

Empowering Parents

Families as the foundation of a learning society

by Titus Alexander 1997



Parenting Education and Support Forum

The Parenting Education and Support Forum brings together those concerned with or working in the field of preparation, education and support for parents. It promotes and maintains a high profile for parenting education and support, where education means learning in the fullest sense, of growing in knowledge, skills, understanding and personal development. The Forum presses for effective policies and practice at local and national level with the aim of serving the best interests of all children and their families.

National Children's Bureau

The National Children's Bureau was established as a registered charity in 1963. Our purpose is to identify and to promote the interests of all children and young people and to improve their status in a diverse society.

We work closely with professionals and policy makers to improve the lives of all children but especially young children, those affected by family instability, children with special needs or disabilities and those suffering the effects of poverty and deprivation.

We collect and disseminate information about children and promote good practice in children's services through research, policy and practice development, publications, seminars, training and an extensive library and information service.

The Bureau works in partnership with Children in Scotland and Children in Wales.

Empowering parents

Introduction

Families are the most important place of learning in the world. If we really understand what this means, we will revolutionise the way in which we organise education, public services and the economy. Instead of treating family life as a cost, we would treat it as our most important investment for the future.

For better or worse, parents are the most influential educators in most people's lives. Yet we spend very little time or money supporting parents. Instead, parents are blamed when things go wrong and huge amounts of money are spent on coping with the consequences of families living under stress.

This report brings together views from over one thousand parents and professionals across the country who looked at ways of supporting families as a place of learning. Fifteen seminars and conferences were held between 2 October 1996 and 16 March 1997 as part of the European Year of Life Long Learning. The series was organised by the Parenting Education and Support Forum in partnership with local agencies across the country, including two in Scotland, one in Wales and four in London.

Each seminar brought together parents and professionals who work with families to share experiences, strengthen links and develop an agenda for action. Half the seminars were high profile events, involving parents, local MPs, chief executives and senior staff from Education, Social Services, Health and other agencies. Most seminars were planned by a local inter-agency group, with the lead taken by Education in nine cases (mainly community education). Social Services and Health lead two each and voluntary organisations one.

Each seminar had a different focus, depending on local needs and circumstances. These included parenting adolescents, literacy, health, schools, family education and parenting programmes. All fifteen explored the importance of families as a place of learning, parents as children's first educator, family learning as a foundation for lifelong learning and citizenship, and the need for better inter-agency cooperation to support parents and children. In many cases this was the first time these agencies had come together to discuss these issues.

All seminars included both plenary presentations and working groups. Most were held over a full day. In over half the participants sat in groups of five to twelve people round a table in order to increase communication. As one parent said 'I never thought I had as much to say as teachers. I thought they'd talk at me.' The level of participation by parents and paid staff working together on equal terms was one of the most rewarding feature of the seminar series. Many people said 'We ought to have more events like this. There is so much to learn.'

In over half the seminars, participants used the '[Dialogue](#)' exercise to discuss responsibilities for learning at home and school or nursery. Over a third constructed an 'issues map' which was used to identify topics for workshops and the action programme. Other seminars held workshops on pre-selected issues with presentations on particular aspects of work with parents.

All produced a long list of recommendations, which in many cases are being taken to elected members and decision making bodies for action. Several seminars have led to the formation or strengthening of a local parenting education forum.

Recommendations for action

Some of the most common recommendations were:

- ≈ similar events should be held regularly;
- ≈ improve inter-agency working, networking and training;
- ≈ promote the availability and positive image of parenting programmes;
- ≈ strengthen partnerships with parents in school and nursery education;
- ≈ provide accessible advice and support through family centres and one-stop shops;
- ≈ produce local directories of services for parents;
- ≈ empower parents.

This report presents a summary of the main points made at each seminar. Yet the most important feature is not the content of each seminar, important as this is, but the dialogue between parents and professional staff, and between staff from many different agencies which work with parents and children. This dialogue is the beginning of an entirely new sector of education, emerging

spontaneously in many different forms throughout the country - family learning: Key Stage Fun as it is called by some, Foundation Stage by others.

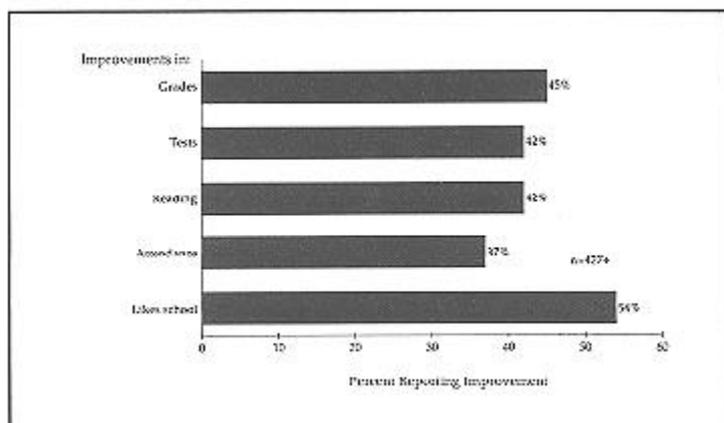
Family learning is as old as family life itself. What is new is the growing recognition that parents need help and support in the increasingly complex responsibilities of bringing up children in the 21st century. The range and variety of support for families is wide - including statutory provision for children or parents with special needs, health visitors, pre-schools and home-school partnerships to parenting education programmes run by parents for parents. This emerging education sector is largely run by voluntary organisations, like Home Start, Parent Network and groups using materials produced by the Family Caring Trust. Among statutory services, the pioneers are often adult and community education, or health visitors and health promotion teams, working with libraries, probation services and other agencies. Institutional barriers are breaking down people reach out to empower parents as the first and most enduring educators in our lives. The challenge now is to transform the way in which institutions work so that inter-agency planning in partnership with parents becomes the norm, not the exception.

Parents' perspective

When professionals talk about working with parents, they usually mean, 'How can we get parents to help us?', by reading with their children at home, promoting healthy lifestyles or preventing crime. These are worthwhile aims, but professionals would have more success if they recognised parents as the most important agent in a child's life and saw their role as supporting parents. Parents, not health professionals, carry the primary responsibility for child health; parents, not teachers, are a child's most important educator; parents, much more than churches or the criminal justice system, can influence drug taking and criminal behaviour among young people. Of course peer pressure, television and other agencies play a part in this, but parents are often the most powerful influence over a child's development. Parents get a great deal of blame when things go wrong, yet there is very little support available to help them in what is the most important and responsible job most people ever take on in their lives.

There is overwhelming evidence for the importance of families as a place of learning. Children spend less than 15 per cent of waking time in school between birth and school leaving age, of which about five per cent is in the playground or between lessons. It is therefore not surprising that many studies show that home background has more influence on educational attainment than school, although school does make a difference. One celebrated study suggests that we develop about 40 per cent of our learning ability by the age of four and 80 per cent by eight years old. Tom Sticht demonstrated the close correlation between mothers' levels of education and children's attainment in school (see Fig. 1). This evidence persuaded the government to fund the Family Literacy Programme, which has itself shown impressive success. What we need is a campaign to ensure that all parents are encouraged to learn and support their children's learning.

Figure 1: The beneficial influence of women's education programmes for their children



© Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, 1993

Not all family learning is positive. Some 750,000 children suffer long-term trauma due to domestic violence, over 32,000 children are on the Child Protection Register and some 7,000 cases of sexual abuse are reported each year. Mental illness among children and adolescents is rising. Thousands of adults seek counselling or therapy to deal with difficult or damaging experiences in childhood.

Parenting education and support groups, like Parent Link or the Family Caring Trust, can help parents communicate better with their children and resolve problems before they become major difficulties. Communication within families is the foundation for communication throughout society. Being a parent is not easy, yet there is almost no preparation and no training available for parents. We need to recognise that parenting is a demanding job which takes skill and that parenting skills can be learnt.

Partnerships between home and school

The importance of parental involvement for educational attainment means that schools need to see their partnership with parents as *equally* important as teaching children. The role of school is to extend and enhance learning which takes place at home; otherwise there will be a constant tension between home and school learning. Yet very few teacher training courses include work with parents and education budgets rarely allow for the extra time it takes. Ideally every school would have a whole-school policy for working with families and sufficient staff time to work with parents - the equivalent of half a day a fortnight for each class.

Relationships between home and school start as soon as parents begin to think about their child's education, which can start before a child is born. First impressions are lasting impressions, so it is essential to give all parents a positive welcome and enable them to feel involved in school. If parents get a negative first impression, the school has to work hard to overcome it every time they make contact with that parent. First impressions start long before parents even come into contact with the school, because the community grapevine is very powerful. If the school has a positive relationship with parents, parents will expect to be involved before their child starts school. Schools can start this process by working with health visitors, pre-schools and other agencies in the local area to become a focus for the community.

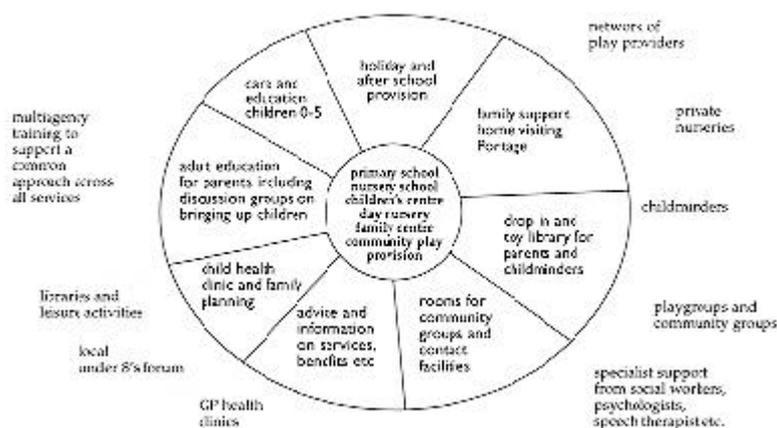
Class meetings have enormous potential as a basis for parental involvement. Regular meetings of all parents and the class teacher or form tutor, meeting once or twice a term are an opportunity

for parents to get an overview of the curriculum, to discuss ways of helping their children, to address issues affecting the class or school, and to enable parents to get to know each other. Class meetings are very common on the continent, where each class also elects two representatives, one female and male, to a parents council for the whole school. Class meetings are probably one of the main reasons why the average level of education is much better on the continent, because they ensure that parents help children carry on learning outside school.

Home learning activities are a way in which parents and children can learn together, whether through reading books or maths activities, such as IMPACT schemes. The key feature of these schemes is that children take home an activity which they have to explain to an adult or older child and involve them in it.

Schools have a great deal of potential as a community focus for family support services, as suggested by the National Children's Bureau in *Championing Children* (see Fig. 2). Schools, libraries and family centres could become sophisticated centres for lifelong learning, offering opportunities for people of all ages.

Figure 2: Support for families with young children: a locally based model



© Manchester City Council. Taken from Rea Price, J and Pugh, G (1995) *Championing Children*. Manchester City Council

Inter-agency partnerships

At a city or county level it is vitally important for all family support services to work together and develop coherent provision for children and parents. Children's Services Plans offer an opportunity for joint planning. Social Service departments are taking a lead on these plans, but other agencies are also involved. Parenting education and parent should be an important part of these plans to prevent everyday family problems from become more serious. To be effective, all agencies would work together with community organisations to produce joint plans for working in partnership with parents and children. In Britain, conflicting legislation, divergent professional traditions and distinct institutional cultures make it very difficult for agencies to work together. But all agencies have a lot to learn from each other and much to gain from working together.

From my experience, effective joint work needs:

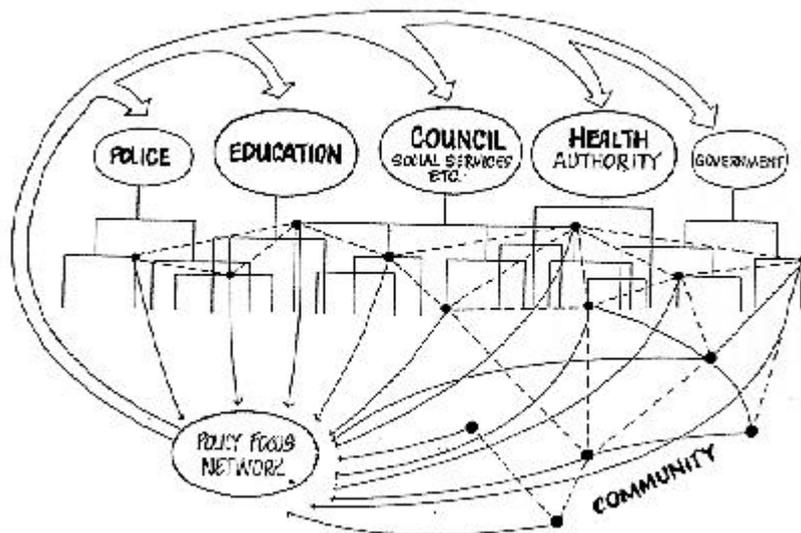
- ≠ a **common purpose**. This means identifying needs and opportunities for joint work, which depends on community knowledge. Involving parents and local communities is therefore essential for success;
- ≠ **mutual respect, trust and understanding** to develop joint ownership. This takes time to develop and requires:
- ≠ **communication and information sharing**;
- ≠ **clarity of structure and process**, so that people need to know who is responsible for what and where decision making power lies;
- ≠ **precise proposals** so that people are really clear about what is wanted, and who is doing what;
- ≠ **influential champions**: active support from people in senior positions can make things happen. Everyone can be an influential champion for someone, including parents for children;
- ≠ **alliances** across departmental boundaries;
- ≠ **shared activities**: joint events, training and funding for provision, such as family centres, parenting education workers and family learning projects;
- ≠ **successful outcomes**, which are celebrated visibly and publicly to reward all those involved;
- ≠ building achievements into **policy and practice**.

Many examples of good practice depend on the good will and skill of an individual teacher, social worker or council officer, which are then lost when that person leaves, unless it is built into the overall policy and practice of the organisation.

One way of creating a coherent policy for families is to form policy-focused networks through which parents and professionals can share experiences and develop joint plans for supporting parents and children, which would then be carried out through all agencies (see Fig. 3). This approach is being developed in Washington State in the USA, where every neighbourhood of 20 - 40,000 people has a community network which draws up joint plans for the area. At State level all agencies and local networks are represented on a Family Policy Forum, which draws up joint policies for all agencies.

In Britain we also need a holistic approach to services which work with families and to recognise that parents are the most important and lasting agents in the care, education, health and well-being of children. Fragmented services create fragmented communities and fragmented people. We all have a responsibility for building links between agencies and supporting families as places of learning, because children are our future and learning within the family is the foundation on which that future grows.

Figure 3: A network for improving family services



Seminar reports

Putting Parenting on the Agenda

Leicester, 2 and 5 October 1996

Organiser: Christine Pickering, Family Life Officer, Leicester Family Life Committee

This seminar on 2 October was introduced by the Bishop of Leicester, addressed by Erica De'Ath, National StepFamily Association, and attended by 80 people. Lynette Paul, of the Mothers' Union, spoke on 5 October, with 50 people in attendance, with over 100 at both days.

Themes which arose included:

- ≈ the importance of reaching out to and involving parents from different communities, particularly speakers of other languages;
- ≈ the development of a unitary child care service involving different agencies and the creation of a centre of excellence for early years;
- ≈ the valuable role of Family Aids who support families in their homes;
- ≈ the essential role of voluntary organisations and the importance of links with statutory services;
- ≈ the need to provide coordinated support services for divorcing couples, including -
 - a 'one stop' family and divorce centre for families going through change;
 - qualified counselling for parents and children;
 - accessible information;

- support for supporters;

- ≠ ways of overcoming isolation felt by parents and building a focus for a sense of community;
- ≠ the need to empower parents and to give them praise, less criticism;
- ≠ support for parents of adolescents;
- ≠ the need to make parents welcome in school and involve them as effective partners.

The seminar is being followed up by the formation of a Leicestershire Parenting Network.

Working Together: Families in a learning society

South Lanarkshire, 22 October 1996

Organiser: Cathie Cox, Community Education

The seminar was opened by Maggi Allen, Director of Education, and facilitated by Titus Alexander in the Banqueting Suite of the Council. It was attended by 118 people from a wide range of statutory and voluntary services, including about 70 parent users of different services. Workshop leaders came from Housing, the Health Board, New Routes to Jobs, Training and Enterprise, Psychological Services, and Special Needs Support Libraries. Participants played the Dialogue game about responsibilities for learning at home and school, then constructed an issues map and held workshops on the main issues.

The priorities identified by participants were, in order of importance:

- ≠ political will to invest in children was by far the most important;
- ≠ more pre-five education;
- ≠ help with behaviour management;
- ≠ more child care, including out-of-school care;
- ≠ economic issues, such as employment, poverty and housing;
- ≠ adult education;
- ≠ drug awareness for parents;
- ≠ support for special needs;
- ≠ security/safety in schools.

Other issues identified included ongoing communication with parents, anti-bullying, support for single parents, information and advice about homework, health, housing and rural transport.

Specific action points from the workshops included the need for:

- ≠ more and better communication, particularly *listening*;
- ≠ secure funding for family learning;
- ≠ advice on how parents can support their children's learning and behaviour;
- ≠ early involvement of parents in education early, through home visits;
- ≠ improved access for parents in schools, particularly in secondary;
- ≠ better liaison between phases of education, particularly into secondary and round the curriculum;
- ≠ involvement of grandparents.

A report from the seminar was presented to elected members and is being followed up by the community education service.

Supporting Parents in Clackmannanshire

Alloa, 31 October 1996

Organiser: John Rogers, Social Worker, Housing and Advice Services

The seminar was opened by Bob Allen, Chief Executive, and addressed by Martin O'Neill, MP. Speakers included John Rogers on Mellow Parenting, Titus Alexander on family learning and Sheila Inglis of Children in Scotland, on parenting today: problems, policies and practices. Bobbie Dickie, Director of Housing and Advice Services, summarised the conclusions at the end. It was attended by 35 parents and 68 staff from education (26) health (three), housing and social services (23) and the voluntary sector (16).

Bob Allen put the issue in the context of children's rights, parents' responsibilities and civic values. He drew attention to the Council's Community Stakeholding Strategy, which commits it to being accessible, accountable and open to the organised community and individual citizen.

Martin O'Neill said emotional deprivation is just as important as economic deprivation and called for more facilities such as family centres and nursery education for all three and four year olds, where parents wanted it. Parents can become more involved in education by breaking down institutional barriers. 'We need to be more innovative in the ways we involve parents, more relaxed and less formal. Holding meetings in a hotel or bar, for example, might encourage more to come along. Parents also need information to help them solve problems themselves.' He also stressed the need to help families out of poverty. Unemployment was at an intolerable level and families need a handout *and* a hand up to break out of poverty. He concluded by saying that there would be no additional money under a Labour government, but the priorities would change. In particular, there was a need to establish a sense of partnership to support families. The community could take a lead in setting priorities and he welcomed suggestions for how this could be taken forward.

John Rogers described the Mellow Parenting programme, which is based on the work of Newpin and has been running since 1990. It runs for 14 weeks and is about relationships rather than skills. Each session takes a whole day, starting with discussion, then a shared lunch followed by an activity. It involves use of video to film activities at home. Other developments include men's courses in parenting and in health, an eight-week course on Getting Through the Day using the Carlton video of the same name, and courses for couples, teenagers and professionals working together.

Sheila Inglis drew attention to the fact that families in Scotland were getting smaller, older and poorer. The proportion of children under 16 living in families dependent on income support has increased 50 per cent since 1983, to almost a third of all children. People living in poverty are likely to experience low self-esteem, feelings of powerlessness, guilt and stigma. These effects make it difficult to be a 'good enough parent'. At the same time, recent legislation has put more emphasis on parental responsibilities and reduced the statutory duty to provide for the needs of children. Lack of coordination of family policy at the highest level has also had a damaging knock-on effect on services for families at all levels.

A study by the Family Policy Studies Centre showed that a fifth of all parents said they had looked for help with some problem with a child. Health (27 per cent) and behavioural (18 per cent) problems were most frequent. In most cases (44 per cent) parents turned to medical professionals, notably GPs (26 per cent). Other sources of help were teachers (18 per cent), family or friends (16 per cent), and social services (eight per cent). In-depth interviews of a small sample showed that eight out of ten were worried about their child's behaviour and that most parents knew little about their responsibilities as parents. As one said, 'I think being a parent is one of the hardest things because you don't know - it's just like trial and error and you usually make more errors than anything else.' Parents often blamed themselves.

The implications of this survey are that

- ≠ mainstream services should treat parents in a non-stigmatised way;
- ≠ non-stigmatised advice and referral should be available;
- ≠ parents need accessible information on sources of help and support;

Conclusion

Key themes from all workshops were the need for:

- ≠ political will to provide resources to support all parents;
- ≠ valuing the important role of being a parent;
- ≠ communication between agencies;
- ≠ joint training across sectors;
- ≠ better communication with parents, particularly between parents and teachers;
- ≠ clear, accessible information for parents and professionals, including a one-stop shop;
- ≠ flexibility of services, accessible to parents and responsive to changing needs.

The Chief Executive, with councillor support, pledged to take the lead by:

- ≠ encouraging parental involvement in decision making;
- ≠ creating a forum (community lunch) for front-line staff from all disciplines to share skills and ideas;
- ≠ establishing a parent forum, with resources for parents to attend;
- ≠ producing a filofax for workers with up-to-date information on services;
- ≠ establishing a Director of Parent Support Services who would be available throughout the community.

Putting Parenting on the Agenda

Malton, North Yorkshire, 1 November 1996,

Organiser: Jo Pitt, A Job For Life, a church and community parenting skills project

The day aimed to explore the need for a comprehensive approach to local parenting education and support. It was attended by 30 people, including five parents who had experienced the parenting courses, seven members of A Job For Life, four community education workers and representatives from NCT, La Leche, Family Mediation, the Health Authority, a health visitor, local churches, Radio York, CVS, and Fair Play for Kids.

Jo Pitt, organiser of A Job for Life, described the project as part of an enormous jigsaw. It started three years ago and has involved over 200 parents on 24 courses. It is funded from ten different sources and is therefore not owned by any one agency. Recruitment is by word of mouth, with health visitors playing a key role. Courses are run by parents, health visitors and other volunteers who are not 'experts'. They are mainly run in parents' homes with groups of five or six - described as 'Tupperware teaching'. Courses are free, with a charge for materials produced by the Family Caring Trust.

The top issues identified by the seminar, in order of priority, were the need to:

- ≠ 'normalise' parenting courses and make them available for all;
- ≠ set up a parents forum;
- ≠ get a commitment to funding for free courses and crèche;
- ≠ have positive images of parenting courses and programmes in the media;
- ≠ identify and overcome barriers to participation;
- ≠ improve the status of parents, including fathers;
- ≠ develop a holistic approach to health, including counselling;
- ≠ improve relationships between parents and schools.

Recommendations included the need for:

- ≠ an inter-agency strategy for supporting parents and children, drawing on the model of Drug Action Teams and Forums established by the government;
- ≠ empowering parents by people 'in authority' showing confidence in parents to do things;
- ≠ involving users in decisions about health and other services;
- ≠ a professional advertising campaign to promote parenting programmes;
- ≠ use television soaps to promote and raise status of parenting;
- ≠ promote as a support group with a social element, rather than as a course;
- ≠ crèche facilities;
- ≠ a parents forum that comes from parents and is supported by professionals;
- ≠ a minister for parents and greater political will.

'Parents should be *encouraged and praised* rather than *blamed*.' The seminar emphasised the importance of work in this field being done from the ground up, that a leader was employed by

users and not beholden to one group or organisation. They did not want to see this work being taken over by professionals, but professionals can help to give confidence and enable parents to act. They wanted *parents* to make the decisions.

Families: The foundation of a learning society

Swansea, 8 November 1996

Organiser: Rhoslyn Griffiths, NIACE Cymru in partnership with Swansea Community Education Service

The seminar was opened by Councillor Martin Caton. Titus Alexander gave an overview and Alwyn Morgan described how to raise the self-esteem and aspirations of parents. Local perspectives were presented by Roger Lewis, a headteacher, Sandy Mather, Health Promotion Unit, and Jennifer Twelvetrees, Council for Voluntary Service. It was attended by 75 people

including the Director of Education, parents, community groups, ethnic minorities, teachers and staff from the County Corporate Strategies Unit, Swansea College, libraries, community safety, English as an additional language, special needs services, Racial Equality Council, University of Wales, Health Service Trusts, family centres and Fire Service.

Alwyn Morgan presented many practical strategies for creating partnership with parents (see Fig. 4). No parents are apathetic about their children's education, but we need to look at the invisible barriers which exclude. Work with parents is powerful. It changes lives and raises self-esteem. Parents, schools and all agencies have a common goal in improving the quality of life.

Examples of ways of involving parents include:

- ≠ a Good Start Club, involving parents and children in different activities in school every week;
- ≠ adult education classes called 'Help! I'm a Parent';
- ≠ five-week taster courses for parents in primary schools, run by Hull College, which have been done by ten thousand parents;
- ≠ Basic Skills classes which involve parents in rewriting the school brochure;
- ≠ living history courses, interviewing older people;
- ≠ family fun activities in secondary schools;
- ≠ parents as co-educators, getting dialogue going in every home, such as asking parents to teach their child a skill.

Figure 4: Home-school liaison strategy



One widowed father taught his child fishing and wrote 'thank you for giving me my family back'.

Inter-agency work is also essential. Whenever you do something new, don't do it on your own but combine efforts and involve other agencies. Sharing information, agreeing priorities, co-ordinating and collaborating enable everyone to be more effective.

Sandy Mather described how she works strategically with other agencies and acts as a catalyst to set up projects through the Health Promoting Schools Network. Health promotion is moving from a topic-based approach (such as campaigns on eating, exercise or smoking) to a 'settings'-based approach, tackling health in the workplace, schools and family.

Roger Lewis said that the starting point for his school was to ask 'what can we do for parents?'. This had led to a family learning programme that enabled parents and children to enjoy themselves together. Parents have to be part of the fabric of the school.

Jennifer Twelvetrees spoke about volunteers and community activities as part of a learning community. Family learning was spontaneous, flexible and driven by people's interests. She gave the example of a community mediation centre which helps people develop active listening skills and deal with bullying.

The working groups came up with a wide range of action points, including the need for:

- ≈ time and space for people working in different agencies to share experiences and work together;
- ≈ the City and County to encourage and support schools developing whole school policies for work with parents;
- ≈ a campaign to inform parents of their importance for children's learning;
- ≈ coaching for parents on how to help their children learn;
- ≈ family education days to bring children and adults together, especially fathers and sons;
- ≈ initial teacher training on work with parents;

Parenting Programmes: The Way Forward

Oxford, 22 November 1996

Organiser: Chris Sewell, Community Education, Oxfordshire County Council

The conference was opened by Cllr David Buckle, Chair of Oxfordshire County Council and included a talk by Titus Alexander, a presentation on local parenting programmes and workshops about different projects for parents. It was chaired by Teresa Smith from the School of Applied Social Studies and Social Research at Oxford University. It was attended by 83 people, including parents, councillors, health visitors, youth workers, teachers, pre-school workers, education officers, education psychologists, adult educators, social workers, family centres, a probation officer, prison visitor, police officer and Oxford Safer Cities.

Oxfordshire's Pegasus Youth Theatre gave a dramatic, powerful and moving presentation about what children really want. They reminded us that children need love, order, protection, food, understanding, stimulation, guidance and the ability to make their own choices. They need an explanation when their parents separate. They want to be proud of their parents and their parents to be proud of them, and most of all they want space to be themselves.

Selina Locke described what she had gained from taking part in a parenting programme. The hardest part was learning about herself, but it enabled her to respect and understand herself, her children and other people. She said that courses like this should be available at an early stage to everyone, with no stigma attached and with more follow-up.

A survey of local parenting programmes prior to the day identified 21 programmes run by the Health Service, Community Education, Social Services, schools, family centres, churches and voluntary organisations, involving 3,850 parents. The largest provider was the Preparation for Parenthood Programme at the John Radcliffe Hospital, where over 3,000 parents take part each year. Most other programmes used Family Caring Trust materials and are aimed at parents in general. A smaller but significant number were for parents whose children had pronounced difficulties. Most focused on parents of young children and only two were for parents of teenagers.

Key points from the conference workshops were:

- ≠ partnerships and inter-agency collaboration should underlie our work;
- ≠ parents are partners too;
- ≠ inter-agency coordination is essential at all levels;
- ≠ parenting programmes can provide preventative support and should operate within an overall inter-agency family support strategy;
- ≠ parenting programmes lie on a continuum of education and support that must include follow-up, self-help and empowerment;
- ≠ resources are scarce and should be shared;
- ≠ parents can learn through a variety of contexts, all of which need support;
- ≠ parenting programmes should promote a family-friendly culture.

The conference produced the following Action Points for Oxfordshire:

- ≠ promote good practice, increasing both provision and access across the age range, valuing diversity and choice, targeting fathers, providing childcare and developing guidelines;
- ≠ develop whole school and community approaches to parenting;
- ≠ create an independent County Forum linked to local networks for information and networking;
- ≠ develop training and accreditation for potential and existing facilitators;
- ≠ secure resources and funding;
- ≠ ensure evaluation of programmes to increase evidence of effectiveness, including a long-term longitudinal evaluation.

Teresa Smith concluded by emphasising the importance of parenting and the need to listen to children and parents. There are many routes into parenting education, through many different agencies. Programmes need to be available in local venues where parents naturally go, such as schools and health centres. Inter-agency support is crucial to developing family support, and prevention through family support is the most caring and cost-effective way of reducing the numbers of children and families at risk.

The local forum is actively taking the recommendations forward.

Literacy 2000: Families and the foundations of a learning society

Lewisham, 28 November 1996

Organiser: Karen Feeney, Director, Literacy 2000

The conference was chaired by Frances Magee, Chief Adviser. It was opened by Jim Dowd MP, and closed by Bridgett Prentice MP. Joan Ruddock MP and Richard Balf MEP, both sent their apologies and best wishes. It was addressed by Barry Quirk, Chief Executive, Sue De'Ath, a Lewisham parent, Althea Efunshile, Director of Education and Community Affairs, Titus Alexander, Karen Feeney, Director of Lewisham 2000, and Cllr Colin Haste, Vice-chair of Education. It was attended by about 100 parents, councillors and staff from the Health Service, Youth Services, DfEE, Poets in Education, Early Years Service, Supplementary schools, Social Services, Portage, schools, the Advisory Service, voluntary organisations and the National Literacy Trust.

Jim Dowd, MP for Lewisham West, said family learning is a significant issue which for the cohesiveness of society. Families have a key role in promoting literacy, security and confidence for learning. The education system relies on families to encourage and help children learn. The Labour Party recently published two documents on Parenting and Early Excellence which emphasise the importance of families.

Knowledge and the ability to acquire information are the key to economic prosperity and opportunity. Families provide the basis for learning as well as social stability and cohesion. We therefore need to look at what kind of support we provide families, particularly for children in the pre-school years.

Barry Quirk, Chief Executive, said Lewisham has considerable social stress and is officially ranked among the two per cent most deprived boroughs in the country. Its 55,000 black people experience racial injustice, particularly in the labour market. It has the highest proportion of lone parents in London. 485 children are looked after by the council. 300 children of homeless families live in temporary accommodation. Nearly 200 children leave school without any qualifications every year. At the same time, Lewisham has many advantages. With 43 different languages spoken in the borough, it can relate to a global world. The council has a belief in achievement and in being positive.

Many employers see work-readiness and interpersonal skills as the qualifications most lacking. There are no exams in these skills, which are learnt in the family, together with a sense of self, self-belief, sociability, respect for others, honesty and love of truth.

Sue De'Ath described the pleasure, achievement and pride she gained from participating in classes at Monson school, where she got an RSA certificate in literacy, learnt calligraphy, poetry and book-making. The Parents' Group produced a magazine called Monson Matters and was featured in the local paper. She became a helper in school. Her most important task is helping children build up confidence in their abilities. As one boy said after working with Sue, 'I didn't know how much fun reading could be.' Sue displayed several books she had produced for her children and described how she became a parent governor, with an active role on the governing body and building community links.

Althea Efunshile, Director of Education and Community Affairs, described Lewisham Council's support for life-long learning as a continuing process. The Education Authority has five main roles:

- ≠ working with schools to raise achievement, academic, social, personal and moral;
- ≠ acknowledging the importance of families, parents and carers;
- ≠ establishing a new Community Affairs Division bringing together community education, Housing Involvement Team, Libraries and the Community Affairs Team. The Division aims to empower citizens and develop local democracy;
- ≠ creating effective partnerships;

- ≈ creating an effective between education, health and social services.

Karen Feeney described Literacy 2000 as the largest council-driven literacy initiative in Britain, which currently involves 69 parents, including three fathers, and 75 children. Karen said that the CBI predicts that three out of five jobs next century will require a degree, for which literacy is an essential foundation. Literacy is everybody's responsibility and requires a combined effort. The project's aims include:

- ≈ raising educational standards, particularly in literacy;
- ≈ stimulating parental involvement in their children's education;
- ≈ promoting home-school partnerships.

Activities include

- ≈ literacy workshops for parents;
- ≈ building up book stocks and holding events in libraries;
- ≈ guidance for parents with children experiencing literacy delay;
- ≈ Baby Start, giving books to parents of babies through the Reading is Fundamental campaign;
- ≈ surveys of home-school practice in schools.

Workshop reports

A parent said 'It was wonderful to talk with other parents and know that you are not the only one with problems.' All groups commented on the benefits of talking with people from other agencies, sharing experiences and networking. Each group reported one main point for action. They were:

- ≈ the importance of making and sustaining links between agencies; giving parents and classroom assistants opportunities for accreditation, and *valuing* each other's work;
- ≈ class meetings for parents
 - space for working together
 - forum for sharing good practice
 - make libraries more accessible;
- ≈ the need to empower parents so that they see themselves as an important part of the learning process. It is important to involve fathers to tackle boys' underachievement;
- ≈ a resource pack of good ideas for involving parents;
- ≈ the need to recognise the work being done by voluntary organisations;
- ≈ a Parent and Toddler group or Family Literacy project for every school that wants one;
- ≈ the importance of inter-agency working and the need for a directory of information and contacts;
- ≈ the need for a forum meeting once or twice a year for all agencies and parents to draw up

an Action Plan for Lewisham and discuss issues such as

- support for parents whose first language is not English
 - building closer links between home and school
 - the closure of small libraries and daunting nature of big ones;
- ≈ the establishment of a forum where people can share ideas on parental involvement and compile a catalogue of tried and tested ways of working with parents.

Responses

Councillor Colin Haste congratulated the conference organisers and emphasised the Council's commitment to Literacy 2000, increasing participation of local people, being a learning Council and increasing access to early years education. The Council seeks partnerships with other agencies to bring money into the borough as well as working together and sharing.

Bridget Prentice, MP Lewisham East, stressed that literacy is the key to achievement. Lewisham is a role model for commitment to literacy. There is a particular problem with boys, described in the Labour Party Report, *Boys will be Boys*, which drew attention to the fact that 24,000 boys left school without any qualifications in 1995.

Learning starts in the home. Recognition of this is in its infancy and this conference may be the first of many. The Labour Party is committed to developing projects like Literacy 2000 across the country so that young people can achieve more.

Barry Quirk, Chief Executive, closed the day by saying that learning is an overarching theme for Lewisham Council and the report will be considered carefully and followed up.

Parents, Adolescents and Young Adults

Waltham Forest, 23 November

Organiser: Mary Crowley, Head, Adult Education Service

The day was introduced by Mary Crowley. In the morning Daoud Laurence, founder of the Black Business Association, spoke about 'Bridging the Culture Gap' and Beverley Thirkell, Education Psychologist, gave an overview of what younger people are saying. In the afternoon Simon Vaughan of Aspire Consultants talked about their report on 'Disaffection and non-participation in further education, training and employment by individuals aged 18-20'. Daniel North described his experiences of a parenting education course. It was attended by 45 people, mainly parents of children in Year 11, half of whom were from black and minority ethnic groups.

Daoud Laurence contrasted his experiences of education in Dominica and here. There was a breakdown in communication between many parents from the Caribbean and their children born here. Young people here were targets of racism and were denied the opportunity of stimulating employment.

Beverley Thirkell contrasted the difference between childhood and adulthood. The change was

often painful, like moving from calm waters into rapids. Many young people felt they had no one to turn to when they got stuck, and about ten per cent of adolescents can become suicidal, more among young women from minority ethnic communities. Many adolescents experienced stress, isolation, low self-esteem and an inability to ask for help. Many were unaware of services which can help. Education and preparation for the future increased the pressures for many, as did feelings of being unable to live up to expectations.

Young people feel adults do not listen to them and often feel ignored and isolated. The best way of helping is to listen, to be available, respect privacy and enable them to find help if necessary. Beverley outlined a number of ways of supporting young people, settling differences and solving problems.

Simon Vaughan asked participants to list their experiences of education and training, most of which were negative, of being beaten, lonely or told 'you won't amount to anything' (to someone who later achieved an MA at 40). Positive experiences tended to come from parents, self-determination and independent study. He then cited research findings which showed that young people were getting messages of *failure* from education. Many young people felt they were living in a society of the deaf. Adults do not listen to them and they feel ignored, isolated and lacking recognition. Since 1982 suicide among young men has increased by 75 per cent. He described four types of response to young people, in order of frequency:

- ≠ no one listens;
- ≠ someone listens but does not understand;
- ≠ someone listens and understands, but does nothing;
- ≠ someone listens, understands and does something together with the young person.

Youth unemployment is an 'economic shock absorber', making life much harder for young people.

The study identified four things which stop young people from participating in education and training:

- ≠ they feel unable: lacking ability, encouragement and information about opportunities;
- ≠ they are unconvinced of its benefits and want instant gratification;
- ≠ they feel unsupported and get them message from parents that they should be what they want them to be and not to be themselves;
- ≠ they lack a sense of connection between conscious thought and conscious action.

Young people need to be valued, have a sense of self-worth and opportunities for participation.

The message from parents who attended the seminar was very clear. They want more for their children and young people. They want schools and other institutions to build their self-esteem and expand their horizons. They want training for all school staff, not just teachers, in how to build self-esteem and treat children and parents with respect.

The education system should build on the real talents and interests of young people. If they try one thing and fail, they should not be written off. They should have comprehensive information about post-16 education and training opportunities. Parents should be invited to the Careers interview in Year 10 or 11. Schools should foster high expectations and the highest level of achievement, regardless of whether they come from a particular estate, a one parent family or a particular ethnic group. Young people should develop pride in who they are, in their culture, in their real talents and abilities.

This work should be taken forward through schools' governing bodies.

Working Together

Lancaster, 23 January 1997

Organiser: Ian Thistlewaite, Health Promotion and Lancaster/Morecambe Parenting Forum

This one day workshop for practitioners involved in providing a service to families and parents attracted by 27 people from statutory and voluntary agencies, including adult and community education, health service, social services, Parent Network, Signposts, Homestart, Women's Aid and schools.

It was a very intensive, interactive day using the 'Dialogue' game and issues map.

Working Together

Cromford, Derbyshire, 24 January 1997

Organiser: Chris Dodd, South Derbyshire Parenting and Family Forum

The conference was held in the magnificent Willersley Castle, Cromford and attracted 65 people, including many parents, teachers, health promotion workers and health visitors as well as workers from Home Start, social services, a housing association, the education department, county council and the Council of Churches. Chris Dodd put the day in context, Titus Alexander gave an overview and led the Dialogue game, Joanne Benson presented a health visitor's perspective and Sue Penglase described families and schools working together. Catalyst Drama Productions performed *Holding the Baby* , a powerful theatre in education show used to stimulate discussion with adolescents. The day concluded with round table discussion and action statements.

Chris Dodd outlined the aims of the Forum, which started in 1994 during the International Year of the Family, and described the family as:

- ≈ the smallest democracy at the heart of society;
- ≈ the basic building block of society;
- ≈ a first window on the world;
- ≈ a centre for socialisation;
- ≈ a first place of learning;
- ≈ a cultural unit;
- ≈ the social microcosm that both creates and reflects the strengths and weaknesses of society;
- ≈ a vehicle for development.

Families are also:

- ≠ creators of neighbourhoods;
- ≠ communities, states and nations;
- ≠ shapers of population;
- ≠ shapers of emotional health;
- ≠ centres of health promotion;
- ≠ agents and beneficiaries of socio-economic change;
- ≠ contributors to sustainable development;
- ≠ survivors of societal and technological change.

Joanne Benson described how positive parenting courses worked with communities to build self-esteem and positive communication within families. Several agencies, such as Home Start, health promotion and the probation services, provided essential support by providing crèches, premises and other help in kind.

Sue Penglase described the FAST project - Families And Schools Together - a family literacy programme involving over 65 parents. Activities include:

- ≠ Challenge Days, when children take a task home to do with their parents, such as finding out how many objects can be put into a film canister, or sticking objects onto a card;
- ≠ Keep Fit With Teddy, when children bring a teddy into school, or come dressed as teddies, and bring their parents;
- ≠ orienteering days, following signs;
- ≠ FAST days, when parents and children work together making books, board games or using language in the environment.

The FAST programme is accredited through the Open College Network.

Working in partnership with parents

Newham, 30 January 1997

Organiser: Bopinder Samra, Parental Involvement Team, Community Education Service

The seminar was opened by Cllr Alec Kellaway, Chair of the Council, and addressed by Titus Alexander. A panel of speakers described a wide range of projects. Newham's Learning Community Strategy was launched at the seminar by Steve Cameron, Head of Youth and Community Services. It closed with a moving presentation and two wonderful songs from parents. It was attended by 113 people, including a large number of parents as well as teachers, education officers, social workers, community projects, inspectors, nursery workers and university lecturers.

Jo Tritton, Headteacher of Star Primary school, described Action for Achievement, which aimed to get to know parents on their terms and start from what parents wanted. As a result parents are now involved in over 30 different ways, including production of a monthly newsletter, a survey of bullying, production of books with children, appearing in drama and many other activities. Jo stressed the importance of involving the whole school, providing a crèche and refreshments.

Jan Davis, acting head of the Early Years Unit, described the wide range of ways in which the

unit makes a reality of parents as educators. This includes acknowledging parents' experience, co-ordinating services across departments through the Early Years Steering Group, the Daycare Forum and liaison meetings. All under-fives providers receive comprehensive training, including childminders.

Chris Goodey, Chair of Parents Support Network, described how the Network helps parents with children with disabilities through the statementing process. Its four staff act as an advocates and empower parents. As a result, Newham has the highest rate of parents contributing to the statementing process.

Ruth Smith, Locality Team Manager for Health Visiting, described how the service provides primary care for over 22,000 under-fives. Each health visitor is in contact with 395 families and aims to stimulate awareness of health needs. Clients keep their own medical records and health visitors respect their clients, by making appointments and working to the health visitors charter. They aim to help parents prevent problems and stimulate children through play.

Professor Sheila Wolfendale of the University of East London talked about the time-honoured practice of parents and children reading together. What's new is that educators are beginning to discover that parents are a child's first educator. Professor Wolfendale presented a summary of family learning initiatives over the past twenty years.

The most moving part of the day was a presentation by mothers who had worked with their children or on their own education. This included two songs by single mothers who created their own production with Theatre Venture, an East London community arts company.

The first song was sung by Debbie, Mary, Sandra, Jayne and other women:

Keeping them happy while I change the baby's nappy,

Helping with their homework - helping them to read and write,

Teaching them road signs and how to ride a bike,

Putting cream on eczema every night,

A nurse and a teacher and I'm here - The Domestic Engineer!

I might paint a wall or unblock the sink

While I watch them play,

A plumber - A decorator,

I do it for love - not a company car,

Or thirty thousand pounds a year.

A Domestic Engineer,

Entertainer, Cook and Cleaner, Referee and Councillor,

Diplomat, Fashion Consultant,

A twenty-four hour job every day,

I'm always here.

*The Domestic Engineer - No - **Not** just a housewife,*

*The Domestic Engineer - No - **Not** just a mother,*

The Domestic Engineer!

Vanessa's song began:

Being a parent, what does it mean?

At first I was excited, now I'm not so keen.

I don't think I really had a clue,

And now she's growing up, what am I going to do?

Chorus: What is my life? - What does it mean? - No time for me!

The song finished:

It's not so bad being a mum,

I have my ups and downs but doesn't everyone?

And I can't deny that she made me smile,

The things she says - make it all worthwhile.

Parents Together in Camborne

Cornwall, 31 January 1997

Organiser: Janet Cormack, Under-8s Service, and Debbie Paynter, Healthy Camborne Project

This day was for parents. It was introduced by Debbie Paynter, of the Healthy Camborne Project. Titus Alexander talked about parents as partners with schools and other agencies. Five speakers presented a range of services for parents in Camborne and an issues map was produced. It was attended by 35 people, mainly parents.

Kate Bousfield, Headteacher of Camborne Nursery School, described a simple and enjoyable way of encouraging parents' involvement in education through a teddy called Hubert, who goes home with a different child every evening, in a bag with a large scrap book to record his 'holiday'. The book is filled with pictures, photographs and writing by parents and children. The nursery also has Home Bags made from curtain materials with things for children and parents to play together. Parents with very young children can also bring them into the Sunshine Room once a week.

Ian Jones, Headteacher of Camborne Secondary School, talked about the illusory rights contained in the Parents' Charter and described the practical ways in which a large secondary school can overcome the barriers to building real partnerships with parents.

Irene Tutton, Senior Practitioner in the Social Services Child Protection Intake Team, described the wide range of tasks carried out by the Team and the central importance of emotional welfare of children and parents. Children's Service Plans provide a focus for joint working between agencies and partnerships with parents.

Dr Sue McGaw, a clinical psychologist from Special Parenting Services, described how the service aims to 'skill up' parents with learning difficulties. The project recognises that parents can be bruised by professionals and aims to ensure that parents remain in control and receive unconditional positive regard from project workers.

Geoff Poxon of Cornwall Community Health Council outlined the Council role as a watchdog on behalf of the public and emphasised that parents should be in control of their family's health.

Following the presentations, parents formed small groups to discuss short and long-term priorities. The groups then combined to produce the following action points:

Short-term priorities:

- ≈ a local information leaflet;
- ≈ baby changing facilities in Camborne town;
- ≈ a play area and pedestrianised town centre;
- ≈ low-cost local travel.

Long-term priorities:

- ≈ a parents advice line;
- ≈ parent support and education;
- ≈ agencies working together;
- ≈ free or cheaper playgroups;
- ≈ centres like Zebedees in Truro and an alcohol-free café and community centre;
- ≈ empowerment.

Other issues raised by the groups:

- ≈ young parents feeling they don't fit in - they are still adolescents too;
- ≈ the need for open access drop-in support for parents;
- ≈ the need for a local parenting forum;
- ≈ the need for recognition of each child as an individual;
- ≈ anxiety about financial cuts to services;
- ≈ the need for existing services to be publicised better;
- ≈ the need for a network for working parents to meet in the evenings;
- ≈ help with reading and writing for parents;
- ≈ the high cost of child care prevents young/single parents finding work or training.

Working Together: Learning Together

Tower Hamlets, 7 February 1997***Organiser: Sarah Gale, Parents Advice Centre***

The conference was opened by Sara Williams, Head of Education Strategy, Cllr. Michael Keating, Chair of Education, and two parents, Fawzia Shelley Chowdhury and Liz Daly. Titus Alexander spoke about families as a place of learning and drew together an issues map, following small group discussions. The conference finished by developing an agenda for action in small groups. The day was attended by 70 people from adult education, schools, community education, family centres, health promotion, Parent Link, the psychology service, training agencies, MENCAP, Royal London Hospital, social services, playgroups, portage, libraries, the WEA, Warwick University and several Bengali and African-Caribbean voluntary organisations.

Fawzia Shelley Chowdhury described how she wanted to know about the education system and how to help her child. This led her to join a course for parents, on which she was now trained as a parent tutor, helping other parents. The course enabled parents to understand what children were learning in school and how to help them at home. It also improved their English skills and helped with parenting. Fawzia had also done a course with the Parent Network on how it build better relationships.

Liz Daly was a parent and support worker with Cities in Schools, a charity which develops links between parents and schools.

Cllr Michael Keating talked about parents' commitment to their children. He was encouraged by a demonstration against cuts in education spending by five hundred parents who marched on the Town Hall. He was shocked at how powerless people are. He had met with representatives of a parents' support group and was struck by their fear of schools.

Parents need support. There needs to be contact, cooperation and joint planning in the voluntary and statutory sectors. Parents are often left out of the equation and must be included in the partnership. He was impressed by the vigour, enthusiasm and joint effort of many schools and parents.

Working Together: Families - the foundation of a learning society***Sheffield 14 March 1997******Organiser: Jackie Field, Parents as Partners Project, Hallam University***

The conference took place in the imposing wood panelled Reception Rooms of Sheffield Town Hall. It was opened by the Lord Mayor and addressed by Jonathan Crossley-Holland, Director of Education, and Titus Alexander, who drew an issues map. David Blunkett MP and Shadow Secretary of State for Education, sent his apologies and best wishes. The day closed with a panel discussion. It was attended by over 120 people, about half parents and half from a wide range of agencies, including adult education, schools, special needs services, voluntary organisations and the WEA.

Jonathan Crossley-Holland declared that parents hold the key to some of the biggest problems we face. We need a crusade to raise standards. Effective schools have good relationships with parents, which includes four types of involvement:

- ≠ volunteer assistants in the classroom, which increases the number of adults to pupils;
- ≠ involvement in learning at home, which is critical;
- ≠ home-community links, such as fetes and fundraising events;
- ≠ being involved in running the school.

A survey of 8,000 parents by Keele University showed that 20 per cent were interested in governance, 70 per cent wanted more information on their children's progress, 50 per cent wanted more information on the curriculum and a third wanted to be more involved in their children's learning. The main obstacles to parental involvement were lack of confidence among teachers as well as parents, lack of information and lack of consistency among teachers.

The LEA was launching a discussion with schools on raising pupil achievement, which was a task for the whole community. The education department aimed to strengthen partnerships with parents and welcomed parent's views about the service. The department faced a stark budget round, but aimed to increase investment in partnerships with parents.

The issues map identified a wide range of concerns, in order of priority:

- ≠ secure funding was the overwhelming top issue, above all others;
- ≠ importance of parents own learning came a strong second;
- ≠ the need to emphasise play in pre-school, rather than subject attainment;
- ≠ school culture should match that of home;
- ≠ communication between parents and school;
- ≠ giving parents information about the curriculum;
- ≠ importance of listening to parents;
- ≠ exclusions and alternatives to school;
- ≠ special needs;
- ≠ community involvement;
- ≠ making parenting skills programmes accessible to all.

Workshops on each of these topics drew up a long list of recommendations.

Eileen Fawcett, Head of Adult Education, summed up 'We need to shift the balance of power from professionals to parents, to help people to help themselves and to listen to parents. Above all, we need to put planning and resources in the hands of users rather than providers'.

Families as the foundation of a learning society

Devon, 15 March 1997

Organiser: Tanny Stobart, Community Education/Family Education Resource Network (FERN)

Over 90 people travelled from all over Devon and as far away as Cornwall and Wales to participate in a day of discussion and workshops. Titus Alexander outlined the themes and introduced the Dialogue game. Participants then discussed the issues and created a map of them. The main issues, in order of priority, were:

- ≠ addressing parents learning needs;
- ≠ policy and funding to support inter-agency work;

- ≠ make education more fun;
- ≠ equal status for parents and professionals;
- ≠ recognition of the home as a place of learning;
- ≠ pupil power and consultation with young people.

FERN is a long-established and active network involving a wide range of parent education projects. The Network includes elected members and professionals from Education and Social Services, the Health Service, four family education users, four project workers and four co-opted members.

Peter Brewer, Chair of FERN, presented the challenges facing the Network as a result of local government reorganisation. The County was losing 36 per cent of its population, two per cent of its area and 40 per cent of its budget. It was therefore decided that FERN would break up into four area FERNs, each of which would be an independent voluntary organisation, with a regional association embracing Cornwall and other counties.

Bibliography

Alexander, T and Clyne, C, (1995) *Riches Beyond Price: Making the most of family learning*. NIACE

Alexander, T, Bastiani, J and Beresford, E (1996) *A Practical Guide to Home-School Policies*. JET Publications

Bloom, B (1985) *Developing Talent in Young People*. New York: Ballantine

Bloom, B (1964) *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics*. New York: John Wiley and Sons

Clark, R (1983) *Family Life and School Achievement: Why poor black children succeed or fail*. Chicago University Press

Osborn, A (1990) 'Resilient Children: A longitudinal study of high achieving socially disadvantaged children', *Early Childhood Development and Care*. Vol. 62, 23-47

Pugh, G, De'Ath, E and Smith, C (1994) *Confident Parents, Confident Children*. National Children's Bureau

Smith, C (1996) *Developing Parenting Programmes*. National Children's Bureau

Utting, D and others (1993) *Crime and the Family*. Family Policy Studies Centre

Webster-Stratton, C and Herbert, M (1986) *Troubled Families, Problem Children*. John Wiley and Sons

Wells, G (1986) *The Meaning Makers*. Hodder and Stoughton

The 'Dialogue' game is available in Secondary and Primary versions from Anne Currie, Department of Education, 8 University Gardens, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ for £23.50 plus £3.50 p&p each set.

The Early Years version is produced by Titus Alexander to order for £15 plus £2 p&p,

32 Carisbrooke Road, London E17 7EF.

Learning begins at home

Imagine an education system where none of the educators are trained. Indeed, where training is seen as a sign of weakness. There is no curriculum, but the amount to be learnt is vast and it is assumed everyone knows what it is. There is no assessment, but if people fail the penalties are severe. This is not any old education system, but the foundation for every course, job, profession in the country. It is, of course, the family. Parents are the most important educator in any person's life, yet they get most of the blame when things go wrong and little support or training to ensure that every child gets the best possible start in life.

Titus Alexander

Parenting Education & Support Forum

The Forum is the national umbrella organisation for parenting education and support. Founded in 1995, it brings together all those working or interested in this field, and has over 500 members across the UK and overseas. It works in partnership with its members and other statutory and voluntary bodies. For further information contact:

The Parenting Education & Support Forum,

Unit 431, Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road,

London NW5 1TL