sharing information with parents on their child's learning and development.
4. Through the 'Steps to School' transition programme, Better Finglas has supported early years practitioners to work with parents to prepare children for the transition to primary school and to share information with primary schools on children's progress in a range of developmental domains.
5. Better Finglas have secured additional funding from Tusla – Child and Family Agency, to deliver training to early years practitioners and primary school staff in order to carry out home visits. This training will commence in September. This initiative will provide a link between a child's home learning environment and their early years setting.



Parenting

An aim of the Better Finglas Parenting strand is to increase parents' access to information and support on parenting and child development. To this end, Better Finglas is supporting the delivery of the 'Triple P' Positive Parenting Programme⁷ in Finglas, offering choice through multi-level provision and by taking a 'population approach', which is based on the premise of universal

access for people in entire regions or catchment areas. An advantage of the population approach is the mitigation of potential stigma attached to parenting courses and the fear of being perceived as a 'bad parent'. Triple P is an evidence-based programme which aims to promote positive, caring relationships between parents and their children from two years of age to 12. The five core principles of Triple P are: having a safe, interesting environment; having a positive learning environment; using assertive discipline; having realistic expectations; and taking care of yourself as a parent. The first two core principles work to promote a positive home learning environment by educating parents in their role as their child's first teacher:

Principle 1 – Having a safe, interesting environment

- ◆ Children need a safe and supervised environment that provides the opportunity for them to explore, experiment and play (Turner et al., 2010).
- ◆ The design and layout of a home environment 'can promote engagement and skill development across the life span' (Turner et al., 2010).
- ◆ A home environment that 'is full of interesting things to do will stimulate children's curiosity as well as their language and intellectual developmental' (Turner et al., 2010: 9).

Principle 2 – Having a positive learning environment

- ◆ Parents are encouraged to provide 'brief moments of uninterrupted attention to children, have brief conversations with children about a current interest...and use incidental teaching' (Turner et al., 2010: 9).
- ◆ Incidental teaching consists of parents being 'receptive to child-initiated interactions when children attempt to communicate with their parents' (Turner et al., 2010: 9). This method has been used widely in the teaching of language, social skills and social problem solving (Hart and Risley, 1995, cited in Turner et al., 2010).

As an example of the distinct yet interwoven work of the operational strands, Better Finglas have been working with early years settings and schools to incorporate Triple P within their services. This will not only be a further means of emphasising the importance of a positive home learning environment, but will also provide parents with some tools and guidance on establishing a caring

⁷ Three of the six Triple P interventions currently available as part of Better Finglas – Group Triple P, Standard Triple P and Group Stepping Stones – state 'Having a Positive Learning Environment' as a key aspect of positive parenting. Last year, in 2016, 165 parents in Finglas attended Triple P programmes which were provided by Better Finglas and its partner agencies.



and rewarding relationship with their child. As conflict and unwanted behaviour decreases, space may open up in the relationship between the parent and the child for play and learning to occur, thereby aiding the child's cognitive, emotional and social development.

Literacy

While directed towards children already in school, the Literacy strand of Better Finglas – called the Wizard of Words programme – helps the development of a positive home learning environment in a slightly different way than the three previously mentioned strands. The Wizards of Words programme, developed by Barnardos, is a targeted school-based reading programme which aims to improve children's overall reading achievement. Children in first and second class of primary schools⁸ who are over four months behind in their chronological reading are paired with a trained older volunteer. Reading sessions occur weekly in the child's school and a standardised programme focuses on four key areas of reading: phonics, vocabulary building, reading comprehension, and reading fluency.

The Wizards of Words programme does not explicitly support a parent's understanding of child development or demonstrate a home learning environment to parents. Nevertheless, it does model a positive home learning environment to young children as they are paired up with an older adult in an informal setting who takes an interest in their learning. As a child's confidence and ability to read increases, so too may their love of reading and when this is coupled with the presence of books in their home environment, it is more likely that children will be reading at home. Often programmes that benefit children will also benefit their parents and care-givers, and Wizards of Words is no exception as it encourages greater parental participation in schools, with parents attending Wizards of Words graduations and receiving children's books for their home. Ultimately, the inherent value to a child experiencing this type of one-on-one educational support is that they may seek out this positive home learning environment in their own homes by telling their parents or care-givers of this enriching experience.

Outcomes

The Preparing For Life (PFL) Programme⁹, which forms one of the foundational programmes offered by Better Finglas to provide input on the home learning environment, has a wealth of evidence supporting its effectiveness from years of rigorous research by the Geary Institute. In its final report (Doyle & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team, 2016), two key findings at school entry for children who received the high treatment supports¹⁰ were:

1. Significant and large impact on children's cognitive development. Children had better general cognitive functioning, spatial abilities, non-verbal reasoning skills and basic numeracy.
2. Significant and large impact on children's overall verbal ability, their expressive and receptive language skills, and their communication and emerging literacy skills.

Evaluation has been an active part of Better Finglas since its formation as the Area Based Childhood Programme has a stated requirement of using both evidence-based programmes and measuring outcomes. The Centre for Effective Services oversees the evaluation of programmes at a national level, drawing on data from all 13 sites of the Area Based Childhood Programme. Prior to a National Report of the findings being published towards the end of 2017, a draft ABC Programme Outcomes Data Report for Year 1 has been made available to Better Finglas which has highlighted positive preliminary findings for the Early Years strand¹¹ and the Parenting strand¹². These early results, which still require final analysis¹³, highlight positive differences for school readiness outcomes and domains of child social and emotional development.

At present, all of Better Finglas' programmes within the five operational strands have been evaluated or are currently being evaluated through a combination of the Centre for Effective Services and research conducted by or commissioned by Better Finglas and Barnardos. Since the PFL randomised control trial ceased and the final report was published (Doyle & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team, 2016), families within the PFL Programme in Better Finglas are currently being

8 Better Finglas currently supports the Wizards of Words programme with 146 children in eleven schools in the Finglas area.

9 Preparing for Life was one of the most extensive randomised control trials of an early childhood intervention conducted in Europe as it followed the progress of over 200 families who agreed to participate in the study.

10 In the study, families were randomly assigned to a low treatment group or a high treatment group. The high treatment group contained the same interventions as the low treatment group with the addition of the Preparing for Life Mentoring Programme, Triple P Programme, and Baby Massage.

11 The Early Years strand was evaluated using the Santa Barbara School Readiness Scale and the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire.

12 The Parenting strand was evaluated using the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire among other parent related evaluation measures.

13 These preliminary findings may be subject to change as a re-weighting of the data may be applied due to the use of a disproportionate sampling approach but the findings certainly point in the right direction regarding the improved developmental and school readiness of children receiving services from Better Finglas.



evaluated in a 0-3 and Oral Language sub-study¹⁴ as part of the wider national evaluation. Finally, a randomised control trial between 2008 and 2012 was used to evaluate the Wizards of Words programme and found that children who received the paired reading support made gains in word recognition, phonemic awareness, phonic knowledge, reading self-beliefs, and reading accuracy (Fives et al., 2013). While often challenging, the emphasis on evaluation has provided confidence in the delivered programmes and is also helping to shape best practice in service provision in Finglas.

Conclusion

The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020 recognises that children are learning from birth and their ‘life chances are shaped and enhanced through support for their early learning and development’ (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2013: 65). Unfortunately, the Policy Framework skips from a recognition of parents as their child’s first teacher to the expansion of universal pre-school provision and investment in early years education (also very important) without seeking to influence the home learning environment and parental involvement. Better Finglas recognises parents as the first educators of their children and has designed its strands to reflect the essential need for a positive home learning environment. Simply put, the more involved parents are in their children’s learning and development, the better the outcomes for the child. Drawing on the original logic models for Better Finglas and its operational strands, it is evident that the home learning environment and parental involvement were part of the overall design of the project. As demonstrated through the breadth of services and programmes provided by Better Finglas, it is

clear the idea of a home learning environment has been operationalised for children and their parents in Finglas from pre-birth up until the age they begin primary school.

A unique aspect of Better Finglas is the seamless continuity of services available to families living in a disadvantaged area, which is a coordinated effort to lessen any effect that may have on children, their development and future outcomes. An expectant mother and her partner may initially avail of Preparing for Baby (antenatal) Workshops and the Preparing for Life programme, which can offer guidance and support until the child is ready to begin school. At the same time, the new mother and her partner may choose to complete a course in Baby Massage to ensure secure attachment or attend a Baby Stay and Play group to have time and space to learn to play with their child alongside other parents. The child then enters an early years setting in Finglas where the early years practitioners, through mentoring and training in best practice, will endeavour to maximise parental involvement in their child’s development up until the child transitions to primary school. Support on positive parenting strategies is also available from Triple P practitioners in this time. This example may seem a little too picture-perfect but, as Better Finglas becomes more established in the community, there are families who are naturally flowing from one service to the next with no gaps in support. For the children and families availing of the services, Better Finglas, with the assistance of its partner agencies, adjusts the starting line for school, ensuring the time from birth to the beginning of primary school does not hinder a child’s development but allows the child to flourish in a stimulating environment of fun and learning.

14 This sub-study is being conducted by external evaluators from the organisation Early Years who have been commissioned by Centre for Effective Services and will report towards the end of 2017.

For more information go to <http://betterfinglas.org/>

References

- ◆ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2013) *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- ◆ Doyle, O. & UCD Geary Institute PFL Evaluation Team (2016) *Preparing for Life Early Childhood Intervention Final Report: Did Preparing for Life Improve Children’s School Readiness?* Dublin: UCD Geary Institute for Public Policy.
- ◆ Esping-Andersen, G. (2004) Untying the Gordian Knot of Social Inheritance. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 57, 115-139.
- ◆ Fives, A., Kearns, N., Devaney, C., Canavan, J., Lyons, R., Eaton, P., O’Brien, A. & Russell, D.W. (2013). Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Barnardos’ Wizards of Words Reading Programme. Dublin: Barnardos.
- ◆ Kluczniok, K., Lehl, S., Kuger, S. & Rossbach, H.G. (2013) Quality of the home learning environment during preschool age – Domains and contextual conditions. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 420-438.
- ◆ Melhuish, E. (2010) Why children, parents and home learning are important In: Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Taggart, B. ed. (2010) *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-School and Primary Education Project*. London: Routledge. Ch. 4.
- ◆ OECD (2011) *PISA in Focus 10: What can parents do to help their children succeed in school?* Paris: OECD.
- ◆ Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Sammons, P., Siraj-Blatchford, I. & Taggart, B. (2008) *The Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE 3–11) project: final report. A longitudinal study funded by the DCFS*. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- ◆ Turner, K., Markie-Dadds, C. & Sanders M. (2010) *Facilitator’s Manual for Group Triple P*. 3rd ed. Australia: Triple P International Pty Ltd.



Counting Games Really Count:

Making the Most of the Home Numeracy Environment

Dr Frank Niklas, Institute of Psychology,
University of Würzburg, Germany,
and Dr Caroline Cohrsen, Melbourne
Graduate School of Education,
University of Melbourne, Australia





Introduction

Children start school with highly diverse mathematical skills. Counting is one important aspect of these skills, but marked differences are apparent in children's ability to demonstrate a range of mathematical competencies and to use mathematical thinking systematically to solve problems, such as how to share the playdough fairly so that everyone gets the same amount. Children's ability to explain their thinking using mathematical language is similarly variable. For example, some children are able to articulate sophisticated solutions to mathematical problems whilst others do not possess sufficient number words or positional language to explain their thinking. If these differences are apparent well before children start school, then they are emerging in the home environment. As a consequence, the home numeracy environment presents rich opportunities to support children's emerging mathematical thinking and numeracy skills.

“Children develop early mathematical competencies long before they start school... This early learning happens in the context of the family.”

Families are Children's First Teachers

Children develop early mathematical competencies long before they start school. They acquire mathematical language, such as the names of shapes, positional and directional language and number words, as part of the business-as-usual of language acquisition. This early learning happens in the context of the family.

Children learn mathematical vocabulary and consolidate it when they are provided with multiple opportunities to engage in back and forth conversations, rehearsing such competencies. For instance, children master counting skills when they rehearse number words and the association between spoken number words and quantities of objects – both seen (such as the number of dolls or blocks) and unseen (such as how many apple slices she had on her plate at tea time). Over time, evolving language competencies reflect a shift from proto-quantitative language such as 'lots' and 'more' to the use of precise number words, however in order to use precise number words, children have to know them and have the ability to link number words with quantities (Krajewski & Schneider, 2009).

Similarly, the names of shapes and positional words are learned when they are explicitly identified and taught.

Exposing children to a variety of shapes, both two- and three-dimensional, and explaining why triangles are triangles regardless of their size and orientation facilitates generalisation of understanding. In the family context, children learn about numbers, counting, shapes, measurement and data (e.g. do we prefer carrots or beans?) during everyday activities with their primary caregivers when such words and concepts are modelled repeatedly in ordinary, everyday conversations.

“In the family context, children learn about numbers, counting, shapes, measurement and data during everyday activities with their primary caregivers when such words and concepts are modelled repeatedly in ordinary, everyday conversations.”

What Do We Know about the Impact of the Home Numeracy Environment on Children's Learning?

The home learning environment provides many opportunities for parents to support their children's increasing competencies (Niklas, Cohrssen, & Tayler, 2016a). When parents pay particular attention to mathematical competencies and support children applying those competencies – that is, when parents support their children's numeracy – child-learning outcomes are advanced. Such support consists, for instance, of the frequency of activities indirectly connected to numbers such as playing games with a numerical context. Exposure to numbers in daily family life is decisive for the development of mathematical abilities and children gathering more number experience at home show greater mathematical competencies later in school (for example, Niklas & Schneider, 2014). Similarly, incidents of formal mathematical learning in the family in which parents instruct their children to count or calculate can support children's numerical competencies and, in particular, children's symbolic number knowledge (Skwarchuk, Sowinski, & LeFevre, 2014). In addition, the significance attributed to mathematics by parents as well as their general attitude towards mathematics is associated with the development of their children's mathematical competencies.

The quality of the home numeracy environment is influenced by multiple, mutually interacting factors, both

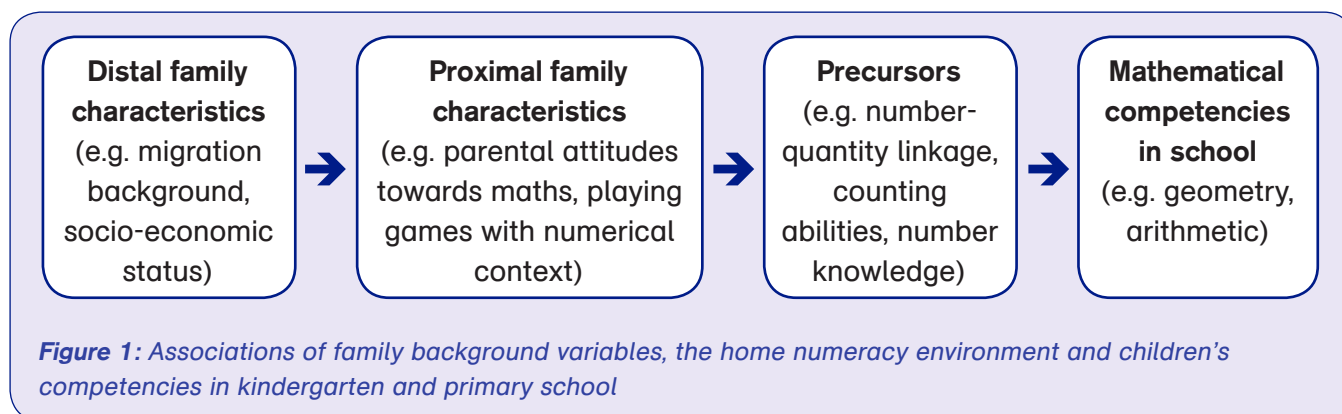


Figure 1: Associations of family background variables, the home numeracy environment and children's competencies in kindergarten and primary school

proximal and distal; factors that are themselves variable over time. Figure 1 above shows an overview of the association of family characteristics, the home numeracy environment and child competencies (see also Cohrssen & Niklas, 2016).

On the right-hand side of Figure 1, academic achievement in school such as arithmetic or geometry is listed. These abilities are predicted by important precursors children develop long before school entry. Children who know more numbers, are better at counting or can link quantities to numbers and thus identify number values early usually do much better in school mathematics (see Butterworth, 2005; Stock, Desoete, & Roeyers, 2009). On the left-hand side, distal family characteristics such as parental education or income (socio-economic status) or migration background are listed. These characteristics are often linked with children's competencies, however, their impact on children's competencies seems to be more indirect (e.g., Niklas & Schneider, 2017). Instead, proximal family characteristics such as what parents actually do at home with their children and parental attitudes towards mathematics are more important. These proximal characteristics and similar aspects of the home learning environment we group together to call the 'home numeracy environment'.

How Can Parents Support Children's Mathematical Competencies in the Home?

Many parents understand helping their young child to 'do maths' to mean counting and 'doing sums', and for many parents, this invokes memories of drill-and-skill, rote learning. Supporting a child's mathematical thinking and numeracy skills in the home environment is different. An important first step for families is to recognise that we

use mathematical language and mathematical thinking all the time without noticing. Early mathematics is not only about counting and doing sums, but is used in many everyday activities: Looking at a map on a smart phone? Spatial thinking. Describing how to get from Point A to Point B when someone asks for directions? Directional language and probably some measurement as well (e.g. cross the road and walk about 500 m, or for five minutes). Packing one pair of socks for each day of a camping trip? Applying the counting principles to solve a problem. Deciding which book to read to your child at bedtime or, alternatively, which book has been read multiple times and needs to be changed? Data collection and analysis.

By recognising mathematical thinking in situations that may seem non-mathematical, and purposefully providing opportunities for children to rehearse such concepts in ways that are relevant to children, supports the acquisition, consolidation and transferral of such skills and ways of thinking. This kind of learning should be fun and tailored to support children's gradually increasing competence. For example, when parents count sets of visible objects with their children in the years prior to school, especially when the sets contain four or more objects, they support children's understanding that the last number word spoken is special, not only as it is the counting word tagged to that object but also as it tells us how many objects are in the set. This association holds true, even when controlling for socioeconomic status and the amount of parent-child talk in general (Gunderson & Levine, 2011). What constitutes a set of visible objects? It could be potatoes in the vegetable basket or ducks in the bath.

A four-month, intensive intervention to support parents in providing a higher quality home numeracy environment, thus supporting Head Start children's mathematical thinking, was found to be successful (Starkey & Klein, 2000). The topic units in the curriculum for the parents

“ An important first step for families is to recognise that we use mathematical language and mathematical thinking all the time without noticing. ”



included number concepts, arithmetic operations, logical reasoning, geometric and spatial concepts, and patterns. However, many families are well-intentioned but time-poor, and whilst wishing to support their children’s learning outcome, seek optimal outcomes for efficient input.

Reflecting the reality of many children’s worlds, when first grade children and their parents used an iPad app to solve short number story problems, children’s mathematical learning was significantly greater than those of their peers who used a reading app (Berkowitz et al., 2015). Children and their parents were asked to read passages on the iPad apps and to answer corresponding questions. The reading and mathematics apps were similar, but the passages on the reading app that were read by parents with their children contained no numerical or spatial content. The mathematics app’s questions covered topics such as counting fluency, geometry, arithmetic, fractions, and probability. The reading app’s questions dealt with reading comprehension, vocabulary, phonics, and spelling. The mathematics intervention was especially successful for children whose parents were habitually anxious about mathematics demonstrating that brief, high-quality parent-child interactions about mathematics at home helps to break the intergenerational cycle of low mathematics achievement.

Research with families of preschool children also found that even a ‘light touch’ intervention with families was associated with an improvement both in the quality of the home numeracy environment and in children’s numeracy outcomes (Niklas, Cohnsen & Tayler, 2016b). In this study, the intervention had two parts. The first part was a one-hour family information session attended by groups of parents at their children’s preschools. The importance of the home numeracy environment was discussed and suggestions made about specific ways in which to include children in typical household activities that demand numeracy skills. In other words, purposeful ways in which to involve children in routine household events that already rely on numeracy skills were emphasised such as using a recipe and measuring ingredients, or counting out cutlery so that each person has one fork.

The second part of the intervention was one 30-minute, individualised coaching session for each parent and their child. During this session, parents were provided with a dice-based game to play with their child and the counting principles were explained and demonstrated. Whilst many parents proudly describe how their child can count to a certain number, this intervention deconstructed counting to tease out the individual components that children need to master. The ability to recite the number words consistently in the correct sequence is clearly important, but tagging each object with one number word only, and knowing that the last number word we

use is special as it answers the ‘how many’ question are examples of two of the additional competencies that the dice game highlighted to parents as important skills to be supported. The focus of the first part of the intervention was on ordinary, everyday activities. The second part of the intervention effectively supported parents’ ability to recognise and extend children’s counting skills – this equipped parents to identify opportunities to other instances of counting, beyond the dice games. The ‘light touch’ intervention thus equipped parents with the knowledge they needed to notice and consolidate children’s number skills every time counting took place.

Playing games that require mathematical thinking is particularly helpful in supporting children to acquire foundational skills such as the names of numbers. When played with children who have mastered foundational competencies, playing maths-based games supports more complex skills such as counting on and counting back as well as computational skills (cf. Ramani & Siegler, 2008). Playing games underpinned by mathematical competencies makes a difference to child learning yet is enjoyable for parents and children. Adults are able to solve such problems almost instantaneously, but deconstructing such abilities into achievable steps supports child acquisition of the steps and, with practice, fluency of such strategies (and the associated vocabulary) increases. Opportunities to use mathematical thinking to solve problems such as who has more, who has less and who has the same as are afforded.

Playing games that require mathematical thinking is particularly helpful in supporting children to acquire foundational skills such as the names of numbers.

Benefits are apparent with older children as well: encouraging families to support children’s mathematics learning in the home environment through school-family collaboration was associated with children achieving at- or above-standard proficiency in mathematics in Grades 3 to 9 (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). For older children in particular, parental attitudes towards mathematics play an essential role. If parents communicate to their children that mathematical thinking is applied in everyday life situations, then children’s own interest in mathematics will be much greater than if parents show little appreciation of the importance of mathematics. Parents act as role models for their children and should be aware that children will adopt their attitudes towards mathematics even if these are not stated explicitly.



Conclusion

Parents are children's first and most important educators. Research demonstrates that families have an important influence on children's early mathematics learning in the home and that such support is easily enacted when parents point out numbers and their meaning in everyday life, as well as when they play number-based games and accompany such games with easy explanations (for example, "I have rolled a '4'. See, one, two, three, four! Now I am going to move my counter four steps forward. One, two, three,

four"). When adults demonstrate the application and value of mathematical thinking, children are more likely to be interested in mathematics and will master basic mathematical principles more readily. As early numerical competencies are the best predictor of later mathematical competencies, such early advantages will have a profound impact on children's learning in the long term. Counting games really count and families are urged to support their children's mastery of this critical foundation stone on which lifelong learning is built.

References

- ◆ Berkowitz, T., Schaeffer, M. W., Maloney, E. A., Peterson, L., Gregor, C., Levine, S. C., & Beilock, S. L. (2015). Math at home adds up to achievement in school. *Science*, *350*(6257), 196–198.
- ◆ Butterworth, B. (2005). The development of arithmetical abilities. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, *46*(1), 3–18.
- ◆ Cohrssen, C. & Niklas, F. (2016). Partnering with families to promote learning. In J. Page & C. Tayler (Eds.), *Learning and teaching in the early years* (pp. 90–111). Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- ◆ Gunderson, E., & Levine, S. (2011). Some types of parent number talk count more than others: Relations between parents' input and children's cardinal-number knowledge. *Developmental Science*, *14*(5), 1021–1032.
- ◆ Krajewski, K., & Schneider, W. (2009). Early development of quantity to number-word linkage as a precursor of mathematical school achievement and mathematical difficulties: Findings from a four-year longitudinal study. *Learning and Instruction*, *19*(6), 513–526. doi: 10.1016/j.learninstruc.2008.10.002.
- ◆ Niklas, F., Cohrssen, C. & Tayler, C. (2016a). Parents supporting learning: Literacy and numeracy in the home learning environment. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, *24*(2), 121–142.
- ◆ Niklas, F., Cohrssen, C., & Tayler, C. (2016b). Improving preschoolers' numerical abilities by enhancing the home numeracy environment. *Early Education and Development*, *27*(3), 372–383.
- ◆ Niklas, F. & Schneider, W. (2014). Casting the die before the die is cast: The importance of the home numeracy environment for preschool children. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, *29*(3), 327–345.
- ◆ Niklas, F. & Schneider, W. (2017). Home learning environment and development of child competencies from kindergarten until the end of elementary school. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *49*, 263–274.
- ◆ Ramani, G., & Siegler, R. S. (2008). Promoting broad and stable improvements in low-income children's numerical knowledge through playing number board games. *Child Development*, *29*, 375–394.
- ◆ Sheldon, S., & Epstein, J. (2005). Involvement counts: Family and community partnerships and mathematics achievement. *Journal of Educational Research*, *98*(4), 196–207.
- ◆ Skwarchuk, S.-L., Sowinski, C., & LeFevre, J.-A. (2014). Formal and informal home learning activities in relation to children's early numeracy and literacy skills: The development of a home numeracy model. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *121*, 63–84.
- ◆ Starkey, P., & Klein, A. (2000). Fostering parental support for children's mathematical development: An intervention with Head Start families. *Early Education & Development*, *11*(5), 659–680.
- ◆ Stock, P., Desoete, A., & Roeyers, H. (2009). Mastery of the counting principles in toddlers: A crucial step in the development of budding arithmetic abilities? *Learning and Individual Differences*, *19*, 419–422.



Engaging and Supporting Fathers in DEIS Schools

Dorothy Keane, Home School Community Liaison Coordinator

Fathers' greater interest and involvement in their children's learning and in schools are statistically associated with better school outcomes for children, including better exam results, better school attendance and behaviour, and higher educational expectations.

(Goldman, 2005:121)



Introduction

Children benefit when both parents are involved in their education. Yet, the reality for many schools is that it is the involvement of the mother that is expected and received. However, recent research in three DEIS schools in Cork City highlighted the importance of fathers in the educational lives of their children (Keane, 2015). The study did not seek to incite rivalry between mothers and fathers but rather to highlight the complementarity of their roles in relation to supporting their child's learning.

The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the issues that impact on the involvement of fathers in the education of their children in DEIS schools, from the perspective of both fathers and teachers. The term 'DEIS' refers to the plan introduced by the Department of Education and Skills to address educational disadvantage in Ireland. A DEIS classification indicates that most of the children attending the school are from families characterised in Ireland by high unemployment, high rates of social housing, strong dependency on social welfare and low levels of parental education.

Methodology

The study was carried out in three urban DEIS primary schools with a sample of 16 fathers and 44 teachers. Teachers completed a questionnaire while the fathers were interviewed. The sample group of fathers consisted of 16 unemployed men who were recruited to participate in a personal development and career counselling programme entitled 'Inroads'. The fathers were interviewed prior to the 'Inroads' programme to establish the level of their involvement in their children's education. The ten fathers who completed the programme were subsequently interviewed to assess the impact of the programme on their capacity to support their children's education.

Main Findings

The results of the study indicated that fathers were more involved in the education of their children than had been anticipated by the educational community. The majority of fathers in the sample group supported their children's learning in the home primarily through their involvement with homework. However, as two thirds rarely signed

homework, their involvement was not always visible in the school. Many of the fathers who were former construction workers were confident in their ability to help their child with maths. Fathers with literacy difficulties indicated that the laptop was a significant support for them in assisting their children with homework.

The barriers to the involvement of fathers were as expected from previous research with low income men (Lawlor *et al.* 2009). These included low levels of education, negative experiences from their own school days and reluctance by fathers to initiate communication with the school. Some fathers were also disinclined to participate in groups which were dominated by mothers. In addition, a perceived positive bias by teachers towards mothers was noted.

Impact of the Inroads Programme

The 'Inroads' programme was funded by the Department of Social Protection and participants received an allowance of ten euro for each session attended. It was delivered in a primary school over 10 weeks with two three-hour sessions per week. The course had a strong educational component and visits to third level institutions were built in to the programme. The course provided an opportunity for fathers to share and process their experiences of school and to explore their role in relation to their child's education.

The programme addressed the isolating effects of unemployment on the mental health of fathers which had a negative impact on their capacity to engage with the school. It supported fathers in the development of the personal and interpersonal skills, knowledge and confidence to enable them to engage more effectively with teachers. The programme increased the fathers' awareness of the importance of their role in their child's education. Fathers prioritised the information they received to inform their discussions with their children, particularly in relation to the options for their children at third level. This is very significant considering that the literature identifies parent aspirations and home discussions as having the strongest relationship with educational achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001).

One of the strongest factors in the success of the programme was the delivery of the course by a highly

“ *Barriers to the involvement of fathers... included low levels of education, negative experiences from their own school days and reluctance by fathers to initiate communication with the school. Some fathers were also disinclined to participate in groups which were dominated by mothers.* ”



skilled facilitator, from a similar background to the participants. The deliberate sharing by the facilitator of her personal story, in relation to breaking through the cycle of disadvantage in her own family, stimulated discussion on class differences in relation to attitudes to education. One father commented on the ‘tough love’ attitude of the facilitator in relation to insisting that her own children remained in education and progressed to third level. This contrasted with the general attitude of the ‘Inroads’ fathers in relation to children dropping out of school, i.e. ‘If they don’t go, what can I do?’ Research confirms that working class parents give their children more choice over their educational decisions than middle class parents (Edwards & Aldred, 2003).

The findings indicate that a well-designed, well-resourced programme can successfully address the challenges to engaging fathers in interventions to increase their capacity to support their children’s education. Key strategies in relation to the recruitment of the fathers included strong encouragement from their partners, the one-to-one invitations from Home School Coordinators, the provision of a financial incentive and the inclusion of several social outings. Furthermore, the programme was tailored to the active, fact-based style of delivery favoured by male participants.

“ *A well-designed, well-resourced programme can successfully address the challenges to engaging fathers in interventions to increase their capacity to support their children’s education.* ”

The results from this study are in line with international evidence, which indicates that the successful engagement of fathers can be achieved when:

- ◆ Programmes are strategically planned.
- ◆ One to one relationships are developed with fathers and speaking directly with fathers is a routine part of getting to know families.
- ◆ The way in which fathers are approached is conscious with sensitivity to the background, education and family circumstances of the fathers.
- ◆ The programme is respectful of different ways of being a father and includes grandfathers, father figures and non-resident fathers. Some work is specifically targeted at fathers.
- ◆ The intervention influences and discusses attitudes and concerns held by mothers.
- ◆ Schools welcome fathers and are comfortable about their inclusion.

(Goldman, 2005)

Perspective of the Teachers

The teachers in this study perceived that parental involvement is primarily the domain of the mother. However, they acknowledged that the involvement of fathers is increasing. Teachers noted the growing attendance of fathers at parent-child activities such as cookery, science and maths, together with ‘hands-on’ outdoor type activities like gardening. They observed that this increased contact has contributed to the breaking down of barriers between fathers and teachers.

A number of issues emerged which hinder teachers in their efforts to involve the majority of fathers:

- ◆ Two thirds of teachers were hampered by a lack of knowledge of the significant males in the household.
- ◆ Teachers lacked sufficient opportunities to engage in both formal and informal communication with fathers.
- ◆ The majority were uncertain about the level of interest of fathers in education and their capacity to support their children’s education.
- ◆ For some teachers, lack of visibility was interpreted as a lack of interest. The exceptions to this were teachers in the preschool or infant classes who reported higher levels of contact. This in turn facilitated higher levels of involvement by fathers in home and school activities.

Notwithstanding the barriers to the involvement of fathers, some teachers were successful in engaging a minority of fathers. Positive outcomes were noted when teachers made a particular effort to involve a father. They reported that fathers followed through with action when they were given specific, practical tasks to support their child’s education. One unanticipated finding was the extent to which some teachers considered that, in relation to increasing the educational achievement of the child, an interested father in a DEIS school could exert an influence above and beyond that of the mother. This was not considered a slight on the mother but rather a reflection of the heavy workload and stresses associated with motherhood, which can detract from the mother’s capacity to focus on their child’s learning outcomes.

“ *Positive outcomes were noted when teachers made a particular effort to involve a father.* ”

Some teachers considered that many fathers have a greater capacity than some of the mothers to support their children with maths. Other teachers observed that fathers are often more structured and focused in relation to keeping a child on task, particularly in relation to



homework. They commented that fathers generally exert greater levels of control. Teachers noted that their view of the potential of fathers had been positively influenced by observing fathers at work with pupils during parent-child activities in the school.

The study concluded that strategies that encourage paternal involvement include a strength-based, gendered approach, issuing specific invitations to fathers, enlisting the support of mothers, building on fathers' interests together with an overall proactive approach to communication with fathers by all educational professionals.

Building a Culture of Father Involvement in Schools and Institutions

When institutions and school make a deliberate effort to involve fathers and when teachers are trained in this process, outcomes for children improve.

(Fagan & Iglesias, 1999)

There are many ways in which schools and institutions can encourage fathers to become involved in their child's education. The following recommendations may provide a starting point:

- ◆ Begin conversations about the importance of father involvement and encourage staff to share models of good practice in relation to specifically involving fathers. An emphasis on the complementarity of the parental roles is crucial.
- ◆ Raise expectations, where possible, from one parent to two parent involvement.
- ◆ Reflect on practice to address any unconscious bias in favour of communication with the mother.
- ◆ Be proactive in initiating communication with fathers. This may involve respectfully resisting the tendency of many fathers to direct engagement towards the

mother, particularly in the context of home visits or phone calls to the home. Build informal links with fathers at the school gate, concerts, sports events. The use of the fathers' first name is recommended.

- ◆ Begin with the early years. Research indicates that involving fathers from a young age increases the likelihood that they will remain involved throughout their children's childhood (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). A study in the US of early childhood settings identified three factors associated with early childhood success at involving fathers. Firstly, sending written correspondence to fathers even when they live apart from their children but still retain parental rights and responsibilities. Secondly, including the father's name on the enrolment form. Thirdly, specifically inviting fathers to participate in activities with their children (Green, 2003).
- ◆ Ensure staff are well informed about the significant male figures in the life of the child. Include a space for the signature of both parents on consent forms for activities and programmes. Circumstances will dictate whether either or both signatures will be the minimum requirement.
- ◆ Enlist the support of mothers. Emphasise that both parents have a role to play in their child's education. In situations where the father is not resident in the home and there is an amicable relationship between parents, consultation with the mother will provide an insight into how the non-resident father can be included in a school activity.
- ◆ Affirm fathers in their role by utilising all opportunities to acknowledge the positive impact of their involvement with their child's education. This needs to be done in a manner that is respectful of the involvement of the mother and avoids over-celebrating actions by fathers for work routinely undertaken by mothers.
- ◆ Encourage informal visits to the class, possibly at the beginning or end of the school day. This will enhance the fathers' knowledge of the learning process and provide an opportunity to view their child's work and for the child to show off what they have learned. This strategy would be most suitable at the Infant level where there are high levels of informal contact with the class teacher.

“Strategies that encourage paternal involvement include a strength-based, gendered approach, issuing specific invitations to fathers, enlisting the support of mothers, building on fathers' interests together with an overall proactive approach to communication with fathers by all educational professionals.”



Tips for Engaging Fathers in School-based Activities

- ◆ Display photographs of father-child activities to convey the message that fathers' involvement is welcomed and appreciated.
- ◆ Offer activities that are likely to appeal to male parents. Programmes such as those linked to sport, science, cookery, gardening and crafts are effective in engaging fathers, particularly if the activity involves working with their child.
- ◆ On occasion, consider some male-only programmes for fathers who may be reluctant to participate in activities because they assume that mostly mothers will be involved. Activities for males should be inclusive of grandfathers, older brothers and uncles etc. to avoid stigmatisation for the child whose father is not involved in his or her life. Some suggestions include:
 - » Dads & Lads Cookery
 - » Barrel-Topped Wagon Project with Traveller Fathers
 - » FRED programme (Fathers Reading Every Day)
 - » Fathers' Day Breakfast Morning
 - » Christmas Craft with Dad
 - » Fathers' Story Week
 - » Father /Child Computer Class
 - » Personal Development Course for Fathers, for example, Inroads
- ◆ Start with a once-off activity to get fathers interested without the commitment of a longer course. Make it fun. A bit of banter and humour helps put fathers at ease and encourage their return.
- ◆ Identify the talents of fathers and invite them to share their expertise.
- ◆ Speak directly to the father. Let fathers know that reading with their child or getting involved with their child's school work will boost their child's achievement and promote positive behaviour.
- ◆ Involve mothers and children in the recruitment process. Fathers usually respond positively to direct requests from children.
- ◆ Give plenty of notice about upcoming events. This will provide an opportunity for fathers who may be working to plan time off in advance. Encourage fathers who are already involved to involve others.

Tips to Engage Fathers in Home Learning

Boys who see their father read for thirty minutes a day read more than boys who never see their father read.

(Mullan, 2010)

- ◆ Consider fathers' specific interests in encouraging fathers to read with their children. The use of webpages and non-fiction books is recommended.
- ◆ Enlist the help of children. Ask the children what kind of books their Dad would like to share with them. Look for feedback from the child.
- ◆ Evaluate your stock of books – Are there books specifically about fathers or father figures? Will the content appeal to fathers?
- ◆ Encourage fathers to build reading activities into their daily routine with children, for example, reading road signs on the way home from school, looking for models of cars, checking sports results etc.
- ◆ Affirm low-literate fathers. Let them know how much they can do to support their child's reading. Emphasise the importance of language development through stories for children. Use fairy tales as the fathers may be familiar with these stories from childhood. Source audio books and encourage their use in the home or in the car.





- ◆ Encourage the use of technology to assist fathers with the skills to support their child's learning. The following comment from a father in a DEIS school illustrates this point:

The laptop is a great help with homework. When the child has work from 'Spell bound', I can pronounce the words but often I don't know what the word means. The laptop gives you different options. If you ask anyone who can't read and write 'what helps?' they are guaranteed to say, 'It's the laptop.'

(Keane, 2014:41)

- ◆ Build on the strengths of fathers. The self-efficacy of many fathers in relation to maths should be utilised. The provision of maths games for use in the home would encourage father involvement in maths-related activities. This would capitalise on the fun approach to learning favoured by fathers. It would also offer a non-threatening opportunity for the teacher to gauge the interest level of the father and initiate communication about the child's learning. Homework activities involving the application of maths skills in the environment could be encouraged.
- ◆ Be alert to informal signals of paternal engagement in the home and build on this. Encourage fathers to sign or co-sign homework, as an indicator of interest and an initial step in setting up a chain of communication with the class teacher. Fathers also need to get regular feedback from teachers on the educational progress of their children.

Final Word

Fathers are interested in their children's education and want them to succeed. With a little encouragement, some guidance and the right materials, they will do their best to support their child's learning in the home or in the school. The evidence from the 'Inroads' programme demonstrates that engaging in conversations with fathers about their needs, including their fears, hopes and dreams for their children, is the first step towards building an equitable partnership with them. One factor

which emerged as consistent across all the fathers involved in the 'Inroads' programme was the power of the child to influence involvement decisions in both the home and the school. For all the men, the child was the focal point of their existence. Perhaps, therein lies the secret to successful paternal engagement – selling parental involvement as a way of life, not just an activity, to ensure a better life for their children.

References

- ◆ Edwards, R. & Alldred, P. (2000) A typology of parental involvement in education centring on children and young people: negotiating familiarisation, institutionalisation and individualisation, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21(3),435-455.
- ◆ Fagan, J. & Iglesias, A. (1999). Father involvement program effects on fathers, father figures, and their Head Start children: A quasi-experimental study. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 14(2), 243-269. EJ 603 899.
- ◆ Fan, X., & Chen, M. (2001) Parental Involvement and students' academic achievement: A meta-analysis, *Educational Psychology Review*, 13(1), 1-22.
- ◆ Flouri, E. & Buchanan, A. (2004) Early father's and mother' involvement and child's later educational outcomes, *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74 , 141-153.
- ◆ Goldman R. (2005) *Fathers' Involvement in their Children's Learning*. London: National Family and Parenting Institute.
- ◆ Green, S. (2003) Reaching out to fathers: an examination of staff efforts that lead to greater father involvement in Early Childhood Programs. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 5(2).
- ◆ Keane, D. (2014) An investigation of the factors that influence the engagement and involvement of fathers in the education of their children in DEIS primary Schools in Cork City (unpublished).
- ◆ Keane, D. (2015) *An investigation of the factors that influence the engagement and involvement of fathers in the education of their children in DEIS Primary Schools in Cork City*. Limerick Education Centre and Clare Education Centre-Research Conference Journal, Vol. V, 59-63.
- ◆ Lawlor T., McKenna A., Doyle G., and Fitzsimons A., (2009) *Men and Literacy: A Study of Attitude and Experience of Learning*. Dublin: National Adult Literacy Agency.
- ◆ Mullan, K. (2010) Families that read: A time diary analysis of young people's and parents' reading, *Journal of Research in Reading*, 33(4) 414-430.



The Parent-Child Home Program

Strengthening the Parent-Child Relationship and Building Literacy-Rich Home Environments

Michele Morrison, Director of Training and Program Support and Cesar Zuniga, Director of Research and Evaluation, Parent-Child Home Program National Center, U.S.

Background

The overarching purpose of this paper is to tell the story of the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP), its history, its practice, and the families that the Program serves. The fundamental nature of the Parent-Child Home Program is relational; in other words, the Program is about Home Visitors building meaningful and trusting relationships with the families they visit. It is also, however, about the relationships that exist internally among PCHP staff, and about collaborations with other stakeholders who advocate, implement, and evaluate the Program. It is also about the ongoing training and supervision that is critical when utilising community-based staff and about using a home visiting strategy focused on demonstrating behaviours, rather than directly teaching parents.

Home visitation programmes offer a unique method for bringing services to urban, suburban, and rural underserved communities; communities that include immigrant and ethnically diverse families, teen parents, families with a history of multi-generational poverty, and homeless families. Empirical research tells us that home environments matter in dramatic ways, including how parents support their children's learning (e.g. Foster, Lambert, Abbott-Shim, McCarty, & Franze, 2005; Klebanov, Brook-Gunn, McCarton, & McCormick, 1998; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network (NICHD ECCRN), 2003), and reaching into them can provide particularly valuable supports for parents and children. In addition, in some underserved communities, it can be especially challenging for families to access centre-



based early education and care because of logistical considerations such as transportation, lack of available and affordable programmes, and not feeling supported by service providers (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, Sampson; Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002).

The Parent-Child Home Program Model

The Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) model was developed when Dr. Phyllis Levenstein, working in a suburb of New York City on her doctoral dissertation, started asking questions regarding low-income children's school achievement. Why was it that low-income children started school so far behind in school readiness skills compared to their middle-income peers? Could it be that these children were exposed to less language stimulation in their homes? Was it possible to intervene in families' homes in a non-intrusive and non-threatening manner to show parents playful and rewarding ways to interact with their young children, as the children's language was developing? Could supporting change in the home environment, by providing high quality children's books and toys – essentially tools for parents to use with their children that are commonly found in middle class homes – also contribute to school readiness? And, if outcomes were positive, would those outcomes be sustained? The year: 1965.

Before delving into the practice and implementation of the Program, it is necessary to provide a brief theoretical framing. Building on the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978), the emphasis on play for the targeted age group (Levenstein, 1976), Bruner's theory of language symbolisation (Bruner, 1966), and attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1973; Bowlby, 1969), the Parent-Child Home Program focuses on increasing parent-child verbal and non-verbal interactions that promote the child's social-emotional and conceptual skills development (development of pre-literacy skills, e.g. receptive and expressive language), while promoting positive parenting skills acquisition by the parent/primary caretaker.

Starting with the concept of offering home visits where the Home Visitor demonstrates behaviours, rather than directly teaching parents, the Program first began to take shape. The focus of the visits was high quality children's books and educational toys, many commonly found in pre-school classrooms, which were provided as gifts to the enrolled families, and a toy chest to keep the items

in. The Home Visitors were trained to be non-intrusive, non-didactic, and non-threatening, and the boundaries of their role were clear. They were in the home to model play, conversation, and reading activities, show parents ways to narrate play or picture-read a book and encourage the child, demonstrate ways to follow the child's lead, and consistently invite the parent to participate in the play and reading experiences in both verbal and non-verbal ways. In an era when social workers or public health nurses told parents what to do and inspected homes, the PCHP Home Visitor was a guest in the home, and never assigned homework or focused on what a parent might be doing wrong, but instead built on what the parent was doing right.

The Parent-Child Home Program is an intervention targeting parent-child interaction and the child's social-emotional and language development. Its stated goals are to improve the quality and quantity of verbal interaction between parent and child, and to foster pro-social behaviour in children with the aim of improving school readiness and success and, ultimately, overall functioning in childhood and beyond. The Program is specifically intended to target under-resourced families with children between the ages of 16 months to 4 years old, where a parent (or other family caregiver, such as a grandparent) might have a low level of education and/or limited literacy levels; the family is low income; or the parents are immigrants or refugees. Although some home visiting programmes in the U.S. were founded as universal access parenting programmes for all parents, regardless of educational or income level, PCHP has been a targeted programme from the start.

The Program sends a community-based Home Visitor, carefully trained as an Early Learning Specialist, to a family's home twice a week, for two 23-week programme cycles, usually aligned with two school years. Each week, she/he brings a new book or toy, which is a gift to the family, and spends 30 minutes with the parent and child together, reading the books and playing with the toys. The Home Visitor helps the parent to mine the materials for all of their educational opportunities, while modelling developmentally appropriate verbal interaction and approaches to learning through play. Home Visitors also seek to model and encourage an array of positive parenting strategies. These include:

- ◆ Responding verbally to the child's verbal and non-verbal requests for attention
- ◆ Verbalising affection for the child

“ Home visitation programmes offer a unique method for bringing services to urban, suburban, and rural underserved communities; communities that include immigrant and ethnically diverse families, teen parents, families with a history of multi-generational poverty, and homeless families. ”



- ◆ Verbalising expectations to the child
- ◆ Verbalising approval of the child
- ◆ Conversing with the child
- ◆ Verbalising reasoning when requesting obedience from the child

In the context of PCHP, parent and child are aided by the presence of a 'third', the Home Visitor. Though this additional presence is perhaps not perfectly objective, she/he is less emotionally involved and, through regular supervision, is sharing information about the family with peers and supervisors, and is thus perhaps less vulnerable to distortion of the relational-emotional dynamics. She/he is there, in part, to help prevent miscommunications between parent and child from spinning out of control, and to help increase the rate at which ruptures of attunement are repaired. She/he may do this by modelling other ways of talking to and with the child. Or perhaps suggesting alternative ways of interpreting the child's behaviour, validating and empathising with the caregiver's feelings, helping caregivers to pick up on cues indicating the child's needs for comfort or attention. In no small part, the Home Visitor also helps the parent to recognise the 'good enough' child; to admire, appreciate, and marvel at the child's humanity and 'me-ness'.

Part of the way the Home Visitor does this is direct, and part of it is through admiring, appreciating, and marveling at the parent/caregiver's humanity and 'her-ness' or 'him-ness'. The Home Visitor is there to assist the child in locating, exploring, and creating the 'good enough' caregiver, and to assist the caregiver in locating and discovering the 'good enough' child. She is there to help facilitate the environment needed for this level of emotional and practical freedom in play to emerge, understanding that it is the precursor to future success in school, in work, and in relationships.

With regard to child outcomes, the Program is targeting pre-academic skills and several key domains of social-emotional competence, including emotional stability, willingness to approach tasks, organization in play and thought, cooperation, and independence, all of which are associated with school achievement. Clearly, these school readiness skills are much broader than pre-academic skills. Indeed, though the ultimate goal of the Program is to close the economic gap in school readiness and achievement, doing so requires certain qualitative features in relationships, and requires children who are happy and secure.

Unique features of the Program include a curriculum that uses commercially-available items that not only support early literacy, early numeracy, problem-solving skills, fine motor development, large motor development, and vocabulary, but act as incentives for families to participate. Each participating family builds a children's

book library, and an educational toy library, as they progress through the Program. Each family also receives curricular guide sheets for every toy or book, suggesting conversational opportunities and enrichment activities, honoring the parent's role as her/his child's first teacher.

A History of Evidence-based Practice

The short- and long-term outcomes of PCHP have been demonstrated in a variety of studies (e.g., Kamerman & Kahn, 1995; Lazar & Darlington, 1982; Levenstein, Levenstein, & Oliver, 2002; Levenstein, Levenstein, Shiminksi, & Stolzberg, 1998; Manz et al., 2015).

A longitudinal study, released in February 2016, demonstrates significant long-term outcomes for PCHP graduates based on standardised Washington state assessments of kindergarten readiness, English language proficiency, and third grade academic performance. The analysis compares results for PCHP graduates in 2008 through 2013 with a comparison group matched on ethnicity, gender, income, residence in an English or non-English-speaking household, and year entered kindergarten (ORS Impact, 2016).

The most recent evidence of effectiveness comes from two longitudinal randomised control trials (18-months post programme participation) conducted by New York University with two of the Parent-Child Home Program's flagship sites in New York City (Brooklyn and Queens). One study is of a culturally and linguistically diverse cohort, and the other of a 100% Spanish-speaking cohort. The studies were designed to examine the effects of the Program on Black and Latino children's school readiness, and to follow the children through third grade. PCHP children in both studies have better social emotional skills and better language skills than the control group, two key indicators of school readiness. At 18-months post programme participation, PCHP children continue to show better language skills and social emotional skills. In addition, PCHP children had more learning materials available to them in their homes that facilitate ongoing learning and development (Astuto & Allen, 2017).

The Parent-Child Home Program Today

Fifty-two years after its inception, the Program continues to flourish, achieve proven outcomes, and win the acceptance of families in over 115 sites in the United States, and in several other countries, including Ireland, where the Program was initially replicated through the National College of Ireland starting in 2007 as part of the college's



Early Learning Initiative. Two years later, the Dublin South City Partnership also implemented the Program. In 2011, a baseline evaluation was commissioned for the Dublin PCHP site in partnership with Trinity College under the guidance of Dr. Michelle Share. This study evaluated the Program implementation and outcomes for the developmental phase (2009-2011) of PCHP in three domains: the Program, the Home Visitors, and the children and their parents. Two pilot sites have since opened in Galway and Limerick. The National College of Ireland functions as the training centre for the country, in partnership with the PCHP National Center in the United States.

The National College of Ireland PCHP site worked with 143 families during the 2016-2017 school year, including 48 families for who English is not their primary language – the home languages include Chinese, Polish, Hindi, Mongolian, French, Spanish, and Arabic. Since the Program's inception at NCI, over 450 Dublin families have participated. An additional 38 families are being served this year by the other PCHP pilot sites in Ireland, with roughly one-third of those being families whose home language is not English. It is important to note that the goal of PCHP is not to teach families English, but to support the parent in interacting with the child in the language she/he is most comfortable in. A solid foundation in the primary language of the home will support the child's English-language learning capabilities upon school entry.

“ The goal of supporting learning and development through partnerships with parents is central to the PCHP home visiting curricular model and a key component of Aistear. ”

The NCI site also has had great success engaging the Traveller Community in Finglas and has employed three women to serve families in that community. Parents from this community have become more confident as advocates for their children's education and are now comfortable talking to their children's teachers and other professionals.

In Ireland, PCHP fits with Aistear, the National Early Years Curriculum Framework. In particular, the goal of supporting learning and development through partnerships with parents is central to the PCHP home visiting curricular model and a key component of Aistear. In the U.S., state early learning guidelines, which can vary across the country by state, also emphasise partnerships with parents and supporting young children across the broad spectrum of social and emotional development; cognitive development; language, communication, and early literacy; and approaches to learning. The Parent-Child Home Program plays an important role in the young child's continuum of learning.

Who are the Families?

The families we serve are moms like Nancy who first heard about PCHP during a New Moms Group meeting in New York City. At the time, Nancy was new to the United States and had little information on how to educate herself and her children. After learning more about the services of the Program, Nancy was eager to participate. She was not only excited that her children would get an early start in education, but also that she would be able to learn alongside her children. Nancy and her children joined PCHP with tremendous excitement. The family's Home Visitor worked with Nancy to develop her skills as a loving teacher of her own children, and she also assisted Nancy in viewing herself as a confident learner. The fact that the Home Visitor spoke Nancy's first language was an enormous help and made things much easier for the family.

Nancy recalls moments when her children could barely hold in their excitement because they knew it was almost time for the Home Visitor to come. It was Nancy's love for the Program that led her to become a Home Visitor. She loved watching the development of her children and wanted to share these experiences with other families.

As in the United States, parents participating in the Program in Ireland are uniformly enthusiastic about their experience. One parent, when asked about the Program, says 'It's brilliant. My daughter is getting on great. Her language is really coming on and she's flying with the books...I've learned lots and try to share it with my sister. When we go to the library, 99% of the time my daughter picks the books from the Program.' Another parent of twins reports, 'There's a massive difference in the twins since we started the Program...I see a massive difference in them compared to other kids who haven't been on the Program. They are so ready for school now. I can't wait for them to start...I would love to work in the Program in the future because I think it's so brilliant, so I am going to go back and do my FETAC level 5.'

Sometimes the encouragement of the Home Visitor has profound effects on a parent. One Home Visitor from the NCI site was working with a father who was in recovery from addiction issues. The Home Visitor noticed that the father was beginning to implement activities and praise his daughter without any prompts. The Home Visitor complimented the father on his involvement with his daughter's learning, and with tears in his eyes, he reported that he had never been praised before. He had never been read to as a child himself and only had received negative attention. This parent has never missed a home visit and continues to stay involved with the Program.



PCHP Today and in the Future

For approximately the past two decades, the Parent-Child Home Program has been serving an increasingly diverse demographic. In the U.S., the Program is reaching families who speak over 50 different languages. Individual PCHP sites have been particularly successful engaging and retaining immigrant and refugee families, developing trusting and productive relationships with parents, children, grandparents, and other family caregivers.

With the current emphasis on the impact of trauma on a child's school success and life trajectory, PCHP is increasingly viewed as a cost-effective programme that brings stability, predictability, empowerment, and fun into families' lives – a needed support that can alleviate post-traumatic stress and provide referrals to other resources, when necessary.

The Program also reflects the current emphasis on the importance of 'serve and return' in parent-child interactions, as well as the increasing emphasis in early childhood circles around the importance of the

skills grouped under the rubric of Executive Function, deemed so important in school achievement. Early childhood skills supported by PCHP, such as taking turns, following directions, and the self-regulation of behaviour are foundational to later school success. The Program has partnered with the Harvard Center for the Developing Child to look at the role of simple game play in addressing these types of skills, particularly in children who have experienced a large amount of stress.

Fifty-two years after its inception, the Parent-Child Home Program model reaches deep into underserved communities, from New York to Seattle; from Dublin, Ireland to Santiago, Chile. Central to the Program is the goal that the parent and child experience the joy of playing, reading, and learning together and start the child on the path to school and life success. Many parents report that they are surprised at what their children can learn at such a young age and marvel at the increase in their children's vocabulary, and relish the feeling of 'I made that happen.'

**For more information on PCHP go to
www.parent-child.org or contact
mmorrison@parent-child.org or
czuniga@parent-child.org**

**For more information on PCHP in Ireland go to
www.ncirl.ie or contact
michelle.moore@ncirl.ie or
linda.mcgrath@ncirl.ie**

References

- ◆ Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1973). The development of infant-mother attachment. In B. Cardwell & H. Ricciuti (Eds.), *Review of child development research* (Vol. 3, pp. 1-94) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ◆ Astuto, J. & Allen, L. (2017) Improving School Readiness for Children Living in Urban Poverty Through Home-based Intervention. New York University. New York, New York.
- ◆ Bowlby J. (1969). *Attachment. Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Loss*. New York: Basic Books.
- ◆ Bruner, S.J. (1966). *Toward a Theory of Instruction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- ◆ Foster, M., Lambert, R., Abbot-Shim, M., McCarty, E., & Franze, S. (2005). A model of home learning environment and social risk factors in relation to children's emergent literacy and social outcomes. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 20, 13-36.
- ◆ Kamerman, S. B., & Kahn, A. J. (1995). *Starting Right*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- ◆ Klebanov, P. K., Brooks-Gunn, J., McCarton, C. M., & McCormick, M. C. (1998). The contribution of neighborhood and family income upon developmental test scores over the first three years of life. *Child Development*, 69, 1420-1436.
- ◆ Lazar, I., & Darlington, R. (1982). Lasting effects of early education: A report from the consortium of longitudinal studies. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 47, 1-151.
- ◆ Levenstein, P. (1976). Cognitive development through verbalized play: The Mother-Child Home Programme. In *Play: Its role in development and evolution* (pp. 286-297). New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc. Levenstien, P. & Levenstien, S. (2008). Messages from Home: The Parent-Child Home Program for Overcoming Educational Disadvantage. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- ◆ Levenstein, P., Levenstein, S., & Oliver, D. (2002). First grade school readiness of former child participants in a South Carolina replication of the Parent-Child Home Program. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 23, 331-353.
- ◆ Levenstein, P., Levenstein, S., Shiminksi, J. A., & Stolberg J. E. (1998). Long-term impact of a verbal interaction program for at-risk toddlers: An exploratory study of high school outcomes in a replication of the Mother-Child Home Program. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 19, 267-285.
- ◆ Leventhal, T., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2000). The neighborhoods they live in: the effects of neighborhood residence on child and adolescent outcomes. *Psychological bulletin*, 126(2), 309.
- ◆ Manz, P. H., Bracaliello, C. B., Pressimone, V. J., Eisenberg, R. A., Gernhart, A. C., Fu, Q., & Zuniga, C. (2015). Toddlers' expressive vocabulary outcomes after one year of parent-child home program services. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(2), 229-248.
- ◆ McCune, L., DiPane, D., Fireoved, R., & Fleck, M. (1994). Play: A context for mutual regulation within mother-child interaction. In A. Slade & D. P. Wolf (Eds.), *Children at play: Clinical and developmental approaches to meaning and representation* (pp. 148-166). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- ◆ National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network (NICHD ECCRN). (2003). Does amount of time spent in child care predict socioemotional adjustment during the transition to kindergarten? *Child Development*, 74,976-1005.
- ◆ ORS Impact. (2016). *Long-Term Academic Outcomes of Participation in the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) in King County, WA*. Seattle, WA.
- ◆ Sampson, R. J., Morenoff, J. D., & Gannon-Rowley, T. (2002). Assessing 'neighborhood effects': Social processes and new directions in research. *Annual review of sociology*, 28(1), 443-478.
- ◆ Slade, A. (2002). Keeping the baby in mind: A critical factor in perinatal mental health. *Zero to Three*, June/July 2002, 10-16.
- ◆ Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- ◆ Zeanah, C., Boris, N., Heller, S., Hinshaw-Fuselier, S., Larrieu, J., Lewis, M., Palomino, R., Rovaris, M. & Valliere, J. (1997). Relationship assessment in infant mental health. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 18(2), 182-198.



Useful Resources on The Home Learning Environment

A selection of these resources are available from Barnardos Library and Information Service.

Go to www.barnardos.ie/library or email resources@barnardos.ie for more details.

Early Learning Initiative (2016). **Enriching the Home Learning Environment: Conference Report.**

National College of Ireland. Retrieved from <https://www.ncirl.ie/Portals/0/Users/058/58/58/Home%20Learning%20Environment%20Conference%20Report.pdf>

Foster, T., Froyen, L., Skibbe, L., Bowles, R., & Decker, K. (2016). **Fathers' and mothers' home learning environments and children's early academic outcomes.**

Reading & Writing, 29(9), 1845-1863. doi:10.1007/s11145-016-9655-7

Hartas, D. (2012). **Inequality and the home learning environment: predictions about seven-year-olds' language and literacy.**

British Educational Research Journal, 38(5), 859-879. doi:10.1080/01411926.2011.588315

Kluczniok, K., Lehl, S., Kuger, S., & Roszbach, H. (2013). **Quality of the home learning environment during preschool age – Domains and contextual conditions.**

European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 21(3), 420-438. doi:10.1080/1350293X.2013.814356

Lehl, S., Smidt, W., Grosse, C., & Richter, D. (2014). **Patterns of literacy and numeracy activities in preschool and their relation to structural characteristics and children's home activities.**

Research Papers in Education, 29(5), 577-597. doi:10.1080/02671522.2013.792865

Melhuish E., Phan M., Sylva K., Sammons P., Siraj-Blatchford I., Taggart B. (2008). **Effects of the Home Learning Environment and Preschool Center Experience upon Literacy and Numeracy Development in Early Primary School.**

Journal of Social Issues [serial online]. March 2008; 64(1): 95-114

McClenaghan, P. (2012). **Lifestart: Educating Parents, Developing Children.**

The Irish Review of Community Economic Development Law and Policy 1(2), 6-30. Retrieved from <http://www.pein.ie/images/uploads/docs/lifestart.pdf>

Niklas F., Cohns C., Tayler C. (2016). **Parents supporting learning: a non-intensive intervention supporting literacy and numeracy in the home learning environment.**

International Journal of Early Years Education [serial online]. June 2016; 24(2):121-142.

Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. (2017). **Home learning environment and development of child competencies from kindergarten until the end of elementary school.**

Contemporary Educational Psychology, 49263-274. doi:10.1016/j.cedpsych.2017.03.006

Niklas, F., Nguyen, C., Cloney, D., Tayler, C., & Adams, R. (2016). **Self-report measures of the home learning environment in large scale research: Measurement properties and associations with key developmental outcomes.**

Learning Environments Research, 19(2), 181-202. doi:10.1007/s10984-016-9206-9

Necşoi, D. (2014). **Home Learning Environment as a Predictor of Preschool Children's Achievement.**

Journal Plus Education / Educatia Plus, 10(2), 226-230.

Niklas, F., Nguyen, C., Cloney, D., Tayler, C., & Adams, R. (2016). **Self-report measures of the home learning environment in large scale research: Measurement properties and associations with key developmental outcomes.**

Learning Environments Research, 19(2), 181-202. doi:10.1007/s10984-016-9206-9

Niklas, F., Cohns, C., & Tayler, C. (2016). **Home Learning Environment and Concept Formation: A Family Intervention Study with Kindergarten Children.**

Early Childhood Education Journal, 44(5), 419-427. doi:10.1007/s10643-015-0726-1

Rodriguez, E. T., & Tamis-LeMonda, C. S. (2011). **Trajectories of the Home Learning Environment Across the First 5 Years: Associations With Children's Vocabulary and Literacy Skills at Prekindergarten.**

Child Development, 82(4), 1058-1075. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2011.01614.x

Sammons, P., Toth, K., Sylva, K., Melhuish, E., Siraj, I., & Taggart, B. (2015). **The long-term role of the home learning environment in shaping students' academic attainment in secondary school.**

Journal of Children's Services, 10(3), 189-201. doi:10.1108/JCS-02-2015-0007

Schmiedeler, S., Niklas, F., & Schneider, W. (2014). **Symptoms of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and home learning environment (HLE): findings from a longitudinal study.**

European Journal of Psychology Of Education - EJPE (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.), 29(3), 467-482. doi:10.1007/s10212-013-0208-z

Webster-Stratton, C., & Bywater, T. (2015). **Incredible partnerships: parents and teachers working together to enhance outcomes for children through a multi-modal evidence based programme.**

Journal of Children's Services, 10(3), 202-217. doi:10.1108/JCS-02-2015-0010

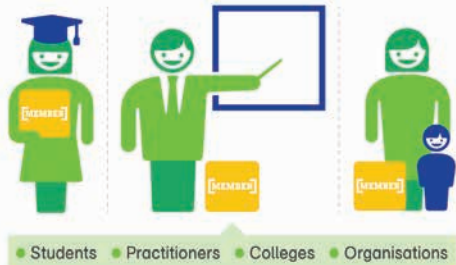
Barnardos' Library and Information Service

Supporting professionals working with children in Ireland for over 20 years!

Become a Member

Student	€35.00
Individual	€60.00
Groups of 3 or more	€50.00 each
Colleges (up to 5 lecturers)	€200.00

Join Today
 Online at www.barnardos.ie/library
 or Email resources@barnardos.ie



• Students • Practitioners • Colleges • Organisations

Membership Benefits



Personal research assistance for members



Monthly email updates

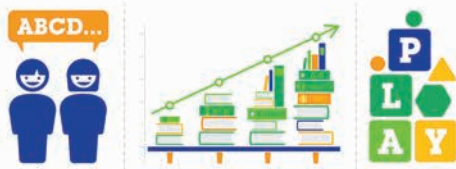


Ever-growing online collection



Free subscription to Childlinks, Barnardos' Journal

Top Topics



- Child development
- Early childhood care & education
- Child protection
- Reflective practice
- Family support
- Attachment & parenting
- Siolta & Aistear

Barnardos' Library and Information Service,
 Christchurch Square, Dublin 8
 Opening Hours: Monday - Friday 9.30am to 5pm

Tel: (01) 4549699
 Email: resources@barnardos.ie
 Web: www.barnardos.ie/library



Barnardos

CONTACT:

T: 01 454 9699

E: resources@barnardos.ie

GO TO:

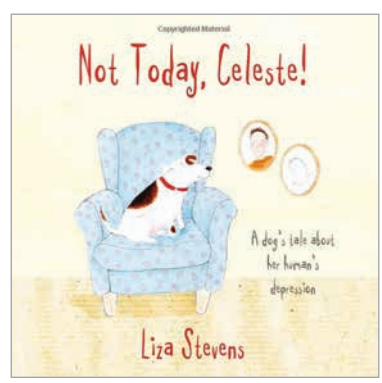
www.barnardos.ie/library

COLLECTION INCLUDES:

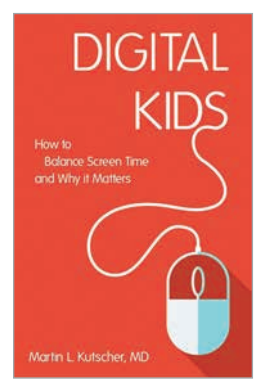
- Books & eBooks
- Academic Journals
- Magazines
- Reports
- DVDs
- Practice Resources & more

MAJORITY OF THE COLLECTION IS AVAILABLE ONLINE TO MEMBERS.

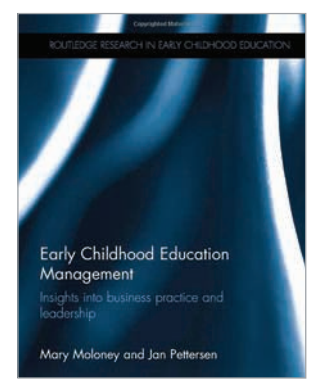
NEW RESOURCES IN THE BARNARDOS LIBRARY INCLUDE:



Not Today, Celeste!
 A dog's tale about her human's depression
 Author: Stevens, Liza
 Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016



Digital Kids: How to Balance Screen Time, and Why it Matters
 Authors: Kutscher, Martin L & Rosin, Natalie
 Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017



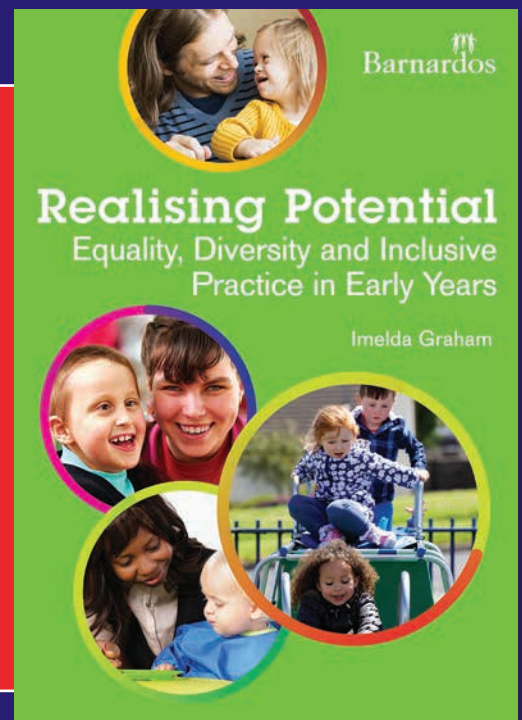
Early Childhood Education Management
 Insights into business practice and leadership
 Authors: Maloney, Mary & Pettersen, Jan
 Routledge 2017

New Publication from Barnardos

Realising Potential: Equality, Diversity and Inclusive Practice in Early Years

This book seeks to challenge, to inform and to support early years educators in addressing equality, diversity and inclusion issues. Through this book, which supports the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education, current policy and the national frameworks, educators will find support and tools to develop high quality inclusive practices that will endure in the lives of the children with whom they work.

Purchase now at www.barnardos.ie



Barnardos Training and Consultancy

Upcoming Public Training Events include:

- Children First, Child Protection Training
- Giving Evidence in Court Proceedings
- Making the Most of Supervision Training for Supervisors
- Reflective Practice for Early Years Professionals
- Designated Liaison Person Training for Early Years Professionals

Please email training@barnardos.ie if you are interested in any of these courses and would like to find out more.

Our members chose Barnardos Reflective Practice training because it was a resource we found useful and interesting. We found the course very positive; we particularly appreciated the workshop being divided into two half days. Members could take back tools learned for implementing new practices and return to the second day workshop to discuss, explore and highlight the Reflective Practice which is a new concept for many members.

Nicola Reynolds, Childcare Support & Development Worker, Leitrim County Childcare Committee

Early Years eNews

This newsletter covers news and developments of interest to the early childhood care and education sector. It also includes updates on publications, training and events happening around Ireland.

To sign up go to www.barnardos.ie

Internet Safety & Cyberbullying

Barnardos provides interactive workshops for children, teachers and parents that deliver up-to-date information on preventing and responding to cyberbullying.

For further information in relation to availability and costs please contact us on **T. (01) 453 0355**