Supporting Parents in Promoting Early Learning

The Evaluation of the Early Learning Partnership Project

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*Department of Education
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The views expressed in this report are the authors’ and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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Chapter 2: The Early Learning Partnership Project: the policy context and the role of the agencies
Kate Coxon and Teresa Smith

Chapter 3: Design and methods
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Chapter 4: ELPP - history, implementation and reach
Teresa Smith, Kate Coxon, George Smith and Jo-Pei Tan

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List of Abbreviations

A Level  Advanced Level
AS Level  Advanced Supplementary Level
CAMHS  Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CASCOT  Computer Assisted Structured Coding Tool
CIS  Caregiver Interaction Scale
CUREC  Central University Research Ethics Committee
DCSF  Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES  Department for Education and Science
DH  Department for Health
DWP  Department for Work and Pensions
EAL  English as an Additional Language
ELPP  Early Learning Partnership Project
EPPE  Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
ESOL  English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESRC  Economic and Social Research Council
EYFS  Early Years Foundation Stage
FCCC  Families, Children and Child Care
FLA  Family Learning Association
FNP  Family Nurse Practitioner
FPI  Family and Parenting Institute
FWA  Family Welfare Association
GCSE  General Certificate of Secondary Education
GP  General Practitioner
HLE  Home Learning Environment
HMT  Her Majesty’s Treasury
HOME  Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment
I CAN  I Can
IDeA  Improvement and Development Agency
IMD  Index of Multiple Deprivation
LA  Local Authority
LGA  Local Government Association
NCB  National Children’s Bureau
NCH  National Children’s Homes
NCMA  National Child Minders’ Association
NECF  National Evaluation of the Children’s Fund
NEELPP  National Evaluation of the Early Learning Partnership Project
NESS  National Evaluation of Sure Start
Newpin  New Parent Infant Network
NHS  National Health Service
NSF  National Service Framework
NS-SEC  National Statistics - Socio-Economic Classifications
NVQ  National Vocational Qualifications
NNI  Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative
OCN  Open College Network
ONS  Office of National Statistics
PAFT  Parents as First Teachers
PCT  Primary Care Trust
PEAL  Parents, Early Years and Learning
PEEP  Peers Early Education Partnership
PFQ  Parental Feelings Questionnaire
PICL  Parents Involved in their Children’s Learning
PIPPIN  Parents in Partnership Parent Infant Network
PLA  Pre-School Learning Alliance
PPEL  Parents as Partners in Early Learning
<table>
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<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Parent Support Advisors</td>
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<td>RCT</td>
<td>Randomised Control Trials</td>
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<td>RQ</td>
<td>Research Question</td>
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<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-economic Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHARE</td>
<td>Share</td>
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<td>SOA</td>
<td>Super Output Area</td>
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<td>SOC</td>
<td>Standard Occupational Classification</td>
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<td>SCC</td>
<td>Sure Start Children's Centres</td>
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<td>SSLPs</td>
<td>Sure Start Local Programmes</td>
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<td>TCM</td>
<td>Thurrock Community Mothers</td>
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<td>TLRP</td>
<td>Teaching and Learning Research Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>TP</td>
<td>Target Practitioner</td>
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<td>VCS</td>
<td>Voluntary and Community Sector</td>
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<td>WTC</td>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
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Executive summary

Introduction and Background

It is now accepted that the link between disadvantage and achievement is cumulative: when poorer children enter primary school, despite early indications of potential, they tend to fall behind (Feinstein, 2003, 2004). Consequently, the chances of breaking cycles of poverty and deprivation are considerably reduced as children get older (DfES, 2004a). However, a range of protective factors have been identified which can help children overcome their initial disadvantage and ultimately prevent social exclusion. These include:

- Strong relationships with parents, family members and other significant adults;
- Parental interest and involvement in education with clear and high expectations;
- Positive role models;
- Active involvement in family, school and community life;
- Recognition, praise and feeling valued.

These factors are recognised as important by policy makers, who consequently highlight the involvement of parents in children’s educational trajectories. The study is located within the context of policies to lift children out of poverty through the provision of integrated services for children; support for parents as first educators; funding initiatives for interventions across education and health care.

The ELPP initiative

The Early Learning Parenting Project (ELPP) ran from October 2006 to March 2008, was funded by the DCSF and taken forward on their behalf by the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI), with the aim of putting in place family-based educational support as a protective factor in the lives of young children. ELPP worked through voluntary sector agencies to encourage and develop practices which could help parents of children aged one to three, who were at risk of learning delay, to engage with their children’s learning. It had a particular focus on parents who might be unaware of how to support their children in this way. ELPP was therefore located within a risk and early intervention framework.

The initiative consisted of three strands:

- **Strand 1**: the implementation of demonstration projects led by the FPI;
- **Strand 2**: the evaluation of the ELPP initiative by the Departments of Education and Social Policy and Social work at the University of Oxford;
- **Strand 3**: the development of the workforce led by the National Children’s Bureau (NCB) and delivered by a consortium with the aim of providing training programmes to increase awareness in early years staff about parental involvement.

In Strand 1, nine voluntary sector agencies were involved with sites across England. These agencies worked with combinations of 12 different intervention approaches all aimed at helping parents recognise and develop their important role in their children’s learning. The nine agencies were as follows: Barnardo’s; ContinYou; Coram; the Family Welfare Association; Home Start; NCH; Pen Green; the Pre-school Learning Alliance; and Thurrock Community Mothers.

The 12 approaches used by the agencies were: Bookstart; Campaign for Learning; Listening to Children; I CAN; Newpin’s Family Play Programme; One Plus One’s Brief Encounters; PAFT; PEAL; PEEP; PICL; SHARE; and Thurrock Community Mothers. Practitioners in sites could therefore work with resources from more than one intervention. Most of the interventions offered associated training. Some such as PEEP offered distinct curricula, others such as PEAL introduced staff to ideas that would help guide their work.
Key findings

ELPP drew on the considerable strengths of the VCS to emphasise the crucial role played by parents during early childhood and highlighted the importance of workforce development to support that early role.

- The initiative developed understandings and skills among practitioners and showed that the continuous development of those skills in the workplace was important;
- Successful organisational practices were identified that brought about valuable changes in the workplace and in practitioners’ new awareness of and commitment to parental involvement;
- ELPP showed that it is possible to reach and engage some vulnerable families in disadvantaged areas to support their children as learners; and
- There was evidence of improvement in parents’ relationships with their children. Parents also showed improvement in ‘organising’ the children’s environment through better health and safety practices and more opportunities for children to learn from day to day activities with their parents outside the home.

Aims

The evaluation was not set up to identify the relative success of the individual approaches that informed practices in the sites. That would have been impossible for two reasons: the one year time-scale would not have permitted it; and many of the sites were drawing on more than one approach as they worked responsively with specific groups or individual parents. Instead, the intention was to examine the processes and outcomes of implementation at an organisational level to offer some guidance for the development of similar initiatives and to gather some indication of whether such an intervention can change how parents support their children’s learning.

Methodology

The research team started their work in April 2007 and finished in March 2008. It considered activities over that period in longitudinal studies in twenty sites identified by the nine agencies across England in order to examine how the principles and purposes of ELPP, together with the approach-related training received by staff, were influencing the following:

- the work of the sites as organisations, the services delivered in those sites and the impact of ELPP on the development of service provision within local authorities;
- workforce development among practitioners who worked with parents and their children; and
- how parents engaged with their young children to support them as learners.

The implementation of Strand 1 of ELPP was complex and called for a mixed methods evaluation study which could (a) capture and make sense of complexity and (b) examine the influence of ELPP on the organisations where it was implemented; the workforce; and the parents who experienced it. The research team is indebted to everyone who participated in the study for their patience, support and consideration.

There were three tiers to the data collection:

(i) Nine agencies were studied through interviews at the beginning and at the end of the evaluation.
(ii) Twenty sites were examined as changing systems using activity theory, which allowed an analysis of the relationships between individual practitioner learning and changes in the sites as systems. Evidence was collected in staff interviews, with both managers and key members of staff, on two occasions, producing four systemic snapshots of each site and its...
activities. Sites were also investigated through data collection and analyses of family take-up of services from July to December 2007 and during 2008. In addition, analysis of postcode data from where it was available provided background evidence for analyses of targeting and take-up.

(iii) More than one hundred parents were studied through interviews to explore their views of participating in ELPP and through detailed observations of their interaction with their children at home.

Figure 1 represents the complexity of the practitioners' role. They diagnosed the strengths and needs of parents in terms of parents’ engagement and understandings and skills and drew on a selection of the tools or resources made available to them by the ELPP initiative in order to work with parents. How they worked with the tools was shaped to an extent by the histories of the agencies which employed them and by the histories of their services and the communities in which they worked.

The evaluation has shown that there was considerable variation across the sites where ELPP was implemented. The 20 sites, which were studied, differed historically in whether they worked with adults or with children; some were settings-based; others focused primarily on home visiting; in some volunteers undertook home-visits; in other sites there were no volunteers; and in some, ELPP was carried out by local authority workers. Sites also varied in the extent to which they had expertise in attracting more socially excluded adults to their provision. ELPP therefore has provided a test-bed example of introducing similar initiatives into the wide range of sites available and can offer lessons for commissioning services and monitoring their implementation.

Findings

A. The agencies’ role in the ELPP initiative

The consortium run by the FPI, which took forward the initiative, was regarded as a bold experiment with considerable potential. It established a new system to deliver the initiative within a limited timeframe. Its focus throughout was on facilitating appropriate delivery via the agencies. Knowledge sharing was a feature of the later stages of the consortium through for example practitioner conferences. Agency staff reported that they liked the consortium model but suggested that more could have been made of it from the outset to develop inter-agency collaboration. There are therefore important lessons for taking forward this potentially powerful model of delivering an initiative.

Successes

- Agencies agreed that the ELPP consortium model, led by the FPI, could provide a useful precedent for future initiatives.
- All the agencies appreciated government recognition of the potential contribution of VCS to work with families who may be disaffected with statutory sector services.
- There was strong agreement among the agencies that it was sensible to select sites for the implementation of ELPP which were already running a range of services, where they hoped that the new initiative could be integrated into the bigger picture and more easily maintained and sustained.

Challenges

- Agency staff indicated that more could have been made of the opportunities for inter-agency collaboration at a strategic level than was achieved within the timeframe. They suggested that more opportunities to discuss and debate approaches with experienced colleagues could have been created.
- Agency staff reported tensions between VCS and statutory sector services in some local authorities and suggested that a stronger steer from government on the role of the VCS would
have been helpful. In particular, they suggested that there was need for more encouragement from the national level about how ELPP might be tied into local authority plans once initiative funding ceased.

- It is possible that important lessons from the ELPP initiative may be wasted without a framework of ensuring that knowledge generated within these practices can inform local strategy and policy.

B. The work of the sites as organisations, the services delivered in those sites and the impact of ELPP on the development of service provision within local authorities

ELPP was usually inserted into existing organisations, even if new ELPP-funded teams were assembled in those organisations. How sites engaged and worked with parents therefore usually reflected their established practices and whether, for example, they had previously focused their work on vulnerable adults or on children. Nonetheless, there was considerable evidence of a change in focus and of staff re-orienting their work towards supporting parents in working with their children. Staff frequently selected elements of approaches or adapted curriculum-based programmes to suit the needs of parents. However, the implementation of ELPP and the potential it offered for developing new systems to support its aims in the longer term, were curtailed by it being a short-term initiative with no expectation of continued funding.

Successes

- Most settings-based services took up the opportunity to add home visiting to their repertoire; while some home visiting services added settings-based sessions to their provision. The rationale for these changes reflected an increased emphasis on parents as supporters of their children’s learning across the sites.
- A major shift in focus for many services was to see adults primarily as parents rather than clients and to bring them into a partnership which recognised their importance to their children’s learning.
- Efforts were being made by practitioners to sustain the work started by the ELPP initiative. These efforts at sustaining provision were more likely to succeed if resources could be found within services or within agencies than if they were to come from local authorities. In one case, however, where ELPP work was incorporated into a bid for Children’s Centre funding, the activities were to be sustained.
- There were some examples of ELPP services developing local inter-agency links at the level of practice to avoid families being left without support once funding had ceased.

Challenges

- ELPP was not well-networked into local authority systems through, for example, the engagement of local stakeholders in partnership arrangements. There were examples of ELPP services being brought into local networks of interagency work through e.g. referral systems. However, the relatively short time-frame for the initiative meant that in the majority of sites there was insufficient time for the potential of ELPP-funded activity to be recognised by other agencies. Consequently, ELPP principles were largely championed locally by senior staff in services which had received funding. There was little evidence that local authorities had been able to learn from the lessons offered by the voluntary sector organisations involved.
- Short-term funding also produced an unwillingness to start to engage with the most socially excluded families because of concerns about letting them down once funding ceased.
- There was a potential tension between a dual focus on attracting and developing the confidence of the more vulnerable socially excluded parents and a focus on equipping them with skills to support their children’s learning, not least because of the need to work responsively with the most vulnerable parents to prevent the destabilising of other areas of their lives.
C. Workforce development among practitioners who worked with parents and their children

Most training was seen as useful in most cases and practitioners valued experiencing it before starting to work in new ways. Staff development through supervision, focused staff meetings, and visiting experts was also discussed as valuable. The ELPP initiative involved practitioners in varying amounts of training. Where approaches were based on curricula such as PEEP, training was necessary before ELPP work started. This was also true of approaches which relied heavily on resources such as Bookstart or Thurrock Community Mothers. There were also some frustrations when training was not offered prior to the implementation of the approaches which did not demand familiarity with a specific curriculum of set of activities, but required practitioners to work with core ideas such as in the PAFT and PICL approaches.

Practitioners’ decision making was an important part of the ELPP process. They were involved in:
(i) identifying vulnerability and parents’ starting points as they learnt to support their children as learners; and
(ii) selecting how to work with parents to overcome both their lack of engagement and skills to support their children’s learning.

Therefore, it would seem important that practitioners are skilled in both identification of need and how to respond to it. Practitioners’ responses to training indicated a thirst for ideas that will inform the responsive professional practices that characterise prevention. One legacy of ELPP, therefore, is clear evidence of a workforce that is eager to learn, and capable of learning and evidencing that learning in their practices with parents.

Successes

• Practitioners gained skills and understanding about working with parents to support children’s learning, from the training they received. Practitioners valued the knowledge about learning and development that they gained from training and shared it with parents.
• Workplace staff development which involved discussion and feedback was important in sustaining and refining lessons from training.
• Practitioners adapted structured interventions and drew on ideas offered in training to work responsively with parents.
• Practitioners became increasingly adept at recognising the learning opportunities available in familiar resources and modelled their expertise for parents.

Challenges

• Training broadened rather than enhanced the expertise of most practitioners; while for some it allowed them to revisit and refresh what they already knew.
• In some of the sites which were working with the most vulnerable parents, there were questions about the appropriateness of shifting their focus to educationally oriented preventative work.
• The timing of training was seen as important to ensure that it occurred before programmes were implemented. Where training occurred after ELPP work had started there was some frustration.
• A focus on training practitioners to implement approaches for working with parents was more evident than help with how to access and engage the most socially excluded families.
D. Parents as their children’s first educators

Interviews with parents revealed many perceived benefits of participation in ELPP: fresh ideas for playing and talking with children; new confidence in their role as educators; keen appreciation for the professional skills of the ELPP workers. Structured questionnaires early and late in parents’ participation showed improvements in parent child relationships, even after controlling for parental education and elapsed time between the two observations. Finally, the widely regarded HOME observation demonstrated positive change in the ways parents ‘organised’ the child’s environment, making it safer and opening up new experiences in the community for the children. However, there was no improvement in parenting behaviours that challenged children’s thinking or extended their language. There remains one concern in proclaiming ELPP a success: numerous studies have shown parental reports of new learning and improved relationships do not necessarily lead to improved child cognitive outcomes, i.e. ‘learning’, nor decreases in children’s problems. However, the timeframe of the evaluation meant that outcomes for children could not be studied.

Successes

- Parents’ experiences of participating in the ELPP initiative were mainly positive. Many aspects of the programme were valued, with parents commenting on the enjoyment and benefit for their child.
- Parents’ interviews also indicated that specific benefits from ELPP included the following: support through interaction with other parents and members of the ELPP team; social engagement in regaining emotional health; practical help in coping with everyday activities; increased awareness and empathy towards their child; knowledge exchange leading to new skills, techniques and creative ideas.
- ELPP shows that it is possible to reach and engage some vulnerable families in disadvantaged areas in an educationally oriented initiative. The ELPP parent sub-sample has been shown to fall within the target of the ELPP initiative based on demographic characteristics including ethnicity, socio-economic status and the amount of benefits and credits received.

Challenges

- Statements made by parents when they were first visited indicated that they were largely aware of their role in their children’s learning. They recognised the importance of their involvement as well as providing a stimulating environment. Services for parents therefore need to aim at more than ‘awareness’ to bring about positive change in parenting behaviours.
- Although ELPP was targeting the more excluded families with children at risk of learning delay, observational data showed that most of the ELPP parents had satisfactory or even good parenting skills. Most showed emotional warmth and support for their child’s learning but more than a fifth did not engage with their children in activities that were intellectually stretching. The challenge for future work is to respond to a range of parental needs: including intellectual challenge for children; improved family relationships; and greater participation in mainstream services.
- Families had many and varied needs, ranging from poor parenting skills, to mental health problems, to severe social isolation. Efficient use of resources requires careful targeting of services to the discrete needs of vulnerable families and the orchestration of inter-agency responses.
The implementation and efficacy of ELPP as a preventative initiative

The current study contributes to understanding the processes of implementation of early interventions focusing on strong parental involvement. The findings of the study are relevant to current government policy as ELPP both emphasised the crucial role played by parents during early childhood and highlighted the importance of workforce development to support that parental role.

The findings pose questions about the replicability and the extent of change in parents' behaviour despite their talking with enthusiasm about their roles as educators. Also, because of the timescale, this study could not demonstrate that ELPP prevented learning delay, nor does it offer answers to the crucial question: do the interventions that comprise the ELPP initiative make a difference to children's long-term learning? However, the study documents successful organisational practices that brought about valuable changes in the workplace and in practitioners' new awareness and commitment to parent involvement.

The ELPP initiative aimed at providing 'protective factors' which are likely to prevent social exclusion. The initiative was ambitious given its short time scale. The challenges involved in the dual focus of engaging socially excluded parents and preparing them to support their children as learners should not be underestimated. Sites and practitioners made informed professional judgments about which approaches to use and how to use them with different parents. This summary indicates the importance of developing understandings and skills among practitioners and the continuous development of those skills in the workplace.
Figure 1: ELPP as Educationally Oriented Intervention

Tools¹
i.e. Bookstart, Campaign for Learning, Home-Start, I CAN, Listening to Children, Newpin’s Family Play Programme, One Plus One’s Brief Encounters, PAFT, PEAL, PEEP, PICL, SHARE, Thurrock Community Mothers

Histories of agencies

Histories of services and communities

Practitioners²

Engagement

(i) Families which are most excluded

(ii) Families which are unaware of their potential role as supporters of their children’s learning

Families’ trajectories³

Understanding and skills

(i) Families which are engaged in mainstream services that support children as learners

(ii) Families which are aware of their potential role and are equipped with skills to support their children as learners

¹ Tools varied between for example programmes such as PEEP and sets of ideas such as PAFT.
² Practitioners had a wide range of qualifications, experience and opportunities to learn.
³ Families had different starting points on these trajectories and varying responsiveness to the opportunities on offer.
Introduction

The Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP) ran from October 2006 to March 2008. It was funded by the DCSF and was taken forward on behalf of the DCSF by the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI). The purpose of ELPP was to work through voluntary sector agencies to encourage and develop practices which could help parents of one to three year old children who were at risk of learning delay to engage with supporting their children’s learning; and to focus particularly on parents who may not be aware of their potential to support their children in this way.

The overall project was to include three strands: first, a demonstration project running a range of approaches in different areas to support parents’ involvement in their children’s early learning; second, the evaluation of this demonstration project; and third, a workforce development project.

Nine voluntary sector agencies were involved with sites across England. These agencies worked with combinations of 12 different intervention approaches all aimed at helping parents recognise and develop their important role in their children’s learning. ELPP was therefore located within an early intervention framework and aimed at putting in place family-based educational support as a protective factor in the lives of young children.

The Oxford-based research team started their work in April 2007, after the start of the initiative. It looked at activities between April 2007 and March 2008 in twenty sites across England in order to examine how the principles and purposes of ELPP, together with the approach-related training received by staff, were influencing the following:

- the work of the sites as organisations, the services delivered in those sites and the impact of ELPP on the development of service provision within local authorities;
- the ways that practitioners worked with adults, children and other practitioners; and
- how parents engaged with their young children to support them as learners.

The twenty sites varied in their histories of working with adults or with children; some were settings-based; others focused primarily on home visiting; in some volunteers undertook home visits; in other sites there were no volunteers; and in some ELPP was carried out by local authority workers. Sites also varied in the extent to which they had expertise in attracting more socially excluded adults to their provision.

The implementation of ELPP was therefore complex and called for a mixed methods study which could (a) capture and make sense of complexity and (b) examine the influence of ELPP on the organisations where it was implemented; the workforce; and the parents who experienced it.

The study therefore consisted of twenty longitudinal case studies of the sites as organisational systems which included a focus on workforce development; and detailed observational and interview data from parents interacting with their children, early and late in their experience of ELPP, which indicated the influence of ELPP on their interactions. In addition, the research team gathered information about agency intentions and progress in interviews with senior staff in the nine agencies; undertook post-code analyses of local demographics; and gathered questionnaire data on the take up of ELPP services. The research team is indebted to everyone who participated in the study for their patience and consideration.

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Eventually this was run by the National Children’s Bureau and Parenting UK. See the Consortium Bid by NCB and Parenting UK, Early Learning Partnerships Strand 3: Up-skilling the workforce to build effective partnerships with parents to support their involvement in the child’s early learning, January 9 2007. Note that the DCSF advisory and steering committees for ELPP2 have included representatives from ELPP3, NCB and Parenting UK, to ensure communication between the strands.
ELPP was a short-term initiative with the potential to offer lessons for the commissioning of services which share ELPP aims. However, it was not the intention of the evaluation to identify the relative success of the individual approaches that informed practices in the sites. That would have been impossible for two reasons: the one year time-scale would not have permitted it; and at the point of implementation many of the sites were drawing on more than one approach as they worked responsively with specific groups or individual parents. Instead the intention was to examine the processes and outcomes of implementation at an organisational level to offer some guidance for the development of similar initiatives and to gather some indication of whether such an intervention can change how parents support their children’s learning.

In Chapter 1 of this report ELPP is located within current thinking on how parents can support children as learners. In Chapter 2 the position of ELPP in relation to other policy initiatives which focus on early intervention for prevention is discussed. The design of the evaluation study is outlined in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the ELPP initiative is discussed from the perspective of the agencies and the groups who experienced the initiative in their localities are outlined. In Chapter 5 the outcomes of ELPP for organisations and services are analysed. In Chapter 6 the focus is workforce development in ELPP. In Chapter 7 attention turns to how ELPP services influenced how parents worked with their children to support their learning. Chapter 8 provides a summary of findings and outlines implications for practice and policy.

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Chapter 1: The role of parents in their children’s development

1.1 Introduction

Parents as educators have a long history. Sociological studies in the 1950s and 1960s of the influence of the home and the school on children’s educational attainment (e.g. Douglas, 1964; Floud, Halsey and Martin, 1956) focused attention on the continuing class gap in children’s outcomes. More than forty years on, the class gap in children’s life chances remains stubbornly persistent (e.g. Bynner, 2001; Feinstein, 2003 and 2004; Feinstein et al, 2007). Programmes of the 1960s such as the British Educational Priority Areas Projects (Halsey, 1972) focused attention on the importance of parental involvement with their young children’s learning, whether in the home or in the school. Subsequent research over the last forty years has sharpened our understanding of different approaches - parental involvement, parental participation, parental engagement, parental partnership, and the nuances in different usage (e.g. Pugh and De’Ath, 1989; Smith, 1980). More recent overviews have delineated the differences and overlaps between, for example, parent training, parent support, parent education, family education (e.g. Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe 2004; Shinman, 2005).

Government policies focusing on parents and their young children have proliferated over the last ten years. These have come from different starting points in health on the one hand (e.g. the Children and Maternity Services’ National Service Framework announced in 2004) and education on the other (e.g. Sure Start announced in 1999, the 2004 Every Child Matters framework) but have many of the same concerns about the role of parents in their children’s development. The policy background to ELPP is sketched out in Chapter 2. However, here it is important to note that the research on effective interventions and programmes stems from different policy interests and theories about child development and learning. Many of these overlap: one strand focusing on for example children’s cognitive development, special educational needs; another on children’s behaviour, developmental delay, conduct disorder, and so on. The nine agencies involved in the ELPP initiative come from a range of backgrounds in both strands.

This chapter focuses on four key concepts: ‘risk and prevention’, ‘parental involvement’ or ‘parents as educators’, ‘learning delay’ and ‘hard to reach’. The concepts are defined and relevant research set out, before moving on to a discussion in Chapter 2 of the policy context for the Early Learning Partnership Project.

1.2 The ‘risk and prevention paradigm’

The concepts of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘at risk’ call for careful definition (LGA, DCSF and IDeA 2007). The notions of ‘risk’ and ‘resilience’ have long been of concern in early years development (HMT and DCSF, 2007a; Luthar, 2003; Schoon, 2006) - to quote Schoon (2006), ‘the factors and processes that promote escape from disadvantage’ (p.1), that enable individuals to ‘beat the odds’ (p.8). Factors include individual attributes, family characteristics, and aspects of the wider social context; resilience is a matter of both trait and process, and it is essential to understand both continuity and discontinuity, as Feinstein and his colleagues have pointed out. Luthar (2003, ed.), in exploring notions of vulnerability and resilience in the context of childhood adversities, summarised the effects of early intervention programmes on child outcomes through a number of different pathways (Luthar, 2003, p.443). Three important pathways of relevance here for the current study are (i) ‘cognitive advantage’, when improvements in children’s early development feed into later school performance; (ii) ‘family support’, when parents’ capacities to support their children’s learning and development are enhanced; and (iii) ‘motivational advantage’ - this is applied to young children’s own self-efficacy, perceived competence and persistence in learning but could equally be applied to their parents. All three ‘pathways’ are important to our understanding of the research context underpinning the policy development of ELPP set out in Chapter 2, and its adaptation by the agencies as discussed in Chapter 4.
In their policy discussion of ‘the paradigm of risk and protection-focused prevention’, France and Utting (2005) suggest that the last ten years under the Labour government have seen a substantial switch in policy focus away from child protection work with families in crisis to preventive work with families of children ‘in need’ (in the language of the 1989 Children Act). The notion of ‘prevention’ has come to focus on early intervention with children and young people who are thought to be ‘at risk’ of developing problems later on: low educational achievers, children with severe behavioural problems, children growing up in families with complex difficulties in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This shift depends on a number of assumptions. The first is that it is possible to predict later problems, or indeed achievements, from early ‘risk factors’; despite the risk of ‘false positives’ and ‘false negatives’ identified long ago by Rutter (Rutter, Quinton and Liddle, 1983). The second is that it is more effective, and more cost effective, to focus on universal services to capture those ‘early at risk’, while more entrenched and more fully developed problems may require more targeted interventions. The third is that research can help us identify not only ‘risk factors’ but also ‘protective factors’: strong families, strong social networks, healthy neighbourhoods with high levels of employment, and so on. France and Utting list large-scale community-based programmes such as Communities that Care, Sure Start, New Deal for Communities as examples, where interventions are neighbourhood-based rather than individually targeted. However, studies of programmes such as these show that individual intervention is possible within community-based programmes and indeed may be desirable in order to tackle issues and problems of different kinds at different levels.

France and Utting correctly identify a policy swing towards more community-based programmes (Smith, 2008). There is considerable evidence that universal services focusing on high-prevalence low-risk problems, for example, learning delay, low level maternal depression, low level behavioural problems, rather than low-prevalence high-risk problems (children with cerebral palsy, for example) will raise child health outcomes and educational outcomes. Melhuish and Hall (Belsky, Barnes and Melhuish, 2007 p.8ff) suggest that it is easier to identify children with ‘low prevalence but high severity’ disability such as cerebral palsy, severe learning difficulties or classic autism. However, children with ‘high prevalence but low severity’ conditions such as mild general learning difficulties, delayed language acquisition, dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are often missed in the early years. Children with these difficulties are more commonly found in low socio-economic groups; and the total burden for society of such low level but high prevalence problems is far greater than problems of high severity but low prevalence.

This sort of argument about the ‘capture’ of ‘low level severity’ prevention by ‘high level severity’ crisis is not new. For example, Aldgate and Tunstill (1996) analysed the 1989 Children Act s.17 returns in a sample of local authorities to demonstrate that it was high risk children already known to social workers or already listed on the Child Protection Register who were likely to be recognised as ‘in need’. Smith (1996) demonstrated similar patterns in an analysis of family centre work, and pointed out the likely impact of community development and adult education approaches for poor families bringing up their young children in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Pugh and her colleagues (e.g. Pugh and De’Ath, 1984; Pugh (ed), 1980; Aplin and Pugh (eds), 1983) were writing from the 1970s onwards about preschool and adult education programmes as preventative and the importance of universal early years provision, but in the context of local authority social service departments’ focus on child protection and education departments’ miniscule nursery provision, this seemed whistling in the wind.

What is new in the last ten years is the increasing interest in children’s ‘life chances’ (e.g. Bynner 2001, Alakeson, 2005) and the disparity between social class groups, and the documentation of those differences (for example, in cognitive development) as young as in the first two years of life (Feinstein, 2003 and 2004; Feinstein et al, 2007). Examples of how this research has been taken up in policy are given in Chapter 2.
1.3 Parents as educators

The ELPP initiative is about supporting parents to get involved in their children’s early learning. It is important here to disentangle different approaches and traditions that underpin the rather general notion of ‘parental involvement’. This section considers definitions and typologies of parent involvement, and then reviews a selection of parent involvement interventions.

The focus on ‘parents as educators’ is sharply different from ‘parents as helpers’ or teachers’ aides - that is, learners about children’s development when they help out in school or other early years settings. This was a typical approach following the 1967 Plowden Report (DES 1967), which called for closer home-school links and better home-school communication as the way to raise the educational achievement of children growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The notion of ‘parents as educators’ is also sharply different from the concept of informed choice contained in ‘parents as managers’, embodied in the 1980 Education Act which expanded parents’ membership of school governing bodies and their rights to school information on admissions criteria, examination results and so on. This located ideas about parents’ support for their children’s education in the debate about parental ‘voice’ and ‘exit’ (Hallgarten, 2000) - that is, parents as informed and active consumers in the educational market.

‘Parents as educators’ with its focus on early education is different again from the focus in family support services on helping parents to identify and deal with children’s problem behaviour, whether these are defined, as set out by Barlow et al (2007), as support for parenting, formal or informal, or parenting skills training, for example, structured programmes to develop parents’ skills and change parents’ and children’s behaviour. These approaches draw on different traditions about child learning and behaviour and different assumptions about the levers to change or improve children’s learning and behaviour. Yet, all these approaches can be analysed along the same dimensions: they all contain assumptions, explicit or implicit, about parent ‘empowerment’ and parental ‘partnership’. More specifically, parents are, or can learn to be, in control of the learning environment for their young children and are (or can be) treated as equal players in creating or choosing that environment, whether at home or in the school or early years setting. There is variation in the extent to which approaches deal specifically with parenting behaviours, e.g. skills of extending children’s language.

Various typologies combine the different approaches in different ways. Two examples given here focus on parental involvement in centres rather than in the home. Gordon (no date, cited in Smith, 1980, p.39), for example, distinguished between:

(i) parents as learners (parent education courses, observing children);  
(ii) parents as teachers of their own children (taking home toys and books);  
(iii) parents as teacher aides and volunteers in the classroom;  
(iv) parents as supporters (clerical, custodial, maintenance, fund-raising);  
(v) parents as policy makers and partners (board members).

Smith’s five categories (1980) are slightly different, drawn from the research literature before analysing her study of preschool involvement in nursery schools, nursery classes and playgroups in Oxfordshire:

(i) working as an ‘educator’ (blurring the boundaries between ‘parent as teacher’ of his/her own child, and the ‘professional teacher’ of a classroom of children2);  
(ii) working in the group ‘doing the chores’;  
(iii) servicing (fundraising, helping with visits etc);  
(iv) factors to do with the ‘openness’ or ‘ethos’ of the group - how ‘welcoming’ or ‘open’ is the preschool centre to parents staying to settle in their child, dropping in;  
(v) involvement in management.

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2 See Katz (1984) for an early explication of this distinction between ‘parent as 24 hour expert’ on his or her own child and the ‘teacher as day time expert’ on his or her class of children.
These are examples of typologies that focus on ‘roles and institutions’ (Pugh and De’Ath’s phrase, 1989 p.31). The focus on management may betray a rather middle class preoccupation with committees rather than education. However, if parental involvement is about power relations, as Arnstein (1969), Freire (1972) and Pugh and De’Ath (1989) remind us, then exercising participation and control by sitting on committees and making decisions about management is important (as some of the agencies reported in Chapter 4 argued).

Pugh and De’Ath (1989) stress that partnership in the early years must be equal, active and responsible (p.31). Their typology moves through:

(i) non-participation which may be actively chosen for example by parents who are working; but it may be passive, that is, not chosen, by parents who lack confidence or are tired or depressed, have disruptive children, or feel ‘it is not for them’;
(ii) support (practical help such as fund-raising, attending events);
(iii) participation (as helpers in the group, or as learners - about their own child or about the wider world);
(iv) partnership - defined as ‘a working relationship that is characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect, and the willingness to negotiate. ‘A sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability’ (p.36);
(v) control - parents ultimately make the decisions for example about hiring and firing and finances.

These definitions and interpretations of parental engagement refer both to the individual level and the programme or site level. They are reflected in the agency interviews reported in Chapter 4. Ideas about partnership with parents are teased out in later chapters, which report the sites visits and interviews and staff views as well as parents’ views.

This kind of typology has echoes of Arnstein’s ‘ladder of citizen participation’ (1969). It has been used in a range of early years studies - for example, Partnership in action (Pugh, Aplin, De’Ath and Moxon, 1987), which includes centres now providing the ELPP initiative. Other studies document parents working in partnership with professionals to support their disabled children through schemes such as Portage (Pugh, 1981). Studies of voluntary sector agencies such as Barnardo's, working with high risk families and children (Daines, Lyon and Parsloe, 1990; Ferri and Saunders, 1991), demonstrate a high level of staff commitment to partnership in the sense of joint decision-making about strategies in working with parents and their children, but also nuance the tensions involved.

Reviews and evaluations stress the importance of the home climate, parents’ aspirations, and joint parent-child skill practice (e.g. David, Gooch, Powell and Abbott, 2002; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Raikes et al, 2006; Shinman, 2005). In their overview of parental involvement, Desforges with Abouchaar (2003) move beyond roles and institutions to what they call ‘at home good parenting’. Three points are worth emphasising. First, levels of involvement are associated with social class, poverty, health, as well as with parents’ perceptions of their role, their levels of confidence in that role and professionals’ respect for their role. Second, the parent-child relationship in the parent involvement process is reciprocal - the higher the child’s attainment, the more parents get involved. Third, ‘at home good parenting’ (a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, and high aspirations) has a more significant positive effect on children’s achievement than other factors. This, in effect, is a ‘parents as educators’ model. The model suggests that parental involvement works indirectly, partly by shaping the child’s concept as a learner and partly by setting high aspirations.

The ‘family cognitive climate’ is strongly related to the child’s later educational achievement. Dave’s index (1963, cited in Gordon, no date, p.15) prefigures that of Hess and Holloway (1984, cited in Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998 p.121) by some twenty years but includes very much the same thinking: parents’ aspirations for themselves and the child (‘achievement press’); language
models; educational guidance; extent and content of indoor and outdoor activities; intellectual climate of the home - nature and quality of toys, the opportunity for thinking and challenge embedded in daily activities; and the family’s work habits. It is possible here to ally Bruner’s notion of the child as ‘active learner’ with a notion of the parents as ‘active educator and partner’ in that process. Sylva et al (2004) and Sammons et al (2007) define and measure the ‘home learning environment’ in the EPPE study, as a seven question interview suitable for large-scale surveys. This is highly correlated with the HOME Inventory (Caldwell and Bradley, 2002).

A different approach to constructing a typology of parental involvement focuses on models for supporting parents in supporting their children’s learning, together with their theoretical underpinning. Here the following aims might be distinguished:

(i) training parents in new behaviours, as in Webster-Stratton’s programme The Incredible Years (Webster-Stratton, 1992), drawing on social-behavioural theory;
(ii) knowledge-sharing between parent and practitioner, for example about child development, as in Pen Green’s work with parents on schemas (Whalley, 2007) drawing on social constructivist educational theory;
(iii) modelling new activities and behaviours, as in the PEEP programme (Evangelou et al, 2005; Evangelou, Brooks and Smith, 2007) drawing on ORIM and ideas about scaffolding learning;
(iv) improving relationships between parents and children, as in counselling or therapeutic programmes of family support, drawing on psychodynamic theories;
(v) adult education and community development, drawing on community development and community advocacy theory (e.g. Freire, 1972).

In practice, parental involvement approaches are likely to combine different models, as can be seen in chapters 4 and 5.

Bronfenbrenner’s comments in his 1974 review of early intervention programmes remain as relevant today (Bronfenbrenner, 1974):

The family is the most effective and economical system for fostering and sustaining the development of the child. The involvement of the child’s family as an active participant is critical to the success of any intervention programme… Without such family involvement, any effects of intervention, at least in the cognitive sphere, appear to erode fairly rapidly once the programme ends… The involvement of the parents as partners in the enterprise provides an on-going system which can reinforce the effects of the programme while it is in operation, and help to sustain them after the programme ends.

Or as Desforges with Abouchaar (2003, p.10) put it:

Research shows that a form of parental involvement… has a major impact on school outcomes even after all other forces (e.g. the effect of poor attainment or of social class) have been factored out… the effect is shown to be indirect and to operate in the main through the promotion of attitudes, values and aspirations which are pro-learning.

1.4 Learning delay

The ELPP initiative was intended to target ‘parents of children aged 1-3 who are at risk of learning delay, to support the parents to get involved in their child’s learning ….’3; the policy context and focus is set out in Chapter 2. ‘Learning delay’ requires careful definition. It could be argued that this concept focuses on children’s early learning and preparation for formal learning, while ‘developmental delay’ draws on a wider body of research on children’s cognitive, behavioural and physical development; but clearly there are overlaps.

3 DfES Invitation to Tender, Annex 1 para.2, 15 January 2007
'Learning delay’ as a term does not appear in the review *Preventing reading difficulties in young children* by Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998). However, the discussion in that text makes it clear that a focus on literacy and ‘reading delay’ can be taken as a proxy for ‘learning delay’. The focus is on ‘the successful learner’ (p.79) with ‘well-developed language abilities, a foundation for reading acquisition, and varied experiences with emergent literacy’ (p.79), and also on the qualities of the home and the preschool centre which can foster such experiences and skills. The ‘preschooler whose home provides fewer opportunities for acquiring knowledge and skills pertaining to books and reading is at somewhat higher risk for reading difficulties than a child whose home affords a richer literacy environment’ (p.122). The home learning environment is crucial. Hess and Holloway (1984, quoted in Snow, Burns and Griffin p.121) identify five areas of family functioning that may influence reading development:

- demonstrating the value placed on literacy by reading to their children and encouraging them to read;
- parents’ encouragement of their children, by responding to children’s interest - what Hess and Holloway call parents’ ‘press for achievement’;
- the availability and use of reading materials - having books and reading and writing materials in the home;
- reading to their children, and providing opportunities to ‘read print’ - ‘refrigerator letters’, ‘environmental print’, cornflakes packets;
- opportunities for verbal interaction - parents talking with their children, shared conversations.

An example of parent-child literacy-oriented interactions (Snow, Burns and Griffin pp.140-141) shows a father with his two boys aged five and three reading stories, helping the three year old to ‘write’ beside him as he writes out cheques to pay bills, the older boy ‘reading’ and pointing out letters to the younger.

Snow, Burns and Griffin suggest (p.137) that children likely to start school less prepared to read may include (i) children from low-income communities, (ii) children with limited English proficiency (in British usage, these would now be termed as having ‘English as an additional language’ or EAL), (iii) children suffering from specific cognitive deficiencies or hearing or early language impairments; and (iv) children whose parents have a history of reading problems. Parents’ beliefs and attitudes (‘reading is fun’) and parental behaviour are important.

Both ‘learning delay’ and ‘developmental delay’ in Snow et al (1998) refer to children with cognitive deficits - that is, children who ‘have apparently intact physical sensory systems but still exhibit significant delays in learning and developing their capacities to remember, think, co-ordinate and solve problems’ (p.166). As the authors point out, in early intervention programmes researchers disagree about the extent to which content learning should be presented directly (didactic or behaviourist approaches) or ‘embedded’ in the child’s play (often called developmental or constructivist approaches) - the High/Scope Preschool Perry Programme is one well-known example of the second approach (see Schweinhart et al, 2004). The authors sum up primary prevention for at risk children as a combination of family-based talk, reading, play and fun, with more intensive work with high-risk groups, including parent education, job training and the provision of social services. Snow and her colleagues concluded (p.171):

*Excellent preschools can also make a difference for at-risk children; excellent in this case implies providing rich opportunities to learn and to practise literacy-related skills in a playful and motivating setting. Substantial research confirms the value of such preschools in preventing or reducing reading difficulties for at-risk children.*

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4 See Tizard and Hughes (1984) for discussion of the importance of parental ‘context’ in developing the child’s high-level comprehension, vocabulary and concepts.
The Snow et al review has been discussed in detail as it raises much the same issues about the home learning environment, parental aspirations for their children, and parents’ support for their children’s learning as have researchers before and since.

A different angle on ‘delay’ and ‘readiness’ derives from health-based programmes and research. US nurse-family partnership programmes for nurses and health visitors were designed to support parents experiencing extreme disadvantage with the aim of improving children’s life chances in a variety of ways, including their ‘school readiness’. The programmes range from pre-birth to two years old. Olds’ survey of these programmes (2006), covering over 20 years of practice, was optimistic about outcomes. Aimed at parents in poverty, with poor education, with drug, alcohol or mental health problems, and people with multiple deprivations, they were designed to increase paternal involvement, reduce behavioural problems, increase the space between pregnancies, increase parental education/employment aspirations as well as increase ‘school readiness’. These programmes have been adopted for the UK Department of Health flagship Nurse Family Partnerships, now renamed Family-Nurse Partnerships (FNP5). The initiative is included in the government’s 2006 Action Plan on Social Exclusion (the Reaching Out programme for the most disadvantaged two per cent6) that also initiated the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners. ‘School readiness’ and ‘prevention of learning delay’ have some obvious connections. The FNP schemes7 are based on nurses and health visitors working under strict supervision to a tight set of criteria which include positive support to parents, focused on strengths, and emphasising the therapeutic relationship which is possible with nurses who have a high level of skill and of public trust. The aim is to change behaviours and patterns of relationships, and explicitly to involve fathers.

Another strand of work based in health and special education to support parents is the programmes to enhance learning and cognitive or behavioural development in children with disabilities: behavioural problems, learning disabilities, or within the autistic spectrum. Here the projects have emphasised the importance of educating parents and giving them the skills by working alongside them. Skilled practitioners, therapists, nurses and psychologists work together to support parents to influence the child’s development and prevent behavioural issues.

Other reviews and evaluations of parenting programmes (Stewart-Brown, 2008; Gardner, Burton and Klimes, 2006; Hutchings et al, 2007; Kane, Wood and Barlow, 2007; Moran, Ghate and van der Merwe, 2004) focus more on parents with children with emotional and behaviour problems, and how to reduce conduct disorder rather than learning delay. However, the message is very similar:

- interventions are more likely to be successful if they have a strong theory base and a clearly articulated model of the predicted mechanism of change;
- both universal interventions and targeted interventions are needed to tackle different levels and intensities of difficulties;
- multi-component interventions are more likely to be successful;
- short, low level interventions that provide factual information and fact-based advice may be successful at increasing knowledge of child development and encouraging change in ‘simple’ behaviours, while more complex interventions may be necessary for higher risk parents and children;
- ‘cognitive’ interventions that change beliefs, attitudes and self-perceptions about parenting may be a necessary component for all programmes.

The final point is echoed in agencies’ views about the ELPP-funded approaches that were needed in order to help parents support their children’s early learning.

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5 See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of this programme as part of the policy context for ELPP.

6 See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the work of the Social Exclusion Unit Task Force as part of the policy context for the ELPP initiative.

7 The first wave of ten sites was announced in 2007 and the 2008 bidding process will put new sites in place to cover the current Spending Review period 2008/09 to 2010/11.
These programmes overlap in their aims, methods, training and targeted populations. Ideally at a local level they work together, sharing successes and avoiding duplication, and they share common preoccupations with the ELPP initiative although they derive from different theoretical perspectives and professional backgrounds in education and health.

1.5 ‘Hard to reach families’ or ‘hard to reach services’?

This section aims to capture some of those understandings of who or what might be ‘hard to reach’ in use in the literature and to summarise evaluatively ways that services have tried to engage with them. Most of the literature describes ways that education, health and social services have understood, and attempted engagement with, those individuals or groups who would not normally be accessing their service. In the process, understandings of what constitutes ‘hard to reachness’ emerge together with descriptions of, or advice on, ways that those characterised as ‘hard to reach’ might be successfully engaged. However, it should be noted that much of the literature points to the concept as being contested and variably understood within and between organisations.

In the following section understandings of ‘hard to reach’ are outlined with the aim of drawing out its complexity as a concept.

Who or what might be ‘hard to reach’?

The term ‘hard to reach’ appears to be used interchangeably in the literature with ‘vulnerable’, ‘isolated’ and ‘excluded’. Throughout this section, the term ‘hard to reach’ is used to encompass all these understandings.

Some literature which discusses ‘the hard to reach’ (Fangier and Sargeant, 1997; Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, and Barducci, 2006) appears to understand ‘hard to reach’ from the perspective of the service provider: that is, as a characteristic of families, or particular groups of people which services might wish to access and attract, but are finding difficulty in reaching. Much recent literature, however, (Milbourne, 2002; Crowley, 2005; Crozier and Davies, 2007; Barrat, 2008) reflects a shift towards understanding the concept from the perspective of the service user, i.e., it is a service which potential families would like to reach, but are unable to do so for one or more of a variety of reasons.

In the literature which understands 'hard to reach' from the perspective of the service provider, a wide range of descriptors is used to characterise the families. Broadly, they can be clustered into six categories, which need to be sketched in before going on to develop a fuller understanding. Firstly, those who might be understood as lacking in something, perhaps self-esteem, confidence, awareness of their need, power, employment, skills, income, adequate housing. Then there are those who are problematised by their life trajectories, either through socially unacceptable behaviour - such as those at risk of or participating in criminal activity, drug and alcohol abusers, or families where there is domestic violence; or because they belong to communities whose lifestyle might place them toward the boundaries of society, such as Travellers or gay/lesbian communities. Next are those who might be described as detached from the system, such as asylum seekers and refugees, people with different value systems from the provider, those who may be service resistant, service weary, service fearful, or simply disinterested in the services on offer; those who have difficulties relating to communication, i.e., they have poor literacy, difficulty articulating need, or additional language needs; those who for some reason are not visible to the service; and finally, those who have health issues. Families may, of course, belong to more than one of these clusters: boundaries between them must necessarily be fuzzy. Doherty, Stott, and Kinder (2004), however, argue that providers need to be very clear about how they are understanding 'hard to reach' so that those in the greatest need can be reached and engaged.
Much of the literature relates to those who are perceived to be lacking something, such as self-esteem or confidence which arises often from isolation - geographical, economic and social (Milbourne, 2002; Doherty, et al, 2004; Statham, 2004; Crowley, 2005; Glennie, Treseder, Williams and Williams, 2005; Barnes, McPherson and Senior, 2006). Milbourne (2002) suggests that isolation is often associated with women and refugees / asylum seekers who have deliberately chosen to go underground to avoid being moved. Engagement with this group is understood to be difficult because the families may not be aware of their need (Barnes et al, 2006); there are transport difficulties (Statham, 2004; Barnes, et al, 2006); lack of recognition of needs on the part of the services (Milbourne, 2002; Statham, 2004; Crowley, 2005; Barnes et al, 2006); or lack of funding, organisation or infrastructure to do the necessary outreach work (Milbourne, 2002, Barnes et al, 2006). Other deficiencies might be in housing (Milbourne, 2002; Faugier and Sargeant, 1997); skills (Hannon, Paul, Bird, Taylor and Birch, 2003; Glennie et al, 2005) or awareness of need (Doherty et al, 2004; Barnes et al, 2006). Doherty, Hall, and Kinder, (2003) draw attention to those considered 'hard to reach' who are actually accessing the services, but who are reluctant to move on, though reasons why this might be the case are not explored. Finally, Bagley and Ackerley, (2006) talk of empowering the families, which presupposes that they are understood, or consider themselves, to be in some way powerless.

Those who might be understood as problematised by their life trajectories appear to be among the most difficult to engage with providers. Some of the ‘choices’ that are made by this group, may not actually be real choices, but some of what they do - drug or alcohol abuse, prostitution, domestic violence, child abuse - is understood as pathologising them. Doherty et al (2004) argue that some of the reasons why such families are not engaging with services are that providers tend to shape the service to the characteristics of the group rather than to the needs of individuals within the group. Other reasons for difficulty in engaging them relate to the transient nature of the lives of some families - travellers, for example - and a sense that strategies for reaching these groups might lead to over-targeting of them which in turn leads to a reluctance to participate (Doherty et al, 2004). For Statham, (2004), however, the problem is less that families are reluctant to engage than that some members of the group may be unaware that the services exist. Milbourne (2002) on the other hand, suggests that it is the service provider who in many of these cases is 'hard to reach' and often unable to act in ways which meet the needs of the user, perhaps because they are not available in the areas where they are needed, or because the provider is constrained by lack of funding or by funders’ priorities. Further, Crozier and Davies (2007), point to the ways that schools tend to adopt an ‘expert’ model of relationship with the home which has an emphasis on pupil compliance and fails to understand, or perhaps listen to, cultural needs and practices.

The fragile existence of projects, suggests Milbourne (2002), means that groups learn not to trust initiatives and become service resistant. Faugier and Sargeant (1997) argue that even in these cases, there are strong social networks among the 'hard to reach' population which can therefore be accessed by drawing on word of mouth contact following contact with just one or two families. Once engagement is made in this way, referral chains and snowball techniques can be used to widen participation.

A third group identified in the literature is those who, for a range of reasons, might be described as detached from the system, either actively or passively. Reasons for active disengagement might include fear of the consequences of engagement with a system which is perceived as having the power to intervene in the user’s life in unwelcome ways: for example, asylum seekers and refugees who might fear being moved (Milbourne, 2002; Statham, 2004); lack of trust in the service providers (Barlow, Kirkpatrick, Stewart-Brown and Davis, 2005); misperceptions about the service (Barlow et al, 2005); rejection of the providers’ values (Crozier and Davies, 2007) or not accepting that there is a need (Barnes et al, 2006). Some families avoid engagement because they fear stigmatisation or because accepting help might be seen as a sign of weakness or failure (Barnes et al, 2006; Mullis et al, 2006). Other families make conscious choices to reject the values and ideas of the provider, or to sustain their own value system (Crozier and Davies, 2007). Yet others feel that providers might be nosey parkers who might judge them unfavourably.
(Barnes et al., 2006) or that home visiting by providers was a form of state surveillance (Brocklehurst, Barlow, Kirkpatrick, Davis and Steward-Brown, 2004). Barnes et al (2006) also reported that some families disengaged because they felt some incompatibility with the service provider. Explanations for passive disengagement with the system included lack of awareness that the service existed (Statham, 2004); being hard-pressed (Crowley, 2005) and lack of understanding of the systems of the providers (Milbourne, 2002). However, Doherty et al (2004) draw attention to the ethics of intervening with target populations who do not want intervention; as well as to the difficulty of overcoming negative perceptions of services.

Difficulties in communication are a barrier to access to services for those who have literacy difficulties (Doherty et al, 2004; Barnes et al, 2006) who have additional language needs (Milbourne, 2002; Chand and Thoburn, 2005; Crozier and Davies, 2007) or who have some difficulty in articulating their needs (Milbourne, 2002). In many cases (notably Crozier and Davies, 2007) it is the provider who is understood as creating the barrier here, rather than the service user, though Crozier and Davies argue (2007, p. 296 ) that too often, providers, especially schools, ‘pathologise’ parents and lay the blame on them for something which is out of their control. This in turn, becomes a reason why schools fail to act to overcome the barrier. Milbourne (2002) also argues that the ‘professionalisation’ of projects and a discourse of managerialism and the market make services more difficult to access. Poor communication between services, funding, resources and need is identified by Milbourne (2002) as an important issue to address if services are to be improved.

Those who might remain invisible to providers tend to be least defined in the literature. Doherty et al (2004) point to groups who are unable to express their needs to providers because they have not been seen by the provider: providers then need to find ways to render the invisible, visible, perhaps through provision of more accessible information or via informal networks of information. The final group - those who have health issues, and in particular mental health issues or post-natal depression - tend simply to be mentioned alongside other 'hard to reach' groups (Milbourne, 2002; Brocklehurst, 2004).

For those writers who understand a service as 'hard to reach', the concept appears to point more to the barriers which services might unknowingly erect between themselves and the service user. Crozier and Davies (2007) suggest that ‘hard to reach’ parents tends to mean ‘parents who are deemed to inhabit the fringes of school or society as a whole - who are socially excluded and who, seemingly, need to be ‘brought in’ and re-engaged as stakeholders’. For them, ‘hard to reach’ is a concept which in their work pathologises parents and leads to a narrow agenda for engagement. They argue that we should question why organisations such as schools are 'hard to reach' for some parents and adopt appropriate strategies to break down barriers to access. Such barriers relate mostly to communication (Crozier and Davies, 2007); organisational difficulties (Doherty, 2004; Statham, 2004); attitudes (Crozier and Davies, 2007); financial and time constraints (Doherty et. al, 2004); or cultural misunderstandings (Crozier and Davies, 2007).

**How might engagement with these families be made?**

Although the literature covers a range of situations in which families might be engaged by service providers, the focus in this section is on how families might be engaged with education services.

Barnes et al (2006) suggest that it is often the least vulnerable families who are likely to take up the offer of help from providers, while the active engagement of the most vulnerable is constrained by the limited funding, organisation and staffing of the providers. Nonetheless, there is some consensus in the literature about ways that service providers might engage those considered 'hard to reach'. Most of the literature points to the need for sensitivity and time in engaging those who are vulnerable and untrusting of the service providers; other writers point to the need to improve communication within and between agencies as well as with the target population. Other successful engagements have come about through some adjustment to
service provision to facilitate access and awareness of the kinds of approach that families might welcome from the provider.

**Relationships**

Relationships between providers and families are the key to successful and continuing engagement with families, suggests the literature. Arnold (2007) argues that many of the barriers to access are connected to the feelings of the user, and accepting the families as they are; being scrupulously fair; acknowledging feelings and explaining decisions can be valuable ways of engaging those who are lacking self esteem or confidence.

Building relationships is at the core of several of the successful strategies highlighted in the literature. (e.g., Brocklehurst *et al*, 2004; Statham, 2004; Arnold, 2007; Barrett, 2008), though successful relationships of trust require time to build (Milbourne, 2002; Hannon *et al*, 2003; Doherty *et al*, 2004; Glennie *et al*, 2006; Barnes *et al*, 2006).

Crowley (2005) argues that too often, families are 'hard to reach' because the service is not meeting their needs and recommends a partnership model of working with 'hard to reach' parents. Consultation with parents is also understood to be important to building successful relationships with the service families by Mullis *et al*, (2006) and Barrett, (2008). Doherty *et al* (2004) point to evidence that providers’ consultation with target populations is greater when interventions are not rushed into, though they also suggest that consultation for some providers might be more aspirational than actual.

**Communication**

Communication involves not only giving out messages, but also strong listening and negotiating skills. Participants include not only the practitioners and the service families, but other services: communication must therefore be strong within and between organisations as well as with the service families.

Brocklehurst *et al* (2004) point to the fact that success in engaging the 'hard to reach' depends on the relationship and communication skills of the professionals trying to engage them; other writers (Doherty *et al*, 2004;) similarly point to poor communication between provider and user and within and between providers themselves as a barrier to engagement, and suggest that providers need to address the fears and negativity of those who are disengaged from the system, as well as areas of difference between provider and user. Doherty *et al* (2004) suggest that practitioners should focus on those 'hard to reach' who are unable to express their needs because they are only partially visible; and on those whose language skills make it difficult for them to articulate their need.

Hannon *et al* (2003), in the context of adult learning, support Mullis *et al*'s (2006) suggestion that services might consider adopting a collaborative rather than directive approach to working with parents, following a holistic approach to learning and allowing the families to guide learning situations. Families should be consulted about their needs (Bagley and Ackerley, 2006; Mullis *et al*, 2006). This might be done: at promotional events, open days, and during home visits (Doherty *et al*, 2004); through the development of parental involvement policies in education establishments (Crozier and Davies, 2007) and through the development of arenas where the 'hard to reach' can voice their concerns (Doherty *et al*, 2004). The key to building those relationships, it is suggested (Doherty *et al* 2004), is face to face contact preferably in pleasant spaces which are close to the target’s home (Glennie *et al*, 2005).

Engagement with 'hard to reach' can be achieved through referrals from other service providers (Statham, 2004; Glennie *et. al*, 2005) and once contact is made, further engagement might be achieved through channels of communication which exist within the social networks of some groups who might otherwise resist service provision (Faugier and Sargeant, 1997).
Making shifts in service provision

Arnold (2007, p. 86) argues that services might consider adapting ‘their methods to ensure that [they] are giving all the parents equal opportunities to be involved in their children’s learning’. Several writers point to ways that services might make shifts in their provision to better meet the needs of those they are trying to engage and to develop relationships. Some suggestions relate to the spatial and temporal location of the service; some to the organisation and structure of the service; and a final group of suggestions relates to the relevance of the provision.

Doherty et al., (2004) argue, and Barrett (2008) lends support to this, that a useful shift might be to take the service to the user rather than expecting the user to come to the provider. This helps to overcome some of the problems of those ‘hard to reach’ who feel isolated or who have transport difficulties: services are located in places which might be easier to reach and can form the basis for social networking within the area. Nonetheless, it is equally important, suggest Glennie et al (2005), to locate the service in pleasant premises.

Breaking down barriers between services and users can also arise when services are pre-occupied with their own structures and systems. Complicated service structures and specialisms may prevent services and families from engaging with each other (Milbourne, 2002; Doherty et al, 2003). Glennie et al (2005) suggest that informal or hierarchical structures are important to ease access for families, while Doherty et al (2003) suggest that the site of delivery and the configuration of the team might affect the way that the ‘hard to reach’ could be engaged.

Flexible, inter-professional work also seems important. The literature suggests that engagement with the ‘hard to reach’ can be facilitated if organisations work together to foster interagency work and develop a holistic approach to families (Doherty et al, 2004; Statham, 2004). In particular, health visitors are highlighted by Glennie et al (2005) as providing a ‘gateway’ for and to other services, and community nurses as the most successful groups in reaching and engaging vulnerable families. Providers might also improve the services they offer to make them more relevant (Doherty et al, 2004), varied and flexible (Barrett, 2008).

Glennie, et al (2005) suggest that services might be improved by commissioning a small number of extra hours, though the realities of funding and funders’ priorities may make this extremely difficult for many, particularly voluntary, organisations. Barnes, et al (2006) draw attention to problems that services may have in engaging target populations because of lack of volunteers and long waiting lists. Barrett (2008) suggests that providers might consider recruiting parents as workers: this would have the dual benefit of increasing the contacts which might be made with families, and fostering a community of peers within which services might be more effectively taken to the ‘hard to reach’. Finally, Doherty et al (2004) suggest that assessing need away from the point of delivery might avoid the kinds of stigma which some ‘hard to reach’ experience.

In summary, there is a range of ways in which ‘hard to reach’ might be understood, both from the perspective of the families who use the services and from the perspective of the service providers. More recent literature tends to argue either that all families (Barrett, 2008) or no families (Barrett, 2008) are ‘hard to reach’, rather that services are difficult to access. If families are to be engaged with service providers, then practitioners need to consider how they might best build relationships with families and provide cohesive, holistic and appropriate assistance in the context of spatial, temporal, human and economic exigencies.

1.6 Key points

This chapter has attempted to define four of the key concepts in the research literature underpinning early years intervention programmes such as the Early Learning Partnership Initiative - ‘learning delay’, ‘risk and prevention’, ‘parents as educators’, and ‘hard to reach families’ or ‘hard to reach services’. In Chapter 2 the policy context for ELPP is delineated.
Chapter 2: The Early Learning Partnership Project: the policy context and the role of the agencies8

Since 1998, when the National Childcare Strategy was announced, there has been an increase in pre-school services for families and initiatives to lift children out of poverty. In 2000, the Children’s Fund was launched to tackle disadvantage among children and young people and to identify those at risk of social exclusion. The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative (NNI), also launched in 2000, ‘pump-primed’ childcare places for children in disadvantaged areas alongside early education and other forms of family support, such as family learning and health services. The last decade has seen parenting support for the early years emphasized in family literacy initiatives, such as Bookstart as well as in the development of local Sure Start programmes. Parental outreach and family support services are integral elements of Children’s Centres and the Extended Schools agenda.

As well as the development of services for families, there have also been significant changes affecting the ways in which these are delivered. The Every Child Matters: Change for Children agenda (published in 2004), underpinned by the 2004 Children Act, introduced a new approach for professionals to work together in the interests of those aged from birth to nineteen. Every Child Matters recognised the crucial role of parents, carers and families in improving outcomes for children and young people, as well as the importance of the local community. This Act also enables local authorities to set up Children’s Trusts to promote integrated working.

The evidence demonstrating strong and positive links between parents’ involvement and interest in a child’s learning, and a child’s subsequent adjustment and achievement, has been reviewed in Chapter 1 (e.g. Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003). The present government has also initiated a number of policies to support parents in their role as the child’s ‘first educator’ (Reynolds, 2006). These have included policies to increase parents’ access to support and childcare in the early years, and funding to expand these services.

In December 2004, Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare was published, which aimed to help parents balance work and family life and improve access to affordable, high-quality childcare for children up to the age of 14, appropriate to their needs (HM Treasury, 2004). The strategy set out a target of 3,500 Children’s Centres in place by 2010. An early years workforce development and transformation fund of £250 million was pledged to help deliver the ten year strategy, with the aim of establishing a suitably qualified and more professional early years workforce in the private, voluntary and independent sector, without compromising the affordability of childcare.

Also in 2004, a five year strategy for children and learners promised greater choice and improved partnerships with parents, a flexible system of ‘educare’ for the early years (jointed-up education and childcare for three and four year olds), as well dawn-to-dusk schools, with breakfast childcare and after-school clubs for those who need them (DFES, 2004). In November 2007, a £642 million cash boost was announced to improve nursery facilities and expand the quality and capacity of childcare in the private, voluntary and independent sector as well as deliver the extended entitlement to three and four year olds of free early years education from 12.5 hours a week to 15 hours per week.

The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services (DH and DfES, 2004) set standards for children’s health and social services, and the interface of those services with education, while the Choosing Health White Paper (November 2004) reiterated the importance of parents in improving their children’s health. In 2007, a new Child Health and Wellbeing Board was set up to oversee all Department of Health (DH) and Department of

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8 This section draws on the public policy documents of the first ten years of the Labour government, 1997-2007 (for more details, see Smith, 2007; Butt, Goddard and La Valle, 2007).
Children, Schools and Families’ (DCSF) programmes which deliver the new Child Health and Wellbeing Public Service Agreement and implement the Children and Maternity National Service Framework. It is important to note that the NSF and the White Paper initiated considerable funding for innovative child health interventions which overlapped with early years interventions initiated by the DCSF, as well as overlapping with more recent initiatives such as the Family Nurse Partnership programme promoted by the Social Exclusion Task Force in the Cabinet Office.

The Childcare Act 2006, the first act to deal solely with early years and childcare, has given local authorities new duties with effect from April 2008, to provide information and advice for parents as well as sufficient childcare. The recognition that parents need more information in order to support their children’s learning, particularly at key transition stages, lies behind initiatives such as ‘Choice Advisers’ to help parents through the schools’ admissions process. Related policy initiatives include transition information sessions and the Starting School Project. Further funds were pledged in March 2008 for the ‘Parent Know How’ project, providing parents with information about schools and parenting issues and including the creation of a ‘virtual school gate’.

The government has also reaffirmed its commitment to early intervention and prevention. In July 2007, a further £396 million was pledged; the Children’s Fund was supported over a further three years, as well as projects that specialise in early intervention and prevention. By 2008, all areas are required to have Children’s Trusts, expected to produce integrated working at all levels, from planning through to delivery, and by 2010 there are expected to be 3,500 Children’s Centres supporting young children and their families.

Supporting parents, and recognising the impact of the parenting process with a particular focus on early intervention and prevention, emerge as core themes in recent policy initiatives. Support for couples, parents and families was pledged (April 2005) in the form of the Strengthening Families Grant, which later became the Children, Young People and Families Grant. While the early years are recognised as important, targeted support has also been offered to parents of older children. Short-term pilot schemes, such as a two year pilot scheme of parenting courses in 15 local authorities for children aged 8-13 were announced in July 2006. In September 2006, Parenting Support Advisers (PSA) were introduced in 20 local authorities and 600 schools as part of a £40 million government pilot project to support children and families where there are early signs that they could benefit from additional help, including parenting programmes, mentoring for parents or children and one to one tuition.

Other significant policy developments include the inauguration of the first Children’s Commissioner in 2005 and the launch of Child Trust Funds (January 2005) to enable parents to save for their children’s future. Support has also been given to practitioners who assist those in the parenting role in the form of the National Academy of Parenting Practitioners, which was established in 2007.

2.1 Early years and disadvantage

Support for parents has also been provided by government departments with a broader remit beyond children and families. Early years policies have been firmly set into the context of early prevention and reducing child poverty and social exclusion. The Social Exclusion Task Force, which replaced the Social Exclusion Unit in June 2006, aims to identify those most at risk, and focuses on ‘hard to reach’ groups. In 2006 the Cabinet Office published the Social Exclusion Task Force’s report Reaching out: an action plan on social exclusion, which highlighted the importance of parenting as a factor in improving outcomes for children. The plan announced ten health-led parenting support demonstration projects for 0-2 year olds, based on the Nurse-Family Partnership programme run by Olds in the US (Olds, Sadler and Kitzman, 2007)9. A year later, Ten pilot areas started work in March 2007. The second wave of sites for the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme, as it has been called in England, was announced in March 2008 by the DCSF and the DH.
the Social Exclusion Task Force published *Reaching out: progress on social exclusion*, which identified some of the most persistent risk factors, and *Reaching out: think family - analysis and themes from the Families at Risk Review*. The latter examined the issues facing the most vulnerable families with the aim of finding ways to break through the barriers to offer whole family support for these families. This emphasis on early prevention and social exclusion and the focus on the most ‘hard to reach’ families echoes the concerns of the agencies as they developed ELPP-funded interventions.

However, support for parents has been accompanied by firmer measures to remind them of their duties and responsibilities, and to enforce these where necessary. Legislation passed in November 2006 (the *Police and Justice Act*; the *Education and Inspections Act*) enabled local authorities, social landlords and schools to apply for parenting contracts and orders. *Parenting Support Guidance* published in October 2006 asked local authorities to develop parenting support services, and appoint a parenting commissioner, and in January 2007, targeted funds were allocated to 40 ‘Respect Areas’ to receive police support, parenting classes and intensive support for parents. Intensive ‘Family Intervention Projects’ are key elements in these ‘Respect Zones’. Meanwhile, efforts to encourage more parents into work have continued (DWP, 2007).

The importance of involving parents in their children’s early education is also reflected in the *Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework*, published in March 2007 and to be implemented in September 2008. This builds on and replaces the non-statutory *Birth to Three Matters* guidance (DfES, 2002), the *Foundation Stage* curriculum for three and four year olds (QCA, 2000), and the *National Standards for Day Care (DfES, 2001)*. The EYFS Framework was published alongside *Every Parent Matters* (March 2007), a significant document which further emphasised the benefits of increased parental involvement and improved parental confidence for fathers as well as mothers. *Every Parent Matters* also introduced *Family Learning Courses*, piloted from autumn 2007, targeted at parents and carers with pre-school children with literacy and numeracy issues. It also reiterated the importance of outreach work from mainly Sure Start Children’s Centres to target priority and excluded families, and endorsed strategies for involving fathers. Support for families with disabled children was announced with the roll-out of the early support programme to help ‘join up’ services for these families.

### 2.2 PEAL, ELP and PPEL

The *Parents, Early Years and Learning project (PEAL)* was commissioned by the DfES 2005-07 ‘with the task of gathering and assessing existing knowledge and best practice in working with parents to involve them in their young children’s learning’. The consortium of organisations included the NCB, Coram, the Thomas Coram Children’s Centre and the London Borough of Camden. PEAL then designed a training programme ‘to support and inspire practitioners’ to increase parent partnership work, which identifies a range of methods and tools, or approaches and techniques, and disseminates existing effective practice (intervention models) for early years settings across the country. In 2007, at the end of the initial period, the PEAL training was incorporated into ELPP Strand 3, the Workforce Development strand. This made it possible to extend the PEAL training beyond Children’s Centres to a wider range of early years settings and practitioners.

At the same time as ELPP began work in the voluntary and community sector, a related initiative, *Parents as Partners in Early Learning PPEL* (DCSF, 2007b), which supports and secures active parental involvement in children’s learning in the statutory sector, was provided with an additional £9 million in 2007-08 to support local authorities in the 30 per cent most disadvantaged areas.

Following almost a decade of reform, in December 2007, the DCSF published the *Children’s Plan*, which sets out plans for the next ten years, and begins by asserting that: ‘government does not bring up children - parents do, so government needs to do more to back parents and families’. The Children’s Plan introduced *Parenting Advisers* and personal progress records for

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10 See Chapter 4 for further details of the different strands of ELPP.
parents on their children’s development, building on the ‘red book’ used by health workers. It also aims to strengthen intensive support to the neediest families by piloting a ‘lead practitioner’ approach. Alongside targeted interventions, the Children’s Plan includes a range of measures aimed at improving the life chances of all children and reaffirms the government’s pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020.

Specific measures include the announcement, for 2008, of strategies for play and child health and an action plan to reduce overcrowding. £225 million has been pledged to improve play facilities, and measures to improve safety for children in a number of different contexts have been introduced. These range from the provision of home safety equipment for certain families, to a Staying Safe Action Plan which addresses matters such as bullying and internet safety, as well as traffic concerns. The Children’s Plan also proposes increased family learning and a new relationship between parents and schools in the form of parents’ councils. Additional proposals include the investment of £100 million to extend the offer of 15 hours of free early education to 20,000 two year olds in the most disadvantaged communities.

Most recently, the first interim report from the Narrowing the Gap project published in July 2007 (LGA, DCSF and the IDeA) firmly sets priorities for improving child outcomes, particularly vulnerable children and those most at risk. Those most at risk include children growing up in families with low socio-economic status; children in care; children with disabilities; special educational needs or poor attendance; children who have been excluded from school; children who live with vulnerable adults or are at risk of significant harm; young offenders; young carers; children in ethnic minority families where English is not the first language; and children of asylum seekers or refugees. The report sets out a range of programmes for family learning, parenting support, and early intervention.

Over the past decade, targeted interventions for priority and excluded families, such as the ELPP initiative, have taken place within a broader context of universal improvements for children and families, such as the increase in Child Benefit, and the extension of paid maternity entitlement. However, with the publication of the Children’s Plan, the message is explicit: it is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later, reminding us of the ‘risk and prevention paradigm’ discussed in Chapter 1.
Chapter 3: Design and methods

3.1 Some methodological issues identified in evaluations of similar studies

An increasing number of interventions in the UK aim to enhance the life chances of children and families. They are based on the observation that not all children are born with the same opportunities to achieve their full potential.

In their attempts to address this problem, interventions share the view that prevention is better than cure. They are also based on a growing body of evidence that intervention at the early signs of vulnerability is more successful than later intervention in overcoming initial disadvantage and social exclusion (Durlak, 1995; Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998). They aim, among other things, to promote school readiness by diminishing “the socio-economic status (SES) disparities in the pre-school years so that poor children enter school on a more equal footing to their more affluent peers” (Brooks-Gunn, 2000, p.9).

The Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP) aimed to support and develop the capacity of parents of children aged one to three who were at risk of learning delay to get involved in their children’s learning. The focus was on parents who may not otherwise understand the value of their role in their child’s early learning, or would not know how to get involved.

There are differences between methodologies to evaluate specific interventions such as the Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) or Parents in Partnership Parent Infant Network (PIPPIN); and those used to evaluate multi-component services such as Sure Start and Children’s Centres. Discrete interventions are often evaluated using Randomised Control Trials (RCT) (Schweinhart, 2004) or quasi-experiments (Evangelou et al, 2007), while the impact of multi-component services is explored using mixed methods. It was not feasible to employ an RCT for the current evaluation as the sites were already established in the communities they served and a suitable control group would have been very difficult to find; and projects were often drawing on more than one approach to working with parents.

Evaluations of more complex service provision tend to draw on both quantitative (administrative data, primary large scale survey data) and qualitative (interviews, focus groups, observations) data. Studies may adopt a longitudinal or a cross-sectional design; the former may include follow-up visits, assessing child functioning over time, measuring gains in their development, and/or following cohorts into adulthood. It is clear that positive outcomes are not always apparent from the outset and that it can take a considerable amount of time for an intervention or service to become well-established. In addition, these evaluations tend to use a range of well-established instruments to measure parent knowledge and behaviour, child development, health and economic outcomes.

Some common characteristics can be identified across the methodologies used to evaluate services: they all advocate a mixed methodology, utilise research teams with diverse expertise, evaluate different aspects at different levels (implementation, variation and impact) and draw data from different sources, often from the main stakeholders (policy makers, senior managers, project workers, populations targeted by evaluation, users etc.). Finally, evaluations of services usually advocate the particular importance of taking into account the views of parents, teachers, carers and children.

In addition, many of the evaluations of services have used large samples by assessing multiple centres in various locations often over different points in time. One recent evaluation of a complex service implementation in the UK, the Sure Start evaluation, used a phased implementation design using the second wave as a comparison group (Belsky, Barnes and Melhuish, 2007). While a pre-post design is commonly used, some studies have addressed the more challenging task of identifying community effects within the targeted population (Evangelou et al, 2007).
3.2 Research challenges

The examination of the implementation of ELPP had to address a number of challenges. These included the enormous range of services on offer under the general umbrella of the ELPP initiative and the need for an evaluation that could investigate the effects of these approaches within a very tight timetable. The study therefore needed to:

- capture the diversity of the projects and provide in-depth understanding of the complexity involved, with the aim of identifying the successes and challenges of provision arising as practitioners engaged parents in supporting their children’s learning; and
- reveal the effects of participating in ELPP on how parents supported their children as learners.

In addition, the implementation of the ELPP initiative started in October 2006 well before the start of the evaluation of the project in April 2007. This discrepancy in the timetable did not allow sufficient time for the evaluation team to create a common framework for collecting data and information about the families in each site, in order to obtain a systematic baseline measure for all approaches and all sites. A further challenge was the delayed start of the implementation in some areas so the local projects rolled out at different points in time. For example, in five of the twenty case study sites ELPP-funded services were not in place at Time 1 visits in the summer of 2007.

Finally, recruiting and carrying out research on a comparison group within the short time frame of the evaluation posed a major challenge. The ideal comparison group for studying the impact of ELPP on families would have been families with similar demographic characteristics to those accessing different ELPP initiatives but without access to the particular approaches. The initial proposal for the evaluation included a comparison element, but it was agreed that the focus of the evaluation was to be on the implementation and process of the initiative and its influence on parents, not on the impact on child outcomes. In order to compensate for a lack of control group every effort was made to ascertain from the sites the demographic characteristics of users of non-ELPP funded services, in order to attempt a comparison between users of ELPP-funded services and those who are not accessing ELPP services. This was collected via the Reach data exercise (3.7e).

3.3 Research aims and objectives of the ELPP evaluation

The overall aims of the study were to examine:

- the approaches used to involve socially excluded parents with children at risk of learning delay in their children’s learning;
- the influence of ELPP on the organisations in which it was occurring and the development of the workforce, particularly how training had influenced the way practitioners worked with families; and
- whether or not sites were effective in engaging parents and influencing how they worked with their children.
3.4 Research questions addressed in this report

The evaluation objectives addressed three areas: service and organisational outcomes, workforce development as part of strand 1 only, and parental views and outcomes. Questions addressed in each of the three areas follow:

Questions that reflect service and organisational outcomes

1. What understandings/definitions of ‘parental involvement’ underline the services delivered by the 19 sites, what are the differences and commonalities in these understandings across the various providers?
2. How are projects being implemented on the ground and delivered to a range of diverse family groups participating in those projects (including ethnic minority families)?
3. What are the reach strategies employed by staff to ensure that the most excluded families participate in the projects?
4. How do the staff define ‘parental involvement’ that the projects expect them to achieve, how are they trained to deliver these projects, and how does this training actually impact on the project delivery?
5. To what extent have outreach services (home visiting) to parents increased in the 19 target areas?
6. Has there been a change in the relationship between Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) providers and Sure Start Children’s Centres (SSCC) in the areas involved, and what is the nature of this change?
7. Has there been an increase in VCS and SCC links with health services in the areas?
8. What sort of support has the LA offered initially for early learning initiatives? Has there been any impact on LA support for early learning initiatives (financial or otherwise)?
9. How is “quality-support” measured or defined by the providers?
10. Has the project raised workforce awareness about the importance of parental involvement in children’s early learning?
11. Has the ELPP initiative helped to prioritise parental involvement in early learning in the VCS early years workforce?

Questions that reflect workforce development

1. How is the training understood by staff members who received it and by the managers of the places where the targeted workforce is employed?
2. Has there been any change in practitioner’s understanding of the important role that parental involvement can play on child development?
3. Has there been a change of interest in the field of parental involvement?
4. What evidence is there of workforce capacity building as a result of the training and of working with parents as partners?
5. What ideas and strategies have been taken most effectively from the training into practice?
6. How do practitioners define the task of enhancing parental involvement (where possible before and after their training)?

Questions that reflect parental outcomes

1. What are ELPP parents’ views on what is important for their child’s learning?
2. How do ELPP parents view their own contribution to their children’s learning?
3. What are parents’ experiences of participating in ELPP?
4. What is the range of parenting practices and attitudes of ELPP parents?
5. Have ELPP parents (who have been visited at two time points) shown changes over time in how they support their children’s learning?

The evaluation eventually examined processes and outcomes in 20 cites.
6. Have the ELPP parents changed their understanding of how best to support their children’s learning?
7. Has there been a change in the range of parenting practices and attitudes in ELPP parents?

3.5 Design

The Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) led a consortium of nine voluntary agencies which received ELPP funding: Barnardo’s, ContinYou, Coram, Family Welfare Association (FWA), Home-Start, NCH, Pen Green, Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA), and Thurrock Community Mothers (TCM). These nine agencies worked with 12 different approaches in order to involve parents in their children’s learning.12

The evaluation examined the work that took place in 20 sites across England as shown in Table 4.1.13 All sites were visited by the research team for two day visits, and with the exception of four late starting sites, each site was visited twice. Time 1 site visits took place between May and July 2007; and Time 2 site visits between November 2007 and February 2008. During these visits the evaluation team interviewed staff and observed interactions between staff and parents either in the physical setting of the site or in parents’ homes. During the Time 1 visits, focus groups were also held wherever possible.

Parents were also visited twice, but these visits were dependent on the timing of their involvement in ELPP provision. These visits are therefore described as early and late in the parents’ involvement to distinguish them from the timing of the site visits and usually involved meeting with parents in their homes, interviewing them and observing them interacting with their children. The visits to parents therefore did not always coincide directly with Time 1 and Time 2 visits to sites (Figure 3.1).

The examination of implementation including service and organisational outcomes and workforce development involved comparative analysis of sites as longitudinal case studies structured by activity theory (Appendix A). Outcomes in relation to parents involved quantitative analysis of observational evidence and data from validated assessment instruments used in the homes of parents. Parent outcomes were analysed in order to compare parents in the early stages of their involvement in ELPP with the way they interact with their children after several months of experiencing ELPP-funded provision.

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12 ContinYou had co-ordinated TCM and Pen Green in their bid, so FPI dealt with seven agencies rather than nine (see Chapter 4 for further details).
13 Note that the evaluation covered a sample of sites with ELPP funding; see Table 4.1 for details.
May-June 07: First round of interviews with agency staff.

May – July: 16 sites visited. Staff were interviewed and observed either in the physical setting of the site or in the parent’s home.

Nov 07-Feb 08: 20 sites visited. Staff were interviewed and observed either in the physical setting of the site or in the parent’s home.

A minimum of four observations of twenty minutes each were undertaken in the settings, focusing on the work of practitioners.

June – Dec 07: First round of family visits. Structured and semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and observations took place.

Jan-March 08: Second round of family visits. Structured and semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and observations took place.

Feb-March 08: Second round of interviews with agency staff.

A total number of 104 families were visited, over a total of 159 visits.
3.6 Sample

**Organisation and workforce**

At Time 1, 16 sites were visited and at least three practitioners, including the managers, were interviewed in each site. At Time 2, 20 sites were visited and at most sites three practitioners, including the managers, were interviewed. In addition, a minimum of four observations of twenty minutes each were undertaken across Times 1 and 2. These observations focused on the work of individual practitioners as they undertook ELPP activities. In three sites there were no focused observations because site visits did not coincide with activities for the parents.

**Families**

The study originally aimed to visit approximately 200 families participating in local ELPP work within each of the 20 sites. A team of six regionally-based researchers travelled across England to interview and observe parents ‘early’ and ‘late’ into their ELPP participation, in order to document any change in parental support of their children’s learning. Project managers from each of the 20 sites were asked to identify ten parents who were being targeted by the ELPP funding and were relatively new to the programme (within the first few weeks of attendance). The aim was to carry out six of the ten interviews at home and four at the site or a different setting. The project managers then obtained permission from the chosen families for the regional researchers to contact them and describe the study. Very soon in the duration of the study it was clear that such targets were unrealistic for reasons which included practitioners’ concerns about the research disrupting relationships with vulnerable parents and delays in recruiting families.

**Criteria for the selection of families**

a. **Mothers or fathers?**

In most cases the parents who were targeted were mothers. However, in sites where the prime focus was on work with fathers, the research team interviewed those fathers on site and did not carry out a home visit. Ideally interviews were to take place with the families in the home but if they were unwilling to allow this, or if the site advised strongly against it, the mothers and fathers were interviewed on site following a different interview procedure. In sites where both parents had equal involvement in the project, the interview was carried out in the home with both.

b. **Selection criteria for parent interview**

The following criteria were used to select parents. Parents who:

- were relatively new to the programme
- were ideally available for follow-up later in the year (December-February 2008)
- had a child aged between 12 and 36 months who was at risk of learning delay.

In particular:

- The mother needed, in the opinion of the site manager, to be in a position to give informed consent to be interviewed. For example we expected to interview mothers who were suffering from postnatal depression, but we did not expect to interview parents with a serious mental illness which would affect their ability to give informed consent to participate. Parents with known or suspected physical or verbal aggressive behaviours were selected out ahead of the interview process.
- The parents did not need to be able to read; however, they did need to be able to carry out a (supported) conversation in English so that they could follow the interview and make known their replies.
All 20 sites were asked to suggest families to the research team which were fulfilling the selection criteria described above.

The research team is cautious about the extent to which families who finally participated in the study were representative of the ELPP families as a whole due to the sampling restrictions. For example some who were not fluent in English were filtered out because all interviewers were English speakers. A few respondents were interviewed in their home language with the help of an interpreter, if there was one available within the site or from the agency. Any particularly ‘at risk’ or abusive families were filtered out by the sites to safeguard the parents and the research team. In this respect, the families accessed within the ELPP parent sample can be seen as representing the ‘top end’ of the ELPP population as a whole. Table 3.1 summarises the achieved sample.

Table 3.1: Parent sub-sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELPP Evaluation Parent Sub-Sample</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early interviews</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late interviews (follow-up of same families)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late interviews only</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of families visited</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of visits</strong></td>
<td><strong>159</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7 Data collection and analysis

a. Interviews with lead agencies

In the early stages of planning the research, interviews were carried out with key staff who acted as ‘leads’ in their agencies for the ELPP initiative. These interviews (Appendix B) were planned in order to make contact with the agencies involved in ELPP and to introduce the research, and were conducted over the telephone by the Oxford’s research team principal investigators. The intention was to obtain a ‘snapshot’ of the agencies’ expectations and plans about the ELPP initiative, as well as elicit suggestions for the ‘research sites’. Questions covered the sites and neighbourhoods where the agency planned to introduce ELPP, the programmes or approaches to be used, the agency’s approach to parental involvement, plans for using the ELPP funding, the target population, staff training and recruitment, and expected outcomes and monitoring of the initiative. These preliminary interviews were carried out in June 200714. Agencies were also asked to begin identifying key sites as ‘exemplars’ of their approach, which the research team would be able to focus on for their visits and interviews with staff members and parents. The interviews were recorded (in some cases, notes were made over the telephone), and supplemented by additional material from the agencies or collected from the sites by the field researchers. Information was then fed back to the research team.

Towards the end of the ELPP initiative, the ‘lead’ workers in the agencies were interviewed again for their views on the impact of ELPP funding on the agency (the extent to which new work or new developments had been possible), the ‘reach’ of the programmes and effects on staff and on parents, wider impacts on the early years workforce, and the sustainability of new ways of working. The interviews (Appendix B) were recorded. Information from both sets of interviews has been drawn on largely in Chapter 4 for the analysis of agencies’ development of the ELPP initiative and for the conclusions in Chapter 8.

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14 Eight of the nine agencies involved in ELPP contributed to the preliminary interviews, as the ninth agency did not come on board the evaluation until some six months after the research began. All nine agencies were included for the final interview.
b. Organisation and workforce elements

In order to do justice to the variety of ways in which ELPP was implemented across agencies and within local organizations, this aspect of the evaluation was designed to allow cross-case comparisons of each case study site, where a case study site was the point of delivery of the ELPP-funded service. Sites therefore included physical settings, home visiting services which were not settings-based and combinations of these forms of delivery.

The case studies were structured by activity theory (Appendix A) to enable the team to examine the recent history of sites; how they were working with ELPP aims in the early stages of the evaluation; how they worked with these aims in the later stages; and their views of future developments once ELPP funding had ceased. Four snapshots of the purposes of their work; the resources they used; how they used them; who they worked with; and how this work was shaped by their histories as organisations were created for each site. These snapshots of each site as a system permitted a structured comparison on key aspects of the implementation of ELPP across all twenty sites.

i. Data collection for the organisation and workforce elements

Data collection occurred through two-day site visits at two points in the evaluation. Time 1 visits occurred between May and July 2007 with one or two interviews occurring in August and Time 2 visits between November 2007 and February 2008. Five sites had not started their ELPP funded work at Time 1 and, of these, four had not set up the relevant staff groups. Consequently, where necessary, Time 2 visits to these sites involved the collection of data about recent history as well as future projections.

At Time 1 in each site, the team interviewed the site manager or the person with strategic responsibility for the implementation of ELPP work in the site and two or where possible three members of staff involved in the implementation of ELPP-funded work. In some cases up to six members of staff were interviewed. Each interview at Time 1 lasted approximately 75 minutes. At Time 2 the manager or equivalent was re-interviewed, as were, usually, two of the practitioners who were engaged directly in ELPP work with parents. These interviews lasted between approximately one and two hours each in most sites. In addition, at Time 1, the research team carried out focus groups with parents where it was possible for the practitioners to arrange these; and at both Time 1 and Time 2 the team observed practitioners as they worked with parents or families on ELPP-funded work.

The interviews (Appendix C) were structured by activity theory to elicit how managers and practitioners were interpreting parents as supporters of their children’s learning; what ideas and material resources they used in their work; how they used them; how the implicit and explicit rules and practices of the site interacted with the purposes of ELPP and their interpretations of parents; and who they worked with to take forward ELPP aims. All the interviews were fully transcribed. The focus groups at Time 1 were designed to elicit how parents were experiencing the ELPP initiative and the extent to which the aims of the practitioners were evident in how parents talked about those experiences. The focus groups tended to produce undifferentiated data, though they made it clear that parents appreciated ELPP work. It was therefore decided to not repeat them at Time 2.

The observations at both Times 1 and 2 focused on target practitioners as they worked with parents or parents and children. These observations were usually twenty minutes in length and occurred twice during most visits. Time 1 observations were scrutinised by the research team prior to Time 2 visits. One outcome of the scrutiny was that Time 2 observations were supplemented by an analytic grid which enabled the team to identify and label the predominant mode of interaction e.g. modelling; the engagement of parents and so on (Appendix I15).

15 Appendices I, J and K can be found at [http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php)
ii. Data analysis for the organisation and workforce elements

Data analysis occurred throughout the year, ensuring that Time 1 analyses were complete before Time 2 visits and that the team could draw on those analyses to focus interviews and, to an extent, observations during the second visits. Data analyses for interviews involved the following stages.

(i) Site-specific data displays of interview data based on the analytic concepts of activity theory were created. These data displays revealed, for example, how different practitioners in the same site were interpreting ELPP work; the resources they drew on to work with parents; how they used them; and why they selected or adapted them.

(ii) These data displays remained an analytic resource in their own right, but also formed the basis of analyses of the sites as activity systems (Appendix A). At Time 1, the two systemic analyses of each site focused on the recent past in the site and the introduction of ELPP work. At Time 2, the two systemic analyses in each site focused on current ELPP-based work and practitioners' projections of future developments.

(iii) Once Time 1 analyses had been completed, the team undertook a cross-case comparative analysis to identify common themes and relevant differences. The outcomes of these analyses informed the focusing of questioning at Time 2.

(iv) Prior to returning to sites at Time 2 the organisations and workforce research team completed a short questionnaire about each site to act as an aide-memoire about (a) site-specific issues and (b) more general cross-site themes. These issues formed the background to the activity theory structured interviews pursued in the Time 2 interviews.

(v) The analysis of Time 2 interview data involved a parallel process of systemic analyses as just outlined and detailed data display. At this stage the team connected Time 1 analyses with Time 2 analyses in each case to allow an examination of change and continuity over time in each case.

(vi) The next stage involved looking across all of the case study sites to check interpretations and analyses and to identify commonalities and variations in the implementation and outcomes for organisations and practitioners. Members of the team did this independently and then held lengthy analytic meetings to check and refine their analyses by looking across all case study sites.

(vii) Initial cross-initiative analyses involved the identification of core themes, tensions, and contradictions in the implementation of ELPP. These elements formed the basis of Chapters 4 and 5. These analyses were then discussed within the whole team to assist, for example, the interpretation of findings from the quantitative analyses.

c. Observations of practitioners

In order to explore the practices occurring at the different case study sites, the research team carried out observations of staff as they worked with parents. These observations were mainly carried out in settings, but for those agencies where all activity occurred in the home, observations were made in families' own homes. Observations were recorded using a minute-by-minute grid (Appendix I) for periods of 20 minutes and two such periods were observed at most sites during a visit. However, observations were not possible at three sites because visits did not coincide with work with parents, and in other cases only one 20 minute observation period was possible because of the short duration of the session.

Time 1 observations captured work in 15 different sites representing seven of the nine agencies between May and July 2007. The observations focused on the actions of a target practitioner (TP) as he or she took part in a group session or home visit. Contextual information was also recorded, including the number of parents, children and other practitioners present, as well as a sketch of the room where the activities took place. Time 1 observations were carried out to
provide the team with an insight into how ELPP was being implemented in the different sites and to help to develop a more detailed analytic framework for observations at Time 2.

Time 2 observations were carried out between November 2007 and February 2008. This sample included sites representing the same seven agencies as previously with two additions and resulted in observations occurring in 17 sites, such that for most sites a minimum of four observations of twenty minutes each were undertaken across Times 1 and 2. At Time 2, the research team used two additional research instruments, a pre-observation proforma and a post-observation analytic grid (Appendix I). These were designed to use information gleaned from Time 1 interviews to identify those aspects of the target programme which had been assimilated by particular sites, in order to make it easier to look for evidence of principles in practice. After the observation, the analysis grids were completed to identify aspects of practitioner-parent interaction during the observation period including mode (e.g. modelling) and emotional tone as well as modifications to the target programme. By this two-stage process, the research team has been able to detect common practices and similarities in the roles undertaken by the TPs in the different sites under different organisations (Appendix J16).

d. Parenting element

i. Data collection of parenting element

The semi-structured interview and the standardised research instruments were designed to be administered to parents both early on and later at the completion of their ELPP participation to measure change in their parenting knowledge, understanding and practices. The parents were given a semi-structured interview developed by the research team, and a set of structured measures that included observations and questionnaires were also administered. The research team also undertook the following activities to collect additional information on how parents experienced ELPP funded services.

Structured measures of parenting and interview schedule

Several measures were used to investigate the effects of ELPP on parents. These are discussed fully in Appendix D. The parent interview was designed by the research team to help the researchers understand the parents’ views on how they can support their child’s learning and how likely parents were to take what they learnt from the ELPP initiative into improving their child’s home learning environment.

ii. Location, duration and conduct of interviews and observations

All the field researchers were trained at Oxford University to carry out the interviews in standardised ways and to gain access to parents’ homes in a sensitive way. All were checked for reliability of their coding against a set of training video films depicting parents and children at home.

After receiving ethical approval and permission to contact ELPP parents via the project managers at each ELPP site, the research team made arrangements for visits with the families via telephone. Most visits took place within homes at a convenient time for the mother, and when the child would be at home and awake. Fathers and any parent who did not wish to be observed at home were interviewed in the site facility via a shortened form of the interviews and questionnaires. These ‘setting’ interviews included three of the six ‘HOME’ subscales, but no instruments requiring the researcher to observe parent-child interaction.

Families received a £20 voucher to acknowledge their participation in the study. All families who took part in the book-sharing task were allowed to keep the book.

16 Appendices I, J and K can be found at http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php
Data handling and analysis of parenting element

‘Early’ data collected from families were explored descriptively and tested for normality and homogeneity of variance. Parenting measures taken in the ELPP sample were compared whenever possible to the parenting of participants in other national studies e.g. the Sure Start National Evaluation. Chapter 7 describes in detail the analyses of the data gathered with parents.

e. Reach data

i. Data collection of reach data

A key aim of the research was to document the extent to which the ELPP funding extended the ‘reach’ of the agencies to more disadvantaged or more disengaged families with children at risk of learning delay. All the agencies were required to send in basic data returns to the Family and Parenting Institute on a quarterly basis, to show how many families were ‘on the books’ for the ELPP-funded services each agency had developed. Agencies had not, however, developed a common collection format for more detailed data, as already noted (section 3.2) so it was agreed that the research team should collect ‘reach data’ in a common format in order to attempt comparison between families accessing ELPP-funded services and families using other services run in the same sites. These data were collected at the end of the ELPP period in the sites, in order to allow the sites maximum ‘ELPP running time’, and allow for ‘peaks and troughs’. Following careful discussion with the FPI and with the agencies, two proformas were drafted, to record data from the twenty sites for two time periods - July to December 2007 for ‘ELPP-funded families only, and February 2008 for both ‘ELPP-funded families’ and a comparison group of ‘non-ELPP families’. Data requested included age of children and of parents, ethnicity, family structure, employment status, participation of particular groups such as Travellers and refugees and asylum seekers, and problems such as disability, domestic violence, drug use and mental health (Appendix E).

ii. Data handling and analysis of reach data

While all agencies and sites collected data for their own records, these data were not necessarily of the same kind or in the same format; the voluntary agencies involved in ELPP had different histories and objectives and therefore different systems of record keeping. This required considerable discussion between the research team and different sites, in order to construct the best categories and the ‘best fit’ comparison groups. All data was inputted into SPSS. Analysis followed the categories set up in the proformas. In addition, postcode analysis allowed comparison of catchment areas, both between sites and in relation to administrative data from the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Noble et al, 2008; Sigala and Smith, 2007).

3.8 Ethical considerations

Two information leaflets, one for practitioners and one for families, were produced (Appendix F). These were sent to the sites prior to the visit by the research team in order to facilitate participants’ understanding of the purpose and their involvement in the study. Written consent was obtained from the target parents before taking part in the study, and families were given the opportunities to ask any questions. Data were collected regarding the parents’ addresses when they were to be seen in their homes in order to facilitate follow-up visits. Parents’ anonymity was retained by giving each family an ID number. The study had approval from The Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/index.shtml which requires each study to submit an ethics review document and to address the following issues: nature and purpose of the study, training of research staff, methods of recruiting participants, consent of participants, potential risk to participants/researchers/others and what can be done to
minimise this, financial and other rewards, monitoring and reporting of adverse or unforeseen events, communication of results, confidentiality and data protection issues.

In addition, one of the 20 sites was operating under a PCT and therefore additional lengthy procedures lasting six months were followed in order to secure access to the sites and to the families involved. The research team had to justify the study as a service evaluation in order to obtain permission to visit the site. The research team's efforts and experience was consistent with that reported by McPherson, Lattin-Rawstrone, Senior and Barnes (2005) regarding obstacles in gaining approval for a study that is not directly funded by the NHS but is partly located within the NHS system.
Chapter 4: ELPP - history, implementation and reach

4.1 ELPP as announced by the DfES

The DfES described the Early Learning Partnerships Project\(^\text{17}\) as targeting children aged one to three years old at risk of learning delay, and helping their parents to get involved in their children’s early learning through effective partnerships between practitioners and parents. The project originated in the 2005 pre-budget discussions about the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period April 2006-March 2008, which continued to give priority to the early years, against a background of preliminary results from Sure Start (NESS, 2005) and concern about the developmental gap already apparent at 22 months between children from disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds (Feinstein, 2003; 2004).

According to the DfES ‘invitation to tender’ sent out in January 2007, the project aimed to:

- demonstrate different approaches to involving parents in their children’s early learning;
- raise awareness in the sector of the importance of parental involvement;
- consider the importance of using suitably trained staff;
- equip more parents with the skills to get involved in their children’s early learning;
- increase the number of parents accessing mainstream services through Sure Start Children’s Centres (SSCC), and build links between Sure Start Children’s Centres and the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

The overall project was to include three strands: the first strand, a demonstration project running a range of approaches in different areas to support parents’ involvement in their children’s early learning; second, the evaluation of this demonstration project; and third, a workforce development project\(^\text{18}\), which was added to focus on the early years workforce and training needs and to provide some continuity for the work of the demonstration project when funding came to an end.

The Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP) Strand 1, called in this report ‘the ELPP initiative’, was intended to run in 19 areas. Strand 1 was to be led by the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI), which had provided advice to the DfES on its implementation. FPI subcontracted the work to seven Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations as ‘area leads’, who in turn contracted the delivery of the programme to local partners. Drawing on the same CSR funding, at the same time as ELPP started work in the Voluntary and Community Sector, the Parents as Partners in Early Learning project (PPEL) was announced for the statutory sector, with an initial audit of policy and practice across 150 local authorities in England\(^\text{19}\).

ELPP began in October 2006. Later, DfES contracted with FPI who co-ordinated seven ‘lead agencies’ which had submitted bids for ELPP funding - Home-Start, NCH, the Family Welfare Association (FWA), Coram, Barnardo’s, the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA), and ContinYou, which submitted a consortium bid including Thurrock Community Mothers (TCM) and Pen Green. These lead agencies in turn were working with delivery partners using twelve different parental involvement programmes to train their staff in different approaches. Some of these programmes were well-known agencies in their own right, such as Pen Green. Consequently, the terminology

\(^{17}\) This section draws on the DfES evaluation Invitation to Tender (January 2007), interview data from a key member of the DCSF team, extracts from bids and early reports from the lead agencies and FPI, and notes of FPI meetings attended by the research team when it had been appointed.

\(^{18}\) Eventually this was run by the National Children’s Bureau and Parenting UK. See the Consortium Bid by NCB and Parenting UK, Early Learning Partnerships Strand 3: Up-skilling the workforce to build effective partnerships with parents to support their involvement in the child’s early learning, January 9 2007. Note that the DCSF advisory and steering committees for ELPP2 have included representatives from ELPP3, NCB and Parenting UK, to ensure communication between the strands.

\(^{19}\) See Parents as Partners in Early Learning Project (PPEL), Parental involvement - a snapshot of policy and practice. http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk:80/primary/features/foundation_stage/parents_partners/
and definition of ‘programme’, ‘delivery partner’ and ‘agency’ is complex in ELPP. The evaluation covered 20 sites, which demonstrated twelve different approaches to involving parents. The consortium model proposed by FPI\(^{22}\) was a new model for the DfES in commissioning new initiatives. It was intended to build on existing work and extensive experience in the voluntary and community sector; reach more families in ways that were tailored to their needs; share learning; and integrate early learning and family support approaches for families who were difficult to engage in mainstream provision\(^ {21}\). Areas were selected for a mix of rural and urban settings, where organisations were already identifying high levels of need and the potential to extend services, where links with early years organisations, health services, local authorities, schools and particularly Children's Centres were already established.

The lead agencies' bids included in the FPI application of September 2006 provide detailed accounts of their history, the types of areas they worked in and the families they served, their experience of outreach, home visiting and family support for families with complex needs, and of working with parents to support their involvement in their children's learning. The bids also set out their proposals for development with ELPP funding. How this worked out is discussed in the next section.

4.2 The development of ELPP: the Family Parenting Institute and the nine voluntary agencies\(^ {22}\)

The objectives set by the DfES (now DCSF) for the ELPP initiative have been set out in the previous section. This section considers how the nine agencies\(^ {23}\) responded to those objectives in their initial planning and in their final analysis at the end of the programme. Senior staff gave their views of the nine agencies’ intentions at the start of the initiative and their experiences at the end. Later chapters in the report give details of what actually happened on the ground in the twenty sites visited for the research\(^ {24}\).

The lead agencies brought together in the consortium by FPI to begin work with ELPP funding in October 2006 were all well-established and well-known for their work. Some agencies, Barnardo's for example, belonged to the voluntary sector group of big charitable foundations working with children and their families which used to be called ‘The Big Five’. It would probably be possible to place all the agencies at different points on a continuum with ‘family support’ at one end and ‘early learning’ at the other. Some claimed a mixture of the two in their work; others located themselves more firmly at one or other ends of the continuum. NCH, FWA and Barnardo’s all provided family support services of varying intensities and specialisms to highly disadvantaged families with complex needs; these agencies would recognise the debate outlined in Chapter 1 about the ‘risk and prevention paradigm’, and the debate about ‘child protection’ and ‘prevention’ stemming from the 1989 Children Act (HM Government, 1989). Thurrock Community Mothers likewise provided family support, but from a starting point in health, with health visitors providing the training. Pen Green, Coram and ContinYou on the other hand have their origins in

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20 See the Family and Parenting Institute’s proposal to the DfES (September 2006), *The Early Learning Partnership project*.  
21 Although the initial DfES tender for ELPP focused on children ‘at risk of learning delay’ and did not specifically mention ‘hard to reach’ families, the FPI bid stated that agencies would be selected for their ‘track record of working with “hard to reach” families or in specific interventions targeted at children’s development’.  
22 This section draws on interviews with the consortium of the nine voluntary sector agencies commissioned by the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI) to develop the ELPP initiative, background papers from the agencies, and data on ELPP delivery collected by FPI. Members of the ELPP research team also attended regular meetings of the voluntary sector consortium convened by FPI.  
23 In this report, Pen Green and Thurrock Community Mothers are considered as separate agencies, so nine ‘lead agencies’ are listed (instead of seven, as in the tender and bid documents). The rationale for this is that they in effect have operated as separate partners, running their own programmes, with ContinYou operating as a very ‘light touch’ overall manager and funding route. One effect of this was that neither TCM nor Pen Green managers attended the FPI consortium meetings. Note that the research did not cover all sites where ELPP funding was in operation.  
24 Chapters 5 and 6 draw on discussions with managers and staff as well as observations in the twenty sites to provide an analysis of actual implementation and staff change at ground level. Analysis of user data later in Chapter 4 shows actual catchment areas and groups using the ELPP programmes.
education, working with parents to recognise and promote their children's learning; ContinYou also encouraged parents into further training or adult education, while Pen Green and Coram worked with particularly disadvantaged groups (young mothers, Bangladeshi families, Travellers) and provided elements of family support. Differences on other dimensions were also important. For example, Home-Start, TCM and PLA worked with or through volunteers or 'local peers' offering 'practical help', and 'informal friendly support'. In Home-Start's words, this was about 'parents supporting parents'; TCM talked about 'community outreach' and 'community mothers'. All three agencies explicitly drew on community development approaches, as did ContinYou and Pen Green but with an educational angle.

Thus the agencies arrived at the 'starting blocks' with different histories and different strengths. How these influenced their choices about the programmes or approaches selected for ELPP funding will be discussed in section 4.3 below.

The ELPP funding started to run in October 2006 and was intended to last for eighteen months, until the end of March 2008. The evaluation was not commissioned, however, until April 2007. This gap meant considerable delay before the research team could make contact with the agencies or negotiate selection of the sites for the research visits and interviews with staff and parents.

The first round of telephone interviews with members of staff in each lead agency, who linked with ELPP, conducted in May and June 2007, was intended to introduce the research and ask about the early planning. The intention was to identify exemplar sites to visit and discuss their interpretations of the initiative. Questions covered the type of neighbourhood and families already served by the agency, selection of sites for ELPP funding and the new developments anticipated from ELPP; the agency's definition of parental involvement; the programmes or approaches to be developed; how ELPP funding would be used; recruitment and training of staff; location of the work; and objectives and anticipated outcomes. Agencies were also asked whether they planned to conduct their own evaluations and which organisations they would work with in delivering ELPP. At this stage it was clear that agencies varied in their 'readiness', and that some sites took considerably longer to be set up. Towards the end of the eighteen months, in February and March 2008, a second round of telephone interviews was conducted with the ELPP link staff in the lead agencies, to ask for their views on the initiative now the funding was coming to an end. Questions covered who services reached; the development of new work; outcomes; sustainability; and overall messages from the experience. Seven themes, from the agency perspective, are analysed below. These draw on documentary material from the agencies as well as the two rounds of interviews with agency staff.

**Locating ELPP**

The first question is where agencies located the ELPP initiative in current policy and practice. To some extent, this depended on the agencies’ own starting points. In most of the agency interviews, ELPP was firmly placed in the context of the Children’s Plan with its emphasis on a range of services from ‘universal’ to ‘targeted’ to meet the needs of young children and their families, and the importance of ‘narrowing the gap’ in provision and in children’s outcomes in education, health and social development. The context was thus firmly the *Every Child Matters* agenda and the ‘risk and prevention paradigm’ discussed in Chapter 1. The more education-focused agencies were more likely to talk about ‘parents as their child’s first educators’ and the government’s early years policies bringing together early learning, childcare and health and welfare. TCM, which was located in a Primary Care Trust (PCT), used the notion of ‘child health’ to refer to child development more broadly, and spoke of integrating child health with parenting; the context was more the epidemiological public health focus of the NHS *National Service Framework* than hospital-based acute services, and their earlier experience as a first wave

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25 The difficulties this gap caused for the research are discussed in Chapter 3.
26 See Appendix B for the ‘pre-’ and ‘post-ELPP’ interview headings.
demonstration site for the joint DfES/DH *Skills for Health* project, which recognised the overlap between health inequalities and lack of basic skills.

From an organisational perspective, agencies were eclectic in their views and thought it was important to bring together health and education, Children’s Centres, teachers and adult educationalists, health visitors and midwives, social workers and GPs, housing, as well as more specialist workers such as speech and language specialists.

Although the initial DfES tender for ELPP focused on children ‘at risk of learning delay’ and did not specifically mention ‘hard to reach’ families, the FPI bid stated that agencies would be selected for their ‘track record of working with ‘hard to reach’ families or in specific interventions targeted at children’s development’\(^{27}\). All the agencies located the initiative at the ‘most excluded’; ‘hard to reach’; ‘vulnerable’ end of the spectrum. These descriptors included: isolated families in rural areas; families on low incomes; parents with mental health problems or learning disabilities or literacy problems; children with disabilities or behavioural difficulties or conduct disorders or special educational needs; very young parents; lone parents; ethnic minority parents with little or no English spoken in the home; asylum seekers or refugee families; Traveller families; and families making little or no use of mainstream services for young children.

**ELPP funding and new directions**

To what extent did ELPP funding enable the agencies to consider new ways of working and to provide new services for new groups of people? This reflects the DCSF expectation that ELPP funding would be used to develop new work rather than simply continue funding existing work, that is, to allow agencies to extend their ‘reach’ to families with children at risk of learning delay or to focus on the more socially excluded.

At one level, it was clear that the agencies did plan to use ELPP funding for new work. They planned to use it to employ new staff; NCH for example, employed staff to develop work with fathers and their children. ContinYou used it to develop new programmes for the one to three age group, having previously focused on the Key Stage 1 and upwards age group. Pen Green included childminding networks in its PICL training. Barnardo’s developed more targeted or focused work in existing areas. TCM used ELPP funding to prioritise its home visiting service to parents with higher needs and children with learning delay, but before the families became ‘crisis families’ on social workers’ books. ELPP was also intended to be used to attract new families. For example, FWA proposed to use ELPP funding to test out models such as Newpin’s ‘Family Play’ and PAFT’s ‘Born to Learn’ programmes for rural communities. PLA and NCMA used ELPP funding to promote parental involvement programmes with families referred by health visitors in rural areas where no other project was providing such a service. The families the agencies intended to target were those that did not make use of mainstream services to help their children, or were thought of as particularly vulnerable or excluded families or ‘hard to reach’. The label ‘hard to reach’, while used as shorthand to describe families, attracted a lot of comment. Euphemisms thought to be more acceptable were ‘hard to engage’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘excluded’, emphasising that in many cases it was not the families that were ‘hard to reach’, but the services that were seen by families as irrelevant, exclusive, or ‘cliquey’.

ELPP funding was also used to provide free training and to develop new resources and materials, as in the following examples:

- NCH developed new courses and materials for fathers together with their children, with the help of Bookstart;
- ContinYou developed new modules of materials, story-telling for instance, with practitioners and parents, and funding allowed practitioners to give out free ‘family packs’ to parents;

• Pen Green developed new forms of training;
• TCM designed new cartoon materials focusing on early learning;
• Home-Start used Bookstart to develop materials to help groups of parents recognise they were making a difference to their children’s learning.

ELPP funding was also intended to be used to make a significant shift to existing services, for example, the NCH emphasis on working with fathers and providing male workers as role models was planned as a direct response to the view of Children’s Centres as ‘women’s domain’.

At another level, agencies described themselves as already working in areas with high levels of rural or urban disadvantage, serving vulnerable or disengaged families, so a focus on disadvantaged neighbourhoods or families was not a new departure in itself. ELPP funding was seen by the agencies as an opportunity to test out new strategies for engaging and working with such families. ELPP allowed time for Home-Start, for instance, to experiment with the relationship between home visiting and group work, asking the question whether group work is a stepping stone into home visiting or home visiting provides the confidence-building needed to bring parents out into groups, thus exploring the notion of parental trajectories which is discussed in Chapter 6.

Another two examples are considered in more detail. FWA described itself as having a long history of working in a family-centred, holistic manner, mainly with high-risk referred families, to address children’s needs for nurture and protection through paying attention to the needs of parents, who might be very vulnerable with mental health, substance abuse or learning difficulties. FWA described its working style as participative in the sense of working alongside parents at their own pace, starting from parents’ priorities and concerns, and building trust. While FWA was familiar with helping parents to see how their parenting style and behaviour impacted on their children’s behaviour, ELPP funding offered to FWA the opportunity to focus this approach on children’s early learning. This was a new strategy for FWA in their work with vulnerable and disengaged families.

Coram provides a second example. Coram already worked with young parents (teenage mothers) and with Bangladeshi families, offering family support, and used the ELPP funding to increase referrals from health visitors for children with language delay, families where English was not the first language and families with difficulties with their older children following the birth of a new baby, in order to focus on children’s early learning. An issue here was to help parents disentangle language delay from difficulties about bilingualism. Based on detailed evaluation by practitioners at the sites the agency was able to report that what parents wanted from the programme was information about child development, ideas for activities to do with their child, and help with their child’s learning. In the agency interviews at the end of the programme, parents were reported as saying that they were reading to the child more, more involved in playing with their child, and using other services more.28

Parental involvement

A key question in the first round of interviews was how agencies defined parental involvement. Was this seen as different from parent education, or parent training, or parent participation? To some extent, this depended on agencies’ purposes and backgrounds, and some agencies had a more precise definition of parental involvement than others. ContinYou, for example, set it in the context of parents’ learning about their child’s development and how to promote this learning by being involved in joint activities and having fun together. Their accreditation scheme for parents through the Open College Network (OCN), and encouragement for parents to move on into adult education or employment training defines this model firmly as one of parent education. Pen Green similarly focused on parents’ understanding of their children’s learning. Taking the starting

28 Coram’s Interim Report (September 2007) lists eight different languages, apart from English, spoken in the family home. The report gives vivid examples of parents learning to spend time with their child and to enjoy doing things together.
point of ‘parents as their child’s first teacher’ or ‘parents as first educators’ suggests that parents are the ‘way in’ to supporting children as learners. Pen Green and ContinYou also set the notion of parental involvement more into a context of community development and community education, focusing on knowledge sharing and advocacy for parents’ aspirations for themselves and their children. Some agencies, for example Pen Green and Barnardo’s, talked about the ‘home learning environment’, the home as a ‘learning place’.

Home-Start, by contrast, was clear that its focus was not parent education, but ‘being with’ the parents to help them grow in confidence, develop their relationship with their children, and strengthen their links with the local community. Here it was hard to define parental involvement except as parental participation in a fairly ‘best fit’ or generic way. Most of the nine agencies talked about parental involvement quite broadly as helping parents to play with their children, recognise their needs, and understand their health, social development and early learning.

Some agencies also emphasised a strong element of parental participation, drawing in one case on Sure Start models: sharing records with parents; helping parents to understand how services are planned and delivered; involving them in planning and evaluating services; and getting them involved in management boards. The agencies with a background in family support were more likely to use holistic language when asked about parental involvement and to stress the importance of working with parents and children together, defined as parents being with their children, supporting their development, being interested in and sharing their activities.

Focusing on educational partnerships between practitioners and parents in ELPP required agencies to think about relationships between parents and professionals in fresh ways. All the agencies started from the assumption that working with parents meant getting alongside, working on issues which parents saw as priorities, jointly defining problems or issues and strategies, rather than the professional imposing a definition of ‘the problem’ and a strategy to solve it. Some of the agencies with a long established background of child protection, however, were very aware of the tensions in balancing the needs of the parents with the needs of the children. In holistic programmes working with the whole family, agencies said that although working with the child was usually best done by working with parents, the child’s needs ‘had to be paramount’ and the professional’s judgement had to come into play here.

Another angle on combining early learning with family support, reported by the agencies in the interviews, suggested that focusing on children’s learning could provide a novel and unthreatening ‘way in’ to engaging with parents. Parents who were reluctant to engage with any question or suggestion about their parenting style or their own problems were more likely to welcome proposals for anything to help their children’s learning. Focusing on children’s early learning allowed workers to engage families’ trust in a new way, and provided a way in to working with families who were very alienated or suspicious of statutory involvement. Agencies reported that parents liked the idea that a programme was positive and focused on the child rather than on their problems, and welcomed the suggestion that they could make a difference to the child. Examples were given of families on social workers’ books (no-one ever gets into the house) making a positive contribution to their children (the mother actually said her daughter smiled at her), and of young parents’ perception of their own child changing as they began to notice what interested the child.

It is clear from the individual agency interviews that the ELPP funding provided the opportunity to adopt and adapt new ways of working with parents, and new thinking about parental involvement. However, as one agency pointed out in the interviews at the end of the initiative, there is little evidence of a coherent discussion or exploration between the agencies of ‘the philosophical underpinnings’ of the different parental approaches - where ‘people were coming from’ and the implications for practice or policy.
Promoting a combination of early learning and family support

ELPP objectives were about helping parents with their children’s early learning. It might therefore have been expected that voluntary sector agencies working with well-established early learning programmes, such as PEEP or Pen Green’s PICL, would have dominated the initiative. However, it was agencies with a background in family support, and a more holistic view of working with parents and children together, that took up ELPP funding with the intention to provide just such a new strategy in their work.

This focus on parents and early learning, however, should be seen not just as an additional strategy but as a more fundamental shift towards a more integrated approach in working with young children and their parents. Agency staff commented that family support workers and early years practitioners come from different backgrounds and different training, and that one of the major strands in current workforce development was how to bring these different groups closer together, whether through integrated initial training or collaborative in-service training in integrated settings. In the agencies’ view, the experience on the one hand of encouraging early learning practitioners to gain more confidence in working with parents and more understanding of adult learning, and on the other hand of enabling family support workers to focus more on children’s learning, showed a profound shift in their own practice and in developing a more integrated approach both in the agencies’ own work and in the skills and understanding of their workforce.

There were some succinct comments and vivid examples of this in agencies’ accounts. One senior agency staff member commented that workers from early learning settings may be knowledgeable about child development but less confident about working with parents, while family support workers may be confident about working with parents but less knowledgeable about child development, and bringing them together cross-fertilised these two sets of expertise. A different nuance is evident in the comment in one interview that many early years practitioners still have a view of parental support for their children’s learning as helping teachers or other professionals in their work. ELPP was thought to embody a different view of parental support for children’s learning as it starts from helping parents to enjoy their children, thus shifting the emphasis from ‘parents helping teachers’ to ‘parents as parents’ in their own right. One illuminating comment from a family support agency suggested that early learning and family support must go hand in hand. Early learning may provide a useful route in to working with families with complex needs but it does not stand on its own, it is a valuable component of a more integrated approach.

Collaboration at the level of the agencies

Collaboration between partner agencies took a number of forms in the ELPP initiative. At one level, that of the FPI consortium, the seven agencies which were part of the FPI consortium attended FPI meetings and discussed collaborative work on the ground. Some agencies thought this aspect of collaboration, bringing the voluntary and community sector together, was one of the most important aspects of the ELPP initiative, and hoped this approach would be continued in the future, while recognising that it would require support from government. At another level, that of the agencies, it is not clear from the interviews with agency staff whether the nine agencies used ELPP funding explicitly to develop ‘value-added’ multi-agency collaboration at a strategic level. There seemed to be little attempt, for example, to develop links at the strategic level between ELPP Strands 1 (involving parents in their children’s early learning) and 3 (workforce development), although there were a number of examples where agencies clearly had developed strong collaborative links. Some agencies spoke enthusiastically about their partners in the ELPP consortium, and recognised the value of learning new skills and new approaches from their partners, which indeed was the rationale for linking up in the first place.

Note that the FPI bid stressed the benefits of working as a consortium over and above any individual benefits from making use of ELPP funding. This aspect is further discussed in Chapter 8.
When asked about the strategic level in the areas where ELPP was implemented, all nine agencies gave examples of locally developing links with a range of statutory and voluntary organisations, workers and programmes: Children’s Centres; Primary Care Trusts; health visitors; schools; libraries; Connexions; housing trusts; ethnic minority community groups; local authorities at different levels, etc. For example, FWA in its two main sites had already developed strong multi-agency links with Home-Start, PLA, Children’s Centres, schools, and community health centres. However, it is important to note that ELPP was not the only initiative in the field; agencies had a range of partnerships supported with ELPP funding at the same time as they had other partnerships supported by other funding. Agencies offered examples of complex interweaving already in place at the local level, with voluntary sector staff working in sites managed by other agencies, both statutory and voluntary. An analysis of inter-professional collaboration on the ground is presented in Chapter 5.5 and offers a more complex picture.

**What can the voluntary sector deliver?**

Work undertaken by the voluntary sector is very complex and varied and the ELPP initiative is a good example. ELPP funding allowed the agencies to combine family support; family learning; new early learning resources; training of parents as workers, both paid and volunteer; English as a second language teaching; and parent and child activities. Work was carried out in groups or on a one-to-one basis in centres and in parents’ own homes. Programmes were already adapted by agencies for their own purposes before ELPP began, were further adapted for use with ELPP funding, and were further customised or tailored by individual sites for the needs of local families in local neighbourhoods. Home-Start’s alterations to Bookstart, One Plus One’s *Brief Encounters* programme, and Coram’s programme *Listening with young children* provide good examples of adaptation, but there were many others. Thus complexity, diversity, and flexibility ran as themes throughout the interviews with agency staff about their experiences of ELPP. There was a strong view that the voluntary sector could *get things up and running* faster than the statutory sector, could *change gear* faster, and it could *get into places* where statutory workers would have more difficulty and could engage with families who refused all contact with statutory workers or mainstream services. This may seem a stereotype of the voluntary and community sector which underpins the rhetoric of the mixed economy of welfare; but the ELPP evaluation research has some interesting examples of this in practice (see Chapters 5 and 6).

These comments reflect the positive aspects of working with and through the voluntary sector. More negative comments include the difficulties of funding; the need for closer linking up with the statutory authorities; the need for more thought about cascading resources, including training and support, down to small-scale voluntary organisations at a very local level.

**Embedding the ELPP initiative into mainstream work**

At the end of the ELPP initiative, the key question for agencies was how ELPP practice was being embedded into mainstream services. Comments here varied along three dimensions. One dimension can be characterised as ‘skills learnt are never lost’, that is, *individual embedding*, the second as new ways of working require follow-up support in order to continue, that is, *institutional embedding*, the third as *organisational embedding*.

On *individual embedding*, some agencies took the view that new knowledge and new skills for helping parents to support their children’s early learning would now be embedded in workers’ individual practice repertoires, and would not be lost. The intention was that multi-agency collaboration would continue. PLA hoped to send some of its workers on PEEP’s accreditation courses; TCM intended to continue links with Pen Green’s PICL programme for engaging

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30 On occasions this caused confusion at site level, when managers reported partners and parental involvement programmes which turned out not to be part of the ELPP initiative. Training sometimes involved staff from other organisations.

31 See section 4.3 for further discussion of the twelve programmes used by the agencies with ELPP funding, and how they were adapted.
parents. On the other hand, budgets were already being cut, and staff contracts were coming to an end and teams disbanded. Where existing staff had had their hours increased with ELPP funding, this might be less of an issue; where new staff had been recruited and had to be made redundant, their skills would be lost. Thus experience varied on the dimension of individual embedding.

On institutional embedding, the point was made that working intensively with parents who were hard to engage required not only new skills but also the time to make three or five visits before the mother opened the door or was ready to focus on the child rather than on her own problems. This required not just individual skill on the part of the worker, but also managerial understanding of the institutional commitment necessary for flexibility and workloads. The time involved would have funding implications, and it was not clear that agencies had the necessary funding flexibility once ELPP came to an end. Short time scale and lack of flexibility were refrains running throughout the second round of agency interviews: disappointment at the ending of the funding with apparently no possibility of carry over and little expectation of continuity into mainstream funding streams. Individual embedding might be there at the end of the ELPP funding, but sustainability in the sense of institutional embedding might be more difficult to guarantee.

The third dimension was organisational embedding i.e. would ELPP principles and practice be likely to be sustained throughout an area? The answers to this question varied. Most agencies talked about the possibility of embedding practice through the commissioning and guidance process of local authorities’ Children’s Centres or other early years programmes, but thought this might be difficult in practice. In many areas, the view was that local authorities had no funding. One comment was that Children’s Centres had to focus on family support, child protection, childcare and education; therefore there was no time or funding for the ELPP approach of very focused and very concentrated work with parents about their own children’s learning, and the intensive time commitment required would be difficult to continue. Another very important comment was that local authorities had not been encouraged to ‘own’ the voluntary sector ELPP initiative and had not been much involved at an organisational or institutional level; for example, there had been no requirement to involve local authorities in the initial bids during the summer of 2006. The legacy of skills would continue, but at a very different level. There was only one agency where the ELPP work had been mainstreamed at a high level by the end of the project, although probably in a less intensive way. This agency had already negotiated with the local authority to take over responsibility throughout the entire area for the Children’s Centres providing services for young children and their families, and together with the relevant local authority team was committed to continuing ELPP practice. This was a highly successful outcome at the end of the ELPP initiative, but it can hardly be seen as a result uniquely of ELPP.

Another solution to organisational embedding for the agencies was when the model was already expected to be self-sustaining, as was the case with ContinYou. Here local authorities had to bid in the first place to take on the work, as ContinYou marketed its modules. With ELPP and the move into the preschool age group, more commissioning was anticipated from Children’s Centres as well as schools adopting it to support their Extended Schools agenda.

Sustainability provides us with another lens to examine how ELPP is embedded into mainstream work. Two examples of sustainability are important to note, both to do with the value added nature of links between ELPP and another initiative. The first was a link between ELPP in the voluntary sector and PPEL in the statutory sector. There were two examples, in work by ContinYou and by Pen Green, of agencies linking their ELPP-funded work and training with PPEL-funded work in schools, to expand parent groups or to bring in additional workers into training sessions. The second was a link between ELPP Strand 1 work and ELPP Strand 3 work, that is, between parental involvement developed in the voluntary sector and the workforce development strand co-ordinated by the NCB. In this case, TCM was co-ordinating a range of work to promote parental involvement funded partly by each strand. Both these examples showed innovative thinking about adding value to existing funding and thereby increasing the
likelihood of embedding new practice into more established institutional frameworks such as schools and the early years workforce.

4.3 ELPP development of parental engagement: the twelve approaches as developed by the nine agencies

The twelve programmes or approaches used by the agencies with ELPP funding are presented in Table 4.1 and summarised in Appendix G. Here an overview is presented of the major themes and differences evident in these approaches. How they were implemented on the ground in the training provided in the twenty sites is discussed through the analysis of site visits, staff interviews and observations in Chapters 5 and 6.

Table 4.1: ELPP - agencies, approaches and sites

(i) Sites included in the ELPP evaluation, and (ii) all sites receiving ELPP funding

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGENCY</th>
<th>APPROACHES</th>
<th>SITES (i) VISITED BY THE RESEARCH TEAM</th>
<th>SITES (ii) WITH ELPP FUNDING IN PLACE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home-Start</td>
<td>• Bookstart/Let’s Find Out</td>
<td>Worcestershire</td>
<td>Worcestershire 4 London boroughs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• 1+1/Brief Encounters</td>
<td>Croydon</td>
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<td>• Listening &amp; learning with young children</td>
<td>Westminster</td>
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<td>NCH</td>
<td>• Campaign for Learning</td>
<td>North Solihull</td>
<td>North Solihull</td>
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<td>FWA</td>
<td>• Newpin Play Programme</td>
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<td>• PAFT</td>
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<td>• PEAL</td>
<td>Southwark</td>
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<td>• PAFT</td>
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<td>• PEAL</td>
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<td>• PEEP</td>
<td>Staffs/Stoke</td>
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<td>ContinYou</td>
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32 Note this study did not aim to evaluate the effectiveness of the programmes as such, nor did it compare the effectiveness of the agencies’ different models of working. The intention was to examine the impact of the programme training on staff, and the impact of staff on parents’ involvement with their children’s learning, in the twenty sites visited for the research.
There was a variety of reasons for selecting the approaches. In some cases, agencies already had good links well-established with the organisations developing the approaches. In other cases, agencies selected particular approaches because they were thought to answer specific needs of the agency to develop new strategies for supporting parents with their children's early learning. In the following paragraphs, 'delivery partners' are listed from the FPI bid.

Home-Start, for example, proposed to use ELPP funding to develop and adapt three approaches: Bookstart/Let's Find Out; One Plus One/Brief Encounters; and Listening and learning with young children, based on Coram’s Listening to young children. Bookstart and One Plus One are listed as 'delivery partners'. Its criterion for selecting programmes was to select those which would best enhance Home-Start’s approach of working alongside parents and provide additional models of practice for the volunteers. One of Home-Start’s staff had already trained on Coram’s programme Listening to young children, and was developing a version for use with Home-Start volunteers. Home-Start also had a long history of working with One Plus One; their Brief Encounters programme focused on attachment, and offered useful additional training in relationships for Home-Start volunteers. Bookstart was suggested by some of the local Home-Start schemes, and was adapted to form part of one of Home-Start’s training modules for volunteers helping parents to make use of books and other material with their young children. ELPP initially enabled Home-Start to offer an additional three day package of training to eight local Home-Start schemes, to further enhance the skills and experience of the volunteers in supporting parents to become more involved in their children’s learning.

Coram took on One Plus One’s Brief Encounters, PEAL, and PAFT as ‘delivery partners’. One Plus One's training for Brief Encounters was used not so much as a new programme but as ‘underpinning’ or a ‘refresher’ for the staff team. PEAL provided a useful framework for staff to think about parental involvement and different strategies. PAFT provided in-depth training in its programme, which Coram then adapted for the needs of its families.

FWA had already absorbed Newpin into its own organisation, and had a long history of using Newpin’s programmes with families with complex problems; the Newpin programme developed for use with ELPP funding was the Family Play Programme. PAFT was selected as it offered a new approach for FWA to working with families in their own homes by concentrating on their children’s learning. FWA conducted multi-agency training in two areas to deliver both PAFT and Newpin. It already had links with PLA who were involved in PAFT training in one area. Home-Start and One Plus One are listed as ‘delivery partners’.

NCH proposed to link with PAFT, explicitly in order to use its programme for supporting children’s learning with fathers. NCH also proposed to link with Campaign for Learning, to make use of its expertise in creating new materials, again explicitly to work with fathers. Both agencies and approaches were new to NCH and were listed as ‘delivery partners’.

Barnardo’s proposed to work with PEEP as a ‘delivery partner’ to help develop more targeted and in-depth work, particularly focused on children’s learning. In Barnardo’s South West, PEEP was already used by Sure Start Local Programmes (SSLPs), now translated into Children’s Centres, as a universal service. In Barnardo’s North East, the intention was to use it to develop work with fathers and their young children and with asylum seekers.

PLA took on three new programmes: PEAL, PEEP and I CAN. These three, together with NCMA, were listed as ‘delivery partners’. All three were new to PLA, and were intended to develop a new dimension to PLA’s work, described as a whole new project. PEAL was seen as giving the best approach for engaging with parents and maximising interaction; PEEP was a well-established programme to help parents understand and learn about their children’s early learning, and could also lead on to accredited training for PLA staff; and I CAN would help both parents and practitioners focus on children’s speech and language.

Note that only ten of these twelve programmes were listed in the FPI’s September 2006 bid.
Three of the agencies used the ELPP funding to develop their own parental involvement programmes further rather than link up with new programmes. ContinYou developed new modules and materials for young children in its programme SHARE. Pen Green continued to develop its programme *Parents Involved in their Children’s Learning* (PICL) with new training. TCM developed new elements of work in its own programme focusing on early learning, for example, through English as a Second Language (ESOL) work with non-English speaking families. Note that in the FPI bid, ContinYou listed Pen Green and TCM as ‘delivery partners’.

The twelve approaches adopted were diverse in nature, content and purposes. Three could be labelled clearly as early learning programmes, with coherent underpinning frameworks and their own structure, curricula content and timetable: PAFT, PICL and PEEP. Two were more about providing a resource base that could be tailored to the particular needs of a local area or adapted and absorbed into another programme: Bookstart and Campaign for Learning. SHARE was a parent education approach, which developed modules appropriate to local needs, and was franchised to different local authorities and organisations. PEAL was described as a training programme for maximising parental involvement, drawing on a range of models, theoretical bases, strategies and techniques. I CAN focused on a particular area of children’s development, speech and language. Three were based on and adapted from other programmes: FWA/ Newpin’s Family Play Programme; One Plus One’s Brief Encounters; and Home-Start’s Listening to Young Children adapted from the Coram programme. The TCM programme was based on a health model, and adopted new strategies and elements from other approaches without formal linking, except with Pen Green through the ContinYou consortium. Finally, some approaches were explicitly community development in their approach, although quite different in other respects: Pen Green’s PICL, ContinYou’s SHARE, and TCM.

The final point to note is that all the approaches selected for use with ELPP funding were adapted by the agencies, and were further adapted, or ‘customised’, by the sites, to meet the needs of particular neighbourhoods and indeed particular groups and families. There was no such thing as a ‘pure’ or ‘original’ form of any of the programmes or approaches. This was evident even for those which were intended to be used by following the laid down session plan format and timetable. The dynamic nature of this adaptation process was well-captured by senior agency staff in Home-Start, who described in the early interview adapting the three programmes for ELPP use. At the end of the ELPP period they explained in the second interview how experience of using the three training modules over the eighteen months had led to the development of a single additional module for volunteer training which combined key elements of all three, entitled 'Enjoy and Achieve in Home-Start', to be disseminated to all Home-Start schemes in 2008. The new module includes the key features of three areas of the original work, but places the focus clearly on working alongside the parents to introduce an element of enjoyment and fun to their involvement in their children’s learning, as part of the distinctive ‘Home-Start approach’.

### 4.4 The take-up of ELPP: who did agencies reach on the ground?

New strategies and expanded services were seen by the agencies to be reaching new parents and also promoting work with families in a much more intensive and in depth way. What does the evaluation data show? ELPP figures collected by FPI and reported to the DCSF up to the end of March 2008 indicated that over 7,000 families had been contacted and over 3,000 parents had taken part in parental involvement programmes, with more than 6,000 children benefiting. This provides background to the more detailed data sought by the ELPP research team.

Sites were asked to provide data for a six month period, July - December 2007, about numbers of ‘ELPP families on their books’. This period was selected to catch any variations in starting date or build up of numbers. They were also asked to provide information on numbers of children with learning delay, and on particularly vulnerable groups such as minority ethnic families, families

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34 Email from FPI, 1 May 2008.
35 See Appendix E for the proformas sent out to the twenty sites.
where English was not the first language of the parents or the child, families without work, single parents, refugee or asylum seeking or Traveller families, families where parents or children had physical health or disability problems, parents with mental health problems, families with drugs or alcohol or domestic violence problems. The intention here was to provide information on ELPP numbers, build up and variation, and the agencies’ level of success in reaching families with difficulties associated with risk of children’s learning delay.

Sites were also asked to provide comparative data for one month (February 2008) for ‘ELPP families’ and ‘non-ELPP families’ on their books. The intention here was to provide information on whether ELPP funding had enabled sites to ‘reach’ a more disadvantaged clientele.

Nineteen of the twenty sites in the evaluation returned data. Two of the returns, however, could not be used: one site was not that visited by the ELPP research team but one which benefited from another early years programme; the other returned aggregated data for ‘home visits’ and ‘group visits’ only. The data reported below is thus for seventeen sites only (see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Summary of user data for the sites* included in the ELPP evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers / percentages</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of ELPP families on the books</td>
<td>621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numbers of children on the books</td>
<td>756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of mothers:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 18</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 26</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children registered with learning delay (% of children)</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority ethnic families (% of families)</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families where English was not the parental first language</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workless families</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent families</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with parents or children with physical health problems or disabilities</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with parents with mental health difficulties</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with drugs or alcohol abuse problems</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families with domestic violence problems</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*See text for numbers of sites providing data in each category.
How many families and children were listed by the ELPP sites?

Data reported for the seventeen sites visited by the ELPP research team show smaller numbers than figures reported by FPI in the overall returns, as would be expected, since FPI reported numbers for the entire period of ELPP funding, while the research data was collected to give a series of ‘snapshots’ at different time points.

For the month of February 2008\(^{36}\), a total of 621 families were recorded on the ELPP books for the seventeen sites, with 756 children. However, this overall total masks considerable variation. Site figures ranged from 145 and 111 families recorded by two large and well-established organisations working in large cities (with 145 and 202 children recorded respectively), to two small sites recording five and seven families (with four and seven children), with sites in the middle of the spectrum recording numbers in the low twenties or low thirties.

Overall totals also mask considerable diversity in the build-up of numbers in the ELPP initiative. One organisation, for example, recorded the following build-up of families over the six month period July-December 2007: starting with 72 families on the ELPP books in July 2007, this increased to 139 in August, 159 in September, 178 in October, 187 in November, dropping back to 127 in December\(^ {37}\). Another organisation started with 18 families in July 2007, rising monthly to 24, 64, 80, 112 and 116; these figures included home visited families (who might stay on the books for several months) and also families attending groups at the centre. At the other end of the scale, one organisation recorded one family in August 2007, rising to 22 in February 2008. Another started in October 2007 with three families, rising to eight by December; an earlier group was ‘not successful despite lots of input’. Another group started with ‘taster sessions’ attracting five families over the summer months, rising to 20 or more in the autumn as regular groups were launched. Another started with six families on the books in July, rising to 23 by December.

Sites on the middle of the numbers spectrum started with 22 families rising over six months to 34; 32 rising to 48; or in some sites numbers stayed more or less static (in one example, starting with 16 in July 2007 and rising to 18 by December; in another, groups of ten staying constant over three months, in a third, groups of 26 over four months). Some sites recorded constant figures over a period of months, commenting that this reflected the length of time that groups ran: one example recorded 79 families over July and August 2007, 85 over September, October and November, dropping to ten in December, rising again to 134 in February 2008. Other sites recording constant numbers over the months were probably reflecting constant referral figures: in one example seven families were listed in July and eight in December, and seven again in February 2008.

Most of the parents using ELPP were mothers (627). Only a small proportion (7\%) were teenage parents under 18; 28\% were aged between 18 and 25; while the vast majority, 65\%, were 26 or over.

Children with learning delay

One hundred and forty seven children were recorded with learning delay (19\% of children overall). This ranged from 69 in one site, to none in three sites. None of the sites indicated how the assessment was made; but note this is a tougher ‘level of difficulty’ than ‘at risk of leaning delay’. One agency commented that in a sense all children had learning delay as this was one of the eligibility criteria for the programme, but in answering this question in the survey had included only those children cited at referral as having specific language or physical delay. Numbers of children cited as ‘with learning delay’ increased over the ELPP period. In one agency, the figure reached high 60s by February 2008.

\(^{36}\) Unless otherwise specified in this section, data are for February 2008, and December 2007 in two cases.
\(^{37}\) Note the monthly figures are ‘snapshots’; that is, unless otherwise stated, there is no indication whether the figures refer to the same families or not.
**Minority ethnic groups**

Figures for ethnicity were returned by 17 sites. When these were calculated for White British and non-White, the percentages were 71% and 29%. When the two largest sites were taken out of the calculations, the results were similar (73% and 27%). However, sites varied considerably in their ethnic mix. Some sites were overwhelmingly white. Eight of the 17 sites had more non-White ELPP families registered than White, usually a mixture of Asian and African-Caribbean.

**Households where English was not the first language**

One hundred and forty households did not have English as the first language of the child (22.5% of households); in 150 households English was not the first language of at least one of the parents (24%). Languages included Swedish, Portuguese, Spanish, German, French, Italian, Creole, Greek, Turkish, Somali, Ebo, Bengali (Sylheti), Corur, Tigrinya, Urdu, Gujarati, Tamil, Punjabi, Arabic, Czech, Polish, Mandarin, Korean - a formidable list. This shows that lack of English in the home was taken as an important indicator of risk of learning delay for inclusion in the ELPP initiative, and this was confirmed by some of the agencies’ own evaluation reports sent to the research team.

**Workless families**

Two hundred and sixty families contained no-one in work - 42% of the total number of families in the fourteen sites answering this question. However, sites varied very considerably. In some sites, all families recorded on the ELPP books were in work; in others, none were in work. Most sites had small numbers of families in total, but in sites with comparatively large numbers of families on the books, worklessness rates were in the 50%, 60% or 70% range.

**Single parent families**

Two hundred and five of the families were headed by single parents - 33% of the families. This is a high proportion of the sample overall; but as one agency commented, single parenthood was not necessarily considered an indicator of deprivation/‘at risk of learning delay’, as Bangladeshi and Somali families in this site were all two-parented. Numbers built up in some sites over the period of ELPP funding, and varied considerably across sites, ranging from 50 in one site to none in others.

**Refugee and asylum seeker families** and **Traveller families**

Only two refugee or asylum seeking families were recorded, and one former Traveller family who now lived in a house. One agency commented that attempts had been made to engage Traveller families by working with a health visitor attached to a GP practice specifically working with this group, but Traveller parents appeared to want only ‘one-off’ interventions rather than the semi-structured home visiting programme offered with the ELPP funding, and those attending ‘one-off sign-posting’ events were not registered as ELPP users.

Information was also sought about the extent to which sites reached particularly vulnerable groups with specific problems. Not all sites collected such data: many of the returns replied to these categories with ‘unknown’. It is likely therefore that the following figures reflect under-reporting; but the fact these data were not collected reflects the lack of salience of these situations as indicators of ‘at risk of learning delay’. Only in one site did these categories show high figures and an increase in estimated numbers over the ELPP period.

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38 Data included for fourteen sites.
39 Data included for fifteen sites.
Families with parents or children with physical health problems or disabilities\textsuperscript{40}

Fifty six families were reported overall (8\% of the sample). British Sign Language was recorded in one site. Again numbers varied considerably, ranging from 15 families in one site to none in others.

Parents with mental health difficulties\textsuperscript{41}

Eighty nine families were recorded (14\% of the sample), ranging from 25 in one site to one or two in others. However, some of the sites with medium numbers of ELPP families had quite high proportions with mental health difficulties: in one case, 12 out of 16 families, in another 16 out of 48, in a third, seven out of ten. This may reflect the high salience of mental health problems as an indicator of ‘at risk of learning delay’ in these agencies, or indeed the fact that it was the focus of their work prior to ELPP.

Families with drug or alcohol abuse problems\textsuperscript{42}

Twenty families were recorded (3\%). The majority of sites recorded no families with problems of this kind; elsewhere numbers were very small.

Families with domestic violence issues\textsuperscript{43}

Ninety eight families were reported with such difficulties (16\%). Again numbers varied; some sites recorded quite high numbers of families with such problems, others one or two. However, as with mental health problems, in some sites quite high proportions of families on the ELPP books were reported as having domestic violence problems. Again this may reflect the importance of this factor as an indicator of ‘at risk of learning delay’ in the work of some of the agencies.

Comparison between ELPP families and other work in the ELPP-funded sites

Sites were asked to provide comparative data for February 2008 about ELPP and non-ELPP families on the books. Twelve of the 20 sites provided data (although not complete in some cases). Agencies experienced considerable difficulty in locating relevant comparisons. Where groups had been set up with ELPP funding, it was not always clear what might count as a comparison group, as users were drawn from different areas, or had children of different ages, or the focus of the group might be entirely different. Where ELPP funding had been used to work more intensively with individual families, then again it was difficult to decide what matching criteria to use to locate comparison families. In some cases agencies decided it was impossible to identify a comparison, as the ELPP funding had been used to develop new curricula or appoint new staff rather than to work with new families. So the following data should be used with caution. It is also important to note than a number of agencies commented that although ELPP referrals, strictly speaking, were coming to an end by March 2008, their support of families on the books and collaboration with other agencies to continue such support was ongoing.

From the picture in February 2008, ELPP families were slightly less likely than non-ELPP families to be without work (42\% compared to 46\%). However, they were more likely to be headed by single parents (33\% compared to 27\%), and more likely to be facing poor physical health or disabilities (8\% compared to 4\%), mental health problems (14\% compared to 9\%) or domestic violence (16\% compared with 9\%). On these dimensions, young children in ELPP families were

\textsuperscript{40} Data included for sixteen sites.
\textsuperscript{41} Data included for thirteen sites.
\textsuperscript{42} Again data were recorded for thirteen sites.
\textsuperscript{43} Data included from fifteen sites.
considerably more likely than their non-ELPP peers to be growing up in contexts which put them at risk of learning delay.

4.5 The ELPP sites and their catchment areas

The twenty sites were also asked to provide home postcodes for their ELPP users for January to December 2007 and February 2008, and also for the non-ELPP families for whom data was provided for February 2008. The intention here was to link the postcode data to the newly published *Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2007* (Noble, McLennan, Wilkinson, Whitworth and Barnes, 2008) in order to show to what extent the agencies were drawing their ELPP users from disadvantaged neighbourhoods, as well as focusing on particularly vulnerable individual families as discussed in the previous sections.

Fifteen of the ELPP sites provided some postcoded data, generating more than 2,900 postcodes over the different time periods and including both ELPP users and non-ELPP users. Three of the sites, however, returned incomplete postcode information, so only 12 sites are included in the following discussion.

The first question concerns the extent to which these twelve sites were drawing their ELPP users from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This analysis compares the IMD scores for the ELPP users (that is, based on their home postcodes) with the IMD scores of the relevant local authority districts, and also with the score for children living in households on low incomes or basic means-tested benefits. Almost all the twelve ELPP sites in this analysis were drawing their users from a more disadvantaged local area than the local authority district in which they were located. IMD deprivation scores for the sites ranged from well over double the national average to just under the national average. With one exception, the neighbourhoods the ELPP sites were serving are very disadvantaged indeed on national terms, both on the IMD scores and also on the child low income measures.

When user data from the twelve sites is combined to give the overall distribution by decile on the child low income measure, this shows that 76% of the ELPP users are in the top three deciles on the child low income measure, that is, the top 30% most disadvantaged. This is sometimes used as the criterion for allocating Sure Start funding. When the site with the largest numbers of users is taken out, the percentage drops to 72%, showing that the pattern is widespread and not just driven by one or two large sites drawing in a different population than the other groups.

It is also possible to compare sites in terms of ‘size of catchment area’, that is, whether they served a very small local user group or a much more scattered population. Four of the twelve sites served a very local area, with users travelling ‘as the crow flies’ an average distance of just under or just over a kilometre. Others served much more scattered or dispersed populations travelling four or five kilometres to the main centre. Possibly these sites were working with particular groups, or in people’s own homes, or working from ‘satellite centres’, which might explain the clusters of postcodes at some distance from the main ELPP site.

The same trend of numbers building up over time was observed in the postcode data as in the proforma data already reported. Numbers increased over the six month period, with the highest numbers recorded for February 2008. There also appears to be a trend towards increasing disadvantage: February 2008 is the time point where the most deprived scores on the IMD were recorded.

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44 See Appendix H for details of the postcode data. Note that higher scores mean higher levels of disadvantage. Individual postcodes are linked to a standard Super Output Area (SOA). SOAs have approximately 1,550 residents. The child low income measure is used in this analysis as more appropriate for a child-based initiative than the IMD with its seven domains which contain numbers of measures of little relevance to children.

45 See Tables H1 and H2 in Appendix H.
The second question concerns the comparison between ELPP users and non-ELPP users. Five sites provided postcode data for February 2008 for both ELPP users and non-ELPP users. Overall for these five sites there are small but consistent differences between ELPP users and non-ELPP users. ELPP users came from slightly more disadvantaged neighbourhoods than non-ELPP users in four of the five sites, as judged by the IMD score of their postcode. In all five sites, users came from more disadvantaged neighbourhoods on the child low income measure, and also lived slightly nearer to the ELPP site.

Overall, the postcode data support the proforma data reported earlier, that ELPP users in general came from highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods and in general from slightly more disadvantaged neighbourhoods than non-ELPP users. There is some evidence from this data of more disadvantaged catchment areas being accessed at the end of the ELPP funding. This is a further indication of the time required to ‘bed down’ an initiative of this type.

The two types of data reported here represent different angles on the definition and identification of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘disadvantage’ in relation to ‘at risk of learning delay’ discussed in Chapter 1. Indicators of ‘vulnerability’ and ‘at risk of learning delay’ are applied to families, while the IMD measures of disadvantage deal with neighbourhoods. However, the analysis shows that high concentrations of vulnerable families identified as having children at risk of learning delay live in highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

4.6 Key points

Against the policy background set out in Chapter 2 as the context for the ELPP initiative, this chapter has explored its development, often detailed and complicated, by the nine agencies, using the twelve approaches to working with parents. Agencies were influenced by their different histories and local needs to adopt and adapt different parental involvement approaches for their particular purposes. The main conclusion on the implementation process has to be the diversity of the picture, and the dynamic nature of the adaptation process which continued over the eighteen months of the ELPP initiative. The chapter also explores the initiative’s ‘reach’ or take-up on the ground. The conclusion here is that it was successful in reaching some vulnerable families with children at risk of learning delay, living in highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Successes

- The ELPP initiative (Strand 1) was a brief, time-limited intervention funded by the DCSF focusing on families with one to three year old children at risk of learning delay, to be delivered by the voluntary sector, running in parallel with the workforce development Strand 3 as well as the PPEL initiative in the statutory sector.
- The organisation of the implementation was a new model for the DCSF, a consortium of nine voluntary agencies led by the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI). Agencies agreed that the ELPP consortium model, led by the FPI, could provide a useful precedent for future initiatives.
- All the agencies appreciated government recognition of the potential contribution of VCS to work with families who may be disaffected with statutory sector services.
- The nine voluntary organisations varied in size, experience and ethos (early years, adult education, family support, health), and brought different strengths and challenges to the ELPP initiative.
- The twelve different parental involvement approaches also varied, ranging from early years programmes with coherent underpinning frameworks and their own structure, curricula content and timetable, to resource base development, parent education, community development and maternal and child health.
- The take-up of the ELPP initiative varied across the sites visited by the research team. Some recorded user numbers in the hundreds, other in small handfuls. Despite this variation, ELPP users were more likely than non-ELPP users to be bringing up their children in situations where they were at risk of learning delay - non-English speaking
families, unemployment, single parents, difficulties of mental health, physical health or disability, or domestic violence.

- Postcode data analysis shows that, overall, ELPP users came from slightly more disadvantaged neighbourhoods than non-ELPP users also served by the ELPP sites. More than three quarters of the ELPP users lived in the top 30% most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the country on the child low income measure.

**Challenges**

- Agency staff indicated that more could have been made of the opportunities for inter-agency collaboration at a strategic level than was achieved within the timeframe. They suggested that more opportunities to discuss and debate approaches with experienced colleagues could have been created.
- Agency staff reported tensions between VCS and statutory sector services in some local authorities and suggested that a stronger steer from government on the role of the VCS would have been helpful. In particular, they suggested that there was need for more encouragement from the national level about how ELPP might be tied into local authority plans once initiative funding ceased.
- It is possible that important lessons from the ELPP initiative may be wasted without a framework of ensuring that knowledge generated within these practices can inform local strategy and policy.
- Trends in the ‘reach’ data provided by the sites showed that numbers of ELPP users were building up over the period of ELPP funding, and there is some evidence that more disadvantaged catchment areas were being accessed by the end of the period. This indicates that time was required to ‘bed down’ the programme, as discussed in Chapter 8.
Chapter 5: The local ELPP sites: service and organisational outcomes

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter analyses and discussion focus on the answers to the research questions which were designed to capture service and organisational outcomes (Section 3.4). The questions reflected the intention that ELPP funding would stimulate new or additional focuses for practice and new ways of working with parents; and that these changes in practices would help to reposition ELPP-funded organisations in relation to more vulnerable families and to other local service providers. This chapter will outline how changing practices and organisational priorities interconnected to shape the implementation of ELPP.

The main evidence base for this chapter is the two sets of interviews undertaken with ELPP-funded practitioners and their colleagues in all of the study sites. Interviews with staff took place at two points during the twelve-month study:

- Time 1: May-July 2007 and

One Time 1 visit to a case study site revealed that practitioners were still waiting for ELPP to be implemented and in four cases the research team was not able to make Time 1 visits because the sites in which ELPP would be implemented had not been confirmed. This phenomenon cannot be described as ‘slow start up’ as it simply reflected the time it can take to negotiate new provision into established systems of provision. In the four late-starting sites the interviews were adjusted at Time 2 to capture some of the items addressed in the Time 1 schedules.

As indicated in Chapter Three, these interviews (Appendix C) were designed to elicit:

(i) how practitioners interpreted the needs and strengths of the parents they were targeting;

(ii) the extent to which these interpretations reflected the principles that had historically shaped practices in the site;

(iii) how ELPP helped shape interpretations of parents and influenced work more generally in each site; and

(iv) the likely longer-term impact of ELPP funding on the sites and the local authorities or Primary Care Trusts in which they were located.

5.2 The priorities of the case study sites prior to ELPP

The focus of evaluation in every case study site was the impact of ELPP on how practitioners worked with parents and how parents then worked with children. It made no difference to that focus whether ELPP funding was used for staff training programmes such as PICL or to employ practitioners such as PEEP workers, as the concern was to identify:

(i) whether and how ELPP enhanced the way that service providers worked with those parents, who were not easily reached by existing services and whose children were at risk of learning delay; and

(ii) whether parents were aware how they could support their children as learners and were learning how to give that support.

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46 Where appropriate, references to the research questions in this section are shown as ‘RQ’.
47 See Appendix A for the analytic framework used in Chapters 5 and 6.
In almost every case study, the site of practice was an established site. In other words, ELPP principles were usually inserted into historically embedded practices which had shaped the existing expertise of staff, their priorities and their expectations. This was the situation whether the service was a distributed system of support for parents such as Home-Start or had a physical location or setting and operated as a base for a variety of activities for children and families. It was also the case when a new staff team was brought into an established site to do ELPP-funded work. New staff teams were established in six sites and elsewhere additional staff were taken on to augment existing staff groups. However, in some cases, rapid start up or concerns about job losses once funding ended had meant that no new staff were employed, but existing staff received additional training.

One measure of the success of ELPP as a set of principles about enhancing parents’ capabilities as supporters of their children’s learning is how these principles could be taken up by a wide variety of service providers to work with client groups that shared some characteristics but also displayed quite considerable local variation. For example, in one case an influx of asylum-seeking families into the neighbourhood reshaped local priorities, while across other cases the more disadvantaged groups that were targeted varied between those suffering from rural isolation and inner-city parents with problems of literacy or mental health. The different target groups will be indicated in 5.3.

The Time 1 interviews elicited information on what had been the focus of the site immediately prior to ELPP and how practitioners now interpreted the ELPP-funded work that was beginning to be developed. There was some difference between those services which had a physical location and those which primarily undertook home visits.

- Settings-based service provision prior to ELPP was primarily, but not exclusively, focused on building parents’ confidence and life skills. There was some emphasis on parenting, but the broad intention across sites was to meet adults’ needs as one aspect of supporting families and enhancing their social inclusion. The services that were offered were usually targeted at specific groups and were often made available as part of a range of activities.

- Home-based provision prior to ELPP either focused on training volunteers to work with families or provided support for parents through the work of paid staff. In both types of provision the main aim was to tailor support to the family and, for example, help them connect with other services. In some cases the level of parents’ need was quite high with relatively severe mental health problems or child protection concerns.

These distinctions between types of provision make it possible to distinguish between services where ELPP funding was likely to influence people in organisations and what the organisations offered; and services where the primary focus was quite directly on individual staff to help them expand the focus of their tailored work with parents to include an emphasis on helping children to learn. The distinction, between developing the worker in the practices of workplace, which more often than not depended on a variety of forms of short-term funding, and developing the worker as a knowledgeable practitioner able to work responsively in a variety of home settings, is useful when examining what was happening in ELPP.

It could be hypothesised that provision that was primarily settings-based would be more likely to offer services targeted broadly according to local demographics; while home-based services were more likely to offer services where families were brought in as partners in configuring, with practitioners, their own routes out of their difficulties. However, the distinction is not that simple. An important feature of co-configuration is the idea of a partnership with clients which in time enables them to take control of their own trajectories out of risk of social exclusion (Edwards and Apostolov, 2007). It is therefore not simply synonymous with home visiting. It may initially involve
home visits, but the intention is to enable parents as partners to shape their own trajectories; to engage with other local resources; and take control over their own lives.

Most of the provision offered via ELPP consisted of a mix of home visits and settings-based work (RQ 5) but with varying balances between them and varying degrees of attention to helping parents move on from the services that were offered.

5.3 How ELPP shaped the focuses of the projects

At Time 1 there was evidence of an immediate impact in almost every site that had started its ELPP activities. This impact can be summarised, in most cases, as a new or renewed focus on the relationship between parents and their children and enabling parents to become confident and competent support for their children as learners. In a few of the case studies a focus on children’s learning was not new, but ELPP provided structure and resources which helped to take that work forward with parents. The parents were usually mothers, but in three sites specific attention was given to fathers. There were, however, examples of sites where their long-term concern with high end need, such as mothers’ mental health, meant that a shift to giving priority to putting in place the educationally oriented protective factors promoted by ELPP was not easy to achieve quickly.

The summary just given reflects a wide variety of ELPP-funded approaches. These of course reflected the approaches48 that were used in each site. In the Barnardo’s sites PEEP-trained practitioners worked directly with parents in group sessions and in home visits. PLA sites also used PEEP but in addition drew on I CAN and received PEAL training. The Home-Start sites used Bookstart, ‘Listening to Children’ (based on Coram’s programme) and One Plus One’s programme ‘Brief Encounters’ to train their volunteers, who then drew flexibly on these resources as they tailored their work to support parents. FWA sites used PAFT as did sites run by NCH and by Coram. At the same time FWA used Newpin’s Family Play Programme; while NCH drew on the resources of Campaign for Learning; and Coram and the PLA sites also experienced PEAL training. Sites under the ContinYou umbrella used SHARE, PICL or Thurrock Community Mothers programmes. While this may at first sight appear an eclectic mix of approaches, the analyses of the processes suggest that in most cases the resources offered by each of the approaches, whether these were curricula, ideas about parents as educators or actual materials, were used to work on what each site had identified as the particular challenges of working with local parents.

Practitioners’ interpretations of the problems to be worked on through ELPP were, unsurprisingly, shaped by their existing expertise; how they were positioned in their local communities by the expectations that other agencies and potential clients held for them; and the specific needs of the people they were able to target. A strength of ELPP arose from its complexity. ELPP was not a roll-out of a pre-determined programme with an expectation of compliance with the details of practice. Rather, it presented practitioners in diverse situations with a variety of intellectual and material tools that they could use to work on their interpretation of the problem of developing parents as educational support for their children. Which tools were selected and how they were used reflected how the problem was interpreted (RQ 1). The interpretation, in most cases, reflected the history of the organisation. These points have implications for what can be reasonably expected from service providers, some of whom were undertaking a considerable shift in focus in a relatively short time.

The key aspects of these Time 1 shifts were focuses on prevention through (i) early intervention with children and (ii) the relationships between parents and children. Most sites were already operating within the ‘paradigm’ of risk and protection-focused prevention (France and Utting, 2005; Little, Ashford and Morpeth, 2004) in their work with adults. ELPP meant that they expanded their approach to prevention by adding early intervention in the developmental trajectories of children to their intentions. There was considerable expertise across several of the

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48 These approaches are discussed in Chapter 4 and described in outline in Appendix G.
sites in the identification of adult vulnerability and the kinds of protective factors that would prevent their long-term social exclusion and this expertise shaped how they identified the focus of their work at Time 1. For example, there was widespread discomfort with using the term ‘at risk of learning delay’ when describing the young children in the families which were being targeted. Instead, the vulnerability of the parent could be taken as a proxy for the risk that the child may not be developing at the appropriate rate.

As a result, work on preparing parents to engage with their children’s learning could be filtered though a concern with vulnerable adults (RQ 1). For example, in services which were based primarily on home visiting the aims included: to engage mums; get families out into the community; get parents involved in doing things with each other; giving parents some personal space; create meeting places for families we work with. These long-standing aims, which were often explained as ‘empowering parents’ were not changed by ELPP. Rather, they operated as the filter through which ELPP-funded approaches were implemented. The consequent implementation and adaptation of ELPP approaches (RQ 2) is discussed in 6.3.

The initial impact of ELPP-based interventions was seen in focuses on play, interaction and learning which were not evident when practitioners described what they were doing immediately prior to ELPP. They outlined their ELPP-related aims in the following terms: aiding children’s learning; engaging parents with their children; learn how to play; have unbroken toys available; more books; more singing of rhymes. These aims were fairly general and it can be seen that by Time 2 there was a more informed focus in their ELPP-funded approaches and that practitioners and volunteers were, by then, better able to see how they might work with the tools offered through ELPP.

Experience of working with vulnerable parents also alerted practitioners in some sites to the need for prior educationally-oriented work with parents before engaging with ELPP. This observation was not limited to those services which worked primarily in the homes. There were obvious literacy problems in sites where target groups included those where English was not the first language, but there were also problems of basic literacy among parents. Practitioners talked of treading carefully round literacy.

Where interventions were of a limited duration, usually six weeks of visits or sessions, there were concerns about the feasibility of equipping all participating parents with necessary skills.

The implementation of the ELPP initiative in physical settings often involved an element of home visiting (RQ 5), but usually included settings-based provision. This provision might be run by visiting specialist staff who led PEEP sessions. Alternatively, they may be sessions for target groups led by settings staff who had received training, including an introduction to PEEP. These included sessions aimed at fathers; mother and toddler clubs; workshops to help parents see the educational potential in everyday materials as in PAFT and SHARE; or looking at what children were capable of in PAFT sessions and those run by Pen Green-PICL-trained staff. All of the settings-based sites, which also carried out home visits, saw engagement in settings-based provision as a sign of success with home visits. In addition, for a variety of reasons, some very practical, most of the home visiting provision in the study also put in place ELPP-oriented settings-based experiences for parents and aimed at enabling them to attend these sessions either alongside home visits or when the home-based ELPP initiative had ended.

Although ELPP work was uniformly valued by the practitioners who were interviewed in settings, short-term funding was a common concern. At this point it is sufficient to note that short-term funding, in settings which were adept at sustaining themselves in this way, had the effect of some practitioners seeing the ELPP initiative at Time 1 as just another piece of work as one of them put it (RQ 2).
At Time 2 there were changes in the focus of ELPP-funded activities from those identified at Time 1. These changes were of three kinds: (i) a sharper focus on children as learners and how parents might support that learning; (ii) some changes in how sites saw their work with children and parents and often a greater emphasis on working with more vulnerable families; and (iii) in a few cases staff were focusing primarily on what to do next as funding was about to end. Engaging new families will be discussed in 5.4 and the impact of short-term funding in 5.6. How practitioners were becoming more adept at recognising what needed to be done to help parents support their children as learners is now outlined.

Focusing on reaching more vulnerable families at Time 2 was helped by practitioners becoming increasingly aware of their ability to influence how parents worked with their children and were now working confidently with this focus with increasingly vulnerable families (RQ 5). Here one senior practitioner, in a site where there was a history of thinking about children’s development as well as a focus on adults’ needs, describes the impact of ELPP on a colleague and how it helped in her work with hard to engage parents.

What she’s most excited about is something about… and she’s a bit surprised by it, about how the focus on the child’s learning has really worked in engaging families who are very hard to engage, and that she’s a bit surprised by that. So she’s someone who has worked with families in a lot of difficulties for years but she’s tended to have more kind of family support role. And now she’s going, let’s talk about your child’s learning and she’s saying, they love it, they absolutely love it and so she’s got a few families like who would never let a social worker in the door kind of thing, who hate professionals, all that kind of stuff … And she’s saying it’s incredible this ELPP thing because, you know, they never let anyone come in before, they didn’t send their children to school, they hate the social worker, they just sit at home and do nothing. You know, but they let me in because I’m doing ELPP.

The greatest changes in how practitioners looked at parents as potential educators were among some of the cases which offered mainly home-based support for parents. ELPP approaches, whether they were structured six week interventions or sets of resources and ideas about parents as supporters of children’s learning, had made practitioners and volunteers more aware of how parents could intervene to engage their children as learners and in some cases meant that volunteers no longer passively took the lead from mothers. One local Home-Start organiser elaborated:

I think perhaps it has made us seize opportunities a bit more, where in the past… there might have been opportunities - but as the volunteers hadn’t accessed the training, it wasn’t at the forefront of our mind as much…I suppose they feel more confident in suggesting something with a family or instigating the situation with a family because of the project than perhaps they would have before.

Across all primarily home visiting sites where ELPP training had brought new skills to existing staff and volunteers there was a strong message that practitioners felt more agentic and effective when working with families. Although they did not stop taking the lead from the family as they co-configured pathways out of vulnerability, the limited time interventions and the educationally oriented materials that were provided gave them a clear sense of what they could do to help parents to help their children (RQ 1, 2, 4, 10, 11).

49 The evaluators noted differences between measures of geographically-based disadvantage and definitions of vulnerability and risk that were used by agencies and practitioners in the initiative.
However, arguments were made in those home visiting sites, which were working with mothers with high levels of vulnerability, that an educational focus was not always possible. Some of these services indicated that recruiting volunteers they could match to parents had also proved an insurmountable difficulty and led to their running settings-based services as an alternative or to augment what they could offer parents in their homes.

Nonetheless, in most primarily home visiting sites there was a strong sense that changes in interpreting how parents could be involved with their children’s learning among staff and volunteers would be sustained. Comments from workers frequently echoed the sentiment that ‘Once we have seen things differently there is no going back’. This observation would certainly be consistent with the theoretical underpinning of this part of the study and suggests that changing the way practitioners interpret their work and providing them with the tools and expectations that support these interpretations can lead to lasting change in ways of working.

There was less promise of long-term change in some of the settings-based sites where ELPP had necessarily been incorporated as another short-term initiative. Dependence on short-term funding together with responding to the needs of different target groups and a focus on adults as well as on children meant that some sites were working on a complex array of problems. For example, in one site where externally-based PEEP workers delivered the PEEP programme practitioners listed the following focuses for work in the setting: preparing families for group work; empowering parents and enabling them to solve their own problems; helping parents to more confidently access schools and other services; equipping parents with skills to help children grow to adulthood; enabling parents to move onto employment; helping children become more confident learners and achieve at school; encouraging children and families to have fun. These aims are, of course, interlinked but the ELPP-funded programme was just one of several tools to be used on that agenda and this array was not untypical.

It is not being suggested that PEEP, as the example in this case, was ineffective with parents; or that practitioners in this setting and those like it were unaware of what PEEP was able to offer. Rather, however beneficial the intervention was, it was simply one of several located in the setting and would not be the last (RQ 11). PEEP practitioners who were members of centrally located teams talked of how welcoming settings were, but there was not always a strong sense of the integration of programmes into the general practices of these busy places and in some cases considerable efforts were made by the agency worker to stitch a programme into a setting to increase the possibility that its influence might be sustained. There were some exceptions to the problem of integrating ELPP approaches into settings-based provision. For example where ELPP principles could be incorporated into existing interventions such as the FWA Well Family model or Barnardo’s High/Scope provision, staff could discuss its integration with enthusiasm (see 6.3).

Where settings-based staff received PEEP or other focused training themselves, there was stronger evidence of their learning to see things differently (RQ 4). A nursery nurse-trained practitioner in one of these multi-service sites was not alone in her observation that after receiving PEEP training I’d find it hard to go back to being totally child-focused again; while for others PEEP also helped them work better with children as well as with parents. Here a practitioner who had also originally been trained as a nursery nurse described how she looked at children as learners as she worked with parents.

_The one thing I think will always stay in my mind is in the PEEP training where they said you must see the world from the child’s point of view. And I think it is the most valuable piece of information that you can take…when I plan a session I look at a session and think my children, how are they going to see this, what are they going to see there? And you can’t go into a session and talk about things that are far too high-pitched for a child that age to understand. So I’ll change it to how will they see it? What are they going to get out of doing this? But the focus of the session is very_
much for parents to believe they have the power to do anything with their child and it will inevitably have an effect on their education.

There were some case study sites where there was less complexity where, for example, discrete sessions were run on local authority premises by local authority workers. One of the sites which used SHARE offered an open access service which aimed at helping parents understand what children do in school and enabling them as supporters of their children’s learning. In another SHARE-based case the focus on children as learners was equally clear, but the local Further Education college had also been recruited to give advice to parents and to encourage them into education themselves. In these settings it was difficult to see how ELPP work was having an impact on how other practitioners in the sites saw parents as instrumental in the early learning of their children, however skilful the practitioner and however much the parents enjoyed what was on offer, as SHARE skills remained with the local authority staff who had bought SHARE training and resources (RQ 10).

In summary, where staff had direct access to training and resources which helped them to recognise how parents might support children as learners, and how they might, in turn, enable parents, there was a distinct shift in the way practitioners interpreted their work with parents. It is therefore safe to say that ELPP has, in most cases, raised workforce awareness about the importance of parental involvement in children’s early learning (RQ 10). However, where ELPP was inserted as just another initiative into the array of services on offer, or was delivered as a discrete service in a multi-purpose setting, it was difficult to see how it made any great change to the focus of the work of the site and therefore whether it can be reported that in those settings it helped to prioritise parental involvement in early learning in the voluntary and community sector work force (RQ 11). A slightly more nuanced analysis is offered in 5.4.

5.4 The influence of ELPP on the work of the sites

The analytic framework used in this element of the study (Appendix A) suggests that a change in focus in a site (RQ 10, 11) would only be seen if there are also changes in:

(i) established practices and expectations; and

(ii) the way that work is shared out.

Those changes were to be found in some of the home visiting programmes where practitioners or volunteers had to use time-limited intervention programmes rather than working solely to the pace and interest of parents and where parents were brought more overtly as partners into work with their children. They were also evident in ELPP-funded work which took place either in group sessions in physical settings or home visits based on these settings. In this section the question of the potential of ELPP to influence more broadly, how those sites were working with parents is tackled. Discussion will centre on: prevention; reaching more socially excluded families; and organisational learning.

Prevention Early years provision is frequently justified in terms of intervention in the early years of life to prevent likely later failure. More recently the meaning of early intervention has been extended to include intervention at the first signs of vulnerability at any point in a person’s life to prevent smaller levels of risk escalating to the point where social exclusion becomes inevitable. There was evidence of both meanings of early intervention in play across sites as they discussed their work prior to ELPP. One way of describing ELPP is to present it as a bringing together of both these interpretations: the interventions were with vulnerable parents to enable them to intervene early in their children’s developmental trajectories so that they might become competent learners. This intertwined approach also reflects current thinking on the need to intervene at the level of the family or its wider network to build sustained support around potentially vulnerable children (Morris and Burford, 2007).
The relative priority given in the past in sites to the two readings of early intervention just outlined shaped the practices that occurred. For one of the Children’s Centre sites, ELPP meant that they now had the funds to link their interventions in children’s developmental trajectories with work with parents at home and in settings in ways they would have long liked to have done, but had lacked the funding. This was also true of sites where the emphasis overall was on ‘cradle-to-grave’ provision and in sites where discrete ELPP-funded provision was brought to localities by using schools or community centres for sessions with parents. All of this provision connected directly with the risk and prevention framework that is driving policy for the prevention of social exclusion.

The prevention through early intervention focus was, as already indicated, more difficult for those home visiting services which were working with particularly vulnerable parents. Moving towards prevention through engaging parents as early educators of their children opened up a new area of work for these services. However, the shift that the practitioners made points to a potential tension in the ELPP initiative. Requiring an emphasis on children’s learning as a protective factor alongside efforts to reach particularly vulnerable or isolated parents presented all the sites with two sets of goals which were not always compatible. The tension may have restricted the full impact of the initiative on sites or, as is suggested in 6.5 and Figure 6.1, has presented a particularly complex set of demands to practitioners.

**Reaching the more excluded parents** Work on reaching and sustaining relationships with target parents occurred in two ways: (i) developing strategies for getting in touch with the more excluded parents; and (ii) developing provision that suited their needs. The development of provision is described in some detail in 6.3 and 6.4, here the focus is how new groups of parents were brought in to contact with ELPP-funded services (RQ 3).

The approaches funded by ELPP focused mainly on developing staff capacity to work with parents. They did not focus on how to attract parents as there was an expectation that sites would have some experience in this area. In many cases this expectation was warranted, but where teams were brought together as a response to ELPP or where ELPP allowed a new focus on vulnerable parents, making contact with and engaging target parents required some effort.

Practitioners often made use of their networks of personal contacts built up in previous employment, but also found that they needed to produce leaflets advertising the project to leave with potential referrers. This all took time, and sites responded to this differently. Some sites delayed engaging with parents until they had consulted key players in the local community to identify and locate particular groups in pockets of need where parents might benefit from some support in their role as their children’s educators. A practitioner explained the strategy:

*We originally contacted sort of key players in the area, community groups…It was the networking, we’d already got networks because we’re based here. And we used the links that we had… and so we had a number of meetings where people were invited to actually then see where were some of the gaps. Having identified some of the gaps, and definitely Asian families and Somali families came up, and young mums, that was one that came up particularly in this area. Then what we did was we then contacted and targeted the community groups that we knew worked with those particular groups.*

This was often not a straightforward process and required detailed knowledge of local communities, for example:

*With the Somali families we went back to basics. The routes that we had tried weren’t working, and I think partly because it’s a really bad time for (community organisation) a lot of their groups had collapsed, a lot of their kind of structure as a community group has kind of collapsed. So that’s been quite difficult. So at the same point in time what we had done was to contact the local nursery that had a lot*
of Somalian families and really then developed a partnership with (Local Authority personnel) who had been developing a PEEP group within (name of nursery). They then became homeless that nursery, so what we did was we then formed a partnership between PEEP Plus [ELPP Programme] and (the Local Authority) and so we've supported that group as a targeted group.

An alternative strategy was to start work with more accessible groups while the new ELPP programme was developing and becoming more widely known, so that during the course of the initiative sites found themselves reaching those individuals who were more reluctant to join local mainstream groups. In most sites efforts were made to attract new parents by going out into local communities and talking with parents at, for example, drop-in clinics in GP surgeries, or pre-school services.

We've reached local parents through the toddler group, that's been very successful, because that's already a known group, people trust it. They may not use it but they're willing to come along, or people have heard about us through that group so we've used them as a way of advertising, if that makes sense... we've run something which may not have immediately attracted our target families but because there's been a small group established we've been able to direct, or we've had families directed to that group, and we've had some success there in establishing a sort of 'come along and see what you think' approach... our experience has been those that we are most keen to reach take the longest period of time to engage and we've had to be willing to visit and have an unconditional approach, if you like.

Conversations with parents in these kinds of settings were generally regarded as more useful than leaflets or posters, though leaflets were useful for reminding other professionals about what was on offer. However, these conversational strategies were most likely to attract people who were already engaged with services and perhaps were not the most excluded. A view in some settings-based sites, that the problem was perhaps one of 'hard to reach' services and that the families are out there waiting for something to click that means they'll take advantage of something that is available, suggested that some settings were working, initially at least, with low thresholds of what was meant by potentially excluded parents.

There were referrals, but few services depended on them. This was in part because there were anxieties on the part of ELPP-funded services about filling gaps arising from understaffing in social services; and in part because practitioners recognised that it would take time for other agencies to become aware of what was available through ELPP and time was at a premium if ELPP targets were to be met.

Short-term funding also played its part in making it difficult to commit to the kind of long-term relationships required by the most disadvantaged groups and the specialist services which worked with them. A practitioner gives an example:

I think that’s been the right decision with the short-term nature of the project because what we do know from, you know, talking to the Traveller and other services that do work with these populations is that it’s a long-haul job, you need to be in it for the long-haul. So knowing that we’re probably not going to be able to do that has, as I think quite rightly, you know, realistically made us think, you know, there’s no point in setting ourselves up for spending loads of time on this because in 12 months we’re just going to be breaking the ice and it’ll be sayonara!

There were also concerns about the time needed to first engage and then reposition parents so that they saw themselves as having a role in supporting their children’s learning.
The disadvantage is obviously it’s very, very short term and when you’re delivering a service from scratch, which we did from (name of place) you have got a very slow take up and you know, the families that we deal with are very hard to reach, very deprived at this end of the continuum and it can take a long time to engage them and get them into the mode where they feel comfortable and confident to go into a group environment.

The potential tension between the two goals of ELPP is quite clear when examining how sites dealt with attracting and engaging parents. Firstly, where sites managed to reach the target group there was some indication that, for some of the more vulnerable groups, a two stage approach of first engagement and then educational partnership might be more appropriate. Secondly, how sites, which needed to find new groups of excluded parents, dealt with attracting and engaging target parents indicates that short-term funding limited the necessary groundwork. This, in turn, meant that it was easier to find and attract parents who were not disengaged.

Another quite understandable long-term strategy that limited the immediate impact of ELPP on more vulnerable parents was explained by a practitioner in a Thurrock Community Mothers (TCM) scheme which, as well as supporting vulnerable parents, focused on careful training of volunteers with the expectation that they become paid employees or move on to further training. New volunteers were recruited through courses developed with ELPP funding, given initial training and paired with the less needy parents. The expectation was that further training and supervision would be provided with a view to moving them into work with more challenging families and paid employment. Here a volunteer who had recently become a paid worker described how she had developed her skills in supporting parents.

As a volunteer I was given first time mums to do the home visiting for, and they would be, as far as TCM were aware, quite straightforward in just that they were first time mums and just needed a bit of reassurance and just exchanging information. So that was primarily the types of people I was visiting as a volunteer. As time went on I asked if I could have more challenges so the support workers and co-ordinators were aware that I was looking for families that were hopefully not too complex but that had sort of other issues other than just being a first time mum. So that was after about a year I asked for that… I built up… I mean this wasn’t straight away I didn’t take five (families), but I built up to try and keep five.

Within this framework it was unlikely that ELPP funding would lead immediately to work with the most excluded families.

Organisational learning and programme adaptation - One sign of an organisation being able to learn i.e. take on and adjust to new kinds of work is whether it can accommodate changes in its implicit rules, its view of its primary purpose and its ways of working with others. These kinds of adjustments were second nature to most of the settings-based sites, primarily because of the need to chase funding.

I think the difficulties are always that you just feel like you are getting somewhere with the project and just starting to integrate it into what you normally do or your usual service and just feel like it really fits in nicely, when the project comes to an end. And the argument is always well if it’s working then it should just become part of your normal work but the reality is, if it causes us more work, we have to go and look elsewhere for that core funding. So whereas it would be nice to say well from now on we’ll offer additional ongoing training on children’s learning as a regular twice yearly session to all new volunteers and in theory, yes, that sounds great but it may be that next year I have to get my funding from an Alcohol Advisory Board or I have to get my funding from a Drugs Awareness Council and therefore that will dictate that I have to deliver ongoing training as part of that funding for them and I think it shouldn’t be that what we are offering is led by the funding but that’s
certainly one of the difficulties of short term funding, is that you don’t have time really to get it up and running before the funding runs out and even if they are fantastic initiatives, unless you’ve got sustained core funding, you haven’t got the luxury of saying, we’ll choose to continue that then as part of our core work.

However, a closer look at where adjustments were being made in relation to the purpose of working with parents reveals that they tended to be adjustments to the approaches rather than adjustments to the organisations in which the approaches were being implemented. For example, practitioners worked flexibly with curricular programmes to fit them to how they interpreted clients and their needs (RQ 9). Here a practitioner working with a structured settings-based programme explained how she and her colleague respond to late arrivals.

We say to them it doesn’t matter … if you’re not here at 9.30, don’t panic, don’t feel that you can’t come, just turn up whatever time.

They also adapted the structure of the programme while sustaining its focus.

…the actual structure and the set up’s been very similar since the beginning, we’ve just put a bit more into it. As much as what the families want. And we listen to their feedback as well of what they would like to do which kind of takes us where we want to go.

This kind of flexibility was widespread and particularly evident in relation to the age of the children whose parents were accessing services. Although the target age range of one to three was the primary focus, observations and interviews revealed that funding was used from ante-natal to parents of children aged seven. This was sometimes because of the need to reach the most excluded parents; because services wanted to offer equal provision to all clients; or because they felt strongly that the lack of attention to parents of children under twelve months was a mistake.

Sites were therefore more likely to be adapting ELPP-funded provision to their purposes than permanently re-shaping their established practices to accommodate pure forms of ELPP approaches (RQ 11). This statement is not a criticism. It can be seen as a sign of a thinking workforce which is capable of making professional decisions about how to work with clients (see 6.3 and 6.5) and is very much in line with the risk and prevention dynamic underpinning current practices. Neither is it an indication that parental involvement in early learning was being down-played (RQ 11). It is perhaps a heartening finding as it suggests the possibility of some embedding of ELPP principles in the practices of the sites.

The responses to feedback from parents just described reflected a strong concern with the relevance of provision for the client group being targeted and evidence of an approach that was seeing parents as partners rather than clients. Practices were frequently judged (RQ 9) in terms of the engagement of parents and their developing skills and understandings. Some evaluations were distinctly formative and led to the adaptation of provision as the following extract indicates.

When we come to our planning we’ll think about what the actual families have asked, kind of look at and what they would like to look at for their children and we kind of listen to their feedback. I mean like next week it’s the start of my block of sessions and originally we were going to do about babies and making choices. However, because the group has changed quite a bit since before Christmas when we originally said that’s what we were kind of going to do. I kind of … you know, reassessed from listening to what the parents have said in the evaluations and things that feedback every week. We get feedback from the group here. And I’ve decided to look at development of writing and mark making. Because it’s something that the families have said … and they’ve also requested more messy play. So it’s, it kind of links perfectly together so we will
listen to what they want and also the needs that they've kind of talked to us about and kind of link that without, you know, highlighting it for everybody. But it also gives the families that want that bit of support and are quite comfortable to speak to us to kind of make it a group, a group learning curve.

Other forms of formative evaluation were integrated into interactions with parents. For example, in some sites parents were asked to keep diaries as a way of ensuring a tight focus on their children's capabilities. In other settings it was part of regular staff meetings to review provision against expected outcomes for parents and formative assessment could be accumulated to provide some summative evidence of how parents were changing in how they worked with their children.

In this extract a senior practitioner explains the importance of evaluation to her team. The example indicates how formative evaluations can feed into summative statements and the need for quite careful and detailed records of changes observed.

I did a big evaluation at the beginning of September of where were at so far so an analysis of all the home visits we'd done at that point and change within them. And I was really delighted by it, I thought it was good but I thought oh god it really is... There was a lot of real change going on in families...I then presented the results about parents' perception of change after the visits to the staff. And they said they thought the thing that had got missed out in that was about how much more parents were reading to their children. They said that they had really noticed that... I was working from their files (for my evaluation) so what I did was I just went through all the files of completed cases and I looked at the before and after and the change, and kind of summarised that in a chart. But they said but you don't say how many more of them are reading. I was, well it's because it's you haven't written it in the file, and they were going oh no they're all reading to their children, it's amazing how. I've talked to them about that, I said make sure you record that because otherwise, you know, it's a really important claim for the project. And I can't put it in a summary of results if you don't put it in your files, you know, so you need to be clear.

Efforts were made across all sites to evaluate provision, in part to develop it, but also to justify actions and be able to make cases for further funding. Evaluation tended to focus on how parents experienced the services provided by each site. There was very little evidence that sites were systematically monitoring whether parents were moving on to access other provision. The main exception to that point was when parents either became volunteers in the programme or went on to formally provided education.

Unfortunately site-based self-evaluations were not designed in a uniform way to enable them to inform the Oxford study or to allow cross-site comparisons. As a result site-based evaluations varied from detailed record-keeping which informed how approaches were implemented, to surveys of parental satisfaction (RQ 9). All sites, however, kept records of who used the ELPP services they provided, and sent regular returns to the DCSF through the FPI, who made them available to the research team.

5.5 Inter-professional collaborations

ELPP was introduced during a period of upheaval in children's services in response to the 2004 Children Act. In almost every case there was reference to changes in the local authority or in the VCS organisations that were occurring in response to national changes. Changes at national and local levels have been largely driven by the need for more joined-up approaches to work with children and families and with adults. ELPP was clearly located within the remit of services for children and families, seeing adults first and foremost as parents. The research team had expected to see some tensions between relating to services which primarily focused on children
and families and those which worked with adults; but none were indicated even though in several cases there were strong links between child and adult services. However, because ELPP was located in the voluntary sector, there were particular challenges to be faced in inter-professional collaborations with statutory agencies.

Breaking down boundaries between the statutory and voluntary sectors and between different professional groups was generally recognised as important. Indeed, in settings where different professionals were co-located and habitually worked alongside each other this was not regarded as anything other than the norm. Nonetheless, ELPP could help to erode boundaries in quite important ways. For example in a Children’s Centre which hosted PEEP, centre staff reported valuing the opportunity to learn about and from Barnardo’s and also how they felt they had been able to share their own values and aims with PEEP staff. This is not a trivial point. A recent ESRC-TLRP study of what sustains inter-professional work with children found that making professional values explicit and teasing out similarities and differences led to a sharing of those values. These values, in turn, helped to keep practitioners from different backgrounds on track when working fluidly across professional boundaries with children (Edwards, Daniels, Gallagher, Leadbetter and Warmington, in press 2008).

Parents and their children took up ELPP-funded services through the following mechanisms: referrals from other agencies; self referrals; open access; and sign-posting. Sites varied considerably in how they welcomed referrals from statutory agencies: much depended on their history of work with the statutory sector. As already indicated, there was sometimes a reluctance to fill gaps in statutory provision by becoming dependent on referrals. However, in some sites referrals which related to the expertise the site could offer were welcomed, not least because they helped sites to reach target numbers for the most excluded groups (RQ 6). Parents who arrived through open access usually came as a result of the kinds of reach activities outlined in 5.4. In those cases interagency collaboration was largely limited to recruitment of families. There were examples of parents being sign-posted to ELPP provision by other services but the timescale of the intervention meant that new ELPP services, or services which had shifted their focuses, were often not yet recognised by other providers.

Other current studies of inter-professional work with children and families are indicating how much time it takes for professionals to make visible their own expertise to others and to know how to access the other expertise distributed across their localities. Here an ELPP-funded practitioner illustrates just how difficult it was to enter local systems of inter-professional support when limited to one year of funding:

…this is the other thing about a year’s post…it takes a long time for people to know what you do, and there’s a lot of people out there that don’t know what (we) are doing…even though we’ve got all this information around …so if you were in a place a lot longer it makes you wonder how many links and how much joint working and how much actual capacity building you could actually do, doesn’t it?

Established links with Further Education colleges in some sites were fruitful because they meshed with college targets. For example, one site incorporated Bookstart into a storytelling project by linking with a local Further Education college which made extra funding available.

Because of the networks that we’ve created, like I said earlier with the Storytelling project, through that network we got Bookstart and Engage, which we linked to (name of) College to pay for… they had some money so we actually did a project with them for the Storytelling, so from those networks we’re able to do activities.

50 These projects are currently on-going and funded by the ESRC: Learning in and for Interagency Working ESRC RES-139-25-0100 which is a project in the Teaching and Learning Research Programme; and Expanding Understandings of Inclusion ESRC RES-000-22-2305.
Sometimes efforts to integrate services into local networks were necessary to avoid leaving families stranded once funding ceased. Here a practitioner explains:

I felt that because it was only a short life project in terms of exit strategies if you like, we needed to work alongside people who could then continue it if it was appropriate or for whom the family would still have some level of support going on, and that was important to us. So we worked from the beginning with people that were already involved and then with services like Connexions, like the library service who also had a desire to be, to reach those families.

A focus on inter-professional collaboration to sustain a service for clients could also result in other, more securely funded, organisations being trained by ELPP-funded staff to continue ELPP work once funding ended. For example, in one site at Time 2 the research team found that staff were focusing their energies on working with other agencies to share the principles of PAFT and NEWPIN and in engaging parents with other agencies to ensure they were not left without support once the project ended.

One research question (RQ 7) focused specifically on whether links with health services had increased during ELPP work. There were glowing accounts in several settings of how speech therapists worked with ELPP staff and reports of how referrals to Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) were part of the work of the home visiting services. However, there was little evidence on the ground that ELPP had helped to promote links with health services, even when one of the programmes was located within the remit of a PCT. Instead there were reports that health visitors were resisting collaboration in one site and in another the local medical centre had refused to advertise the services that were on offer for parents; though in another site a local paediatrician offered to lobby for continuation funding for the ELPP service.

5.6 The longer-term impact of ELPP

Every study of initiatives which are based on short-term funding, is able to comment on the deleterious effects of limited life projects on both staff and clients. ELPP was no exception, and the following effects were reported:

1. **job insecurity**, which as we have already observed, changes the focus of practitioners’ activities as the end of funding looms;

   Now I kind of feel as if I definitely want something far more than just one year, to really get my teeth in …., Because I feel as if having done that for three years and three different settings, it is really draining. It makes me think well does that mean that actually I'm no longer going to work in the voluntary sector? Because the voluntary sector, full stop, just seems to be constantly not sure about funding. I think that is a real shame because it means that, you know, workers like myself are put off working in the voluntary sector because you go ‘well actually, no, I don’t want to do that any more’, because it is unsettling, it is draining in terms of energy and all. And I'm bored of fighting applications, I'm bored of writing applications, filling in applications and you know, and that process that you have to do. Every time this time of the year I've got to think, right, better start looking for another job.

2. **job loss and the closure of groups** for disadvantaged parents which have been carefully nurtured, as this practitioner illustrated;

   The disadvantage is I won’t have any work. I lose my job. I think the main disadvantage is, like I say, for this group myself and (the other worker) are the role, are the leaders within the group… Unfortunately, you know, the worry is, with this group, and lots of other groups, that they won’t happen and that will just
then have to stop and there’s not necessarily other agencies that are willing to
take this over which is where the problem comes.

3. loss of career development for staff gave rise to frustration among workers whose
experience with ELPP had enabled them to develop considerable expertise with working with a
specific group, but who would lose this focus when ELPP funding ended and would be less likely
to be using the skills and knowledge which they had built up and which were clearly of value to
people working in this area;

Me personally, definitely I can take a lot forward, and I’ve learnt a lot and I’m able
to share that with that loads of other people because I know a lot of people email
me and say, can you give me a pointer on doing this and that and the other. I’m
able to give them good advice. It’s just frustrating because this great advice
around engaging in different things, it would be great if it was staying local and
people were taking it onboard and keeping… because obviously the main thing is
having been able to do a specific job and to target a specific area which isn’t going
to be in place long term… I know they’ve (Campaign for Learning) been really,
really happy with everything that’s been done so I know they’re looking to fund
more things around dads and different things so they might carry on. My
involvement I don’t know because obviously I don’t know what my role will be
really. I’ll be a general worker but whether I’ll have a focus on dads I don’t know.

4. problems in recruiting staff and volunteers, as this organiser of a scheme which works
with local volunteers explained;

And then we could have done a lot more. We could have taken on more staff if it
went on longer, but we haven’t done that because they can’t have a job at the
end. It’s awful to take on particularly a volunteer from the community, give her a
job and then say well sorry but that’s it at the end of March. You’ve done a great
job but…..

5. loss of ideas and experience as a battle-hardened practitioner in a settings-based site
indicated.

But it’s no different from any other funding that I have, you know, it’s just a year
on year on battle. And the problem is you could come… you become specialists
at something for a very short period of time and then you simply have to end
that and pick up somewhere new. And it’s not that you ever lose those skills,
you don’t, you carry them forward but it’s not that you can then take something
forward in its entirety.

This loss is, however, more than a personal problem. It is clear from this and other studies, for
example, the National Evaluation of the Children’s Fund (NECF) (Edwards, Barnes, Plewis and
Morris et al, 2006) that the voluntary sector is well-placed to undertake the kinds of responsive
and innovative practices that characterise locally appropriate preventative work. However, as
NECF and other smaller scale studies have shown, it is not always well-placed to weave the
ideas and practices generated in this kind of work into established and more securely funded
organisations or to take forward that work itself. One practitioner’s summary was typical of many
who discussed the loss of expertise; of relationships with parents; and increasingly now with
other professionals that short-term funding brings.

When it finishes you’ve lost all those workers that have been working on that
project, you’ve lost that continuity with the parents, and you’ve lost that trust and link
with the professionals …I mean it’s like lots of projects. People then look back and
go ‘oh that was really good. Remember when so and so did that work? …that’s what
we need isn’t it? Oh let’s do it, and we’ll reinvent it and we’ll call it something else
and it will be quite similar and…', you kind of think at what point do we just say 'right, we know what’s needed, we know what works, we know how much it costs… we need to get funding and do it for at least five years'.

The differences between settings-based sites and case studies where home visiting was the main way of working with parents were important when looking at the continuation of ELPP principles. It seemed easier for sites which were primarily home visiting to integrate what they found to be the benefits of ELPP into future provision. This was in part because they had been developing individual practitioners and volunteers who had clearly focused work which was unlikely to change; and in part because they were often looking for financial commitment within their own organisations. Here a local organiser gives a flavour of how ELPP principles were being integrated into their planning.

I think we’re completely committed to taking (ELPP) forward. I’ve got everybody very excited about it, my trustees, my staff. Before the ELPP I was looking at different things anyway and the ELPP just fit where I was going. And so I think the ELPP helped focus things and brought all sorts of disparate things that I’d been looking at together. I feel we have a very clear agenda for our future from doing the ELPP and so I’m very excited, I’m very, very excited about it because before that I had an idea that it was still forming, and certainly when the ELPP came and I saw what it was about I thought right this fits with the direction I want to go, and it gave me that clarity. …It’s not that we’ll be doing anything different, but it is about reframing the work that we do. I mean I think any organisation needs to review what they’re doing and sometimes you know, just do something slightly different to get everybody excited about it again and to revitalise.

That example indicates how relatively easy it was for ELPP ideas to be moved up-stream to the trustees to ensure strategic support for the development of ELPP-based practices. It was also easier if there was funding within the organisation to continue to support a post for ELPP-based work. For example, in one Children’s Centre funding was found to continue the home visiting scheme made possible by ELPP. Engaging local strategists with ELPP principles was much more difficult when that kind of up-stream movement of ideas involved working across boundaries between the voluntary and statutory sector to gain funding (RQ 8). Here one senior practitioner, who was ultimately unsuccessful in achieving local authority support, muses on the difficulties she was experiencing in trying to gain it.

So communication, I think, is sadly lacking. I keep getting comments like, we keep hearing about how good your project is, on a sort of face to face to basis through various people. I informed all the relevant bodies about what we were doing but we’ve had no official communication of any sort. But again that might be political because there is this huge upheaval going on in terms of tendering for services, so whether that's come at a poor time for this project, because obviously they will now be accepting tenders from somebody, possibly like Barnardo’s and not us or vice versa. In another point in the year they may have been happy to be more informative or to take some information from us but, you know because they’ve been tendering for services they may have not wanted to be seen to be too interested in one voluntary sector group’s work and not another. I don’t know.

ELPP was not introduced into localities through local partnerships which included local authority representatives; consequently its integration into local authority planning very much depended on the local authority agenda (RQ 8). For example, in one authority ELPP work with fathers was included in a successful Children’s Centre tender, though the worker who had developed ELPP practices was moved elsewhere in the authority to become a generalist practitioner. Here a senior practitioner in another city recounts how ELPP could be seen as attractive to a local authority.
(Name of local authority) has got its joint area review going on which is a massive inspection of the local authority. I've just been to a meeting about it. And they want to show off ELPP as part of kind of what they're doing - it's a bit of a joke because they're not paying for it at all, but they want to show it off as something that's happening in the borough.

However, the same practitioner was not overly optimistic about spreading what had been gained through involvement in ELPP beyond the immediate workplace. It was clear that the local authority was not offering support for this local initiative (RQ 8). Instead practitioners were placed as champions for the approaches developed through ELPP funding.

Well I think some of it will just stay with us really, stay with us as a centre. I think some of it will stay in the individual staff, they will never unlearn what they've kind of learnt and some of that way of working can just be integrated into general work with families I think. But actually I would really like to continue the programme, I think it's valuable and I'm trying hard to find ways to fund that work to continue to do it. We've just put in a tender to run a kind of ELPP programme across (the Local Authority) paid for by (the Local Authority), and I've no idea if we will get the money for it.

This comment summarises much of what was reported at Time 2. ELPP-based knowledge is likely to stay within the ELPP sites, where those sites continue to exist. However, there is very little guarantee that the principles will be picked up and taken forward by local authorities in developing their strategies, despite the best efforts of those who have tried to champion ELPP across the VCS-statutory agency divide.

5.7 Key points for service and organisational outcomes

Successes

- Most settings-based services took up the opportunity to add home visiting to their repertoire; while some home visiting services added settings-based sessions to their provision.
- The rationale for these changes reflected an increased emphasis on parents as supporters of their children’s learning across the sites.
- A major shift in focus for many services was to see adults primarily as parents rather than clients and to bring them into a partnership which recognised their importance to their children’s learning.
- By the end of the study practitioners reported that ELPP had substantially influenced their thinking.
- Efforts were being made by practitioners to sustain the work started by the ELPP initiative.
- These efforts at sustaining provision were more likely to succeed if resources could be found within services or within agencies than if they were to come from local authorities. In one case, however, where ELPP work was incorporated into a bid for Children’s Centre funding, the activities were to be sustained.
- There were some examples of ELPP services developing local inter-agency links at the level of practice to avoid families being left without support once funding had ceased.

Challenges

- Short-term funding meant that in some sites ELPP could be seen at times as just one other initiative which did not require organisational change.
- There were examples of ELPP services being brought into local networks of interagency work through e.g. referral systems. However, the relatively short time-frame for the
initiative meant that in the majority of sites there was insufficient time for the potential of ELPP-funded activity to be recognised by other agencies.

- There were some examples of ELPP services developing local inter-agency links at the level of practice to avoid families being left without support once funding had ceased.
- Short-term funding also produced an unwillingness to start to engage with the most socially excluded families because of concerns about letting them down once funding ceased.
- There was a potential tension between a dual focus on attracting and developing the confidence of the more vulnerable socially excluded parents and a focus on equipping them with skills to support their children’s learning, not least because of the need to work responsively with the most vulnerable parents to prevent the destabilising of other areas of their lives.
- Although ELPP provided training to equip practitioners for work with parents to help them to support their children’s learning, it did not include guidance on attracting and engaging the most socially excluded parents. Not all services had the same level of expertise in this area.
- ELPP was not well-networked into local authority systems through, for example, the engagement of local stakeholders in partnership arrangements. Consequently, ELPP principles were largely championed locally by senior staff in services which had received funding. There was little evidence that local authorities had been able to learn from the lessons offered by the voluntary sector organisations involved.
Chapter 6: ELPP in the Settings: workforce development

6.1 Introduction

Analyses in this chapter centre on the practitioners involved in ELPP-funded projects: what they were learning about engaging and working with parents and what they were doing when they worked with parents. The research questions addressed are therefore those related to workforce development51 (3.4). A major concern was to ascertain what and where practitioners were learning about how to work with parents; whether they were increasing their understanding of how parents can shape their children’s development; and what strategies were used to work with target parents.

The main evidence base for this chapter is the two sets of interviews undertaken with ELPP-funded practitioners and their colleagues in all of the study sites. At some points the analyses also draw on observations of staff working with parents. Interviews with staff and observations of staff took place at two times during the twelve month study:

- Time 1: May-July 2007 and

One Time 1 visit to a case study site revealed that practitioners were still waiting for ELPP to be implemented and in four cases the research team was not able to make Time 1 visits because the sites in which ELPP would be implemented had not been confirmed. This phenomenon cannot be described as ‘slow start up’ as it simply reflected the time it can take to negotiate new provision into established systems of provision. In the four late-starting sites the interviews were adjusted at Time 2 to capture some of the items addressed in the Time 1 schedules.

Aspects of the interviews with project managers and workers (Appendix C) relevant to workforce development include the following:

- the staffing strategies employed to take forward ELPP;
- the relevance and influence of training supplied through ELPP;
- how practitioners engage with target families;
- what they are trying to change and to achieve as they work with parents;
- what they do when they engage and work with parents and the influence of ELPP on that work;

In Chapter 5 it was shown that ELPP was firmly located within a framework of early intervention where practitioners are expected to identify vulnerability and respond by putting in place appropriate protective factors. There it was suggested that this kind of work calls for an informed workforce, which is able to work responsively within agreed sets of aims to prevent the social exclusion of children and their parents. Analyses in this chapter examine the extent to which ELPP-funded projects provided evidence of informed responsive practice aimed at enabling parents, some of whom are among the most excluded, to support their children as learners.

51 Where appropriate, references are made to the research question in this section as ‘RQ’ as the findings are reported.
6.2 Training and staff development across the projects

As already indicated in 5.2, sites varied quite considerably in their approaches to staffing their ELPP-funded work. In some places ELPP work was carried out exclusively by existing members of staff. For example, part-time staff were allocated additional work or full-time staff reallocated part of their existing workloads to accommodate ELPP. In other locations practitioners were redeployed from within the organisation to work on ELPP. Redeployment was possible because of reorganisations under way in both statutory and VCS services. Elsewhere, new staff were appointed who either supplemented existing staff groups or created an entirely new team for the duration of the project. With the exception of services based on home visits by volunteers, there was no discernable relationship between staffing strategy and the programmes used. Sites that were primarily working with volunteer home visitors, for the reasons outlined in 5.4 and 5.6, tended to work with existing volunteers; though in one site new volunteers were recruited and given ELPP training.

Training

The evaluation did not involve an examination of the purposes or delivery of the training related to programmes or of the PEAL awareness raising provision. Rather, its concern has been the implications of exposure to training for workforce capacity in working with parents. In most cases, practitioners saw training as a prerequisite to undertaking ELPP work (RQ 1). The main purpose of training from the practitioners’ perspective was to reorient the focuses of their work (RQ 2, 3). For some services, seeing vulnerable adults primarily as parents was quite a shift; while for others ELPP required a focus on parents with their children rather than working only with children. Where staff were in place to deliver discrete ELPP approaches, training was seen as essential, while in services which depended largely on volunteers to work with parents, the volunteers’ involvement in training was not always compulsory.

For almost all practitioners, training involved a broadening of existing expertise through recognising the need to work on parents’ pedagogic relationships with their children; rather than the development of their specialist expertise (RQ 1). Here a trained teacher who joined a new ELPP team talked about how PEEP and I CAN training helped her to work in a different way. Her account of growing confidence in working with parents is typical of practitioners who had backgrounds in direct work with children.

…before any of the training I was very nervous about working with parents; I was very much going in talk to the children and just kind of ignore the parents. But now I’m more confident, and I think because of the training I’ve received, I’ve got more knowledge now about how to do it and what I’m talking about, that it makes me more confident to go and talk to the parents as well as the children.

Where ELPP training coincided with the start of a new post it could provide useful induction to a new way of working. Here a practitioner who was new to a home visiting service explained just how timely her training was.

… before I came here I used to do a lot of Early Years stay and play sessions. And I started here and I thought, oh my life, I’ve got to go and do these home visits and stuff. And then pretty much straight away I went on the (PAFT) training and straight away … I felt… I can actually go out and do this now. So coming into the new (job) for starters and then meeting all the new families and actually having to work with them, I thought, oh what have I done, can I do this? But going on the training was very, very useful and just give me the confidence to go out and meet the families and do home visits.
The appointment of practitioners who needed training before they could undertake ELPP work had implications for time-limited projects with short-term funding (RQ 1). This was particularly so if training were delayed for any reason, as this cut into the time available to carry out work with parents.

I think if they’d had their training before they’d started and we actually had a year that would have been much better. I don’t think they should have been in post before they had the training … There was a delay in the training and it came after the funding came in, so … to me they should have had the training prior to the funding being in place and then had a year…

Some organisations managed to overcome this difficulty by maintaining contact with a pool of trained and experienced practitioners who could turn their hand to new work when these opportunities arose. One such practitioner describes how she became involved with ELPP.

This was from working through PEEP and starting work at Barnardo’s. I became involved with it when I started working at Barnardo’s originally, going back quite a few years ago, then went out of it when my contract came to an end, then came back in October and have been working within Barnardo’s specifically in that area for the last few months.

Other organisations maintained a long-term view because they saw that ELPP training was providing an opportunity for existing workers to broaden their repertoire of responses when they worked with families (RQ 3). These were primarily agencies which focused on home visits and individually tailored programmes for parents. These were also organisations where continuity of funding post-ELPP was less uncertain and where they therefore felt confident that ELPP principles would be taken forward in the practices of their staff and volunteers. These organisations tended to focus on developing their existing staff rather than taking on new staff or volunteers who could not be sustained once funding ended, though there were a few exceptions to this approach.

Training also stimulated ways of thinking about how ideas from programmes could be integrated into existing work for longer-term sustainability (RQ 3). Here a practitioner described how PEEP might help them take a longer-term preventative role in their work with families. The comment reflected the tendency outlined in 4.3 that projects shaped approaches to suit local needs.

I think one of the other bits of learning from when I came back and took on the piece of work was about looking at family learning as a concept and how we could integrate that into our family support model. So it wasn’t a standalone and we weren’t purely being seen as intensive family support for families in crisis. It was about looking at using it as a preventative measure where families are coming in that haven’t yet reached the attention of the various agencies. And hopefully then preventing them entering any kind of social care circle or anything like that.

All the training programmes to greater and lesser extents provided staff with the opportunity to visit basic features of parental involvement with children’s learning. However, programmes varied in their emphasis on particular aspects of children’s learning. PAFT provided information on brain neuroscience; I CAN on stages of language development; PICL on children’s use of developmental schema; and several programmes drew on attachment theory. Whether these ideas were taken into practices depended very much on how practitioners were interpreting parents’ disengagement and children’s risk of learning delay and that interpretation, in turn, depended, as already indicated in 4.3, on their specific expertise and previous experience as well as what was historically the purpose of the organisation.
Staff therefore varied in their responses to training (RQ 1). For some, training was too short, focusing on awareness raising and little more; others appreciated the materials such as the ELPP bags they received. For others, training gave them a new-found confidence in their own abilities ‘I didn’t realise that I really do know child development’; while for others, concepts such as ‘attachment’ offered a way of conceptualising practices which gave coherence to the work of teams. Acquiring conceptual tools was particularly helpful as it allowed practitioners to reflect on and develop their practices. Here a practitioner indicates how what she has learnt about the plasticity of children’s developing brains in PAFT training has given her a new confidence.

_I think because I have found it all so very interesting, I have kind of just made a point of finding out more about Early Years and a bit more about how children's brains develop and what they need. I wouldn't say I've become exactly evangelical, but I think I do bang on about it quite a lot about missing those early vital years. And I think I've not ever, ever had that sense of urgency before. Because while its my, my observations and my experiences, the sort of work I have had taught me that for various reasons if things had gone really very violently wrong for children in those first three or four years of their lives, it was very difficult to make that up. I didn’t have the theory and now I feel like I’ve got the theory and that’s very useful to have._

The sharing of conceptual tools also helped practitioners in their responsive work with parents. Whether it was an understanding simply that _play is children’s work_ or and recognition that _I really do understand what happens when a child’s language develops_, it enabled practitioners to recognise children’s vulnerability to learning delay and how to respond to it.

There also appeared to be no perfect way of delivering the training (RQ 1). For example, two different London-based projects give very different accounts of the need to leave London to undertake PAFT training. First is an account from a senior practitioner in a centre-based setting which indicates that the training was almost a reward.

_...I think it was a really important team outing as a kind of cohesion thing and it was a bit of a reward ...I felt I was rewarding them for having worked so hard..._

The second account from a home visiting service indicates the difficulties in leaving the core service to get training.

_We can’t go away...the core service would have to close...There isn’t any (training) in London. The aim would have been to develop staff a bit more through ELPP._

Nonetheless, a striking theme running through almost all the interviews at Time 2 was how much practitioners and volunteers felt they had gained from the training opportunities available for them. Even if the training itself was seen as too short, or not as stretching as it might be for the particular practitioner, the opportunity to think about their work with others, or to acquire new ideas and material resources was seen as immensely valuable.

Given that so much of the work undertaken was based on practitioners:

(i) identifying vulnerability and parents’ starting points as they learnt to support their children as learners; and
(ii) selecting how to work with parents to overcome both their lack of engagement and lack of skills and understanding to support their children’s learning
It would seem imperative that practitioners are skilled in both identification of need and how to respond to it. Practitioners’ response to training indicated a thirst for ideas that will inform the responsive professional practices that characterise prevention. One legacy of ELPP, therefore, is clear evidence of a workforce that is eager to learn, and capable of learning and evidencing that learning in their practices with parents.

**Staff development** However, staff did not only learn from exposure to training (RQ 2, 3). We heard repeatedly that practitioners learnt from each other when planning or evaluating; through supervisions; from other professionals and particularly speech therapists; and from getting on with the work and seeing how they could influence parents. ELPP was also sometimes the stimulus for staff training events aimed at equipping staff for the demands of new or expanded client groups. The learning that can occur when practitioners work in environments where they are able to talk about their practices and receive feedback on them should not be underestimated. Eraut has made a similar argument from his grounded analyses of what helps early professional learning in organisations and suggests that organisations should provide opportunities for feedback that assists learning (Eraut, 2007).

The theoretical analysis underpinning this element of the evaluation (Appendix A) also reveals that learning occurred because staff were required to see vulnerable adults as parents i.e. they expanded their understanding of them and looked for the adults’ capabilities as parents in order to help to develop them. Practitioners were also given new tools such as ELPP bags, Bookstart materials or concepts such as ‘attachment’ as they worked at developing parents’ capabilities. These tools and the professional talk associated with them quite clearly shaped the way practitioners approached and responded to parents.

Analyses in a Research Council-funded study52 of inter-professional learning to prevent social exclusion currently being undertaken by one member of the evaluation team has shown how practices may be restricted by the way that organisational categories are used in practitioners’ talk. For example, if practitioners want to see adults as potential educators of their children rather than needy adults, they need to reshape how they talk about them. It was clear across the board that this reshaping of talk was occurring in some way. Here a practitioner explains new relationships with parents in her centre as a result of ELPP.

> I have noticed that workers in the ELPP project continue to get into families, not always but often, when other workers are not being allowed through the door. And I think that it is because they come with this different task almost and are seen in a different way. And some parents talk about the courses, the PAFT course and the NEWPIN course, and they see it that that's what they're doing. They're doing a course around helping their child to learn.

However, it was not always easy to do. The potential tension, which was outlined in Chapter 5, between aiming at working with the most excluded families and the need to focus on parents as potential educators of their children, is revealed in how one practitioner describes how she and her colleagues work with families.

> You know, (name) has done more training on the sort of Blue Peter here’s one I did earlier stuff like that. So that’s gone into the families, so we are doing quite a bit of that. But, you know, none of those families are in the same situation they were when we first started this project because their lives are chaotic, hectic and change a lot. So our volunteers don’t know what they’re going to be faced with each visit. Each week it can be something else. So basically if there’s something going on that’s happened in that week which is really awful in their life like rats running across the beds then they’re not going to sit and do sticky and colouring with the children.

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52 Learning in and for Interagency Working ESRC RES-139-25-0100 which is a project in the Teaching and Learning Research Programme.
really. But they might sit and read books all together … just calming things. But it’s more likely the volunteer will be trying to assist with housing issues ….

Clearly this practitioner had some way to go in seeing the purpose of ELPP in terms of long-term protective factors and its relevance for the parents with whom she worked. She worked in one of several settings which filtered ELPP through their well-established focus on vulnerable adults. Shifting that focus would take time, if indeed it was appropriate to shift the focus.

There are three implications from this brief overview of how practitioners learnt in the workplace to see and work with parents differently. The first implication is that learning is not easily evidenced where the kinds of tensions outlined in the extract just given, meaning that practitioners’ work remains shaped by a long-term commitment to vulnerable adults. In these services questions need to be asked about whether it is appropriate for them to change what they do. The second implication is that, as with other studies, it is clear that practitioners are learning when the purposes of practices are shifted, new resources are put into place and there is an opportunity to discuss the new work in supervisions, planning, evaluations or staff days. There was plenty of evidence of that kind of learning occurring in most of the sites. The final implication relates to safeguarding and supporting the practitioner learning that occurs. In 5.6 the longer-term impact of ELPP was discussed and difficulties involved in moving the learning occurring in ELPP upstream to inform strategic developments in organisations were outlined. The kinds of subtle repositioning in relation to parents that staff were revealing in interviews and observations require strategic support to sustain it.

6.3 ELPP training and professional decision-making

ELPP, as indicated in 5.3, was located within the ‘paradigm’ of risk and protection-focused prevention (France and Utting, 2005; Little, Ashford and Morpeth, 2004), which requires practitioners to be alert to signs of vulnerability and to be able to work responsively by building protective factors to reduce the risk of social exclusion. In ELPP these protective factors were largely educational in orientation. Practitioners therefore needed to be able to diagnose specific vulnerability and to know how to respond to it\(^53\). The analytic framework used for this part of the evaluation (Appendix A) permitted an examination of:

- how practitioners were interpreting vulnerability to social exclusion and risk of learning delay; and
- what resources they were using to respond to those interpretations and how they used them.

Analysing working practices in this way revealed the extent to which practitioners were using ideas from training to work responsively with parents (RQ 1, 4, 5, 6).

In Chapter 1 five descriptors or models that could be applied to the programmes which were being implemented through ELPP were discussed (1.3). These descriptors are not pure forms that can be seen in discrete programmes, as it is clear that most early intervention programmes are hybrids of these models. Nonetheless, it is worth revisiting them here as they will help to distinguish what ideas and ways of working practitioners found to be valuable in their work with parents. The models were labelled as follows: *training or instruction; knowledge sharing; modelling; relationships; and advocacy*. In Appendix I\(^54\) it is shown that observations revealed that in ELPP projects modelling was the most commonly noted feature of interactions between practitioners and parents in homes and settings, followed by advising, encouraging and explaining. Interview data also revealed that modelling and knowledge sharing were widely used.

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\(^{53}\) There are, of course, implications here for inter-professional collaboration as often vulnerability may not be evident unless practitioners look across several domains of a person’s life and, once the complexity of vulnerability is revealed, a complex multi-professional response is often needed.

\(^{54}\) Appendices I, J and K can be found at [http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php)
strategies, but also that in some programmes there was a strong focus on relationships with the most vulnerable parents (RQ 4, 5, 6).

The extract that follows exemplifies knowledge sharing as a practitioner working with fathers gave his interpretation of the needs of the fathers he was working with and explained why he used his new understandings of brain development with his group.

the PAFT training was really, really good and has helped the workers to do lots of different things … Just more about the baby brain and how it… When speaking to dads what I’ve found is I think men can be quite logical and they need a reason to do things sometimes. Like when I’ve done different groups or done home visiting they say well we’re doing this but why are we doing this? Well actually with repeating this activity which is probably boring you to tears, you’re actually reinforcing the connections in your baby’s brain and then it grows… well they don’t need where all the gobbledegook comes in but the case of why you’re repeating it and it’s important you do, because it’s like a road and you’re reinforcing a road and it stays there, so obviously your child is able to do more things from that. That’s really good. So I think that’s quite a good thing in terms of being logical and having a reason for doing things.

It was impossible to judge the broad relevance of training and the models that can be seen in them to particular groups of practitioners as so much depended on the organisational conditions within which they worked. In one case, volunteers who received training underpinned by research into adult relationships thought that this topic was not appropriate, partly because of their status as volunteers, and partly because it did not relate directly to helping parents to focus on children’s learning.

I think what came out of it was, you know, well what would you do, different scenarios, you know, you got to a house and you could hear dad shouting inside, what would you do? Well I’m sorry but I’m only a volunteer - I keep saying that to myself - I would get back in the car and I would ring the office, It’s not our place to go into somewhere where a) we don’t know the situation and b) we could be putting ourselves in danger… we’re not Relate counsellors… And I didn’t see how us sorting out their arguments… I know it would calm a family situation down and maybe make them educate but somehow it didn’t directly relate.

However, volunteers working with the same organisation but on a different site received the same training package and found it inspiring:

…the volunteers love it, they respond to that because a lot of them are interested, they are parents themselves or they, you know, that’s something they’re involved in studying, [...].And some of our volunteers have come back after some of the training and they’ve gone to see a family and they’ve come back here so excited about what they’ve done and what they’ve achieved. And I think with the ELPP training sometimes the language has helped. They’ve had words, language to use and they’ve had clarity and so they’ve been confident in tackling certain things and talking to parents I think, where before they may have been a little bit reticent.

The two examples of training that was informing practice just given were training programmes which gave practitioners or volunteers ideas, such as brain plasticity, or language which carried concepts such as modelling that they could use while interacting with parents (RQ 5). Ideas are also often independent of specific resources, a point that was not lost on this home visiting volunteer, a former teacher, who wanted some very basic ideas which could be independent of the complex resources which were being suggested.
I think the course made some people feel inadequate because as I say it was all this, you know, let’s make books, let’s take in jigsaw puzzles, and that might have made people think well wait a minute, a) I can’t afford it, b) I don’t feel it was simple enough …I mean you take them for a walk, you know, you have a plastic bag and you pick up a leaf and… but that sort of thing, using what’s there not bought equipment. You know, as somebody said to me, what we really needed was what to do if we walked into a bare room with nothing, and my first family was like that, there was not a toy in sight. So you needed to be sort of, you know, what could you do? Right well you talk about the colour of their shoes or the patterns on things or… there wasn’t enough of that. It was all a bit too aimed at almost sort of art and craft and school type stuff. We really wanted right down to basics. Because again a lot of parents can’t even afford a wooden jigsaw puzzle or some tissue paper and they wouldn’t know what to do with it anyway.

These three illustrations could be augmented by accounts of the influence of ideas about attachment theory and children’s schemas which came from PAFT and PICL training in turn (RQ 5). When they were understood by practitioners they could become a part of practice and used when needed to take forward parents’ learning. However, as one of the extracts just provided shows, it cannot be assumed that training will always inform how practitioners or volunteers interpret and respond to problems of practice. On-going staff discussions and feedback, as indicated in 6.2, are also important aspects in developing practices (RQ 4).

Training which was based primarily on sharing key concepts about children’s learning and development helped practitioners to work responsively with individual parents in homes and settings. However, this was also the case with approaches that provided practitioners with clear formats and strategies such as careful modelling in the PEEP programme (RQ 5). An experienced PEEP group worker explained how she benefited from a refresher course at the start of ELPP, but then adapted PEEP to work with parents in their homes.

I mean actually getting down to the planning side of things, (the training) helped to really focus. But it also enabled us to pick a mix from different plans. Because each child is so different and they’re at a different stage at different times. So it was handy to be able to do that. … I mean, obviously when I go in I don’t sort of do the hello songs straight away. I get down there, get the treasure baskets out and help the children engage, and then I slowly bring it in over the time I’m there. So it’s not actually structured: ‘That’s that time we’re going to sing hello. That’s that time we’re going to do the activity’.

Interviewer: So you take the elements but sort of move them around to suit? Is that something you were taught on the course or is that something you’ve worked out yourself?
ELPP worker: Yeah. Something we’ve worked out ourselves which works.

Not surprisingly, where whole teams were trained to carry out new work, they tended to work more rigidly within the framework which had been presented to them, especially in the early stages, and were almost apologetic about the need to alter the framework to make it work in the situation they found themselves in. However, after six months of working with the format delivered to them in training, most had developed an understanding about how to work flexibly within programme frameworks (RQ 4) as this extract exemplifies.

Well we’ve certainly taken on the PEEP methodology in a big way but we’ve adapted it quite considerably in the way that we use the materials and I can quite honestly say that’s often on a group to group basis. You know what works well for one group. So, for example, we may well actually involve the group in a sort of singing time, and then have an activity, and then come together for discussion. That might work well in one group. For another group we’ve done a singing time and a talking time and have sent home activity packs. Some groups we’ve actually sort
of separated out the discussion time from the singing time to give a more involved
time to chat. So we’ve really got to know the group a bit and then they’ve got to
know us a bit and then we’ve worked on there what works best for that group.
And the same with home visits, you know some home visits we’ll follow the very
steady pattern using the PEEP materials. Others there’s been much more time to
get know each other and then a very gentle approach.

It is very clear from all these examples that many of the practitioners were working
comfortably with the need to identify vulnerability and parents’ starting points in developing
skills and understandings as supporters of their children’s learning. They were assessing
situations and adapting their practices to them by drawing on ideas and strategies offered in
training, but they were doing so on the basis of their interpretations of what would work with
parents (RQ 6). In addition, as discussion in 5.4 has indicated, they were usually carefully
evaluating group responses.

6.4 ELPP training and the use of resources

Interviews and observations revealed that some of the material resources, which practitioners
had encountered in training or through new contacts made through ELPP, were helping them to
understand how they might develop their work with parents. Gradually, through training and in
practice, practitioners were building up their own sets of artefacts which helped them in their
work with parents by providing opportunities to model how to engage children in learning
activities.

Practitioners were keen to share information about these resources: evaluation sessions within
sites often led to discussions about what resources worked and what did not. The opportunity for
practitioners to discuss with colleagues the learning potential in the resources they used clearly
helped with sharing knowledge and understandings across groups.

Artefacts were useful at two levels: they helped practitioners to model ways of interacting with
children and they provided an opportunity to share ideas about children’s learning (RQ 2, 3, 4, 5,
6). Here a volunteer described how she attempted to help a mother see the benefits of
construction play.

Imaginative play, it’s not something they tend to do comfortably, the parents…. but,
but at least, you know Duplo bricks and things like that, whereas mum’s quite keen on
books and looking at words etc and I try and veer off that because I feel that isn’t what
they need…Duplo is something that they haven’t got at, got at home so that’s actually
what I bought them for their third birthday so it tends to be out now because obviously
I bought it so it’s there. So that’s something that they’ve quite enjoyed, you know
because they didn’t seem to have the, you know sort of construction. I think dad has
quite enjoyed playing with that as well so I thought, hmm, that’s something.

They also helped model how to use easily available local resources, such as library services.
One of the most frequently mentioned artefacts were the Bookstart packs of age-appropriate
books and ideas for activities which are available free of charge. The process of acquiring the
packs led to new ways of encouraging parents to help their children’s learning and particularly
the take up of local library resources. Locating and collecting the packs led to trips to the library
and opened up conversations with parents about sharing books.

I think we’re much more ready to let parents know what else is out there. So there’s a
real sense of look do you know that your child can have a Bookstart pack? Did you
know about that? Well if you didn’t, come on we’ll make sure that we put you in touch
with the right person.
It was also clear that practitioners worked reflectively with material resources and were uniformly aware of the potential for promoting learning in the resources and activities they selected to discuss with the research team (RQ 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). Ideas about children’s learning and parents’ roles in it were intertwined with the activities they modelled and encouraged. Home-made musical instruments such as rice and pop bottle shakers and gloop, a sticky mixture of corn flour and water, were often mentioned as turning points for parents enabling them to see how they could help their children. Here an ELPP practitioner working with families with English as an additional language described how gloop led to a mother trying out activities at home and making suggestions for future group activities.

*I think that gloop was a real milestone actually because we did gloop didn’t we and again it was (name of child) and his mum just he absolutely loved it didn’t he? And she absolutely loved it. And she did it the following week didn’t she, she did it at home. But what was lovely she was coming up with, this would be great. And I mean she said to me, “on the grass, it would be great to do outside in the summer.*

Sometimes practitioners illustrated points about children as learners while working with everyday objects, like mirrors or junk, such as collections of empty pots and boxes with tiny objects hidden inside. Parents saw how their children were fascinated by these and practitioners were able to use this interest to open up discussions about how to encourage the development of fine motor, cognitive and language skills using everyday opportunities. However, it was possible to see how the use of some artefacts could become routinised as fun activities without the underpinning concepts which had accompanied their introduction in training. For example, in several settings large sheets of stretchy fabric were used as a cradle, trampoline, tent or parachute, uses which were enjoyed hugely by the children. These activities needed an accompanying discussion about opportunities to develop understanding of, for example, prepositional terms, numbers, and colours to help parents to incorporate similar learning opportunities into activities at home.

In some cases, artefacts came to encapsulate an aspect of the new way of working, such as the door left open through the session to make parents welcome, even if they were late, and a knotted rope used in a group activity which allowed parents to participate on the periphery by holding the rope when they might not be confident enough to join in by speaking or taking a more active role. Practitioners running group sessions in settings also became adept at encouraging parents to do the activities they experienced in settings when they were at home. They gave parents leaflets, with, for example, recipes for play dough or left over resources from sessions.

The role of resources made the timing of staff training important (6.2) and particularly so in a short-term initiative like ELPP (RQ 1). These comments from a senior practitioner outline the frustrations of timing and the importance of on-going staff development and support for practitioners’ learning in the workplace.

*Well absolutely because we haven’t been able to staff to the level that we would have liked to have done because we didn’t have any time allocation for recruit, recruiting staff. And we’ve had to learn and train on the job, so, for example, the PEEP materials weren’t made available to us until after we’d accessed the PEEP training and similarly the nature of the project wasn’t clear until after the PEEP training. So actually we’ve had to work with materials while we’ve been delivering, which to me isn’t the way I like to work. I like to be very genned up and clued up and then begin and we’ve done that the other way round.*

The relationship between timing of training and the use of materials with parents was particularly relevant where volunteer home visitors worked directly with parents. Here a local organiser suggested it would have made more sense to have worked first with the staff and then with the volunteers and to have timed the training to fit with the availability of the materials to be used.
I think because we just did not have the materials when we first did the ELPP training, you know, volunteers kind of didn’t have a good overview of what they were supposed to do. I’m doing the training this week and I think I will be able to give them, or have the materials so I’ll be able to give them very clear instructions that they will be able to relate to. And I mean I think that members of staff really should have been trained first.

6.5 Understanding practitioner decision-making in ELPP

Practitioners were making a number of decisions as they worked with ELPP aims. These included assessments of: the extent of parents’ social exclusion; the quality of parents’ understanding of their role in supporting their children as learners; and the skills and understandings they were able to bring to bear to support their children. In addition, practitioners assessed the resources offered by ELPP-funded training to meet the needs revealed by these assessments and drew on them in their work with parents. Some training offered ideas or resources to be used when appropriate, others offered specific curricula or programmes to be followed. However, as already indicated, practitioners often chose to adapt these programmes to suit their assessments of what was most appropriate for parents. In Figure 6.1. the decision-making undertaken by practitioners is presented in diagrammatic form.
Tools\(^1\)
- i.e. Bookstart, Campaign for Learning, Home-Start, I CAN,
  Listening to Children, Newpin’s Family Play Programme,
  One Plus One’s Brief Encounters, PAFT, PEAL, PEEP,
  PICL, SHARE, Thurrock Community Mothers

Practitioners\(^2\)

Engagement

Families’ trajectories\(^3\)

Understanding and skills

(i) Families which are engaged in mainstream services that support children as learners

(ii) Families which are aware of their potential role and are equipped with skills to support their children as learners

(i) Families which are most excluded

(ii) Families which are unaware of their potential role as supporters of their children’s learning

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\(^1\) Tools varied between for example programmes such as PEEP and sets of ideas such as PAFT.

\(^2\) Practitioners had a wide range of qualifications, experience and opportunities to learn.

\(^3\) Families had different starting points on these trajectories and varying responsiveness to the opportunities on offer.
Figure 6.1 suggests that practitioners’ interpretation and use of the tools offered in training was filtered by the histories of their agencies, their own experiences and the histories of the sites in which they were working. At the same time they were making complex decisions about how to work with different parents which involved them in assessing: the potential social exclusion of the parents; their current awareness of their role in supporting their children as learners; and their responsiveness to what the practitioners were offering. These assessments were also filtered, as indicated in 5.3, by the professional backgrounds of staff. Nonetheless, it was clear that practitioners were working with parents who had very different starting points on the two trajectories shown in Figure 6.1. This representation of practitioners’ work is a reminder that different outcomes are to be expected of different parents as not only are parents’ starting points different, but their capacity to work with ELPP-based ideas will also vary. It also helps to address a concern identified in the recent Phase 1 Report on the Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) project (DCSF, 2007b), about the need for some precision and clarity in the definitions of parental support, parental engagement and parental involvement. In Figure 6.1 engagement is presented in terms of a trajectory of social inclusion; while support and involvement are translated as work with parents to develop their awareness of their role in children’s learning and the skills and understanding they need to undertake it. The relative amounts of awareness, support and involvement will vary as parents become more skilled and less dependent on staff.

Seeing parents’ development as trajectories of increasing engagement and understandings and skills, also highlights the need to think about the relationship between practitioners and parents as one which is aimed at enabling parents to take control over their own life trajectories rather than maintain a relationship of dependency with service providers. The nature of that relationship in ELPP-funded work is examined in the next section.

6.6 Expertise and working with parents: being a professional friend

ELPP was based on the principle of a partnership between practitioners and parents to promote early learning and at the same time it was clear (6.3 and 6.4) that many of the practitioners were developing new expertise in relation to children’s learning. They mainly worked within the framework of professional friend and over the course of ELPP began to expand their understandings of what was involved in that role. Being a professional friend required practitioners to understand their own expertise; to know how to use it responsively with parents; and to reposition themselves in relation to parents in order to enable parents to take control over their own life trajectories and those of their children.

Understanding their own expertise and using it with parents called for different kinds of learning depending on practitioners’ backgrounds. In some cases ELPP simply gave staff confidence in what they already knew. The PEEP materials have given some concrete confidence if that makes sense. Others found that training provided with them new knowledge which helped with ELPP work. A senior practitioner described how useful training in speech and language development had been for her team.

The I CAN speech and language training certainly developed confidence in our workforce, and everybody was thrilled with that and keen to put that into practice.

Sometimes staff had the necessary knowledge but needed to develop expertise in working directly with parents. Here an ELPP worker with a background in Further Education explains how she had worked her way into a new role as professional friend, using knowledge which she already had but finding ways to share that knowledge in the context of PEEP groups.
(my previous experience was) training staff rather than working with parents directly. For me I’ve realised that the personal contact, the one to one with parents is far more important than anything that I stand and deliver to them...And people love it when you call them by their name, it’s personalised... I’ve become much more parent-friendly... I think because I teach students they’re a completely different client group. And it’s made me look at what I do and reflect on what I do much more and you know, how am I going to change this. For example the behaviour thing, (a special session requested by parents) I wanted to bring in some sort of theory because there’s two in the group that really are quite clever ladies and I wanted to have something in that would sort of appeal to them. So I was talking about the self fulfilling prophesy and put it all into nice simple terms, and they’re, oh I’ve never thought of that, you know. And it’s made me look at what I do and use the knowledge I’ve got but kind of make it much more user-friendly for the group. And one of them said, oh I’ve heard that, someone talk about that but I never knew what it meant. And it’s kind of helping parents not feel inferior, not feel lacking in knowledge, and I think that’s one of the things that I’ve learnt that I need to do personally to make it kind of... to open it up for them so that they can access it.

For some volunteer-based home visiting programmes, being a professional friend provided challenges of a different kind because ELPP required practitioners to be more purposefully educational in their work. Volunteers demonstrated that they could work with parents who were suspicious of contact with statutory services, but while their ambiguous status between friend and advisor made them more acceptable to parents, it left them with questions about the boundaries of their work which sometimes made it difficult for them to see how to take forward ELPP educational aims. There was, for example, uncertainty in some sites over pushing ELPP’s prevention aims if parents had not chosen to work on becoming better educators of their children. This concern was, as already indicated in 6.2, sometimes evidence of a tension between ELPP’s intention to work with more vulnerable parents while at the same time engaging in a prevention programme.

However, ELPP intentions could also clash with the way that some home visiting programmes had previously expected volunteers to follow a parent’s lead rather than intervene to shape or give direction to the family’s development by drawing on their own training and expertise. A senior practitioner explained how ELPP had allowed her to clarify what she saw as the purpose of work with families and the importance of volunteers using their expertise to guide families.

I think the only stumbling block with the volunteers is being very clear about the fact that ... we’re asking them to support somebody with a purpose. Sometimes groups of volunteers are quite set in their ways about what that purpose is and so they can hang onto phrases like, ‘be led by the family’ and then they won’t move from that and they won’t sort of think well actually here’s a really good opportunity that I could extend this learning opportunity or I could signpost this family to another agency. They will wait for that direction all the time but I think that’s more about us giving them more confidence during the training and making sure that they’ve got that additional support when they have their review procedures really.

Not all volunteer-based home visiting programmes had the same concerns about the use of expertise in relationships with parents. For example, in the case of Thurrock Community Mothers, considerable emphasis had long been given to training and developing the expertise of volunteers who were expected to demonstrate it in supporting parents as their children’s educators. There were also differences between sites in other volunteer-based home visiting programmes where much depended on the extent to which there had been a long-term emphasis on staff development with volunteers.
Achieving a balance between careful guidance and enabling parents to take control over their life trajectories was a core expertise that was at the heart of many of the ELPP interventions. As Figure 6.1 suggests it required practitioners to work knowledgeably and responsively with parents by using the conceptual and material resources provided by programmes to shape those trajectories and to engage parents as partners in that reshaping.

Guiding parents to the point where they no longer needed ELPP support did not always seem a priority. Where sites were already good at signposting parents and introducing them to other services, ELPP approaches were incorporated as part of support for that trajectory towards more independent functioning. This was the case for many of the sites. However, there was little evidence when practitioners discussed what they were learning through ELPP that they were developing a stronger sense of how to help parents work with other preventative or mainstream agencies and how that might shape their own role as professional friend in developing parental independence. Rather, most of the discussion about what had been learnt focused on how to help parents develop the skills and understandings necessary to support their children as learners (RQ 6). In other words, there was more emphasis in training on the second of the two trajectories in Figure 6.1 than on the first.

This is not a criticism of the initiative, as there was much to be done in a short intervention to reorient practitioners towards helping parents support their children and to develop new forms of expertise in relation to children’s learning or being parent-friendly. Rather, it is suggested that any developments might include more emphasis on expertise in terms of managing the professional friend relationship with parents; and how parents might be supported as they take forward what they have learnt and exit the service.

6.7 Areas for development

**Training** A strong message from the analysis of what practitioners were learning and doing is that there was a thirst for knowledge and understanding among ELPP-funded practitioners, regardless of professional background. The enthusiasm with which so many practitioners grasped what were for them new ideas was quite stunning. On relatively short courses these ideas could only be presented in quite simple forms, but concepts such as brain plasticity, schema and attachment were seen as immediately relevant and appropriate to share with parents. Practitioners were less pleased with training which focused only on resources but valued those which connected resources with ideas which they could share with parents.

There are considerable implications here for the kinds of training that might be offered if the VCS is to play an important role in prevention strategies like ELPP. These implications include the need for more advanced training and educational opportunities for staff, which are not only related to specific approaches. Indeed the capacity of practitioners to take programmes and reshape them to meet the needs of local parents suggests that although approach or programme-based training is an important first step there is a case for provision that extends across approaches and enables practitioners to work in more depth with understandings of how children learn and adults can support that learning.

**Staff development** Across the sites there were differences in the extent to which practitioners were able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ELPP to develop their thinking about how to work with parents and to take forward ELPP principles in their future work. These differences were clearly linked to the extent to which sites paid attention to knowledge sharing; discussing and questioning practices; seeking new knowledge sources such as information from other professional specialisms; and supporting each other as they learnt in both formal and informal ways through feedback from parents and colleagues.
It was difficult to disentangle the implementation of approaches from opportunities for staff development, as the same approach could be implemented and experienced by staff in different sites in quite different ways. Problems with the timing of training and the availability of resources also highlighted the need for a good workplace learning environment. In brief, it is not enough to roll out a programme, attention needs to be paid to features of the site where the intervention is implemented. Of these features, evidence from the study of ELPP suggests that a focus in the workplace on supporting staff learning is important.

Creating knowledgeable workers who are able to work with ideas and to shape the tools they work with to build protective factors into the lives of disengaged parents takes time. For some staff, ELPP training and other experiences gave them confidence in expertise they did not know they had, by for example, labelling and explaining familiar practice. For others, there was a complete reorientation in their work from a focus on adults to one on parents and children. For others, the shift was less extreme, requiring them to revisit familiar ideas and sharpen their thinking. Practitioners’ capacity for responsive work which involved adapting programmes or drawing on a range of ideas when interacting with individual parents therefore also varied. One message is that the kinds of programmes and associated training offered through ELPP should not be seen as the end of the road. Instead, it should be regarded as a starting point for helping less qualified or experienced VCS staff develop the expertise they need to responsively support parents in reshaping how they engage with their children.

Help with accessing and engaging the most disengaged parents. Training and knowledge sharing largely focused on how to work with parents once they had been recruited to the programme and rather less, if at all, on how to access and engage them. The problems arising from difficulties in attracting the most excluded parents were outlined in 5.3. It would make sense to share expertise in accessing and engaging across the initiative before expertise in this area is lost.

Focusing on the nature of the relationship between practitioner and parent - Because training and implementation of approaches paid attention to how parents might help children, and in part because some practitioners were developing confidence in this kind of work over the short initiative, little attention was paid to how to manage relationships with parents so that they become more capable of taking control over their own lives, through, for example, signposting them to other services both while working with ELPP or when the intensive ELPP work had ended. There were exceptions to this conclusion, in part to ensure that families would not be left without support once ELPP funding ended, and in part because this was embedded in the established practice of the service. Lack of attention to this aspect of preventative work may be due to the fact that many services were accessing parents through existing services and therefore the parents were not sufficiently needy to require that kind of planning.

Nevertheless knowing how to manage relationships in preventative work, which are necessarily oriented towards independent functioning, is important and may usefully inform further training and workplace discussions.

6.8 Key points for workforce development

Successes

- ELPP training successfully oriented practitioners’ attention to a focus on parents as supporters of their children’s learning. For some services this change meant that they shifted from seeing adults as ‘vulnerable clients’ to working with them as parents who were educators of their young children.
- Practitioners gained skills and understanding about working with parents to support children’s learning, from the training they received.
- Training broadened rather than enhanced the expertise of most practitioners; while for some it allowed them to revisit and refresh what they already knew.
• Workplace staff development, which involved discussion and feedback, was important in sustaining and refining lessons from training.
• Practitioners valued the knowledge about learning and development that they gained from training and shared it with parents.
• Practitioners adapted structured interventions and drew on ideas offered in training to work responsively with parents.
• Practitioners became increasingly adept at recognising the learning opportunities available in familiar resources and modelled their expertise for parents.

**Challenges**

• Training broadened rather than enhanced the expertise of most practitioners; while for some it allowed them to revisit and refresh what they already knew.
• In some of the sites, which were working with the most vulnerable parents, there were questions about the appropriateness of shifting their focus to educationally oriented preventative work.
• The timing of training was seen as important to ensure that it occurred before programmes were implemented. Where training occurred after ELPP work had started there was some frustration.
• A focus on training practitioners to implement approaches for working with parents was more evident than help with how to access and engage the most socially excluded families.
• There was little evidence in some sites of attention to the nature of the relationship between expert practitioner and parent and how that relationship might change as parents take more control over their lives and access other services and particularly mainstream services.
Chapter 7: Enhancing parental involvement: the parent sub-sample

7.1 The importance of parenting practices, attitudes and knowledge

More than 100 parents were visited to find out about their experience of participating in the ELPP initiative and to explore its effects on their parenting. Specific parenting practices in the home have been shown to make a substantial contribution to children's development. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project ("EPPE", Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart, 2004a) documented a range of everyday activities in which the parents of three year olds enhanced their children's development. These included joint play focused on language and specific involvement of parent and child in numeracy and literacy activities. EPPE found that such supportive parenting was more influential in children’s development than the qualifications or income of the family. Such 'stimulating' parent-child interactions rest on the confidence that they can make a difference to their children’s lives, and the knowledge that children's learning can occur in the context of everyday activities.

The broad aim of this study of parents was to:

- describe parenting practices in the home;
- document the parents’ own views of their participation in ELPP; and
- measure the effects of the intervention on parenting over the course of ELPP participation.

Parents were visited both ‘early’ in their ELPP participation, and once again after a gap of between 3-7 months (when 'late’ visits took place) in order to investigate changes in parenting. This ‘early’ vs. ‘late’ design has been followed in similar studies that have found measurable change in parenting after twelve week interventions (Webster-Stratton and Hancock, 1998 for example). Both informal interview and structured questionnaires/observations were used in this mixed method part of the evaluation.

Specific research questions relating to outcomes for ELPP parents were as follows:

(i) What are parents' experiences of participating in ELPP and what did they find useful?
(ii) What are ELPP parents’ views on what is important for their children’s learning?
(iii) Have the ELPP parents changed their understanding of how to support their children’s learning?
(iv) Have ELPP parents (who have been visited at two time points) shown changes over time in how they support their children’s learning?

7.2 Descriptive profile of the families in the parent sub-sample

Recruiting and interviewing families

Interviews with the parents were carried out in family homes while the target child was present. This allowed parent-child interactions to be observed and discussed within the everyday home environment. If home visits were not possible, interviews were completed in the ELPP site. Fifty-five parents were seen both early and late into their participation (Table 7.1). It was not possible to revisit some of the ‘early’ families a second time for a number of reasons including families ending their ELPP participation, delayed start-up times for the ELP project for certain sites, and delays in getting access to the names of families. Information from families seen only 'late' was collected where families had been participating in ELPP for several months before their name was passed on to researchers.
Table 7.1: Parent sub-sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELPP Evaluation Parent Sub-Sample</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early interviews</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late interviews (follow-up of same families)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late interviews only</td>
<td>17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of families visited</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total of visits</strong></td>
<td><strong>159</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two families were removed from this sample due to the children being over the age of 55 months

**Demographic Information**

ELPP staff targeted a range of families, all thought to have children at risk of learning delay. Learning delay in preschoolers has been found in research studies to be linked to factors such as minority ethnic status, worklessness or low level jobs, instability of family units and low parental education. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) mentioned the children of ‘low-income communities and (those with) limited English proficiency’ as particularly vulnerable to learning delay.

The demographic information provided by ELPP parents is particularly important because it can tell us the recruitment priorities of ELPP staff and their success at reaching those who might benefit. The families were asked about their personal background and current family structure, including information on housing tenure, ethnicity and language, educational qualifications, employment and benefits. The 104 families in the achieved parenting sample were from varying levels of disadvantage, with some falling within the ‘most excluded’ group. The quality of parental involvement is predicted by factors of social disadvantage (Desforges with Abouchaar, 2003) and the occurrence of learning delay is found within similar types of families. Targeting of families was guided more as a criterion of disadvantage than through a specific diagnosis of learning delay.

Statistical comparisons were made between the achieved ELPP sample and a similar national UK sample of parents with nine month old children living in disadvantaged areas - the National Evaluation of Sure Start (NESS) (Belsky, Barnes and Melhuish, 2007). Although the number of ELPP families is very small by comparison, it was thought useful to study the achieved ELPP parent sample against a national benchmark sample of families in the bottom twenty per cent of disadvantage. These comparisons need to be made with caution due to vast differences in sample size.

**Target families overview**

The age of the target child at the time of the first interview ranged from 9 - 55 months with a mean age of 23 months\(^{56}\). The target-child gender balance was fairly equal, with fifty-six per cent\(^{57}\) of the children being male. Nearly two-thirds of children were considered by the respondent to be of white British origin, followed by mixed-race and then Asian British origin. Ninety one per cent of families spoke at least some English with their children at home. A number of the ELPP sites were targeting single parent families, as reflected in the demographics of the sample with one third of the families living alone at the time of interview\(^{58}\). While the majority of respondents were mothers, nine per cent of the interviewees were fathers who were given a shorter interview in the ELPP setting rather than being interviewed and observed at home with their children.

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\(^{56}\)The ELP project required agencies to target parents with a child who is at risk of learning delay and aged between 1-3 years of age. The achieved interview sample reflects the actual families served by ELPP and therefore included those aged 9 months or over up to the age of 4 years 11 months. Many ELPP sites targeted these older and younger age groups as they deemed the target children to be at risk of learning delay for their age.

\(^{57}\)All percentages have been rounded up.

\(^{58}\)Parents who are classed as ‘living alone’ in Chapter 7 were not living with a partner at the time of interview.
Ethnicity
The ethnic breakdown of the ELPP parent sample was compared to the NESS (Belsky et al., 2007). As both samples were drawn from socially disadvantaged communities, it was expected that the demographics of the small ELPP parent sample would match rather closely the large scale NESS sample. Table 7.2 shows the similarities between the two samples; the proportion of non-white families in ELPP is five per cent higher than non-white respondents within the ELPP sample. These results suggest that ELPP managed to reach a slightly larger proportion of the ethnic minority families than those recorded in the NESS sample. The small size of the ELPP sample must be emphasised when comparing these samples.

Table 7.2: Comparing the ELPP parent sub-sample to NESS: ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>ELPP Evaluation (England, raw numbers in brackets)</th>
<th>National Evaluation of Sure Start (Disadvantaged area sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>14084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>67.3 (68)</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race</td>
<td>5.9 (6)</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>4.0 (4)</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>3.0 (3)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>1.0 (1)</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.9 (6)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
<td>4.0 (4)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>6.9 (7)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.0 (2)</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total from non-white ethnic group</td>
<td>32.7 (33)</td>
<td>27.8 (3911)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In percentages of the sample population targeted.

Please note: The achieved ELPP sample is much smaller than the NESS sample, and therefore data should be used as a guide.

Within the ELPP parent sample, most parents described themselves as of white-British origin, black African, Asian British and mixed race, with seventy-eight per cent of parents speaking English as their first language. For the quarter of families for whom English was a second language, the most common first languages were Urdu, Hindi and Arabic. This table confirms that ELPP reached families whose children were at risk of a delay in learning to read, due to speaking ‘English as an additional language’ (Snow, Burns and Griffin, 1998).

Highest educational qualification
Parents were asked about their highest level of qualification. This is important because many research studies show a strong link between educational qualifications and the quality of support for learning at home. The learning environment, in turn, has been linked to children’s future cognitive and social-behavioural outcomes. When data are compared with the NESS sample (Belsky et al., 2007) (Table 7.3), ELPP parents were just as likely to have general vocational qualifications or below as NESS parents, with a larger proportion of individuals achieving degrees or higher level qualifications than compared to NESS. Figure H1 (Appendix H) shows that the range of qualification levels across different ethnic groups varied a great deal. ELPP parents are not necessarily more highly educated than NESS parents because some of the

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59 The link between limited English proficiency and learning delay is discussed in more detail within Chapter 1.

60 Data on vocational qualifications were collected from the ELPP parent sample, and assigned to an academic qualification category using the national qualifications framework. Although this framework has recently been revised, the original 5 level framework was used as it was believed this was the one parents would have been using when they achieved vocational qualifications. If further information on the vocational qualification was unavailable, results were placed into a ‘general unspecified vocational qualification’ category.
degrees were obtained overseas and are not equivalent to the English qualification system. On the other hand, these data may indicate the extent to which ELPP outreach work was with well-qualified but poorly paid first generation immigrant families.

Table 7.3: Comparing the ELPP parent sub-sample to NESS: highest educational qualification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Educational Qualification</th>
<th>ELPP Evaluation Parent Sample (%)</th>
<th>National Evaluation of Sure Start (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>14084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree, higher education or equivalent</td>
<td>25.5 (26)</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level or equivalent</td>
<td>12.7 (13)</td>
<td>22.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undifferentiated vocational qualification</td>
<td>8.8 (9)</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE or equivalent</td>
<td>33.3 (34)</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No formal qualification</td>
<td>13.8 (14)</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not answer question</td>
<td>5.9 (6)</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of vocational qualifications and below</td>
<td>55.9 (57)</td>
<td>60.3 (8495)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note that options for ‘other’ qualification have been removed to allow comparisons with other data sets. The achieved ELPP sample is much smaller than the NESS sample, and therefore data should be used as a guide.

**Housing tenure**

Four fifths of parents who lived alone were in rented accommodation compared with just half of those living with a partner. Those who lived alone were also more likely to rent from the council or a housing association (70%) compared to renting privately like the two-parent families (40%) who rent from non-profit organisations. Many of the sites reported that a parent would be considered as ‘most excluded’ due to lack of permanent housing. Again, the high amount of renters within this sample provides some evidence suggesting ELPP reached its targets of the most excluded families.

**Benefits and tax credits**

When the benefits and tax credits received by this sample were analysed, a large and varied range was discovered. However, it is likely that respondents did not always understand which benefit was referred to in the question e.g. ten per cent of those answering the question about Child Benefit claimed not to receiving this (a much higher percentage than would be expected from national surveys). It is possible that the ELPP parents’ English was not fluent enough to understand the question, as one fifth of the sample spoke English only as an additional language. It is also possible that the ELPP sample included parents who would not be eligible for Child Benefit (this would be the case for foreign nationals, families living in temporary accommodation, and asylum seekers).

Working Tax Credit (WTC) is a ‘top-up’ to increase the earnings of those with low wages. Parents who receive WTC are also eligible for receiving childcare tax credit. Fifty four per cent of those receiving WTC said that they also received childcare tax credit.

Partner status was related to benefits received, with those living alone being more likely to receive Income Support, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit and less likely to receive WTC. Single parents who were renting were also compared on the benefits they received. A very large range of benefits was claimed by this subgroup of ELPP parents, including Income Support, Child Benefit, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit, and disability allowance.
Socio-economic classification

National Statistics Socio-Economic Classifications (NS-SEC) (Office for National Statistics, 2005) were calculated for each working parent in the family and compared to the NESS sample of mothers (Table 7.4). The two-fifths of ELPP parents who were unemployed are not presented in Table 7.4. ELPP mothers and fathers tended to have a higher socio-economic status than mothers in the NESS sample. Over three quarters of those ELPP mothers who were in employment were working part-time e.g. in roles such as shop assistants, care assistants and hairdressers. Comparatively, three quarters of the ELPP fathers were in full time employment, with typical job titles including manual-based jobs such as builders and labourers. NS-SEC data for fathers were available for just over half of the sample due to the main respondent being single or not being knowledgeable about their partner’s employment. In addition, the achieved ELPP sample is much smaller than the nationally representative sample, and therefore caution must be taken when interpreting these data.

Table 7.4: Comparing the ELPP parent sub-sample to NESS: SES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification</th>
<th>ELPP Mothers (%), raw numbers in brackets</th>
<th>ELPP Fathers (%), raw numbers in brackets</th>
<th>NESS Mothers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>11195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 + 2. Managerial and professional occupations</td>
<td>25.8 (8)</td>
<td>25.5 (13)</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Intermediate occupations</td>
<td>32.3 (10)</td>
<td>5.9 (3)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Small employers and own account workers</td>
<td>6.5 (2)</td>
<td>21.6 (11)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lower supervisory and technical occupations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.8 (5)</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Semi-routine occupations</td>
<td>22.6 (7)</td>
<td>21.6 (11)</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Routine occupations</td>
<td>12.9 (4)</td>
<td>15.7 (8)</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (31)</td>
<td>100 (51)</td>
<td>100 (11195)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentages shown for ELPP data are taken from answers given by the respondent about both themselves and their partner, and represents a calculation of the SEC of all employed parents mentioned in the demographics. NS-SEC Category 8 (Never worked and long-term unemployed) has been removed to include only those who are currently in employment. Categories 1 and 2 (higher and lower managerial occupations) have been merged for comparison with NESS. Sixty-nine per cent of mothers were not in employment or did not answer. Forty-four per cent of fathers were not in employment or data was not provided.

How representative is the ELPP parent sample compared to the ELPP population?

Interview information from individual families shows the percentages to be very similar between the interviewed (smaller) sample and the full ELPP population reported by the site staff (section 4.4). There were similarities in percentages of individuals of non-white ethnicity (32.7% and 29.1% respectively); percentage of English as a second language speakers (22% and 22.5% respectively), percentage of workless families (39% and 42% respectively) and the percentage of single parent families (34% and 33% respectively). From the substantial similarities between the interviewed sample and the full ELPP population, it can be safely concluded that the ELPP sub-sample fairly reflects the demographics of the entire ELPP population receiving services.

Some families had been filtered out before interview by the staff at sites, e.g. parents with mental health or substance abuse problems. In addition, the ELPP families studied through interview tended to live closer to the sites than the general ELPP population.

Postcode information collected from the ELPP sub-sample suggests that some of the families are living in neighbourhoods that are slightly more advantaged than the ELPP population as a whole (Appendix H). Half of the families in the interviewed group were living in the lowest thirty per cent of areas classified according to disadvantage while three quarters of the ELPP population did so.
Living in more advantaged postcoded areas does not necessarily mean that these parents are themselves advantaged: demographic data collected on individual families through face to face interviews showed them to be very disadvantaged on individual characteristics, such as income and qualifications.

7.3 The methods used to explore parent outcomes

Parents were visited twice over a period of three to seven months (average 5 months) using a set of structured measures. Four research tools measured parenting outcomes: three observation scales and one questionnaire61 (Appendix D). In addition a semi-structured interview developed by the research team was administered to learn about the parents’ experiences and views on the ELPP project (section 7.6). The data collection methods attempted to describe two aspects of the parents: their parenting skills and their views and experiences of ELPP. Researchers were trained to reach adequate standards of reliability on the observation measures. Table 7.5 summarises the data collection instruments used in this study of parents.

Structured measures of parenting

Three observations were used in the study. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) is a standardised semi-structured observation and interview normally undertaken in the parents’ home to assess the quality and quantity of support for children’s development. Higher total scores indicate a richer quality of home environment for the child. The research literature abounds with studies (e.g. Totsika and Sylva, 2004 for a review) showing a strong relationship between the HOME scores and the subsequent cognitive development of the child. For observations that could not be completed within the home, an ‘abbreviated HOME’ interview was given consisting of subscales that did not require observations of normal adult-child interaction. The three subscales used in the abbreviated HOME instrument assessed Organisation, Involvement and Variety in the child’s home environment, and are considered by the research team as the most important to children’s learning. Two further observations were used in this study, the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) and the Book-sharing Observation Scale. The non-punitiveness subscale of the CIS is an observation measure normally used within care settings to assess the presence or absence of a caregiver’s negative interactions with children. The EPPE project (Sammons, Sylva, Melhuish, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart and Elliot, 2002) found high scores on the non-punitiveness subscale to be associated with better pre-reading and early numeracy skills for children. It was hypothesised that parents scoring high on non-punitiveness would have children at low risk of learning delay. In addition, the Book-sharing Observation Scale (ELPP Evaluation team, 2007), was developed by the research team in order to measure how parents introduced and shared a new book with their child. During the home visit parents were given an age-appropriate book for their child and asked to ‘share the book with your child just as you normally do when we are not here’. The books had attractive pictures and limited vocabulary, allowing the parents to elaborate the story based on the pictures.

Finally, three other structured instruments on parenting were used as part of the questionnaire, as previous research had shown each one to have an impact on some feature of a child’s later development. The three scales formed a baseline measurement from which change in parental views and support towards their children’s learning could be assessed. Questionnaires were administered orally to the parent to make them more ‘friendly’ and to help any parents who had literacy difficulties or for whom English was an additional language. Some questions, especially those related to feelings, were asked with the aid of a coloured scale on which the parent could point to their level of agreement with statements about their child or the relationship. The Parental Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ) includes a set of statements suggesting a number of feelings parents may have about their relationship to their children. ‘Positivity’ and ‘Negativity’ subscales can be derived from the information collected to describe the nature of the parents’ feelings towards their child. The Home Learning Environment (HLE, EPPE: Sylva et al., 2004a)

61 Appendix D contains copies of the instruments, and fuller discussions of their usage and scoring systems.
was designed to measure parental involvement within certain activities in the home. The parent rated their response to seven activities, depending on the frequency of their occurrence at home. Sylva et al found a higher quality HLE to be significantly related to differences in children at primary school age in their social and behavioural development, factors both important to the learning capabilities of children. In order to understand the family situation further, the Father Involvement Scale as used in NESS (Belsky et al, 2007) measured the mother’s perception of their partner and his involvement with the child.

Table 7.5: Summary of parenting instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>The Infant-Toddler Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME)</td>
<td>Semi-structured observation and interview. Used as a comparative outcome measure on children of all ages (9-55mths)</td>
<td>Caldwell and Bradley, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS, one subscale used)</td>
<td>Observational outcome measure. Used as a measure of parent-child interaction for all-aged children if they were present at the time.</td>
<td>Arnett, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Book-sharing Observation Scale</td>
<td>Observational outcome measure. Used as a measure of parent-child interaction for all-aged children if they were present at the time.</td>
<td>The ELPP Evaluation Team, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Home Learning Environment</td>
<td>Rating scale outcome measure. Used only if child was aged 24 months or above.</td>
<td>EPPE, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Parental Feelings Questionnaire</td>
<td>Rating scale outcome measure. Used as a measure for children of all ages even if child not present.</td>
<td>Deater-Deckard, 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>Father Involvement Questionnaire</td>
<td>Rating scale outcome measure. Asked only to mothers who have partners.</td>
<td>The National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured Interview</td>
<td>ELPP Evaluation Interview Schedule</td>
<td>Multiple aspects of parenting, employment, and group participation, as well as views of their children, their role in their children’s development and their views on ELPP participation.</td>
<td>The ELPP Evaluation Team, 2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>ELPP Evaluation Interview Schedule</td>
<td>Family demographic characteristics</td>
<td>The ELPP Evaluation Team, 2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Large-scale UK studies were used to allow comparison between the ELPP sample and other samples considered to be representative or consist of disadvantaged families. It is best practice to read the following data with care due to the vast differences in sample size, data collection methods and items used. Data collected from the structured parent-measures during the ‘early’ wave of home visits were explored descriptively and tested for normality and variance. Parametric methods (including ANOVA and multiple regression) were used to explore whether particular parent or child characteristics influenced scores on each measure. When data were collected at two separate time periods, parametric methods were used to detect changes in the parental scores over time, after taking into account demographics such as parental education level, child’s age and gender. This was an important statistical procedure because the families
had children of different ages and gender, and the parents varied in terms of their own educational levels. Significance is reported as (p<0.05, p<0.01) throughout, with results being rounded up to the nearest decimal point.

7.4 Parents’ practices and attitudes

**Observed parenting practices and responses to structured questionnaire/interview instruments**

Information collected from ‘early’ family visits was first explored to measure the levels and skills of parenting before a long period of ELPP participation.

*The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME)*

The HOME (Caldwell and Bradley, 2002) has published ranges of parenting quality, encompassing ‘poor’, ‘satisfactory’ and ‘good’ parenting. Although these were initially developed in the United States, they have been used successfully in many other countries. Inspection of parenting scores from the full and abbreviated HOME results indicated that the ELPP parent sample were mainly ‘satisfactory’ or ‘good’ at parenting, falling into the higher end of ‘average’ parenting according to the published norms (Table 7.6). Totsika and Sylva (2004) reported that a parenting score falling into the lowest fourth of this published range (so-called ‘poor parenting’) suggests the children’s environment may pose a risk to their development. Less than one tenth of the ELPP parent sample showed ‘poor parenting’ on the HOME total score. Subscales where parents scored the lowest include the Involvement in Learning subscale, and the Variety subscale. This suggests that the greatest ‘gap’ in the ELPP families’ parenting skills is in their active role as a stimulator of their children’s learning, and not in being responsive or warm. ELPP parents were less likely to actively encourage and challenge their children to learn, or to provide a ‘stimulating environment’ to challenge their children’s thinking. On the other hand, the vast majority of parents interviewed and observed showed warmth and responsiveness towards their children.

**Table 7.6: Scores of the parent sub-sample on the HOME observation schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOME Subscales</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
<th>Mean classification</th>
<th>“Poor Parenting” (%)</th>
<th>“Satisfactory Parenting” (%)</th>
<th>“Good Parenting” (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responsivity</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning materials</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in Learning</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full HOME Instrument</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The NESS study (Melhuish et al 2008) used the Acceptance and Responsivity subscales from the HOME as part of their measurement of the risk posed to the development of children in the NESS sample. Their scoring was: 0= little risk to child's development, assumed to represent satisfactory or good parenting; 1= some risk; and 2= high risk. ELPP parent scores were compared to the NESS sample of parents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Table 7.7 shows that, compared to the much larger NESS sample, ELPP parents have higher parenting scores on Responsivity and are at an equivalent level on Acceptance.
Table 7.7: Percent of parents falling into parenting bands on the HOME: comparison with NESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of parenting</th>
<th>ELPP Parent Sample</th>
<th>National Evaluation of Sure Start (Disadvantaged sample)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsivity (%)</td>
<td>Acceptance (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor parenting</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory/good</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parenting range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note: The number of ELPP parents answering to this measure is much smaller than the NESS sample, and therefore caution should be used when making comparisons.

The Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS)
The ELPP parent sample shows a very caring environment for their children as measured on the CIS (Table K2, Appendix K) with scores falling close to the maximum available score. The high scores within the ELPP parent sample show clearly that the ELPP parents provide a caring emotional environment at home and have a very low level of punitiveness.

The Book-sharing Observation Scale
Table K3 (Appendix K) suggests that book-sharing scores were quite low, typically falling at half of the total score available. Item two was the only item to score highly (“help child hold book, turn pages or touch book”) and was the only item not requiring a verbal interaction from the parent. Low book-sharing scores may stem from the large number of parents from ethnic minority groups (one third of the sample) who were not comfortable when trying to read an English book. Although the majority had some English, the presence of a researcher may have led to feelings of embarrassment while reading an English book despite the preponderance of illustrations and a limited text.

Findings from questionnaires / structured interviews

The Parental Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ)
The PFQ contains two separate subscales: Negativity and Positivity. Table K4 (Appendix K) shows the mean Positivity score is very close to the maximum score. Comparatively the mean score on the Negativity scale falls at just over half of the available maximum score, suggesting that the ELPP parents hold a very positive attitude towards their children.

A summarised version of the PFQ was used by Sylva, Evangelou, Taylor, Rothwell, and Brooks (2004b) to compare parents who had participated in a PEEP intervention with a matched sample of parents from a similar neighbourhood where PEEP was unavailable. Table 7.8 compares the feelings of parents in the ‘Enabling Parents’ study with the ELPP families. Both groups within the Enabling Parents study have a slightly higher rate of negative feeling towards children than the ELPP parents. When considering the Positivity subscale, scores are similar across the ELPP and the Enabling Parents samples, suggesting that the ELPP parent sample actually have very positive feelings towards their children when compared to other UK studies.

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62 ‘Satisfactory / Good parenting’ encompasses both the ‘satisfactory’ and ‘good’ levels of the HOME for ELPP families. For NESS this comparison was not possible and so ‘satisfactory/good’ families represent those who do not pose a risk to their child’s development (i.e. group 0). ‘Poor parenting’ families include any who pose a risk (groups 1 or 2).

63 Appendices I, J and K can be found at [http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php](http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php)
Table 7.8 Mean scores on the Parental Feelings questionnaire compared to another sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parental Feelings Questionnaire Subscale</th>
<th>Early Learning Partnership Project (mean scores)</th>
<th>‘Enabling Parents’ study of disadvantaged parents (mean scores)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intervention group</td>
<td>Comparison group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negativity</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>13.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positivity</td>
<td>42.70</td>
<td>42.62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Father Involvement Questionnaire
The Father Involvement Questionnaire was administered only to mothers who lived with a partner. Initial demographic data from the primary respondent suggest that 66 per cent of the sample were living with their partners at the time of interview. However, as 75 per cent of the sample completed the Father Involvement Questionnaire, some of the described fathers may not have been living with their children at the time of interview, which may artificially lower the score. Table K5 (Appendix K) shows that the mean score for Father Involvement within the ELPP sample is two-thirds of the total available score. This lower score suggests that the ELPP fathers do not spend a lot of time with their children, although a firm conclusion is not possible as the sample is very small.

The Home Learning Environment (HLE)
The HLE was only administered to parents with children over two years of age because its questions are inappropriate for babies and toddlers. Table K6 (Appendix K) shows the distribution of scores. ELPP parents were compared on their HLE scores with a sample of parents taken from the national EPPE study (Sylva, et al 2004a). Table 7.9 shows the HLE scores for parents in the two studies after breaking them down into the highest educational qualification achieved by the primary respondents. The table highlights a strong and positive relationship between parental qualifications and quality of the Home Learning Environment. It also suggests that the ELPP parent sample have a higher HLE score for every educational group, thus providing good learning experiences for their children.

Table 7.9: Mean scores on the Home Learning Environment: comparing ELPP to EPPE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s Highest Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Mean HLE score for Early Learning Partnership Project sample 2007-2008</th>
<th>Mean HLE score for The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project 1997-1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree, higher degree or equivalent</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note: The achieved ELPP sample is much smaller than the nationally representative sample, and therefore data should be used as a guide.

The satisfactory parenting findings may be explained by societal change. The HLE for example was published a decade ago and proved to be a very sensitive instrument for measurement of ‘at home’ parenting; however these results led to many interventions and programmes to support parents as home educators and therefore a normative belief that all parents should be regularly providing learning experiences for their children at home. As such it is possible that parents across the country have ‘improved’ their parenting practices. Once again the ELPP sample on this instrument was too small (n=24) to be very confident in generalising the results.
Main effects of demographic characteristics on the parenting measures

Many studies have shown evidence of a strong relationship between parental education and aspects of the Home Learning Environment contributing towards support for the children’s learning. Table 7.9 shows how parental education relates to the ‘cognitively challenging’ items in the HLE devised by EPPE, e.g. ‘read to the child’ or ‘take the child to a library’. The effect of the primary respondent’s highest educational qualification, and the target child’s age and gender were investigated on each of the measures of parenting. Maternal education was related to most measures of parenting, with higher qualifications predicting higher scores especially on the ‘cognitively stretching’ items, such as the ‘intellectual stimulation’ subscales within the HOME instrument and the HLE. These positive correlations suggest that something “real” was being measured, i.e. the quality of parenting within the sample varied in line with the parents’ education. Moreover, many of the parents in the ELPP sample were quite well-educated which may be the reason for the relatively high levels of parenting found on the HOME, the CIS, and the EPPE HLE interview. Child’s age was also related to parenting scores (e.g. older children experienced more library visits and had fewer punitive interactions with their parents). As the level of parenting was found to be sensitive to parental qualifications, child’s age and gender, these variables were controlled for in the analyses that investigated the effect of the ELPP participation on parenting skills and feelings.

7.5 Improvements in parenting practices and attitudes

The ‘early’ and ‘late’ parenting scores were compared in order to test for improved parenting across the sample (section 7.4). Recall that there was a gap of 3-7 months (mean=5 months). Before comparing the results over time, parental education, target child’s age and gender were taken into account, i.e. the effects of ELPP on parenting are “net” of other influencing factors. Of the 11 measures of parenting tested in this way, three showed a significant improvement in parenting between the ‘early’ and the ‘late’ observations.

Organisation (measured via the HOME)
The organisation subscale of the HOME comprises 6 items including; child gets out of the house at least 4 times a week; child’s play area is safe; child has a special place for toys and treasures. The parent sample achieved a significantly higher score on the organisation subscale when visited a second time later into their participation; \( F (1) = 4.345, \) \( n=54, \) \( p<0.05 \) suggesting that one area of significant improvement is in the deployment of routine within the child’s home environment, their higher level of concern for the child’s safety and health, and the provision of opportunity for the child to leave the home and to experience outside learning. This finding is in line with the objectives of home-based ELPP work, where families are often unable or unwilling to leave their homes (for example due to suffering from the effects of depression). Within these sites a large part of the work is often aimed at helping the parents to become more independent in the outside community and to take part in mainstream services.

Positivity (measured via the Parental Feelings Questionnaire)
The Positivity subscale comprises of 9 statements which parents were asked to grade based upon their level of agreement. Items included; ‘I feel close to my child both when she/he is very happy and when she/he is worried’; ‘I consider his/her needs and interests when making my own plans’. Early data from the ELPP parent sample suggested that scores on the Positivity subscale were already very close to the maximum score available (section 7.6). ELPP parents however still showed a significant increase in their levels of Positivity during their second visit (\( F (1) = \) 64 The Father Involvement Questionnaire was not measured for change as a number of projects were targeting mothers and the paternal influence was not suggested to change significantly over the course of a few months: 34% of families also did not live with their partners. The Home Learning Environment was not considered due to a requirement of it being asked only to parents with children aged 24 months and above; as such only 24 families completed this measure at both time periods. Tables K7 and K8 in Appendix K present results: (http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/resgroup/fell/index.php)
4.388, n=53, p<0.05) with an average increase in score of 0.8. The statements reflect the parents’ ability to hold a positive attitude towards their children and consider their needs when making decisions. An increase in this scale suggests that the parents are taking more notice of their children in general. An improvement in the parents’ relationship with their children was a welcome finding as several agencies were working primarily to improve the parents’ relationship with their children.

**Negativity (measured via the Parental Feelings Questionnaire)**

The Negativity subscale comprises of 4 items which parents were asked to grade on a number-based scale according to their level of agreement. Items included: *Sometimes I feel very impatient with my child; Sometimes I am frustrated by him/her*. Early data from the ELPP parent sample suggested that scores on the Negativity scale were slightly more positive than the mid-line (section 7.6). During the ‘late’ visits, ELPP parents showed an almost significant decrease in Negativity (F (1) = 3.767, n=53, p=0.058) with an average change in score of 1.2 marks. A decrease in the Negativity subscale shows a move towards a more positive relationship with their children. This result is also welcomed as a number of sites were trying to decrease negativity in the relationship.

**Engagement (measured via the semi-structured parental interview)**

A set of structured questions were used to investigate change in parenting practices due to the influence of ELPP (section 7.6). One question asked parents if they had ‘attended a group’ (other than an ELPP group) since their first interview. From this, two fifths of the parents reported that they were attending a ‘new group’ since their first interview. Replies such as these indicated increased engagement in Early Childhood Services, e.g. baby and children groups, drop-ins, libraries, nurseries and parent groups. These new forms of engagement are seen as important because they are ‘over and above’ the ELPP participation.

Those who replied ‘no’ to the use of community groups were asked ‘why’? Reasons for not attending groups showed a significant shift from the ‘early’ interviews; in early interviews, parents mostly cited transport/location problems and inconvenient times (39%) and health difficulties (23%), as the main reason for not attending any extra groups. The ‘late’ visits suggest that the main reason for not attending new groups was because the parents already attended other activities such as the ELPP initiative or a nursery (55%) and therefore believe that their children are already getting sufficient stimulation.

**Characteristics of those parents showing improvements in parenting practices and attitudes**

When considering the demographic information of parents showing an improvement on parenting measures, a variety of differences were observed. Parents showing an improvement on the Positivity subscale of the PFQ were more likely to live with their partners (75%) have a lower socio-economic status (10%), and were more likely to work (48%) than those parents who did not show an improvement on the Positivity subscale (68%; 28% and 31% respectively). Parents improving on the Negativity measure followed a similar pattern. Those showing an improvement on the Organisation subscale were comparatively less likely to live with their partners (67%), less likely to own their own homes (37%) and more likely to receive Working Tax Credit (63%) than those families who did not show an improvement on this measure (71%; 40% and 36% respectively).
7.6 The methods used to explore parents’ experiences and views of ELPP

Semi-structured descriptors of parenting

In addition to the set of structured instruments, parents were given a semi-structured interview, designed to supplement information from the structured instruments and also to provide added detail about parents’ experiences. A set of 18 questions measured important factors relating to the parents’ understanding of parental involvement in their children’s early learning, their experiences of the ELPP initiative so far and where they feel they could turn to for advice about their child or their parenting. The supplementary questions were designed to aid the researchers’ understanding of basic parental views on how they can support their children’s learning and how likely parents were to take what they learnt from the ELPP initiative into improving their children’s home learning environment. Some families identified by the sites for study had already completed their full participation in the ELPP initiative by the time researchers were given their names. These families were interviewed only once and considered as a ‘late’ family i.e. their views towards the end of participation were sought. The interview schedule for ‘late only’ parents was adjusted to incorporate a number of questions reflecting on the parents’ experience of the ELPP initiative as a whole. This instrument was also given to revisited families to explore the possibility of change in behaviour or feelings towards the child.

The Coding of interviews: Eighty-seven ‘early’ interviews and seventy-two ‘late’ interviews were analysed through content-analysis after developing the coding frames on randomly selected sub-samples of interviews. This allowed patterns in responses representing the same approximate meaning to be identified, grouped together and given “labels” to indicate the thematic idea. A combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches was required. The analysis concentrated on investigating new themes within the parents’ own words (bottom-up) while maintaining a focus on specific research questions (top-down). The combination of these approaches led to a hierarchical arrangement of thematic nodes and exemplars of each node. The nodes (represented by shaded ovals in Figures 7.1 to 7.4) stand for overarching themes and provide a meaningful structure to the varied accounts of parents. Inevitably, questions about the relationship between and within nodes arose and resulted in reorganisation of the codes. As Strauss and Corbin (1990) report, such a reorganisation of categories forms the basis for analysis of the data and enables a better understanding of their diverse nature. Any ambiguous parental responses were discussed within the evaluation team and the coding frames revised accordingly. Once a consensus was reached on categories, interviews were coded according to a list of codes constructed for each question.

7.7 Parents’ views on what is important for their children’s learning and confidence building

What do parents believe is important for supporting their children’s learning?

Figure 7.1 illustrates the model developed through content analysis of the parental accounts during the ‘early’ stage of their involvement in ELPP. Parents were asked what things they think are important for helping their children to learn and feel confident. Some parents believed their children learn best in a structured environment with clear routines: ‘Needs an environment that isn’t chaotic’; ‘To develop routines which he knows’. Other parents recognised that their children want to be challenged; they need variety and diversity in their everyday play: ‘I swap her toys around so she has a change’. The idea of a stimulating environment was further described as outdoor exploration, various trips, walks or excursions: ‘I try to take her places’; ‘going to the park’; with activities to do with nature or with animals: ‘Playing with the dog’; ‘feeding ducks’. When probed about which activities parents see as important for their children’s learning, parents mentioned different kinds of play and a range of activities such as reading, musical and fine motor activities or outdoor physical play. A further specification of which activities children enjoy
and most engage in was found in answers parents gave to the question “What activities does your child like to do?”. The favourite activities ranged from the general ‘being outside’ to the more specific, such as, ‘likes building towers’ or ‘helping me cleaning’. The responses tended to emphasise the importance of playing in an engaging environment: ‘He likes to have lots to do’; with many varied toys: ‘Having the right toys’. Due to the diversity in age and capability of the children, the examples provided by individual parents were quite different from each other, covering different domains: sport and active physical activities such as ‘Cycling’, ‘football’; pretend play e.g., ‘feed her dolly’; or simply basic needs such as the children’s enjoyment of eating: ‘he likes to eat’.

In addition, the experience of being with other children and adults emerged as a dominant theme. Parents highlighted the importance of social interaction in children’s everyday activities: ‘Being with other children’; ‘Visiting grand-parents’; stressing the importance of parents, the parental support, attention and positive affect: ‘Making sure he feels safe and loved’; ‘Me and my partner doing things with him’; ‘To be understood, to be shown reassurance’. Of the parents who answered the question about what is important for their child’s learning, one tenth made reference to physical affection in the parent-child relationships: ‘He likes cuddles’; ‘She likes to be held’. The nature of the parent-child relationship was also reflected in parents’ awareness of their children’s current capabilities and progress they made in several domains, including learning. The following two examples illustrate a relatively high parental awareness of the level of their child’s knowledge: ‘[name of child] has learnt about aeroplanes’; ‘learnt new animals’. In some answers, the level of detail was rich and touched on a number of different skills: ‘[he has learnt] blowing kisses’; ‘Breaking bread to feed ducks’; ‘Pushes video buttons’; ‘To turn taps’.

The vast majority of parents who commented on specific learning in their children, supported learning using positive parenting techniques. Concepts such as encouragement, recognition or praise, regardless of the type of progress children made, are evident in the following extracts: ‘I clap hands and say ‘very good’; I always continue with things she does’; ‘I laugh to reward her’. If parents reported on ‘negative’ development: ‘[name of child] learnt to hit other people’; ‘he started to swear’, they would either employ prohibition, show disapproval: ‘I tell him don’t…’ or would choose not to intervene in situations where the child is misbehaving: ‘Try not to give him a reaction’.

In order to develop a relationship with their children, parents referred to the importance of constant verbal interaction. The overarching theme of listening and speaking emerged from expressions such as ‘asking him questions’, ‘explaining things’. Some parents perceived their involvement in children’s learning as an encouragement of gradual independence of the child. Parents who took this view provided examples of how they promote autonomy and more self-control in their children: ‘I want him to manage things himself’; ‘I let him choose’.

The contribution of parents to children’s learning was recognised as more important than physical resources or the contributions of other family members and friends. Some parents perceived themselves as first educators to their children, teaching them emergent literacy skills as well as moral values and principles of conduct. The following quotations sum up this view: ‘I teach her maths’; ‘I teach him right from wrong’; ‘…Tell him when things aren’t good’. A handful of parents viewed themselves as models for their children’s emotional wellbeing: ‘I try to be confident myself’. When invited to describe activities her child needs for a healthy development, one mother commented: ‘Nothing. I always feel it’s been difficult. My parents didn’t help me. I haven’t been there for my children’. However, there were only two cases when the word ‘nothing’ was used as a response to the question. These two mothers were unusual in a sample of parents who were largely positive about their role in their children’s learning.

Where do parents go for help and advice?

Parents were asked who they would go to for help and advice if they needed it. Answers were grouped to observe whether parents primarily looked for help from informal (i.e. friends and family) and/or formal sources (i.e. people working for ELPP or in a formal school setting; health
The majority of parents cited family and friends as the main source of help. Interestingly though, about a tenth of parents who answered this question referred to seeking help independently, through the Internet or through reading books: ‘[If I need advice, I] go to library and look it up’. It was evident that home visitors and centre staff were deemed knowledgeable and helpful, as they were cited as the third most likely source of help, after family and the health visitor, that parents would consider using in the future.

When asked whether parents would like to have more information or advice and if so, what sort of information, the answers tended to be similar: ‘No, because I have enough now’; ‘No, because I’m happy with what I have’. Out of the few parents who indicated a need for more advice, five called for more practical, less theoretical information on day-to-day issues: ‘[I need advice on] feeding, sleeping, potty training - [I] am a first time mum’.

7.8 Parents’ experiences of participating in ELPP

What parents enjoyed about ELPP services

The principal emerging category in answer to the question ‘What do you or did you enjoy about the group you attended?’ was the perceived benefit of social interaction, the experience of being with other people, other parents or people working for ELPP with whom parents could talk to and share their feelings with. The participation in relationships and activities was valued especially by parents who otherwise felt excluded or without opportunities to attend such programmes: ‘Feeling of belonging to a group’; ‘Break from isolation’. Attending a group enabled and supported social inclusion for the parents, which, they reported, led to raising their self-esteem and building up their confidence: ‘I gained confidence’. Appreciation was expressed for the ‘mutual support’ of the group as well as for help offered to parents by ELPP members of staff: ‘They give good advice’. Furthermore, the initiative seemed to support parents effectively through working with outside professionals: ‘Other people visit to give talks’.

In addition to the feeling of belonging, the enjoyment of the group meetings seemed to come from a stimulating, safe and structured environment with a homely feel. Parents valued the wide range of activities offered by the groups: ‘she is occupied all the time’, and the diversity in these: ‘Do different activities every time’. The idea of variety was conceptualised as opportunities for various visits, excursions and special events parents and their children could not otherwise afford to take part in. The other two environmental characteristics parents enjoyed and their children have benefited from, were safety and structure in play activities. In the groups, the child was safe: ‘Feel secure, children are safe’ and play in the groups was guided rather than self-directed play: ‘they have structured play’.

As indicated in Chapter 5, one objective of the ELPP initiative was to shift the focus of ELPP-funded work to the parent-child dyad. Whereas the child-focused features of the environment were appreciated by parents through their child’s enjoyment: ‘My child likes it!’ the home-like atmosphere operating in the centres was valued by parents for themselves. About a fifth of parents who answered the question referred to the open-door approach operating in ELPP. The following examples give a flavour of these kinds of responses: ‘Is very warm and welcoming’; ‘Feel relaxed there, can talk freely’. Free resources and space provision has clearly helped to reinforce the good atmosphere: ‘Have sofas and kettle there’; ‘lots of equipment’.

Moreover, parents’ comments indicated that the parent-child and ELPP staff-child activities in the centre were all joint activities: ‘All join in together’; ‘We play, read together’. Parents felt actively involved in the process of enhancing the learning and development of their child. This active engagement, coupled with the knowledge offered by staff were the main results of the initiative’s success as measured by parental enjoyment.
In sum, as can be seen in Figure 7.2, many aspects of group sessions were valued by parents, with many elements depending on the enjoyment and benefit to the children ‘[I like it because of] the fact that the child likes the group’, but also as one mother commented: ‘It gave me something for myself!’

From all parents who answered the question “Overall, in what ways could the group meetings be better?” there was a clear consensus that attending the meetings was a valuable experience for both parents and children. About one quarter of parents who answered this question said (paraphrase) ‘It couldn’t be better.’ A few parents suggested that the group sessions should take place in bigger venues or should happen more often.

**Perceived benefits of participating in the ELPP initiative**

When asked during the ‘early’ visits about their specific experiences, the range of immediate gains for each parent varied enormously, reflecting the diverse levels of need and capacity of the target group. Parents appeared to have found their participation in the ELPP initiative beneficial in four main ways: firstly, the support they received through interaction with other parents and members of the ELPP team; secondly, the role of social engagement in supporting emotional health; thirdly, practical help in coping with life issues; and, finally, the benefit from knowledge exchange, leading to new skills, techniques and creative ideas that parents can use with their children. The four main benefits are explored in more detail below.

**(i) Social benefits**

Many parents referred to the benefits of being in a group with other parents. The realisation that other parents have to cope with similar problems and seeing how they deal with them was, for many parents, extremely helpful, informative and inspirational: ‘Advice from other parents is useful’; ‘Can see things in them [other parents] that I want to do differently with my child’. The social interaction was also perceived as beneficial for parents themselves: ‘I go to the groups because I can] talk to other mums’ as well as their children: ‘[My child can] mix with other children’.

**(ii) Health and wellbeing benefits**

In addition to the initiative being supportive in the social sense, some parents recognised that ELPP played a substantial role in providing emotional and psychological support. The group meetings and home visits gave parents encouragement, improved their emotional wellbeing and helped to build up their confidence: ‘I have more peace of mind now’; ‘Has given me confidence’. Out of all parents referring to the emotional support, about one tenth felt a strong desire to improve an aspect of their life, to become a better parent: ‘I want to try harder’; ‘I’m striving to be [a] better parent’.

For parents who could not attend group meetings, for example due to poor health or child care responsibilities (about one fifth of respondents) or for transportation reasons (about one third of respondents), the home visitor served as a counsellor and advisor: ‘She [the home visitor] gives me support by talking to me’.

**(iii) Practical benefits and educational play**

Looking specifically at the most valued ideas and advice received from ELPP, the histories of the services discussed in 5.2 and 5.3 must be acknowledged. Whereas some parents appreciated the advice on their own health difficulties: ‘Advice about how to feel better with depression’, a small group of parents saw the home visitors as just an ‘extra pair of hands’, providing physical help or doing chores: ‘Would shop and help with cleaning’; ‘help with carrying Tesco shopping’. However, the majority of parents agreed that the group meetings and home visits in particular were very beneficial for their children’s cognitive and educational development. Slightly less than fifty per cent of parents who have been visited at home valued the educational activities the visitor was doing with the child; ‘They [the home visitor and child] play but it’s not just play’; ‘She’s teaching the child’; ‘She is doing activities targeted at their developmental stages’. The
acknowledgment that ELPP-funded services were beneficial for their child’s development was marked by comments referring to a behavioural change parents noticed in their children: ‘He has become much better at getting ready to go out’; ‘Before [name of home visitor] came, [name of child] would not sit down and do things. He would go off and cry. Now he will read a book.’ Many parents commented on the visitor’s frequent verbal interactions with the child: ‘Encourages him [the child] to speak’; ‘She talks to him as he has language difficulties’. The modelling approach taken by ELPP-funded staff led to attitude changes in some of the parents: ‘I want to start English classes so I can help him more’.

ELPP services as providers of a stimulating environment was another benefit featuring in a number of parental interviews. While the group meetings offered various activities and many opportunities for excursions: ‘They [ELPP site] organise lots of trips’; the home visitor provided a range of resources not available at home: ‘she always brings books and toys’; ‘she has a big bag of bricks’.

(iv) Knowledge acquisition benefits

Parents often made reference to the use of new materials which they would otherwise not use because they thought them inappropriate or not useful: ‘I was scared to give him pens or dough, I thought he was too young.’ The acceptance of activities such as messy play was another result of the collaborative approach operating in ELPP services: ‘She [the home visitor] showed me how to use house things as toys’; ‘Made me not so worried about messy play’. Importantly, the new focus on particular activities was marked with a shift of emphasis towards joint parent-child play: ‘I play more with my child than I would have done if I hadn’t gone’.

Many parents visited early in their participation responded actively to the new ideas received at ELPP. Parents recognised an increased capacity to understand and respond to their children’s needs: ‘I now understand more why [name of child] is behaving in that way’; ‘Now know things you can do for your child’ which led to a number of concrete actions being taken or planned for the future: ‘I used [a] speech therapist’; ‘I need to speak to him more’. Figure 7.3 is a graphic summary of the various aspects of the ELPP initiative perceived by parents as beneficial for them or their children. Please note that this figure does not include ‘benefits for the overall parent-child relationship’ a theme emerging in early interviews. This recurrent idea became more evident in the ‘late’ parents’ accounts and is explored in more detail in the section below.

7.9 Have there been changes over time in parents’ understanding and behaviour to support their children’s learning?

What did parents say they do to support their child’s learning?

Content analysis of the seventy-two ‘late’ interviews revealed a more detailed understanding of the variety of ways parents can support their child’s learning. Parents’ statements made later in their participation in ELPP pointed to change and development in their knowledge and practices.

Section 7.8 is divided according to the three dominant changes that were detected when comparing ‘early’ and ‘late’ interviews:

i) Changes in parents’ behaviour
ii) Changes in parents’ beliefs and attitudes
iii) Changes in children as reported by their parents
i) Changes in ELPP parents’ behaviour

Active involvement
In the first stages of participation in the ELPP initiative, the ELPP group staff and home visitors served as an inspiration and role model for activities parents could use to help develop their children’s learning and skills. As a result of the ELPP experience, parents recognised an increased capacity to understand and respond to their children’s needs: ‘I now understand more why [name of child] is behaving in that way’; ‘(I) now know things you can do for your child’. Subsequently, many parents said they now feel more confident and capable to carry out certain activities that had been learnt from the ELPP initiative, at home with their children, often allowing children to take part in activities parents previously thought were inappropriate or untried: ‘We try new things with him whereas before we wouldn’t have… Like I was unsure about play dough I would have waited till he was older.’; ‘Lots of ideas that I didn’t think of myself’; ‘We are more adventurous with jelly and paint’. Parents commented on how they had become more creative in their daily routines and activities, and how the ELPP initiative had guided them to use the different resources available in their own homes or to start new games: ‘It’s about using simple things to play with children, like home made dough’. For some parents, the initiative served as an inspiration for purchasing a new resource for the child: ‘We bought her a chalk board as she enjoyed it there [at the group sessions]’; ‘I invested in plastic containers that he can play with at home’.

Another outcome apparent in the parents’ accounts was an increase in their involvement in their children’s pre-school experience (one of the ELPP objectives). This involves two courses of action: developing their children’s positive dispositions to learn and giving them the opportunity for healthy social interaction.

Parents as their children’s first educators
Many parents viewed themselves as their children’s first teachers, building foundations for their future school success. More than half of the parents interviewed ‘late’ suggested that their children’s daily routines are now characterised by an emphasis on language and literacy-promoting behaviours. Parents showed awareness of the importance of listening and talking as a first way to help children learn and deepen their understanding: ‘Always talk to her, about what we’re doing and so on’; not to use baby words but to talk to him in the same way as adults’; ‘I have learnt how to talk to my child’. The most notable change apparent with the ‘late’ interviews was a change not so much in what the parents do (e.g. activities), but rather how often and in what manner. The initiative gave parents inspiration for how often and in what way they can share books with children, sing nursery rhymes or songs and perform early numeracy activities such as counting: ‘I now read lots with her and talk about books’; ‘We sing more with him now’; ‘I count with him whenever I can’.

Participation in ELPP also seems to have led to changes not only in the frequency of parents playing with their children (a theme prevalent already within early interviews), but also in the nature of joint parent-child play: ‘We play in a different way and use new things’; ‘it’s changed how I play with him’.

(ii) Providing a social experience for their children
In order to support their children’s learning and confidence, about one third of parents referred to the importance of the time their child spends with other children: ‘It is important for her to mix and play with other children’; ‘taking her to playgroup is very important for her’; ‘starting nursery has given her lots of confidence’. Parents’ role in - ‘taking the child out of the house a lot’ as one mother remarked, was another concrete behaviour change promoted by the initiative.
ii) Changes in parents’ beliefs and attitudes

Change in parenting techniques
In addition to the behavioural changes, there were many parents for whom the initiative served as a motivation for belief and attitude change. Many parents suggested that the change occurred in their inner attitude and beliefs towards their discipline techniques: ‘I let him get on now, you know, when he’s lining his cars up”; ‘I’m more permissive now”. Some parents referred to a change in parenting as a result of practitioners’ suggesting useful parenting methods such as praise or positive regard: ‘Being more positive with her”; ‘I praise more’. Many of them felt they had regained control of their own lives and feelings. For example attitudes and beliefs towards certain disciplinary techniques had changed: ‘I know I have to keep to what I say and keep calm”; ‘I shout less’. For some parents, less endorsement of control was viewed as the most important thing they can do to enhance their children’s learning and confidence: ‘It is important that I encourage his independence in all things”; ‘I try to push him to do things himself, so he realises what they’re capable of’.

More time dedication
The most significant attitude change occurred on a very basic level. When asked what things parents do to help their child to learn and feel confident, the majority of parents referred to the amount of time committed to their child. Parents seemed to be aware that in order to develop a relationship with their child, time dedication is needed: ‘Spending time with them is most important”; ‘Being with him all the time”; ‘Gardening, cooking - we do lots of things together - I think that’s important. Hence, the idea of active involvement was conceptualised by some parents as simply an increased interaction with their child: ‘Now I’m more involved with the kids’. A general increased interest in the child follows naturally from the theme of active involvement. The ELPP initiative is often mentioned as an important motive for this change: ‘She [the home visitor] helped me to develop a strong interest in his learning’.

Where do parents go for help and advice?
Another change noticed in ELPP parents was in their accounts of where they sought help or advice. In the early interviews, family members were cited as the main port of call for seeking advice, followed by the health visitor. However, in the late interviews parents named ELPP staff as their second source of advice, moving ahead of health visitors or any other professionals (GP, therapist etc).

iii) Changes in children’s behaviour as noticed by their parents

The ‘late’ parent interviews asked questions about changes noticed in the children since the last visit by a researcher. Developmental progress (physical or language progress) was the most common positive change reported by the parents: ‘His speech is much clearer and he can say exact words”; ‘She walks more’. The second most important positive change mentioned by the parents was their children’s social progression. Parents expressed how their children are learning to share and becoming more confident in social situations: ‘He’s a lot more confident with people and approaching other children”; ‘She gained social confidence with adults’. Many parents saw this social development as a direct consequence of their participation in ELPP group sessions. Playing alongside others has been beneficial in teaching the child to play as part of a group, take turns and share fairly: ‘He has learnt to share, especially at groups’. Furthermore, children have not only learned how to interact within groups but have also gained experience in how to interact with their own parents. Parents were pleased about their child’s improved comprehension: ‘He understands instructions better, he helps me more’ and better understanding of their expectations: ‘He understands a lot more now - when I speak to him’, ‘He has a better understanding of right and wrong’. This cognitive progress seems to have led to a direct positive effect on the overall parent-child relationship.
Stronger physical attachment
The interviewed sample of parents seem to enjoy a better parent-child bond, as highlighted by the mentioning of positive changes in child’s behaviour towards them. Parents reported that their children are becoming more emotionally and physically attached: ‘He’s a lot closer to me. If he is upset he stays with me till he is happy’; ‘She is very gentle, cuddles me more’.

7.10 Enhanced parent-child relationship

As noted already in the ‘early’ interviews, parents positively commented on how the initiative has promoted better parent-child interactions and has contributed to an enhanced relationship with their child.

Emotional warmth
The theme of emotional warmth was evident in most of the answers received in the ‘late’ interviews. Parents viewed physical affection as the third most important thing they can do to support their children’s learning (preceded by a certain type of activity and a greater time dedication): ‘Giving him cuddles is important’; ‘Always keep him close to me, show him lots of love and hold him’. Parents also perceived their children to be more secure in their relationship: ‘She is a lot closer to me now.’ Close emotional attachments between parents and children were mentioned by many parents after ELPP participation.

Activities to support child’s early learning
ELPP has encouraged parents to actively participate in reading, singing and rhyming, or play activities with their children. Importantly, parents have been explained the importance of these in their child’s learning experience: ‘xxx [home visitor] made me understand that it’s his schema and that’s the way he learns’; ‘showed me how his brain works so he really needs it [mother referring to the importance of play]’; ‘Made me a strong parent. I understand xxx [my child] a lot more.’ As a result, activities which parents previously valued as educationally beneficial for their children and which were observed at groups or home visits, were reported in the ‘late’ interviews to be put into practice by parents themselves. Figure 7.4 graphically illustrates the main changes found in parents’ ‘late’ accounts.

Summary of the parental ‘accounts’ of participation in ELPP and what they have gained from it

Parents interviewed ‘early’ into their participation in ELPP were aware of their role in their children’s development, and the activities available to support their children’s learning. Analysis of ‘late’ questionnaires revealed some important changes in parenting practices and in the affective relationships between the ELPP parents and their children. Parents have been helped to develop a better attachment-relationship with their children. A change in their parenting techniques and beliefs (e.g. more praising, more time dedication) has also been reported. The analysis of their accounts has suggested a more educationally-focused approach to some routine activities. Parents reported having adopted new ways of reading and playing with their child, as well as carrying out other activities viewed as important to support their child’s learning. Thus the knowledge parents gained from ELPP staff led to an increased cognitive and emotional understanding of their child which led to (at least in their own eyes) an enhanced parent-child relationship.

Overall, parents interviewed later into their ELPP participation confirmed that a longer participation in ELPP has enhanced their enjoyment of the initiative. Answers along the line of ‘It’s perfect, I wouldn’t change anything’ were predominant when parents were asked in which ways the ELPP group sessions could be improved. However, parents did express a strong wish for longer sessions, again highlighting their enjoyment: ‘The sessions aren’t long enough. Need more time’; ‘make it longer, let mothers stay as long as they want’.

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Fig 7.1 What do parents say is important for their children’s learning?

**Education/Teaching key skills**
- “Teaching” moral values
- “Teaching” social skills
- “Teaching” preschool skills

**Encouragement/Confidence/Boundaries/Guidance**
- Independence
- Permission
  - “He’s learning from me”
  - “I want him to manage things himself”
- Modelling
  - “I let him choose”

**Social Interaction and communication**
- Peer
  - “Being with other children”
- Family
  - “Visiting grandparents”
- Adult friends

**Emotional warmth**
- Recognition
  - “Praise him”
- Positive regard
  - “Making sure he feels safe and loved”
- Attention
  - “They love attention”
- Sharing affection
  - “He likes cuddles”

**Recognition**
- “I’m always there to help”
- “I’m always there to help”
- “‘To be understood, to be shown reassurance’”

**Activities**
- Excursions
  - Fine motor
    - “Painting; puzzles”
  - Reading
  - Varied activities
    - “Trying to do new things with her”; “To feel busy”
  - Outdoor active physical play
    - “Play catch”
  - Resources
    - Adult things
    - Toys in general
      - TV, PC, Video
    - Books
    - Resources
    - TV, PC, Video
    - Nap, Sleep
    - Rest
    - Structured environment
    - “My CD player”
    - “Appropriate toys”

**Resources**
- Nap, Sleep
- Rest
- Structured environment
- “Needs an environment that isn’t chaotic”
Figure 7.2: What did parents enjoy about the ELPP groups?

- **Children learning new things/Cognitive stimulation**
  - 'My child is learning'
  - 'Do different activities every time'
- **Range of activities**
- **Opportunities for excursions**
- **Variety**
- **The environment**
  - Structured
  - Safe
  - Providing resources and space
  - Good atmosphere
  - 'Child is safe'
  - 'Have sofas and kettle there'
- **The social aspect**
  - Interaction with peers (children)
  - Interaction with other mothers
  - Interaction with members of staff
  - 'Feeling of belonging to a group'
  - 'We all play TOGETHER!'
  - 'Feel relaxed there, can talk freely'
- **Support (for the parent)**
  - Feeling supported
  - Professional help
  - Opportunities for Lifelong Learning
  - 'It gave me something for myself!'
  - 'They give good advice'
  - 'Gained confidence'
  - 'It's for free!'
  - 'It gave me something for myself!'
7.3 Aspects of ELPP initiative perceived by parents as beneficial for them or their children

- **Social benefits**
  - Social interaction for the child
    - ‘He can mix with other children’
  - Ideas through social interaction
    - ‘Can see things in them [other parents] that I want to do differently with my child’

- **Practical benefits—Coping with overload**
  - Advocacy
    - ‘She [ELPP home visitor] helps me to get disability funds’
  - House chores
    - ‘She helps with ironing and cleaning’
  - Help with care
    - ‘J. [ELPP worker] played with them [other children] while I was doing housework’

- **Knowledge broadening/knowledge sharing**
  - Raising
    - ‘I now understand more why is xxx behaving in that way’
  - Professional
    - ‘I used speech therapist’

- **Emotional support for the parent**
  - Self-esteem
    - ‘Has given me confidence’
  - Motivation
    - ‘I want to try harder’
  - Emotional harmony
    - ‘I have more peace of mind now’
  - Encouragement
    - ‘She (ELPP worker) gives me emotional support’
7.4 Changes over time in parents and children as reported by ELPP parents interviewed ‘late’

**Changes in parents**

- **Change in parents’ beliefs and attitudes**
  - ‘Has changed the way I discipline’

- **Change in parenting techniques**
  - ‘I know I have to spend more time with her’

- **More time dedication**

- **Providing a social experience for the child**
  - ‘I know now that taking him out of house is really important’

- **Change in parents’ behaviour**
  - ‘I’ll let him play with dough at home, am not worried about the mess’

- **Enhanced child-parent relationship**
  - ‘Has changed the way I discipline’

  - ‘I know I have to spend more time with her’

**Changes in children**

- **Better understanding**
  - ‘He’s a lot more responsive to requests I make for him to behave himself’

- **Physical affection**
  - ‘Is more loving, gives me more hugs’

- **More active involvement**

- **Emphasis and a new way of...**

- **Rhyming activities**

- **New activities**
  - ‘I’ll let him play with dough at home, am not worried about the mess’

- **Getting a new resource**
  - ‘I will try to get him more of those toys’ [observed at ELPP centre]

- **Early numeracy activities**

- **Play**

- **Shared reading**
7.11 Drawing together parental views and observations

Demographic data on the interview sub-sample show that the ELPP staff were reaching families who were disadvantaged when compared to samples used in national studies such as NESS. Moreover, the sub-sample of families interviewed were broadly similar to the ELPP population on most of the key characteristics that define disadvantage (section 4.4).

Parents were positive in describing their participation in ELPP. They cited benefits for themselves and their children stemming from both home and centre-based experiences. They commented on the intellectual benefits of participating in ELPP but they also liked the emotional benefits such as the *cosy feel* and the *kettle always there*. Statements made by parents when they were first visited indicated that they were largely aware of their role in their children’s learning. They recognised the importance of their involvement as well as the importance of providing a high quality environment that enhances several aspects of a child’s development. Parents interviewed ‘late’ in their participation reported a growth in their awareness of how they could support their children’s learning; a realisation of the importance of their role in their children’s life as first educator; and an understanding of how change in their behaviour will be reflected in their children’s overall emotional and cognitive development.

The structured observations showed that most of the parents who had been interviewed early in their participation in ELPP demonstrated satisfactory or good parenting skills. Most of the mothers and the few fathers interviewed were caring parents, who reported using a variety of means to support their children’s learning. The only aspect of parenting in which some of the parents had low scores was ‘Involvement in Learning’. Those ELPP families (about 22%) who scored low on this subscale might be considered ‘at risk’ of low support for their children’s learning (6.5 and Figure 6.1). However, the majority of parents in the ELPP sample showed little weakness in supporting their children’s learning through activities and interactions that stretched the child’s mind. This was a surprising finding because the ELPP initiative was intended to target parents who needed support to increase their skills as educators of their own children.

The families with low scores on ‘Involvement in Learning’ were appropriately targeted by ELPP, although there were few of them in the sample. Evidence showed that the parenting scores of ethnic minority families were satisfactory to good, though agencies felt that they would benefit, particularly by increasing their social capital and extending opportunities for the child to participate in activities where English is the primary language. With this in mind, it is important to note that two fifths of the sample reported attending a ‘new group’ since their first interview, and have probably increased their engagement with mainstream services.

A number of reasons may account for the satisfactory quality of parenting observed at the outset, including the methods of recruitment to the parenting interview sample (section 3.6) which resulted in limited access to parents who were stressed from housing issues, had mental health problems, or were suspected to be violent. Furthermore, the parents accessed via the evaluation may not have been completely new to parenting risk-prevention programmes, having been involved in other parenting programmes at an earlier point. Section 7.2 and 5.4 noted that the parents accessed for interview early in the evaluation may have been those who were most easily accessible to the site while the new ELPP approach was developing, or while sites were awaiting key players within the local community to help them locate the most excluded families.

When ‘early’ and ‘late’ observations of parents at home with their children were compared for signs of progress, ELPP parents showed improvements on certain aspects of parenting, most notably when considering their relationships with their children. The majority of change within the parents was related to parental warmth and feeling rather than to children’s learning. The change therefore merely enhanced an observed strength instead of addressing cognitive or language stimulation at home. However a safer home environment and an improvement in the level of routine within the child’s life in order to stimulate learning were also found in the ‘late’ observations. Parents appear to be providing their children with more opportunities to leave the house (e.g. shopping trips) and
more routine (such as using a regular babysitter), both of which are important to children’s cognitive development as they allow opportunities for stimulation. A shopping trip would present new and interesting experiences to the child. Similarly the introduction of a regular babysitter to the child will allow them to understand that different adults have different expectations. These experiences can prepare them for nursery and pre-school. Increased scores on the organisation subscale suggest the ELPP parents have improved in providing for their children’s health through regular visits to a doctor, reflecting the objective of some sites to educate parents in their children’s welfare, and the home-visiting nature of some agencies which may help provide parents with ideas on how to make their home environment safer for their children.

Analyses suggest that the ELPP initiative may have been more beneficial to ‘partnered’ parents, and to families where the primary respondent was in employment (and therefore their partner performed the majority of childcare during work hours) as there was an improvement in the relationship towards their children. The ELPP initiative may have been more beneficial to single parents or those who do not own their own homes by showing the parents ways to further their children’s learning, by, for example, more shopping excursions.

The ELPP evaluation did not show evidence of significant improvements in the levels of cognitive and language stimulation for the child. A number of factors may have led to this, including the fact that programmes required more time and/or intensity to have an effect on parenting skills as educators. One recommendation for the future is a longer intervention to allow time for the parents to develop new patterns of behaviour in their interactions with their children. Another recommendation for the future is to use more structured, cognitive and behavioural programmes.

7.12 Key points for parental views and outcomes

Successes

- The ELPP parent sub-sample has been shown to fall within the target of the ELPP initiative based on demographic characteristics including ethnicity, socio-economic status and the amount of benefits and credits received.
- Parents’ experiences of participating in the ELPP initiative were mainly positive. Many aspects of the programme were valued, with parents commenting on the enjoyment and benefit for their child.
- Parents’ interviews also indicated that specific benefits from ELPP included the following: support through interaction with other parents and members of the ELPP team; social engagement in regaining emotional health; practical help in coping with everyday activities; increased awareness and empathy towards their child; knowledge exchange leading to new skills, techniques and creative ideas.
- At interview, parents praised the ‘knowledge exchange’ through which they learned ways to support their children’s language development. These included shared reading and other literacy-related activities but also following a routine and praising the child’s advances in language.
- On objective parenting measures, the ELPP parent sub-sample showed some improvement between early and late visits. Parents appeared more positive and less negative on the Parental Feelings Questionnaire. They also achieved higher scores on the ‘Organisation’ subscale of the HOME, suggesting that parents are introducing more routines to their children, paying more attention to their health and safety and producing further opportunities for the child to leave the house.
- Families showing an improvement in their relationships with their children were mainly two-parent families or families where the primary respondent was in employment. Families showing an improvement in organisational routines (such as ‘outings’) and a new focus on their child’s health were mainly single-parent families, or those who do not own their own homes.
• Structured interview questions showed that about 40% of the families who were followed over time increased their engagement in group activities e.g. parent groups or library events for young children.
• ELPP shows that it is possible to reach and engage some vulnerable families in disadvantaged areas in an educationally oriented initiative.

Challenges

• Statements made by parents when they were first visited indicated that they were largely aware of their role in their children’s learning. They recognised the importance of their involvement as well as providing a stimulating environment. Services for parents therefore need to aim at more than ‘awareness’ to bring about positive change in parenting behaviours.
• Although ELPP was targeting the more excluded families with children at risk of learning delay, observational data showed that most of the ELPP parents had satisfactory or even good parenting skills. Most showed emotional warmth and support for their child’s learning but more than a fifth did not engage with their children in activities that were intellectually stretching. The challenge for future work is to respond to a range of parental needs: including intellectual challenge for children; improved family relationships; and greater participation in mainstream services.
• Families had many and varied needs, ranging from poor parenting skills, to mental health problems, to severe social isolation. Efficient use of resources requires careful targeting of services to the discrete needs of vulnerable families and the orchestration of inter-agency responses.
• The time-scale of the initiative and of the evaluation combined with the lack of a control group left no scope for a study on child outcomes.
Chapter 8: The Implications of the ELPP Initiative

8.1 The ELPP initiative

Strand 1 of the Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP) initiative, the demonstration projects, ran from October 2006 to March 2008. It was funded by the DCSF and was taken forward on behalf of the DCSF by the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI). The purpose of ELPP was to work through voluntary sector agencies to encourage and develop practices which could help parents of one to three year old children who were at risk of learning delay to engage with supporting their children’s learning; and to focus particularly on parents who may not be aware of their potential to support their children in this way. ELPP was therefore located within an early intervention framework and aimed at putting in place family-based educational support as a protective factor in the lives of young children.

The evaluation has shown that there was considerable variation across the sites where ELPP was implemented. The 20 sites which were studied differed historically in whether they worked with adults or with children; some were settings-based; others focused primarily on home visiting; in some volunteers undertook home-visits; in other sites there were no volunteers; and in some, ELPP was carried out by local authority workers. Sites also varied in the extent to which they had expertise in attracting more socially excluded adults to their provision. ELPP therefore has provided a test-bed example of introducing similar initiatives into the wide range of sites available and can offer lessons for commissioning services and monitoring their implementation.

8.2 ELPP in the context of current early years policy

It is now accepted that the link between disadvantage and achievement is cumulative. For example, it is known that when children enter primary school, despite early indications of potential, poorer children tend to fall behind (Feinstein, 2003, 2004). Consequently, the chances of breaking cycles of poverty and deprivation are considerably reduced as children get older (DfES, 2004a). However, a range of protective factors has been identified which can help children overcome their initial disadvantage and ultimately prevent social exclusion. These include:

- Strong relationships with parents, family members and other significant adults;
- Parental interest and involvement in education with clear and high expectations;
- Positive role models;
- Active involvement in family, school and community life;
- Recognition, praise and feeling valued.

These factors are now recognised as important by policy makers, who consequently highlight the involvement of parents in children’s educational trajectories.

...parenting appears to be the most important factor associated with educational attainment at age ten which in turn is strongly associated with achievement later in life. Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers (DCSF, 2003a).
These policy statements are backed by recent UK research. The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) study found that:

The quality of the learning environment of the home (where parents are actively engaged in activities with their children) promoted intellectual and social development in all children. Although parents’ social class and levels of education were related to child outcomes, the quality of the home learning environment was more important. What parents do is more important than who they are.

(Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart, 2004, p. 57)

EPPE evidence suggests how important it is that local authorities commission services that improve parents’ understanding and skills as well as their engagement with their children’s early learning in the home. It found, for example, that parents’ involvement in their children’s early learning at home had continued significant positive benefits for children’s attainment and social behaviour at age seven or older. These benefits were particularly important for children of low income mothers with few qualifications. EPPE evidence also indicated that higher qualified early years staff do enhance children’s development and make a difference to child outcomes (Taggart, Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Melhuish, Sammons, and Walker-Hall, 2000; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sammons, Melhuish, Elliot, and Totsika, 2006).

While EPPE findings point to the importance of parental skills alongside a focus on achieving their engagement, the Birth to Three Matters framework (DfES, 2003b) reflected a more general preventative approach. Aimed primarily at practitioners working directly with children, the framework provided guiding principles for practice and was based on the following premises:

- parents and families are central to the well-being of the child;
- relationships with other people (both adults and children) are of crucial importance in a child’s life;
- learning is a shared process; children learn most effectively when, with the help of a trusted, knowledgeable adult, they are actively involved and interested;
- caring adults count more than resources and equipment; and
- children learn by doing rather than by being told.

The recent Children’s Plan echoes the Birth to Three Matters framework with the following five principles:

- government does not bring up children - parents do - so government needs to do more to back parents and families;
- all children have the potential to succeed and should go as far as their talents can take them;
- children and young people need to enjoy their childhood as well as grow up prepared for adult life;
- services need to be shaped by and responsive to children, young people and families, not designed around professional boundaries; and
- it is always better to prevent failure than tackle a crisis later.

(DCSF, 2007a, pp.5, 6)

The ELPP initiative has therefore reflected current policy direction and has additionally complemented the work of the Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) project, also funded by the DCSF until March 2008. PPEL, delivered through the statutory sector by 41 English local authorities, has had similar aims to those of ELPP, focusing on involving parents with their children’s early learning to enhance their children’s language, literacy, personal, social and emotional development.
The Phase 1 evaluation report on PPEL Parental Involvement - a snapshot of policy and practice (DCSF, 2007b) summarised key elements in the baseline audit of PPEL. The points made included the following two, which are of direct relevance to the lessons to be learnt from the implementation of ELPP:

- **There is a need for greater precision and clarity in the definitions of ‘parental support’, ‘parental engagement’ and ‘parental involvement’ as a part of strategy development.**

- **There is a wide range of programmes on offer across authorities focused on parenting skills, family learning, and parental engagement and involvement in children’s learning. However audit findings suggest that many of these programmes have been developed in response to localised initiatives rather than in response to coherent authority-wide strategies on parental involvement.**

The first point extracted from the PPEL report is addressed both in this chapter and in 6.5 in the present report. In particular, a distinction is drawn between engaging the more socially excluded parents and working with them to develop their skills and understandings of how to support their children’s learning. This distinction has enabled a teasing out of the different strands of activity undertaken by ELPP-funded practitioners under the general term of parental involvement.

The second point taken from the report on PPEL echoes the analysis in section 5.6 of the present report. There, practitioners’ frustrations about influencing local authorities on the basis of relatively small scale projects were outlined and it is suggested that more attention needs to be paid to how the knowledge, which is generated in innovative practices, is moved upstream to inform local, and national, strategies.

8.3 The Evaluation

The ELPP evaluation was not set up to identify the relative success of the individual approaches which informed practices in the sites. That task would have been impossible for two reasons: firstly, the one year time-scale of the evaluation would not have permitted it; secondly, many of the sites were drawing on more than one approach as they worked responsively with specific groups or individual parents. Instead, the intention of the evaluation was to examine the implementation of ELPP and to offer findings which could inform the development of similar initiatives.

The research team started its work in April 2007 and finished in March 2008. It looked at activities over that period in longitudinal studies in 20 sites across England. The team examined how the principles and purposes of ELPP, together with the approach-related training received by staff, were influencing:

- the work of the sites as organisations, the services delivered in those sites and the impact of ELPP on the development of service provision within local authorities;
- workforce development among practitioners who worked with parents and their children; and
- how parents supported their young children as learners.

The implementation of Strand 1 of ELPP was complex and called for a mixed methods evaluation which could (a) capture and make sense of complexity and (b) examine the influence of ELPP on the organisations where it was implemented; the workforce; and the parents who experienced it.

The study therefore consisted of 20 longitudinal case studies of the sites as organisational systems together with a sample of more than 100 parents drawn from across the sites. In addition, the research team gathered information about the intentions and reflections of the nine agencies in interviews with senior staff; undertook post-code analyses of local demographics; and gathered questionnaire data on the take up of ELPP services. The team is indebted to
everyone who participated in the study for their patience and support. The detailed findings of the evaluation are provided in Chapters 4-7 of this report. A brief overview follows here, before the implications of ELPP for policy, practice and future research are outlined.

8.4 Summary of findings

(i) A major shift in focus for many services was for practitioners to see adults primarily as parents rather than clients who can make a difference to their children’s development as learners, and to bring parents into partnerships which recognised their influence on their children’s learning. By the end of the study practitioners reported that ELPP had substantially shaped their thinking about parents’ contributions to children’s early learning and that they would take their new understandings into the work they undertook when ELPP funding ceased.

(ii) At the same time, practitioners worked hard to sustain the work started by the ELPP initiative. These efforts were more likely to succeed if resources could be found within services or within agencies than if they were to come from local authorities. Importantly, ELPP was not well-networked into local authority systems through, for example, the engagement of local stakeholders in partnership arrangements. Consequently, ELPP principles were largely championed locally by senior staff in services which had received funding. There was little evidence that the local authorities had been able to learn from the lessons offered by the voluntary sector organisations involved.

(iii) Short-term funding was a major problem with considerable implications at the operational level. For example, the short time-frame for the initiative meant that in the majority of sites there was insufficient time for the potential of ELPP-funded activity to be recognised by other local service providers, though, there were some examples of ELPP services developing local inter-agency links at the level of practice to avoid families being left without support once funding had ceased. Short-term funding also produced an unwillingness to start to engage with the most socially excluded families because of concerns about letting them down once funding ceased.

(iv) Importantly, there was a potential tension between a dual focus on attracting and developing the confidence of the more vulnerable and socially excluded parents alongside a focus on equipping them with skills to support their children’s learning, not least because of the need to work responsively with the most vulnerable parents to prevent the destabilising of other areas of their lives. In some of the sites, which were working with the most vulnerable parents, there were questions about the appropriateness of shifting their focus to educationally-oriented preventative work. For some sites, however, the challenge was rather different, because although ELPP provided training to equip practitioners for work with parents to help them to support their children’s learning it did not include guidance on attracting and engaging the most socially excluded parents and not all services had the same level of expertise in this area.

(v) The training that was received was largely welcomed and practitioners gained skills and understanding about how to work with parents to support children’s learning. However, training tended to broaden rather than enhance the expertise of most practitioners. The eagerness with which practitioners approached much of training, and their appreciation of the ideas shared in training, suggests that there is a considerable thirst for relevant knowledge among practitioners. Alongside formal training, workplace staff development, which involved discussion and feedback, was also important in sustaining and refining lessons from training.
(vi) The parent interviews showed many perceived benefits of participation in ELPP: fresh ideas for playing and talking with children, new confidence in their role as educators, keen appreciation for the professional skills of the ELPP workers. Structured questionnaires early and late in parents’ participation revealed improvements in parent child relationships, even after controlling for parental education and elapsed time between the two observations. Finally, the widely regarded HOME observation revealed positive changes in the ways parents ‘organised’ the child’s environment, making it safer and opening up new experiences in the community for the children. There remains one concern in proclaiming ELPP a success: numerous studies have shown parental report of new learning and improved relationships does not necessarily lead to improved child cognitive outcomes, i.e., ‘learning’. (Melhuish, Belsky, and Leyland, 2008; Hiscock, Bayer, Price, Ukoumunne, Rogers, and Wake, 2008).

8.5 Implications for policy

Interviews with senior staff in the nine agencies in March 2008 revealed reflections which had implications for the development of policy.

(i) Although agency staff indicated that ELPP will leave what was described as a very positive legacy, there was a consistent message about the difficulty of sustainability. Almost all the agencies indicated that it would be difficult to continue this sort of work with the necessary intensity, as that required both time and funds.

(ii) A second strong message was the importance of ELPP’s focus on early learning. However, some of the agency staff suggested that this focus had not been taken far enough. They suggested that opportunities to discuss and debate approaches with experienced colleagues had not been created. The tensions between early education and family support, and between adult education and early learning approaches, were recognised but could have been more fully explored at an inter-agency strategic level during the implementation of ELPP.

(iii) Thirdly, all the agencies appreciated government recognition of the potential contribution of the voluntary sector to work with families who were disaffected with the statutory sector. However, agency staff reported tensions between VCS and statutory sector services in local authorities and suggested that a stronger steer from government on the role of the VCS would have been helpful. In particular, they suggested that there was need for more encouragement from the national level about how ELPP might be tied into local authority plans once initiative funding ceased.

(iv) Agencies agreed that the ELPP consortium model could provide a useful precedent for future initiatives. However, they indicated that more could have been made of the opportunities for inter-agency collaboration at a strategic level than the ELPP consortium model delivered.

(v) Criticisms of how agencies were commissioned included a widespread view that the timescale had been much too tight. Bids for the funding had to be put together hastily by the agencies over the summer of 2006 when there was no opportunity to consult with education colleagues or with local nurseries. It was agreed that the programme had needed more lead-in time. Agencies recognised the pressures from tight funding schedules in central government, but they were critical of the pressures to produce quick results, and more importantly, the potential impact of these pressures on parents in difficult and sensitive situations. The pressures from what was seen as the short-term nature of the initiative meant that agencies had to be very selective as to the work they could undertake. Consequently, there was strong agreement that it was sensible to select operations which were already running a range of services, so that the new initiative could be integrated into the bigger picture and more easily maintained and sustained, in areas where they were already known and trusted.
There was a general view that the evaluation had been commissioned far too late, some six months in to an eighteen month initiative, when decisions had already been made by the consortium and the agencies about implementation. One effect of this delay for the agencies had been the lack of agreement on any base-line data collection, despite efforts by the consortium to get this discussed at the initial stages of development. Thus the opportunity to collect robust data to a common format by the agencies was lost. An additional reflection from the research team is that early years services should be required to collect postcode data routinely, as with PLASC data collected by early education settings, to enable more robust evaluation of targeting and uptake.

Analysis of data from the sites also raises issues of relevance to policy.

There was agreement amongst ELPP staff and families that the focus on parents as educators was exactly what was needed. Parents and staff in the sites agreed with policies aimed at enhancing parental involvement in their children’s learning. The evidence for such confidence is in their own observation of families and parenting staff working together to reduce risks to children, especially those associated with exclusion.

The analysis of ELPP evaluation data indicates the importance of targeting both geographical areas of disadvantage and vulnerable families within these areas.

Site-based staff made it clear short-term funding inhibited their ability to target the most vulnerable families because of the time needed to develop appropriate relationships.

Difficulties reported by staff about influencing policy and strategy in local authorities, suggest that initiatives of this kind need to be set within frameworks that ensure that knowledge generated in practice moves upstream in local systems.

8.6 Implications for practice

The implications of the dual focus of ELPP

Figure 8.1 describes the components of ELPP from the perspective of practitioners. Their intention was to help families move along two parallel but linked trajectories. The first trajectory in 8.1 captures the engagement of families. This engagement can range from that found in families which are among the most excluded, to engagement in mainstream services that support children. The second trajectory represents the enhancement of parental understanding and skills over time. This trajectory ranges from parents who are unaware of their potential role as supporters of their children’s learning, to families where parents are aware of this role and are equipped with the necessary skills to support their children as learners. Movement along both trajectories towards (i) engagement with mainstream services for children and (ii) the development of the skills and understanding which are used to support children’s as learners can together be seen in terms of an increasing involvement of parents in their children’s learning.

Evidence from the study shows that families had different starting points on these trajectories and varying responsiveness to the opportunities on offer. Different outcomes are therefore to be expected of different parents as not only are parents’ starting points different, but their capacity to work with ELPP-based ideas will also vary.

Practitioners assessed parents’ starting points on both trajectories and adapted how they used the various ideas and material resources available to them to support
parents as they developed skills and understandings. These adaptations suggest that however useful the training in specific approaches was, practitioners needed and made use of a degree of freedom of movement to make responsive adjustments when working with vulnerable parents.

(iii) There was less evidence that practitioners were learning through ELPP how they might recruit and engage with the more excluded families, there was a need for guidance in some cases.

(iv) Practitioners discussed the need to work at different rates on each trajectory and, where necessary, focus on the inclusion trajectory before turning to supporting the development of skills and understandings. These comments from several sites suggest that for some families the process of engaging the most excluded families is a slow one which needs to be given adequate time.

(v) Perhaps because of the short time-scale of the intervention, there was little evidence of efforts to enable parents to take control over their own life trajectories rather than maintain a relationship of dependency with service providers.

(vi) Most of the ELPP sites made improvements in parenting practices a cornerstone of their practice. All focused on learning, although in very different ways. The parenting element of the evaluation suggests that parents changed more in their relationships with their children and in ‘global’ support for learning rather than in specific behaviours such as labelled praise or the use of household routines for vocabulary learning. This suggests that future work with parents ought to focus more concretely on parenting behaviours in addition to attitudes and aspirations.

Training

A strong message from the analysis of what practitioners were learning and doing is that there was a thirst for knowledge and understanding among ELPP-funded practitioners, regardless of professional background.

(vii) On relatively short courses, complex ideas could only be presented in quite simple forms, but concepts such as brain plasticity, schema and attachment were seen as immediately relevant and appropriate to share with parents.

(viii) Practitioners were less pleased with training which focused only on resources but valued those which connected resources with ideas which they could share with parents.

(ix) Where funding for short-term training interventions is available there is a tension between training for specific interventions such as The Incredible Years (Webster Stratton, 1992) and a broader training in supporting young children’s learning. One leads to specific skills that can be applied in specific circumstances, the other to flexible work across different individuals and needs. The evaluation literature strongly supports specific training, while many practitioners call for the latter. It is suggested that tightly focused training is the better use of limited funding.

(x) There is also a case for more advanced and longer term provision which extends across approaches and enables practitioners to work in more depth with understandings of how children learn and adults can support that learning.
Staff development

Across the sites there were differences in the extent to which practitioners were able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ELPP to develop their thinking about how to work with parents and to take forward ELPP principles in their future work.

(xi) These differences were clearly linked to the extent to which sites paid attention to knowledge sharing; discussing and questioning practices; seeking new knowledge sources such as information from other professional specialisms; and supporting each other as they learnt in both formal and informal ways through feedback from parents and colleagues.

(xii) Problems with the timing of training and the availability of resources also highlighted the need for a good workplace learning environment.

(xiii) Consequently, it is not enough to roll out a programme - attention needs to be paid to features of the site where the intervention is implemented. Of these features, evidence from ELPP suggests that a focus in the workplace on supporting staff learning is important.

(xiv) Staff learning is more powerful when connected with specific sets of objectives and principles for working with parents.

8.7 The implementation and efficacy of ELPP as a preventative initiative

The current study contributes to understanding the processes of implementation of early interventions focusing on strong parental involvement. The findings of the study are relevant to current government policy as ELPP both emphasised the crucial role played by parents during early childhood and highlighted the importance of workforce development to support that parental role.

The findings pose questions about the replicability and the extent of change in parents’ behaviour despite their talking with enthusiasm about their roles as educators. In addition, because of the timescale, this study could not demonstrate that ELPP prevented learning delay, nor does it offer answers to the crucial question: do the interventions that comprise the ELPP initiative make a difference to children’s long-term learning? However, the study documents successful organisational practices that brought about valuable changes in the workplace and in practitioners’ new awareness and commitment to parent involvement.

The ELPP initiative aimed at providing ‘protective factors’ which are likely to prevent social exclusion. The initiative was ambitious given its short time scale. The challenges involved in the dual focus of engaging socially excluded parents and preparing them to support their children as learners should not be underestimated. Sites and practitioners made informed professional judgments about which approaches to use and how to use them with different parents. This summary indicates the importance of developing understandings and skills among practitioners and the continuous development of those skills in the workplace.
Figure 8.1 ELPP as Educationally Oriented Intervention

Tools¹
i.e. Bookstart; Campaign for Learning; Home-Start, I CAN; Listening to Children; Newpin’s Family Play Programme; One Plus One’s Brief Encounters; PAFT; PEAL; PEEP; PICL; SHARE; Thurrock Community

Histories of agencies

Histories of services and communities

Practitioners²

Engagement

Families’ trajectories³

(i) Families which are engaged in mainstream services that support children as learners

(ii) Families which are aware of their potential role and are equipped with skills to support their children as learners

(i) Families which are most excluded

(ii) Families which are unaware of their potential role as supporters of their children’s learning

Understanding and skills

¹ Tools varied between for example programmes such as PEEP and sets of ideas such as PAFT.
² Practitioners had a wide range of qualifications, experience and opportunities to learn.
³ Families had different starting points on these trajectories and varying responsiveness to the opportunities on offer.
8.8 Implications for research

The ELPP evaluation has used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study a bold new initiative with the VCS sector that focused on new ways to ‘reach’ parents whose children were at risk of learning delay. The initiative aimed to reduce ‘risk’ to children’s development of a variety factors known to lead to a poor start to school.

This evaluation suggests three very different lines for future research.

(i) The first is an evaluation of the work of several agencies that would study the effects of participation on both parents and children. This should take the form of a randomised control trial of 2-3 distinct approaches to work with families. Its outcomes would include measures of parenting and also children’s social and cognitive/linguistic development over time.

(ii) The second line of research needs to focus quite explicitly on staff training and qualifications for work with parents as early educators of their children. A mixed methods design would be appropriate here.

(iii) A third line would be an examination of how knowledge generated in innovative practices is mobilised and moved upstream in systems to inform strategy and policy. Here the analytical framework outlined in Appendix A can be applied.

8.9 Lessons from the evaluation

Key points to reiterate in conclusion are as follows:

(i) The opportunity for the VCS to demonstrate its capabilities was appreciated by the agencies involved.

(ii) ELPP required a shift in focus in the work of many staff. Practitioners demonstrated their ability to learn new ways of working. However, these new forms of working were still in their early stages by the end of the initiative.

(iii) ELPP involved practitioners in informed decision-making as they selected ways of working with parents. The initiative, therefore, demonstrated the demands that this kind of responsive work can make on practitioners and indicated the importance of support for them.

(iv) This work involved changing perceptions of adults from seeing them as ‘vulnerable clients’ to working with them as parents who were educators of their young children.

(v) ELPP shows that it is possible to reach and engage some vulnerable families in disadvantaged areas.

(vi) It is possible that lessons from the ELPP initiative may be wasted without a framework of ensuring that knowledge generated within these practices can informed local strategy and policy.

(vii) One question still remains, do the interventions that comprise the ELPP initiative make a difference to children’s long-term learning?
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- Appendix I: Observation grid and target practitioner summary
- Appendix J: Summary of Target Practitioner Observations in the sites
- Appendix K: Technical analysis of parent data
Appendix A: The Activity Theory framework for examining the ELPP case studies
An overview of activity theory based on the work of Engeström, 1987, 1999

Why use activity theory?

In examining service and organisational outcomes and workforce development in ELPP, the research team drew on activity theory. Activity theory allows the investigation of how people work in their social, cultural and historical contexts; and how those contexts shape and are shaped by the development of working practices. The study demanded a case study framework which would allow a systematic comparison across case sites over time and which would be able to capture (a) practitioners’ learning as they engaged in new practices and (b) organisational change in response to these practices. Activity theory offers a systemic and longitudinal framework for understanding the development of practices and practitioners’ learning and therefore meets these requirements.

Practitioners’ learning

The team used activity theory to explore shifts in practitioners’ ways of understanding the work required by ELPP funding and how they worked with resources and ideas as they acted on what they saw as the new tasks or problems that they encountered through involvement in the initiative.

Organisational change

The framework also allowed an examination of organisational responses to changing practices and to examine implications for longer term sustainability of the practices initiated through ELPP.

An outline of activity theory

Activity theory has its origins in the 1920s and 30s and Vygotsky’s idea of mediated action (Figure 1). In brief, all action is shaped by how we interpret the task we are working on and what tools we have available to us. The tools mediate what is valued in our culture and shape our responses to the task. Tools can be theoretical such as understanding that plasticity is an aspect of brain development in a young child; and they can be material such as coloured building blocks. Conceptual and the material tools are always intertwined in action. Therefore how practitioners work with building blocks while helping parents and children to enjoy learning may be shaped by their knowledge and understanding of plasticity.

Figure 1, which is a development of Vygotsky’s work but is nonetheless the basic mediational triangle which is often used to represent his ideas, shows the following elements:

- **A subject**, from whose perspective the activity is understood, and who may be an individual or maybe several people who act on an ‘object’ i.e. a problem such as a child’s learning trajectory that is developmental delayed.
- **The mediational means or tools** which will be the ideas that are valued by the subject and also usually material artefacts.
- **The ‘object’** which is the task being worked on. The ‘object’ is often described as a ‘problem space’ where energy is directed and where people hope to see change. How the task is interpreted shapes how it is worked on. The ‘object’, in turn, acts back on both the subject and the tools helping to reshape them.
In ELPP, this framework enabled the research team to understand how practitioners (subjects) understood the problem spaces (objects) towards which their actions were directed. It could, for example, reveal whether a service was focused on needy adults or on parent-child relationships as the object of activity. It also allowed the team to elicit the tools which practitioners employed to work on and transform the objects of their activities i.e. what resources did they have available and what ideas were shaping how they used them. At the same time, because objects act back on subjects requiring them to rethink their interpretations it was possible to reveal what practitioners were learning over time as they worked at developing parents as supporters of their children’s learning.

Activity theory has been more recently developed by Engeström (1987) who takes the idea of mediated action further, by expanding the Vygotskian model to represent the social/collective elements of an activity through the addition of the elements of ‘community’, ‘rules’ and ‘division of labour’ (Figure 2). The community element reflects those other participants who may be working on the object alongside the subject, thereby reflecting the social context of the work. The community brings other voices into the activity, each of which is shaped and positioned by the way that they understand the object. The division of labour is understood as the ways that work and power is divided among the participants in the activity. Finally, rules are understood as affordances or constraints with the activity, as a kind of tool which assist participants to act or refrain from acting in particular circumstances. Rules are often historical and need adjusting to enable new ways of working on fresh interpretations of the object of activity.

In Figure 2, the subject is shown as acting on and through the object in order to achieve a particular outcome. In the case of the present research, that might mean that a practitioner (subject) may be acting on parents’ understandings to achieve the outcome of the parents being able to support their children as learners. The practitioner draws on tools such the idea of ‘attachment’ and story books to work on the parents’ interactions with their children. The practitioner works within particular policy agendas, policies, laws, funding criteria or locally generated rules which might direct the ways in which she is able to work on parents: for example, it may be that she is directed to work with the parents of children aged 1-3 in a particular set of circumstances. The practitioner (subject) is not acting alone in her work on parents: there may be other practitioners within her organisation who are doing similar work, or who may be supervising her.
She may have to collaborate or compete with other organisations or practitioners, such as health professionals or schools, who are also working with the parents. Finally, work on the parents’ practices with their children as the object of activity is distributed with varying degrees of power among colleagues and co-workers which will shape how the practitioner may act. In practice, this may mean that a practitioner feels helpless to act in circumstances where she feels she should act and can’t, for example, work as responsibly with a parent as she might like to do.

Engeström’s work emphasises the systemic nature of what he terms an activity system. Elements in activity systems such as a home visiting service will interact and objects can become tools and tools can become rules as systems change over time. For example, a service may have the long term aim of engaging mothers in the on-site learning opportunities it also offers. However it may find that it has to work on developing a parent’s confidence and understanding of her role in her child’s learning through home visits before she is ready to use that confidence and understanding while working with her child in settings-based session. In this example the parent’s confidence and understanding is first worked on through home visits as object for those visits. Then the confidence and understanding becomes the tool that the parent uses when taking part in a settings-based session with her child. These kinds of analyses have allowed the research team to look at how services have worked with families and get to grips with the developmental trajectories for families that were implicit in their practices.

Engeström (1987) has particularly emphasised the importance of tensions and contradictions within activity systems as the driving force of change and thus development. Instability i.e. internal tensions and contradictions are, for Engeström, (1999b) the ‘motive force of change and development’. For example, a service might have a contradiction inherent in its intention to help parents to become independent of the service while at the same time needing to demonstrate that people are using the service. This contradiction, if worked on, could lead them to a clearer set of expectations for parents and perhaps some co-ordinated inter-professional approaches to supporting a family’s trajectory towards social inclusion. A major contradiction in the ELPP initiative as an activity system was the need to engage the most socially excluded parents within a time-frame which made a number of practitioners anxious about raising expectations among parents that knew they would not be able to fulfil. The emphasising of the role of contradictions in organisational development was extremely helpful for shaping the research team’s understandings of whether or how ELPP requirements were able to influence practices and the organisations in which the practices were occurring.

In Engeström’s first development of Vygotsky’s work, however, activities were understood as independent units: little account was taken of how activities might interact with each other. What he has termed a third generation version of activity theory aims to address this gap (Engeström, 2005). This version is based on the understanding that activities may intersect through work on a shared object. The minimal representation which Figure 3 provides, shows just two of what may
be a myriad of systems interconnecting to exhibit patterns of collaboration, contradiction and tension.

**Figure 3. Third generation activity theory model**
(downloaded from http://www.edu.helsinki.fi/activity/pages/chatanddwr/chat/)

In this third generation of activity theory it is possible to use the framework to begin to understand how two or more organisations working on a shared object might interact. Within ELPP, for example, the framework can be used to reveal how voluntary organisations working with parents might intersect with health visitors working with the same parents, and to tease out tensions which might act as barriers to successful work with a parent. For example, historically generated practices within one activity may be in conflict with historically generated practices in the other and might create a further barrier to successful work on the potentially shared object of activity.

**How we used activity theory**

The interviews with managers and practitioners in each site were structured by activity theory to elicit, for example, the object of activity, rules and tools and the relationships between them. Interviews at Time 1 captured aspects of the service before ELPP funding arrived as well as what was going on in the early implementation phase. Interviews at Time 2 captured expectations for the future as well as current ways of working within the ELPP initiative. We were therefore then able to create four snapshots of systems over time based on Figure 2 to allow both a within case analysis of change and cross-case comparisons. More detail on analysis is given in Chapter Three.
Appendix B: Interview schedules with lead agency key informants
‘PRE-ELPP’ QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEAD AGENCIES

AGENCY:
PERSON INTERVIEWED:
DATE AND TIME:

Introduce yourself and the research

I am [NAME], one of the ELPP Research Team. Your name was given us by [NAME] as the best person in [LEAD AGENCY] for us to liaise with. Introduce ELPP and the purpose of the call - REMIND INTERVIEWEE OF THE CONTACT EMAIL.

Remind interviewee of ethics and consent arrangements - form to be sent

1. Your organisation is responsible for ELPP-funded [SITES] - is that right?
2. You plan to use [PROGRAMMES / APPROACHES] with ELPP funding - is that right?
3. Can you tell me something about each of the sites or local authorities where your organisation will be working? [FOR EACH SITE OR LOCAL AUTHORITY]:
   a. How long have you been working with parents and young children there?
   b. What made you put forward that site/team for inclusion in ELPP?
   c. What sort of area is it - how would you describe the area? (employment, ethnicity, housing, health, demographics, disadvantage etc)
   d. Where is the site/team based - in a school / clinic / local centre / Children’s Centres etc?
   e. When was the [PROGRAMME / APPROACH] introduced / when will it be introduced at this site / team?
   f. Which site/team in each local authority would you say is a good exemplar of your approach in the local authority? Could you give me the contact details of the manager there (or tell me who could tell me)?
4. How would you describe your approach in [AGENCY] to working with parents and young children? [NB GET EXAMPLES - IF THIS VARIES IN DIFFERENT SITES, GET DETAILS]
   a. Do you focus on parents, or children, or both?
   b. Do you work only with referred families / parents / children - if so, from which organisations and why are they referred?
   c. Or do families use you / your services on an open access / neighbourhood basis?
   d. Before ELPP, what proportion of your work with parents and children focused on parental involvement? What proportion focused on services for children?
   e. How does your organisation define parental involvement? Is parent involvement different from parent participation, parent education, parent training?
   f. Which of these best describes the approach you will use with ELPP?
5. What will you be using ELPP funding for? [EG WILL THEY RING-FENCE IT TO HIRE DEDICATED STAFF? OR TO DEVELOP NEW / DIFFERENT WAYS OF WORKING? OR TO DEVELOP NEW ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME?] What does ELPP funding allow you to do that you have not been able to do before?
6. What do you think is your ‘target population’ for ELPP?
7. What are the three key objectives you have for ELPP?
8. How are you training staff to work on ELPP? [EXAMPLES - IF THIS VARIES IN DIFFERENT SITES, GET DETAILS]
9. Have you recruited new staff? If so, what will they be working on? Is this a new
development for you [NOT JUST AN EXTENSION OF EXISTING PRACTICE]? Will they
be 'dedicated' to ELPP?
[EXAMPLES - IF THIS VARIES IN DIFFERENT SITES, GET DETAILS]

10. Will ELPP be delivered in the site centres? Or in parents’ homes? Or both? [EXAMPLES -
IF THIS VARIES IN DIFFERENT SITES, GET DETAILS]

11. Have you used the [PROGRAMMES / APPROACHES] before - if so, how, and what will
be new about using it/them in ELPP?

12. What are the main outcomes you would anticipate from ELPP? How different is this from
the three objectives you outlined earlier?
   a. for the organisation?
   b. for parents?
   c. for the early years workforce?
   d. for the voluntary and community sector?

13. What monitoring or evaluation will you be conducting yourselves of ELPP?

14. What other organisations will you liaise with in delivering ELPP?

15. Has the local authority been involved in your bid / planning for ELPP?

-----------------------------------------------
AND FINALLY, is there anything else about the way your organisation involves / works with
parents, or in developing the ELP project, which you would like to tell us?

VERY MANY THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP.

MAY I CONTINUE TO CONTACT YOU IF THERE ARE ISSUES WE NEED TO DISCUSS?

June 2007

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‘POST-ELPP’ QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LEAD AGENCIES

AGENCY:
PERSON INTERVIEWED:
DATE AND TIME:

Thank you very much for giving me your time. You will remember that [NAME] from the Research Team spoke to you last year about your plans for ELPP. Now that the funding is coming to an end (and so, of course, is the research) we wanted to get your thoughts on what ELPP has offered your organisation.

NB Can I just check where you were using the ELPP funding and what training programmes you used with your staff / volunteers?

1. You know that we are collecting data about ‘reach’ - but could you just summarise for me what sort of families has been your ELPP target population?

2. Overall, what has the ELPP funding meant for you - has it helped you continue or develop work that otherwise you would not have been able to continue or develop?

3. What have been the main outcomes for you from the ELPP funding?
   a. for the organisation
   b. for parents
   c. for the early years workforce
   d. for the voluntary and community sector

4. What about sustainability - will you continue the work once ELPP funding comes to an end, and if so, how? Do you think local authorities will pick this up as part of their support for Children’s Centre work, for example?

5. If government were to develop more initiatives along these lines, what would be the main messages you would want to get over from your experience with ELPP?

Anything else you would like to say….?

February 2008
Appendix C: Instruments for Organisational Outcomes and Workforce Development

1. Interview schedule for initial interviews in setting - manager
2. Interview schedule for initial interviews in setting - staff
3. Interview schedule for follow up interviews in setting
Instrument 1. Interview schedule for initial interviews in setting - manager

Preamble

Thank you very much for agree to talk with me. A bit of background. We have been commissioned by the DCFS to look at the roll out of ELPP and were given the name of this setting/team as an exemplar project (or one that seems primed to be one). We are looking at the programme as a whole and not evaluating the practices of specific settings / teams. We are interested in how ELPP aims on working with families where children are at risk of developmental delay and/or are hard to reach are being absorbed into what is already going on, whether practices are changing in any way and so. You’ll see that the questions are focused on these topics.

For the typist - Can you give me your name and your job. Today's date is - and this is (add name of setting/team and LA)

The history and implicit rules

1. Can you give me a brief history of the project (i.e. setting / team) - Encourage a focus on the last three to five years unless the earlier history seems particularly relevant.

2. What would you say have been its strengths in the recent past?

3. What kind of work has the project been focusing on in the recent past? - An object of activity question

4. What kind of work has been tried with parents in the recent past - i.e. before being involved with ELPP? - Explore purpose and strategies i.e. object and outcomes; and tools

5. How has the project linked with other agencies in the recent past? Can you give me one or two examples which are fairly typical of the way in which you have worked with other agencies? - Explore any sense of how the project has seen itself as part of a local network of resources for children and families. If referral is mentioned explore how referral has been seen as sequential handing on of children or as a system of parallel and collaborative support. Explore both VCS and statutory services.

6. Has ELPP involved the recruitment of new staff? Or a specific change in the role of staff? Why? What have you been looking for in the new appointments and why? How have you shared ideas about parental involvement in the setting / team? Probe what goes on in staff meetings - how important staff meetings are etc.

What are you working on? What is the object of activity?

You will need to work through similar questions to elicit (i) how they are dealing with the need to reach hard to reach families and families where children are at risk of developmental delay and (ii) views of parental involvement.

7. Moving on to look at what is happening now. Can you tell me about the families you are targeting and what, for example, makes them in need of support? i.e. How are they defining the object of activity?

8. What are you doing to encourage these families to work with you? Looking at tools for working on the object. Explore how these practices (strategies) have changed with ELPP - we need to know whether effort and success has 'increased' through ELPP
9. What do you hope to change about the families and or their circumstances to help them take up what you are offering? A more probing question about the object - you will need to keep paring away.

10. How far are you able to achieve these changes? What or who else might help? They may come up with other tools as a result of your probing the object. Also explore how they see themselves as part of a set of local strategies or working in isolation i.e. to what extent is working with their target families helped by co-operating with other services - an ‘expanding the object’ question.

**Moving on to look at parental involvement**

11. When you think of these families what do see as the purposes of parental involvement i.e. what are you working on with them and trying to change? What is the object of activity in parental involvement? What behaviours, attitudes, skills are they working on? Also explore here whether they are thinking about a homogeneous notion of their target parents or are taking a more tailored approach to their work.

12. What does/would that change look like? How would we recognise a successful graduate of your project? We need this question to guide interviews with parents and inform home observations.

13. Can you think five years ahead - suppose your strategies with these families have succeeded - how would the families be operating? What would be your role with them then? A run-away object question - which might elicit how they are positioning themselves vis a vis parents (as experts or potential partners)- raising questions about division of labour.

**Strategies for parental involvement. What tools and how appropriate are they?**

14. What are you doing to achieve the changes you want to see in parents? Tell me a bit about the strategies you and your staff use in when helping parents to be come better able to support their children’s learning. tools for objects

15. How do you assess whether a member of staff is doing good quality work - what do you look for and how do you record and use what you see? - i.e. Explore how they define and measure quality support.

16. How have the strategies the staff use developed? After they provide an initial outline you can probe the training linked with the programme to which they are affiliated (Share, Home-Start or whatever) and what they and colleagues have got from that - but make sure that you allow them time to respond without referring to specific training.

17. Tell me a little more about the training that has been offered. What ideas and techniques have been particularly relevant to your work here? Some projects will have received several training packages - also explore their relative virtues and any contradictions.

18. Can you give me say two examples of where ideas from training have ‘stuck’ i.e. become part of practice?

19. What about PEAL training? How useful have you found it? What has stuck? If anything-can you give me a couple of examples?

20. How has the training played to the strengths of staff? What other kind of training would be useful?
21. What would be two lessons from working with parents in this project that you would like to share with other practitioners?

How are parents and other agencies involved in the project? Division of labour and current rules

22. Can you tell me a little about how parents are involved in the project? Explore relationships between staff and parents - e.g. the extent to which parents are seen as clients or (potential) partners in work with their children. Are parents involved in the management? Do they have relatively free access? Are most parents referred to the project by other agencies? And so on.

23. How are other agencies involved or are becoming involved with the work of the project? Can you give me one or two examples of ways in which you see yourself developing your work with other agencies? - Explore any sense of how the project now sees itself as part of a local network of resources for children and families. If referral is mentioned explore how referral has been seen as sequential handing on of children or as a system of parallel and collaborative support. Explore both VCS and statutory services.

24. What do you think has been the impact so far of involvement in ELPP on the practitioners in this setting / team? Explore their priorities and practices i.e. implicit rules.

25. What do you think about ELPP’s impact or likely impact on other VCS and local authority service development? Explore challenges and reasons for any optimism.
Instrument 2: Interview schedule for initial interviews in setting - staff

Preamble

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk with me. A bit of background. We have been commissioned by the DCFS to look at the roll out of ELPP and were given the name of this setting/team as an exemplar project (or one that seems primed to be one). We are looking at the programme as a whole and not evaluating the practices of specific settings/teams. We are interested in how the ELPP aims on working with families where children are at risk of developmental delay and/or are hard to reach are being absorbed into what is already going on, whether practices are changing in any way and so. You’ll see that the questions are focused on these topics.

For the typist - Can you give me your name - and your job - and the date is
And this is (add name of setting/team and LA)

The history and implicit rules

1. What would you say have been its strengths of this project/team in the recent past?

2. What kind of work have you been focusing on in the recent past? An object of activity question

3. What kind of work have you tried with parents in the recent past - i.e. before being involved with ELPP? Explore purpose and strategies i.e. object and outcomes; and tools

4. How have you linked with other agencies in the recent past? Can you give me one or two examples which are fairly typical of the way in which you have worked with other agencies? - Explore any sense of how the project has seen itself as part of a local network of resources for children and families. Explore the extent to which links are fluid and responsive or driven by bureaucracy.

5. Is your post funded by ELPP or to what extent do you work on ELPP-funded work? How does the ELPP work fit with other aspects of your job?

What are you working on? What is the object of activity?

You will need to work through similar questions to elicit (i) how they are dealing with the need to reach hard to reach families and families where children are at risk of developmental delay and (ii) views of parental involvement.

Moving on to look at what is happening now.

6. Can you tell me about the families you are targeting and what, for example, makes them in need of support? How are they defining the object of activity?

7. What are you doing to encourage these families to work with you? Looking at tools for working on the object. Explore how these practices (strategies) have changed with ELPP - we need to know whether effort and success has ‘increased’ through ELPP

8. What do you hope to change about the families and or their circumstances to help them take up what you are offering? A more probing question about the object - you will need to keep paring away
9. How far are you able to achieve these changes? What or who else might help? They may come up with other tools as a result of your probing the object. Also explore how they see themselves as part of a set of local strategies or working in isolation i.e. to what extent is working with the target families helped by co-operating with other services - an ‘expanding the object’ question.

Moving on to look at parental involvement

10. When you think of these families what do see as the purposes of parental involvement i.e. what are you working on with them and trying to change? What is the object of activity in parental involvement? What behaviours, attitudes and skills are they working on? Also explore here whether they are thinking about a homogeneous notion of the parents being targeted or are taking a more tailored approach to their work.

11. What does/would that change look like? How would we recognise a successful graduate of your project? We need this question to guide interviews with parents and inform home observations.

12. Can you think five years ahead - suppose your strategies with these families have succeeded - how would the families be operating? What would be your role with them then? A run-away object question - which might elicit how they are positioning themselves vis a vis parents (as experts or potential partners) - raising questions about division of labour.

Strategies for parental involvement. What tools and how appropriate are they?

13. What are you doing to achieve the changes you want to see in parents? Tell me a bit about the strategies you use in when helping parents to be come better able to support their children’s learning. Tools for objects.

14. Can you give me an example of work you do that you think is particularly helpful with these parents? Explore how they define quality support.

15. How have your ways of working with these families developed through thinking about ELPP?

After they provide an initial outline, probe any training they have had in relation to the programmes that are being implemented in their setting (PEEP, Share or whatever) and what they have got from that - but make sure that you allow them time to respond without referring to specific training.

16. Tell me a little more about the training that has been offered. What ideas and techniques have been particularly relevant to your work here? Some projects will have received several training packages - also explore their relative virtues and any contradictions.

17. Can you give me say two examples of where ideas from training have ‘stuck’ i.e. become part of practice?

18. What about PEAL training? How useful have you found it? What has stuck? If anything - can you give me a couple of examples?

19. What other kind of training would be useful?

20. What would be two lessons from working with parents in this project that you would like to share with other practitioners?
How are parents and other agencies involved in the project? Division of labour and current rules

21. Can you tell me a little about how parents are involved in the project? Explore relationships between staff and parents - e.g. the extent to which parents are seen as clients or (potential) partners in work with their children.

22. How are other agencies involved or are becoming involved with the work of the project? Can you give me one or two examples of ways in which you see yourself developing your work with other agencies? Explore any sense of how they see themselves as part of a local network of resources for children and families. If referral is mentioned explore how referral has been seen as sequential handing on of children or as a system of parallel and collaborative support. Explore both VCS and statutory services.

23. What do you think has been the impact so far of involvement in ELPP on you and what you are able to do? Explore their priorities and practices i.e. implicit rules

Thank you very much.
**Instrument 3: Interview schedule for follow up interviews in setting**

**Preparation:** Preparation for observations; prompt points from previous interview data; and AT analyses are all pre-reading for these interviews

This time I have not distinguished between manager and front line staff interviews. The interview is structured by CHAT and is focusing on the present and future.

**Preamble before recording:** Thank you very much for seeing me again. In this interview I'll be trying to follow up some of the ideas that we discussed last time with a particular focus on the ELPP work, how it has been going, what impact if any it has had on parents, children and colleagues.

**For the typist:** It is date…. I am revisiting …….and talking with ……. who is …...(give role or job)

**Attracting parents** object of activity, strategies and rules

1. Can you talk me through your current target groups of parents - who are you aiming at attracting through ELPP funding. How is recruitment going? *Probe using previous analyses.*

2. We are interested in gathering information on successful strategies for recruitment of parents. What is working well for you? *Explore any differences from strategies mentioned last time.*

3. What if any are the frustrations you are finding with recruiting parents? What is making it a challenge? *Explore rules, rule-bending, division of labour, strategies as appropriate.*

**ELPP funded work in the setting** object of activity, strategies and rules

4. Can you update me on how the ELPP-funded work with parents as supporters of their children’s learning is going? What has been happening here since we last met? *You can probe here drawing on the evidence you have about tools and strategies in play last time.*

5. It seemed that last time the focus of your ELPP work was add here object of activity in time 1… What would you say you were working on and trying to shape in your ELPP work now? *Exploring current object of activity.*

6. Do you think the way that you and colleagues here are working with parents as supporters of their children’s learning has changed over the last six months or so? If so, in what ways? *Listen first to their response to that open question and then probe based on evidence from the previous analyses. Also explore strategies in relation to current object of activity.*

7. Can you give me some examples of what you and colleagues are now doing when you are working with parents as supporters of their children’s learning? *Explore strategies and resources and differences from last time. If there are differences, explore how they arose.*

**Workforce development** subject positioning, rules, division of labour, expansion of the object, new strategies

8. Is ELPP work integrated into the work of the setting / centre / team? Or is it something done by a distinct group of people? *Explore any changes and the more general impact of ELPP on the work of other colleagues when they interact with or plan for work with parents. Perhaps explore division of labour with parents - e.g. are parents seen as needy*
or capable? How do staff in general position themselves in relation to parents i.e. are parents seen primarily as clients or partners?

9. Do staff in the setting (maybe ELPP funded or may be staff in general - will depend on the setting) feel more confident when working with parents as supporters of their children’s learning? Ask for examples

10. What are the messages from any ELPP training that are most highly valued in this setting? Clarify what kind of training, which organization. Also why it is useful in relation to the object of activity.

11. Do you have regular staff supervision sessions? Do lessons from ELPP feed into staff supervisions for non-ELPP staff? How do staff supervisions help to sustain a focus on ELPP? Exploring strategies for workforce development, division of labour and rules

12. What about working with other services in your work with parents? Have any new practitioner networks developed? If they have, what, if anything, are you and colleagues learning in these networks? Explore all links, but don’t forget health services. Division of labour and rules

13. Are messages about the work you are doing here reaching the local authority either through practitioners in local services or at a local authority strategy level? If not, can you help us to understand why not. If so, what has enabled that to happen? Explore barriers to communicating with the LA and who mediates messages from the project to the LA. Are there local ‘champions’ who can speak for this kind of work and influence people (either practitioners or strategists) locally?

ELPP as an initiative

14. ELPP is relatively short term funding, can you talk me through the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of initiative focused funding in your setting?

15. How do you think you will be able to take forward what has been learnt as a result of engaging with ELPP? Explore what ideas and how they will be taken forward.

16. Do you foresee any difficulties in taking it forward?
Appendix D: Measures and instruments used with parents
Measures of Parenting

Several measures were used to investigate the effects of the initiative on parents. The parenting measures allow support for children’s learning to be measured early on in the parents’ ELPP participation, and then later on i.e. at two points in time to measure a change in parental behaviours and understanding.

Two main measures were used within this study. Firstly, a qualitative instrument was devised in order to collate ELPP parents’ views on their participation and role in child’s learning. Secondly structured measures were applied. The quality of the home environment was assessed by the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) and the Home Learning Environment (HLE). Parenting skills were assessed by the Parental Feelings questionnaire, Father Involvement questionnaire, Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS) and the Book-sharing Observation Scale. For those interviews which could not be completed within the home, an ‘abbreviated HOME’ interview was given consisting of only three subscales that did not need observation, and were considered by the research team as the most important to a child’s learning; these were the organisation, involvement and variety subscales.

I. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME: Caldwell and Bradley, 1984)

The HOME is a standardised semi-structured interview used to systematically assess the nature of the environment in which the child lives. The Infant-Toddler HOME consists of 45-items which were graded in a binary manner (responding ‘yes’ or ‘no’) depending on the parents’ answers or the researcher observations. A higher total score would reflect a richer quality of home environment for the child, and therefore a reduced risk of learning delay for the child. A substantial correlation has been noted in previous studies between the HOME and cognitive measures, and previous research has frequently shown the validity of this instrument in describing a child’s true home environment which is required to be stimulating in order to further their development. The ‘full’ HOME scale can also be considered as a construct comprising of 6 subscales: responsivity, acceptance, organisation, learning materials, involvement and variety.


This is a 7-item instrument designed by the EPPE team to measure parental involvement within certain activities in the home, including reading to children, teaching nursery rhymes and songs, and playing with letters and numbers. The parent rated their response on the basis of a 6 point likert scale, depending on the frequency of occurrence at home. Sylva et al (2004) within their EPPE study found a higher quality ‘home learning environment’ to be significantly related to differences in children at primary school age in their social and behavioural development, factors both important to the child’s learning capabilities.

III. Parental Feelings Questionnaire (PFQ: Deater-Deckard, 2000)

The PFQ scales were used to produce a baseline from which parental outcome change could be measured. This instrument includes a set of statements which are shown to the parent and suggest a number of feelings that parents may feel about their relationship to their children. A response of between 1 and 5 is required on a scale of how true the parent feels the statement is. The statements can then be divided into negative and positive scores in order to detect a total ‘positivity’ score for the parent towards their child. This evaluation used a shorter 13-item version as trialled in the Enabling Parents Study (Sylva, Evangelou, Taylor, Rothwell and Brooks, 2004b).
IV. Father Involvement scale (Belsky, Barnes and Melhuish, 2007)

The Father Involvement Scale as used in National Evaluation of Sure Start (2007) included a set of 7 statements relating to a mother’s perception of their partner and his involvement with the child. The 5 point scale was shown to the mother who then responded accordingly to the frequency the father helps with each situation.

V. Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS: Arnett, 1989)

The Caregiver Interaction Scale is an observation measure normally used within nursery settings to assess the interactions of a single caregiver on their interactions with all children. The CIS has been validated across numerous studies to show that positive staff-child interactions are often related to better social and behavioural child outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, and Taggart, 2004). As the instrument was being used with a single parent, only the 7-item subscale for ‘non-punitiveness’ was used as this was the most relevant to the parent outcomes. Sylva et al found a high score on the non-punitiveness subscale to have a significant positive impact on a child’s pre-reading and early numeracy skills. Researchers observed the parent-child interactions during their home visit, and marked their observations on a scale of 1 to 4 for each item after having left the house.

VI. Book-sharing Observation Scale

The Book-sharing Observation Scale (ELPP research team, 2007), was developed by a number of Oxford staff with a vast experience of working with children, in order to produce an observation measure on a parents’ ability to introduce a new book to their child. Parents are presented with an age-appropriate book for their child, and asked to introduce this to their child in their usual way. Emphasis was made on the interest in the child’s response to the book. Researchers graded the parents interaction with the child depending on how true each of 7 statements were to the situation, after having left the home. Each statement was graded on a scale of 1 to 4.

VII. ELPP Parent Interview (qualitative instrument)

The parent interview was designed by the research team to assess areas which were not covered by the structured instruments. These 18 questions measured important factors relating to the parents such as a parents’ understanding of parental involvement in their children’s early learning, their experiences of the ELPP initiative so far, and where they can turn to for further advice. These supplementary questions were designed to help the researchers understand a parents’ own definition of parental involvement, and how likely parents were to take what they learnt from the ELP intervention into improving their child’s home learning environment.

Families who had already completed their full participation in the ELPP initiative in their area at the time researchers were completing their ‘early’ visits were interviewed only once and considered as a ‘late’ family i.e. interviewed late into their ELPP participation. The interview with late parents was slightly adjusted to incorporate a number of questions exploring what the parent has learnt and how they feel their child has changed. Post interviews were intended to follow pre interviews after a period of at least three months had elapsed.

VIII. Demographic Questionnaire

For all interviews, a demographic questionnaire was also given to collect background information on the families. This consisted of 20-items which included questions about ethnicity, qualifications, employment and socio-economic indices i.e. benefits received.
Items

I. The Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment

© Caldwell and Bradley, 2002

II. Home Learning Environment

(Ask only to children aged 24months and above, NOT under 2 years)
[Note: The main questions are to be read out to the parent, and the options must be read if the parent replies ‘yes’. Only ask each question if it is appropriate for that family. For example, do not ask a mother with learning disabilities if she reads to xxxx, or a disabled family how often they take xxxx to the library.]

1. Does someone at home read to xxxx? How often?
2. Does someone at home take xxxx to the library? How often?
3. Does someone at home teach xxxx a sport, dance, swimming or another physical activities? How often?
4. Does someone play with letters at home or numbers? How often?
5. Does someone teach xxxx the ABC or the alphabet? How often?
6. Does someone at home try to teach xxxx numbers? How often?
7. Does someone teach xxxx songs, poems or nursery rhymes? How often?

© EPPE, 2004
III. Parental Feelings Questionnaire

[Read out to parent] “Every parent experiences all sorts of positive and negative feelings towards their children. I will now read out some statements that suggest some of the feelings that parents may experience. For each statement can you please show me how true you feel this is for your child, by pointing it out on the below scale”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely untrue</th>
<th>Somewhat untrue</th>
<th>Not really true or untrue</th>
<th>Somewhat true</th>
<th>Definitely true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sometimes I feel very impatient with my child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I usually feel quite happy about my relationship with her/him</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sometimes I am amused by him/her</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sometimes I wish she / he would go away for a few minutes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sometimes he / she makes me angry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I usually feel close to her/him</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sometimes I am frustrated by him/her</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I see both my child’s good points and his / her faults</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I feel close to my child both when she/he is very happy and when she / he is worried</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I care about my child even when she / he does less well than I know she / he could</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I think of things that will please him / her</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I give him / her a lot of care and attention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I consider his / her needs and interests when making my own plans.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Deater-Deckard, 2000
IV. Father Involvement Questionnaire

[Use information taken from the HOME to gage whether the person has a live-in partner and therefore whether to ask this questionnaire. Do NOT ask to single mothers] “Now I’d like to ask you some questions about your partner and his involvement with your child. Please say how often he does each of the things I am going to read out - in general, not just when around.”

Ask these as questions and probe the mothers’ responses to fit into the table. Tick the mothers’ responses in the correct box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More than once a day</th>
<th>Once a day 1</th>
<th>Once or twice a week 2</th>
<th>Less than once a week 3</th>
<th>Never 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. First, how often does he look after xxxx on his own?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. And how often does he play with xxxx</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. And how often does he dress him/her?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. And finally how often does he get xxxx ready for bed in the evening?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How often can you count on him if you need him to take care of xxxx?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How often does he share a book with xxxx?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© The National Evaluation of Sure Start, 2007

V. Caregiver Interaction Scale

CIS - Scoresheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all true 1</th>
<th>Somewhat True 2</th>
<th>Quite a bit true 3</th>
<th>Very much true 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Does not seem critical of the child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Does not place high value on obedience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Does not speak with irritation or hostility to the child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Does not threaten child in trying to control him/her</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Does not punish the child without explanation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Does not find fault easily with the child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Does not seem to prohibit many of the things the child wants to do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Does not seem unnecessarily harsh when scolding or prohibiting the child</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Arnett, 1989
V1. Book-Sharing Observation Scale Scoresheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all true</th>
<th>Somewhat true</th>
<th>Quite a bit true</th>
<th>Very much true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduces the book in an interesting and engaging way; helps turn child’s attention to the book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Helps child hold book, turn pages or touch book</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Encourages child to join in the story/experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Emphasises specific words</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Links book to child’s experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discusses details of story or pictures</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Gives praise for child’s attention and engagement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Important Observations:
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VII. ELPP Interview for ‘early’ visits

The following ELPP interview was originally created with provision for the interviewer to write notes. This gap has been removed from the following appendix.

A - General Questions

I would just like to ask you a few more questions about your life with xxxx in general.

1. What things do you think are important for helping xxxx to learn and feel confident?
   [For example adequate toys, loving environment, parental time, experience in early years setting]

2. Can you tell me something xxxx has learnt within the last month?
   [If positive action] How do you encourage that action?
   [If negative action] What do you do to prevent this action?

3. Can you tell me some of the things xxxx likes to do?

B - Participation in Groups / Home Visits

Groups/Centres for mothers and babies/children - probe about any groups mentioned in the HOME inventory

4. Are you attending or have you attended in the past any groups/centres with xxxx? [If yes probe for which ones, and continue to question 6. If no continue to question 5]

5. Could you say why you have not attended a group? [then move to question 11]
Do tell me more this group:

6. How long have you attended / did you attend this group / centre?

7. What do / did you enjoy about the group you attend/ed?

8. Has it given you new ideas about being a parent and what you can do for your child? *[If yes, probe for what sort of ideas?]*

9. Has the group changed the way you do anything with xxxx? *[If yes probe- what has changed?]*

10. Overall, in what ways could it be better? *[Prompt - Have you met any new people, learnt any new things, is it accessible or friendly?]*

11. Have you ever been visited in your home by somebody at the centre? *[Probe to make sure the visitor is from the ELP project. If they are not, or do not visit, go to qu 17]*

12. How often are the visits?

☐ 1-2 days a week
☐ Fortnightly
☐ Monthly

13. What sort of activities do you do with them or do they do for you? *[Probe carefully, to find out exactly how the home-visit helps. Is the aim for mother support or child learning.]*

14. For how long have they been visiting you?

☐ Less than a month
☐ 1 - 6 months
☐ 6 -12 months

15. Have you been given any new ideas from the visitor about how to support your child’s learning? *[Probe for ideas]*

I’m now going to ask you a few questions on where you receive guidance or help, should you need it, on your child’s development.

16. Many parents feel it is helpful to talk other adults for information or advice on their child’s learning. If you were concerned about your child’s learning who would you ask for help and advice? *(Prompt: if they suggest only health visitor, ask if there is anywhere else they might go - any other person, book, centre, newspapers, magazines etc. Ask if they would seek help from friends and family)*

Note:
☐ Informal source (Family/friends)
☐ Formal source (School/centre, doctor, health visitor - please specify which)

17. Would you like to have more information or advice available? *[If they are defensive, explain that all people could use advice from time to time. If yes, what sort of information]*
ELPP Interview for ‘late’ visits

The following ELPP interview was originally created with provision for the interviewer to write notes. This gap has been removed from the following appendix.

A - General Questions

I would just like to ask you a few questions about your life with xxxx in general.

1) Can you tell me one or two things you do with xxxx that help him or her learn and be more confident? Which of these are most important? [For example adequate toys, loving environment, parental time, experience in early years setting]

2) Can you tell me something xxxx has learnt within the last month? [If positive action] How do you encourage that action? [If negative action] What do you do to prevent this action?

3) Can you tell me some of the things xxxx likes to do?

4) Since you began the ELPP course, xxxx has probably changed a lot. Can you tell me one way that xxxx has changed that you were happy about?

5) And one way that xxxx has changed that you were not so happy about?

6) You’ve mentioned two ways your child has changed in the last (number) months. Do you think either of these changes happened because you have been going to (or visited by) the X programme?

B - Participation in Groups / Home Visits

Groups / Centres for mothers and babies / children

7) Since you have been attending the ELPP group / been visited by the centre, have you attended any new groups / centres with xxxx? [If yes probe for which ones, and continue to question 9. If no continue to question 8]

8) Could you say why you have not attended a new group? [then move to question 14]

9) [If more than one group/centre mentioned in question 7] Which one did you like best?

About the ELPP group they have attended:

10) How long have you attended / did you attend this group / centre?

11) What do / did you enjoy about the group you attend/ed?
12) Has it given you new ideas about being a parent and what you can do for your child? [If yes, probe for what sort of ideas?]

13) Has the group changed the way you do anything with xxxx? [If yes probe- what has changed?]

14) Overall, in what ways could it have been better? [Prompt – Have you met any new people, learnt any new things, is it accessible or friendly?]

15) Were you visited in your home by somebody at the centre? [Probe to make sure the visitor is from the ELPP project. If they are not, or do not visit, go to question 20]

16) How often were the visits?
- [ ] 1-2 days a week
- [ ] Fortnightly
- [ ] Monthly

17) What sort of activities did you do with them or did they do for you? [Probe carefully, to find out exactly how the home-visit helps. Is the aim for mother support or child learning.]

18) For how long had they been visiting you?
- [ ] Less than a month
- [ ] 1 - 6 months
- [ ] 6 -12 months

19) Have you been given any new ideas from the visitor about how to support your child’s learning? [Probe for ideas]

I'm now going to ask you a few questions on where you receive guidance or help, should you need it, on your child’s development.

20) Many parents feel it is helpful to talk to other adults for information or advice on their child’s learning. If you were concerned about your child’s learning, who would you ask for help and advice? (Prompt: if they suggest only health visitor, ask if there is anywhere else they might go - any other person, book, centre, newspapers, magazines etc. Ask if they would seek help from friends and family)

Note:
- [ ] Informal source (Family/friends)
- [ ] Formal source (School/centre, doctor, health visitor – please specify which)

21) Would you like to have more information or advice available? [If they are defensive, explain that all people could use advice from time to time. If yes, what sort of information?]
VIII. Demographic Questionnaire

“Before I go, may I just ask you a few questions about your family and household: Remember you do not have to answer a question if you do not wish to”

1. Do you live with your husband or a partner?

2. [ask if answer not obvious] Could you tell me if you live in a:
   - House
   - Mobile home
   - Flat
   - Bedsit
   - Other

3. Do you own or rent your home? [If rented] Is that a council or a housing association property?)

Ethnicity and Language

4. Which ethnic group do you consider that you belong to?
   - White-British
   - Black-British
   - Indian
   - White-Irish
   - Black-Caribbean
   - Pakistani
   - White-Other
   - Black African
   - Bangladeshi
   - Asian-British
   - Black Other
   - Chinese
   - Asian-Other
   - Japanese
   - Mixed race
   - Other (specify)

5. Which ethnic group do you consider your child to belong to?
   - White-British
   - Black-British
   - Indian
   - White-Irish
   - Black-Caribbean
   - Pakistani
   - White-Other
   - Black African
   - Bangladeshi
   - Asian-British
   - Black Other
   - Chinese
   - Asian-Other
   - Japanese
   - Mixed race
   - Other (specify)

6. Is English your first language? [if no give details]

7. Which languages do you use with xxxx at home?

8. What is your highest educational qualification? [Show card A and let them pick their number. If they are struggling to read, help them with the options.]

Employment and benefits

Now I’d like to ask you a few questions about work:

9. Could you tell me if you work at the moment? [If no, jump to question 39] [If yes] Are you:
   - Employed full-time
   - Employed full-time and studying
   - Studying (or training) full time
   - Looking after children and home full-time
   - Other (please state)

10. [If part time work] How many days a week do you work?
11. What job do you do? *[Probe if the answer seems a bit vague such as ‘manager’. What was the nature of the job?]*

12. Do you supervise people? If so how many (approx)?

13. How many hours do you work on average a week?

14. How old was xxxx when you started back at work?

*[Skip question if a single mother]* Now I am going to ask a few questions about your partner’s working life.

15. Is he:

- [ ] Employed full-time
- [ ] Employed full-time and studying
- [ ] Studying (or training) full time
- [ ] Looking after children and home full-time
- [ ] Other (please state)
- [ ] Employed part-time
- [ ] Employed part-time and studying
- [ ] Seeking work/unemployed
- [ ] Full-time or part-time carer for another adult

16. *[If part time work]* How many days a week does he work?

17. What job does he do? *[Probe if the answer seems a bit vague such as ‘manager’. What was the nature of the job?]*

18. Does he supervise people? If so how many (approx)?

19. How many hours does he work on average a week?

20. Could you tell me which of the following you or your partner receive? *[Show card B and let them pick their answer]*

### Education, Benefits and Tax credits

The following shows the cards given to the parents. Parents were asked to point to which of the following they have achieved, or receive.

**Card A - Highest qualification**

1. No formal qualification
2. GCSE
3. Vocational qualification (NVQ etc) (specify which)
4. A or AS Level
5. Diploma of higher / further education or equivalent
6. Bachelors or higher degree
7. Any other qualification (please say which it is)
Card B - Benefits and tax credits received

1. Child benefit
2. Child support
3. Working Tax Credit
4. Child care Tax Credit
5. Job seeker’s allowance
6. Income support
7. Housing benefit
8. Council tax benefit
9. Disability allowance or equivalent?
10. Maternity allowance or pay
11. Other (please specify)

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Appendix E: Reach data proformas
22 February 2008

Dear X

I am writing to ask for your help in filling in the last piece of the research jigsaw in evaluating the Early Learning Partnership Project. We are calling this 'mapping the context'. Our aim is to analyse 'reach' - to what extent does ELPP reach families most at risk of exclusion, given that its aim is to 'reach' families most at risk of exclusion with children at risk of learning delay?

For us to do this, we hope that you will be able to provide information about ELPP families 'on the books' over the last six months (July-December 2007) - this will allow us to include projects which have started their ELPP work at different time points, and projects where ELPP numbers have varied, for whatever reason, in different months.

We also hope you will be able to provide information for us about all your users - that is, both ELPP families and 'non-ELPP users' - for one month, February 2008. This would allow us to see whether ELPP families are different in any way from the 'non-ELPP' families which use your programme.

We are not asking for any individual data - all the data you provide will be aggregated (as shown in the attached proforma). We appreciate that you may not collect all of this data about families using your programmes, or you may not collect it in this format; in that case, we should like to have your 'best guess', as set out in the proforma (remember to mark this *). Any additional comments you would like to write in about the families using ELPP, or to explain your data, would be most helpful.

We realise that this request will create an additional burden on already very busy teams. So we will send vouchers worth £150 to all sites completing the proformas, as a contribution towards your time.

When we were planning how best to approach you about 'mapping the context' we spoke with all the agencies, as well as with the Family and Parenting Institute. So X at Home-Start has discussed this with us, and will be able to answer any of your questions.

It would be helpful if you could let us have your material by Friday 21 March at the latest. If you have any queries, I should be grateful if you would contact me direct teresa.smith@socres.ox.ac.uk.

With best wishes

Teresa Smith
For the ELPP National Research Team
## NATIONAL EVALUATION OF THE
## EARLY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

## MAPPING THE CONTEXT: ELPP USERS July-December 2007

### NAME OF PROJECT/SETTING………………………………………….

Please complete Jul-Dec 2007 for ELPP users only, and Feb 2008 for ELPP users and non-ELPP users. If you do not collect this information, please give us your ‘best guess’.

This is in 'soft copy format' so you can make the boxes as large as necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ELPP Users July - Dec 2007</th>
<th>Feb 2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Number of ELPP families ‘on the books’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How many mothers use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many fathers use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Home postcodes <em>(please list all)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How many children have learning delay?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Gender of children* <em>(numbers m/f)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How many ELPP mothers are under 18?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How many ELPP mothers are 18-25?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How many ELPP mothers are over 26?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How many ELPP fathers are under 18?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. How many ELPP fathers are 18-25?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. How many ELPP fathers are over 26?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. How many families are single parent families?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. How many families are joint parent families?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. How many families are other kinds of family?* <em>(e.g. grandparents or other carers)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. How many households have an adult in work?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. How many families are White (British, Irish, or other White background)?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. How many families are Black or Black British (Caribbean, African, or other Black background)?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. How many families are Asian or Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or other Asian background)?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. How many families are Mixed background (White/Black Caribbean, White/Black African, White/Asian, or other Mixed background)?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. How many families are Chinese?*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. How many households do not have English as the first language of child?* <em>(please list the languages)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. How many households do not have English as the first language of parent?* <em>(please list the languages)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

167
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24. How many refugee/asylum seeker families use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. How many traveller families use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. How many children or parents with problems with physical health/disability use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. How many parents with problems with mental health use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. How many families with problems with drugs/alcohol use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. How many families with problems with domestic abuse use ELPP?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB * means please give us your ‘best guess’ if you do not collect this information, or not in this format

PLEASE WRITE IN ANY OTHER COMMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD

NAME OF PERSON COMPLETING THIS FORM………………………………………………
EMAIL ADDRESS…………………………………………………………………………
TELEPHONE NUMBER……………………………………………………………………
DATE……………………………………………………………………………………
Appendix F: Information for parents
What happens to the information collected?

We want to find out as much as we can about the different ways that parents, staff or volunteers are working together to support children's learning. We are not collecting information on individual children or families: services, staff, volunteers, parents and children will not be named in the study. All the information we collect will be treated in strict confidence, unless someone is at risk of serious harm. We keep this information secure, and only the research team will have access to it. We then destroy it when it is no longer needed.

Who is carrying out the Evaluation?

The study is being carried out by Dr. Mara Evangelou, Professors Kathy Sylva and Anne Edwards at the Department of Education, University of Oxford, and Teresa Smith at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work. All research team members who will be visiting services and homes have been through enhanced Criminal Records Bureau vetting procedures.

Findings and Further Information

The findings will be reported on the website at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (www.dcsf.gov.uk).

If you want to know more about the study please contact Kate Coxon, Project Manager on 01865 284095. We look forward to finding out more about your views so that we can improve services for families with young children.

For more information about the National Evaluation of the Early Learning Partnership Projects, contact:

Kate Coxon
Research Officer and Project Manager
University of Oxford
Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens
Oxford OX2 6PY
(01865) 284095

Funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families
www.dcsf.gov.uk

Early Learning Partnership Project

A guide for parents
What is the ELPP?

The Early Learning Partnerships Project (ELPP) is exploring ways of helping parents support their children's early learning. A number of voluntary agencies are involved in the project, and are benefiting from training and financial assistance.

What is the Evaluation?

We would like to know more about the ways parents support their children's learning, how staff or volunteers help them, and the kind of training that staff/volunteers or parents receive. The National Evaluation of the ELPP will study the different ways of involving parents used by various programmes across England. We want to find out as much as we can so that we can improve services for parents and children. The study is funded by the Department for Children, Schools and Families and is based at the University of Oxford.

Why have I been asked to take part?

We have asked you to take part because you have a child in the right age group. We are very interested in your views on supporting your child's learning, and how services for families can be improved. We would like to visit you at home at a time that suits you to talk to you about the kinds of things you enjoy doing with your child. A member of our research team will contact you to arrange this and answer any questions you have. The visit should last around an hour. Alternatively, we can talk to you at the ELPP setting (if available) or arrange to meet at a place you feel comfortable with.

As part of the study, we are visiting family services around the country where staff or volunteers are working with parents. We want to hear about the exciting activities that parents, staff and volunteers are doing with children. We know that many parents are happy to give advice on how services can be improved, and we would like to find out your views. You only have to answer the questions you want to and can withdraw from the study at any point if you wish.
Appendix G: Twelve approaches used by the agencies

*With thanks to lead agencies for their comments*
BOOKSTART/LET'S FIND OUT

Bookstart/‘Let’s Find Out’ is used by Home-Start with ELPP funding in Worcestershire, Croydon and Westminster, in partnership with Bookstart. ‘Let’s Find Out’ is a one day training ‘package’ designed by Home-Start staff and delivered in conjunction with Bookstart facilitators to Home-Start volunteers. A key focus was also accessing the Bookstart materials (which were also available in other languages). Home-Start volunteers offer home-based parenting support and have used the knowledge and ideas from the ‘Let’s Find Out/Bookstart training to encourage parents to interact with their children and to enjoy books, songs etc helping to develop the children’s early learning; the Bookstart training has also been used to develop activities with Home-Start family groups.

The Bookstart packs are often accessed through library services, but are more usually disseminated to families by health services (e.g. by health visitors, at clinics with parents bringing their children for check-ups).

The focus of the module is to explore practical, creative ways of making books and learning fun, and enabling parents to record play and learning activities together (including using resources such as disposable cameras). There are activities for parents, Bookstart packs for children of different ages (Bookstart for babies, a Bookstart pack for 18 to 30 months old children, and ‘My Bookstart Treasure Chest’ for 3-4 year olds), profile books, rhymetime books, CDs and scrapbooks. Parents are encouraged to mark involvement through scrapbooks, memory boxes, etc. They are shown how to access the free Bookstart materials.

All volunteers attending the training have been given ‘arts and craft bags’ to provide resources and activities for family and children. Volunteers complete additional monitoring and evaluation forms and keep a ‘reflective diary’.

The theoretical base of ‘Let’s Find Out’ includes cognitive development, modelling and activities-based elements, family support, and empowerment (improving parents’ confidence and coping strategies, reducing social isolation).

This approach, together with Listening and Learning to Young Children and One Plus One/Brief Encounters, was adapted by Home-Start into one new module in the distinctive Home-Start approach by the end of the ELPP initiative.

CAMPAIGN FOR LEARNING

Campaign for Learning promotes lifelong learning and adult education within the family and community context. In North Solihull, Campaign for Learning has worked as a partner with NCH using ELPP funding to help develop father-friendly approaches while carrying out another short-term funded project about parental partnership in parallel. The materials developed have focused on fathers (‘Putting Dads in the Picture’), with fathers’ events and fathers’ sessions, including a Campaign for Learning coaching programme, ‘The Best Coach for Your Kids is You’, developed with and run by fathers.

Campaign for Learning has operated as a partner with NCH, rather than as a training programme. Ideas for materials and activities have been developed jointly by workers and users. The materials developed are very flexible; they are given out to parents, and can be used individually and also in groups. There are now two modules in place, with a third being developed; these will be marketed to a wider audience.

ELPP funding was used to appoint a father’s worker to the NCH team; developing materials and events has also involved volunteers.
As its theoretical base, Campaign for Learning draws on principles of lifelong learning and community involvement, and has operated as a resource developer and provider for NCH in North Solihull.

CONTINUOUS/SHARE

‘SHARE’ is a community development and family learning programme developed by ContinYou (formerly the Community Education Development Centre in Coventry - CEDC) aimed at increasing parents’ involvement with their children’s education at home. The aims are to increase young children’s learning while enhancing and recognizing parents’ skills and knowledge, with a linked accreditation scheme for parents through the Open College Network (OCN). The programme is intended to be very flexible, and can be delivered in a range of settings - for example, libraries are often used. Originally designed for Key Stage 1, by 2003 SHARE was running in some 1000 schools across 200 local education authorities and Education Action Zones. Other modules developed include: SHARE 3-5s developed with DfES funding; and SHARE PLUS, funded by the Home Office and piloted by ContinYou together with Parentline Plus, provides materials for young people and their parents on issues to do with bullying, anti-social behaviour, and learning and family communication, and is used by a range of agencies (e.g. Education Action Zones, the Education Welfare Service, Sure Start, crime prevention, adult education).

Using ELPP funding, ContinYou has developed SHARE for younger age groups in Leeds and Bradford, working largely through Children’s Centres, with groups of parents who are introduced to ideas of what they can do at home to encourage their children’s learning. Parents can choose to make a folder of the activities they do at home and the folder can be accredited. The funding has been used by parents and practitioners to build up family packs of materials and resource banks, for example on story telling, and by ContinYou to develop new modules for the youngest age groups.

SHARE is not a training programme as such. It draws on community development approaches that encourage parents and practitioners to collaborate in identifying and encouraging parents’ skills and knowledge about their children's learning while developing materials and building up resources for parents to draw on. Siraj-Blatchford’s evaluation (2005) describes SHARE’s theoretical base as social constructivist. She shows that SHARE helps parents to deepen their understanding of their children's dispositions to learn and to recognise signs that their children are learning, the learning styles preferred by their children, and their children’s levels of knowledge and understanding. ContinYou works through local authorities and encourages them to support centres using the SHARE approach. In Leeds, for example, SHARE training has been in place for some years. Each site develops its own approach and focus.

Evaluations of SHARE include the following:

FAMILY WELFARE ASSOCIATION (FWA)/NEWPIN FAMILY PLAY PROGRAMME

The Family Welfare Association (FWA) Newpin ‘Family Play Programme’ is one of the four modules of Newpin’s Personal Development Programme. It is being used by FWA with ELPP funding in three sites - Swaffham, Sheffield, and Southwark (the last site is a FWA Newpin site, which offers this programme on its own, unlike the two other FWA sites using ELPP funding). All Newpin services have transferred to FWA, and the ‘Family Play Programme’ originally developed by Newpin has been partly adapted by FWA. Training has been provided by FWA/Newpin staff ‘in-house’. For example, in Southwark one staff member attended the two days ‘training the trainer’ training in order to roll out the Newpin Family Programme; all Southwark staff are trained in-house to provide Newpin, usually after the twelve week Personal Development Programme run by the centre manager for parents and staff together, and the ‘Family Play Programme’ is delivered alongside or as part of this programme.

The Newpin programmes are in theory aimed at parents (usually mothers) with long-term mental health problems and designed to be run with small groups of less than four members. The Family Play Programme works as a stand-alone module, consisting of twelve weekly sessions of two hours. There are ten play sessions, eight of which are structured; introduction and evaluation are for parents only. The aim is to help parents relate positively to their children through play. For ELPP, the Family Play Programme is provided in Southwark as an outreach programme in parents’ own homes of two sessions a week for ten weeks (the home visiting model); in Sheffield and Swaffham it is provided in centres for two sessions a week for twelve weeks (the group work model; the home visiting model is provided in these two sites by Parents as First Teachers).

The aims of the Family Play Programme are to provide parents and children with structured opportunities to engage in exciting and creative activities together in a supportive atmosphere; to develop parents’ understanding of the value of play for children; to develop parents’ ability to recognise and participate in the child’s focus of attention and initiative; to develop mutuality, reciprocity and trust; to increase the amount of contact, involvement and engagement between parents and children; and to develop parents’ ability to reflect on their play and interaction with their children and equip them to take the approach into everyday life.

Described as a therapeutic programme, it draws on psychodynamic approaches (e.g. Winnicott), and uses attachment theory as its theoretical base.

I CAN/EARLY TALK

I CAN’s ‘Early Talk’ is a national programme focusing on young children’s speech, language development and communication. It is designed to aid the communication development of all pre-school children through integrated therapy and educational approaches, often complementing other training programmes such as ‘Communicating Matters’.

With the help of ELPP funding, I CAN has been used by the Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA) in Staffordshire to support Stoke Speaks Out, a multi-agency project exploring the issues underlying children's language deficits in Stoke on Trent with a long-term vision to develop Stoke as an area recognised for ‘confident communicators’ who are able to take full advantage of social, health, educational and employment opportunities. The multi-agency project team includes professionals from agencies such as North Stoke Primary Care Trust (PCT), Stoke on Trent LEA, Newcastle-under-Lyme PCT, PLA, and the Combined Healthcare and the University Hospital of North Staffordshire. Staff come from speech and language therapy, teaching, special educational needs support services, clinical psychology, midwifery and play services backgrounds - this is an example of the ICAN principle that all practitioners have an important role to play in developing children's communication skills. In Cumbria, with ELPP funding PLA has developed a two day training course on language development for PLA workers and NCMA childminders, which forms part of the I CAN ‘Early Talk’ programme.
I CAN draws on a large body of research on children’s language development as the base for its speech, language and communication programme. One strand is increased parental communication knowledge and skills; the other strand is children’s improved communication skills.

Materials include one video for practitioners, and another for parents to help them focus on their children’s language.

‘LISTENING AND LEARNING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN’

‘Listening and learning with young children’ is used by Home-Start with ELPP funding in Worcestershire, Croydon and Westminster. One of three modules devised by Home-Start as a training package for Home-Start volunteers working with parents in their homes, it has been adapted from the Coram programme ‘Listening to young children’ by a member of the Home-Start training team who trained in the Coram programme. Home-Start scheme staff provide the one day training for their volunteers.

The focus of the module is helping parents to learn to listen to their children, and helping them to express their feelings. The training suggests ways for volunteers to encourage parents to listen to their child’s views and to help the child express feelings, likes and dislikes (‘smiley faces’, stickers etc.). Parents are encouraged to record and note their children’s learning, and are provided with resources such as disposable cameras.

Volunteers are encouraged to write up action plans, record their learning in a ‘reflective diary’, and make a book for each child.

The theoretical base of the programme focuses on parent-child attachment and responsiveness, and family functioning and relationships.

This approach, together with BookStart/Let’s Find Out and One Plus One/Brief Encounters, was adapted by Home-Start into one new module in the distinctive Home-Start approach by the end of the ELPP initiative.

ONE PLUS ONE/‘BRIEF ENCOUNTERS’

One Plus One’s ‘Brief Encounters’ is used with ELPP funding in partnership with One Plus One by Home-Start in Worcestershire, Croydon and Westminster, and by Coram in Camden. ‘Brief Encounters’ is a brief intervention module designed by One Plus One originally for health professionals (as a professional course approved by the Royal College of Nursing), exploring relationships, conflict and family breakdown.

For Home-Start, the ‘Brief Encounters’ training package was modified to make up a single one day module, the first of three, delivered to Home-Start volunteers supporting parents in the home. Training was provided initially by One Plus One trainers; at later stages Home-Start staff who had attended One Plus One training then cascaded the training to other staff and volunteers using the videos provided (e.g. of parental conflict). For the second half of the project the ‘Brief Encounters’ package was adapted to be a stand alone package for all Home-Start volunteers. The adapted package was delivered through a one day workshop and used a video resource (described as ‘a half-day programme for those who cannot access the other training alternatives’). The training pack used includes a video, a guide for facilitators and a workbook for participants.

The theoretical base of ‘Brief Encounters’ is derived from relationship counselling and family therapy. Their manual includes research references for practitioners on family relationships; lists underpinning concepts such as crisis intervention, and a developmental model of relationships; introduces basic counselling skills; it offers an introduction to systemic family thinking; focuses on
developing empathic responses; uses attachment theory (conflict is explored in this context); and considers the impact of family change on children and families.

This approach, together with BookStart/Let’s Find Out and ‘Listening and learning with young children’, was adapted by Home-Start into one new module in the distinctive Home-Start approach by the end of the ELPP initiative.

Previous evaluations of One Plus One


**PAFT/BORN TO LEARN**

Parents as First Teachers (the English arm of the original American programme Parents as Teachers) provides a highly structured programme in separate age-based modules for early years practitioners. ‘Born to Learn’ provides five days of training with a focus on child development and the idea that the parent is the child’s first principal instructor.

With ELPP funding, PAFT has been used by Coram in Camden to develop a structured home visiting service for parents in their own homes (six visits introducing new play activities), running alongside ELPP ‘Born to Learn’ centre-based groups, where parents choose the topic to be covered and can meet other parents in similar situations. The Family Welfare Association (FWA) has used ELPP funding in Sheffield and Swaffham to develop PAFT for sessions with parents in the home. PAFT is also used by NCH in North Solihull with ELPP funding.

The PAFT training covers neuroscience research on early development and learning; sequences of early childhood development in the areas of intellectual, social-emotional and motor development, and language; the structure of the individual visits in the home; how to facilitate parent-child interaction; ideas for parent group meetings; ways to provide access to community resources; how to provide services to ‘diverse families’ from different backgrounds, including different ethnic groups; ‘red flags’ in areas of development, hearing, vision and health; and training in recruitment and programme organisation.

PAFT provides a curriculum, a menu of activities for parents, and parent instruction. It aims to increase parents’ knowledge of child development and appropriate ways to stimulate and nurture their child’s intellectual, language, social and physical development; increase parents’ competence and confidence; enhance parenting skills and parent-child interaction; to prevent child abuse and neglect; to develop strong partnerships between parents and schools; to provide early detection of developmental problems; and to increase children’s school readiness and school success.

As its theoretical base, PAFT draws on child development research. It is a primary prevention programme, aiming to address root causes of child abuse, unrealistic expectations of children, feelings of isolation and parental stress. It is a ‘strengths’ model, recognising that parents are the first ‘experts’ on their children. It can be described as a parent education and family support programme for all families with young children. Its core values focus on the early years as critical; parents as their children’s ‘first and most influential teacher’; research-based curricula; and universal access for all young children and their families.
Evaluations have shown that children start school more advanced in language, social development and problem solving; parents are more confident, and more knowledgeable about child development; and children with learning difficulties are identified earlier, and the likelihood of child abuse and neglect is reduced. See, for example, evaluations listed at http://www.parentsasteteachers.org/

THE PARENTS AND EARLY LEARNING PROJECT (PEAL)

The Parents and Early Learning Project (PEAL), run by a consortium of the National Children’s Bureau (NCB), Coram and the London Borough of Camden, was funded by the DfES in 2005. The project set out to develop a model or ‘best practice framework’ for working in partnership with parents living in disadvantaged areas, in order to support parental involvement in children’s early learning. The model and training developed from a review of the literature and research on parental involvement in children’s learning and from good examples of existing practice.

‘Parents, Early Years and Learning’ is a two day training programme to help practitioners develop their relationships with parents. The first day takes place in the practitioner’s own setting with the aim that practitioners will be inspired to build on existing good practice in their own settings. Participants are given an activity book that guides them through a range of techniques to engage with parents. The second day is an interactive training day, focusing on partnerships with parents and how best to involve parents in their children’s learning. Questions include how best to make parental partnership a reality; how best to work with parents living in disadvantaged areas to involve them more in their children’s learning; and what impact on children’s outcomes would be expected if the approach were successful. The material includes examples of ‘good practice’ and a ‘menu’ of practical ideas and activities.

PEAL’s ‘best practice framework’ aims to help teachers and other practitioners to focus first on the pedagogical and theoretical underpinnings of each programme - the underlying research and policy as well as practice - and secondly on how to engage with parents, so that selection and adaptation can be tailor-made for each community. Thus PEAL itself includes a wide range of theoretical approaches, depending on the programme selected. PEAL principles underline the importance of (i) staff/parent relationships, (ii) workers’ confidence and skills, (iii) an infrastructure of support and parental involvement policies in each setting, and (iv) building on what staff do already.

PEAL has been used with the help of ELPP funding by the Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA) in Staffordshire/ Stoke and Cumbria, and by Coram in Camden. The framework has been slightly adapted (e.g. to include new material, or material relevant for home visiting). In each case the framework has been combined with or run alongside other frameworks or training programmes: PEEP and ICAN in the case of PLA, and One Plus One’s ‘Brief Encounters’ and PAFT in the case of Coram.

The PEAL framework is also ‘rolled out’ nationally in early years centres as part of the government-funded workforce training co-ordinated by the NCB (ELPP Strand 3). This programme is being evaluated separately.


PEEP/LEARNING TOGETHER

The Peers Early Education Partnership (PEEP) is an early learning programme which aims to improve the life chances of children, particularly in disadvantaged areas. Its purpose is to raise educational attainment, especially in literacy, by supporting parents and carers in their role as the first educators of their children. PEEP focuses on how to make the most of learning opportunities in everyday life at home - listening, talking, playing, singing and sharing books.
For ELPP, PEEP has been condensed into a two day course for practitioners. This introduces the PEEP principles, curriculum and materials and includes strategies for working with parents and carers and children in groups and at home; there is a comprehensive handbook. PEEP can be delivered by home visits, in groups or through open access activities (e.g. Children’s Centres). With ELPP funding, it is being used by Barnardos (in Bristol, Newcastle and Northumberland) and the Preschool Learning Alliance (PLA) (in Cumbria, Stoke/ Staffordshire), delivered through home visits and group sessions as well as open access activities, and also targeted towards specific groups of parents (for example, young parents and homeless parents in Bristol).

PEEP’s theoretical framework is based on the following core principles. First, relationships with parents and carers should value and build on parents’ and carers’ knowledge, work with parents as equals in a non-judgemental way, value diversity, and create opportunities for parents to share experiences in safe and supportive environment. Second, learning together with children is based on principles that parents and carers are the child’s first educators, that self-esteem is central to learning, that learning occurs best when understood from the child’s viewpoint, that children learn through play and interaction, that singing, stories and books are important in this process of learning together, and that relationships are at the heart of learning. The programme is structured around the ORIM framework: Opportunities to learn; Recognition and valuing of their early efforts and achievements; Interaction with adults to talk about what they do and how they feel; Modelling by adults of behaviour, attitudes and activities.

The curriculum focuses on five developmental areas: self-concept and learning dispositions (e.g. perseverance, curiosity); oral language; reading; writing; and numeracy. These are explored through nine themes at each age level. Core activities of the programme include (i) songs and rhymes, sharing books and stories and activities; singing, talking, and playing together to develop children’s listening, talking and later literacy, and strengthen relationships; and (ii) talking time, when a child development theme encourages parents and carers to share experiences. PEEP’s ‘Learning Together’ materials include a folder for each of five age levels (babies to four year olds). Each folder has nine themes combining information and ideas to do at home, and five accompanying videos. There are also two songbooks.

Previous evaluations of PEEP include:


**PICL/ENGAGING PARENTS**

Pen Green’s ‘Framework for Engaging Parents’ is a professional development programme which outlines Pen Green’s way of working with parents called ‘Parents’ Involvement in their Children’s Learning’ (PICL ). This is a long established approach that offers a framework for knowledge sharing between workers and parents about children’s learning. Pen Green describes its approach as ‘social constructivist’- that is, children construct their own knowledge through their own firsthand experiences and are influenced by people in their environment. Involving parents in their children’s learning draws on principles of advocacy, knowledge sharing and community development.

PICL is not a manual-based ‘off the shelf’ programme. It is a way of working which respects the knowledge of parents about their own children, and works with parents in a ‘knowledge sharing approach’:
**Video reflection** is a very powerful tool for engaging with parents as equals. The video allows parents and workers to ‘be in the moment’, and to bring their knowledge of the child together to discuss the learning captured on tape. When children watch the video footage at home with other key people, often many times over at their own request, they celebrate and revisit their own learning. Videoing in a setting allows workers to reflect on and review current practice.

**Sharing child development theories**: sharing ways of analysing children’s learning with parents enables parents and workers to share the same tools for understanding children’s deep level interests. Parents and workers can then share knowledge about the child and plan together to support children’s learning.

**Developing a dialogue**: parents and workers both bring their own knowledge and understanding of the child as they develop a dialogue in order to understand each other’s point of view. They listen to each other, and create new knowledge and understanding together. This process requires professionals to be open to new learning, and to ‘be humble, have faith in others and believe in their strengths’ (Freire, 1970, p.71).

Parental involvement in their children’s learning at Pen Green takes a number of forms: ‘key concept’ sessions, family group meetings, videoing their child at home and discussing patterns of activity, keeping a diary, contributing to a home-school book. Key concepts introduced to parents include ‘involvement’ and ‘well-being’ (Laevers, 1997), ‘schemas’ (Athey, 2007) and ‘adult pedagogic strategies’ (Pen Green, 2005).

ELPP funding through the ContinYou consortium has allowed Pen Green to offer **PICL** training to a range of practitioners in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Leeds and Bradford. The three day training requires two people from each centre/site to attend - one leader (who can ensure time for the whole staff team to be involved in the training), and the other working directly with children and families. Examples include a childminder network co-ordinator and a childminder, a teacher working in several Children’s Centres and a worker from one of the centres, a mental health worker working in a drop-in centre and a nursery nurse from a linked private day nursery.

- Pen Green (2005) *Adult Pedagogic Strategies* unpublished paper

**THURROCK COMMUNITY MOTHERS**

*Thurrock Community Mothers* (‘Thurrock Community Mothers Parent Support Programme’, CMP) offers parents with young children living in less advantaged communities a semi-structured home visiting programme delivered by a local experienced mother (called a ‘community mother’), who offers peer support ‘as one parent to another’. Ongoing training, support and guidance are provided to the community mothers by a community development practitioner, usually a health professional. Although the term ‘community mothers’ is used, programmes are directed at fathers as well as mothers; many programmes actively try to recruit ‘community fathers’ and some programmes refer to themselves as ‘community parent’ programmes.

The Thurrock CMP was set up by the health visiting service in Thurrock, Essex in 1991, with the help of the Early Childhood Development Unit in the University of Bristol. Other programmes followed in Dublin and the Netherlands. Thurrock CMP was recognised in 1999 by the European Mental Health Strategy Network and in 2004 by the European Social Inclusion Project as a national example of good practice.
In 1996, the Thurrock CMP co-ordinator developed a training package, and a national network for co-ordinators was set up in Thurrock 1997. Some 25 CMPs based on the Thurrock model operate in disadvantaged communities across England, Wales and Scotland, many funded by Sure Start. Most CMPs have strong links with Primary Care Trusts, and the majority of programme co-ordinators have experience in the health sector, for example as health visitors or health promotion workers.

CMP focuses on prevention and early intervention. Although parents are offered universal access, the programme is focused particularly on more vulnerable and marginalized parents who are wary of ‘official services’. The core capacity building components of the model include a community development model; building trusting peer relationships, social networks and mutual support; strengthening and supporting the development of confidence, self-esteem, knowledge, skills and aspirations through less advantaged communities, that is, both the community mothers recruited and the parents visited; raising awareness of and valuing the central role of parents in supporting their own children’s health, learning and all-round development; joint identification of local community needs, focusing on solutions and positive action for addressing them; and volunteer- to-employment training and progression pathways to promote the self-delivery of programmes by the participating community mothers.

The evidence base for the CMP is largely based upon a 1989 randomised controlled trial of the Dublin Community Mothers Programme, which found increased immunisation uptake, improvements to children’s and mothers’ diets, improved children’s cognitive stimulation, and reduced Post Natal Depression (PND).

Appendix H - Characteristics of ELPP parents
Supplementary Demographic Information

1) Socio-economic classification

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) (Office for National Statistics, 2000) was used to code all employed parents on the basis of their job title and the classification of their job skills. The coding for each SOC item was taken from the Computer Assisted Structured Coding Tool (CASCOT: 2007). SOC codes were then translated into the eight-class National Statistics Socio-Economic Classifications (NS-SEC) (Office for National Statistics, 2005) for ease of comparison with other studies. It must be retained that 39 per cent of the ELPP parent sample received no income from employment and are therefore not presented in Table 7.4 of the main text. Of these ‘workless’ households, 72% were single parent families compare with only 17% of families with partners. It is worth noting that only 32% of ELPP mothers reported that they were still in employment; as such the high number of intermediate occupations may be an artefact caused by the restrictions of such a small sample.

NS-SEC data for fathers were available for just over half of the sample due to the main respondent being single or not being knowledgeable about their partner’s employment. Caution is therefore needed in interpreting these data.

2) Postcoded Data

Postcode data was requested by the ELPP research team for two periods: for ‘ELPP users’ for the six months July-December 2007, and for both ‘ELPP users’ and ‘non-ELPP users’ for February 2008. Each postcode was linked to a Super Output Area (SOA) using the August 2007 Postcode Look-up Table. Postcode and SOA data were then linked to results in the *Index of Multiple Deprivation 2007* (Noble et al., 2008), to provide overall IMD scores and also a measure of children living in low income households. The child low income measure is a simple proportion that gives the percentage of children living in households on low incomes or basic means-tested benefits, with a national average of about 21%. The IMD score is more complex, based on seven underlying domain scores, with a national average of 21.67. Higher scores represent higher levels of deprivation. For ELPP, as a child-focused initiative, the child low income measure is more appropriate, and is used in these tables. The national deciles have been used; that is, dividing all SOAs into ten equal bands.

The way the data were returned posed considerable difficulties for the analysis (see Chapter 4). Only nine sites provided non-ELPP user data, and reported problems in locating ‘comparison groups’. Some sites did not complete the time series. There were very unequal group sizes in both user and non-user data.

The sub-sample used for the parent survey reported in Table H1 reports on 86 cases drawn from 17 sites.
Table H1: Frequency Distribution of ELPP sub-sample of parents by Deciles of Child Low Income Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deciles of child low income</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most deprived</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>20.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.9</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>75.6</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>83.7</td>
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<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>97.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Least deprived</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the frequency distribution of the ELPP user population as a whole reported in Table H2, data was provided by 15 of the 20 ELPP sites, generating more than 2,900 postcodes. Three sites, however, returned incomplete post codes. Thus the data reported here draw on 505 cases in 12 sites.

Table H2: Frequency Distribution of ELPP population in Feb 08 by Deciles of Child Low Income Households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deciles of child low income</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most deprived</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>40.8</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>16.2</td>
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