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**The Family Learning Approach:
The contribution of family learning to the
Education for All and the Millennium
Development Goals**

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ALBSU	Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EFA	Education for All
FABE	Family Basic Education
FLLN	Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LABE	Literacy and Adult Basic Education
LLN	literacy, language and numeracy
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NALA	National Adult Literacy Agency
NRDC	National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy
OCN	Open College Network
PALS	Parents as Literacy Supporters
PEEP	Peers Early Education Partnership
PEFaL	Parental Empowerment for Family Literacy project
PISCPL	Pacific Islands School Community Parent Liaison
TTAL	Talk To A Literacy Learner programme
WEA	Workers' Education Association
WFL	Wider Family Learning

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of Family Learning in the UK, within an international context. It analyses the key features of Family Learning programmes, particularly those which focus on literacy and numeracy. The paper also reflects on the lessons learned to date and identifies how Family Learning could usefully help in the achievement of two of the Education for All goals of Universal Primary Education (UPE) and youth and adult literacies, as well as the Millennium Development Goal of UPE.

INTRODUCTION

This paper scopes UK developments in family literacy and family learning over the past two decades. Family literacy and learning within a wider international context is also considered, in conjunction with ways in which to develop effective community learning provision. Models and lessons learned from research and evaluation are considered in terms of their applicability to meeting the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The phrase 'family literacy' was introduced by Denny Taylor in 1983 and family literacy programmes began in the USA, England and Israel in the 1970s and 1980s (Thomas, 1998, in Benseman, 1992). Hannon and Bird distinguish between two meanings of the term family literacy: firstly, literacy practices within families; and secondly, literacy programmes that involve families (in Wasik, 2004). The former may be spontaneous, as Morrow notes, 'Sometimes, family literacy occurs naturally during the routines of daily living and helps adults and children "get things done". These events might include using drawings or writings to share ideas; composing notes or letters to communicate messages; making lists; reading and following directions; or sharing stories and ideas through conversation, reading and writing' (1995, p. 7). In contrast, literacy programmes teach literacy, while acknowledging and making use of the learners' family relationships and engagement in family literacy practices (Hannon & Bird, in Wasik, 2004). Family literacy appears to be the preferred term used outside the UK.

'Family learning' represents an umbrella term under which a wide range of models are in operation, including family literacy practices and family literacy programmes. In this review of the literature, the term family learning is used primarily, but not exclusively, in the UK. It is generally understood to refer to learning approaches that engage parents and children jointly in learning, ranging from initiatives such as 'Bookstart' in the UK, where book bags are distributed through health visitors to stimulate early book sharing in families, to the wide range of family programmes funded through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in England, which falls into two categories, Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy (FLLN) and Wider Family Learning (WFL). The LSC tends to refer to 'family programmes' as the overarching term, with WFL and FLLN as its two subsets (Heathcote & Brooks, 2005).

Family learning provides a way to develop the skills of both children and adults while helping to develop other 'softer' qualities, such as confidence. The World Conference on Education for All in 1990 positioned basic education high on its agenda. In 2000, delegates from 164 countries reaffirmed their commitment to EFA in Dakar, Senegal. Family learning provides one practical solution to two of the six EFA goals; to expand early childhood care and education and to expand adult literacy by 50% by 2015 (UNESCO, 2000). In particular, countries in Sub-Saharan Africa face considerable challenges in meeting the EFA targets. It is estimated that in Sub-Saharan Africa, 88 million additional school places will need to be found for children while, in relation to adult literacy, success requires more than a doubling of previous efforts to achieve the target of 50%. Similarly, the eight MDGs, which are agreed to by all the countries of the world and all leading development institutions, include achieving universal primary education by 2015. This paper reflects on the lessons learned in the UK and internationally in the development of family learning to identify models, which may be usefully adapted to help in the achievement of two of the EFA goals and one MDG identified above.

1. FAMILY LEARNING AND ITS DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK

The use of the term family learning in the UK appears in the literature in the 1990s, for example, Alexander and Clyne's publication for the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in 1995, *Riches Beyond Price: Making the Most of Family Learning*.

Family learning describes learning 'which takes place among family members' – intergenerational learning, although it usually refers to programmes or 'what people outside the family do to enable and facilitate the learning that goes on in families' (Haggart, 2000, p. 3). Family is defined in its widest sense to mean a network of 'intergenerational relationships in which people care for each other' (Haggart 2000, p.5); this may mean parents/carers, grandparents, childminders, foster parents, other adults and older children.

1.1. Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy

FLLN provision has developed in the context of adult literacy and early childhood education provision (Hannon & Bird, in Wasik, 2004). In the 1970s, the UK government drew attention to the issues of adults with literacy and numeracy requirements. Provision was developed through the On the Move campaign, with classes taught by tutors funded by local education authorities, voluntary organisations, colleges and adult education institutions. In the 1980s, family literacy focused on school-initiated programmes and non-school reading groups (Harrison, in Morrow, 1995). The latter included the Family Reading Groups project and Bookstart. The first family reading groups involved parents, teachers, and school and public librarians Hannon and Bird describe the use of reading workshops, family reading groups and prescriptive approaches to parents listening to their children read during this period (in Wasik, 2004).

In 1993, the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) published *Parents and their children*. This study reported that 60% of children in the lowest reading attainment group at age ten had parents with low literacy scores, whereas only 2% had parents with high literacy scores (1993). In 1995, Bynner and Steedman published research findings that seemed to indicate that FLLN programmes were likely to produce positive improvements for parents and children in disadvantaged circumstances. A grant was made available for pilot projects, based on the American model of 'teach the mother, reach the child' of the 1980s, to be organised by the ALBSU (McLeod, 1993). Four demonstration programmes were run in England. The programmes worked with both parents with few or no qualifications in courses that lasted 96 hours over 12 weeks (Hannon & Bird, in Wasik, 2004). In the 1990s, Hannon developed a framework to conceptualise family literacy programmes, suggesting that families should provide children with four requirements – known as ORIM. The ORIM framework has been used in a number of programmes, including the ALBSU demonstration programmes (Hannon & Bird, in Wasik, 2004):

- O** *Opportunities* to read texts, to attempt writing, and to talk about literacy.
- R** *Recognition* of early literacy achievements, including the earliest sign of emergent literacy.
- I** *Interaction* with more proficient literacy users.
- M** *Models* of what it is to use written language in everyday family social practices, at work and in the community.

Family Literacy and Family Numeracy demonstration programmes were expanded with funding from the Standards Fund in the late 1990s, which came from the Department for Education and Skills to local authorities with support from the Basic Skills Agency. The monies were allocated on indices of deprivation. Other family learning activity with families drew on local authority budgets, while the Community Education Development Centre (now ContinYou) developed nationally recognised programmes such as SHARE, involving parents in their children's learning at primary and secondary school level.

In 2000, the LSC was set up to fund adult and community learning. The Department for Education and Skills sent Standards Fund money through the LSC. Consequently, the two traditions of 1) family literacy and family numeracy and 2) other family learning under the rubric of WFL, were maintained. Funding for family learning from the LSC commenced in 2002.

Family literacy and family numeracy were encompassed by the Skills for Life agenda, which focuses on the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults, of which parents and other primary carers are a key priority group. Skills for Life was a response to the Moser report on post-school basic skills. The report of the working group, *A Fresh Start – Improving Literacy and Numeracy* (1999), made recommendations for a national strategy and highlighted the scale of adult literacy need, that of seven million adults in England who were 'not functionally literate'. Key elements include targets of improving the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 adults by 2004, 1.5 million by 2007 and 2.25 million by 2010. As part of this national strategy, FLLN programmes have been part of a major drive to build capacity and improve standards.

FLLN programmes feature the following elements:

- a common learning process, known as a 'learning journey', ensuring that learners experience eight essential stages in their learning;
- learning outcomes mapped to a core curriculum in literacy, language and numeracy;
- training programmes for staff, linked to national standards;
- a body of guidance documents and resource materials for practitioners;
- a national test that recognises achievement;
- nationally provided training programmes for staff.

In 2004/5, for example, there was a range of LSC-funded FLLN programmes in existence (DfES, 2004b). They included taster courses and workshops of a one-off nature or short duration, such as a 'Play and Language Taster' where parents with few or no qualifications are encouraged to talk to and play with their babies and young children. This session sets out the importance of play in children's early language development. Introductory programmes such as 'Keeping up with the Children' introduce parents/carers to the ways in which their children are taught at school in the literacy hour and in maths lessons. Programmes such as this give parents the confidence to support their children and to develop their own literacy and numeracy skills. There are six short programmes for parents/carers of school-age children, to raise the literacy standards of both parents and children and help develop parents' skills in supporting the literacy development of their children. Finally, there are intensive programmes – again designed to help raise standards of literacy, numeracy and language of both parents/carers and children.

1.2. Wider Family Learning

In contrast, there has not been one single key government policy driving the development of WFL programmes; rather, it has developed in response to a number of policy initiatives and moves by other sectors to develop learning provision. For example, raising standards in schools, lifelong learning, widening participation and engaging 'hard to reach groups', the Every Child Matters: Change for Children (DfES 2004a) agenda encapsulated in the Children Act (2004), Extended Schools, Sure Start Children's Centres and Skills for Life have all shaped the development of WFL; while the Museums, Libraries and Archives sector has built upon its ability to provide informal learning opportunities to develop family learning opportunities. This has meant that WFL development has had greater flexibility and worked within broader contextual aims and objectives, such as promoting community cohesion. For example, in Scotland, family learning has developed in the context of community education and development contexts (NALA, 2004), to tackle deprivation and regenerate communities.

WFL programmes are distinguishable from FLLN programmes in that the former may have literacy and numeracy embedded within them, while they are the primary purpose of the latter (Lochrie, 2004). Many WFL programmes are developed locally and accredited through local Open College Networks (OCNs). There are, however, some notable national programmes, including the Workers' Education Association (WEA)'s 'Helping Your Child in School' and ContinYou's 'SHARE' programmes. The wide curricula offered to parents/carers in WFL are successful in engaging adults who may then progress to FLLN programmes, and vice versa. WFL programmes may include 'Family ICT', 'Storysacks', art and craft, languages, healthy eating and sports-themed activities.

SHARE, for example, is offered in early years, infant, junior, secondary, and other community settings. It is delivered by facilitators who have been trained in the use of the materials. Facilitators can support parents in a number of ways, including running meetings and/or structuring group sessions. Parents/carers are encouraged to work with their children at home using the SHARE materials, which complement classroom teaching and literacy and numeracy frameworks. Parents can gain accreditation for their work, as the programme is accredited by the OCN. Similarly, Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) supports parents as their children's first educators and enables parents to learn themselves. The Learning Together programme, developed over the last ten years, is a combination of activities including sharing books, singing, playing, listening and doing crafts. PEEP also uses the ORIM framework. PEEP is a flexible programme that can be adapted for use in a variety of settings and with different communities. There are a number of ways in which PEEP is used, including home visits made when babies are young to invite parents/carers to attend a group; home programmes for a one-to-one approach; and weekly PEEP group sessions.

Family learning in England has undergone a great deal of development from family reading groups in the 1970s to systematic funding of a wide range of programmes delivered through local authorities in a variety of community settings. LSC-funded programmes are complemented by successful national programmes such as SHARE. The numerous governmental policy strands that have encouraged the development of family learning have seen its growth in settings such as Children's Centres, Extended Schools, museums, libraries and archives, workplaces, prisons, colleges and community learning locations, funded through a variety of sources including, but not limited to, government funding via the LSC. The delivery of family learning, whether via formal programmes funded by the LSC or more informal learning opportunities in a variety of locations such as libraries, is reliant on family learning practitioners working with colleagues to draw on expertise and resources.

Family learning practitioners and services in England have been successful in engaging with a wide range of families. A number of local authority Family Learning Services in England have engaged with

Traveller families, for example. Development work with this diverse group may be appropriate since 'Travellers have a strong culture of informal and family learning, often engendered through oral and practical means that fit the patterns and needs of their lifestyle' (NIACE, 2006, p. 43). For example, in Derbyshire, a development worker employed by Read On – Write Away! (ROWA!), worked one day a week, building relationships with Traveller families on site. The ROWA! bus was parked on site for one morning each week and a course, 'Backpack', involved parents and children enjoying a wide range of activities, including listening, speaking, literacy and numeracy skills. To encourage the families to attend, a different activity or book was added to the backpack at each session. The parents on the Traveller site asked the development worker for further learning opportunities (NIACE, 2006). In Oxfordshire, Irish Traveller families from two Traveller sites attended monthly workshops offered in a local church hall. These women-only sessions, which were the preference of the learners, included topics such as learning styles, phonics and reading, making games and sharing books with children. Similarly, attendance at these initial workshops led to families joining FLLN sessions (NIACE, 2006).

Family learning is also used successfully to engage with asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. It can be used to illustrate to parents/carers the kinds of learning and teaching their children may experience in the UK. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) can be combined with family learning programmes to form Family ESOL. In Liverpool, for example, a bilingual family learning programme also links with classes in subjects such as sewing, cookery, gardening, crafts and ICT.

The flexibility of WFL enables it to be shaped to the requirements of local families and it can therefore attract minority ethnic families or Traveller families. The notion of parents/carers doing something to help their children successfully appeals to adults across cultural, religious and other socio-economic divisions; doing something for the family is seen as a legitimate activity. Parents/carers may then discover engagement in family learning stimulates a thirst for further learning. In recent years, the WFL approach has been used to develop taster sessions, activities and programmes in a wide range of curriculum and subject areas, including health, sport, music, drama, art, gardening, nature and wildlife, craft, cooking, play, child development, cultural awareness, dance, massage, photography, disability awareness, genealogy, first aid, ICTs, poetry, history, sign language and storytelling.

In England, the Campaign for Learning is funded to support Family Learning Week. Presently, this involves nine days of family focused learning activities run by organisations such as schools, health centres, libraries, museums, sports centres, community centres and colleges. Its aim is to attract families that would not normally be engaged in learning with informal, fun activities and then signpost them to further learning opportunities. Family Learning Week began as Family Learning Day in 1998 and its growth to nine days in 2006 is indicative of its popularity – in 2005, approximately 5,000 organisations were involved. The activities in Family Learning Week are also used to attract 'disadvantaged groups including those from deprived areas, with learning difficulties, some ethnic minorities and those with physical disabilities' (Campaign for Learning, 2006).

1.3. Concerns

The development of family learning is not without criticism.

- Family literacy education began with a 'transmission' model of literacy – from school to home. There was an assumption that children with low levels of literacy came from homes with poor literacy practices (Mace, 2003). Family literacy programmes were a means to transmit school literacy practices into the home, which was criticised as representing a 'deficit' approach (see, for example, Auerbach, in Taylor, 1997).

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- Arguably, family learning programmes which, while not aimed exclusively at women, are attended by women in the main (see, for example, Ofsted, 2000), could be perceived as both empowering for women and oppressive. To give mothers an opportunity to acquire other forms of literacy and skills may prove helpful in relation to the development of roles in the community, in commerce and in spheres outside the home. Conversely, family learning can serve to confirm women's role as carers of their children and places the responsibility for their educational development firmly on their shoulders. As Smythe and Isserlis argue, 'the work and power of institutions that promote family literacies policies and programmes, such as schools, government education departments and welfare agencies, are influenced by longstanding "mothering discourses" that represent culturally-bound beliefs and values surrounding who and what constitutes a good mother, a normal family and by extension, appropriate literacy and pedagogical practices in the home' (2002, p. 2).

2. EVIDENCE OF IMPROVEMENTS IN LITERACY FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

There is evidence to suggest that family literacy impacts positively upon the literacy (and other) skills of parents and children. In England, for example, evaluation of the ALBSU early family literacy programmes carried out by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Brooks et al., 1996) found that 91% of parents who completed the course improved their reading and writing skills, with 95% of these attaining accreditation of some form. The courses also impacted upon family behaviour, with families spending more time together with learning activities embedded in daily practices. Follow-up research with 154 parents who had participated in the family literacy programmes between two and three years previously found that over 85% of parents thought that their reading and writing skills continued to improve, while over half of the parents were involved with their children's school, accompanying outings, attending meetings and taking on roles such as literacy helpers (Brooks et al., 1997).

Focus group research with parents participating in family literacy and numeracy programmes in London, England, found a number of benefits for those who took part, including gains in confidence and independence, opportunities to meet people and to develop support networks, and parents having a better understanding of the needs of their children (Brassett-Grundy, 2002). Similarly, in New Zealand, an evaluation of the Manukau Family Literacy Programme found that there were positive impacts on adult participants (Ministry of Education, 2004). Prior to the programme, they were asked to consider whether they had difficulties with maths, reading, spelling, English or writing. Compared with the ratings at the end of the programmes, it was discovered that the average self-rating in literacy had risen from 4.6 to 7.9, while self-confidence had increased from 5.7 to 9.6 on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 represents 'considerable difficulty' and 10 represents 'no/few difficulties'. The adults also felt more confident about helping their children with homework, and their family relationships generally had improved as a result of effective discipline and understanding educational processes.

Similarly, there is research to suggest that family learning also impacts positively upon adults in relation to literacy skills, confidence and community involvement. An evaluation of the first two years of the SHARE programme (Bastiani, 1999) developed by ContinYou (formerly the Community Education Development Centre), which in England is categorised as WFL, identified a number of benefits, including improvements in the achievement and progress of many pupils and greater involvement between schools and parents. Parents' confidence increased and many developed strong relationships with other parents. An evaluation of the programme in 2005 found that the programme was most commonly used with parents of nursery and primary-aged children. Running groups on a weekly basis was the most popular mode of operation, with mothers as the family members most likely to attend, although fathers, grandparents, aunts, brothers, sisters and childminders had also attended.

A six-year study of the PEEP programme (Evangelou et al., 2005) of more than 600 children found that they made significantly greater progress in literacy related skills compared with children who were not involved in PEEP. In addition, there appeared to be gains in their self-esteem, with PEEP children rated higher on this by the age of five. The Enabling Parents project, which explored the impacts of the programme on parents/carers through comparing the experiences/attitudes of those who had taken part in the programme with a group that had not, found that the socio-economic status of the mothers improved, parents had a greater understanding of their child's literacy development, and participants felt able to return to some form of formal education (Sylva et al., 2004).

The NIACE evaluation of LSC-funded programmes across all local education authorities in England found that, in relation to WFL, a number of gains were reported for parents, including raised confidence, making new friends, sharing activities with their children, acquiring new skills and the development of a support network (NIACE, 2003). Similarly, FLLN learners reported gains in confidence. A NIACE evaluation of family learning in Lancashire, England, found that parents enjoyed focusing on their children as well as learning for themselves. In terms of impacts, adults attending FLLN and WFL both reported gains in confidence, however, a higher number of parents who had participated in FLLN stated that they felt more confident in undertaking further learning than those parents who had participated in WFL (Horne & Haggart, 2004). In relation to the wider community, parents attending family learning courses were more likely to become involved in their child's school and over half of parents nearing the end of their course had made friends through attending family learning courses. Family learning programme attendance was also related to community involvement, with 15% of parents who had taken part in family learning over a year ago indicating that they were more involved in their community.

The evidence that is available in relation to family learning in the UK suggests that programmes improve both children's and adults' levels of literacy and confidence. Furthermore, there are a number of wide-ranging benefits to families, including family members spending more time together and having better relationships with one another and with other families. Adults were more likely to become involved in their children's schools, volunteer or get involved in their communities as a result of family learning.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAMILY LEARNING OUTSIDE THE UK

Much international family learning provision has been influenced by developments in the USA. Outside of the UK, family literacy is the preferred term of usage and the majority of the programmes discussed in this section are certainly identifiable as family literacy even if they are not referred to as such in their titles. The following section considers family literacy and family learning in a number of countries.

3.1. USA

The best-known model for family literacy in the USA is the Kenan model, which developed from Parent and Child Education programmes piloted in 1986 (NALA, 2004). The programmes aimed to develop the skills and confidence of parents. Provision from the Kenan Trust was used to establish the National Center for Family Literacy in Kentucky. The Kenan model consists of four components:

- Adult Education;
- Children's Education;
- Parent and Child Together Time;
- Parent Time.

This model is used as the basis for a number of family literacy services in the USA. Parents taking part in the programme attend classes for three days a week over the course of a year. Benseman argues that it is this length and intensity that is crucial to the effectiveness of the programme (Benseman, in NALA, 2004). Even Start, the national programme introduced in 1989, was based on the Kenan model and integrated adult and parenting education with early childhood education for the most disadvantaged families. Intergenerational learning, or adults and children learning together, has been a key part of the programme and 'impresses upon parents that they are key to their children's education' (McKee & Rhett, in Morrow, 1995). The national evaluation of Even Start found that families benefited from intensive and continuous instruction. In the USA, family literacy services share a number of commonalities as a result of legislation, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Even Start), the Head Start Act, the Reading Excellence Act (Benseman, 2002).

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy, founded in 1989, has also influenced the development of family literacy in the USA. In the first five years of the foundation, 52 family literacy or reading programmes in 32 states were funded or extended. No single model was utilised, but the programmes were guided by the principle that the literacy behaviours and skills of adults can be improved by those adults helping their children.

Family literacy research in the USA has challenged a number of assumptions about the rationale for programmes and the home experiences of children with low literacy levels. For example, it has challenged the assumption that the homes of adults who are low income, minority ethnic and for whom English is a second language, are literacy impoverished. Rather, it became clear from a review of the evidence that often the opposite is true, as education and literacy are seen as ways to advance in society and that literacy is used for many different purposes (Auerbach, in Morrow, 1995). Auerbach also identified the value of situating literacy in relevant social contexts, such as health issues and the need to look at community practices as the basis for informing school practices. She argued that family literacy programmes should incorporate community cultural norms, existing literacy practices and social issues into the content of the curriculum.

A number of popular programme models also focused on adults learning how to share books with their children. Shared book reading has been a focus of research and practice in the USA for the last 20

years (Gadsden, in Morrow, 1995). For example, the Parents as Partners in Reading Programme developed from research that revealed that parents were often instructed by schoolteachers to read with their children, but did not know how or why this activity related to their children's development. Similarly, it emerged from conversations with teachers that some of their perceptions of the parents were unfounded and there was no appreciation that some parents struggled with reading. The programme was held in a community library with access to children's books, and parents received instruction on how to read and share books effectively with their children (Edwards, in Morrow, 1995).

3.2. Canada

There is no single programme of family learning used in Canada but there has been some work on developing programmes for First Nations communities¹. For example, Parents as Literacy Supporters (PALS) is a programme for parents to support their children's development and is under development to fit the needs of First Nations communities who have a very strong oral tradition and whose culture and identity is threatened by language loss. In Alberta, activity is guided by a Parent-Child Literacy Strategy initiated in 2000. The strategy aims to integrate adult literacy instruction with oral language development for young children in socially and economically deprived localities. The strategy recognises and respects the cultural and spiritual traditions of families and children and includes a distinct family literacy component for Aboriginal families. There are a number of family literacy programmes/models used in Alberta that, which are very similar to family learning programmes in the UK. Examples include 'Books for Babies', which encourages parents to read with their children, delivered through community libraries and health professionals; 'Storysacks', where a cloth bag is made containing props relating to the story inside, which is used in various settings to support reading, and 'Rhymes That Bind' where parents and their children enjoy rhymes, stories and songs, sometimes called 'Baby Rhyme Time' in England. The latter is particularly useful for adults with low or no literacy skills since a completely oral format is used.

3.3. Australia

In Australia, the Talk To A Literacy Learner (TTAL) programme is used in over 400 schools (NALA, 2004). It involves 16 two-hour workshops on topics that include learning, literacy and the role of parents. The programme was designed to focus on adults rather than children, enabling parents to reflect on their behaviours and the roles they assume when interacting with their children in relation to reading and writing (Cairney, 1992). The programme includes some joint sessions where parents work/learn with their children and some adult-only sessions. The project has three distinct stages over an 18-month period. The first stage involves working with parents to promote literacy development and make more use of literacy resources within their community and enable them to interact effectively with their children as they are engaged in literacy practices. Stage 2 involves workshops for parents from stage 1 who are interested in becoming community or school tutors; parents gain greater knowledge of literacy and work with children in the school. In stage 3, a number of parents are trained to act as community tutors.

This model would seem a useful one to adopt as adults initially attending the course are empowered to assist others in school and in the community. However, evaluatory research of TTAL has found that parents' self-confidence and esteem improves, but it does not explicitly refer to improvements in literacy.

¹ First Nations is a term used in Canada to denote the indigenous peoples of North America who are not Inuit or Métis.

3.4. New Zealand

Family literacy programmes in New Zealand have lacked the instructional intensity of programmes elsewhere (Benseman, 1992). The Pacific Islands School Community Parent Liaison (PISCPL) project, however, is a useful example of a scheme that fosters closer relationships between communities and schools. Officially launched by the ministry of education in 1996, evaluation of the project reveals a number of critical factors crucial to its success, including the appointment of a community liaison coordinator. The coordinators work with the local community, teachers and school principals. Their remit includes visiting parents at home, facilitating communication between schools and communities, encouraging parents to become involved in programmes and to attend events, and facilitating 'focussed interventions to grow parent capability so that they could help in school related activities e.g. reading programmes, homework centres' (2004, p. 10). In terms of encouraging student participation, learning and achievement, initiatives such as Polynesian clubs, which reflect cultural experiences such as song, dance, arts and crafts, are popular, as is the heightened visibility of cultural icons in schools. In relation to family learning, programmes include a parent reading tutor programme designed to help parents support their children's learning, and literacy programmes involving parents supporting their children.

In common with family learning development in the UK, the Manukau Family Literacy Programme in New Zealand has been influenced by the work of the National Center for Family Literacy in the USA. It is aimed at improving the literacy skills of both adults and children and subscribes to the Kenan model, with four components including various forms of Parent and Child Together Time. The ministry of education evaluation report of the programme revealed that the Manukau programme requires each parent to officially nominate one child to be the focus of the family literacy activities. The rationale for this includes administrative arrangements and an assumption that involving multiple children would somehow 'dilute' the programme's impact (ministry of education, 2004).

3.5. Ireland

According to the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in Ireland, family literacy programmes have developed with adult education, libraries, schools and community projects since the early 1990s. In relation to their development, partnership is a key feature of successful family literacy programmes, particularly with schools and community development projects. The Clare Family Learning Project, which began in 1994, focused on the importance of the home in early learning and how children and adults learn. In 2000, the project produced a Family Learning Resource Pack, which included a set of workbooks for parents, a resource guide and a 'photopak' of colour photos showing the various learning activities that take place in families. The photopak can be used to generate discussion and raise awareness of the opportunities to use literacy in everyday situations. Using 14 sessions, this became the basis for a 28–30 hour course that includes a range of topics such as everyday writing, rhymes, songs and poems, storytelling, sharing books, making a book and exploring the links between oral language in everyday living and the home (NALA, 2004).

3.6. South Africa

In Cape Town, South Africa, the Families Learning Together Project emerged from Parents and Schools Learning Clubs instigated by parents to address underachievement among young people. This involved family members sharing their experiences and culture with their children as a basis for literacy development, as seen in the example from New Zealand mentioned above. The project promotes literacy by involving family members in literacy and development activities. Workshops are utilised to give family members the opportunity to consider ways of working with their children on topics such as story reading and writing, family history and learning about what their children learn at

school. Joint child and adult activities include cooking as a means to connect home and school knowledge (NALA, 2004). Staff running Parents and Schools Learning Clubs discovered that many of the parents could not read or write English whereupon they translated materials into African languages with which the parents were familiar. This encouraged families to share knowledge of family trees, poems, totems, recipes, recreation and music, which were recorded by other family members who were literate (Mashishi, 2001, in Prinsloo, 2005). The parent workshops also used available resources such as scraps of material, junk mail and cereal boxes to produce learning and teaching aids (Mashishi & Cook, in DeBruin-Parecki & Krol-Sinclair, 2003).

The Storysacks idea used in Canada and in the UK was adapted for the Families Learning Together context. The families involved in Families Learning Together do not have books at home and involves families speaking a number of different languages. Staff ask parents to narrate folktales that they know to their children and encourage the children to write them down. Parents who do not know any folktales are invited to ask other family members to tell them stories that they could then share in the sessions. During the course of the project, staff found that some parents could make puppets and dolls and they were encouraged to train other parents in this skill using scraps of material and rubbish to make toys for their children. This dimension of the project has also highlighted to staff the importance of play for children and they have begun to create a toy library for parents to share with their children (Mashishi & Cook, in DeBruin-Parecki & Krol-Sinclair, 2003).

3.7. Uganda

Family Basic Education (FABE) in Uganda was started in 1997 by Literacy and Adult Basic Education (LABE), a local non-governmental organisation. FABE targets parents having low rates of literacy. The project attempts to make schools more challenging for children and find ways for parents to engage with the education system so that they appreciate the value of keeping their children in school. In helping parents acquire and improve their literacy skills, the programme contributes to community development. FABE has three objectives:

- to develop communication channels between parents and teachers so that there is a better flow of information on children's educational issues;
- to develop a learning programme that promotes the ability of parents to support their children's learning by acquiring literacy and numeracy skills;
- to increase the interactions between parents and children in relation to education and learning (ministry of gender, labour and social development, 2003).

Kisira (in Barton & Papen, 2005) notes that parents may in fact be grandparents and other child carers due to migration and loss of many parents to AIDS, reflecting the reality that 'the concept of family and daily life in families often embraces a larger, more extended family group' (p. 22). The LABE model in a Ugandan context differs from its English counterpart in scale and educational history of parents. Schoolteachers in Uganda, for example, may work with classes of 80 children and their parents may not have had any schooling (Mace, date unknown). However, Kisira notes that levels of literacy among parents differ; for example, in rural areas, parents/carers may have no or few literacy skills, but those in peri-urban areas may have basic literacy skills. These differences affect the rollout of the programme. In rural areas, parent-only sessions concentrate on acquiring reading, writing and numeracy skills while promoting parenting skills; in peri-urban areas, parents are equipped with the skills to teach and reinforce their children's skills.

3.8. Transnational

There are also a number of transnational family literacy programmes. For example, the Parental Empowerment for Family Literacy (PEFaL) project is a European Union funded project involving seven countries. Its objectives include the development of parents' literacy, numeracy and social skills at the same time as that of their children. The programmes identified in a review of the literature were almost overwhelmingly family literacy programmes. The project has utilised a top-down approach, with the coordinator in each participating institution deciding in which community the project will be run and with which families. Parent trainers are selected to run the programmes with 15–20 pairs of adults and children.

QualifFLY is a new European project on family literacy. Seven institutions from six countries are participating in the project, which is coordinated by the UNESCO Institute for Education.

3.9. Key features

This review of some of the more well-known and significant family literacy and family learning developments outside of the UK has revealed a number of commonalities due to the prominence of the American Kenan model. Most of the programmes identified in this review were family literacy focused: the exceptions are New Zealand and Canada, where some of the activity is of a kind that, in the UK, would be identifiable as more general family learning. Schools were the main settings for much of the international activity, although other community locations such as public libraries were used in the USA, Canada and Ireland. The cultural element of family literacy and family learning practice emerged as a strong feature in the examples identified in Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. As the programmes in Canada with First Nations communities and in New Zealand with Pacifica communities reveal, activities that reflect cultural experiences, including song, dance, storytelling, arts and crafts, are popular. The role of parents within international activity also varies; in different instances they are the initiators of programmes (South Africa), the facilitators (Australia) or, most commonly, the followers (USA, Canada, New Zealand, Ireland and Uganda). Similarly, as in the UK, it would seem that practice involves both joint sessions where adults and children learn together and single activities for adults.

The activities identified in this international review suggest that the important elements of family literacy and family learning programmes are primarily related to its cultural appropriateness. The role of a coordinator can be crucial to the success of a family learning programme in providing a link between communities and educational institutions, while programmes consisting of oral content are useful for parents/carers with no or low levels of literacy. Much of the practice – in the English-speaking world at least – would seem to be top-down in its approach and, while well intentioned, does not necessarily respond to the wishes, interests and ambitions of the communities it aims to help. Moreover, this review has also highlighted the different uses of terminology; for example, family literacy, parents as literacy supporters, school-community-parent liaison, family learning, families learning together and family basic education are all used to describe predominantly family literacy and family learning activities and programmes.

4. FEATURES OF FAMILY LEARNING THAT COULD BE CONSIDERED FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Consideration of the value of family learning for Sub-Saharan African contexts necessitates reflection on a number of pertinent issues, including communication, culture, gender, context, language and dialect, and gaining support and involvement from the local community.

Sub-Saharan Africa consists of 42 mainland countries and six island nations and is the poorest region in the world, characterised by inter-ethnic and political conflict. The absolute poverty in which many people live makes it hard to imagine how family learning, which has developed primarily in wealthy countries, could be utilised in poorer contexts. There are of course other issues that need to be considered when working with communities, as this section explores. However, the examples of family learning programmes in South Africa and Uganda indicate that there is some mileage in this approach, particularly when one considers that family learning can draw in women, for example, who make up the majority of the population without literacy, and tackle issues such as maternal health or HIV/AIDS in a geographical area that is home to more than 60% of all people living with HIV (World Bank, 2006).

Robinson-Pant, in her consideration of whether ideas and approaches can be transferred, suggests thinking why certain approaches were successful in their original context (in Barton & Papen, 2005). Barton and Papen, in their contemplation of linking literacy and numeracy courses in developing countries and the UK, emphasise that literacy and numeracy cannot exist in a vacuum but must be integrated with economic, social and political concerns. On the issue of transferability, they note that 'transfer is not only an issue of funding and support for programmes in the South ... it is also about transfer of ideas between policy, practice and research within and across countries' (2005, p. 10). Many developing societies are multilingual; what language or dialects do adults want to be taught in? As Wasik warns: 'Family home language also needs to be respected and family wishes related to the home language included as appropriate within the program' (Wasik, 2004, p. 621).

Gaining the trust of communities and their involvement was noted in a NALA review of family literacy in Ireland and is another important facet of effective community provision: 'Courses which are based on very specific models need to develop ways of responding to local strengths and needs if they are to be very effective' (NALA, 2004, p. 36). Programmes also need to be responsive to local communities; 'Family literacy programmes are developed through discussion with the participants. Listening to families is at the heart of the process' (NALA, 2004, p. 50). Similarly, Benseman notes, 'Participatory models of planning and needs assessment firstly help ensure that the programmes are driven (at least in part) by the learners themselves. In this way the teaching content incorporates the learners' culture and modes of expression' (Benseman, 2002, p. 6). In terms of building partnerships with parents, NALA suggests that parents are involved early on, understand why the project or programme is useful, find the project interesting and supportive, feel that it promotes the well-being of their children, and participate in the planning, organisation and review of the programme. Research in Uganda has highlighted, that the family may be broader than some Western perceptions (Kisira, in Barton & Papen, 2005).

In the wider context of community learning, research findings from a six-month study funded by the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC), which investigated community-focused provision for teaching adult literacy, language and numeracy, identified a number of commonalities among the communities they observed. They found that much community-focused provision was based upon a vision. This vision was frequently a manager's but was shared by tutors and the organisation. This strategic view of the provision could be shared in a mission statement and 'in relation to communities and learners, meant a readiness to find ways of fitting provision to learners rather than learners to provision' (Hannon et al., 2003, p. 16). Development

work was crucial and involved staff networking with community groups, talking to people in communities and finding out what they were interested in so that 'provision continued to meet those interests but also challenged learners to move on' (p. 16). Development work took time and this has implications for programme funding. Hannon et al. identified different levels of development work – strategic, semi-strategic and community. At a strategic level, staff served on management committees, learning partnerships or steering groups to get LLN issues on the agenda. At a semi-strategic level, staff made contact with other community service providers and organisations to see how an LLN strand might help the groups they served. At the community level, staff tried to identify the needs of local people in relation to learning. The authors note that this was not simply a case of staff asking learners what they want, since they may not know, rather, providers tended to offer a menu of opportunities and those that attracted interest were run.

Are programmes culturally appropriate? Wasik suggests that when working with families it is important to 'begin with an understanding of culture and diversity. Literacy and language are not independent of family traditions, values, beliefs and practices' (2004, p. 621). Similarly, it is important to find out what parents understand and believe about how their children learn and how they relate these to their own goals as parents:

Involving parents early in the process, asking them about their family practices, and discovering what they would value for themselves in the family literacy program are essential for bridging the home and school environments in ways that make families feel comfortable and welcomed into the educational setting.

(Wasik, 2004, p. 621)

Gender is another factor that has to be considered in the development of programmes. It is believed that there are more women than men without literacy skills – according to the recent EFA report on literacy, women account for 64% of the adults worldwide who cannot read or write with understanding (2006, p. 67), and family learning offers a useful tool to help women acquire literacy while their children improve their skills. This is particularly so when research and evaluation in the UK, for example, shows that it is generally women who participate in family learning (Ofsted, 2000). However, the acquisition of literacy skills can have negative consequences. Puchner, for example, notes that empowerment can damage family cohesion (1997). There are also other dynamics to consider, such as the relationships between young and old members of families and the community, when it is always assumed that literacy is a positive force. Literacy can have impacts such as younger people questioning the authority of community elders. It is also important to be clear about what participants will gain from family learning. Puchner cites the example of family literacy in four villages in Southern Mali in West Africa where, annually, Save the Children carried out recruitment for literacy classes. Her criticisms relate to the claims made for women's literacy such as family benefits without any explanation of the relationship between the two. Many of the women who had attended the classes felt that literacy would lead to financial gain through the form of increased revenue, which would benefit their families. In some classes, children came along and it was suggested that exposure to literacy may have increased their levels of literacy. There were issues around attendance and husbands who did not want their wives to attend. This was not necessarily because the husbands were not literate, as some literate husbands did not permit their wives to attend. The endorsement of the community leader was important in some husbands permitting their wives to attend. Puchner also felt that the impacts of acquiring literacy skills were limited, as the classes did not focus on any practical issues or applications of the skills. In the UK, there has been some attempt to address the gender imbalance in family learning in terms of the very small numbers of male carers who undertake family learning programmes. Some family learning services have developed 'Lads and Dads' or similar programmes using sports such as cricket and football to engage male carers in their children's learning (for

example Lancashire County Council has developed Dads and Lads; Dads and Bigger Lads; Dads and Lads Rugby and Howzat! Dads and Lads).

Lovett notes that education about the community, which involves dialogue with the community about the sorts of issues that classes might be organised around, and education with the community, where learning is aimed at problem solving and developing and empowering the group, are both appropriate considerations for the development of effective community based family learning provision (1997 in DfES 2001). The latter is characteristic of the participatory REFLECT approach to embed literacy in the social, cultural and political concerns of communities (Barton & Papen, 2005). REFLECT has evolved from practice in developing countries to place 'learners at the centre of their process' (Archer, in Barton & Papen, 2005, p. 53) and is now at an early stage of adaptation for use in the UK.

Appreciation of context is important if programmes are able truly to engage with the communities they are designed for and on behalf of:

Learners, both children and adults, internalise family traditions, beliefs and practices that have a direct bearing on their learning styles and the meanings they make of their educational experiences. Narrowing in too quickly on the educational needs of an adult or child without recognizing broader sociocultural contexts can hinder an individual's ability to relate to and become engaged in the learning process.

(Wasik, 2004, p. 621)

An appropriate learning environment was also considered important, and having people with the right skills to manage and provide the learning (Hannon et al., 2003). Similarly, Benseman highlights that Brooks et al.'s evaluations of the Basic Skills Agency programmes discovered that 'intensive courses taught by qualified literacy tutors and backed by additional help in the classroom clearly achieved the greatest impact on the learners' literacy skills' (p. 8). Giving learners the opportunity to progress on to other learning, while making sure that they progressed at their own pace, was another important aspect of delivery (Hannon et al., 2003).

A strong message that has emerged from the literature is that a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate and, while the above factors need to be considered, ultimately a family learning programme cannot be fleshed out until its location is determined upon. Elements of a family learning programme might include the following:

- Intergenerational learning – learning which involves individuals from a younger and older generation and sometimes more than two generations.
- Community consultation – as NALA recommends in relation to family literacy, programmes are 'developed through discussion with the participants. Listening to families is at the heart of the process' (2004, p. 50).
- Building partnerships with parents and schools (or other relevant community organisations) – this is important in order to get parents on board, to support the development of the programme and to take part in its organisation (NALA, 2004, p. 55).
- A menu of activities – to give parents a choice, as their needs may differ. This is also a useful approach to take if consultation with the community fails to establish a clear programme of value. A menu also provides means of progression on to other types of learning activity or programme. Similarly, taster sessions can be used to respond to the requirements of a particular family.

- Practical activities – literacy can be embedded within a programme that focuses on the development of specific skills, interests or activities.
- Resource(s) development that is culturally sensitive and contextualised in order to be relevant to the families using the resource(s).
- Community leader endorsement – research suggests that this is important in some communities in order for men and/or women to participate. Similarly, the programme requires organisational leadership and needs to be endorsed at senior management level.
- Tutors with appropriate skills – in the UK, qualified tutors deliver quality family learning. In addition, ‘staff need to be trained in participatory practices that include women and men, so that they can support learners by developing locally appropriate materials’ (Oxfam, 2005).
- Appreciation of how long the process to develop the programme and gain trust and build relationships with local communities may be. The shape of the programme over a long period of time needs to be envisaged.
- Resource commitment for development work – programme development and relationship building in the community.
- Practical issues – the location of the programme, access to facilities such as toilets, cultural awareness such as whether men and women will learn together, timings of the programme and how people will travel to it are all practical issues that need to be considered. Childcare is a key practical issue if adults are to be given the opportunity to have time to learn.
- Women-only or men-only sessions, if culturally appropriate. Although women make up the majority of those worldwide with low or no literacy skills it is important that family learning does not become perceived as the reserve of women and that men are included in family learning. Men-only and women-only family learning sessions might be one way to engage both men and women in family learning where mixed sessions are culturally inappropriate.
- Placing learners at the centre of the process. The REFLECT approach could be drawn upon, with families identifying the issues, preparing the agenda and their own learning materials as part of an empowering process to improve their communication methods (Archer, in Barton & Papen, 2005).
- Evaluation – to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and ways in which it can be improved. This factor needs to be built into a programme. Evaluation should not be seen as taking away from delivery money.

In light of these considerations, the key features of family learning models that could usefully be modified for Sub-Saharan contexts include the following:

- The flexibility of WFL with literacy or numeracy embedded in a programme that focuses on practical issues or skills. Evidence from the UK and internationally illustrates that a wide variety of subject areas is important in successfully engaging families. In the Sub-Saharan context, a WFL approach could be used to engage families in learning about maternal health, HIV/AIDS or other pertinent issues.
- WFL works well with parents/carers who are unfamiliar with learning or reluctant to take part, as it is flexible enough to respond to local need and interest, and there is a track record of work with disadvantaged groups such as Traveller families, migrants, refugees and asylum

seekers. Consultation with the community to offer a menu of opportunities, perhaps with small taster sessions, can be useful in attracting new learners (Hannon & Bird, in Wasik, 2004).

- The model of a Family Learning Day or Family Learning Week may be a useful in an African context to consider promoting the concept of families learning together to improve the literacy skills of both adults and children.
- A school-focused and based approach may be applicable in some communities and has already worked well in family learning programmes in Uganda and South Africa.
- In communities with parents/carers with no or low levels of literacy, approaches such as Storysacks, which focus on the oral literacy skills of adults, but gently introduce texts, books and linked reading and writing activities, may be appropriate.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has mapped the development of family learning in the UK over the last 20 years or more, the wider international context and evidence from the research in relation to its impacts on adults and children. Much family learning appears to be based on the Kenan model. A further study may wish to explore the extent to which other approaches have developed in some detail and how family learning practitioners in the UK and in Sub-Saharan Africa can work collaboratively to improve practice in both regions, perhaps through reporting on a number of detailed case studies.

A number of key considerations have emerged from this review of the literature in relation to effective family and community learning provision. Cultural appropriateness emerged as a fundamental consideration when planning and developing learning programmes, while the role of a coordinator in a community can be crucial to the success of a family learning programme in providing a link between communities and educational institutions. By far the most important element of a family learning programme in Sub-Saharan Africa would be that learning is intergenerational, involving family – however that family may be defined – from at least one younger and one older generation, and practice must be situated within families' cultures.

Research suggests that the more narrowly focused FLLN and more flexible WFL programmes provide benefits to families. Family learning provides a way to develop the skills of both children and adults in relation to literacy, language and numeracy, while helping to develop other skills, such as confidence. Family learning presents one practical approach to two of the six EFA goals (to expand early childhood care and education, and to expand adult literacy by 50% by 2015) and to the MDG to achieve universal primary education by 2015, since it focuses on both adults and children. In some circumstances, adult literacy may be more easily advanced where it is linked with early childhood education and, conversely, early childhood education is better promoted in situations where it is linked with parental learning. Family learning may be used to engage both men and women in learning to promote HIV/AIDS awareness and education, an understanding of child development and the importance of parental involvement in children's education and for women, specifically, to promote maternal health.

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