

L&W LEARNING AND
WORK INSTITUTE

Forum for Adult Learning **NI** ECORYS 

L&W SEFYDLIAD DYSGU A GWAITH
LEARNING AND WORK INSTITUTE



Scotland's Learning Partnership



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

Evidence Review:

The impact of family learning on adult learners



Introduction

For adult learners, family learning can provide a stepping stone into more formal learning and employment, as well as producing wider outcomes such as increased confidence, motivation and wellbeing. Family learning can play a critical role in closing skills gaps and encouraging social participation of those most excluded communities.

This report is written by Learning and Work Institute (L&W). Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is an independent policy and research organisation dedicated to promoting lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion. We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

L&W are engaged in an on-going programme of research and development activity to support providers across the UK and Europe, to deliver family and community learning programmes, which benefit adult and child learners.

What is family learning?

Family learning refers to any activity that involves learning for children and adult family members. Family learning can produce learning outcomes for all family members and contribute towards a culture of learning within the family.

Family learning programmes vary in length and structure, but generally include adult-only time, where parents and carers will work on their skills needs – which could include parenting skills, literacy, numeracy and digital skills, either delivered directly or embedded in contexts as varied as financial literacy, science or art.

In some programmes, adults and children learn together at the same time, supported by family learning tutors who are experienced in working with both adults and children, including those who have literacy or numeracy needs, poor digital skills or low levels of prior achievement. In others, adults learn separately, with children benefitting from home activities and from the experience of parents who have learned to value learning.

Family learning can happen in the home, or in museums, schools, libraries, community centres or prisons. Family learning can involve activities that help parents learn how to support their children, as well as having learning activities for the whole family.

What can family learning do?

Family learning can help children to increase their attainment as well as encouraging adults to engage in life-long learning and feel confident in acting as their child's educator. Family learning can be particularly effective for those most disadvantaged and excluded from society and the labour market. For these adults, family learning can act as a stepping-stone into formal education, employment, volunteering and community participation.

Globally, family learning forms part of the agenda for life long learning, particularly in disadvantaged communities. In their conference on Family Learning in Europe, UNESCO Institute for Life long Learning shared the message that family learning can be seen as a way of breaking down barriers between formal, non-formal and informal learning.¹ Moreover, family Learning that encourages and improves literacy sits within the framework of children's right to literate grandparents and parents²

This review

Family learning produces outcomes for both adult and children. However, significantly less research has been conducted into the evidence for the impact of family learning on adult participants, despite it being acknowledged as a key part of life-long learning. In 2017 L&W conducted research into employment outcomes for adults participating in family learning. We found that one in six adult learners got a new job, one in five started to volunteer on a regular basis, and over half felt more confident about searching and applying for a job in the future, and 92% were more confident in their ability to educate their children. This literature review expands upon this work by collating evidence for adult learners internationally.

This review begins with a brief summary of robust research into the impact of family learning on children. However, it's main focus is the evidence on the impact that family learning can have for *adult learners* educational, economic, personal and social progression, with a focus on how these may lead to employment outcomes.

The review also considers the important role that family learning can have for those disadvantaged and socially excluded families.

¹ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning: <http://uil.unesco.org/literacy-and-basic-skills/engaging-families/family-learning-europe-best-practices>

² Haneman et. al., (2017) Learning together across generations, Guidelines for Family Literacy and Learning Programmes, UNESCO.



Methodology

This review was conducted via desk-based research. However, L&W have also produced an international call for evidence, the results of which will be added to this document in due course.

This desk based research has included reviews of academic research, grey literature, national and local monitoring data, government reports and research from non-governmental organisations. Due to the sparsity of available research on the impact of family learning for adult learners, literature has been included from as early as 2003, although where possible research has been more contemporary.

When looking at the impact on children, randomised controlled or quasi-experimental research have been prioritised. However, at present no such studies have been carried out with a focus on adult learner outcomes. Predominantly, research in this area has been survey based, qualitative or involved analysis of monitoring data, a selection of which has been included in this review.



Findings

Family learning faces challenges in collecting outcomes data on participants, and conducting robust evaluations. In 2017, L&W's UK based research found that although most interventions employ pre and post questionnaires to measure outcomes, these are usually designed 'in house' making aggregation of evidence and comparison between programmes difficult. Additionally, family learning providers find it hard to track longer-term outcomes as they lose contact with learners post-programme.

The most robust evaluations have tended to focus on the impact of family learning upon children, rather than adult learners. This section first collates some of the more robust evidence for the impact of family learning on children, and then goes on to summarise research into the impact of family learning on adult learners.

Outcomes for children

Evidence suggests that family learning can increase child attainment, competence, and attitudes to learning, and that this impact may endure across the life course:

- NIACE's inquiry into Family Learning in England and Wales demonstrated that family learning could increase the overall level of children's attainment by as much as 15 percentage points³.
- Longitudinal research in the United States has produced robust evidence for the longer-term impact of family learning in children and on parental attitudes.⁴ Most famously, the Perry Preschool randomised controlled trial found that by ages 15 and 19 program groups had better attitudes towards school than the non program group.
- More recently, research into families who engaged with early learning centres in the Midwestern United States found that after 5 years these children were more successful than a control group, academically, socially and emotionally⁵.
- The Early Intervention Foundation⁶ - examined evidence for 75 interventions aimed at supporting parents and children aged 0-5 years old to improve child

³ <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk.gridhosted.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-Inquiry-into-Family-Learning-in-England-and-Wales-Summary.pdf>

⁴ Perry Pre-school programme, TOP early learning centres – Midwestern

⁵ Early Childhood Education: The Long-Term Benefits, Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 2016.



social and emotional skills through positive parent interactions. The evaluations included Randomised Controlled Trials and Quasi-Experimental studies, and found positive evidence for children's social-emotional skills and secure attachment later in life.

- In Turkey, longitudinal research into the impact of the Turkish early Enrichment Project and the Mother-Child Education Programme, both aimed at disadvantaged children, demonstrated a long-term impact on children's cognitive skills including literacy⁷. As well as better employment outcomes for these children in adulthood.⁸
- A meta-analysis of family literacy in Europe found that the effect size of family learning to have a relatively large impact on child literacy outcomes⁹. The meta-analysis demonstrated that the UK's 'Bookstart' programme, had a strong impact on child literacy. The review also suggested that the best results were produced by programmes that train parents or carers to teach their children specific reading skills, or listen to their children read, as opposed to programmes where parents read to their children. Positive results were also found from programmes where parents or carers were trained in-parenting skills.
- Currently, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) are conducting an international comparative study of over 3000 children engaged in family early-learning centres. The research will involve surveying and observing children aged 5 to 5.5 and their parents and main care givers, as well as staff members, and aims to systemically examine outcomes for children. The study aims to look at literacy, numeracy, as well as wider social and emotional skills. The results of this study will be available in 2020.

⁶ Asmussen et. al., (2016), Foundations for life: what works to support parent child interaction in the early years, The Early Intervention Foundation.

⁷ Beckman, S (2003) From Research Project to Nationwide Programme: The Mother-child Education Programme of Turkey;

⁸ Kağıtçıbaşı, C. et. al. (2005) Continuing effects of early intervention in adult life: Preliminary findings of Turkish early enrichment project second follow-up study, Istanbul, Mother Child Education Foundation Publications.

⁹ Family Literacy in Europe: using parental support initiatives to enhance early literacy development, 2009, Institute of Education, University of London



Outcomes for Adults

Employment and employability skills

In 2017, L&W conducted analysis of a small sample (N54) of family learning participants, and found that one in six adults got a new job¹⁰. Research by Estyn in Wales also found anecdotal evidence of adult learners progressing into employment¹¹. However, at present research demonstrating 'hard' employment outcomes is hard to find. This may be because employment progression is difficult to track, as it involves longitudinal follow-up work post-programme, or because evaluations have tended to focus on child outcomes with outcomes for adult learners tracked less systematically.

However, there is significant research linking family learning to employability related outcomes – such as skills acquisition, learning progression and achievement of qualifications.

Hard employability skills include those quantifiable outcomes such as numeracy, literacy, digital skills, obtaining qualifications and accreditation, or progression onto into further learning, accredited learning and qualifications. These skills are attractive to employers and can have a direct impact on an individual's employment prospects.

In some instances, family learning has been shown to improve literacy due to parents relationship with their child's learning:

- A recent evaluation of informal family and community literacy programmes in the UK found that adult participants demonstrated increased awareness of the school literacy curriculum and undertook more reading with their children¹²

In other cases, adult learners achieve certification in numeracy or literacy, which may be transferred into an employment or educational progression:

¹⁰ <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk.gridhosted.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-Inquiry-into-Family-Learning-in-England-and-Wales-Summary.pdf>

¹¹ The impact of family learning programmes on raising the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults (2012), Estyn.

¹² Field, J, Tuckett, A, (2016) Informal learning in the family and community, Foresight, Government Office for Science; Swain, et.al. (2015) The impact of family literacy programmes on children's literacy skills and the home literacy environment. National Research and Development Centre, London.

- Leeds Council, UK, analysed outcomes from seven contracted family learning providers. The family learning programmes were commissioned as part of a wider adult learning agenda, and all programmes embedded CERTA accredited maths and English qualifications. Of the 1100 learners who took part in programmes in 2015/16, 663 learners achieved accreditation.¹³
- In Scotland, five independent evaluations were conducted into the Peep Progression Pathway Pilots. Peep pathway pilots are aimed at 'enhancing home learning and early attachment'¹⁴ and are being delivered across five Scottish local authorities. The evaluation took a mixed methods approach – including interviews with staff and stakeholders, and surveying of practitioners and parents. Parents who completed the progression pathway unit were shown to improve their own literacy, as well as to have gained confidence in accessing further education and employment.

As well as literacy and numeracy skills, some family learning programmes offer the chance for adult learners to gain qualifications related to their parenting skills, which can sometimes provide a progression pathway to jobs related to childcare or teaching:

- In Wales, Family learning programmes often contain accredited Agored Cymru modules, such as 'Help Children with Reading'. From 2009-10 Agored Cymru awarded approximately 1600 credits to adults participating in family learning in Wales.¹⁵

In other instances, Family learning has been shown to progress adult learners into further education programmes.

- Analysis of family literacy programmes in the UK showed that 55% of parents had been on another course and 84% were thinking of taking one¹⁶.

Soft outcomes

In addition to hard employability skills, family learning has been shown to increase soft skills such as confidence, motivation, attitudes to learning, parenting skills and

¹³ Leeds City Council Adult Learning; Self-Assessment Report 2015/16, Published January 2017:
<https://www.leeds.gov.uk/docs/Adult%20Learning%202015-16%20SAR%20-%20Jan%2017.pdf>

¹⁴ Peep Learning Together Progression Pathway: Pilot Evaluation, Report to Education Scotland, July 2015, p2.

¹⁵ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/family-learning>

¹⁶ Swain et al, (2013) Learning Literacy together: the impact of Family Literacy on parents, children, families and schools

overall wellbeing. It is possible that these soft outcomes can act as a stepping stone into 'hard' employability outcomes. For example, increases in confidence may lead to parents re-joining/joining the labour market, or participate in further education.

- In 2017, L&W conducted evaluation of three family learning pilot programmes aimed at increasing employability for parents/carers. Questionnaire results found that they had a clearer idea of the types of jobs they wanted to do¹⁷.
- The Peep progression pathway pilot evaluation found that parents had improved confidence in their ability to access further education and employment, and to complete projects¹⁸.
- Analysis of the UK community learning survey showed that family learning in the community improves parents' self-confidence and parenting skills. Learners also felt more confident in their capacity to progress in their career and in looking for work.¹⁹
- A case study of family learning at Miskin Primary School in Wales, by ESTYN Wales showed – a 12% increase in parent-child relationship score and a 9% increase in parental self-efficacy²⁰
- A two-year trial of family literacy programmes across England found that 64% of parents were more involved in their child's school and 76% of parents felt that had 'changed as a person' because of family learning – usually through increased confidence, feelings of capability and self-efficacy²¹.
- In Germany, the Intergenerational Family Literacy Project initiated by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, demonstrated improvement in adult participants' communication skills, self-esteem and integration into German

¹⁷ <http://www.learningandwork.org.uk.gridhosted.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/The-Inquiry-into-Family-Learning-in-England-and-Wales-Summary.pdf>

¹⁸ Peep Learning Together Progression Pathway: Pilot Evaluation, Report to Education Scotland, July 2015

¹⁹ Harding, C. and Ghezelayagh, S., 2014. Community Learning Learner Survey: Additional analysis of participants following family learning courses. BIS Research Paper no. 180. London: BIS.

²⁰ <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/family-learning>

²¹ Local Action on Health Inequalities: Public Health England, UCL, Institute of Health Equity, September 2014

society. Between 2004 and 2011, the programme benefited around 1,000 parents and 1,000 children annually (UIL 2014d).²²

In some instances, research found that family learning had an insignificant impact in hard skills outcomes but greater impact on soft skills:

- An evaluation of Family Literacy programmes across England tracked improvements in reading and writing of adult and child learners in 74 family learning courses across 42 local authorities. They found that parents demonstrated a 'small but statistically significant' gain in writing, however progress on reading was non-significant. However, parents there was a significant change in parents perceptions and assessment of their child's home literacy and a significant improvement in parents perception of themselves and their children as learners, and their confidence in learning.²³

It is possible that longitudinal research is needed to show whether these soft outcomes convert to harder skills and employability outcomes over time.

Social Inclusion

Evidence suggests that participating in family learning can reduce isolation and foster community participation and inclusion²⁴. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds may be more likely to have negative attitudes or concerns about learning. For 'harder to reach' families, family learning can work as an engagement tool as a wish to support one's children is often a key motive to overcome practical, financial or dispositional barriers to learning.

By bridging the gap between informal and formal learning, family learning can act as a stepping-stone into further education and employment for these adult family members.

- In their in-depth qualitative study of family learning Wainrights and Marandet (2017) conclude that family learning can provide a stepping stone into work, by bringing adults out of the home:

²² Windisch, H.C.,(April 2016) How to motivate adults with low literacy and numeracy skills to engage and persist in learning: A literature review of policy interventions.

²³ Swain et al, (2013) Learning Literacy together: the impact of Family Literacy on parents, children, families and schools

²⁴ Review of Family Learning Supporting Excellence and Equity, Scottish Government, December 2016; Windisch, H.C., Adults with low literacy and numeracy skills: a literature review of policy interventions, OECD 2016.

“The socialising aspect of family learning was important in breaking everyday domestic routines, prompting considerations of further learning and paid employment.”²⁵.

In other cases, family learning acts as an in route into more formalised support for disadvantaged families:

- Research into supported playgroups for disadvantaged groups in Australia show that adults improved social support networks and that for some, family learning provided a ‘soft’ entry point into more formal support provision²⁶.

A desire to help one’s child’s learning and development can be a powerful lever to for community involvement and learning for those more disengaged groups.

- Miskin primary school²⁷ sits in a disadvantaged area in Wales which has higher than average rate of children eligible for free school meals and 44% of children with additional learning needs. The school uses family learning as a method of engaging parents, in order to create a sense of community among families and with the long-term aim of improving learning outcomes for children. Evaluation results demonstrated improvement in parental self-efficacy and child-parent relationships.

For adults with ESOL needs who may experience socio-cultural barriers to social participation, as well as language barriers, family learning can provide a non-threatening in-route to community participation as well as progression into further education and training²⁸.

- The Scottish Government has recognised the crucial role that family learning can play for refugee children and families²⁹.
- Research in an area of London with a high immigrant population found that family learning can help parents and carers to gain confidence and help those who have been social excluded to re-enter the labour force³⁰

²⁵ Education, parenting and family: The social geographies of family learning, Wainwrights and Marandet, 2017

²⁶ <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/cfca40-supported-playgroups.pdf>

²⁷ Example used earlier.

²⁸ Review of Family Learning Supporting Excellence and Equity, Scottish Government, December 2016

²⁹ Ibid

Family learning has been shown to be successful when targeted at particular disadvantaged groups:

- Family learning programmes designed for families from gypsy, roma and traveller backgrounds have demonstrated an impact into literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults and children³¹.

Family learning in prisons may also increase social participation and inclusion by reducing reoffending rates for adult learners:

- Safe Ground have commissioned nine independent evaluations and reviews of their 'Family Man' programme including a re-offending analysis by the MoJ Data-lab and the Family Man Impact Study³² - a longitudinal study which looked at the programme's impact on a range of outcomes including family relationships and resettlement. A more recent MoJ Datalab analysis of Safe Ground's Fathers Inside programme showed that those who took part were less likely to re-offend than those who did not (24% compared to 40% in the control group) and when they did, they committed fewer re-offences.
- In the US, the Parenting Inside Out Programmes conducted a study, of 359 male and female participants³³. They found measurable positive impacts on rates of re-offending. Participants one-year post release, were less likely to have been arrested, (27% compared to 48%), and less likely to report having been involved in criminal behaviour. Other impacts included better parental involvement in the lives of their children; better attitudes and reduced substance misuse

Family learning has also been shown to have a positive impact on the developing world. Family learning forms part of the goals for adult learning, a key part of UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action³⁴. UNESCO believes that family learning does not only produce outcomes for those directly involved but that adult

³⁰ Education, parenting and family: The social geographies of family learning, Wainrights and Marandet, 2017

³¹ Taylor, C. and Hrubciak, E. (2009), 'Gypsy/Traveller Family Learning in Derbyshire'. In: Basic Skills Bulletin. No. 77, October 2009, p7-8.

³² <http://www.safeground.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/FM-Impact-Study-final-version.pdf>

³³ Parent and Child Study (2012): A randomized controlled trial (RCT) of the effectiveness of the Parenting Inside Out program.

³⁴ Hanneman et. al., (2017) Learning together across generations, Guidelines for Family Literacy and Learning Programmes, UNESCO.



learners can become ambassadors for learning within their community, increasing their social participation as well as impacting the local community.

Conclusions

This review has collated evidence of the impact of family learning on adult learners. Research in this area is sparse, and there is a gap in studies using robust methodologies. However, the current research suggests that family learning can produce employability skills and soft skills for adult learners and can act as a route to social inclusion and further learning for those most disadvantaged communities. Moving forward, comparative studies and longitudinal research is needed to fully understand the impact of family learning on adult learners and systematically track longer-term post-programme outcomes, including employment. Standardisation of evidence tracking, both within individual nations and, where possible, internationally may help to create a wider aggregate evidence base and compare family learning delivery models.