



Family Involvement in Education

*Study prepared for Pobal and Planet, the
Partnerships Network*

by

Siobhan Phillips and Anne Eustace



Research Aim

To identify and document effective models for the engagement of parents of disadvantaged children who would be among the target groups of the NDP Local Development Social Inclusion Programme.



Approach

- Literature Review of Irish Policy and International Practice;
- Study Visits of projects identified by the Partnership Companies that helped parents of young children address parenting, developmental or educational needs within community systems or the home.



Policy Backdrop

Current Structures for Family Involvement

- Provision is limited;
- No comprehensive system for early (first five years) identification of families at risk of educational exclusion;
- There are structures and systems through which preventative programmes could be mediated, however.



Principles Shaping Family Involvement

- More systemic, child centered approach;
- A shift from labeling families schools and communities as disadvantaged to one that recognises inherent strengths of families;
- A focus on approaches that that develop and enhance protective factors like self efficacy, personal responsibility, social supports.



Main Research Findings

- Strong, positive relationship between educational achievement, personal confidence, social class and parental involvement;
- Considerable commitment required of schools/others because such families typically wait for an approach rather than seeking help.



Effective Family Involvement Practices

- Strong commitment to involve low income families;
- Practices that foster enhanced parenting in the home - particularly those focused on high learning environment- tend to have the strongest impacts on children's educational achievements;
- Quality, intensity and continuity of support very important.



Implications/Needs

- Recognise the importance of the first five years and prioritise the child at the centre of interacting systems;
- Prioritise ‘at risk’ families;
- Have a positive view of families and communities as equal partners;
- Recognise that interventions for families at risk need to be well funded and intensive in nature;
- Support the development of high learning environments in the home.



How? Suggested Practices

- Actively reach out to build trusting relationships with harder to reach families;
- Use strategies to raise teachers and parents expectations of their children;
- Help parents support learning in the home;
- Train teachers to work collaboratively with other providers in the community;
- Welcome families and demonstrate it in school access and communication policies.