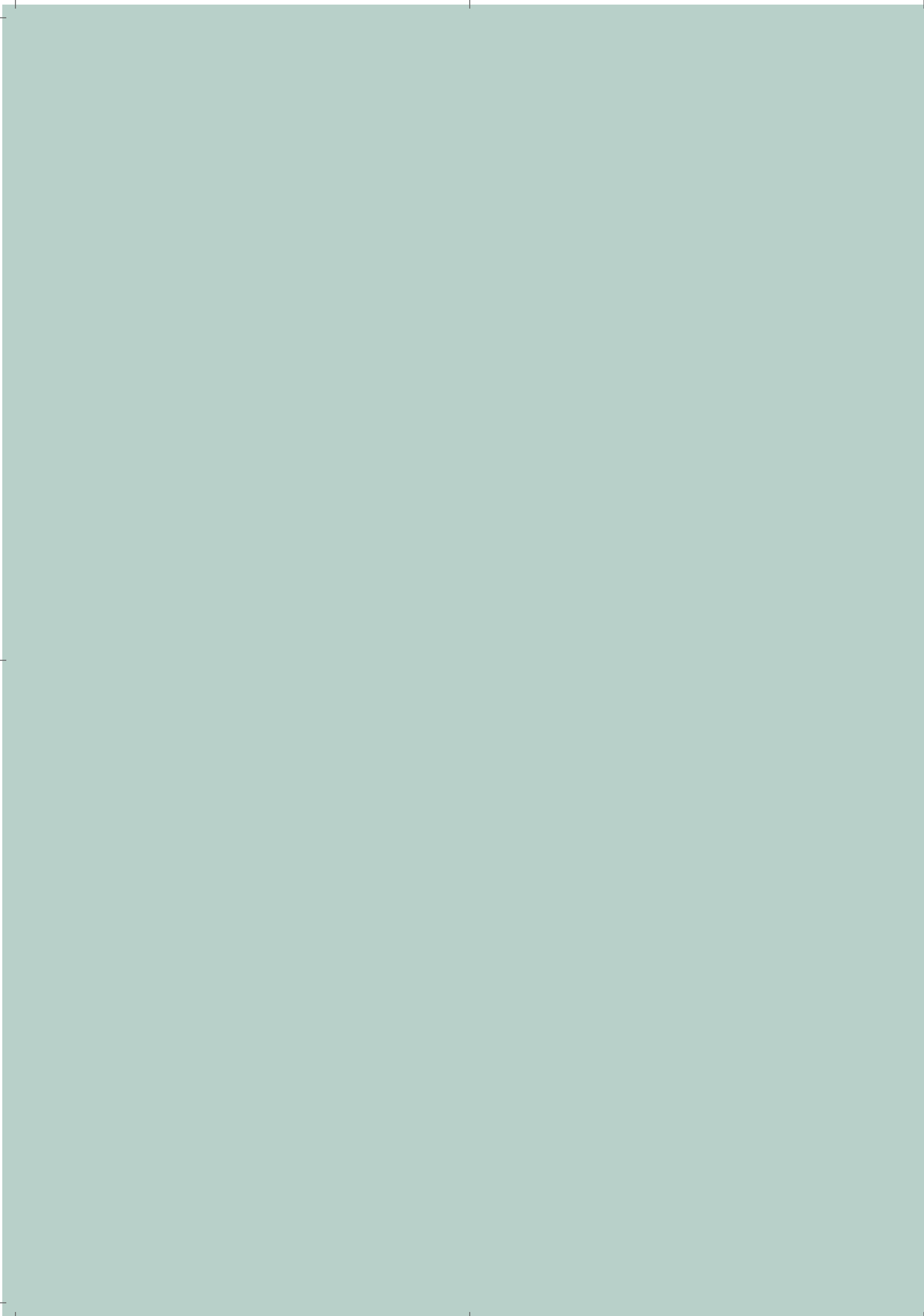




What is Family Learning?

An initial discourse

Scotland's Learning Partnership
July 2013



Background and Purpose

Throughout the course of 2013 Scotland's Learning Partnership has been writing a series of papers designed to generate discussion and debate by and between those involved in the delivery of various aspects of lifelong learning in Scotland.

In this paper we highlight and discuss key issues around the meaning of family learning in Scotland and raise awareness of some of the main thinkers in the family learning field.

Prior to further work in developing our approach to family learning Scotland's Learning Partnership is seeking to:

- **Encourage a cross-sectoral discussion**
- **Examine the variety programmes involved in the delivery of family learning in Scotland**
- **Find solutions to developing shared learning and innovations.**

Crucially, this paper is seen a means of helping develop a democratic approach where learners are in control and their voice sits at the heart of Scotland's approach and commitment to family learning. The hopes and expectations of all learners should be a driver in establishing high quality family learning opportunities for Scotland.

“Nurturing positive learning within families has the potential to transform society”

Titus Alexander

Family Learning – Definitions

Family Learning incorporates all the learning that happens by, with, in and across a family. The express purpose of family learning is to enable the family both jointly and individually to gain skills, knowledge and an understanding that will meet their needs, and aspirations.

Family learning crosses and shares boundaries with adult learning, parenting, lifelong learning and children’s education. As such there are many definitions as to what family learning is and what its components might be.

The following offer a range of high level definitions, while practical explanations should include the means of providing the information and knowledge that a family requires to develop and operate on a successful level, appropriate to the family’s needs.

“Aim to encourage family members to learn together. They are learning as or within a family. They should include opportunities for intergenerational learning and, wherever possible, lead both adults and children to pursue further learning.”

Learning and Skills Council (LSC)

“Family learning covers all forms of informal and formal learning that involve more than one generation. Family members can include friends as well as family, reflecting the range of support relationships that individuals rely on in the twenty-first century. It includes:

- Learning about roles.
- Relationships and responsibilities in relation to stages of family life.
- Parenting education.”

“Learning how to understand, take responsibility and make decisions in relation to wider society, in which the family is a foundation for citizenship” The Family Learning Network

“Family learning supports efforts to raise children’s achievement levels, raises expectations and aspirations of both children and adults, promotes active citizenship and, as the family group is the microcosm of the community, is community capacity building at its best...” Family Legacies / NIACE

“Family life is our first school for emotional learning; in this intimate cauldron we learn how to feel about ourselves and how others will react to our feelings... [It] operates not just through the things parents say and do directly with children, but also in the models they offer for handling their own feelings...”

Emotional Intelligence / Daniel Goleman

Importance of Family Learning

Family learning offers benefits to the family, individuals within the family, communities and society. Most of us recognise that we would like to achieve in terms of being able to live healthy, prosperous, safe and happy lives. Learning in terms of formal education is generally accepted as one route but less so the possibilities open to us through learning with and through our families. If we know and accept that learning is good for us then, the first task to hand is less about developing family learning activities and opportunities but more about raising awareness of the value of family learning.

Across Scotland, there are many examples of agencies etc. working closely with families to help them develop basic skills, improve their health and wellbeing and to create better social circumstances. Much of this is specifically targeted rather than approached from a more holistic viewpoint that unites all aspects of family life under one banner – building the capacity of families through learning. **An approach that cuts across all services and where all interventions form part of a 'wrap around' perspective of a family's learning, helps ensure that the family 'knowledge bank' is there to help enable families prevent themselves falling through gaps.**

A family that places a value on learning is a family that is more likely to be receptive to engaging in learning activities. Engaging in learning generally means that people are more likely to achieve, so the key task is to demonstrate and convince families of the value of learning. It is important therefore to consider the barriers to and the reason for families being unwilling or unable to recognise the worth of learning to the family.

The following suggest some significant barriers:

- Learning requires a commitment to a structure. Something with which many families are challenged
- Learning has failed to deliver any obvious benefit to date
- Learning is a formal thing and does not appear to fit with what is perceived as family life
- Learning is for the children so they can get an education. Parents are 'done with learning'
- Many individuals within families lead their own separate lives despite being under the umbrella of the family

"I believe that there are four reasons why people fail to learn. They are in order of importance:

- **Low self-esteem**
- **Weak motivation**
- **Insufficient ability or potential**
- **Lack of Opportunity"**

Motivation and readiness to learn / Christopher Ball IN Schools in the Learning Age

From a family perspective they must see that learning leads where they need or aspire to be. From a societal perspective agencies must see that engaging with families will:

- Enhance community capacity and stability
- Deliver academic achievement
- Reduce health and welfare costs
- Create more motivated economic involvement
- Narrow equality gaps

For the societal gains to become a reality it requires families to become learners. By having actual learning families expecting and demanding learning opportunities and then by delivering relevant learning, as a consequence of their learning we will only begin to see the effects. Only then will we be able to measure the community, academic, health and economic benefits. So, a certain leap of faith is required.

If government and its agencies believe these societal goals are our aspirations then we must first actively support the building of family learning capacity.

And yet how can we convince families that learning will take them to these places when there is often little evidence that jobs will follow, that communities will be more stable, that health services can cope?

Let us suppose that schools, and other agencies had a specific remit to support families with their learning – a remit that is backed up with clarity of purpose. Schools would develop family learning curriculums that paralleled and was complementary to their student curriculum. Other support agencies would also have a duty to take a whole family approach to their information provision and their intervention activities. In the first place families would begin to believe that there is a real commitment to family learning. Next we introduce the mechanisms for establishing the learning capacity of families. Follow this with a series of learning support opportunities that will build the capacity of families to engage with learning.

Now we are in a position to provide the actual learning needs – be it literacy, numeracy or health and hygiene activities.

Complementary to the above is a programme showing families why learning has the potential to change their lives. This must be pitched not as official speak but instead must be relevant to the everyday lives of people and delivered through the mediums that people engage with and trust.

“The Department of Health estimate that 4 million out of the 11 million children in England are at risk of failing to meet normal developmental goals because of stresses in the family caused by parental mental illness, domestic violence, parental abuse of alcohol, drugs and other substances or by material and social conditions creating stresses and chaos... a survey of parents of children aged 3 – 8 years in three general medical practices [found] 20% were experiencing difficulties with their children’s behaviour. A similar fraction had attended a parenting programme. 58% expressed an interest in attending such a programme in the future

The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review by Prof. Charles Desforges –
http://bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/files_uploaded/uploaded_resources/18617/desforges.pdf

The Family

Families are complex organisations.

The make-up of a nuclear family could include:

- Childless couple
- Couple with children
- Single parent with children
- Foster or care family

Extended families where additional family relatives play a role have considerable potential and influence in terms of encouraging and taking part in family learning.

The concept of the family has changed over generations and cultures as values and norms have changed. These two 'European' definitions are all encompassing without being in any way judgemental:

"A social unit where one or more children are being cared for and/or brought up."

Netherlands Cabinet

"All the people who live under the same roof as a family – even if they aren't related"

National Statistical Service of Greece

We are all part of at least one definition of a family, but often the biggest challenges and the need for support and resources is when we become adults

"When people become parents, their identity undergoes a change, as they have to make room in their inner self not just for the child, but also to become a mother or father to their child. This change is fundamental – and irreversible. However, becoming a parent is not just a psychological change; it must also be anchored in a cultural and sociological context".

*The importance of social support and reflective functioning for parenthood/ Mirjam Kalland
IN http://www.expoo.be/sites/default/files/kennisdocument/fam_eng_anp701_web1.pdf*

The Family Life Cycle and Learning

As a new family comes into being they will bring with them a set of values and attitudes, not just to learning, but how they need and want to progress as a family. We are all subject to the values and beliefs that surround us.

We inherit values from our ancestors, we create our own values based on our experience of the society we live in. In terms of learning this will have coloured the value we place on it and what we expect it to deliver. Third generation unemployed may not place a high value on learning for economic reasons, poor school experience may reduce not just our expectations but also our ability to engage with learning, yet aspirations for the future of our family may lead us to break these ties and see learning as the route forward.

If we accept that when two people join together to form a family, then family learning starts. We have a number of potential needs for skills, knowledge and understanding from the outset. These may be both practical and emotional. Practical financial matters sit alongside emotional relationship building. And, where appropriate, family planning. Learning together and as a family becomes a real possibility now.

On the birth of children the family naturally expands in number and needs. Again a new set of practical skills and knowledge is required, and now family learning takes on a new meaning. For some time while the child is growing, the adult has a responsibility to ensure that the child is also learning. Also, there now exists a purpose to learn together as a family.

This stage in a family's development is likely to bring them into contact with a host of information sources. Health, welfare and educational agencies have a duty to inform and support the family. The danger here is that this is all too readily seen as societal interaction as opposed to learning engagement. This I suspect is true of both the agencies and the family. Now, also is a time when families begin to interact with other families. Drawn together by their children, parents will discuss and share a considerable amount of information. This too is family learning, as we learn from the experience and knowledge of other families.

As our children become more directly involved in education and indeed in other forms of structured learning (clubs etc.) families should not be left out.

For many parents, what the children are learning at school may be different or just new to them. How our children learn today means that the Schools etc. have a role to encourage and provide the necessary understanding that will allow families to support, complement and enhance the educational learning. Learning in school to read write and count is critical and while schools will aim to place as much of this as possible into a relevant context, **by extending the skills and knowledge taught in school into the family's regular routines and lifestyle, the learning not only becomes embedded in respect of the child it provides the whole family with a means of supporting the child and making learning relevant for the family.**

This is equally true for all learning that all members of the family are involved with. Parents who share their knowledge with their families will show that learning has a value and a context.

Then, there is the 'stuff' that family members do together, for fun! Outings, events, holidays, etc. all offer learning opportunities. Just because they are not linked to a test or a formal structure, they still widen our knowledge, expand our horizons and help us form those attitudes and opinions that we in turn will pass on to the next generation.

Some families of course unravel, and while this in itself presents many new learning needs it is also a time for putting into action the skills, knowledge and understanding built up. It might be argued that if families were learning families from the start then some of this unravelling might be reduced. It should surely be true that much of the dis-functionality of families could be reduced if they were learning families! However it pans out, the learning that a family has engaged with must surely offer some help and confidence in dealing with the practicalities and emotions of any fallout.

Some families will remain as a unit but become either geographically or emotionally apart. Teenagers by the very nature of their development can become emotionally estranged from their family yet continue to depend on the family for practical support. Generational changes occur, and this is often a frighteningly new experience for parents, despite the fact that they too were once teenagers. Whole new arenas of family learning opportunities can open-up at this point.

The Learning Family

Family Learning offers families the opportunity to build their capacity to value and use learning as a means of enabling them to function as a family and in wider society. While no one will deny the potential benefits of functioning families, one of the biggest challenges facing those seeking to work with families is procuring their engagement in any learning processes.

“Learning is not a neutral concept, but rather, is influenced by the purposes of education and adult learning”

Researching Learning Cultures and Educational Learning in Communities

The culture and beliefs within families will shape its attitude towards learning and past experiences will influence their willingness to engage with any learning activity.

An essential component of capacity building is the building of trust. Trust that the learning is meaningful and relevant. Trust in those who families engage with. Trust among the various agencies providing learning for the family, and finally trust within the family that learning will benefit all.

Alongside trust sits fear. The pace of change in education means that parents often perceive they lack the ability to support their children’s learning. The fear of getting it wrong and as a possible consequence, ‘standing out’ makes people retreat and find avoidance strategies.

Schools, and other agencies, have much to do to create non-threatening learning environments.

The learning family might be represented as a circle enclosing the constituent members of the family. All engaged in learning both individually and collectively and building capacities that will enable and enrich the whole family. Capacity is then built within the families but that ‘circle’ must have entry and exit points that will allow the family to go out and engage with others in their pursuit of knowledge. Equally these circle points must be able to allow entry by family focused practitioners providing opportunities and experiences that will strengthen the beliefs, resources and abilities of the family

Parenting and family life is a unique experience and each family will develop according to its own needs and aspirations.

Yet, there are many ways in which we can support families to ensure they have the capacity to develop. To all intents and purposes, this is a key component of family learning. By **creating a culture at both community and national level that demonstrates a clear value for learning, by enabling the processes and resources that makes learning accessible, by building their skills in terms of becoming effective and confident learners and by connecting them to relevant support and guidance.**

The potential for family learning lies in all aspects of life. Families need to learn how to operate and exist as a family. Families need to access information that will ensure their development and safety. Families will aspire to gain skills and knowledge that will enable them to achieve their ambitions.

Where, when and how will families learn?

Families can learn everywhere – in the home, at school, in the community, etc. There is no specific learning environment for families although the family home is an obvious place where learning can and should be encouraged and enabled. Creating a learning atmosphere that respects and supports, plus the accessibility of learning resources, makes for a Learning Home.

Families can learn all of the time. There will be formal learning times, often on an individual basis, but whenever family members are together there is the opportunity to learn with and from each other, and other people they are interacting with

Families will learn in different ways. They can be taught, they can explore, they can gain experiences, and they can share knowledge.

If we look across the typical life cycle of a family we can see that learning needs and opportunities, while changing, are constantly required. The challenge is for both the families and those providing and supporting family learning needs to recognise the value and opportunities.

There can be no definitive learning family as each and every family has its own needs and aspirations that will set the parameters for their success as a learning family. However there are a number of components that will have an impact on or influence a family's ability to be successful family learners:

- Early engagement. (Scotland's Chief Medical Officer is convinced of the need for encouraging and stimulating early family learning) *"Attachment behaviour is the process by which kids learn, where they learn about control over their environment,"* he says. In a functioning family, a baby will learn from the responses it gets from its parents. *"The only way it knows how to create an impression is to cry, so mum picks it up, cuddles it and feeds it. It is learning to make sense of the world and is finding that the world is explicable and manageable."* In a dysfunctional family, however, the lessons are different. *"The chaotic environment sends the child completely chaotic signals. Sometimes it'll get fed when it cries, sometimes mum will be drunk. Sometimes mum will lose the rag and hit it. It gets the signal that it can't control the world because it doesn't know when it's going to get a good response or a bad one, so it can't explain it, can't manage it. And that makes it stressed."*
- Parenting skills. We are not born parents we have to learn how to be confident and competent.
- Reflecting and reviewing own family experiences. Too many times we hear of repetitive intergenerational behaviours. Build a future that recognizes the past.
- The provision of meaningful learning experiences that relate to and are based on needs and aspirations. Learning providers must first understand the learning needs, then the capacity to learn before introducing the actual learning.
- Engaging the whole family

Benefits of Family Learning

From Adult Basic Skills/Shona Macleod and Suzanne Straw

http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/18LoRes_AdultSkillsBook.pdf

“The evidence points to the impact of family learning programmes on adults’ personal confidence, social skills, educational advancement and opportunities for employment. However, in the models of practice identified, it is rare to find examples of planned progression routes, which show clear pathways for adults from family learning programmes on to other educational and employment advancement”.

Possible Outcomes for Parents

- Improvement in adult reading level
- Improvement in English proficiency
- Improvement in adult math skills
- Attainment of or improvement in computer skills
- Improvement of budgeting and basic financial skills of parents
- Improvement in parent income level
- Increase in parental knowledge of child development
- Increase in positive interaction between parent and child
- Parent reads more to child
- Household has more books for adult and child
- Increase in use of library
- Improvement in confidence of parents in their role as their child’s first teacher

Possible Outcomes for Children

- Improvement in developmental levels of child
- Child ready for early education
- Child enjoys being read to by parent
- Increase in positive interaction between parent and child
- Decrease in behaviour problems of child

Possible Community Outcomes

- Increase in literacy rates
- Increase in employment rates
- Increase in income levels
- Improvement in school readiness
- Improvement in attendance and attainment

Family Learning Providers

These are the people and organisations that have a duty or a commitment to helping families understand their rights and gain access to the support they need.

In the broad picture, learning providers have a key role to play in providing information and knowledge. **Greater emphasis placed on the various forms of contact as having a learning component**, by both families and organisations, is needed. Information and knowledge are two of the bedrocks of learning. From the information we receive we learn how to do things.

Learning providers are charged with or voluntarily providing resources and services that families must or choose to engage with. These are the key providers of formal, and often informal learning. While much of it is recognised as learning it is all too often described mainly as education and as such can at best be seen as necessary or at worst as compulsory. Other providers who fall more into the leisure category are equated more as fun rather than learning. But, surely learning can and should be fun! **The problem with learning is that it fails to embrace our normal everyday lives.**

Families Together

There exists an opportunity to establish an infrastructure whereby families can and are more able to share and access with and from each other. Who better to understand the needs of families but other families?

Families Alone

Families will also and should be encouraged as much as possible to equip themselves, both practically and emotionally to work together. While external support should be on hand, the first onus is on the family to recognise its need and then have the ability to access or chose the necessary support.

Partnerships for Learning

"The most successful partnerships for learning are composed of individual partners who each have their own set of connections, information and resources that they are willing to share with one another. Through such exchanges, partnerships for learning can widen their networks to create a web of complementary learning supports across multiple people and institutions to provide a seamless learning experience that addresses the complex conditions and variety of environments where children learn and grow." *Partnerships for Learning/ Harvard Family Research Project*

Family Learning Partnerships

A true partnership is where all parties participate on a give and take basis. **The partnerships that will exist between the family and the learning agency must be based on trust and most importantly that the trust is flowing in both directions.**

Where learning providers are part of the partnership then naturally the flow will be biased towards the flow of information from them and to the family. However, the response in terms of need, experience and success must also have a clear communication channel.

Learning families will also be partnerships. Each member of the family is a trusted member of that partnership and while their needs may be different depending on age and development, and may change significantly over time, each family member should contribute to the necessary two-way flow of information.

Family and Community

While the family is itself a source of social capital, it is also a "system in a network of mutually interdependent systems", Through its interactions with political, economic, cultural, religious and legal systems, the family not only increases the resources available to its members, it also contributes to the social capital available to promote public goods. Social capital generated through interactions between families and other actors within the community increases resources for families and networks.

Intergenerational Learning

Although parents and children may be seen as the centre point within families, other important roles have been ascribed to other close relatives, in particular grandparents.

In 2003, 26% of all dependent children in Great Britain received childcare from their grandparents (Social Trends, 2006, cited in Broad, 2007). Because grandparents live longer and healthier lives and parents are having children when they are younger, the role of grandparents is increasing (Jerrome, 1993). This also has the effect of increasing the length of time spent as a grandparent, often to around a third of the lifespan (Dench and Ogg, 2002).

"It seems that highly focussed, intergenerational programmes had both specific and wider effects. Specifically, significant gains in literacy and numeracy were achieved, sustained and transferred to school. More broadly, it was reported that communications between parents and children improved markedly, and parents reported being more able and confident in helping their child at home and communicating with the teacher in school." *Desforjes*

New technologies and family learning

Based on a survey of the views of parents of children from 3 to 5 years of age attending nurseries in Scotland, McPake et al (2005) have identified three types of competence developed through the use of ICT: technical (basic operational skills), cultural (understanding of the social roles that ICT plays) and learning.

The latter, seen to be of particular significance to young children, refers to their ability to use ICT for social and cultural purposes, including communication, self-expression and entertainment as well as their work. ICT was used in the home to support early literacy and numeracy, communication and musical skills, as well as in helping children learn how to learn.

Importantly, the degree of competence children had acquired appeared to depend on such factors as access to equipment, support in learning to use it, and the particular interests and aptitudes of older family members.

The authenticity seen to be afforded by technological activities can aid learning. This has been followed up in the family context by Jane and Robbins (2004) who have also reported on the potential benefit of such activities to grandparents in that it allows them to revisit and explore technology in a new and fresh way as a result of interacting with their grandchildren. Kenner et al (2008) noted the role of the computer as mediating artefact (Crook, 2001) and participant in learning activities with grandparents and grandchildren. In this context, however, the importance of the role of the grandparent in structuring the approach to the activities was also noted (Kenner et al, 2008).

Family structures and intergenerational transfers of learning changes and challenges

<http://www.beyondcurrenthorizons.org.uk/family-structures-and-intergenerational-transfers-of-learning-changes-and-challenges/>

There is an opportunity to harness the potential of digital technologies in family learning courses, both as a tool to enable learning, and as a set of skills worthy of study in its own right. The vision of technology as an essential tool for learning, enabling flexible and customised learning as well as supporting leisure and informal learning... Mobile and internet technologies should also be used more to support learning in between face-to-face classes and after courses have finished, blending physical events with online and mobile interaction.

Mobile and Internet technologies can extend learning opportunities to the home, potentially overcoming some of the barriers of time, access, transport and cost of courses. Family learning providers should consider making greater use of technologies to extend access to family learning opportunities, including separated and divided families who have less opportunity to learn with and from one another in shared spaces.

There are extensive opportunities for using technologies to create and support engaging and creative learning opportunities in the home environment. Such creative and engaging home learning resources should build on family practices and the relationship between parents and children, allowing for open-ended, playful interaction, fitting in with daily routines such as bedtime, and be flexible, portable and durable.

Using such learning resources can support children's learning both at home and at school, and facilitate parental engagement in children's learning, contributing to raising children's educational achievement (PSA10) as well as building on family relationships, enhancing both children's – and parents' emotional wellbeing."

Learning in families with digital technologies

http://archive.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project_reports/becta/Learning_in_Families_policy_report.pdf

Family Learning Writers

Titus Alexander has been called a “one man think tank” on family learning, citizenship, education and global issues.

“Families are the foundation of education. Children spend less than 15 per cent of their waking time in school between birth and school leaving age. Parents and other carers are responsible for 85 per cent of a child’s waking time. Many studies show that home background is the biggest influence on children’s learning. Differences in support for learning at home are probably the greatest source of inequality in educational attainment among children of equal ability.”

“Family learning refers to the vast amount of learning that takes place in and around families, from personal development, language acquisition and hobbies to the process of becoming a teenager, parent, step- parent or grandparent, or taking other family responsibilities.”

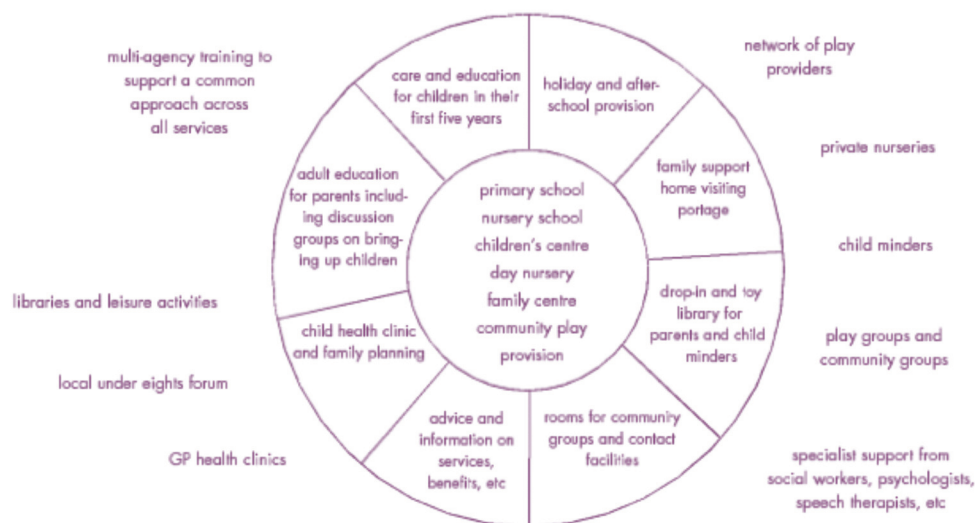
“Increased support for parents as children’s first and most enduring educators would bring significant improvements in educational achievement as well as helping to reduce mental illness, crime, drug abuse and violence. Active support for family learning could create a virtuous cycle of positive personal development, higher achievement, increased earnings, greater well-being and ultimately more cohesive communities.”

“Once families are recognised as the foundation of learning, a far- reaching transformation of institutions that work with children and parents will begin.

Parents will be treated as the lead agents in the care and education of children, with training and support like every other agency working with children. Schools will see their role as extending and enhancing family learning, strengthening and supporting the foundation of learning at home. All agencies concerned with families will see their priority as supporting parents as children’s first and most enduring educators.”

Family learning: The foundation of effective education / Titus Alexander –
<http://www.demos.co.uk/files/familylearning.pdf>

Figure 1. Support for families with young children: a locally based model



Source: Rea Price J and Pugh G, 1995, *Championing Children*, Manchester City Council, Manchester.

Charles Leadbeater is a leading authority on innovation and creativity. He has advised companies, cities and governments around the world on innovation strategy

"Families are vital to learning and yet family life in much of the developed world is in the midst of flux. In the United Kingdom, children are far more likely than they were 40 years ago to experience parental separation, lone parenting, step families, half siblings, being an only child, or moving between different homes. In the United Kingdom, a significant minority of children live in deeply chaotic families. These are the children most likely to drop out of school early.

In response, policymakers are putting more resources into strategies to supplement schools"

"Integrated approaches to family and community-based learning, however, will require organizational innovation. Teachers and schools will not necessarily be central to this. The Reggio Emilia approach created children's centers for learning that did not exist before. The Family Nurse Partnership uses nurses, midwives, and healthcare as a way into families and learning."

"A prime example of the scale of innovation required is the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ), which aims to transform the aspirations and achievements of a whole generation of 10,000 children living in 97 blocks in one of the most devastated urban communities in America.⁵⁹ An eight year old boy in Harlem has a 33 percent chance of ending up in prison. A third of students drop out of high school. Three-quarters of Harlem children cannot pass the grade exams for their age. The HCZ, inspired by community activist Geoffrey Canada, set out to mobilize family and peer support to encourage learning: to make going to college the norm and to break the culture of low aspirations. HCZ starts work with parents before their children are born. It offers pre-kindergartens, personal tutoring, dance and sports classes, food coops, and social services help with housing and health issues Middle class children do not just have more resources for learning. They and their parents probably have more time and capacity to make choices about education. Choices are made in a social context of peer and family influences. If these mitigate against learning – for example if parents had a negative experience of school, or elder siblings left school with few qualifications – then providing young people from poor, chaotic or disrupted families with more choice may not encourage them to consider different choices."

Learning from the Extremes / Charles Leadbeater –

http://www.charlesleadbeater.net/cms/xstandard/LearningfromExtremes_WhitePaper.pdf

Charles Desforges is an emeritus professor in the University of Exeter. He now works as an independent researcher and education consultant with special interests in teaching, learning, parental involvement and school leadership

"Pupils' achievement and adjustment are influenced by many people, processes and institutions. Parents, the broader family, peer groups, neighbourhood influences, schools and other bodies (e.g. churches, clubs) are all implicated in shaping children's progress towards their self fulfilment and citizenship.

The children themselves, of course, with their unique abilities, temperaments and propensities play a central role in forming and reforming their behaviour, aspirations and achievements.

Of the many forms of parental involvement, it is the 'at-home' relationships and modelling of aspirations, which play the major part in impact on school outcomes. Involvement works indirectly on school outcomes by helping the child build a pro-social, pro-learning self-concept and high educational aspirations.

Parental involvement takes many forms including good parenting in the home, including the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship; contact with schools to share information; participation in school events; participation in the work of the school; and participation in school governance.

The extent and form of parental involvement is strongly influenced by family social class, maternal level of education, material deprivation, maternal psycho-social health and single parent status and, to a lesser degree, by family ethnicity.

The extent of parental involvement diminishes as the child gets older and is strongly influenced at all ages by the child characteristically taking a very active mediating role.

Parental involvement is strongly positively influenced by the child's level of attainment: the higher the level of attainment, the more parents get involved.

The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups.

Other forms of parental involvement do not appear to contribute to the scale of the impact of 'at-home' parenting.

Differences between parents in their level of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health, and also with parental perception of their role and their levels of confidence in fulfilling it. Some parents are put off by feeling put down by schools and teachers.

Research affords a clear model of how parental involvement works. This model is described in the report. In essence parenting has its influence indirectly through shaping the child's self concept as a learner and through setting high aspirations."

The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review by Prof. Charles Desforges –
http://bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/files_uploaded/uploaded_resources/18617/desforges.pdf

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