

Original citation:

Cullen, Stephen Michael The Parenting Early Intervention Programme, 2006-2010 : parents' perceptions of parenting courses as an educative process leading to changes in family life. In: European Conference on Educational Research, Helsinki, Finland, 25 Aug 2010.

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**The Parenting Early Intervention Programme, 2006-10:
Parents' perceptions of parenting courses as an educative process
leading to changes in family life.
ECER, Helsinki, 25th August, 2010.**

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1.OVERVIEW

1.1 Labour governments, 1997-2010, and family 'support'

Family policy was a key component of the British Labour government's domestic agenda from the election of the first 'New' Labour government in 1997 to its defeat in May 2010. The 1997 Labour Party manifesto set out the overall approach to family policy that characterised that policy its 13 years in power:

'Labour does not see families and the state as rival providers for the needs of our citizens. [...] But families cannot flourish unless government plays its distinctive role: [...] Society, through government, must assist families to achieve collectively what no family can achieve alone.' (Labour Party, 1997).

The Labour government subsequently introduced a wide range of family focused initiatives and interventions designed to 'support' families and improve individual, family, and social outcomes. The variety of policy initiatives were matched by important government reports and legislation, such as Every Child Matters (H M Government, 2003), the 2004 Children Act, and the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007).

This UK approach has mirrored recent European developments. In particular, the Council of Europe commissioned important work in respect of positive parenting and the role of governments and parents in family life. For example, Daly (ed. 2007) addressed key issues relating to positive parenting and parents' entitlement to support from the state in carrying out their role as parents. And in 2006, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

recommended that member states should adopt a range of measures to 'promote positive parenting as an essential part of the support provided for parenting' (Council of Europe, 2006).

2. PARENTING

2.1 The Parenting Early Intervention Pathfinder and Programme, and evaluation

A key English family policy initiative, the Parenting Early Intervention *Pathfinder* ran from September 2006-March 2008, providing £7.6 million of central government funding to 18 Local Authorities (LAs) in England to implement one of three evidence-based parenting programmes for parents of children aged 8-13. The pathfinder was followed, in 2008-2011, by the Parenting Early Intervention *Programme* (PEIP) - across all English LAs in two roll outs, Wave 2 (from 2008) and Wave 3 (from 2009), with two further evidence-based programmes added to the original three. The PEIP programmes were: Triple P; Incredible Years (school age) (IY); Strengthening Families, Strengthening Communities (SFSC); Families and Schools Together (FAST); and the Strengthening Families Programme 10-14 (SFP10-14). The PEIP had a particular focus on parents of children at risk of anti-social behaviour, although LAs were given the freedom to establish particular roll out strategies and target groups. In some cases, LAs made universal offers of PEIP parenting courses, for example through schools, while in others, LAs utilised a variety of referral routes to target particular parents and families, focusing largely on the 'at risk' groups.

A national evaluation of the three stages of the PEIP roll out was carried out by the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR), the University of Warwick. The evaluation of the first stage – Wave 1 – was reported on in 2008 (Lindsay et al 2008). The evaluations of Wave 2 (2008-11) and Wave 3 (2009-11) are still in progress. The evaluation has adopted a combined methods approach, using quantitative and qualitative methods.

2.2 Critiques of government family support and learning policy

The effectiveness of evidence-based group parenting programmes has been established by a number of systematic reviews (e.g., Barlow and Stewart-Brown, 2000; Patterson et al, 2002). There is strong evidence to suggest that such programmes are an effective and cost-effective way of improving parenting, parental mental health, and the social and emotional development of their children. However, most of this work has been conducted outside Europe, with parents of children who already have problems or are at high risk of developing those (Patterson et al, 2002). For governments, the attraction of evidence-based parenting courses is that they present an opportunity to intervene at the individual level with the aim of

impacting upon problems that have a high political profile, and significant societal costs. Emotional and behavioural problems are the most common cause of disability in children (Bone and Meltzer, 1989), with a prevalence of 10-20%, depending on such variables as socio-economic status, parental educational levels, and single parenting (Patterson et al, 2002). Such problems have important implications for adult mental health (Broidy et al, 2003; Robins and Rutter, 1990), delinquency and costs to society (Scott, Knapp et al, 2001). Parents have a key role in children's development generally and the appearance of problems (Gerhardt, 2004). In the last 20 years many programmes have been developed to support parents in their parenting.

Despite the evidence of the effectiveness of parenting programmes, their employment by government has been seen as problematic, particularly in terms of classed policy and gender relations. The adoption of parenting programmes as a strategy to improve parental mental health, for example, and to act indirectly on manifestations of social fragmentation such as anti-social behaviour, has been seen to be part of a broader policy shift away from tackling fundamental inequalities in social and economic life, towards locating responsibility for these issues at the level of the individual. Sharon Gewirtz (2001), Carol Vincent (2001), and Val Gillies (2005a, 2005b & 2008) have questioned the class basis of government discourses of 'support' & 'inclusion' in family education policy, arguing that such discourses represent the re-construction of the working class by the state. For example, Gewirtz argued that the Labour government's overarching strategy was to undertake a programme of the re-socialization of the working class based upon the values of a fraction of the middle class, which she termed 'cloning the Blairs' (Gewirtz, 2001). Within this strategy, parenting programmes for parents, specifically from the working class, who did not share particular middle-class values and aspirations were one element of a two-pronged approach – the other element being the reform of schools to reflect similar ambitions and targets. The fundamental aim of this strategy was 'the eradication of class differences by reconstructing and transforming working-class parents into middle-class ones. Excellence for the many is to be achieved, at least in part, by making the many behave like the few' (Gewirtz, 2001, 366). In this analysis, parenting programmes are a tool for locating personal and social issues arising from systemic causes at the level of the individual and the family, whereby participating parents are to be reconciled to social and economic disadvantage. The primary aim, it is argued, is not, therefore, to improve parent-child, or family relations – as parenting programmes claim.

The role of gender relations in the formation of government parent and family policy has been highlighted by Miriam E. David (1984, 1993, and 1999). David used feminist theory to

critique family life education and parent education as being disproportionately focused on women as mothers, and for creating situations where ‘women are pitted against each other, as mothers or as workers in the caring services’ (1984, 28). She traced the policy history of classed and gendered parent and family policy, identifying key elements of continuity between Labour policy (David, 1999) and that of Conservative governments in the 1980s and early 1990s (David, 1984, 1993). A key argument was that the Labour government sought to prescribe and plan to ‘regulate parental standards for all’ (David, 1999, 120), and that policy aimed at:

‘new forms of social control through public scrutiny built into them [...] Despite the rhetoric of public provision for families to be more involved with education and upbringing all the [parent and family] schemes imply more public forms of standardisation and surveillance.’ (David, 1999, 122)

In addition, the dominance of women in the ‘caring’ workforce, and the understanding of ‘parent’ as a synonym for ‘mother’, along with a Labour government policy drive to compel mothers into paid employment aggravated tensions for women in the roles of mother and members of caring professions.

3. THE PAPER

3.1 Aims

This paper focuses on the experience of parents undertaking the PEIP parenting programmes. Findings indicated that the majority experience of completing a parenting course resulted in a range of well-being and self-efficacy benefits. In addition, it is argued that the programmes are experienced by parents as an educative process leading to changes in the cultures of family life. These cultural changes are overwhelmingly experienced in positive terms by participating parents. The arguments advanced here are that the PEIP, as experienced by parents and families challenges class, and to a lesser extent, gender based critiques of family education initiatives. A more nuanced analysis is proposed on the basis of this large scale study than allowed by current critiques of parenting and family learning policy.

3.2 Data collection

The data underpinning this paper is drawn from quantitative and qualitative data research undertaken with 18 LAs from Wave 1, 23 LAs from Wave 2, and 24 LAs from Wave 3. Quantitative data was drawn from questionnaires containing four standardised instruments completed by parents at the start and end of their parenting group (n= 2207 Wave 1; n=

2676 Wave 2; n= 644 from Wave 3; with Wave 2 and 3 evaluation data collection still in process).

The qualitative data was drawn from 133 parent interviews, conducted face to face, or in groups. Interviews were semi-structured, recorded, fully transcribed and analysed by thematic analysis. The interview transcriptions were coded individually against pre-determined themes (deductive analysis), and emergent themes revealed by analysis of transcripts (inductive analysis). The development of the coding system was a recursive (iterative) process.

The data from the Wave 1 PEIP (which provides the primary focus for this paper) consisted of three evidence based parenting programmes – SFSC, IY and Triple P. Data was gathered concerning basic demographic backgrounds of parents. In addition, four standardized parenting measures were used, being administered by parenting group facilitators before and immediately after the completion of PEIP course. The instruments were: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ); Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS); Parenting Scale (PS) (laxness & over-reactivity); Being a Parent Scale (BAP) (satisfaction and efficacy).

4.FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic

For the Wave 1 parents (n=2207) 86.7% of parents were women, 13.3% were men.

One in eight PEIP Wave 1 parents (12.5%) did not indicate their ethnic group; of the others (n=1932) 76.1% were White British; the remaining 23.9% were spread across a range of ethnic groups. In the UK as a whole, in the 2001 Census, 92.1% of the population indicated 'White British' and 'white other'. However, there are very wide LA and area variations in the ethnic geography of the UK, with England having a higher BME proportion than the other constituent countries of the UK; and the variation in English regional figures spanning a spectrum of 29% of all London residents compared to 2% in the North East of England (ONS, 2001). LA figures vary to an even greater extent. The PEIP evaluation cohort is skewed in terms of its demographic sample towards areas with higher than UK average BME populations.

In terms of educational levels, 46.9% left school at the minimum school leaving age of 16, or younger; 11.0% left school at 17 or 18 years; 24.0% attended Further Education college; 4.9% undertook an apprenticeship or trade based course; and 13.3% attended university.

These findings compare with (in October 2009) 29% of the British population being educated to degree level; and 12.4% with no qualifications.

Establishing income levels was a difficult process given the nature of the facilitator administered questionnaires. Parents were asked to indicate their weekly income, but sensitivity over disclosing income, combined with problems associated with the details of earned income, benefit entitlements, taxation, and net and gross income limited the effectiveness of the data. As a result, issues with the income data impact upon assessments of class. For the Wave 1 parents who responded to income questions (n=1814; 82.1%), 33.2% indicated income of less than £150 per week; 19.1% of between £151 and £200 per week; 12.2% of between £201 and £250 per week; 8.7% between £251 and £300 per week; 8.2% between £301 and £350 per week; and 18.6% with £351 and above per week. During the year ending April 2009, the median *gross* weekly earnings of full-time employees in the UK were £489.

The problems associated with income data, and the implications for the class profile of the cohort, led to a switch in data collection for the evaluation of Waves 2 and 3 from income to housing tenure. Of 3320 parents from Waves 2 and 3, 94.7% provided housing tenure details as opposed to the 82.1% of Wave 1 parents who provided income details. A high proportion of the Wave 3 parents, 63%, lived in rented accommodation, compared to the national average of around 27%.

To date the demographic findings from Waves 2 and 3 were similar to those from Waves 1, but with an increasingly heterogeneous cohort. For example, 28% of Wave 2 and 3 were parents educated to higher education level. In addition:

- 87% of Wave 2 and 3 of parents were female, 23% male (n =3276).
- 80% of Wave 2 and 3 parents were White British ethnicity; the largest minority groups were at 10%. (n= 3236)
- 21% of Wave 2 and 3 parents (n= 3020) reported no educational qualifications, 29% had GCSEs (16+); 28% reported being educated to Higher Education levels, including 10% with a degree.

4.2 Parenting course outcomes – quantitative data

The data presented in summary here refers to findings from Wave 1 and the full findings are given in Lindsay et al (2008), pp. 50/69.

Prior to participation in parenting courses, parents overall had significantly lower levels of mental well-being than the general population. PEIP parents also had a substantially higher proportion of children with SDQ scores rated 'abnormal' than the national sample. The impact of undertaking a PEIP course showed a significant increase in parents' mental well-being, and in self-reported efficacy and parental satisfaction. In addition, there was a significant decrease in parenting laxness and parenting over-reactivity; and statistically significant improvement on all SDQ measures as indicated by reductions in the levels of problems. These findings refer to Wave 1. Interim analysis indicates that these are replicated for Wave 2 and Wave 3 so far.

Three evidence-based programmes were used in PEIP Wave 1 (Triple P, IY, and SFSC), to which were added SFP10-14 and FAST for Waves 2 and 3. Use of the programmes was uneven across the PEIP, with, for example, 47.5% of post-course questionnaires coming from parents who had taken part in Triple P programmes, compared to 21.4% from IY programmes in Wave 1. During Wave 1, comparisons between programmes indicated that the differences across all child and parent outcomes between programmes are generally small or non-existent.

4.3 Parenting course outcomes – qualitative data

4.3.1 *Parent interview findings*

Interviews were conducted with 133 parents from across the three waves of the PEIP (a process that is still continuing, with a focus on follow-up interviews). The interviews were carried out either face to face or by telephone (depending on parental preference), in groups or one-to-one. All the parents interviewed had completed a PEIP parenting course. The parents' accounts across all programmes were very positive overall and similar in content and emphasis. Parents reported changes in their approaches to parenting in line with principles and strategies learned on their programme. In consequence, they explained that their children had noticed changes in their parents' approach and responded with positive changes relating to self-esteem, behaviour and interest in school work. There were many examples of parent-child improvements in relationships, with less confrontations and friendlier co-operation. Parents from all programmes felt that the programmes should be made more widely available, especially for parents of young children.

4.3.2 *Family issues*

In their accounts of family life prior to undertaking a PEIP course, a common theme among parents was their realization that their family lives were affected by disharmony. For example, a father explained:

'It was just like a free-for-all, really, in my house. The kids were doing what they wanted, not listening when you tell them to do something.' (P1/LA C160)

Parents frequently described family life as involving a repeated pattern of interactions that they were unhappy with, such as their children not responding to reasonable requests, or frequent occurrences of shouting between parents and children. There was a sense that, for many parents, they felt that in their relations with their children they had reached an impasse and one that was having a negative effect on them as well as their children. One mother explained why she decided to go on a PEIP course by saying:

'To be honest the reason I went along was because I was at the end of my tether with my daughter.' (P1/LA C206)

Similarly:

'There were a couple of interesting bullet point [on the information leaflet] that caught my attention, but, again, I also felt that I was in a crisis where I needed help desperately'. (P2/LA C343)

Another commented:

'At the time I was contacted I was at the end of the road, I had looked at so many different places for help, and this fell on my doorstep and I just thought, "anything I can do to get help and information has got to be a good thing"; so I thought it would be an opportunity to go and learn, perhaps not where I had been going wrong, but how to put things right'. (P3/LA C123)

The parents wanted to address the problems that they recognised in their family lives, and wanted to improve their relationships with their children. They were concerned that other families were not like their own, and they were worried about attending PEIP courses where their 'dirty washing' might be on public display. Despite these reservations, parents accepted places on PEIP courses, and, even when referred, were willing to try the courses, in the hope that they might help in rebuilding relationships.

4.3.3 *Parenting courses as educational processes, and family cultural change*

The interview data indicated that undertaking a parenting course was an educative process. Parents argued that the PEIP courses enabled them to acquire new knowledge and skills, which impacted positively on the culture of family life, interpersonal relations between adults and children, and between adults in the same household.

Parents identified a number of elements in the educative experience of completing a PEIP course. For the overwhelming majority of parents, the key transformative understanding was the acceptance of the knowledge that parent behaviour is of primary importance in parent-child relationships, and that parents need to change their own behaviour as a first step to the improvement of those relationships. For example:

'I was raising my voice willy nilly and I didn't realize, I wasn't present enough to see how that was masking him feel, how threatening that was, and some of the role plays and some of the things we did here made me see ... I was shouting and screaming and everything, but now, just the fact that I don't raise my voice now has changed everything. I'm mummy and he's safe, and he feels safe, and he gives that off. It's completely different'. (P2/LA C321)

'Whereas before I used to lose my rag, totally, now I am more under control. Before it was grab her, smack her bum, but [now] I didn't stress up big time because it would have stressed her out more. She still got mad, but I thought, if I keep calm, she will keep calm. I've put that into practice a couple of times and it's worked'. (P2/LA C333)

The process of acting upon the new insights around the central part played by the adult's behaviour in parent-child relationships, and the rewards from that, helped parents gain new confidence in their parenting skills. In consequence, they were more capable of establishing or re-establishing appropriate parent and child roles, which, in turn, led to improved parent-child relationships, as identified, for example, by this parent:

'It's made me more confident in my parenting. It's made me more able to set boundaries with my daughter. It's made me more confident in challenging her when she's being disruptive. She knows when I mean business now. It's kind of ingrained in me now, and I can see, even when things are happening, and I'm not referring to the book, I can see myself thinking and afterwards I think, "I did that because of that course". It's changed the way I react to her reactive behaviour. It's just completely changed both of us, I think, in our outlook to each other as well. We're enjoying each other's company now. We're

not just arguing constantly. It's changed our lives. It really has given me my daughter back'. (P1/LA C434)

The parents also provided accounts of the ways in which they had learned, through the PEIP courses, to devote specific time to their children, and, in that way they had learned how to build their relationships with their children:

'I now actually stop what I am doing and listen to them or say things like "let me just finish this washing up and I'm all yours". They ask you something while you're washing up ... it's always, "just a minute". I think more about how *they are* feeling and not just what *I've* got to do. That has improved a lot in my relationship with my daughter'. (P4/LA C544)

Improved parent-child relationships, child-centred time given by parents, boundaries for children, and appropriate parent and child roles all contributed to the improved quality of family life.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The PEIP and classed policy

The national focus of the PEIP was on families and children at risk of anti-social behaviour. LAs were, however, free to decide on local priorities and on referral pathways. In consequence, there were a range of referral mechanisms, from universal offers to all parents to court order referrals. The national focus on 'at risk' groups might suggest that, as critics of parent 'support' strategies argue, programmes like the PEIP are part of an attempt by the government to re-create the working class. There are problems with this approach in itself, with, for example, the inference that anti-social behaviour is a marker of class, but in the context of the PEIP evaluation findings, there are additional difficulties with the approaches of Gewirtz (2001), Vincent (2001), and Gillies (2005a, 2005b & 2008).

The class base of the PEIP parent cohort is not class specific. Instead, there is a strong heterogeneity in, for example, the educational levels of parents involved in the PEIP, with 28% of parents from Waves 2 and 3 having been educated to Higher Education level – which compares with an overall UK percentage of 29% (in 2001) of the population having received Higher Education. There is a more class focused aspect of the PEIP cohorts in terms of housing (measured for Waves 2 and 3) with 30% parents being owner occupiers, while 64.1% rented housing (for the UK population in general, in 2001, 68% are owner occupiers, 32% rent housing). Similarly, even given the problems associated with generating

accurate returns regarding income, the PEIP cohort reflects higher proportions of lower income groups. Nonetheless, there is, again, heterogeneity across the cohort, with 18.6% of the parental income being above £351 per week, with 33.2% having an income of less than £150 per week, and a range between those two positions. Despite the national focus of the PEIP on 'at risk' families, it is the case that this did not, in terms of the PEIP cohort, translate into a straightforward class based intervention. The cohort exhibited a range of education, income, and housing backgrounds.

In terms of the qualitative evidence generated by the parent interviews, there was no evidence that the parents regarded their participation as a classed experience. By contrast, parents explained that the experience of the parenting course was one that was characterised by non-judgemental respect. In addition, the delivery of PEIP courses was such that parents did not feel that they were in a formalised or hierarchical learning situation. As one father explained:

'It was the way it was delivered. It was not like a classroom setting, it was just like ... your mates, a bit like a bunch of friends. Just like ... down the pub with your mates or something. It was just ... it was not, like, dictated to you like if you was at school, like, your teacher ... this, this, this and this. It wasn't said, this is how you do it, this ... it was suggested this is how you do it. It was never put forward, this is how you must do it. It was ... these are only suggestions, you can take them on board if you like'.
(P2/LA C160)

Further, the priority of the parents was to improve their relationships with their children. In some cases, there was an awareness that their children had been identified, by, for example, schools, youth workers, or police, as presenting with anti-social behaviour, but these issues were still seen in the light of their own relationship with their child.

It was a common belief among parents who had undertaken a PEIP course that all families would benefit from such courses, regardless of background. Interestingly, one father who had been referred onto a PEIP course by his social worker, argued that:

'If you knock on ten doors round this place, and people say, "yes, I've got the perfect family" ... what liars! There is no such thing on this planet as the perfect family that social services have made it out to be.' (P1/LA C160)

In this case, the father was using his life experience, and his experience of the PEIP course, as a way of subverting what he saw as his neighbours' and social workers' myths of 'perfect families'. Other parents were enthusiastic about the PEIP courses and the impact of their new parenting knowledge, and thought that the courses should be universally available. They were also aware that many parents were wary of participating, fearing that the courses were a means of control. An example is the commentary made by a mother who had attended a school organised PEIP course. The school had offered the course to all the parents of its pupils (the majority of whom came from a London borough with unusually low levels of social deprivation), and, following a very successful participation in the course, the mother, and her friend, were keen to engage other parents for the next course:

'We've been trying very hard to promote [the course] but I think most parents at the school are too busy or on the other hand they are very suspicious of it, they see it as something else. Once you've done it and you realise you get so much from it but originally you were "oh this is going to be like the school interfering or it's for bad children", so I think the difficult thing is that maybe it's you struggle to get other parents to see the benefits from it.' (P2/LA C248)

Parents suggested that PEIP groups should be made more available, so that more parents could access the support. They also argued that groups should be run at a range of times and locations to suit different work patterns. In addition, parents suggested that parents should have access to groups when their children were young and problems were less severe.

5.2 The PEIP and gender relations

The quantitative data generated from the PEIP cohort illustrates a strong gender bias among parents undertaking PEIP courses, and those involved in delivering the courses. For example, 86.7% of Wave 1 parents were women, and 90.1% (1238 of 1373) of PEIP Wave 2 and 3 course facilitators were women. These quantitative findings apparently further strengthen the arguments of David (1984, 1993, and 1999) concerning gender and family life education, with its focus on mothers and women workers.

While the cohort shows that the PEIP courses were delivered largely to, and by, women, the qualitative findings suggest a more nuanced picture of the gender relations meaning of this bias than suggested by David (1999). The argument is that this type of bias reveals a focus on women as the subjects of punitive state action which is built around notions of mothers' failure and the need to publicly expose that failure. Further, the fact that the caring

professions are dominated by women workers (who are often mothers themselves) puts women in a position where their different roles as 'failing mother' and 'parenting professional' pits women against each other. These arguments are not, however, substantiated by the interviews with mothers who undertook PEIP parenting courses, and who represented, for example, 83% of the Wave 2 and 3 parents interviewed. There was no sense that the mothers undertaking PEIP courses felt that they were in conflict with the facilitators. Rather their views on the facilitators and parenting workers were that they exhibited understanding and respect. For example, a mother commented:

'I, personally, like the fact that they [the facilitators] are friendly ... We generally stay on course with what we're doing, but we still generally have a laugh, and they'll laugh back'. (P2/LA C765)

There were also explicit acknowledgements that mothers were aware of professional roles, but that they did not feel that women in these roles were in conflict with mothers undertaking the PEIP groups; for example, one mother said:

'I know [facilitator 1] is a health visitor, and [facilitator 2] is a foster carer, but they're normal [laughter]. They don't have that hat on – "What I say goes". They're normal. It's been nice'. (P5/LA C765)

The very low percentage of men undertaking PEIP courses raises a large number of issues concerning gender relations. In some cases, these issues are of great sensitivity, for example, those related to domestic violence (Wasoff, 2009). The findings from the PEIP evaluation suggest, however, that the issues relating to the inclusion, and low levels of participation, of fathers in the PEIP are related to those arising in similar government initiatives aimed at parents, but, in fact, being largely experienced by mothers. An example was the Parent Support Adviser (PSA) pilot in England, 2006-08, which also saw low levels of male participation in both parent and practitioner roles (Cullen et al, 2010). The PEIP evaluation interviews with both fathers and mothers suggest that there was a desire of fathers to be included. Fathers who undertook PEIP courses believed that there had been a general failure to adopt strategies to include fathers. In some cases, mothers and fathers highlighted the issue of the timing of PEIP courses, most of which were run at times during the working week that effectively excluded both fathers and mothers engaged in full-time employment. This type of issue, impacting on men in a disproportionate fashion, but also having implications for women, could also be seen in PEIP groups that included adults and

children (SFP10-14). In the case of the SFP10-14, parallel groups for parents and children were run, plus a family session. In the parent groups, and among facilitators, women were in the dominant majority, but in the young people's groups the majority were boys. This had a gendered impact on boys, who were in gender relationships with mothers and women facilitators. As one, female, facilitator explained:

'It was all boys in the youth group, and it was all mums in the parent group, and with all the facilitators being women, the boys were heavily outnumbered and at first they, not ganged up, but kind of stayed together and were quite loyal and solid as a group, but once they realised we weren't as frightening as I think they thought we were it all came apart and they all got individual things out of it.' (F3/C108)

In such circumstances, attending girls could also be affected by the gender balance among the young people. In one case, at least, a solitary girl left the young people's group after just one week, after finding herself in the minority among the boys.

6. Conclusions

The large-scale evaluation of the PEIP in England indicates that the dominant parental experience of undertaking an evidence-based PEIP course was characterised by:

- Improved mental well being, and self-efficacy measurements
- Educative experiences leading to improved parent-child relationships, happier family life based on developments in family cultures.

Government sponsored parent and family education interventions have been subject to class and gender based critiques, and characterised in negative terms. However, the evidence from the PEIP evaluation strongly suggests that such critiques need to be revised given:

- The heterogeneous class nature of the PEIP cohorts
- Strongly positive participant perceptions of PEIP courses
- Gender related issues associated with the running of PEIP courses

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ⁱ This paper builds upon work undertaken by a CEDAR, University of Warwick -based research team: Lindsay, G., David, H., Band, S., Cullen, M. A., Cullen, S., Strand, S., Hasluck, C., Evans, R., Stewart-Brown, S.