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ABSTRACT

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOL INTERVENTIONS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND EXPLORATION OF STORYLINKS

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There is considerable emphasis in research literature and educational policy on the importance of parental involvement in supporting children’s academic and social outcomes. Much of this is based on correlational, rather than experimental evidence. Also, the focus has been on children’s academic outcomes and attainment, as opposed to emotional and social outcomes. A systematic review of existing literature was conducted to evaluate recent empirical studies of school-based interventions that actively involve parents in supporting and promoting children’s mental health and emotional well-being. It aimed to describe the characteristics of such interventions and to consider whether there is research evidence supporting the ‘added value’ of these. Results suggested the interventions promoted a range of positive outcomes related to children’s mental health and emotional well-being. However, further work is needed to understand to what extent positive outcomes are related to the specific approaches and methods used, especially as there is much variation in the types of interventions used. Currently there is little robust empirical evidence for the additional benefits of actively involving parents in interventions to support children’s emotional well-being. Also, further research needs to be undertaken that seeks to consult with the parents, children and professionals facilitating these complex interventions to better understand potential barriers and facilitating factors of parental involvement in school-based programmes.

The empirical paper aimed to explore the experiences and views of parents, children and facilitators who have been involved in the StoryLinks intervention. StoryLinks is an individualised, parent-partnership intervention that involves children, parents and school in the co-creation of stories to support children’s emotional well-being and literacy skills (Waters, 2010). StoryLinks is based on the principles of therapeutic storywriting and attachment theory, including the use of metaphor to explore feelings and story-making as a way of supporting relationships. There is some preliminary evidence that the intervention may have a positive effect on children’s emotional and social well-being, behaviour and rates of exclusion, as well as the parent-child relationship (Water, 2014). The current exploratory study drew on the multiple perspectives of parents, children and facilitators who have been involved in the intervention. The research aimed to gain a better understanding of their experiences of the implementation, process and outcomes of StoryLinks. Semi-structured interviews with eight participants (four facilitators and two parent- child dyads) were conducted and thematic analysis was applied to the transcripts. The findings for each group were analysed and presented separately. There were some commonalities between groups, suggesting that participants had mostly had a positive experience of StoryLinks and considered it to be a collaborative intervention. Outcomes identified by participants included that StoryLinks had supported relationships and adults felt they had developed greater insights into their child’s emotions and behaviour. Findings were discussed in the context of relevant literature and research related to therapeutic storywriting approaches and parental involvement in interventions. Consideration was also given to implications for future practice and research.