

**An exploration of Family Learning with particular focus  
on the perspective of the father**

Submitted by Julie Passey to the University of Exeter as a thesis for  
the degree of *Doctor of Education* (Generic Route)

May 2012

The thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JP Passey' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Signature.....

.....

## **Abstract**

What is the nature and purpose of Family Learning? The discourses relating to how a strong home-school relationship affects attitudes to Lifelong Learning and the impact of paternal involvement in young children's development have been well researched and document clear links and positive, enduring benefits for families and professionals. In spite, or perhaps because of this focus, the means by which these connections are achieved and maintained remains less well explored. The issues that need addressing now are more tangible challenges, such as: what does good practice look like, who decides which notions are consolidated, when and why?

Coupled with questions such as how do we get more fathers more involved and what will enable these relationships to flourish, this research reports on the initial findings from a small-scale exploratory inquiry, conducted as part of a professional doctorate, which considers a possible approach to these issues. It is an illuminative case study, located within an interpretive research paradigm, based on ontological assumptions of empowerment and emancipation for participants. A sociocultural epistemology informs and frames the work. The study sets out to explore the value and potential of Family Learning as a means of focused intervention in response to the questions raised, whilst also examining and increasing awareness of the issues involved, as seen by participants, to facilitate the expression of paternal agency and voice within the research process.

The data collection, conducted over a period of six months, focuses on an existing Fathers' Group, as they participate in a Family Learning project. It seeks to establish the nature and purpose of this type of provision, by clarifying the processes, outcomes and determinants of involvement through the eyes of the fathers, as they define and ultimately come to terms with their own identity and roles, in relation to their young children's development. The research centres on two workshops supported by several participant-led focus meetings. Two semi-structured staff interviews offer insight into the role that both

professional and personal cultural and historical understandings of Family Learning play in the process, whilst the data analysis illuminates and describes the relationships between parents and practitioners, policy and pedagogy.

The research observations could be used to inform approaches to both the establishment and the development of individual, personalised family frameworks for Lifelong Learning. The findings may also contribute towards a fresh perspective and offer creative approaches for professionals, in which pedagogical practice is not pre-determined but constantly evolving, on an equal and collaborative basis, between professionals and participants. This study offers a critical examination of grassroots Family Learning in practice. It is firmly embedded within and responsive to the needs of its local community. It aims to provide independent evidence to reinforce and extend the current knowledge base and ultimately, to maintain, strengthen and expand the connections between Family and Lifelong Learning.

# Contents

<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>2</b>
List of Tables .....	8
List of Figures .....	8
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. Introduction / background .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Rationale / context .....	12
a) Current policy.....	12
b) Contribution to knowledge / relevance of the topic .....	15
c) Personal interest .....	19
1.2 Overview of thesis.....	22
<b>2. Review of Literature .....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	24
2.2 Challenges .....	26
2.3 Official approaches to Family Learning .....	28
a) Summary of definitions and theoretical models .....	28
2.4 Sociocultural framing of the study .....	40
a) Theories of masculinity .....	40
2.5 Literature concerned with paternal motivations and involvement in young children's learning.....	45
a) Impact of disadvantage on learning .....	45
b) Positive impact of parental involvement in children's learning .....	47
c) Distinct and complementary roles of mothers and fathers .....	51
d) Impact of fathers on outcomes for their children.....	54
e) Difficulties of involving fathers in Family Learning .....	58
2.6 Conclusion.....	59
<b>3. Methodology.....</b>	<b>61</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	61
3.2 Research design and rationale.....	61

Epistemological Position .....	63
Methodological Context.....	65
Paradigm .....	65
Theory .....	67
3.3 Case study .....	69
3.4 Participants.....	72
a) The 8 families .....	72
b) The 3 Children's Centre staff members .....	74
c) The Family Learning tutor .....	76
3.5 Data collection.....	77
a) Procedures .....	77
b) Materials .....	78
Questionnaires.....	79
Focus Groups .....	81
Observational field notes and reflective diary .....	82
Digital videotapes.....	83
Interviews.....	84
Fathers Booklet.....	86
3.6 Approach to data analysis .....	87
a) Procedures .....	87
3.7 Ethical issues .....	89
Rationale.....	89
Procedure .....	90
Potential Issues.....	91
Strategies.....	92
3.8 Conclusion.....	92
<b>4. Analysis and Findings.....</b>	<b>94</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	94
4.2 Analysis of questionnaires data .....	97
Initial / sub themes .....	98
Major themes .....	98
Evidence linked to findings.....	99
4.3 Analysis of focus groups data.....	101

Initial / sub themes .....	102
Major themes .....	102
Evidence linked to findings.....	102
<b>4.4 Analysis of video data .....</b>	<b>107</b>
Initial / sub themes .....	108
Major themes .....	110
Evidence linked to findings.....	110
Intergenerational learning themes linked to findings.....	112
<b>4.5 Analysis of observational data .....</b>	<b>114</b>
Initial / sub themes .....	115
Major themes .....	119
<b>4.6 Analysis of interview data .....</b>	<b>124</b>
The Children's Centre staff interview.....	124
The Family Learning tutor interview .....	125
Major themes .....	128
Evidence linked to findings.....	129
<b>4.7 Synthesis of data sources.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>5. Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>138</b>
5.1 Summary of key findings.....	138
Interpretation.....	138
5.2 Strengths .....	154
5.3 Limitations .....	157
5.4 Conclusion.....	160
<b>Appendix 1: Ethics .....</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Questionnaires .....</b>	<b>172</b>
Analysis of questionnaires .....	172
Completed questionnaire version 1, Dad 1.....	175
Completed questionnaire version 1, Dad 2.....	176
Completed questionnaire version 1, Dad 3.....	177
Completed questionnaire version 1, Dad 4.....	178
Completed questionnaire version 1, Dad 5.....	179
Completed questionnaire version 1, Dad 6.....	180
Questionnaire version 2 .....	181

Completed questionnaire version 2 .....	182
<b>Appendix 3: Focus Groups .....</b>	<b>183</b>
Transcripts from Focus Group 1 .....	183
<b>Appendix 4: Observational data .....</b>	<b>191</b>
Field Notes .....	191
Second Workshop 21/1/2011 .....	191
Sample extracts from reflective diary .....	213
<b>Appendix 5: Video Data.....</b>	<b>216</b>
Sarah .....	233
Anna .....	234
Helena .....	235
Melanie .....	236
Karl .....	237
Billy .....	239
Emily .....	240
Jessica.....	241
<b>Appendix 6: Staff Interviews .....</b>	<b>243</b>
Tutor Interview 22/3/2011 .....	243
Coded transcript of CC Staff Interview 4/3/2011 .....	251
Interview Schedule .....	270
Analysis of Staff Interviews .....	271
<b>Appendix 7: Outcomes Evidence.....</b>	<b>283</b>
Completed Homework example .....	283
Dads' evaluations completed during 3rd focus group .....	284
Session Plan page 1 .....	285
Session Plan page 2 .....	286
<b>Appendix 8: Fathers Booklet.....</b>	<b>287</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>291</b>