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Hard-pressed parents struggle to help with schoolwork

- Cambridge report warns of 'scholarisation'
- Drive to get families involved could backfire

Polly Curtis, education editor
The Guardian, Thursday 22 November 2007

Parents feel intense pressure to read to their children and help them with their schoolwork but struggle to find the time, according to a report. It suggests that they should instead be protecting play time from an encroaching "scholarisation" of childhood.

The research, which will become part of the Cambridge University Primary Review, says drives to encourage parents to get more involved in their child's education - which are likely to be a focus of the 10-year children's plan which ministers are preparing to deliver next month - could backfire.

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Some parents are intimidated by academia, while others feel guilty for failing to live up to expectations, according to in-depth research published as part of the biggest review of primary education in 40 years.

"While parents often welcome advice as to how to help their children with school-focused work, too high an expectation of what is achievable can lead to pressure and guilt for some and resentment for others. Neither emotion is likely to enhance the relationships between parents and their children's teachers."

Many children feel protective towards their free time, it says. "The scholarisation of childhood presents parents with dilemmas: how far to protect children from its incursions, and how far to help them engage with its agendas. Parents have an important function in helping their children to have some free time." The researchers argue that the extension of breakfast clubs and after-school clubs - sold by the government as "wraparound" care for busy parents - can increase the pressures on children.

Schools find it increasingly difficult to talk to parents, as family structures have shifted: "Children may be living in two places over the week with different sets of siblings, both birth and step, in each. Schools in such circumstances may find it difficult to know which parent is the first point of contact," one report says.

The research says that many parents in one study said they felt "uncomfortable" about taking on a teaching role, and were concerned about "importing the classroom into the home" as a result of their children doing more schoolwork on computers.

Today's reports are four of 30 which are being released this winter. They will inform the panel of experts conducting the review of primary education, led by Cambridge University's Robin Alexander.

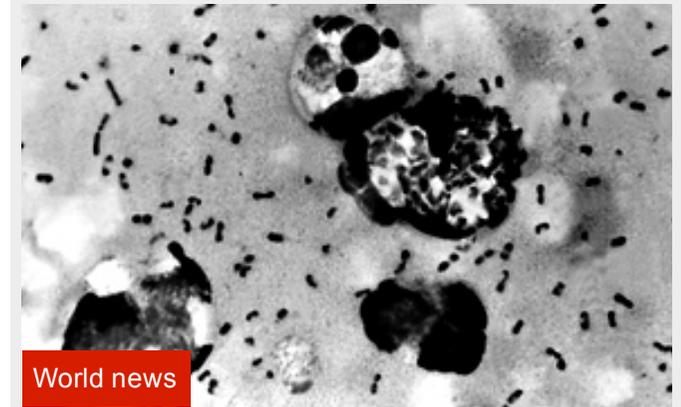


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