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NRDC is a consortium, led by the Institute of Education, University of London. It brings together the best United Kingdom researchers in the field, together with expert and experienced development professionals and a wide range of talented practitioners.

The partners are:
- Institute of Education, University of London
- Literacy Research Centre, Lancaster University
- School of Continuing Education, University of Nottingham
- School of Education, University of Sheffield
- East London Pathfinder
- Liverpool Lifelong Learning Partnership

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Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy

Preface

Effective practices in family Learning, as it relates to the Skills for Life agenda and adult learners is of great interest to NRDC. In December 2005, through support from CfBT and the DfES, we embarked on a new Family Literacy Language and Numeracy (FLLN) research and development project the aim of which was to identify and support effective and inclusive FLLN practices. This was an attempt to address the lack of evidence on the potential language, literacy and numeracy benefits for adults in FLLN programmes and prioritise the development of new evidence, models and strategies for FLLN to impact on practice and policy.

Although adult outcomes in Family Learning programmes have traditionally been focused on parenting skills and employment, we were interested in other potential wider benefits of learning such as increased civic participation, strengthened language, literacy and numeracy skills, community cohesion, development and integration.

The Project began in 2005 with three distinct phases of work:

**Phase 1: Meta-study**
This consisted of collation and analysis of selected international quantitative and qualitative evidence on the effectiveness of FLLN programmes.

**Phase 2: Case studies**
These aimed to investigate the potential and problematics of FLLN in England. ‘Telling case’ research sites were selected to illuminate issues which impact on FLLN in terms of policy, funding, materials, practice, theory and development.

**Phase 3: – Development phase**
This phase was designed to develop a Practitioner Handbook to encourage innovative and inclusive learning and teaching FLLN practices, and to provide practical guidance and tips for practitioners.


The project team comprised of the following individuals:

- John Vorhaus – NRDC – Associate Director, Research Programmes
- Professor Greg Brooks – University of Sheffield – Project Co-Director
- Felicity Rees – University of Sheffield – Quantitative Meta-Study Researcher (April–August 2005)
- Alison Pollard – University of Sheffield – Quantitative Meta-Study Researcher (April–August 2005)
- Jo Weinberger – University of Sheffield – Case Study Researcher (April 2005–January 2006)
- Kate Pahl – University of Sheffield – Qualitative Meta-Study Researcher (March–December 2006)
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- Dave Baker – NRDC, University of London – Project Co-Director (to August 2006)
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- Rachel Hodge – Lancaster University – Case Study Researcher
- David Mallows – Independent consultant – Author, Practitioner Handbook (October–December 2006)

Copies of the Meta-Study and Practitioner Handbook will be available shortly from CfBT.

For more information on these publications, please contact:
CfBT Education Trust at 60 Queens Road, Reading, RG31 5NS, contact Becky Osborne or online at www.cfbt.com/research
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Introduction

What is family literacy, language and numeracy (FLLN)?

Family learning programmes are those specifically designed to enable adults and children to learn together; this type of ‘intergenerational’ learning rarely happens elsewhere in formal education. Such programmes aim to develop the skills or knowledge of both the adult and child participants and help parents/carers to enhance the support of their children’s learning and development. For many adult learners a family programme is their first step back into learning since their own school days and one important reason they go along is because they want to offer their child or grandchild support and opportunity; for many children it is the extra motivation they need to re-engage and feel success in learning. Family learning also crosses the separate phases of education, from pre-school to higher education.

This specific focus on improving the literacy, language and numeracy skills of adults has meant that in recent years FLLN has become seen as increasingly significant in the delivery of the Skills for Life strategy as government policy makers recognise FLLN can provide an effective pathway for adult learners to develop their own LLN Skills, whilst at the same time supporting the learning of their children. The more recent emphasis on nationally recognised accreditation in FLLN is also contributing to the achievement of the national targets.

This publication deals specifically with FLLN as opposed to wider Family Learning. FLLN programmes specifically focus on improving:

- the literacy, language and numeracy skills of parents/carers;
- parents/carers’ ability to help their children;
- children’s acquisition of literacy, language and numeracy.

FLLN is, by definition, always family learning, whereas family learning is not necessarily FLLN. These programmes have been found to have triggered the development of the literacy, language and numeracy skills of both parents/carers and children; they also deepen parents/carers’ involvement in their children’s learning and encourage them to go on to further training and to gain qualifications.

Throughout this publication we take an inclusive approach to the family, in respect of such aspects as age, gender, size and diversity of culture and ways of living and working.

A brief history of family literacy, language and numeracy

The concept of family literacy originated in the United States, initially organised through the Even Start programmes funded by the US Department of Education. In England the initial focus for family literacy and the rationale by government agencies appeared to be improving children’s literacy. This was tied to a focus on children’s literacy standards in the early 1990s, which culminated in the National Literacy Strategy. Family literacy also grew throughout the 1990’s, after the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) imported the Kenan model of family literacy from the United States. This was an intensive (three or four days a week), long-term (over a school year) model which focused on low-literacy parents/carers and their pre-school children. Following a fact-finding research tour of the US in 1992–3, ALBSU instituted four demonstration programmes in different ‘areas of deprivation’ in England and Wales in 1994. They were based in or near primary schools. An evaluation study by the NFER (Brooks et al., 1996) claimed that the programmes produced changes in reported home literacy activities and significant gains in the literacy achievement of both children and parents/carers. A follow-up study of families
20 to 34 months later found that children had retained their gains, and that parents/carers reported benefits in finding or retaining employment (Brooks et al., 1997).

The effect of the ALBSU initiative and its associated research was to establish a national prominence for family literacy (Hannon and Bird 2004:19). From then on, family literacy programmes began to recognise the importance of family literacy practices involving both children and parents/carers. Such activity as parent literacy support groups and family reading groups followed this pattern.

In the UK, in the years 1994–96 a co-funding scheme of grants to support some 400 smaller programmes was instituted by ALBSU, and in 1995 its remit was extended to include supporting the development of effective programmes in literacy, language and numeracy for children and young people and changed its name to the Basic Skills Agency (BSA). As the remit for the BSA widened, so too did understanding of FLLN with a new focus on literacy, language and numeracy activity in the home.

As a result of their work with families in Sheffield, Hannon and Nutbrown (1997) developed a conceptual framework for FLLN, which identified ways of working with parents/carers and young children together within the home. They argued that it was possible for parents/carers to provide:

- **Opportunities** for their children’s literacy development (trips, visits, shopping, materials for writing, drawing, books, opportunities for play)
- **Recognition** of their literacy practices (explicitly valuing what children do, and listening to them talking playing and writing)
- **Interaction** with children to develop their literacy (such as spelling out words children want to write, looking at letter/sound names, helping children spell a word)
- **Modelling** of their own literacy practices (reading signs, directions, instructions, packaging, print in the environment, writing notes, letters, shopping lists, reading newspapers).

(Hannon and Nutbrown, 1997)

This kind of thinking was also being mirrored in policy developments which focused on supporting children’s literacy and language through initiatives to help parents/carers understand the Literacy Hour. The National Literacy Strategy instituted a short programme to help parents/carers understand the new approaches to literacy in the primary classroom, and the Standards Fund allocated funding for family literacy classes as part of schools’ remit to raise literacy and numeracy standards in the late 1990s. Through the National Numeracy Strategy similar courses were set up to support parents/carers in their numeracy and to help them help their children in their numeracy development.

In 1993 the National Literacy Trust (NLT), was set up with the aim of working with others to enhance literacy standards; to encourage more reading and writing for pleasure by children, young people and adults; and to raise the profile of the importance of literacy in the context of social and technological change. The NLT initiated a series of surveys in order to determine the scale and scope of family literacy provision in the UK. These found that 400 initiatives could be described as family literacy initiatives, out of a total of 1,300 returns from their survey of literacy initiatives. The picture revealed by the surveys was of provision in a range of settings, including baby clinics, family centres, day nurseries, libraries, after-school clubs, travellers’ sites, playgroups, churches and housing schemes. Many agencies were involved, including schools, adult community colleges, further education colleges, voluntary organisations, educational business organisations, newspapers, community associations, ex-offender organisations, social services and healthcare organisations. Activities were very broad, including the making of books, puppets or story sacks, and some provided resources for parents/carers to use at home. Accreditation was often offered through ‘Open College,’ systems (Hannon and Bird, 2004). Many of these courses were aimed at multilingual parents/carers and were supported by bilingual tutors and workers.

The position today is one of very diverse provision, with very different models of family literacy. This is partly to do with the focus on
innovation instituted by Skills for Families, an initiative developed by the Learning and Skills Council to encourage new ideas and training in the field of FLLN and also because of the many creative way in which individual local authorities have worked with families over the years. Sure Start has also encouraged local groups to ‘take hold’ of different models of FLLN and adapt them to local contexts.

What is FLLN?

What is FLLN?

Summary

• There are different models of FLLN and it can be delivered in diverse settings.

• FLLN is, by definition, always family learning, whereas family learning is not necessarily FLLN.

• Families are witnessing unprecedented change – FLLN takes an inclusive approach to the notion of family and recognises and values multilingualism.

• FLLN course teams need to recognise the importance of family literacy, language and numeracy practices involving both children and parents/carers.
Who are the adult learners?

Case studies

CASE STUDY 1

Natalie

Natalie is mother to Tamara, aged five, and her four-year-old sister. She heard about the course from a friend and liked the idea of being able to spend time with Tamara. She says that by the time she realised it was about how children learn, she was already ‘hooked’. She suffers from depression and struggles to feel that she is a good enough mother. For her the value of the course has been the recognition of her role as a teacher in her daughters’ lives and the tutor’s emphasis on what she has already achieved. She feels that the fact that it is ‘basic and non-threatening’ has allowed her to succeed.

Her relationship with her children has changed because of what she is learning. ‘I am aware of the stages of learning and aware of the skills needed. I’m putting less pressure on them because my expectations aren’t so high.’ She is able to list many things that she has learned: about the national curriculum, how to choose and use books for her children, about learning styles, which she says has made her re-think how she uses activities with them, about writing development and lastly, as she puts it, ‘Being able to get a look inside their heads... how they are thinking and learning.’

CASE STUDY 2

Matt

Matt is the adoptive father and carer of Abigail, aged four and a half. He works part-time at the local hospital, as a midday supervisor at the school and in the Nursery library, as well as helping with various school activities. His wife works full time. He says he is often the only man present on the course but is used to this at work as well. He went to an initial meeting and decided to join the course because of the interaction with Abigail. It also seemed to be ‘friendly and non-threatening’, which was important because, as he puts it, ‘I have learned nothing since college 22 years ago (for an engineering course) and school was 26 years ago.’

Matt sees most of the gains as being for Abigail rather than for himself; he thinks he responds to her on a better level because he understands what she is doing in school. He also feels more confident and is considering taking the national tests in English and maths. For Matt, the highlight of the course is ‘the look on Abigail’s face when she walks through the door. She knows she’s going somewhere special.’
Preethi

Preethi is the mother of Ibram, who is five, his brothers aged four, seven and eleven and one sister aged 13. At home the family speaks Urdu, Punjabi and English. Her husband mainly speaks Punjabi, as his English is not good. The children mostly speak English and the whole family reads Arabic. Preethi wanted to join the course so that she could improve her English enough to help Ibram and his youngest brothers with their homework, which she could not do for the older ones. She also attends an ESOL class run by the college at the same school every week.

Preethi appreciates the bilingual teaching support and feels that whenever there is something she does not understand, she can ask. She also appreciates that the course takes place in the school and thinks that it would be harder to have to go into the college. She has particularly enjoyed learning the letter sounds and finding out about different ways of learning. She now feels able to help more with homework and can read storybooks at bedtime. She mentions that it has made parents’ evenings easier. An extra benefit for Preethi has been that she can talk to her older children about what they have done at school and can now understand more when they are speaking to each other.

Christine

Christine is the mother of Jamie, aged five, and his brother aged two. She heard about the course through a friend and Jamie’s teacher. Her reasons for taking part were to spend more time with Jamie and to be able to do things with him in the same way as he is taught at school; she thinks she has succeeded in this.

She says that the course, while good for Jamie, has made no difference to her own reading and writing. However, her self-esteem had been low and she is now more confident. She mentions that she had always wanted the chance to do maths and English again, but having a young child had made that impossible. Now she has been learning about skimming, identifying and correcting wrong spellings, punctuation and area, ‘square metres and square feet and all that’.

She says that she would recommend the course, ‘…because some people are not as well educated as others… I wanted to improve from a personal point of view to help Jamie later on… It is good that you can do things for yourself, it could make more people come if they knew that.’
Group interaction

Reflecting the value placed on social aspects of the course by Brenda, in many of the interviews carried out with learners the importance of group interaction was apparent.

In one group the learners did pair and group work and displayed a high amount of interest in each other on a personal level. They were highly supportive of one another, often offering help with answers and asking questions of one another. The teacher supported this and seemed to acknowledge the desire of the women to get to know each other not only for skills development support, but for wider friendship beyond the classroom. Many of the learners spoke about spending time with others in the group to study together but also on a social level. The value of this social interaction should not be ignored:

‘… obviously my son is too small to do anything with at home (seven months old) but the class has helped me be a better mom just by getting me out of the house! I was really finding being a new mom difficult – I had left a bad relationship, moved to a new neighbourhood, didn’t know anyone, didn’t have any support… it’s not easy… and the class it just reminds me that I am smart and I can learn things and here I have made friends. I will know a lot for when he is ready for school… I will feel prepared even though I didn’t grow up here…’

However, it was not always the case that the group interaction, visible in all the groups observed, extended beyond the classroom. Another group of learners were supportive of one another in class and shared stories of their children or own experiences with numeracy. But the majority of the in-class work observed was individual, independent work and during the child-parent session, the children and parents/carers did not mix with others in the group to do activities. This could have been a result of the strong parental focus on skill development for the child in this group.

School/home interface

There were constant reminders of the ways in which Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy courses impacted on their home life:

‘I have noticed changes at home in that Georgie wants to do maths at home – she considers it fun and as a naturally curious kid, her participation in this class has meant that maths is something she finds fun! That is totally different to my own experience as a kid and you know part of our reason for doing this class is to try to see if she can have a better experience than I did. My wife grew up in a family that was strong in maths and so we are trying to ensure Georgie sees that having good maths skills is a good thing…’

‘… he amazes me actually, he wants to play with maths related toys and the other day before bed he asked if he could listen to his maths tape! So, yes, the programme has without a doubt had an impact on him and that is what I wanted since my own experience was not like that and both me

Brenda

Brenda has lived in England for almost two years. She has one child, a seven-month old son, and is separated. She completed secondary school in her home country in central Africa but never continued her studies. She now hopes to do this in England and this is what motivated her to join the course. She joined the FN course when she was told about it by health visitor linked to the Sure Start centre where the course is held. As well as taking a first step back into education and improving her numeracy skills Brenda saw the course as an opportunity to work in a group and hopefully make friends with other mothers of young children. She also hopes to continue to improve her English through participation in the course. When asked if she would continue to improve her numeracy skills, she said yes and that she would join all the LLN courses the centred offered. This was typical of most of the learners in this group – their motives for participation were related to their own independence, empowerment and advancement.
and my husband aren’t strong in that area, I mean, we are from different disciplines you know?’

‘... I didn’t think the class helped me with my daughter ‘cause she is so young but the class that we have together has had an impact... I do sing the songs we sing in that class and I have learned games and stuff to do with her. The maths class is a break for me, it is my time and I know that I am happier because of it... I found only being at home with her very hard, so coming to the centre has changed things for me and I think I will be a better mom now...’

Who are the adult learners?

Summary

• FLLN is informed by the voices and experiences of families and is enriched by interaction between adults and children as well as between the participants themselves and the teaching teams.

• Adults value the opportunity to spend more time with their children and learn how to do things with them in the same way as they are taught at school.

• While most adults profess to have joined FLLN courses to help their children, there are gains for both the adults and the children and for the wider community.

• FLLN impacts on the home life of participants and enables adult participants to recognise the role as a teacher in their children’s lives.

Questions for course teams

• How does staff training support provision that takes account of valuing what participants bring and the cross-transference and support of both home and school practices?

• How does FLLN provision fit with and support their other learning and social involvements?
Partnerships

Partnerships between organisations are key to building successful FLLN provision. FLLN by its very nature straddles a number of boundaries in bringing adults’ and children’s learning together and to do this successfully it is important to draw on the expertise, resources, reputation and credibility of different organisations.

Partners may include LLN providers and primary and secondary schools which provide expertise on the children’s curriculum, recruit parents as learners and offer space and context for the course to take place. Staff from some partners also teach on programmes or provide input into sessions; they may talk about school behaviour policy or promote aspects of child development. Libraries, theatres and museums may also host classes and work with the provider on recruitment as can Sure Start, early years, children’s and family centres. Community groups, tenants’ associations, housing trusts, Information Advice and Guidance centres, charities and other voluntary organisations can provide links to disadvantaged and under-served communities. Wider partnerships with health services, job centres and others should also be explored.

Such partnerships are of great value and enrich FLLN courses in many ways. However, organisations should bear in mind that setting up and maintaining them can be both difficult and time-consuming. The case study sites revealed a number of ways in which this was successfully achieved. At all sites there was a realisation that a great deal of advocacy was necessary to engage organisations; this was usually done by FLLN co-ordinators, tutors and classroom assistants or by outreach teams. One of the organisations we worked with also has a ‘Parents as Learners’ (PALs) programme to help with partner and learner outreach. Here, former learners serve as learning champions, going out to speak to parents/carers and telling their own stories about coming on to courses. Another provider has designed short information sessions for schools considering involvement; these can be delivered by outreach workers or by FLLN tutors.

The Step in to Learning training and development programme, a part of the Skills for Life strategy, aims to help staff and managers working in the early years and childcare field to identify parents and carers who might have literacy, language and/or numeracy needs and to signpost them to appropriate learning opportunities to help them improve their skills. It also looks at how to support parents with LLN needs in their day-to-day practice.

These are just two examples of the innovative ways in which organisations have worked in partnerships to support their FLLN programmes. Whatever method is chosen it is clear that agreeing a process to develop new partnerships and identifying realistic resources to support it is vital if the partnerships are to be effective and sustainable.
Partnerships

Summary

- Partnerships between organisations are key; they enable FLLN teams to draw on the expertise, resources, reputation and credibility of different organisations.
- It is time-consuming to set them up and it is important to identify realistic resources to maintain them.
- Advocacy is an important skill needed by those working in the community to establish and maintain links with partners.

Questions for course teams

- What areas of expertise would complement those you already have?
- Are there groups of learners you find it difficult to engage?
- What local groups do you know who can help with either of the above?
- Who in your organisation can make contact with these groups?
- Who needs to be involved in setting up the partnership (approval, contracts, funding, face-to-face meetings etc.)?
- Who will be responsible for maintaining the partnership?
- How many hours and what budget will be allocated to this?

Recruitment

A major role for partners is to engage learners; in fact in many cases the adult learning provider does not make decisions about the recruitment process. Instead, targeting and recruitment are undertaken by the schools. The targeting may be based on individual children’s needs: class teachers may identify certain parents/carers because they consider that their child would benefit from more parental support at home; there may also be a more general assessment of need via the school improvement plan after Ofsted or SATs results, leading to less targeted recruitment.

As the focus of the schools is likely to be on the benefits to the children rather than their parents/carers, such recruitment could, unless done properly, be limiting in terms of widening participation. For example, in one course the school determined that FN would be offered and recruited learners via a letter sent home to parents/carers. It would be reasonable to suggest that learners with significant LLN needs are less likely to respond to a letter sent home with their children. In essence the partner is able to recruit the kind of individual that is most likely to participate in its programmes anyway. This type of strategy and a desire to accommodate any parents/carers who want to attend – even if they do not have a child in Early Years or are not at the preferred level – can lead to a wide range of levels and learning needs in the same class, putting great pressure on the teachers. It can also cause problems for learning providers who often have to meet targets of learners at particular levels.

However, in terms of inclusion this may need to happen sometimes and there can be real benefits. In one particular class that we observed (see Working with a bilingual tutor section) one learner, Kirsty gained enormously in confidence and self-esteem from being with the group even though she was unlikely ever to take the level 1 qualification the group were working towards. Another learner in this group, Naheen, realised that she had the skills to support the learning of others in the group:

‘I think I have developed the skills of teaching and supporting other learners even though I don’t treat myself as higher than anybody else, just the same. I find it very interesting.’
There were learners in most of the classes we observed who were likely to be higher than level 2 (i.e. learners with backgrounds in professional accounting and maths teaching). In this case what should be considered are the various motives for engagement in the programme; these may be cultural as well as intergenerational. The development of more positive attitudes towards maths skills development and increasing understanding of the English maths school curricula and pedagogy were both common motivators for the various learners we interviewed. These motives are explicitly contained within the FLLN policy rhetoric thus making pre-screening or exclusion of learners above level 2 highly problematic.

However, in many schools a large majority of the parents/carers have no or few qualifications so parents/carers of the majority of children are eligible and may be reached through targeted or general publicity. In this case particular parents/carers can also be invited because of their children’s need. This reduces any uncomfortable feelings that may be attached to targeting individual parents/carers with ‘literacy or numeracy needs’ but achieves the same result.

Here are a few different strategies we saw being used to engage learners:

- The provider produces flyers which are sent out by the schools to their own target groups of parents/carers, for example all parents/carers of Reception class children. The flyer may then be followed up by personal contact from the children’s teacher or by word of mouth from other parents/carers.

- The school writes a letter to all families with children in the selected year groups; followed up by personal contact by the headteacher or class teacher or other staff member with parents/carers that the school particularly wants to involve.

- One community FLLN provider provides a disk of sample recruitment and publicity materials for partners to use and has a FLLN ambassador to work with partners as well as development hours for the tutor or teacher.

- Other recruitment strategies include school-gate contact, newsletters, parents/carers’ workshops and home visits by nursery staff and FLLN/school development workers.

One tutor advises starting recruitment well before the usual time of September so that she knows people’s contact details, educational background and requirements such as crèche facilities, and is ready when she contacts them again in September.

According to a headteacher interviewed as part of this project, ‘the personal touch’ was the most important aspect of the recruitment process. Indeed, success in reaching learners is often attributable largely to the skill, confidence and cultural knowledge of the community of those who approach parents/carers to participate, especially in the case of bilingual workers/tutors in multilingual areas where people may not speak much English. Such staff highlight the motivational factors of wanting to support and help their children; most participants on FLLN provision speak of their motivation for participation as focused on helping their children and they need to be given the confidence that they can, with particular strategies, still make a difference to their children’s learning. Recruitment advice also needs to address the many barriers, perceived and real, to involvement for parents/carers, such as crèche facilities, timetabling and location, as well as offering reassurance about the style and ethos of the programme, and the enjoyable nature of the activities.

When parents/carers are approached by the class teacher or headteacher, the importance of the programme can be emphasised, along with the personal nature of the intervention. Staff from a similar culture, language or community, or previous students such as those on the PALs programme, for example, can also add extra encouragement.
Recruitment

Summary

• Different recruitment strategies may be needed but the personal touch is always important in recruitment.
• If the focus is placed on children, parents/carers may feel more confident to come forward.
• There are benefits to an inclusive approach to recruitment and the targeting of parents/carers through their children but it can lead to a wide range of levels and learning needs in the same class, putting great pressure on the teachers.
• Consider parental involvement in planning FLLN activities.

Questions for course teams

• Who will make initial contact with the parents/carers?
• Does the person chosen to do this know enough about the school/partner organisation, its children and their families?
• Have they been fully trained/briefed in different methods of approaching parents/carers?
• What other strategies, other than direct face-to-face contact, could be used?
• Should parents/carers be targeted mainly via their children?

Staff

‘I suppose it is quite a multi-task thing, the FLLN... you don’t just want an ESOL teacher but you want someone who knows about families and their children’s education, who can take on a literacy class, who can deal with a range of skills in their class, who has the personal skills to get on with partners, who has the strength to carry all of the resources from one location to another, who has the resources to work with IT... so yeah, we are quite lucky and we have a great team!’

In addition to strong pedagogic skills and subject-specific expertise, with knowledge and commitment to language, literacy and numeracy teaching, FLLN practitioners require expertise in the school-based curriculum and language support, ESOL sensitivity, and the ability to help adults and children to build on and further develop their home practices and life skills. They also need to be able to work with groups that may be made up of learners at different levels. During observations of FLLN sessions it was evident that much of the success of the courses depended on the tutor maintaining a semi-formal class atmosphere, where the learners arrive on time and listen when others speak, while simultaneously creating a friendly, informal ambience in which learners feel empowered to put forward their own ideas and suggestions without fear of failing.

The adult teacher – Julie

Julie has worked as a Skills for Life tutor for four years. She is a graduate, with a degree in biochemistry, and initially worked in cancer research for eight years. After time off to have her children, she worked as a parent helper, then a teaching assistant and a special needs assistant in a variety of schools, secondary and primary, for 11 years.

During her time working in schools she says that she realised how much children’s progress depends on their parents/carers. She went on to do City & Guilds courses in Basic Skills, then applied to a college as a tutor in 2002. She was subsequently moved into the family learning team in 2003. She gave up her school job and started her PGCE in FE on a part-time INSET course while working at the college. She currently works as a part-time hourly-paid tutor in family learning, doing variable hours.
She says that her years of experience in school and the range of children she met have taught her a lot that is relevant to her job now in terms of the practical issues; the theoretical aspects were filled in by the PGCE.

Julie says that she loves her job now – it gives her immeasurable satisfaction to help one child to have a better experience or one parent to gain something. She says she always spends time talking to the adult learners, who have so many issues, and to their children as well. She wants to feel that she can pass her own experience on and ‘do a tiny bit to help’. She considers the main successes of her work so far have been with those learners who, having come in feeling antagonistic and lacking in self-confidence, stayed and enjoyed the course: people who have since started working in school and then gone to college and become ‘different people’. She believes that the courage it takes for some parents/carers to come through the door is sometimes underestimated.

She sees the main benefits of FLLN to the adults to be their improving skills, the social aspects and seeing that their children may not have the difficulties they initially perceived them to have. Her aim is to create a safe and confidential environment, to break down school/home barriers and the negative memories that they sometimes have of their own time at school.

Julie recognises that parents/carers may feel disempowered by not understanding the way their children are being taught, so another of her aims is to show them ways to become more confident in working with their children to help them to recognise that they are capable of teaching them, that they are and have been their children’s first teachers.

She believes that FLLN should be available in all schools but that it is important to use trained adult tutors in recognition of the differences between teaching adults and children, otherwise it can create barriers. She would also like to see all schools being supportive of the joint parent/child sessions. Difficulties can be created by children arriving late or the school seeing it as an add-on and not recognising how important this ‘quality time’ is to the parents/carers and the children.

Again partnerships can add great value to FLLN programmes; it makes a significant difference to the strength of a course and its outcomes when a teacher from the host school, with in-depth knowledge of literacy and numeracy teaching with those learners, is the person teaching the children. The primary school experience of such a teacher is useful in making links between the FLLN programme and the school system, particularly in highlighting pedagogic methods that primary school teachers employ to teach specific maths concepts and attempting to develop methods for use in the home environment.

The children’s teacher – Anne

Anne is a retired qualified Early Years teacher. She is employed on a sessional basis through LSC funding to work in one school. She takes the children for two hours of a family literacy class (held in the Sure Start centre building) in a small, separate room in the adjacent primary school and then brings them to join their parents/carers for a joint activity in the final hour of the session.

Anne thinks the teaching modules on which the course is based have been very well thought out. She has the freedom to use the excellent resources as she sees fit. This is essential, as at any one time she may have children from three levels; Nursery, Reception and Year 1. She sometimes substitutes her own choice of material if she thinks it would be better. She likes the children to experience a variety of activities which link creativity, play and learning which they can do at home as well as at school:

‘I always have a story and a song or game, a creative, artistic activity, a literacy activity like writing a sentence or a labelling activity, a craft activity such as cutting, pasting, painting – a wide variety with support activities linked to the theme, like a game they can choose and play on their own or with a partner.’

She says that the key to successful family literacy work in a school is working in good cooperation with teachers, making sure that they understand what activities are planned and the value of these to the children:

‘I make sure that teachers have an outline for the year for the themes… I try to find out the reading and writing schemes the
Anne says that more interaction with teachers would strengthen their confidence in the family literacy work but this is difficult to achieve:

‘In an ideal world I would like a session with the teachers to explain but [this is difficult] due to timetabling and pressure on them. I make sure I speak to each teacher when I pick up the child and hand them back to the teacher.’

Anne feels that the benefits the women gain are manifold:

‘The benefits? How long have we got? The opportunity to make independent decisions, make new friends. It alters their perception of school as more accessible, they gain enormous confidence, they recognise that they are doing something for themselves. I can see them supporting each other, it improves their self-esteem… they gain study skills and research skills on the computer. Many have come back for level 2 and 3, one or two go on to college, one has got a job at school…’

Partnerships with local community groups can also be fruitful in providing support for learners; in particular, bilingual support is invaluable in including the parents/carers whose English is not at the level necessary to fully understand the course.

‘Amina (bilingual tutor) does a wonderful job and her being here makes them more relaxed and able to learn both the art and the reading, writing and number because she can explain things in their language.’

Trained bilingual workers like Amina, well known in the local community, are crucial not just in terms of translating but for creating a comfortable, safe environment conducive to creativity, self-expression and free communication.

The bilingual tutor – Zara

Zara has been employed at one primary school by the local authority Young People’s Services as a bilingual worker for the past six years; as part of her work she teaches the family literacy class. Zara is a qualified childcare worker, youth worker and has a level 3 advice and guidance qualification. She also has an Adult Literacy 7037 qualification and is working towards her 7047 which leads to a Cert Ed.

Zara is based in the Sure Start building adjacent to the school and is very well known and trusted in the local community. In addition to her family literacy class, as a bilingual worker she is involved in outreach and home visits, and she runs advice and guidance sessions and an open learning group. All this has a very positive impact on recruitment and retention in the family literacy class.

Zara feels that the way she uses her bilingual resources has been a key factor in working effectively in family literacy in this school where 85% children are of South Asian heritage:

‘To have the ability to communicate with students of different levels and recognise their individual skills… they can relate to it better and understand the examples I give them in their own language. It might be one word that throws them and then they’ll come back and ask and I’ll give them an example, I’ll put it in context and I’ll give them a sentence to explain it. This is all the hard work that is not in the lesson plan.’

The FLLN curriculum Zara works with is built around holistic child development rather than being driven by the school curriculum; she feels that this is key to the participants’ initial interest, motivation and persistence though they soon go on to want to learn for themselves as well:

‘Because we show them all the different ways they can help their children and it’s not necessarily just learning English. The centre piece is their child and they are learning about child development and to read and write themselves through how their child learns … They love their child and want to help their child so they’ll do anything they can and start to pick up skills.’
Zara explains what she feels to be effective practice in FLLN:

‘... what goes down well with students and what they can understand. We’ve done fine-tuning as we’ve gone along… we have built up and charged resources and activities according to parents’ feedback, needs, interests and purposes. They need to have a nice comfy room, to be safe and to have crèche facilities nearby – not having to go from building to building. To be comfortable with the course, offering a holistic course – good sessions with all resources such as trips, transport, no cost whatsoever, high quality, well resourced, well planned, bilingual resources. There need to be a wide range and variety of activities both inside and outside the classroom e.g. visits to the curriculum centre, to the library, to the job centre – making them aware of all the free facilities they can access. There need to be strong links and feedback with the school and teachers and support from the school head for this to work. Effectiveness means linking what they do in class with life outside.'

In this session the women are working on a module on play, ‘Learning is fun’. The activities explored how children learn through: becoming familiar with a range of board games; creating their own stories from a board game; talking about their own experiences of games in their home countries; selecting and evaluating for educational value toys from catalogues according to a given budget; making a nursery rhyme mobile with their children and learning the rhyme together; writing up evaluations of how children learn from these. All these activities generated a great deal of speaking, listening, reading and writing as well as numeracy.

There are eight participants in this session: Rema, Sanu, Shami, Nada, Seema, Naheen (all South Asian [Pakistani] heritage), Kirsty (white ethnic) as well as Dot, Kirsty’s social/learning support worker and Zara, the tutor. Anne is working with the children in a separate room.

In this part of a session called ‘Learning is fun’ the women are looking up items listed on a worksheet, in a toy catalogue.

Rema: ‘Baji, [affectionate term meaning older sister] no index [in catalogue she was given] can I have Argos?’

Dot is helping Kirsty use the index. Kirsty can’t find ‘paints’ so Dot helps her search.

Sanu and Shami help Nada and Seema when they get stuck:

‘the paintbrushes will be on page …’ (this is because paintbrushes are not listed in the index and Sanu and Shami knew that they had to look at ‘art and crafts’ in the index.)

Sanu and Shami mainly speak English but occasionally code switch whereas Nada and Seema speak more Urdu to each other as they work out how to do the task. Rema works by herself. Zara is supporting Nada and Seema switching between English and Urdu where necessary for understanding the text.

Rema helps them all find ‘duvets’ under ‘bedding’ in the index.

Rema to researcher: ‘You have to use your initiative because the paint brushes were hidden in ‘arts and crafts’. Bats and balls were in the sports section but they weren’t listed in index.

Naheen (who seems the most advanced) has responded to the questions on the sheet and is helping Saana write hers up. Naheen, Rema and some others have finished writing up their worksheets. Kirsty, Nada and Seema have hardly started... Dot helps Kirsty put in the full stops and commas.

The women feed back on their purchases, e.g. Naheen gives the price and learning value for children from her selected items, for example she selected Monopoly, priced £13.99 and assessed the learning value as: sharing, taking turns, using money, reading, new words, place names.

Zara: ‘ladies, add it up, has she gone over or under [£50]?’ all the women are laughing and enjoying the activity.

Zara: reviews all this in Urdu quite quickly for Seema and Nada. All the women feed back on their ‘purchases’. Kirsty adds everybody’s list up on her phone calculator.

This is a rich snapshot of everyone working to their own strengths to facilitate not only their own learning but their peers. Throughout, the tutors give appropriate levels of support. We see how important bilingual resources are in the classroom. Rema calls Zara ‘Baji’ which reveals the closeness and trust she has built up with the learners through her understanding of their languages and culture in her dual role as tutor/worker. Though English is used wherever possible, the tutor and also the women use their bilingual skills to support each other whilst reading and working on an English language text (the catalogue). Kirsty, who, as Zara explained to me, came with a label of ‘learning disabilities’ flourishes in this cooperative, practical environment and does not seem any less able than many others. She is able to use the expertise that the others do not have in numeracy whilst receiving the support with literacy and social confidence that she needs at this point in time.
Parents/carers and tutors often consider FLLN courses are notable for their positive, welcoming, supportive, friendly, non-threatening atmosphere – in this the FLLN practitioners are of great importance:

‘No blame, no finger-pointing. She (the tutor) talked to everybody on the same level.’ (Parent)

‘It takes out the taboo that teachers are scary because it’s done in a relaxed atmosphere.’ (Tutor)

However, while the attitude and qualities of the tutor are central to this, there are other factors that need to be taken into consideration. The creation of such a productive learning experience can only be achieved if everyone connected to the programmes, including other teaching and non-teaching staff in schools who might be encountered during the programmes, is well-informed and engaged in understanding the programme, particularly the inclusion agenda. Frequent contact with the headteacher or other senior staff at all stages of planning and delivering a programme shows the value given to the learners and the programme. The endorsement and support of leadership and management teams in the school is a significant factor in success.

**Staff**

**Summary**

- The attitude and qualities of the tutor are central; they need strong pedagogic skills as well as subject-specific expertise.
- They also need to create a positive, welcoming, supportive, friendly, non-threatening atmosphere.
- Joint planning needs to take place between the adult and child’s teacher.
- Effective partnership work is important to underpin the effectiveness of the classroom teachers.

**Questions for course teams**

- Is it better to have a school teacher with additional training to teach adults or an adult LLN tutor with additional training around school requirements, or a partnership of the two?
- What areas and opportunities for skills development are there among the teaching team?
- What continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities are needed to address any gaps and to ensure effective induction of new staff?
- How can the expertise of the whole FLLN team be drawn on for CPD?
- How does staff training support provision that values what FLLN participants bring to the course and both home and school practices?
Teaching environment

Another important element in a successful FLLN course is the teaching environment. There should be separate spaces for the children and the adults. Where possible the adults should work in an adult area rather than a children’s classroom. Ideally this would be non-threatening and also give a high profile to the course:

The session takes place in a school classroom containing arts and crafts materials and is evidently used for other FLLN classes. The walls are decorated with photographs, paintings, poems and other work created by a family literacy group. The classrooms are all situated off a glass-walled corridor in a ‘L’ formation. This one is the fourth of five along one arm of the ‘L’ and therefore well integrated and visible within the school.

However, where the school environment is less appropriate, provision held away from the school in partner organisations has the advantage of removing possible negative connotations of school-type environments. Museums, libraries and theatres are all used in this way as well as more obvious venues such as Sure Start centres.

The family literacy class is held in the parents’ room in the Sure Start building which is in the primary school grounds. This is a very pleasant room with plenty of table space and comfortable chairs…. The walls are covered with a wide range of posters related to family health, safety and education as well as artwork from the family literacy class. There is a kitchenette, computer, bookshelves and arts and crafts storage. Adjacent to the parents’ room is a creche.

The latter is, of course, of great importance in recruitment and retention to FLLN courses.

Teaching environment

Summary

- Adequate space is very important when delivering FLLN provision.
- Negative connotations of a traditional classroom which may be held by adults need consideration.
- There should be separate adult and child areas.
- Familiar and visible spaces for the adults, with tea and coffee facilities and ‘grown up’ classroom furniture help make the adults more comfortable and able to engage with the course.

Questions for course teams

- Have you made the best of the room available? Could more resources make the room more welcoming or more conducive to learning?
- Are the FLLN adult staff welcomed, or even recognised, within the school/partner organisation and do the adult staff respect the school context?
- How have you made those in the school/partner organisation who aren’t directly involved in the project aware of it?
- How could the course be better integrated into the aims and values of the school/partner organisation?
- How can research on the benefits of FLLN participation be used to develop a strong case for partner recruitment?
Assessment and accreditation

Some learners are uncomfortable with the idea of being assessed, particularly if they have had previous negative experiences of learning. Depending on the starting point of the learner this requires sensitive handling by staff as it can often be a barrier to recruitment and particularly to retention. On many courses no formal initial assessment is carried out, but questions are asked at the starting point as part of the process of completing an Individual Learning Plan.

‘No-one is turned away because they are over-qualified. They may have needs in other areas. All tutors differentiate so that there is a range of activities and the learners put in more or less.’

Once on the course it usually takes a few sessions for participants to feel confident and trust in the adult teacher, so initial assessment is frequently delayed until a little way into the course. This is done as and when the tutor feels it is appropriate in order to be sensitive to learners who may be put off by being ‘tested’.

‘… I don’t know that I would have been put off by a test right at the start – I probably wouldn’t have liked it but Carol (the FN teacher) was so welcoming and open that she put me at ease – still I can imagine that a pre-screening test in maths would put a lot of people off!’

The tutor comments:

‘We tried, via our development work in Skills for Families, to see what the impact of pre-screening would have on our programme and we determined that it would damage our ability to run a programme that aimed to help learners who had poor school experiences and also to ensure we had a community development focus at the core of our work.’

However, this can create problems for providers and learners alike. As assessment takes place after the onset of a course, some participants have to be signposted to other provision if the course is not suitable for their level and needs. This is particularly common on courses on which there is a requirement for 80–100% of participants to have LLN levels below Level 2 and can lead to a shortfall in funding.

One centre uses an oracy trail in the local park with participants hunting for the answers in week one as an alternative to the more structured initial assessment usually used in FLLN. This is embedded in initial classroom activities and is designed to be less threatening. This model has worked very well in sensitively assessing participants’ oral and literacy skills.

Very few participants on FLLN courses begin with an expressed desire to take accreditation as part of the course. Indeed, the mention of accreditation in course publicity materials can have a negative effect on recruitment. However, this attitude can change as reported on one of the case study sites:

‘… participants on this course spoke about how the course helped them increase in confidence in their own numeracy skills and although many were anxious about taking the national test, slowly their interest in the qualification grew. They attributed this increase in confidence in part due to the supportive, relaxed approach of their tutor. There was no pressure to take the national test and yet they were made aware of the test and what it entailed. They were gently encouraged to take the test and most participants spoke about taking the test as a way to personally confirm their abilities – something that after starting the course they felt more proud about.’

In many courses, there are parents/carers willing to take accreditation and some where they are very keen on it. Much depends on the attitude and approach of the teachers, who with experience and different expectations need to be skilled and confident in addressing the issue. Appropriate timing is important, as is the choice of accreditation, with choices between giving participants the opportunity to take the National Test and/or more tailored Open College Network accreditation.
The FLLN Programme

Non-accredited

This programme is described as a non-accredited short course based on creativity, designed to demonstrate to parents/carers of children aged four to six creative ways of helping to develop their child’s interest and learning in literacy and numeracy. It fits the definition of a FLLN springboard course in that it is designed to introduce parents and carers to the range of family services and programmes available in their locality and to signpost them to the most appropriate progression route.

The programme starts with an hour-long taster and then runs for two hours for the following six weeks. There are three modules of two weeks each in writing, reading and numeracy. These are supported by a rucksack (the Backpack) of books, games and creative materials that is loaned to parents/carers during the course.

The emphasis is on making games and activities to support learning at home in a way that can be enjoyed by parents/carers and children. In most of the sessions parents/carers find out about literacy and numeracy teaching and learning in school and how they can support this at home. They are shown ways of doing this with a variety of resources, some of which they may already have, some of which are included in the backpacks on loan to them and some of which they can make or buy. The children join them for 30 minutes to begin a joint creative activity which can be finished off at home.

Assessment and accreditation

Summary

• Assessment can be embedded in other activities.
• Accreditation can increase confidence but much depends on the attitude and approach of the teachers as well as appropriate timing and choice of accreditation.
• It is important to be sensitive to participants’ fears of accreditation and ‘testing’ during recruitment.
• Assessment should be formative as well as summative.

Questions for course teams

• Have you researched different types of assessment and accreditation?
• Have you spoken to other organisations about what they do and what works?
• Has the course team been made aware of different methods of assessment and accreditation and trained to use them?
• Does the course team and management welcome and encourage feedback from each other and from learners about what assessment/accreditation they value?
There are multiple and diverse forms of FLLN practice and this is reflected in both course hours and format. FLLN programmes follow a number of different models.

- The traditional model is a shared parent and child programme in which they all work together throughout the time of the course.
- The dominant model in the UK, following that of the BSA, is a hybrid course with separate parents’/carers’ time and children’s time at first, then joint time when the children are brought into the adults’ group by the children’s teacher for the last hour.
- There are also numerous models of short taster courses contextualised to particular groups, settings and host organisations.

The main purpose of these programmes is to attract, inspire, retain, engage in learning and facilitate and support achievement, by children and adults who have – for a variety of reasons – missed out on traditional learning opportunities and do not turn enthusiastically to anything labelled ‘educational’. Setting up such programmes requires creative thinking about alternative teaching methods or approaches different from those learners may have experienced at school. While adults are quite happy with some traditional ways of learning if they are delivered in an appropriately supportive atmosphere, opportunities to broaden horizons through new experiences and activities based closely on the personal interests of the adult or children learners are particularly successful. Parents/carers and children relax, enjoy the experience of learning and the good feeling of small and large achievements in areas in which they may previously have lacked confidence.

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The courses studied by NRDC mainly ran over 30–72 hours, frequently in 2.5 hour-sessions during school hours.
Effective and inclusive practices in family literacy, language and numeracy

Learning together

There are 13 parents/carers enrolled on this course. 11 are present in this session (Tina, Samar, Jasmin, Harvinder, Preethi, Natalie ‘Nat’, Matt, Nadesh, Christine ‘Chris’, Susan and Saba). There is a tutor (Julie) present and a bilingual facilitator from the college (Nabila), who helps with handing round materials, marking the register and so on, and a bilingual teaching assistant from the school. The room is well equipped, with plenty of resources labelled ‘Family Learning’ and adult-sized furniture. It is bright, colourfully decorated and in the centre of the school, with display boards all around showing the children’s work. On the whiteboard at the front of the room is written: ‘Welcome to Family Learning. Week 8: Learning Styles’ and the date. The tables are arranged in a wide semi-circle with chairs around the outside. Julie stands at the front, with a small table in the centre of the semi-circle where she has arranged all her handouts etc.

Julie begins by talking about an outing the group made the previous week and handing round photographs of the trip. She then returns folders containing their OCN accreditation coursework and explains what took place during a visit by the external verifier and what has been written inside their folders. She hands out flyers for Quick Reads, describing them as ‘geared to adults (and) ideal if you don’t have enough time to read a thick book or are not a confident reader.’

The main part of the session is about learning styles, relating this to how children learn, but carrying out what Julie describes as ‘an experiment’ to test their own learning style. She reassures them that she will not ask who gets the answer right or wrong. The task is to analyse how they set about memorising a random series of numbers. She goes on to introduce different learning styles, writing on the board:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Style</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>Seeing (like colours and diagrams)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory</td>
<td>Hearing (instead of a written sheet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinaesthetic</td>
<td>Doing (movement and handling things)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She tells the parents/carers that the majority of children start out with learning by doing, and suggests that a teacher may be reaching only a third of a class by using each teaching style. She goes on to relate this to being a parent working with your child at home, saying that you may be denying them the opportunity to learn by only using your own preferred learning style.

A learning styles questionnaire follows, then a worksheet matching activities to styles, then two about their own child. They either work in pairs or groups, with Julie reading the questions aloud. After each activity she asks for feedback both about their answers and their experience with their own children.

After a coffee-break, with 25 minutes remaining, Julie demonstrates how to make a ‘fortune-teller’ out of a square of paper, adding numbers, colours and tasks. The children are brought in for the final 20 minutes to help finish making them and to try them out.

Many different activities can be used as a medium for learning: measuring the school garden, designing posters, using ICT to insert photographs, observing and recording children’s sports day, quit-making: choosing materials, touching and describing, cutting into different shapes, listing features and drawing a dream town, planting differently shaped beds with different vegetables and measuring plants as they grow, writing and performing a puppet theatre play, writing poems, making healthy ‘smoothie’ drinks and using interactive whiteboards together. One secondary school ran a ‘Family Literacy through Science’ course as a new approach. Many of these activities are commonplace in the practice of primary schools but these programmes have opened opportunities for learning to many more adults.

Use of the creative arts is very popular on FLLN courses as it is immediately practical and accessible to any child or adult whatever their educational background and level of LLN; this leads quickly to feelings of satisfaction, pride and self-confidence.

‘It’s something they enjoy doing and… can feel real satisfaction doing, so it’s easier to make somebody feel confident, enjoy it and get on with it than say coming in to learn how to spell or improve your literacy. … you can build on that and people learn though it.…’

Participants also often learn about child development through games while developing their own language and literacy skills at the same time. Such games offer learning and leisure opportunities not only in the class but also at home.

Family literacy initiatives have traditionally attempted to take school knowledge into the home to support both child and adult learning. Opportunities arise from work in the classroom that can inspire and enhance activities in the home. The use in the classroom of materials and situations found in the home, e.g. recipes for cooking, instructions for games and use of equipment, timetables for trains, television or radio, measurements for home improvements, forms and letter-writing can be particularly effective.
Gifts of simple equipment establish links between work in school and in the home e.g. dictionaries, pens, pencils, calculators, folders, carrying cases, alphabet and number-lines and base boards for games. Efforts should be made to provide activities that can be adapted for the home and out-of-class activities that can be repeated with the family in their own time.

However, the rich existing knowledge of participants and their own home literacies can often be ignored in favour of privileging official and particularly school literacies. This deficit view does not encourage attention to be paid to everyday practices and learning at home and in wider everyday life. Materials such as photographs, diaries and family artefacts should also be invited from homes into the classroom and learning activities based on them.

Valuing home knowledge

In FLLN courses there are great opportunities to blend participants’ existing practices with new knowledge, skills and resources to learn about and evaluate how children play and learn. Here a FLLN manager describes such an activity:

‘… they were doing standard and non-standard measurements, and it was brilliant because it was a mixed group of white and Asian women and they were all saying what they used to use, you know, like a step or a hand span to measure and the Asian women would still do it much more, it had kind of died really in our tradition and they were saying, they only ever cook by handfuls and they know their child’s t-shirt is two and a half of these, they only ever cook by handfuls and they know their child’s t-shirt is two and a half of these, they don’t look at the age 5 because that could be different at Marks and Woolworths… it was like you couldn’t really argue that standard measures were better because nothing was better than this “two and a half” for age 5… the white families have got other ways of walking across, you know, about a yard was a stride, and I thought it really did value what people were bringing from their background to the course, not saying you have to learn to add up, but saying, you know, you’ve got all these skills already and we can perhaps tell you some more about what’s going on in maths in school.’

The FLLN Programme

Summary

A FLLN programme can involve:

• valuing home knowledge and practices
• drawing on creativity and creative approaches to learning
• visual accounts of experience
• trips and outings
• learning about child development
• literacy, language and numeracy
• alternative teaching methods
• a diverse range of activities
• learning by doing as a model
• using family artefacts to develop authentic and creative learner stories.
Valuing home practices

Teachers are also in partnership with the participants themselves in developing teaching and learning in schools.

‘If we indeed value home and community languages and literacies, then we must consider how to use our knowledge and appreciation of home cultures to promote learning and to broaden worldviews of all children.’

Gregory (2004)

One example of this can be seen in the inclusion of activities around oral storytelling, which is still much more deeply embedded in the family practices of many immigrant groups than in Western practices. Such activities further enhance well established patterns of practice and skill in storytelling rather than introducing new ones. The learners draw on their existing skills, languages and resources to tell new stories in English, then go back home and talk about these and tell them to grandparents in their mother tongue and to their children in both languages. This type of activity was observed in one of the courses we observed:

‘In a previous class the students were asked to make a puppet based on the story of Rapunzel that they could use to tell the story to their children. Naheen told me with great humour that she reworked the story to be about a mother-in-law who kept her daughter-in-law imprisoned in the castle, calling her puppet Rajina for whom she made Pakistani-style clothing. Naheen had the space through the creative activity to draw on her own folklore traditions and culture to create a story she related to culturally. She then went into Early Years classes in school to present the story of Rajina and her mother-in-law in English to the children. In this way she brought her own traditions, reworked with new language and new creative arts learning, into the school classroom learning.’

Learning in such FLLN classes/sessions is multidirectional, travelling from home into the class and from the class back to home and into school. This is part of a consistent pedagogical approach based upon the principles of social justice and recognition of difference and diversity.

Valuing home practices

Summary

Valuing home practices involves:

- listening to families’ stories
- drawing on the specific folklore of countries where families originate
- translation as a practice
- use of artefacts and props
- use of creative arts.

Questions for course teams

- Has the team discussed where the balance between home and school curriculum should be?
- How are ‘what participants bring’, e.g. existing skills, cultures and languages, valued in the learning environment?
- In what ways does the FLLN programme take account of both home and school practices?
Outcomes

Why FLLN?

FLLN has a positive impact in a number of different ways. There are gains that are immediately transferred to home: adults participating in FLLN programmes develop a greater understanding of how their children learn and what they can do to support that.

'I learn as I go on about the children developing. I can teach them how to play, how to get messy, enjoy themselves and be happy.'

(FLLN learner)

Existing research evidence suggests that children who take part in FLLN courses do make gains in all three skills. Schools also report better motivation and increased confidence in the children who take part in FLLN programmes with consequent improvements in their overall performance at school. The children also benefit in terms of increased interaction with adults around LLN activities within the course and at home; there is evidence to support a link between parents’/carers’ involvement in their children’s literacy and their children’s improvements in literacy learning.

Kath says that Carl is taking a lot more interest in books, having asked for books instead of Easter eggs this year. ‘Yesterday (at Asda) instead of wanting a Power Ranger he wanted a new book … He doesn’t like them now if they’re short. He says, “Mum that was short, read me another”.’

Naheen explained how FLLN has benefited her child, her family life and the wider community:

‘My husband is really happy. He wants me to get out and enjoy myself because I was always a bit stressed staying at home with family problems. My daughter is so happy that I come to the group… I’m happier because she’s happier. She can concentrate and she loves school now. Even though she’s behind with her work she gets all the help in the world from me. Her friends come over and we do homework together, cooking together, shopping together, Eid or Christmas we make cards. We do all sorts… it’s like having a school in my home at the weekend.’

This learning transfers back into school:

‘My daughter and her friends are picking up my skills and doing the same at school. I’m really good at art and storytelling and they’ve picked up all the ideas from me.’

Furthermore when one member of the family takes part in a FLLN programme this can lead to wider involvement of other family members:

‘His Dad’s started reading now and Carl sees him reading.’

(Learner)

‘It has changed since I went on the course. Dad is listening to them read and my mum is setting an example.’

(Learner)

In one group in which the learners were parents of pre-school children, a number reported how the programme had helped them give more support to their older children.

Adults themselves also develop their skills in LLN; this may lead to accreditation and progression onto other formal and informal learning programmes as well as greater engagement with the local community. As one FLLN tutor explains:

‘The majority of parents/carers have gone on to volunteer to help in school. Some have started to do story time in classroom and others have become classroom assistants, lunchtime supervisors and some have gone on to college. One learner did hair and beauty in college and does that from home now. One mum wanted to know how to work in a classroom and how you work with a child. She picked up the skills in FLLN and is now working as a classroom assistant. She now sits with a lot of kids reading books and setting up activities and clearing away. Eight out of fifteen also go to ESOL classes. A lot

1 For more detailed analysis of the research evidence see the quantitative and qualitative meta-studies that were carried out as part of this project; Effective and Inclusive Practices in Family Literacy, Language and Numeracy: A Review of Programmes and Practice in the UK and Internationally (www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation).
of mums have asked for more qualifications and want to do literacy and numeracy qualifications to help them get a job.’

(Tutor)

Adults also gain in social confidence through participation in FLLN courses:

‘I seem to be talking a lot more… I feel more confident. I’ve finally come out of myself. At one stage I didn’t know if someone was taking advantage of me. Now I do know. I seem to go out a lot more. I just used to sit in the house with the girls all the time. I never went out anywhere. The thing is I can read now – about what toys are suitable for their age [from catalogues] I can actually do that now. I used to struggle and the worker had to come with me [to the shop].’

With her tutor’s encouragement this learner now goes to all school and community centre meetings.

Learners in another group spoke of the sense of confidence and control their participation in the programme gave them over their home lives. Almost all the women interviewed stated feeling better about themselves after they took the course, in part due to the reminder that they could ‘learn’.

For schools, the benefits of FLLN programmes are far wider than just improvements in the LLN skills of the children, there are also gains that are shared between home and school. The increased confidence reported by participants improves the relationship between parents/carers and their children’s school.

‘Now I am very, very confident. The class has helped me and the friendship of other women. … now if there is a problem with children I go to the [school] teacher.’

(FLLN learner)

There is ample evidence from the interviews with the parents/carers and children, as well as in the observations, that this work has strengthened links between school and home. FLLN courses help to build stronger relationships between the school and parents/carers through increased contact at an informal level. This improvement in communication gives teachers opportunities to learn more about the home lives of their pupils and their LLN practices in them.

Outcomes

Summary

- There are gains for adults, for children, for the school and for the local community.
- Some gains are immediately transferred to home, some are evidenced in the FLLN learning environment and some lead to wider participation.
- Parents/carers aren’t always aware of the different gains they have made and so tutors need to raise their awareness to boost confidence and motivation.
- Gains can include improvement in confidence, an increased desire and skills (some accredited) to embrace a culture of wider learning and participation as well as improved communication and increased interaction between parents/carers and their children’s school.
- There are also benefits to the wider family.
- Progression routes are not linear and single-tracked towards accreditation.

Questions for course teams

- In what ways, in the management of provision, in the learning environment and in the curriculum do you acknowledge that desirable gains include but go beyond achieving higher accredited levels in LLN?
- How do you use the various gains to recruit to courses and to engage partners?
- How do the various partners learn about the outcomes?
Evaluation

As can be seen from the previous section the positive outcomes from FLLN courses are many and course teams should bear in mind the need for course evaluation to enable them to report on these outcomes not just to the course funder but also to the school and the wider community. Many of the outcomes described above provide powerful motivation for strong commitment to the programme. Their achievement should be an integral part of FLLN courses and providers should be accountable for these as well as for the adult literacy and numeracy outcomes which are the aims of the funders.

One organisation was developing better ways to track learner progression; they were interested in uptake among the learners of other learning opportunities on completion of the FLLN course. They were also in discussions to determine ways in which they could more systematically document wider benefits to learning such as increased community development, individual confidence, increased engagement with schools and various partner organisations, more positive family relationships and so forth.

Another provider we observed carried out multi-layered evaluation. They carry out evaluations with learners three times throughout the year, not just at the end. They take learners’ perspectives very seriously and are now introducing recorded oral evaluations i.e. informal guided conversations with young children and adults who have little written English as a much more effective way of gaining their perspectives. They also carry out their own internal evaluations through class visits and interviews with teachers and heads of schools.

Evaluation

Summary

Evaluations need to

• be ethical, multi-layered and oral in nature
• account for learners’ perspectives, both children and adults.

Questions for course teams

• Who is the evaluation for?
• Who should carry out the evaluation?
• Whose views should be sought?
References and Resources


Some useful family literacy, language and numeracy websites:

The Basic Skills Agency
http://www.basic-skills.co.uk/

NIACE
http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/Family/Default.htm

The Learning and Skills Council
http://www.lsc.gov.uk/National/Partners/PolicyandDevelopment/SkillsForFamilies/default.htm

The National Literacy Trust
http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/

BBC Skillswise
http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/tutors/expertcolumn/family/

DIUS – Bill Rammell – Minister of State for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education – speech
http://www.dfes.gov.uk/speeches/search.cfm

DCSF and DIUS – Standards Unit
http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/primary/publications/literacy/63533/651497/920401

National Youth Agency

Campaign for Learning
http://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk/