



**BIS RESEARCH PAPER NUMBER 93**

**Evidence of the Wider Benefits of  
Family Learning: A Scoping Review**

**NOVEMBER 2012**

**RESEARCH**

**Olga Cara**

Research Officer,  
National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy,  
Institute of Education, University of London

**Greg Brooks**

Emeritus Professor of Education,  
University of Sheffield

The views expressed in this report are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

1 Victoria Street

London SW1H 0ET

[www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk)

Research paper number 93

November 2012

# Contents

<b>Contents</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Background .....	4
<b>Purpose and scope of this review</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Main review methods .....	6
<b>Assessment of the evidence base</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>Summary of findings from previous research</b> .....	<b>9</b>
Assessment of evidence gaps .....	12
<b>Options for further research</b> .....	<b>15</b>
Research specification 1: Wider benefits of family learning: secondary analysis of matched data .....	15
Research specification 2: Wider benefits of family learning: primary data collection and analysis through a matched-groups quasi-experiment intended as a methodological pilot for an RCT ...	17
<b>References</b> .....	<b>19</b>

# Summary

This scoping exercise confirmed that the evidence base for the wider benefits to parents of participating in family learning is thin. We identified just 15 relevant publications, of which five were reviews of previous work. Of the 10 which reported new findings, seven were largely qualitative; only three had gathered quantitative evidence. Only three or four randomised controlled trials were mentioned across the sources. Most of the evidence came from studies of family literacy, with less from family language or numeracy, and hardly any from wider family learning. The range of benefits mentioned was multifarious, with very few covered in more than a handful of studies, even within the prior empirical work covered by the reviews.

The findings were largely positive, in that parents reported themselves, or were reported, as having derived benefits for themselves, their understanding and handling of their children, and their contributions to society. Even though participants are notoriously reluctant to give negative responses, and some researchers hesitate to report them, the stories are at least consistent.

This situation does mean that the field is wide open for better research. As the first two contributions towards this, we provide specifications for two studies:

- Secondary analysis of ILR and NCDS data using individuals located in both datasets, to investigate what they had gained from their involvement in family learning
- A matched-groups quasi-experiment asking whether parents who participate in family literacy go on to gain more employment and/or show more involvement in their children's schools. This would be intended as a pilot for an RCT.

The first of these could be extended to other existing datasets (e.g. BCS70), and the second could be applied to other research questions, if required.

## Background

This review forms part of the 'Review and update of research into wider benefits of adult learning' (Tender number: BIS/RBU/027/2011) commissioned from NRDC by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in early 2012. The overall aim of the larger Review was to update knowledge on the wider benefits of learning, with an emphasis on estimating, and, where possible, quantifying the value of these benefits to individuals and society. This part was intended as a scoping exercise to determine the potential for re-analysing national and international data sets, and undertaking more rigorous research to gather evidence of the wider impact of family learning, including family literacy and numeracy, on adult outcomes. This limited ambition stemmed from the fact that it was already known that the existing evidence base was exiguous.

# Purpose and scope of this review

This section describes the review's purpose and its focus. While a substantial body of research evidence on the wider benefits of learning through the lifecourse has been established in the UK through the work of Schuller *et al.* (2001, 2004) and Feinstein *et al.* (2008), there remains a lack of robust research on the wider benefits of family learning as a specific type of learning. Broader evidence suggests benefits in respect of adult literacy, engagement and interest of adults in their children's learning, and more positive attitudes towards adults' own learning. However, as with many aspects of adult learning, much remains to be confirmed in respect of the direction of causation: as for example, in determining how adults' confidence, knowledge levels, aspirations and engagement in learning are related as variables in a causal sequence.

There is some scope to re-analyse existing national and international data sets, and to undertake more rigorous (quasi) experimental research to gather evidence of the impact of family learning, including family literacy and numeracy, on adult (as well as children's) outcomes. The state of the existing evidence base is such that it is cost-effective for this project to consist of a scoping exercise, designed to lead to detailed research specifications and recommendations; this is what we offer here.

Although there is a distinction between non-formal and informal family learning, in this report, and owing to the state of the evidence base, only formal learning will be investigated, that is, only evidence from family learning *programmes* will be analysed.

## Definitions:

- (1) A broad definition of 'family' is adopted, including but not confined to the 'nuclear' family.
- (2) Family learning programmes are those designed to take account of participants' membership of a family, and comprise family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) and wider family learning (WFL) – WFL includes all forms of family learning other than FLLN.
- (3) In principle, 'wider benefits' will be construed as all measured outcomes of family learning programmes other than those which are their principal aims. FLLN programmes have as their principal aims benefit to parents' own skills, and/or benefit to parents' ability to assist their children's development, and/or benefit to children's developing skills – none of these forms of benefit will be directly covered in this project. Instead we will focus on parental self-esteem, progression to further learning, educational aspirations and social cohesion.

The most recent and relevant UK reviews appear to be Brooks *et al.* (2008) for FLLN and Lamb *et al.* (2009) for WFL. Brooks *et al.* (2008) had a broad international scope and analysed both quantitative and qualitative data on both principal and wider benefits. Several other international reviews of family literacy have appeared since then (and are analysed and updated in Carpentieri *et al.* 2011), but none reported evidence on wider benefits even where that is known to exist, and there appear to be no recent reviews of

family language or numeracy. Lamb *et al.* (2009) derived their evidence solely from England, and presented it in qualitative case-study fashion. Brooks *et al.* (2008) and Lamb *et al.* (2009) will be taken as the baselines for updating.

Research questions, all to be tackled qualitatively, and as many as possible quantitatively:

- *RQ1: What new evidence is there on wider benefits of family learning in England?*
- *RQ2: What new evidence is there on wider benefits of family learning internationally?*
- *RQ3: What forms of wider benefit are already noted in the literature?*
- *RQ4: What are the evidence gaps with regard to methodology and research questions?*

However, the main aim of this scoping exercise is not only to gather and review any new evidence of wider benefits of family learning, but also to assess the evidence gaps and to offer detailed research specifications and recommendations.

## Main review methods

This section outlines the methods used in the study. The study began by establishing the questions to be addressed and determining the parameters for identifying material relevant to the study topic. Parameters were used to identify exclusion and inclusion criteria, for example, those associated with publication date and country of publication.

The study used a broad range of sources to identify relevant material:

- searches of bibliographic databases (containing literature on education, social sciences, psychology and health)
- web searches
- current research
- 'reference harvesting' (following up items cited in other documents identified in the review).

Only research published since 2008 was included in the searches, to update an in-depth review that was carried out by Brooks *et al.* in 2008 that remains of particular significance to the current situation and provides a strong evidential base for the period prior to 2008.

Search results were screened to remove duplicates and material that did not fit within the parameters. Following this a 'best evidence' approach was used to select literature of the highest quality and most relevant to the review. This entailed identifying: the items most relevant to the review questions; the quality of the research methods, execution and reporting. Original research was given priority over reviews, but, as was later discovered,

there was little original research, and large-scale reviews and meta-studies were therefore also included.

As the next step all items were reviewed in more detail and were summarised, focusing primarily on their findings in relation to the review questions, but also giving a summary of the methodology used and geographical area covered.

The studies reviewed were also assessed for the quality of evidence and methodology used. Based on this scoping exercise and the extensive evidence gaps we took a decision to include some detailed specifications for future research in this report.

This approach has both strengths and limitations. **Strengths** include:

- identifying the best available evidence from research and national datasets to inform specific questions
- comprehensive and documented searching for relevant information
- an analysis of the quality and strength of evidence.

**Limitations** include:

- the very short time in which this review was carried out, which limited the ability to extend and develop the evidence base. It was not possible to adopt all of the processes expected of an extended or systematic review.
- time was limited for hand-searching references. A small number of studies were not available electronically or through libraries in the UK.
- the review was limited to English-speaking countries only.

# Assessment of the evidence base

This section provides an overview of the evidential basis of the review. The initial searches generated 34 titles, and it was considered that 15 titles were relevant to the research questions. The studies that were identified as providing evidence relating to each of the research questions required, and demonstrated, a range of methodological approaches.

Of the 15 studies, 7 focused on the UK, 2 on Ireland, 2 on the USA, and 1 on Australia, and 3 were international reviews. Around one third looked at family literacy programmes, and the rest looked into the wider benefits of wider family learning programmes, in some cases including family literacy. Two thirds of the items identified in the searches were original research reports and academic papers, and the rest were large-scale reviews.



# Summary of findings from previous research

The key finding of this report is that participation in family learning programmes results in a variety of wider benefits of learning. We arrive at this conclusion based on our review of 15 primary studies and broader reviews, all of which found positive effects on social and emotional aspects that were not direct and principal aims of the family learning programmes (see Table 1, at the end of this paper). These findings support those of the still small body of methodologically robust research on wider benefits of learning as such and specifically family learning.

However, the majority of evaluations of family learning have focused on family literacy, with very few looking at family numeracy, and almost none investigating wider family learning programmes. Moreover, most of the existing studies have been concerned with children's cognitive outcomes (see, for example, Whitehurst *et al.* 1994; Wagner *et al.* 2002; Sénéchal & Young 2008; McElvany & van Steensel 2009; Manz *et al.* 2010; van Steensel *et al.* 2011; Carpentieri *et al.* 2011) and participants' views and experiences (both children's and parents'), and the so-called 'softer' benefits have generally received less attention and were very often sidelined and therefore not included as a primary focus of the research. Although some prior studies have reported parents' views and wider benefits of learning experienced (see, for example, Brooks *et al.* 1996; Hannon 1986; Hannon and Jackson 1987; Hannon *et al.* 1991, 2006; Hirst 1998; Kirkpatrick 2004; Anderson & Morrison 2007), overall, parents and wider benefits of family learning have been neglected.

Brooks *et al.* 2008 assessed a UK-wide and international context and evaluated studies investigating family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN) programmes and practice. Brooks *et al.* found (limited) quantitative evidence on benefits to parents' child-rearing practices, employment, further study, self-confidence, knowledge of first aid, understanding how children learn, computer skills, and involvement with their children's schools, and qualitative evidence on some of these and on such other benefits as health awareness and community partnerships. They found little evidence on wider benefits for children, because data on this had not been gathered.

Our searches showed that there appear to be almost no recent studies of family language or family numeracy, or of WFL in the UK or any other countries. Most of the literature we found was predominantly based on the earlier work done before 2008, and in most cases these were rather small qualitative studies or larger reviews of the previous research. The largest primary study was the 2007-09 national evaluation of family literacy programmes (Swain *et al.* 2009). Their report summarises the findings of a two-year project to assess the impact and effectiveness of family literacy programmes in England. The findings on wider benefits of family learning include the following, as reported by parents in the survey and interviews:

- higher involvement in pre-school and school activities
- greater self-confidence

- greater self-reported capabilities
- improved options for finding work
- progression to further learning.

However, even this large study of family literacy programmes had only a one-group design and did not include a control group. Additionally, wider benefits of learning were not a primary focus of the study.

A review under the name 'Family learning. An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community' was carried out by Ofsted (2009), looking into a variety of family learning programmes in schools, children's centres and libraries. It was a qualitative study based on a sample of 23 local authority adult and community learning providers of family learning and a sample of 36 family learning classes. It suggested that the wider benefits of family learning are:

- increased parental involvement in school life
- increased parental activity in their child's school or in their local community
- gaining employment
- an increased social network
- improvement in confidence, communication and interpersonal skills
- improved parenting skills
- increased ability to manage their children's behaviour, communicate with them and support their learning at home effectively.

In addition to this study there was one large-scale review of wider family learning in the UK. The review 'Providing the Evidence: the impact of wider family learning' carried out by NIACE (Lamb *et al.* 2009) showed that, in addition to acquisition of the skills and knowledge covered on particular courses, reports also mentioned fun, enjoyment, desire for further learning and improved family relationships for parents and children, improved self-confidence, health and well-being, and budgeting and greater community involvement for parents, and better motivation and behaviour by children in school. Lamb *et al.* also noted the strategic contribution of WFL to national objectives in Public Service Agreement terms.

The other 11 studies and reviews we looked at provided similar findings (see Table 1). Among the benefits of family learning the following wider benefits were mentioned in research carried out in the UK, Ireland, USA, Canada, Australia and internationally. Most of these studies were small-scale qualitative studies, and very few analysed or made any references to quantitative data and randomised controlled trials (RCTs).

### **Social capital and societal gains**

- developed a sense of community
- social cohesion through higher involvement in local community and school
- increased social networks, that is, improved and newly formed social relationships
- gain of social capital
- social confidence
- 'know how' about their own and their children's learning processes
- greater integration within the community
- promotes active citizenship
- improved capacity to advocate for themselves and their children.

### **Individual level gains**

- self-confidence in their skills
- bonding with children
- increased self-esteem
- increased personal responsibility and aspiration
- improvement in parenting attitudes
- decreased parental stress
- increased knowledge of child development
- enhanced parenting skills.

### **Educational gains**

- interest in further learning
- higher educational aspirations for parents and their children
- empowering experiences and process of learning.

As is evident most of the wider benefits of learning were related to the societal level or the social capital of individuals. Fewer studies focused on specific gains on an individual level,

such as self-esteem, self-efficacy or educational aspirations and progression to further learning or employment.

To conclude, one of the major criticisms of research on family learning programmes as such and on the wider benefits of these programmes in particular has been made before (Brooks *et al.* 2008, Carpentieri *et al.* 2011); that is, there is a lack of evidence derived from systematic evaluations, including in particular randomised controlled trials. In most cases, with regard to the wider benefits of family learning programmes, the level of programme evaluation amounts to little more than testimonials and use of qualitative interview or observational data with no control group; that is, most studies merely have a one-group pre/post design. It appears that in the last decade the evaluation of family literacy programmes, especially in relation to cognitive outcomes for children, has produced evidence that is more robust than in the past (Carpentieri *et al.* 2011). However, family numeracy and wider family learning programmes have not experienced a similar improvement in the number or quality of evaluation studies in respect of the wider benefits of learning. In the next section we assess in more detail the evidence gaps in this field.

## Assessment of evidence gaps

In general, the quality of reporting varies significantly, and most primary studies lack methodological rigour; the information provided is often patchy, even in well-funded and well-regarded evaluations. In most cases, there is a lack of information about participant and intervention characteristics that is often a product of limited data collection and/or reporting in primary studies. The evaluation design quality of many of the studies is too weak to allow researchers or other programme evaluators to measure programmes' efficacy. Some studies that have better designs still have inadequate sample sizes or non-random samples, which weaken any findings presented.

First, there are very few methodologically robust empirical studies investigating the wider benefits of family learning, in the UK or internationally. There is more evidence for literacy and language than for numeracy, and almost none for wider family learning programmes. Very few studies have the wider benefits of family learning as the sole focus, and in most it is a subsidiary focus. Most of the quantitative studies has been carried out in North America and outside the UK and, given the markedly different cultural and policy environment, this potentially reduces the generalisability of findings for the UK and their usefulness for policy-makers.

Secondly, although the latest qualitative evidence from the major reports suggests that there is a variety of wider benefits of family learning, little is known about how widespread these benefits are, how generalisable these findings are across different contexts and for different groups involved, and finally whether these wider benefits are greater than would occur without the family learning interventions. As Brooks *et al.* (2008) state, and our review confirms, very few UK or international studies used quantitative data, and even fewer used a controlled trial; most had used qualitative interviews or matched-group and one-group pre- and post-test designs, which means that much of the evidence needs to be treated with caution. There is an increasing need for more methodologically robust research using RCT or quasi-experimental designs to control for some natural changes in family lives, as for example when children start school.

Additionally, Brooks *et al.* argued that research has been unable to provide a definitive answer not only to whether two-generation FLLN programmes benefit parents as well as children, in respect of wider social and emotional outcomes, but also whether parents in FLLN programmes make better progress than they would in discrete or stand-alone adult literacy (or numeracy) programmes, and, finally, whether particular pedagogic approaches to FLLN are more effective than others in respect of producing a range of outcomes including wider benefits.

Thirdly, the majority of evaluations of FL have focused either on quantifiable outcomes on children's progress in reading, or on qualitative research on participants' views and experiences (both children's and parents'); the so-called 'softer' benefits have generally received less attention. Brooks *et al.* concluded that, although there is convincing evidence that parents benefit in their ability to help their children in many ways, and that children's skills also improve, the amount of evidence on parents' skill development (in terms of improved outcomes in reading and/or writing) is much smaller, and less convincing. Furthermore, wider benefits of learning are rarely included in evaluations of family learning programmes and, when they are, they are often included outside the main study and appear only in interviews with parents or teachers or in follow-up stages of the research. Indeed, most of the evidence on the wider benefits arises from self-report post-programme interviews or from less direct measures, such as teachers' reports about parents and children. The use of these indirect and qualitative measures puts limits on the reliability of the data and the scope for generalisation.

Fourthly, although the literature shows the vital role of the family dimension in the learning of young children and parents, research currently has very little to tell us about the quality of interactions between parents and children in their home learning environment. There is almost no evidence on how participation in family learning programmes changes home behaviours and practices. And there is no evidence on the relationship between the benefits to parents' and children's literacy, language and numeracy skills, and parents' ability to assist their children's development, on the one hand, and the wider benefits of learning on the other.

Finally, there have been few evaluations that have looked at how durable any changes are. The exception to this is the work of Brooks and colleagues who evaluated the Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes which were set up in England and Wales during the mid 1990s. They found that the programmes were associated with statistically significant advances in achievement in literacy for both parents and children (Brooks *et al.* 1996). In a follow-up study, two years later, all these specific, and many wider, gains were being sustained (Brooks *et al.* 1997). Likewise, there is evidence that family literacy programmes positively affect adult participants, in terms of self-efficacy (Rodriguez-Brown 2004) and developing social capital (Anderson and Morrison 2007). But again, there is need for more research that addresses the extent to which these benefits are sustained.

Overall, further research into family learning programmes will not only improve our understanding of the degree to which such initiatives work in the UK, but will also enhance our understanding of how, why and for whom these programmes work, and under what conditions. A larger UK evidence base would reduce the current over-reliance on North American and European research and increase cultural validity. The situation calls for much more in the way of systematic data collection by means of a series of rigorous studies. Whilst the totality of evidence to date points towards a number of wider outcomes,

none of the existing studies was an RCT, very few had comparison groups, and the rest were one-group studies. There remains, therefore, a need for research that is methodologically robust. In the next section we offer two research specifications that are designed to meet this need in areas where the evidence is inadequate.

# Options for further research

## Research specification 1: Wider benefits of family learning: secondary analysis of matched data

**Research question:** What are the wider benefits from participation in family learning programmes?

**Research design:** Building on previous analysis of wider benefits of lifelong learning, and using data from the 1958 NCDS lifetime cohort study, with the aim of extending understanding of the wider benefits of family learning as compared to other lifelong learning programmes or no learning at all. We suggest that the ILR could be matched to NCDS, and, if possible, also to Millennium cohort datasets, to investigate a range of wider benefits of family learning, such as well-being and health, self-efficacy and changes in parental behaviours. It is possible to use a quasi-experimental design and match groups based on different characteristics, such as cognitive ability and socio-economic status. The NCDS is a longitudinal dataset that allows for pre and post analysis.

### Results of scoping exercise and background:

In examining the data we explored issues arising from data collection in Family Learning, and also at the compatibility of the Individual Learner Record (ILR) with the NCDS.

Collection of accurate data is a recurring problem for family learning providers. The main issue is related to the fact that family learning is a part of adult and community learning and currently adult safeguarded learning. All adult learners on LSC/SFA-funded WFL and FLLN programmes must have an ILR. However, the ILR is widely used across the further education sector and was not designed for short, more informal programmes that do not lead to formal qualifications, such as family learning programmes. Because of this, the information that can be extracted from the ILR is less than ideal in terms of evaluating the success and impact of the programmes. Many fields containing information on learners are empty and some of the earlier (pre-2008) data is not recorded on the ILR at all. The returns have become more reliable, but on their own they provide only limited scope for analysis of the wider benefits of family learning or for any evaluation of the effectiveness of these programmes.



**Table 2: Numbers of learning aims, wider family learning and family literacy, language and numeracy, 2003/04-2009/10**

	WFL	FLLN				
		Total	Literacy	Language	Numeracy	Other
<b>2009/10</b>	93,993	91,434	35,505	4,292	19,217	32,420
<b>2008/09</b>	92,568	88,462	35,540	3,404	17,198	32,320
<b>2007/08</b>	59,412	64,465	24,962	2,595	11,955	24,923
<b>2006/07</b>	84,398	88,544	(No reliable data split available)			
<b>2005/06</b>	65,824	76,111				
<b>2004/05</b>	(no data available)					
<b>2003/04</b>	43,185	36,464				

As Table 2 shows the historic weaknesses in the ILR data mean that any basic year-on-year comparisons are fundamentally unreliable as evidence of an increase or decrease in provision.

Evidence of the wider impact of family learning, such as gains in confidence, gaining employment, increases in social cohesion and changes in aspirations, as well as provision of opportunities for learner progression in educational, economic, social and personal terms, cannot be extracted from the ILR. However, the ILR remains a good source for identifying individuals who participated in those programmes and any other adult learning programmes. Therefore, if the ILR data can be matched with any other data that contains information on the wider social, cognitive, economic or emotional profile of those individuals then it is likely that the matched dataset can be used to answer the questions raised above.

The National Child Development Study (NCDS) follows the lives of 17,000 people born in England, Scotland and Wales in the week of 3-9 March 1958. The NCDS has gathered data from respondents on child development from birth to early adolescence, child care, medical care, health, physical statistics, school readiness, home environment, educational progress, parental involvement, cognitive and social growth, family relationships, economic activity, income, training and housing. Since the birth survey in 1958, there have been eight further 'sweeps' of all cohort members at ages 7, 11, 16, 23, 33, 42, 46 and 50.

The 1958 cohort have given their consent for administrative data linkage. In order to see whether this option is worth pursuing further we examined how many individuals in the ILR dataset who participated in WFL or FLLN have birthdates between 3 and 9 March 1958. The initial results are presented in Table 3. Based on these numbers some analysis would be possible using matched samples and replicating a quasi-experimental design.



**Table 3: Number of NCDS members participating in WFL and FLLN, 2003/04-2009/10**

	<b>N of those born between 3-9 March 1958 in the WFL and FLLN programmes</b>
<b>2009/10</b>	18
<b>2008/09</b>	12
<b>2007/08</b>	10
<b>2006/07</b>	16
<b>2005/06</b>	20
<b>2004/05</b>	(no data available)
<b>2003/04</b>	18
<b>Total</b>	94

Additionally, or alternatively, similar matching exercises may be possible making use of longitudinal datasets derived from the Millennium Cohort, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC) and the formerly named British Household Panel Study (now the UK Household Longitudinal Study).

**Pros:**

- Experimental matched data and analytical methods have been tried and tested.
- Low-cost high-impact analysis drawing on matched dataset supporting robust analysis.

**Cons:**

- Difficulty differentiating between different types of family learning – beyond what is recorded in the ILR.
- Difficulty uncovering the nature of historical retrospective data; analysis can use only those outcomes recorded at the time points that are available.
- Working with any of the birth cohort studies requires a focus on a specific age group (for example, in 2012 all NCDS members are aged 54).

### **Research specification 2: Wider benefits of family learning: primary data collection and analysis through a matched-groups quasi-experiment intended as a methodological pilot for an RCT**

**Research question:** Do parents who take part in family literacy programmes go on to gain more employment and show more involvement in their children's schools than parents who do not take part in family literacy programmes?

**Research design:** Ideally, such a question would be investigated through an RCT, but such studies are large (in the case of family learning, particularly because the clustering of participants in course groups would require the sample to be increased) and therefore

expensive and difficult to set up and keep on track. We therefore propose a pilot study testing the methods that it is envisaged would be used in an eventual RCT. A further pragmatic consideration entails basing the investigation on family literacy programmes rather than any other type of family learning: this is because (a) such programmes outnumber other forms of family learning; (b) NRDC has recent experience of running an evaluation of family literacy programmes, and therefore has the required networks of contacts to find appropriate participants.

**Sample:** The initial size of the study group of parents would be 150 – our experience on the 2007-09 national evaluation of family literacy programmes suggests attrition of about a third; thus the target retained sample would be 100. They would be drawn from about 20 family literacy courses based in schools in 4 local authorities with whom NRDC has good relationships, and contacted via family literacy managers and then their teachers. The comparison group would be the same size, and would be drawn from parents of children in the same schools who are not attending family literacy courses but agree to participate and would be matched at group level with the parents in the study group.

**Outcome measures:** Both groups of parents would be contacted at regular intervals during the period of the study and asked (a) whether they had gained or changed jobs; (b) about their involvement with their children's schools.

**Analyses:** At the substantive level, the participants' responses would be analysed for any difference between the groups in terms of employment and involvement with the children's schools. Equally importantly, the progress of the study would be closely scrutinised for soundness of the approach, sampling, instruments and processes so that a design for an RCT would benefit from the lessons learnt.

**Pros:**

- The outcome measures focus on wider benefits which emerged in earlier studies but with much weaker designs
- The scale of the study is manageable and low-cost
- If successful, it would provide the first reasonably robust evidence on such wider benefits
- The design could be adapted to other research questions if required.

**Cons:**

- Recruiting and retaining the comparison group could be difficult

# References

- Anderson, J. and Morrison, F. (2007). A Great Program... for Me as a Granma: Caregivers Evaluate a Family Literacy Initiative. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 30 (1), pp 68-89
- Anderson, J., Anderson, A., Friedrich, N. and Kim, J.E. (2010) Taking stock of family literacy: Some contemporary perspectives. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 10(1): 33-53.
- Brooks, G., Gorman, T.P., Harman, J., Hutchison, D. and Wilkin, A. (1996). *Family Literacy Works: The NFER Evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency's Family Literacy Demonstration Programmes*. London: Basic Skills Agency.
- Brooks, G., Gorman, T.P., Harman, J., Hutchison, D., Kinder, K., Moor, H. and Wilkin, A. (1997). *Family Literacy Lasts: the NFER Follow-up Study of the Basic Skills Agency's Demonstration Programmes*. London: Basic Skills Agency.
- Brooks, G., Harman, J., Hutchison, D., Kendall, S., & Wilkin, A. (1999). *Family Literacy for New Groups: The National Foundation for Educational Research Evaluation of the Basic Skills Agency's Programmes for Linguistic Minorities, Year 4 and Year 7*. London: Basic Skills Agency.
- Brooks, G., Pahl, K., Pollard, A. and Rees, F. (2008). *Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: a review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally*. Reading: CfBT Education Trust. Available at [http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/our\\_research/evidence\\_for\\_youth/family\\_learning.aspx](http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/our_research/evidence_for_youth/family_learning.aspx)
- Carpentieri, J., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Litster, J. and Vorhaus, J. (2011). *Family literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development*. London: NRDC. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/literacy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/2011/literacy_en.pdf)
- Clair, St. R. (2008) Reading, Writing, and Relationships: Human and Social Capital in Family Literacy Programs. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal* 2 (2) pp. 84-94
- Doyle, A. and Zhang, J. (2011) Participation Structure Impacts on Parent Engagement in Family Literacy Programs. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39 (3). p. 223-233
- Feinstein, L., Budge, D., Vorhaus, J. and Duckworth, K. (2008) „The Social and Personal Benefits of Learning: A Summary of Key Research Findings.“ Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning, Institute of Education, London
- Hannon, P. (1986). Teachers' and parents' experiences of parental involvement in the teaching of reading. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 16(1), pp. 28-37
- Hannon, P. and Jackson, A. (1987). Educational home visiting and teaching of reading. *Educational Research*, 29 (3). pp. 182-191

- Hannon, P., Morgan, A. and Nutbrown, C. (2006). Parents experiences of family learning programme. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 4(1), pp. 19-44
- Hannon, P., Weinberger, J. and Nutbrown, C. (1991). A study of work with parents to promote early literacy development. *Research Papers in Education*, 6(1), pp. 77-97
- Heckman, J.J., Moon, S., Pinto, R., Savelyev, P. and Yavitz, A. (2009) The rate of return to the High/Scope Perry Preschool Programme. IZA Discussion Paper No. 4533.
- Hirst, K. (1998). Preschool Literacy Experiences of Children in Punjabi, Urdu and Gujarati Speaking Families in England. *British Educational Research Journal*, 24 (4). Pp. 415-429
- Hope, J. (2011) New insights into family learning for refugees: bonding, bridging and building transcultural capital. *Literacy*, 45 (2), p 91-97
- Jones, J. and Macrae, C. (2008) *Scoping Study on Models of Family Learning*. Report by Linked Work and Training Trust
- Kirkpatrick, K.T. (2004). Reframing Child Abuse & Neglect for Increased Understanding & Engagement: Research Findings & Their Implications. FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP
- Shook Slack, K., Maguire K., Gjertson, J and L. M. (Eds) (2009). *Child Maltreatment Prevention: Toward an Evidence-Based Approach*. State of Wisconsin. The Department of Children and Families. University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Lamb, P., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K. and Evans, S. (2009). *Providing the Evidence: the impact of wider family learning. A report commissioned by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills*. Leicester: NIACE. <http://shop.niace.org.uk/providing-evidence.html>
- Lowe, K., Martens, D., Hannett, K. and Tunks, T. (2009) *Review of the Literature: Family Literacy Programs*, Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations University of Canberra
- Manz, P., Hughes, C. Barnaba, E., Bracaliello, C. and Ginsburg-Block, M. (2010) A descriptive review and meta-analysis of family-based emergent literacy interventions: To what extent is the research applicable to low-income, ethnic-minority or linguistically-diverse young children? [Early Childhood Research Quarterly](#), (2): 409-431.
- McElvany, N. and van Steensel, R. (2009) Potentials and Challenges of Family Literacy: Interventions: the question of implementation quality. *European Educational Research Journal*, 8 (3): 418-433.
- Mol, S.E., Bus, A.G., De Jong, M.T. and Smeets, D.J.H. (2008) Added value of dialogic parent-child book readings: A meta-analysis. *Early Education & Development*, 19 (1): 7–26.

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

OFSTED (2009) Family learning: *An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community*. [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Rocha-Schmid, E. (2010) Participatory pedagogy for empowerment: a critical discourse analysis of teacher-parents' interactions in a family literacy course in London. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 29 (3): 343-358.

Rodríguez-Brown, F.V. (2004). Project FLAME: a parent support family literacy model. In Wasik, B.H. (ed.) *Handbook of Family Literacy*, Mahwah NJ and London: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp. 213–32.

Rose, A. (2011) Building on existing informal learning in Traveller communities through family literacy programmes: an Irish case study. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*

Schuller, T., Bynner, J., Green, A., Blackwell, L., Hammond, C., Preston, J. and Gough, M. (2001) *Modelling and Measuring the Wider Benefits of Learning*. Institute of Education, London, p. 61.

Schuller, T., Preston, J., Hammond, C., Brassett-Grundy, A. and Bynner, J. (2004). *The Benefits of Learning: The impact of educational on health, family life and social capital*. London: Routledge

Sénéchal, M., & Young, L. (2008). The Effect of Family Literacy Interventions on Children's Acquisition of Reading From Kindergarten to Grade 3: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(4), 880-907. .

Swain, J., Welby, S., Brooks, G., Bosley, S., Frumkin, L., Fairfax-Cholmeley, K., Pérez, A. and Cara, O. (2009) *Learning literacy together: the impact and effectiveness of family literacy on parents, children, families and schools. Executive summary - October 2009*. Coventry: Learning and Skills Improvement Service.  
[http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications\\_details.asp?ID=162](http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=162)

Van Steensel, R., McElvany, N., Kurvers, J., & Herppich, S. (2011). How effective are family literacy programs? Results of a meta analysis. *Review of Educational Research*, 81 (1) pp 69-96

Wagner, M., Spiker, D. and Inman Linn, M. (2002). The Effectiveness of the Parents as Teachers Program with Low-Income Parents and Children. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 22(2), pp. 67-81

Wainwright, E. and Marandet, E. (2011) Geographies of family learning and aspirations of belonging. *Children's Geographies*, 9 (1), p 95-109

Webb, J. M. (2007) *An assessment of the impact of family learning programmes on parents' learning through their involvement in their children's learning*. MA thesis. Waterford Institute of Technology

Whitehurst, Grover J.; Arnold, David S.; Epstein, Jeffery N.; Angell, Andrea L.; Smith, Meagan; Fischel, Janet E. (1994). A picture book reading intervention in day care and home for children from low-income families. *Developmental Psychology*, 30(5), pp. 679-689

**Table 1: Summary of the findings and basic information about the studies included in the scoping exercise**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Research design</b>	<b>Research methods</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Programmes evaluated</b>	<b>Wider benefits of family learning</b>
Learning literacy together: the impact and effectiveness of family literacy on parents, children, families and schools (Swain <i>et al.</i> 2009)	England	Mixed methods	One group pre/post quantitative tests and survey of parents and children with qualitative interviews with parents and teachers	74 courses, 583 parents, 527 children	Family literacy programmes in schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher involvement in pre-school and school activities</li> <li>• greater self-confidence</li> <li>• greater self-reported capabilities</li> <li>• improved options for finding work</li> <li>• progression to further learning</li> </ul>
Family learning. An evaluation of the benefits of family learning for participants, their families and the wider community (Ofsted 2009)	England	Qualitative	Observations and case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a sample of 23 local authority adult and community learning providers of family learning.</li> <li>• 36 family learning classes</li> </ul>	Variety of Family learning programmes in schools, children centres and libraries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased involvement in school life. Many parents became more active in their child's school or in their local community.</li> <li>• gaining employment</li> <li>• an increased social network.</li> <li>• improvement in confidence, communication and interpersonal skills</li> <li>• improved parenting skills. Parents commented on how they were better able to manage their children's behaviour, communicate with them</li> </ul>

Study	Country	Research design	Research methods	Participants	Programmes evaluated	Wider benefits of family learning
						and support their learning at home effectively.
Providing the Evidence: the impact of wider family learning (Lamb <i>et al.</i> 2009)	England	Qualitative review	Case studies, interviews	Review and summary from previous studies	Family learning programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• family bonding</li> <li>• empowerment</li> <li>• gains in confidence and understanding</li> <li>• improved social communication</li> <li>• links with the community</li> <li>• raised aspirations, understanding of and motivation for learning</li> </ul>
Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy: a review of programmes and practice in the UK and internationally (Brooks <i>et al.</i> 2008)	England and international	Meta-study	Review of previous qualitative and quantitative research	16 quantitative studies on the evaluation of the FLLN programmes and over 20 qualitative evaluations.	Family literacy, language and numeracy interventions and programmes worldwide in different contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased ability to help their children's education</li> <li>• improved mothers' child-rearing practices</li> <li>• better chances for parents' employment</li> <li>• increased self-confidence in parents</li> <li>• parents being more involved with their children's schools</li> </ul>



<b>Study</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Research design</b>	<b>Research methods</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Programmes evaluated</b>	<b>Wider benefits of family learning</b>
Review of the Literature: Family Literacy Programs (Lowe <i>et al.</i> 2009)	Australia and international	Review	In-depth literature review		World-wide family literacy programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developed a sense of community &amp; closer relationships with the child's school</li> <li>• social networks</li> <li>• improved and newly formed social relationships</li> <li>• social confidence</li> <li>• self-confidence in their skills</li> <li>• 'know how' about own &amp; children's learning processes</li> <li>• bonding with children</li> </ul>
Reading, Writing, and Relationships: Human and Social Capital in Family Literacy Programs (Clair 2008)	USA, Texas	Mixed methods	Pre and post tests, surveys, interviews, case-studies	53 programmes	Family literacy programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self-esteem</li> <li>• self-confidence</li> <li>• sense of community</li> <li>• bonding within family</li> <li>• gain of social capital</li> </ul>
An assessment of the impact of family learning programmes on parents' learning through their involvement in	Ireland	Mixed methods	One group post design. Questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. Follow up a year later	22 parents	Family learning programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• better understanding of their learning</li> <li>• increase in confidence</li> <li>• increase in social confidence</li> <li>• greater integration within the community</li> </ul>

Study	Country	Research design	Research methods	Participants	Programmes evaluated	Wider benefits of family learning
their children's learning (Webb 2007)						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interest in further learning</li> </ul>
Scoping Study of Models of Family Learning (Jones & Macrae 2008)	Scotland	Case studies	Interviews, observations	4 case studies	Family learning programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher involvement in local community and school</li> </ul>
Fathers' involvement in young children's literacy development: implications for family literacy programmes (Morgan <i>et al.</i> 2009)	England	Matched pairs RCT	<p>One group pre and post design.</p> <p>Interviews and home visit record analysis</p>	85 parents	Family literacy programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher involvement of parents in child's learning and development</li> <li>• bonding within family</li> <li>• social cohesion</li> </ul>
Building on existing informal learning in Traveller communities through family literacy programmes: an	Ireland	Case study	Interviews and observations	<p>1 local family literacy coordinator;</p> <p>1 school teacher; 4 adult</p>	Family literacy programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher educational aspirations for parents and their children</li> <li>• increased confidence in parenting skills</li> <li>• empowerment</li> </ul>

Study	Country	Research design	Research methods	Participants	Programmes evaluated	Wider benefits of family learning
Irish case study (Rose 2011)				practitioners; 8 ex-learners; 16 current learners. 4 observations of family literacy sessions		
New insights into family learning for refugees: bonding, bridging and building transcultural capital (Hope 2011)	England	Ethnographic study	Interviews and observations; analysis of registration forms and evaluation proformas; analysis of registers of attendance	2 family learning programmes	Family learning programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empowering experiences</li> <li>• social cohesion</li> <li>• intercultural learning</li> <li>• increase in social capital</li> </ul>
Geographies of family learning and aspirations of belonging (Wainwright & Marandet 2011)	England	Case study	Interviews, focus groups,	16 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders; 3 focus groups with 33	Family learning programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empowering process</li> <li>• promotes active citizenship</li> <li>• increases personal responsibility and aspiration</li> <li>• social capital</li> <li>• social cohesion</li> </ul>

Study	Country	Research design	Research methods	Participants	Programmes evaluated	Wider benefits of family learning
				women;  10 in-depth interviews with programme participants		
Participation Structure Impacts on Parent Engagement in Family Literacy Programs (Doyle & Zhang 2011)	USA	Unmatched group post study with no control group	Focus groups and questionnaires	Focus groups with 45 parents (21 in parent-only and 24 in parent-child model)  49 questionnaires (23 in parent-only and 26 in parent-child model)	Family literacy programmes: comparison of a parent-only model and parent-child model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family bonding</li> <li>• Parental empowerment</li> </ul>
Taking stock of family literacy: Some contemporary perspectives (Anderson <i>et al.</i> )	Worldwide, majority from Canada	Review	In-depth literature review		Family literacy programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understanding better expectations of school</li> <li>• increased ability to support their children's learning at home</li> <li>• improved the capacity to</li> </ul>

Study	Country	Research design	Research methods	Participants	Programmes evaluated	Wider benefits of family learning
2010)						advocate for themselves and their children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development of important social networks</li> </ul>
Child Maltreatment Prevention: Toward an Evidence-Based Approach (Shook Slack <i>et al.</i> 2009)	USA	Review	In-depth previous research review		Parenting programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improvement in parenting attitudes</li> <li>• decreased parental stress</li> <li>• increased knowledge of child development,</li> <li>• enhanced parenting skills.</li> </ul>



© Crown copyright 2012

You may re-use this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. Visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is also available on our website at [www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk)

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to:

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET  
Tel: 020 7215 5000

If you require this publication in an alternative format, email [enquiries@bis.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@bis.gsi.gov.uk), or call 020 7215 5000.

**URN 12/1238**