SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL SUPPORT

The important role of social-emotional learning in school success is an expanding body of educational and psychological research. Parental engagement and family-focused competency building are the primary means by which to support children's social, emotional, and behavioural well-being.

This exemplar will increase the knowledge, skills and understanding of practitioners in social-emotional learning in schools. This will be most relevant for practitioners delivering family learning and parental engagement outcomes such as those working in schools, CLD, The Third Sector, early years etc.

Case Studies

An intervention trial carried out in 8 primary schools in London over 28 weeks, all located in areas of high disadvantage, included components that addressed parenting behaviour, child behaviour, and child literacy. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire assessment was completed by both parents and teachers both pre- and post-intervention because all intervention children rated above average for anti-social behaviours.

Children involved in the intervention moved from the 80th percentile to the 61st while control children did not change (Scott et al 2010). The rate of children displaying oppositional defiant behaviours also halved. For literacy, intervention children gained a reading age advantage of 6 months, from below average to the top quarter of the population (using the British Ability Scale) (Scott et al 2010).

A Family Check-Up intervention in the US is 3-4 collaborative decision-making sessions with parents in the family resource centre; the intervention included a comprehensive family assessment, support for family management skills, and interventions targeted at helping parents reduce youth high-risk behaviour (Stormshak et al 2009). High-risk youth whose families received the intervention showed a GPA (grade point average) that remained stable during the transition to high school, while high-risk youth in the control group demonstrated a decline in GPA. Similarly, the control group showed a substantial growth in absence rates from middle school to high school, while the absence rate among the intervention group remained static (Stormshak et al 2009).

A UK-based randomised control trial on the SPOKES behaviour and literacy intervention demonstrated both a significant reduction in children's emotional and conduct problems as well as a gain of 6 months of reading age over 3 school terms (Sylva et al 2008). Additionally, parents in the intervention group reported using more strategies associated with successful literacy learning at home with their children.

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A US implementation study of the Family and Schools Together (FAST) programme, in which entire families participate in program activities designed to build parental respect in children, improve intra-family bonds, and enhance the family–school relationship (Ackley and Cullen 2010). This preventative programme for at-risk youth demonstrated statistically significant results for enhanced family relationships and parent-school engagement (Ackley and Cullen 2010), and parents reported significant gains in their school involvement, parent-to-school contact, school-to-parent contact, and total parent engagement (Crozier et al 2010).

 'Sparking the Imagination' was a small scale project aimed at enhancing the educational opportunities of young children from disadvantaged backgrounds in Northern Ireland. One of the primary means of achieving this goal was to enable children and their parents to thrive in the formal school setting, particularly through building their self-confidence and self-esteem, which can help raise educational aspirations in children through positive attitudes to school.

The project operated in 3 primary schools and brought together parents, children, teachers, and creative experts from the community for workshops. Teachers were encouraged to enhance their professional development and follow up on creative ideas that may not fit the regular curriculum, parents were introduced to innovative approaches to parental engagement, and children's creativity was fostered. All participants planned the workshops together and worked collaboratively.

The area highlighted by all parties in which significant gains were clearly evident was self-esteem. The raising of self-esteem in the children taking part in the study was remarked upon by teachers, parents and the creative experts alike. Teachers claimed that self-esteem was nourished because the creative tasks allowed expression of skill and knowledge in more diverse ways.

Many of the parents reported positive changes in their children's attitudes to school and commented on how the children wanted to continue creative activities at home. Some felt that they had benefited from the affirmation that their contribution to their child's education was of value, and that they were in the privileged position of actually seeing their children work in the school environment.

There also appeared to be a growing confidence in parent–teacher interactions and relationships as parents became more comfortable in their participation in the creative workshops and teachers became less fearful of their ability to organise and manage the active learning environment.

What does the evidence say?

Risk factors associated with psychological and emotional problems and conduct disorder behaviours include conflict in the family, family breakdown, poverty and low

income, abuse, and caregivers who may be struggling with mental illness or drug or alcohol misuse (Geddes 2008). For these reasons working with parents on these issues is a key dimension of parental engagement to reduce the attainment gap. Understanding how social competencies positively influence academic attainment is the aim for many studies that examine either, in broad terms, 'family functioning' or 'cognitive improvement'. Further intervention studies have found that addressing academic and cognitive development alongside social, emotional, and behavioural support is more effective for improving children's overall outcomes.

There is evidence that the integration of social and emotional programmes into the broader school curriculum can have a positive effect on academic achievement and wellbeing (Emerson et al 2012; Patrikakou 2008). Social and emotional types of learning can improve pupils' understanding of academic subject matter, reduce anxiety, and increase their motivation to learn (Patrikakou 2008). Focusing on the social and emotional wellbeing of children early in their development, rather than waiting until some pupils begin to exhibit problems, may help to prevent any potential achievement gap (Scott et al 2010). Using parental engagement in education as a tool to enhance pupil wellbeing rather than solely to promote academic achievement, can also reduce the risk of parents placing excessive pressure on students to excel (Emerson et al 2012).

The relationship between poor reading ability and a range of academic, social, emotional and behavioural problems is complicated and it is difficult to disentangle cause and effect. One study associates poor reading with poor outcomes - academic and social and emotional - for children (Scott et al 2010). Low levels of literacy and high levels of behaviour problems, particularly in older children and those transitioning into adolescence, often co-occur (Sylva et al 2008). The link between poor literacy or cognitive abilities and socio-emotional difficulties was also found in the analysis of the Growing Up in Scotland longitudinal study; children with higher mean scores on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire total difficulties scale were more likely to have lower cognitive development scores indicating both lower problem solving and vocabulary ability (Bradshaw et al 2012).

When children and adolescents participate in an intervention or programme aimed to improve their socio-emotional and academic outcomes, those whose families are actively engaged display much less delinquent behaviour later in life than those children whose families were not involved (Grayson 2013; Patrikakou 2008). When parents became engaged in their children's learning as well as forming positive ways of managing children's behaviour, children's achievement improved (Beckett et al 2012 and Kiernan and Mensah 2011, both cited in Grayson 2013).

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What seems to be working?

Effective school-family partnerships include establishing an inviting and participatory relationship with families of pupils – a positive parental attitude towards school will influence the children's socio-emotional association with the school (Patrikakou 2008; Sylva et al 2008). One possible way to facilitate this partnership is to deliver a community programme at school, with many families experiencing this as less stigmatising than attending a group of 'referred' families (Sylva et al 2008). Similarly, effective partnership between the school and family requires unified messages regarding behaviour – when the home reinforces behaviour expected at school it influences the way children respond to learning and the school environment (Harris and Goodall 2008).

The development of a family resource centre in schools can provide parents with brief in-person consultations, telephone consultations, feedback regarding their children, and access to intervention or educational materials (Stormshak et al 2009). These family resource centres also become a means of signposting and linking intervention services, with an emphasis on mental health services for families. It is especially important in areas of high deprivation and disadvantage to link intervention services in the school and community; this facilitates both uptake by families and promotes self-selection into the most appropriate interventions services (Stormshak et al 2009).

Combining support for children's behaviour while also delivering literacy interventions (Scott et al 2010; Sylva et al 2008). Maximisation of behaviour and learning interventions requires active family engagement and a teacher component to address the classroom context (Scott et al 2010). An example of such an intervention is Supporting Parents on Kids Education in Schools (SPOKES), which was used in several intervention studies (Scott et al 2010; Sylva et al 2008). SPOKES integrates the Incredible Years parent-training programme for managing children's behaviour with a literacy programme for the children (which varies).

Using these reflective questions will support you to consider your own approach to engaging and supporting children and their families:

- Do we begin any specific targeting for parental engagement from day one of (primary, secondary) school or do we wait until there appears to be a problem or struggle with the student's achievements?
- How effectively do we use current available data about levels of poverty in our community to help us target our interventions?
- How effectively do you encourage parents to support their child's learning in literacy? In what ways could this be developed further?

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- How effectively do you encourage parents to support their child's learning in numeracy? In what ways could this be developed further?
- To what extent do staff understand GIRFEC, the wellbeing indicators and how these can have a positive impact on children and families?
- How effectively do we monitor programmes?
- What evidence do we have that family learning is improving the life chances of the families involved?
- Are outcomes for children improving as a result of their participation in family learning? How do we know?

Documents: -

How Good is Our Third Sector (2015)
https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk3hgiothirdsector.aspx

How Good is Our Schools 4 (2015)
https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk2hgios.aspx

How good is the learning and development in our community? (2016)
https://education.gov.scot/improvement/Pages/frwk4hgiocommunitylearning.aspx