



Family SEAL /

Helping my child to learn programmes

2009

Education Bradford /

University of the First Age in Bradford

Evaluation report

September 2009

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About Icarus

This report has been compiled by the Icarus Collective. Icarus exists to get people working well together so that they can make better decisions. We specialise in planning, doing and reviewing stakeholder engagement. We make sure that everyone who needs to be involved in a decision, issue, strategy or plan will have their voice heard and can actively participate in the process. We also undertake training to pass on our expertise.

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About the Pilot programmes

Education Bradford / Bradford University of the First Age (UFA) have delivered two programmes within the pilot work, across four schools. Two schools received the Family SEAL programme. Two further schools received the Helping my Child to Learn programme. Both programmes align strongly with the established goals of Family SEAL approaches while adopting UFA tools and techniques to engage parents and children and deliver the work. In three of the four schools, children were involved in part of the sessions alongside their parents.

The full agenda for both programmes is attached as Appendices A and B. The basic details of the delivery of the programmes across the four schools are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: basic delivery information

School	Programme	Period	Number of sessions	Ages of children involved	Key school staff involved
Lilycroft Primary, Manningham Bradford West 2	Family SEAL	February – March 2009	6	Foundation stage 1 Year 3	Nursery PIW School PIW
Ley Top Primary, Allerton Bradford West 1	Family SEAL	June – July 2009	6	KS1 KS2	School PIW
Parkland Primary, Thorpe Edge Bradford East 1	Helping my child to learn	April – May 2009	5	Across all year groups	School PIW
Cavendish Primary, Eccleshill Bradford East 1	Helping my child to learn	June – July 2009	5	Children not involved	School PIW

PIW = Parent Involvement Worker

About the evaluation

Icarus was commissioned by Education Bradford / UFA in January 2009 to provide external evaluation support in assessing the impact of the four pilot programmes.

This support consisted of:

- working with UFA staff to identify the desired outcomes from the pilot programmes
- designing evaluation tools to support UFA and school staff in reflecting on their work and gathering data to inform the evaluation
- undertaking a number of tasks felt to be appropriate for an external evaluator, principally undertaking interviews with UFA and school staff, and with parents involved in the pilot work
- the provision of an evaluation report at the conclusion of the work.

The evaluation has gathered information using the following techniques:

- semi – structured interviews with delivery staff from the UFA and external providers The Learning Group
- semi – structured interviews with Parent Involvement Workers at each school
- focus groups with parents
- observation notes made by delivery staff and PIW's following each session
- immediate feedback from parents and children following each session through a simple recording device (footprint cut-outs to symbolise the learning journey involved)
- a case study, completed by the PIW in three schools, of one family (from each school) involved in the programme.

Each of these techniques sought to gather information concerning either the impact or delivery and operation of the programmes to allow informed judgements to be made concerning the outcomes of the work for parents, children and schools. After discussion with the UFA staff, the following outcomes were agreed as those which could legitimately be expected to be contributed to by the programmes and which would be explored through the evaluation:

- parental understanding of child development and how children learn
 - o parents support children to feel successful
 - o parents encourage and motivate children
 - o parents help children to pay attention and concentrate
 - o parents can identify how their child learns best

- parental recognition of their own worth in supporting their children as educators
 - o parents and children work positively in team and group situations
 - o parents set boundaries for children
 - o parents give choices to children
- parental communication skills with children are improved
 - o parents listen well to children
 - o parents praise children's achievements
 - o parents respond positively to questions from children
- children's communication skills are improved
 - o children listen well to each other, and to adults
 - o children demonstrate ability to compromise, share and take turns
 - o children show patience with each other.

Other outcomes explored through the evaluation included the perceived learning gained by children and parents, and the outcomes for the participating schools.

About this report

The report is structured into three sections. The first section focuses on feedback linked to the desired outcomes and outputs for the work; the second reflects on the operation and delivery of the pilot programmes, including issues such as parental recruitment and logistical matters. The final section offers a number of conclusions and guidelines which it is possible to draw from the pilot work and which could inform the rollout of the programmes across other schools.

Table 2 details the various data which the report draws on:

Table 2: evaluation data studied

School	Interviews Delivery staff (+ timing)	Interviews PIW (+ timing)	Focus Group Parents (+ timing)	Observation notes from delivery staff and PIW's	Post session feedback from children and parents	Case study from PIW
Lilycroft	YES (post)	YES (mid point)	YES (post)	YES – staff NO – PIW's	YES	NO
Ley Top	YES (post)	YES (pre and post)	YES (post)	YES - both	YES	YES
Parkland	YES (post)	YES (pre and post)	YES (post)	YES - both	YES	YES
Cavendish	Yes (post)	YES (pre and post)	YES (post)	YES – staff NO – PIW	n/a	YES

Outcomes

Parents have been extremely positive in their feedback and appraisal of the programmes in which they have participated. This feedback has partly related to the degree to which they have enjoyed the programme and the degree to which many have been (pleasantly) surprised by the open and engaging approach taken by the facilitators. Parents across all four schools have reported high levels of satisfaction, fun and learning from the pilot programmes.

Outcome: parental understanding of child development and how children learn

Both pilot programmes concentrate in their delivery and content in promoting and improving understanding of how children learn. The programmes actively mix learning theory and activity, offering children and parents the opportunity to learn together and experiment with different tools and techniques to discover new ways of learning.

There is good evidence from parents and from delivery staff and PIW's that the pilot work is improving parental understanding of how children learn. In particular, the underpinning theory of Multiple Intelligences (Dr H Gardner, 1983) and the notion that each individual child or adult learns in different ways and has different strengths has been strongly recounted throughout to the evaluation by parents.

The discovery of this learning has been variously described by parents as "a *lightbulb moment*", "eye opening" or "very useful". As the theory of learning styles runs through the pilot programmes and is supported through various tasks within the programme, the degree of understanding and application of the theory is intended to develop over the course. This does appear to have been the case for many parents. Delivery staff and parents noted this in their feedback:

"Most of the parents have now realised how their children learn and are applying this to the activities." (PIW, Ley Top, Week 5)

"Parents are beginning to have good ideas linked to the learning styles and are thinking about how their kids can learn better." (PIW, Parkland, Week 3)

"It's shown me what kind of SMART he (my son) is – I can now help him learn better at home." – (parent, Parkland)

"When a child explained the meanings of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning to his mum, she listened, smiled, nodded and all of the group applauded." (facilitator, Lilycroft)

Other observations and feedback linked to this outcome suggest other indicators of progress have been present within the programmes. While these indicators should not be seen as directly demonstrating improved understanding of how children learn, they are indicative of a confidence and willingness demonstrated by parents to engage with their children in the task of learning. There is a consistent pattern of reporting across the four pilots which suggests parental connection with their children's learning has been improved:

- there are numerous examples of parents explaining tasks and theories to children within the sessions (the pattern of delivery involves dialogue with parents prior to the arrival of children in the sessions)
- delivery staff report parents asking questions regarding the learning theory behind some tasks
- delivery staff and PIW's have reported instances of parents encouraging and motivating their children during tasks within the sessions in all three schools where children were involved.

Crucially, there is evidence that the theories and practical tools and games used within the sessions have been adopted and practiced outside of school. At least one parent in each setting described instances of either spending more time with their children at home or of undertaking or repeating the tasks and games from the sessions either with the children they had worked with during the sessions or with their siblings. Examples included;

- a parent at Cavendish school who had mapped the different brain strengths and learning styles with all four of her children following an input on right/left brain function. She noted it was really valuable in understanding why her children responded to tasks in different ways
- a parent at Cavendish school who was using songs with her children to help learn spellings
- a parent at Lilycroft who described having changed the pattern of homework with her children to better reflect what she and the children had learnt about themselves and the way that they learnt
- a parent at Parkland who reported that she was now far better equipped to support her son with homework and revision. Another Parkland parent reporting using memory games to undertake spelling homework with her son
- a Year 6 pupil at Ley Top who had taken the games and theories home and had been using them with her younger siblings and with her friends.

The short term nature of the inputs and the concurrent nature of the evaluation means it is difficult to assess whether such changes in behaviour are more than temporary, though there is sufficient consistency of reporting to indicate that the theories have been understood and are, at least temporarily, being applied by some families.

Outcome: parental recognition of their own worth in supporting their children as educators

Part of the philosophy of the UFA is the affirmation of parents as the principle (potential) educators of their children. Much of the work within the two programmes focuses on making learning accessible, fun and easy to use. All four of the schools selected or which volunteered for the pilot work described challenges in engaging parents within school, and all four described, in varying degrees, a limited value placed by parents on their willingness or capacity to engage with the school as a partner in their children's learning. Parents broadly reinforced this view in comments to the evaluator, noting issues such as poor experiences themselves with school when they were children, not wanting to be criticised as parents, limited confidence in their own skills and a reluctance to engage within what they perceived as the school's role for fear of criticism from teachers.

There is strong evidence from the evaluation that the feeling of self worth among parents with regard to their ability to support their children in learning has been improved. Specifically, this seems to have resulted in an increasing willingness and confidence among most parents in the pilot sessions to engage with their children on learning tasks in a constructive way.

The degree to which this has taken place has, unsurprisingly, varied, depending on the starting point for individual parents the needs of themselves and their children. The facilitators at Parkland school, for instance, described an initial concern regarding a lack of engagement between a child and her mum which took a number of sessions to begin to improve.

Supporting evidence for this outcome includes:

- parents making connections between current and past tasks for their children and encouraging children to reflect on how they succeeded in those past tasks. An example described by the PIW's at Lilycroft was of parents asking children to think, when faced with building a tower out of sticks and jelly beans, how they had approached a previous tower building task (that time with paper)
- numerous examples of parents asking good quality, reflective questions of children to encourage thought or clarification

- numerous reports of parents bringing children back to tasks and re-focusing children's attention towards learning
- examples of parents showing an interest in their child's progress, achievements or frustrations with a task
- the PIW at Ley Top school described changes in behaviour within a family, noting that a parent who had previously dominated a task and ignored her children's inputs was now operating more inclusively, listening and offering roles to the children within tasks
- reports of families approaching tasks in stages, with the children consulted as to next steps, where previously parents had been more autocratic.

A further indicator of parental confidence to engage children as educators has been the degree to which parents have supported children other than their own in the sessions. This has been reported in all three schools where children have joined parents for part of the sessions. One of the UFA staff, after a gap of a few weeks, remarked that, on returning to the group *"it was difficult to tell whose child was whose"*, such was the level of engagement between children and adults during the latter stages of the pilot.

A strong, and perhaps unexpected, theme within the feedback linked to this outcome, has been the degree to which older children have taken on a supporting role with younger siblings. This was reported by parents and by staff in both schools (Lilycroft and Ley Top) where parents had two children of differing ages and both children joined the sessions at different points.

Other noteworthy comments include:

"Parents are now encouraging children to reflect of what they have learnt in previous sessions." (facilitator, Lilycroft)

"The older children are showing the younger ones how to do the tasks and are smiling at them when they arrive." (facilitator, Lilycroft)

"There is now evidence of supportive conversations, clear praise and help from parents to their children." (PIW, Parkland).

Outcome: parental communication skills with children are improved

Communication skills are a basic cornerstone of relationships and formed a specific goal of the pilot programmes. While the programmes do not overtly 'teach' communication skills, the programmes are delivered in a style which models good communication. In particular, it was hoped that the pilot work would provide opportunities for improved listening skills, parents praising their

children and demonstrating that they valued their achievements and that parents responded positively and patiently to questions.

There is reasonable evidence that parental communications skills have been enhanced to different degrees for families across the pilot programmes. Of the three schools where children were involved in the sessions, it is interesting to note that the greater evidence has emerged from Lilycroft and Ley Top which were the two schools where parents were recruited as a consequence of their having a child in each of two stages of the school (Nursery and Year 3 in the case of Lilycroft and Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 at Ley Top). A less structured approach was used at Parkland, where recruitment was open and only one child joined the parents during the sessions and less strong evidence in improved communication skills was evident.

Evidence of improved communications skills reported to the evaluation included:

- observation of improved eye contact and body language in a number of parents
- parents actively discussing tasks and questions with children in sessions (this was a trend reported by staff as increasing over the duration of the sessions)
- observation of parents listening actively to children
- children asking parents for help with tasks and parents responding positively
- parents seeking advice from their children
- parents giving praise to their children.

Other useful examples of good communications skills being evidenced include:

"A lovely instance of a mother encouraging her child to look at the teacher and listen. A really good example of re-focusing attention by good communication." (facilitator, Lilycroft)

"Making the paper tower really helped me to communicate well with my son – we couldn't do without each other." (parent, Lilycroft)

"There was lots of good eye contact today between mums and kids – mums were wanting to hear what the children said, rather than directing them as they had done previously." (facilitator, Lilycroft)

"A parent that had arrived late to be with her husband and family asked each child what they had done, listened well and praised their efforts." (PIW, Ley Top)

Outcome: children's communication skills are improved

There is a clear parallel in seeking improvements in children's communications skills within a programme which aims to enhance parents' communication with their children. Similarly, where communications improvements are evidenced for parents, it should be expected that a degree of improvement will be evident in children, who are taking part in the same conversations.

As with parents, there is reasonable evidence of improvements to children's communications skills within the pilot programmes. Again, a note of caution should be sounded concerning the short term nature of the inputs and the fact that the evaluation is not a longitudinal one which can assess the medium to long term impacts, if any, of the work. Accepting these caveats, there is a variety of reported evidence which suggests children have benefitted from the programmes and improved their communication skills;

- there are numerous observations of children asking good quality questions of parents and of the facilitators
- there are repeated reports of children listening more attentively over the course of the sessions
- some of the children at Ley Top were described as having made "*notable progression*" by the one of the facilitators, who contrasted behaviour in week 1 of the course ("*no significant interaction between the children*") with week 5 ("*conversations are much more respectful and are taking place between children as well as with their parents*")
- the PIW at Ley Top reported increasing sharing of resources, patience and turn taking among the children as the sessions progressed
- children at Ley Top thanked their parents for taking the time to be at the session
- children at Parkland were noted as being increasingly tolerant of each other
- children at Lilycroft were observed to be working increasingly constructively together, listening to each other and sharing resources
- the PIW at Lilycroft noted that, in the latter sessions, children were more confident to offer their own opinions and views on the tasks
- some of the children at Lilycroft enquired as to the learning which was intended by particular activities.

Case studies

Three of the PIW's completed brief case studies of individual parents who had participated in the pilot programmes at their schools. The case studies allow the personal impacts of the work for three parents (all mums) to be appreciated. Both names used are pseudonyms.

Case Study A: Jane, Cavendish Primary

Jane is a single parent with two children, a boy in Year 2 and a girl in Year 5. She is a shy, nervous lady who tries to do everything 'right' for her children. She is very wary of attending events in school on her own and therefore, usually tries to attend with another particular parent.

With regard to the Helping My Child to Learn course, straight away Jane wanted to know whether a lot of writing would be involved as, in her words: "My writing's not very good – I hate writing." She then wanted to know if there were other parents interested, saying "I won't be on my own, will I?" I explained that there were eight parents in total who had expressed an interest. She asked if a particular parent would be attending (the one she attends most events with). When I said that she was she was most relieved.

When the course first started she attended with her friend. As the course proceeded, Jane listened intently to what was being said and done. She did not know all the parents and maybe felt a little shy about volunteering information or answers.

As the weeks progressed, I and the two tutors noticed that Jane was slowly gaining in confidence. This was more surprising because her particular friend only attended the first session. Jane had decided to continue coming with her new friends. She was not only volunteering information and answers, she was giving information which was quite personal to her and her family. She was beginning to feel more relaxed and able to speak out and make light of topics without feeling inhibited. She was taking away the 'homework' given and having a go, reporting back her findings and letting everyone know how her kids 'performed' with the various brain gym activities etc.

At the fifth (final) session Jane said that she had, in fact, enrolled to do a Maths and English course at the Gateway Centre in Ravenscliffe in September. This was purely as a result of attending this short but informative course and realising that when she puts her mind to it, she can do it!

Good luck to her.

Christine Bates, Parent Involvement Worker

Case Study B: Michelle, Parkland Primary

Michelle has two children at school – Jack who is in Year 1 and Emily who is in Year 2. Michelle has three older children (who are half sisters and brother to Jack and Emily) who attend the local Secondary School. The family moved to the area some years ago (when the older children were in Key Stage 2) from an estate in a neighbouring town where Michelle has experienced domestic violence. The school and the family have had a difficult relationship; Michelle’s partner was very aggressive and Jack’s elder brother had lots of problems at school including poor relationships with peers and with staff. Michelle was not known to the school staff until her partner was banned from the school premises. Michelle is very timid, and we are slowly building a relationship with her which is allowing her confidence to grow.

Michelle is clearly skilled and intelligent but has a severe lack of confidence. As a school, we are keen to encourage her to fulfil her potential. Jack and Emily are bright and enthusiastic but require good management and direction to improve their social skills and attention span.

Involving Michelle in the Helping My Child to Learn programme gave us the opportunity to build her self confidence, improve the relationship with the school and improve Michelle’s skills in guiding and managing her children’s learning and behaviour. I had previously worked with Michelle on another course. She had shown potential but unfortunately had been unable to complete that course due to family illness. Her attendance on the Helping My Child to Learn programme was better, though she did miss two sessions.

I think the programme has successfully improved Michelle’s self-confidence and the relationship we have with her as a school. I believe she has taken on board how to improve her children’s learning and is keen to support them. She spent time at home with all five children working on the learning styles and other aspects of the course.

I spoke with Michelle during the course about the possibility of her becoming a volunteer at the midweek ante-natal clinic, to which she has agreed.

Sandie Smith, Parent Involvement Worker

Case Study C: Helen, Ley Top Primary

The family are fairly new to the area and the school. The parents had split up and Helen wanted to get away from her partner as he had a drug and drink problem. Helen's 10 year old daughter, Ashleigh, was beginning to make friendships in school but struggled during some lessons when drug and family issues were discussed. Helen's son, Kyle (aged 4) settled well into nursery and made friends through playing football. Helen worked during the day when the children were at school.

I first became aware of the family when both Helen and Ashleigh came into school crying. The learning mentor spoke to Ashleigh whilst I talked with Helen. They had had an argument that morning. Helen said she struggled to bond with Ashleigh, that they were too alike and both were stubborn. She revealed how Ashleigh felt insecure and let down by her father. She had been asking questions about drugs that Helen didn't know how to handle. As the children had different dads, Ashleigh felt jealous when Kyle visited his dad. Helen also said there was a problem of bonding between the two children.

Through discussions with Helen she identified her goal was to bond better with Ashleigh, for them all to have family counselling and for better bonds to be built between the siblings. Ashleigh wanted to be able to talk to her mother and share experiences with her. My goal, though working with the family, was to get the family to enjoy being together. I envisaged this being done through the learning and nurturing experience provided by UFA staff.

After discussions with Helen she agreed that Ashleigh could be involved in SEAL with other members of her class. She also had interventions with a SEAL support tutor who gave her one to one time and helped her to communicate her feelings through writing letters. The UFA team encouraged the family to work together by sharing fun activities. Ashleigh was encouraged to care for Kyle and guide him through activities. The nature of the programme allowed mum and daughter to have time together before introducing Kyle into the activities. Other outside agencies have been introduced to the family to support them and give them strategies to deal with the emotional issues around drugs and separation.

At the end of the programme Helen cried and thanked the staff. She said it had made a real impact, not only on the relationship with Ashleigh but also the bond between the two children had greatly improved. She still has ongoing struggles with the courts over access. Ashleigh seems more settled in school. She has a close friend who she openly talks with about her situation with her dad and even lets her look at the letters she has written and the special items in them. Her reaction/relationship with men has changed. Over the weeks she has bantered and challenged one of the dads and enjoyed a joke with him. As far as school is concerned we will continue to work with the family and put interventions in

place, but there has certainly been a marked change in the dynamics of the family.

I think right from the beginning the tutors put the parents' minds at rest that they were not there to dictate to them or tell them the right or wrong way of being a parent. The parents began to trust in the tutors and laughed about everyday issues and even divulged sensitive issue because they did not feel judged. Having one to one time with Helen and then bringing the younger child in was definitely a success as it made the parent-child relationship stronger and the nurturing side of the Ashleigh develop when Kyle came in. The group gelled as a team very well and shared and supported each others' children. I feel that everyone in the room felt valued and this made a big difference to how they responded.

Jacqui Tate, Parent Involvement Worker

Other impacts

The evaluation has gathered evidence of other impacts for parents, children and schools.

a) additional benefits for parents

The various interviews with parents and delivery staff strongly suggest three significant additional benefits for parents arising from the pilot programmes:

- time to work with their children. Both parents and delivery staff have noted repeatedly that the sessions have been very valuable in providing the opportunity to spend time constructively with their children. The PIW at Parkland noted that many children attending the school appear to have very limited opportunities for dedicated quality time with their parents, and parents in all three schools where children worked alongside parents described the opportunity as very valuable and worthwhile.
- time for themselves, to reflect. One parent described the sessions as good 'me' time, suggesting that the chance to relax and think about herself and her relationship with the children was not available in the normal pattern of her life. This was a common theme in comments and observations made during the evaluation.
- tools to use at home. In addition to improved understanding of how children learn, many parents valued the fact that many of the techniques used within the pilots had a practical application at home and could continue to be used with their children.

b) additional benefits for children

A number of additional benefits have been reported for children. These benefits broadly revolve around behaviour:

- the PIW at Ley Top reports feedback from teaching colleagues suggesting the children involved in the programme have been happier in class, more settled, stable and relaxed. It has been noted that one particular child, who was prone to exclusion from class, had been much less frequently removed from lessons since the outset of the course. Another child had been removed from a concern list after attendance (which had previously been persistently poor) markedly improved.
- A teacher at Lilycroft reported improved behaviour in class from one particular child who attended the sessions. A further report noted that a child who had a history of striking his mum had changed his behaviour

towards her when he was dropped off in the mornings and was now giving her hugs.

- Parents at both Ley Top and Lilycroft reported better behaviour / interactions between siblings which they attributed to involvement in the sessions.

c) benefits for the schools

While the impacts for schools cannot be expected to be significant (the programmes are relatively short and only connect with a small number of parents and children), feedback to the evaluation suggests a number of specific benefits have emerged for individual schools and one, perhaps unexpected, benefit for all four schools.

- the PIW at Ley Top reports that teaching staff at the school are more respectful of her role following the course, and that she has seen an increase in requests for support and involvement from teaching colleagues. She also believes the relationship between the parents involved in the pilot programme and the school has been significantly improved.
- the PIW's at Lilycroft reported that the pilot programme has provided an opportunity for the school and nursery to work together on a shared activity for the first time, and that this has increased awareness and appreciation of each other's roles. They also report that the pilot has helped to develop their appreciation of the value of family based approaches within school and that gaining the support of parents as educators can support and enhance the work of the school.
- the PIW at Parkland reported that the pilot had enabled her to re-connect with parents who she believed were "*lost to the system*" as a consequence of their experiences and relationship with school. She described one parent who has begun to volunteer at the school since attending the pilot programme, and who is surprised that the school believe she is skilled enough to contribute to their work. This engagement of parents as volunteers in one form or another has happened at all four schools which have taken part in the pilot. A parent at Cavendish school made the choice to enrol in a literacy course. She stated this was as a result of the confidence she had gained through attending the Helping my Child To Learn course.

The delivery of the pilot programmes

The evaluation has considered a range of practical and logistical issues associated with running the pilot programmes. This section of the report draws on feedback from delivery staff, PIW's and parents. The feedback is structured in a sequential form, working through issues associated with expressed needs, parental recruitment, programme duration and timing, programme style and content, challenges in delivery and suggested improvements from stakeholders. The section concludes with a set of 'conditions for success' which are intended to support future delivery.

Needs (parents and children)

The PIW's and the delivery staff were asked to note the needs of the individual parents and children who attended the sessions. A range of needs were identified. In some instances, PIW's expressed greater concern with a parent's needs, in other instances the primary presenting issue was identified as that of a child and in some instances the relationship between child and parent was seen as a principle need. In general, the level of knowledge and understanding held by the PIW's regarding needs was good, and was commented on by the delivery staff in each of the settings.

The commonly identified needs of the parents and children involved in the pilots were:

- challenging behaviour (children)
- poor capacity to manage challenging behaviour (parents)
- poor communication between parent and child
- poor listening skills (children and parents)
- limited quality attention given by parents to children (often coupled with large family size)
- low confidence (parents)
- poor relationship between parents and school
- special needs (children)
- emotional needs (children)
- speech difficulties (children)
- separation / poor family stability

- poor attendance (children)

This list is indicative of everyday challenges facing schools in poorer communities in Bradford. It is suggestive of ongoing needs and hints at the potential role of small scale interventions such as the pilot programmes. Realistically, brief inputs such as the two pilot programmes represent an opportunity to begin to engage, or re-engage, parents and children in a learning process upon which schools can build, resources permitting, once the short term input is complete. As such, programmes such as the Family SEAL and Helping my Child to Learn should be viewed as part of a wider approach to Family Learning and parental engagement by schools.

Parental recruitment and retention

Each of the four schools involved adopted a different approach to both the targeting of parents and the principle recruitment methods;

Table 3: targeting and recruitment methods

School	Initial recruitment method	Follow up recruitment method	Targeting
Lilycroft Primary, Manningham Bradford West 2	Letter	Phone calls Reminders	Parents with children in both Year 3 and Nursery
Ley Top Primary, Allerton Bradford West 1	Letter	Face to face contact in playground	Parents with children in both KS1 and KS2 (initial pool of 30 families)
Parkland Primary, Thorpe Edge Bradford East 1	Letter, face to face contact at parents evening	Face to face contact in playground	Parents thought likely to attend / parents identified as having potential to benefit / parents whose children presented concerns
Cavendish Primary, Eccleshill Bradford East 1	Letter	-	Whole school

The methods seem to have had little bearing on the eventual recruitment outcome, as all the schools did recruit sufficient numbers to form a suitable group to which to deliver the course. However, parental feedback in two of the schools suggested that the personal approaches used as follow up to initial

written information were appreciated and valued, and increased the likelihood that parents would attend.

The PIW's in both Lilycroft and Ley Top described the recruitment process as involving "lots of chasing up" and "hard work". It is reasonable to note that the recruitment process is likely to be time-consuming for a school, and that, even with high levels of follow up, will not guarantee success (a common fear expressed by the PIW's to the evaluator was that parents would simply not turn up).

In two schools (Ley Top and Parkland) preparatory sessions were held with parents to explain the programme and give parents a chance to meet the facilitators. This was generally identified by parents and delivery staff as valuable.

Retention across the pilot programmes was reasonable, as evidenced by the attendance records below. Although parental attendance dipped at points during each programme, a core cohort completed at each school and numbers did not drop to a level in any of the pilots which would have compromised the potential delivery of the work.

School	Week 1		Week 2		Week 3		Week 4		Week 5		Week 6	
	Ad.	Ch.	Ad.	Ch.	Ad.	Ch.	Ad.	Ch.	Ad.	Ch.	Ad.	Ch.
Lilycroft	7	12	9	15	5	9	7	12	5	10	8	13
Ley Top	8	17	7	18	6	16	5	13	7	16	6	15
Parkland	7	9	7	9	6	8	7	9	7	9		
Cavendish	8	n/a	7	n/a	7	n/a	7	n/a	7	n/a		

The feedback from each group suggested that they would have wished for longer programmes (i.e. more sessions). This needs to be considered alongside both the fact that longer programmes would necessarily incorporate a break as they would cross a school holiday and that parents may not have held that view prior to initial attendance (and so may not have actually committed to a longer programme). However, for these groups of parents, the potential for engagement in longer learning programmes now seems more possible.

Programme duration and timing

Both pilot programmes are short (Family SEAL is six weeks, Helping my Child to Learn is five weeks) and are designed to fit inside a school half term, meaning it

is possible to programme consecutive weeks without an enforced break for a school holiday.

A number of issues were raised through the evaluation with regard to duration and timing:

- without exception, the four groups of parents felt the courses were too short, and would have welcomed the chance to continue. The delivery staff agreed with this perception, saying that the curriculum and materials for the courses could be delivered over a longer period or that extra learning modules could be added. This view needs to be considered alongside the feedback from PIW's prior to the start of the pilots that they felt recruiting to a longer course would have been significantly more challenging.
- three of the four pilots were delivered in the mornings, at the start of the school day (meaning, as one of the PIW's put it, that "*parents can't escape*"). The sessions at Lilycroft were delivered immediately after lunch, in order to fit in with the nursery timetable (collecting children). Generally, feedback from parents and from delivery staff confirmed that the morning timing worked well, with parents dropping children at school and moving straight into the session. Timing was also felt to be good at Lilycroft. There was disquiet from the delivery staff at Lilycroft concerning preparation time however, as the room used was a dining area, though this feedback relates to the selection of the room, rather than the time of day.
- sessions were two hours in length. There was general agreement among parents, PIW's and staff that this was a good length for the sessions – long enough to address the issues well without being overlong.
- the logistical challenge of fetching and introducing the children posed difficulties in all three of the settings where children were part of the group. Two particular difficulties were noted by the delivery staff. Firstly, the arrival of one (and at Lilycroft, two) groups of children had the potential to disturb the momentum of sessions. The delivery staff at Lilycroft, in particular, noted that regaining momentum after firstly the Year 3 children, and then, half an hour later, the Nursery children, joined the parents, was difficult. Secondly, the arrival of the children was usually staggered in the case of Parkland and Ley Top as children were coming from across the school. Clearly, the larger the school, the more staggered the arrival could be. This was also noted as disturbing momentum. However, it should be noted that the staff who raised this issue clearly saw the benefits of children's involvement as outweighing the logistical challenges.

Rooms

Only one of the four schools (Parkland) was identified as providing a consistently good setting for the work. Difficulties were encountered at Lilycroft (where a small dining hall was used) with the space being overlarge, unavailable for preparation and prone to interruptions from other school staff. Ley Top school provided what was felt by all involved to be a good, spacious room, though the group were obliged to use a second room on at least one occasion. The room at Cavendish school was cramped and not ideally suited to groupwork.

The room provided at Parkland was spacious, well lit, overlooked the playground and was used by a playgroup, which meant it allowed an informal (or as one parent noted "non-classroom") feel.

The nature of the programmes (which involve a number of physical tasks) is such that reasonable and flexible space is of significant benefit to delivery, particularly when numbers of parents and/or children are high. As is often the case with interactive programmes, a good setting enables work and is rarely noticed, while a poor one can disable activity and frustrate both participants and facilitators.

Facilitation

The pilot programmes were delivered by a combination of staff from Education Bradford, UFA Partnership Managers, and workers from independent delivery agency, The Learning Group. Each pilot programme was delivered by two staff (with the exception of Ley Top where an additional member of staff from the Learning Group was involved). Each delivery pair or team was comprised of staff from both agencies. The Learning Group staff have significant experience of delivering UFA activities. This familiarity with the ethos and content of the programmes was identified as valuable by the Education Bradford staff and by parents. The PIW's from each school participated in varying degrees with the delivery.

Other comments made by parents concerning the delivery teams were universally positive. The facilitators were described as "*friendly*", "*happy*", "*laid back*", "*empowering*" and "*great teams*" by parents.

If asked to clarify these comments, two particular aspects of skill emerged as significant in allowing parents to make such comments. Firstly, there were a number of comments that the work seemed to 'matter' to the facilitators, such as "*you can tell this not just a job for them*" (parent, Cavendish school). Another parent noted that the delivery team made the content "*come to life*" and that because the content seemed important, it felt as though this also

meant that the parents were important. Secondly, many parents and a number of the PIW's commented on the professionalism of the facilitation teams. Various aspects of quality were noted; familiarity with the content of the programmes, attitude towards parents, attitude towards learning, promptness, preparedness, flexibility and fun.

"They were on time, reliable, well prepared and good with the parents and the kids – the best outside provider that I have worked with." (PIW, Parkland Primary)

Programme style and content

The programmes are based on interactive learning and on the basic premise that parents are (or have the potential to be) the principle educators in their children's lives. Both programmes overtly assert that a parent can engage their child effectively in learning, whether this is informal learning or learning directly linked to the school curriculum (homework, reading, spelling, numeracy etc). In order to reach positive outcomes, or begin the path towards positive outcomes, the programmes need to engage parents and children separately and together in learning activity, create an understanding for parents that learning is more than what happens in school for their children (or happened to them when they were at school), instil a sense of self belief in parents that the types of learning being illustrated are not beyond them to deliver, and motivate parents to take what they discover in the sessions and apply it at home with their children.

To achieve this, the programmes adopt a mixture of theory linked to learning styles mixed with practical tasks and interactive learning games, coupled with the challenge of taking pieces of activity into the home environment to work on with children.

This approach has been, without exception, appreciated by parents and led, as noted above, to good outcomes for them. A number of parents have expressed surprise at the degree to which they have enjoyed, and learned from, the sessions, and comments contrasting what they actually experienced with what they anticipated are numerous. Typically, parents were worried at the outset that the programmes would be 'like school' or that their parenting was going to be criticised.

Links to attainment?

Caution needs to be taken in seeking to draw direct causal relationships between modest, short term inputs to a small group of parents and children and the formal attainment of those children at school.

The Family SEAL curriculum is based on the assumption that, in order for children succeed at school, children need good learning skills and a level of social and emotional literacy and stability, both in and out of school:

"Family SEAL is about collaboration and sharing ideas, with recognition and respect for the beliefs and values of the participants, while understanding that a child will need certain skills if he or she is to cope with the complexity of the social environment of the school." (DCSF, 2009)

"If these children (those involved in the pilot) are more socially and emotionally healthy, they will learn better." (PIW, Parkland Primary)

The pilot programmes seek to *"learn together about the delights and challenges of helping their child develop social, emotional and behavioural skills. This is followed by opportunities for participants and children to complete activities together."* (DCSF, 2009)

The impacts noted earlier in this report suggest that these pilot programmes are providing shared learning between children and parents and the opportunity to 'complete activities together'. The feedback from parents suggests that the pilot programmes have the capacity to *"bring the SEAL work to life"* (as one of the PIW's phrased it), and the reporting, albeit smallscale, of outcomes such as improved attendance and behaviour for children and better engagement between parents and school, suggest strongly that the programmes have a complementary role to play for a school wishing to boost attainment for pupils by improving the potential for learning and engagement with learning.

A further note of caution should, however, be sounded concerning the need for activities such as the pilot programmes to be seen as integral, and not peripheral, to a whole school approach to social and emotional aspects of learning for the potential impact on formal learning goals to be maximised. Pilot programmes are, by definition, modest and fleeting in the life of a school, and ownership of, and investment in, the principles and approaches within the day to day routine of school represent the most likely means of securing ongoing contributions to learning and attainment.

Delivery challenges

A number of challenges were experienced by the delivery teams over the four pilots. A number of these were school specific, though there were some common themes which emerged and will be useful for future planning:

- fetching the children – this is a simple logistical challenge, and one which is magnified when the school is large or spread out over a big site, or when the children are from across the school population and need to be fetched, and returned, to numerous locations. The approach adopted by Lilycroft Primary (where all the children came from either one year group or the nursery), proved the most manageable solution.
- briefing the teaching staff – mentioned to greater or lesser degrees in all four schools, the task of supplying good information to class teachers about the work some of their children would be taking part in, was identified as a valuable addition to the programme and one which would potentially increase then impact of the work
- creche facilities – highlighted in three of the schools as being likely to increase the likelihood of attendance from parents
- timing (within the school year) – the Ley Top programme highlighted the challenges of delivering the programme at a time of year when assessments are carried out. This meant the participation of some children was limited.

Suggested improvements from stakeholders

The principle improvement suggested by parents, schools and facilitators was for longer programmes. Other suggestions made were:

- ensuring that all activities were well suited to the ages of the children participating
- ensuring that all activities were 'short and snappy' (the dream catcher exercise in the Helping my child to learn programme was cited as one which could be shorter)
- that if larger families are to be involved (more than two children), then extra staff would be beneficial to support those families
- to minimise the disruption caused by the arrival of the children
- to have more time with the children involved.

Conditions for success

The feedback from the evaluation allows conclusions to be drawn concerning the likely requirements for successful delivery of future programmes of Family Learning in partnership with primary schools in the district. It should be stressed

that peripatetic inputs delivered within schools are, traditionally, dependent on good communications between a host school and the delivery organisation which establish the purpose, remit and role of the work and allow all involved clarity of expectation. This has largely been evident within the pilot programmes and would need to continue to be a priority for future delivery.

Other success factors suggested by the evaluation are:

- a whole school approach to Family Learning and parental engagement, allowing a short term input to form part of a planned programme of learning which complements the wider ethos of the school
- a conscious approach to targetting, based on working knowledge of family needs
- dedicated time and resources from a school worker (usually though not necessarily a PIW) to manage recruitment and retention of parents
- a briefing session prior to the course for parents
- a briefing session prior to the course for affected school teaching staff (i.e. those who will have children in their class attending)
- scope to expand the course beyond 5/6 weeks in negotiation with school and parents
- sessions no longer than 2 hours in length, to include breaks as appropriate and delivered at a time most likely to ensure attendance, based on local knowledge
- delivery at a point during the school calendar which minimises clashes with other school priorities
- involving children from defined year groups where possible
- minimising the level of time involved in collecting and delivering children to the sessions wherever possible
- delivering the sessions in a spacious, well lit room where possible (ideally a non classroom setting)
- providing high quality facilitation
- ensuring delivery is learning focused, though informal, interactive, short and age appropriate
- creche facilities where a clear need is identified and resources are available.

Conclusions

The evaluation suggests that the pilot programmes have been well delivered and made a contribution to positive outcomes for families. In particular, there is strong evidence that the programmes can boost parents' confidence to see themselves as educators and engage their children in learning, and good evidence that the programmes can improve parents' understanding of how children learn. There is also reasonable evidence that the programmes can enhance both parents' and children's communication skills.

The evaluation also suggests additional benefits for parents, in terms of the amount of time spent with their children in learning related activity, time spent in self reflection and in providing parents with practical tools and techniques to use at home in learning activity with their children.

There is some evidence of additional benefits for children and schools in terms of reduced exclusions from class, improved attendance and improved behaviour, though the small scale of the pilots, the short term nature of the programmes and the concurrent (rather than retrospective) nature of the evaluation suggest further work would be needed to confirm the potential for the programmes to deliver such outcomes on an ongoing basis.

However, a consistent outcome in each setting has been the recruitment of parents to voluntary (or in one instance paid) roles within school, or to ongoing learning. This suggests the potential for the programmes to engage, or re-engage, parents with school and/or learning is good.

While there is no evidence (nor was any sought) of any direct causal link to children's attainment, the evaluation suggests that, if adopted as part of a wider school approach to Family Learning and parental engagement, the pilot programmes can support and contribute to the development of social and emotional stability for children, which may in turn enable better informal, and formal, learning.

Richard Sorton, Icarus

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- Jan Pollard, Ley Top Primary
- Nicola Roth, Lilycroft Primary
- Laura Newcombe, Parkland Primary

Appendix A: Programme, Family SEAL

Appendix B: Programme, Helping My Child To Learn