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Introducing and evaluating the 'Books Together Programme'

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**Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together
Programme’**

Claire Ann Owen

**A thesis submitted to the School of Psychology, Bangor University, in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

5th October 2022

This PhD was funded in part by a Kess II funded scholarship, The Centre for Evidence-Based Early Intervention, and a grant from the widening access centre at Bangor university.

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Reflective Commentary

I worked in the youth justice and social care field for many years before commencing this PhD. Having directly and indirectly experienced how childhood experiences have a long-lasting effect led to a thirst for knowledge that can support positive lifespan trajectories. Following completion of a BSc undergraduate Psychology degree as a mature student, I was keen to progress into higher education. Therefore, I was delighted to secure a Knowledge Economy Skills Scholarships (KESS 2) to pursue an MbyRes with The Centre for Evidence-Based Early Intervention in November 2019 under the supervision of Professor Judy Hutchings and Dr Margiad Williams. I was excited to evaluate delivery of a Dialogic Book-Sharing programme, a part of the Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative with which Judy is involved.

Following success of pre-post-delivery of the programme my scholarship was upgraded to a PhD opportunity to further explore the impact for schools and families in a randomised controlled trial. Still, we were concerned about recruitment as each school were required to release a member of staff for training and to deliver the 7-week programme during a time when primary schools were experiencing significant funding cuts. We were surprised and pleased at the level of school interest in the programme and identified 18 schools in North Wales to take part. The schools then identified 56 eligible families for the trial and baseline data was to be collected in two home visits per family. I felt incredibly fortunate to receive support from my colleagues and three research assistants as 112 home visits were planned within a short timeframe between January-April 2020.

We were well on the way to achieve our target of beginning the trial after Easter break in 2020 when schools closed on March 26th, 2020, in response to Covid-19. This created a huge amount of anxiety regarding the future of the research, and I felt dejected due to failure to fulfil my commitment to schools and families. Therefore, I was grateful for the support from

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my colleagues who invested time to assist me to restructure the intervention into a digital format for families during school closures. We promptly put together a new research protocol for pre-post-delivery of the programme and an ethics application which was granted in May 2020. Of the 56 parents originally recruited for the study, 44 agreed to continue in an online platform. This encouraged me to plan a stepped process to achieve my goal of completing the work for my PhD, and I spent the summer ensuring that families had the resources and support needed to participate.

Despite all the challenges 35 families completed the programme and we found promising results in the form of reduced child behaviour problems and increased parental capability and well-being. Notably, parents reported that both themselves and their children enjoyed the programme and got a lot out of engagement. The process of planning and conducting this research has been fulfilling in terms of my own personal development and the positive outcomes that it has yielded for families in need. My PhD experience has inspired me to take the lessons that I have learned and apply them to further research and within my work to improve outcomes for those at risk.

Summary

Rates of developmental deficits in children entering full-time school are increasing in the UK with recent nursery closures and social restrictions exacerbating the situation. Currently, almost half of the children in the United Kingdom (UK) fail to meet typical developmental milestones in communication, language and personal, social, or emotional development at school entry. Numerous risk factors for the development of school readiness have been identified but a key risk factor is dysfunctional parenting practices.

Parenting programmes are the most effective interventions to improve early child development, however obstacles to recruitment and engagement often prevent some families, particularly disadvantaged families, from accessing support. School-based and online parenting programmes reduce some of the barriers associated with group-based programmes and may be more accessible and therefore appropriate for families.

The Dialogic Book-sharing Programme is a behavioural parenting intervention for parents of young children with developmental deficits in language, communication, attention, and social/emotional understanding. This thesis reports on the first evaluations of the ‘Books Together Programme’ a Dialogic Book-sharing programme for parents of children aged 3-5 years delivered both in a group format by school staff and subsequently as an online programme. Chapter 1 offers an outline of school readiness and its longer-term impact. Chapter two gives an overview of the origins and background of the ‘Book Together Programme’ followed by qualitative exploration of the feasibility of the school-based delivery of the programme for parents and schools (Chapter 3). The second study in Chapter four explores the effectiveness of school-based delivery of the programme for parents and children. The next two chapters report the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of the online evaluation study. The ‘Books Together Programme’ was effective in improving parenting

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capacity and child development and feedback from schools and parents was positive with all reporting they would continue to use the methods taught. The final chapter of the thesis provides a summary of the research findings and discusses their implications, limitations, and future directions (Chapter 7).

Chapter 1

General Introduction

An overview of School Readiness

The term school readiness features widely in public policy, research, and educational literature and is generally defined as a measure of how well equipped a child is to thrive, cognitively, socially, and emotionally, in school (Duncan et al., 2007; Department for Education, 2019). The Department for Education (2019) highlights that those children who have reached specific goals in these prime areas of development, are considered ready to start school as they have the foundations that contribute positively to an attitude to work, concentration, memory, and social conduct. To address escalating complications in later childhood and adulthood the Welsh Government implemented The Early Years Foundation Phase (EYFP) curriculum, a universal initiative aimed at improving school readiness outcomes to ensure that every child reached their full potential (YouGov, 2020). The EYFP is statutory guidance that childminders, preschools, nurseries, and school reception classes must follow to promote children's communication and language, physical, personal, social, and emotional development. It encourages play-based learning as the basis on which children learn most effectively (Waters, 2016). An EYFP profile assessment tool is completed by teaching staff within six weeks of a child entering their first year of statutory school. The profile assesses children's knowledge, understanding and abilities against expected attainment levels at age 5 and identifies children with additional needs for individualised support. However, it fails to establish the biological, psychological, or environmental determinants of children's attainment of these skills.

The numbers of children arriving at school with additional needs in school readiness has increased significantly and, currently, almost half of UK children fail to meet typical developmental milestones in communication, language and personal, social, or emotional development at school entry (YouGov, 2021). This could be attributed to firstly, recent nursery closures and social restrictions as a response to Covid-19 that may have reduced

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learning opportunities for children (Araujo, Veloso, Souza, Azevedo, & Tarro, 2021).

Secondly, the EYFP focuses on institutional (nursery-based) practices but fails to consider the sociocultural impacts (Landry et al., 2017). Sociocultural contexts, particularly the home environment, are most significant predictors of the level of child developmental attainment at age 5 and are influenced by the level of interactive dialogue children are exposed to with adults in their immediate environment (Eun, 2010). This suggests that the EYFP guidelines aimed at improving children’s school readiness need, in addition to focusing on institutional practices, to include social relationships, collective activities, and home-based learning.

It is increasingly important that children are school ready, as schools are presently struggling to provide the resources needed to support those with additional learning needs. Funding in the UK has been significantly reduced in schools whilst the number of children needing support has risen (YouGov, 2020). Since 2011 there has been a 7.3% decrease (£324 per pupil) in school funding, resulting in 40% of Welsh schools having budget deficits (Welsh Government, 2020). These funding cuts are counterproductive as investment in early intervention yields a positive economic return and social benefit that, over time, is greater than the initial outlay (Allen, 2011). Where children are identified as having additional learning needs, they are often supported in the classroom by support staff (generally not trained teachers), despite evidence that more highly skilled adults working with children, achieve better outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Consequently, it is likely that children with developmental delay on school entry will fall further behind their peers as the support for those with an additional learning need in school is limited.

Developmental delays are evident by age 5, occur more frequently among socially disadvantaged children, (Ofsted, 2014; Juniper Education, 2021), and are strongly correlated with problems in adulthood, including cognitive impairment, academic underachievement,

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mental and physical health difficulties, and social problems (Gilkerson et al., 2018; Jones, Greenberg, & Crowley, 2015). Given the strong association between developmental delay at school entry and subsequent long term adverse emotional and economic problems for individuals, families, and society (Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011) greater focus is needed to identify children at risk of poor outcomes and to design and implement low-cost interventions that develop their school readiness.

School readiness is generally described in terms of three prime categories: communication and language development; physical development; and personal, social, and emotional development. Promoting high quality pre-school provision for children could potentially enable them to develop competencies in a combination of these categories to enhance their lifetime outcomes (Reynolds & Temple, 2019).

School Readiness categories

Communication and Language Development

Communication and language skills are the strongest predictors of school readiness (Cakiroglu, 2018) and are the underpinning skills needed for executive function and social/emotional competencies (Slot & von Suchodoletz, 2018; Wolf & McCoy, 2019). Children who meet their developmental milestones in language and communication at age 5 can play, talk, listen, understand, and pay attention, which allows them to fully engage in their learning environment (Adams Baxendale, Lloyd, & Aldred, 2005). The attainment of language skills primarily depends on exposure to child directed speech from caregivers during the preschool years (Golinkoff, Hoff, Rowe, Tamis-LeMonda & Hirsh-Pasek, 2019; Zeanah, Gunnar, McCall, Kreppner, & Fox, 2011). Children from deprived backgrounds are commonly exposed to significantly less quantity and poorer quality of language in their home environment that can have having lasting effects on their later performance in life (Hart and Risley, 1995). Following the preschool period language and communication skills are more

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difficult to acquire (Khul, 2004). Language and communication delays that persist-beyond the preschool years predict disengagement in the school environment (Bierman et al, 2008), and are associated with life-long limitations including underachievement, poor mental health, and social problems (Armstrong et al., 2017; Zambrana, Ystrom, Schjølberg, & Pons, 2013). For example, adolescents in the criminal justice system frequently present with language delay, behavioural and emotional disorders (Duff, 2018). Given that language and communication development take place in a social context, parents who provide stimulating interpersonal interactive activities for preschool children can optimise their language skills and safeguard them against later psychosocial problems (Duff, 2018; Roseberry-McKibben, 2013).

Physical Development

Physical development is a vital area of children’s development that includes their physical growth, as well as their growing capacity to control the muscles of their bodies (Lundgren, Daly, Linden, Gardsell, & Karlsson, 2009). Physical development is rapid in the preschool years, during this time children typically gain the gross motor skills needed to make coordinated movements with their arms, legs, feet, or entire body (Westendorp, Houwen, Hartman., & Visscher, 2011). In addition, children also become competent at actions that require fine-motor skills such as hand-eye coordination, production of sound, and control of eye movements (Brown, 2010). These skills facilitate social communication, reading, writing, and playing that are required for educational attainment. Fine motor skills are strongly correlated with the development of cognitive skills (Van der Fels, Wierike, Hartman, Elferink-Gemser, Smith & Visscher, 2015). For example, Stoeger, Ziegler, and Martzog (2008) explored pupil achievement and underachievement at age 9 and discovered that underachievers made more mistakes on a test of fine motor skills than achievers. This was influenced by an interaction between underdeveloped fine motor skills and poor concentration. Furthermore, cognitive impairments, such as delayed expressive

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language in autism spectrum disorders, are partly linked to underdeveloped fine motor skills (LeBarton & Iverson, 2013). Taken together, these studies suggest that poor physical development negatively impacts the quality of participation in the school curriculum.

Social/emotional development

Social/emotional development is the process through which children learn to understand and manage emotions, establish, and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Durlak et al., 2007). A growing body of literature highlights the need to focus on children’s social-emotional skills due to the theoretical and empirical association with school readiness and adjustment (Bierman & Motamedi, 2015; Boise, 2019; Denham & Brown, 2010). Children who enter school with well-developed social-emotional competencies are motivated to learn, adjust well to the school environment, and have good academic attainment (Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999; Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1996). In contrast, children with poor social-emotional competence at school-entry often present with low motivation to learn, self-regulation deficits, maladaptive behaviour, and interpersonal dysfunction, all of which can negatively impact their school engagement (Penney, Young, Butler-Maich & Philpott, 2019). Pre-school children who understand emotions and social relationships react appropriately towards others, whilst children lacking in these abilities are at increased risk of challenging and aggressive behaviour (Denham, 2010).

Children’s attachment security to their caregivers is the most important determinant of their social/emotional development (Bowlby, 1979; Denham, Wyatt, Bassett, Echeverria, & Knox, 2009). Sensitive and reciprocal caregiving contributes to children’s social/emotional competencies (Barone, Lionetti, & Green, 2017). An unpredictable caregiving environment impairs children’s social/emotional development leading to lifelong limitations including poor academic attainment, delinquency, and substance misuse (Dozier & Rutter, 2016). Children are socialized in emotional skills through social learning such as: modelling,

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coaching, and contingent responses to their behaviour (Denham & Burton, 2003). Modelling refers to how caregivers display their own emotions, coaching refers to how caregivers educate children about emotions and contingency refers to how caregivers respond to the emotions of others (Denham & Burton, 2003). Consequently, promoting positive early interactions through responsive and sensitive parenting provides an environment to optimise children’s social/emotional development contributing to positive school engagement (Bozicevic, et al., 2020; Whipple, Bernier, & Mageau, 2011).

The Role of Parents

The home environment, during the pre-school years, is the strongest predictor of school readiness and children from homes in which parents speak little to them (Hart & Risley, 1995; Gridley, Hutchings, & Baker-Henningham, 2013) or that lack stimulation, start school with as much as a two-year developmental deficit in school readiness skills (Menting, van Lier, & Koot, 2010; Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg, & Peters, 2011). Social disadvantage reduces parental ability to nurture, and interact with, their children, delaying their cognitive and social/emotional and language development, self-regulation, and self-esteem (Welsh & Farrington, 2007; Hoeve et al., 2012; Hutchings et al., 2007). By contrast, positive interactive parenting buffers the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage by promoting children’s healthy early cognitive development that benefits their school readiness and longer-term academic attainment (Whittle, et al., 2017). This is supported by Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1979) which suggests that child development is optimised when caregivers provide children with sensitive, reciprocal interactions which contingently respond to their verbal and non-verbal signals of their interests and emotional states. Another perspective has been established by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), which argues that children model the behaviour of others in their immediate environment. If a child imitates a particular

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behaviour, and if the consequences are rewarding, it is likely that the child will continue to behave in that way again in the future (Bandura, 1977).

Grusec and Davidov (2010) identify three caregiver behaviours that encourage children’s development in cognitive and social/emotional domains: firstly, reciprocal interactions that respond to children’s interests; secondly, guided learning that links task demands to the child’s level of understanding; finally, predictable routines that give children experiences that support a social bond to their family. More recent research has established that positive change in the home environment at age 3, in terms of providing stimulating experiences and providing age-appropriate learning materials, predicts gains in school readiness in terms of language, attentional control, and social/emotional competence (Korucu & Smitt, 2020). Therefore, supporting parents to respond sensitively to children’s verbalizations and behaviours during the pre-school period through academic tasks, may provide appropriate levels of challenge that introduce children to new concepts and skills. Parents who do this through predictable and regular activities in the home environment may support their children’s school readiness.

Home/School Links

Although many predictors of children’s success are related to their pre-school experiences, home-school relationships are also significant predictors of children’s academic attainment (Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013) and of a smooth transition into school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Home/school communication, unity of purpose between home and school learning, shared support, and promotion of achievement encourage children’s attainment (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). For example, Powell, Son, File, and San-Juan (2010) investigated the effect of positive preschool home/school partnerships and found positive child academic performance, social and emotional competence, and lower levels of problem behaviour. Likewise, Wilder (2014)

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reports a positive relationship between children’s academic outcomes and parental involvement, regardless of child age or ethnic origin. This suggests that children achieve more when school, family, and community work collaboratively to improve children’s developmental outcomes (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Bryan & Henry, 2012). This view is supported by ecological systems theory that underlines the contribution of multiple environments to child adjustment and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In addition, strong home/school partnerships can increase parental satisfaction and efficacy, build community bonds, and support teachers with their work (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010).

A lack of parental involvement in their education negatively affects children’s perception of school and ambition to achieve (Sheppard, 2009). One of the greatest challenges to building effective home/school links is engaging parents who experience poverty, isolation, and poor mental health, as these reduce parental resources needed to fulfil the parenting role (Azmoude, Jafarnejade, & Mazlom, 2015; Skreden, Skori, Malt, Pripp, Bjork, Faugli, & Emblem, 2012). Consequently, it is important to identify ways to support parents, particularly socially disadvantaged parents, to address home/school communication barriers during preschool to create an active system of communication that influences children’s successful transition into school. Despite policymakers identifying the need for parental involvement, research into ways of promoting home/school partnerships is limited and inconsistent (Welsh, Bierman, & Mathis, 2014). Given that engaging families in the learning process from the very beginning maximises children’s developmental outcomes (Bridgemohan, Van-Wyk, & Van- Staden, 2005) strategies are needed to encourage parental involvement during pre-school.

Strategies for Intervention

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Parents have the primary influence on their children’s school readiness and interventions that enhance positive parenting behaviours represent the gold method to improve child developmental outcomes (Carneiro, Galasso, Garcia, Bedregal, & Cordero, 2019; Dadds et al., 2019; Sanders, 2019). In a recent global systematic review and meta-analysis of 102 randomised controlled trials, Jeong, O, Pitchik, & Yousafzai, (2018) found that parenting interventions during the earliest years of children’s lives (0-3 years) teach parents the behavioural strategies needed to enable children to achieve their full potential. Moreover, parenting programmes can improve satisfaction and self-efficacy in the parenting role (Jones & Prinz, 2005; Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik, and MacKinnon, 2011), promoting healthy functioning for parents and their children (Albanease, Russo, & Geller, 2019). This is particularly important as parents’ psychological functioning is a direct and indirect precursor to child development (Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010).

Many pre-school parenting programmes demonstrate good child development outcomes in the UK (Bierman, Heinrich’s, Welsh, Nix, & Gest, 2016), yet growing numbers of children still arrive at school with additional learning needs (YouGov, 2021). Consequently, more needs to be done to extend the reach of parenting programmes to diverse populations of parents. Behavioural parenting interventions can be delivered in group, individual, and self-directed contexts. Video clips are typically used to display the behavioural strategies being taught, with parents encouraged to practice using the new skills through role-play and home-based practice with their children (Kennedy, Landor, & Todd, 2011). This integrates a range of approaches to teaching new behaviour including prompting, coaching, modelling, and shaping behaviour towards new goals (Furlong, McGilloway, Bywater, Hutchings, Smith & Donnelly, 2012). Furthermore, when facilitators provide positive reinforcement for parents, they, in turn, provide positive reinforcement to their child to encourage the behaviours of interest (Borrego & Urzuiza, 1998; Eames et al., 2010).

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Although pre-school parenting interventions show promising results in terms of both child and parent behavioural and psychological outcomes (Piotrowska et al., 2017) attendees are often over-represented by middle class urban mothers and the reach is smaller for fathers (Panter-Brick et al., 2014), and families marginalised by ethnic origin, socioeconomic status, and rurality (Dadds et al., 2018; Hansen, Broomfield, & Yap, 2019). Moreover, even for those parents that do enrol low engagement and attrition in parenting programmes reduces intervention impact (Ingoldsby, 2010). Typically, parents attend 39%-50% of intervention sessions, with around 30% of those enrolled not attending a single session (Breitenstein & Gross, 2013). Intervention dosage and the ability to engage and retain parents in parenting programmes impact outcomes (Dadds et al, 2018). Therefore, a need exists to explore new methods to recruit, engage and retain parents in pre-school interventions that support children’s school readiness.

Since positive child adjustment and achievement are predicted when home-pre-school links are successful, offering training to parents in the preschool setting may create the relationships that will benefit children’s academic attainment. Despite policymakers identifying the need for parental involvement in children’s education, there is limited exploration of developing such links (Welsh, et al., 2014). Some work has been done in Wales using the Incredible Years ® school readiness programme (Hutchings, Pye, Bywater, & Williams, 2020). This four-session parenting programme builds children’s academic, social/emotional, and problem-solving skills (Webster-Stratton, 2011) through play and uses books to aid discussion. It was delivered by school-based staff to groups of parents of children aged 3-5 years. This first evaluation of the programme (Hutchings et al., 2020) demonstrated feasibility for school staff to deliver it and reported increased parent and child skills. However, the costly training and resources required suggests the need for feasible, low cost, interventions.

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Pre-school parenting programmes that teach dialogic book-sharing strategies may be a cost-effective way to increase children’s school readiness (Dowdell, Melendez-Torres, Murray, Hartford, & Cooper, 2019). During book-sharing, adults implement sensitive and reciprocal interactions by using the picture content of books to encourage children’s participation. For example, whilst sharing picture books adults follow the child’s focus of interest through active listening, open questioning, reflecting on their utterances, and praising and encouraging them, to create a stimulating learning environment. Teaching book-sharing techniques to parents through videotape modelling techniques and group role play is a financially viable strategy to increase pre-school children’s language development (Whitehurst, 1994). A recent meta-analysis of 19 different book-sharing interventions with parents of children aged 1 to 6 years (Dowdell et al, 2019) found that reciprocal exchanges between parents and children encouraged children’s expressive and receptive language. Similarly, Cooper et al. (2015) demonstrated significant increases in the language skills and attention span of disadvantaged children. In addition, further analysis of data from the same programme reported that improvements in parental sensitivity, elaboration and reciprocity facilitated children’s language, attention, and pro-social behaviour (Murray et al. 2016). However, these studies were conducted with parents outside the pre-school environment and mainly with younger children.

It is important to identify the theory of change when evaluating interventions of public health importance as it helps to understand how different factors come together to create a desired outcome (Taplin, Clark, Collins, & Colby, 2013). Identifying the key steps and factors needed to create change, may support government bodies to make better decisions about how to use their resources and advocate for a policy change in areas of public health improvements. Identifying the theory of change for dialogic book-sharing parenting interventions may be useful to understand the specific factors that merge to support children’s

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early development and subsequent school-readiness outcomes (Taplin, Clark, Collins, & Colby, 2013). In short, exploring under what circumstances is dialogic book sharing effective, and for who, may be a fruitful area of future research.

To our knowledge no published studies have investigated pre-school delivered book-sharing training for parents. The growing numbers of children arriving at school with additional learning needs and the access barriers to parenting programmes suggest a need to explore interventions that promote children’s school readiness (Welsh, et al., 2014). Pre-school delivery of book-sharing interventions to parents aimed at promoting children’s school readiness skills could contribute to this field.

Aims/Objectives of Thesis

The initial aims of the thesis were to:

- i) To explore the origins and supporting literature for the ‘Books Together Programme’.
- ii) Test the feasibility and acceptability of the ‘Books Together Programme’ delivered by school-based staff to parents of children aged 3-5 years in a pilot trial.
- iii) Explore effectiveness of pre-school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ in an RCT in terms of its impact on children’s language, social-emotional competencies, and attention, and on parents’ skills and well-being.

As a result of COVID19 restrictions, following the initial school-based pilot, evaluation of delivery by school staff to groups of parents in an RCT became impossible and the initial aims were revised to include:

- iv) Testing the feasibility and acceptability of online delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ to parents of children aged 3-5 years

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- v) Exploring initial effectiveness of online delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ in terms of its impact on child social-emotional competencies, attention, behaviour, and parenting skills, and well-being.

Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters, including one submitted paper and one in preparation: Chapter 2 describes the intervention of interest, the ‘Books Together Programme’, including its background, origins and supporting evidence to date.

Chapter 3 reports the feedback from the schools and parents involved in pre-school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ in terms of satisfaction and feasibility through qualitative methods.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology of a pilot pre-post trial evaluation of pre-school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together programme’ delivered by school-based staff, including recruitment of pre-schools and families, study procedures, data collection measures, statistical analyses, and outcomes (paper in submission).

Chapter 5 reports a qualitative study exploring the outcomes and feedback in terms of satisfaction with, and feasibility of, the online delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ with the families involved.

Chapter 6 describes the methodology of a pre-post trial evaluation of online delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’, including recruitment of families, study procedures, data collection measures, statistical analysis, and outcomes. (Paper in preparation for submission).

Chapter 7 provides a reflection on the findings of the thesis, their implications, critical analysis, strengths and limitations of the research, and future directions for research and implementation of the programme.

Chapter 2

The 'Books Together Programme'

A review of the origins and evidence base, and development of the programme in Wales

Introduction

Interventions that train parents to share picture books with their pre-school children are associated with accelerated child development outcomes (Dowdall et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016). Dialogic book-sharing (DBS) involves interactive discourses in which the adult follows the child’s interest and is associated with prolonged joint attending to provide a rich and effective environment for promoting child development (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006). DBS interventions are usually delivered to caregivers in small groups over several sessions in which key strategies are demonstrated through facilitator support, modelling, video tapes, and role play. In addition, picture books and summary sheets are typically provided containing key points of each session, to enable home practice (Dowdall, et al., 2019). This chapter describes the origins of, and evidence for, DBS and introduces the ‘Books Together Programme’ a group delivered parenting intervention for families of preschool children, including its current evidence base.

DBS has shown promise in terms of developing pre-school children’s skills associated with school readiness (Cooper, et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016). During DBS caregivers encourage children to become the storyteller through open questioning, expansion of child utterances, praise, and encouragement, linking book content to child experience, and labelling objects within the book (Arnold, Lonigan, Whitehurst, & Epstein, 1994). Thus, DBS involves sensitively supporting children’s interest by engaging them in reciprocal interactions over the content of picture books (Murray et al, 2016). These interpersonal interactions increase children’s interest in books and foster higher-level thinking, and an ability to engage in extended discourse, promoting more diverse vocabulary than is achieved by reading to children (Van Kleeck, 2014). Evidence for DBS is so strong that it has been termed a

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‘vocabulary acquisition device’ (Ninio, 1983; Barcroft et al., 2021), laying the groundwork for children’s successful social/emotional expression and understanding (Murray et al. 2016).

DBS has strong research evidence and practical applications and demonstrates increased expressive vocabulary, oral language skills, attentional control, and social understanding both for typically developing children and for those who are considered at risk (Dowdell et al., 2019; Vally, Murray, Tomlinson, & Cooper, 2015; Murray et al., 2016). Children exposed to poverty generally hear less words (Hart & Risley, 1995), receive less cognitive stimulation (Knauer et al., 2019), and have less access to books in their home environment (Mee-Bell et al., 2020), leading to a substantial vocabulary gap at school entry between disadvantaged children and their more affluent counterparts (Neuman, 2012). Consequently, providing the parents of these children with the skills and resources needed to develop the skills promoted in DBS may facilitate the rich interactions necessary to support children’s school readiness.

Origins of Dialogic Book-Sharing

The dialogic reading approach is underpinned by the Vygotskian principle that increases in child cognition and language are contingent on structured interactive exchanges pitched at a child’s developmental level (Vygotsky, 1978). The term dialogic reading was first developed by Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst in 1988, to describe the way caregivers can provide suitably scaffolded adult-child interactions in the context of picture book sharing. The first serious discussions and analyses of dialogic reading emerged during the 1980s when Valdez-Menchaca and Whitehurst (1988) studied its effects in a randomised control trial. They recruited mothers of 30 typically developing children aged 21-35 months who were either trained in dialogic reading or traditional reading conditions. Those in the dialogic reading condition were trained, during one-to-one sessions, to use child directed speech when

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sharing picture books with their children to include a) the use of open-ended questions such as why, where, how, and who, b) to reflect and expand on children’s utterances, and c) to provide praise and encouragement for children’s contributions. These strategies were taught via didactic instruction, direct modelling, and roleplay. The study found increases in children’s expressive language at post-intervention which were maintained at 6-month follow-up compared to children in the control group. To support the implementation of these strategies Arnold et al. (1994) later established the acronyms CROWD and PEER to help caregivers to recollect the strategies used during dialogic reading activities. CROWD refers to the five types of requests asked by caregivers when participating in dialogic reading with children such as:

1. *Completion prompts*: (e.g., "When we go out in the rain we put on our _____.")
2. *Recall prompts*: Questions that involve the child recalling aspects of the book (e.g., "Can you remember why Harry was upset?")
3. *Open-ended prompts*: Encouraging children to answer questions regarding the book in his or her own words (e.g., "Tell me what is happening on this page").
4. *Wh-prompts*: Asking *what*, *where*, and *why* questions (e.g., "What is the dog called?", "Why did Sally want to go to the party?", "Where is Harry going?")
5. *Distancing prompts*: Linking part of the story to children’s lived experience (e.g., "Nanny has a dog like Harry" "We go to a parade like Susie did?")

The acronym PEER reminds adults to *prompt* the child to label objects in the book and talk about the story, *evaluate* the child’s replies, *expand* the child’s utterances through repetition and add on information, and encourages the child to *repeat* the extended utterances.

To extend the reach of DBS strategies, Arnold, et al. (1994) developed videotape training for pre-schools and parents and examined its effects in a randomised control study with 64 mothers and children between the ages of 24 and 34 months. They randomly assigned to (a) a control group, (b) a one-to-one training group, or (c) a videotape training group. They

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found that videotape training was the most practical and cost-effective way to teach parents to improve child language outcomes. In a similar study, Whitehurst, et al. (1994) explored the videotape training effects with 73 three-year-old children exposed to poverty. Participants were assigned to (a) a preschool dialogic reading setting (b) a preschool and home dialogic reading condition, or (c) a preschool play setting. Post intervention analysis found that preschool children who received interactions through both dialogic reading conditions had significantly higher expressive language ability compared with children in the control group, with results maintained at 6-month follow up. Later, Whitehurst, Epstein, et al. (1994) replicated these finding in a study with caregivers of 167 four-year-olds examining the effectiveness of merging dialogic reading with phonologic awareness training. Children in the intervention condition practised interactive book sharing at home and in the classroom and classroom-based training in sound and letter awareness. They found that children in the experimental group had significantly higher oral language, writing, and print concepts and ability to identify words. In a follow-up study, Whitehurst et al. (1999) monitored the Whitehurst, Epstein et al. (1994) study cohort and a new cohort through second grade and found sustained positive group effects such as early writing skills, letter naming, letter sound identification, blending, rhyming, and segmenting for those involved in the early dialogic reading study compared to the control group. These studies confirmed the long-term benefits of training caregivers in DBS skills and laid the groundworks for further research into this field.

Work that built on the research of Whitehurst and Colleagues.

Research into DBS has grown considerably since the work of Whitehurst and colleagues and increasingly demonstrates benefits to child development, predominantly language skills both for typically developing children and those considered at-risk. For example, several studies report that training parents in DBS skills improves child language

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abilities regardless of developmental delay, cultural diversity, or cognitive disabilities (Towson, Gallagher, & Bingham, 2016; Mol, Bus, & De Jong, 2009). Fung et al (2005) investigated the effects of using the PEER sequence and CROWD prompts suggested by Whitehurst and colleagues (1988;1994) to train DBS skills with parents of 28 deaf and hard of hearing children in Hong Kong. These children aged 4-5 years had a similar degree of hearing limitations and were assigned to either a dialogic reading, typical reading, or control condition for the 8-week intervention. Children in the dialogic reading condition had significantly higher vocabulary scores at follow up than the other two groups. Similarly, Hargrave & Senechal (2000) provided training in DBS skills to caregivers of children with a language delay (an average of 13 months behind their chronological age) and found that allowing children to become an active participant in regular DBS routines, accelerated their expressive language ability. This suggests that rather than typical reading activities, language improvements are facilitated through rich caregiver/child interpersonal interactions. However, findings from these studies should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample sizes.

Several well controlled studies, mainly carried out in the United States, have demonstrated that carers can be trained to engage in high quality dialogic reading, and that, when such training is provided, there are significant benefits to child development (Brannon et al., 2013; Blom-Hoffman, et al., 2006). Furthermore, in recent years, there has been increasing evidence of the gains of training parents in DBS skills cross culturally. For example, Knauer et al (2019) taught parents in Kenya to encourage children’s cognitive stimulation, by talking about the pictures in books and found improved parental and child vocabulary at post-analysis with children of illiterate caregivers benefiting just as much as children of literate caregivers. Similar gains from DBS interventions have been reported from research conducted in Mexico, Bangladesh, and Brazil (Opel, Ameer, & Aboud, 2009;

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Valdez- Menchaca, & Whitehurst, 1992; Weisleder et al., 2018). Another study found delivering a DBS intervention to teenage mothers of infants in New Zealand increased the quantity and quality of words that they used with their infants (Scott, McNeill, & Van-Bysterveldt, 2020). These studies strengthen the evidence for improving school readiness outcomes through training parents in DBS skills during the pre-school period. However, these findings were based on self-report data which may be open to response bias. Consequently, exploring the potential benefits of DBS skills training through direct observational studies may be a fruitful area of future research.

The sensitive and reciprocal approaches taught during DBS parenting programmes may be a factor in the rapid improvements in preschool children’s language and social competence (Luo & Tamis-LeMonda, 2017). More than in any other context, during DBS, caregivers respond to a child’s signals promptly and appropriately, using child directed speech to name objects, acknowledge, extend, and elaborate on their focus of interest (Fletcher and Reese 2005). Therefore, the DBS strategies increase: complex cognitive talk between caregivers and children, shared interest, enjoyment, and participation (Deckner, Adamson, Bakeman, 2006; Gottfried, et al., 2015). In addition, they develop children’s linguistic and cognitive skills, improve verbal reasoning ability, and the learning of new words (Rowe, Leech, & Cabrera, 2017). This suggests that DBS interventions foster the sensitive and reciprocal caregiver approaches that increase executive functioning and cognitive processing during the earliest years of life (Barnett, et al., 2012; Hutton, et al., 2017; Stams, Juffer, & Ijzendoorn, 2002).

Despite the benefits of DBS, a common barrier preventing family engagement in book-sharing activities is limited finances, including less availability of books and learning materials (Boggs et al., 2016; Whitehurst et al., 1994). However, several well controlled studies have demonstrated that parenting programmes that provide parents with cost-effective

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training and the resources needed to engage in high quality DBS with their children show significant benefits to child development. Brannon et al. (2013) investigated the effectiveness of a 12-week DBS intervention with 26 families with four-year-old children at risk of developmental delay. Intervention families received video training in DBS skills using the acronym DARE. These strategies included, a) *discussing* the book and encouraging a child to talk about what they see, b) *asking* a child question about the pictures, c) *reading* the story to a child, and d) *encouraging* a child to connect components of the story to their life. Each week a new book and notes with a reminder of the DARE strategies were provided, including sample questions to ask during home practice. Post-intervention analysis showed improved child expressive language and the accuracy in word identification as well as increased frequency of positive interpersonal interactions between children and parent that fostered children’s enthusiasm for books.

In another study, Blom-Hoffman, et al. (2006) examined the acceptability of the ‘*Read together, talk together*’ DBS videotape training in a randomised controlled trial for parents of 18 pre-school children. Parents in the experimental group watched the video during a routine community health clinic visit and were provided with a book and a handout summarising key points. Parents in the control group were provided with a bookmark entitled “Seven super things parents and caregivers can do”. Experimental group caregivers learned the use of DBS strategies which were maintained 12 weeks later, and increased children’s verbalisations compared to controls. Both parents and healthcare workers reported positive opinions of the videotape training, with no one reporting negative views. This demonstrated that videotape training was acceptable for parents and that the provision of training and resources needed to conduct DBS with their children encouraged their language development. However, this study had a small sample size so should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, meta-analyses of book giveaway programmes have reported improvement of

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children’s home literacy environments which then result in more interest in reading and higher scores on children’s measures of literacy-related skills during preschool (Bondt, Willenberg, & Bus, 2020). Therefore, providing cost-effective training and resources for parents to engage in high quality DBS with their children appears to support their developmental outcomes.

Recently, the positive benefits of training parents DBS skills for pre-school children’s language ability were further supported by Dowdall et al (2019), who conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on 19 DBS interventions with parents of children aged one to six years old. They found that improved parental DBS competence during training facilitated the reciprocal exchanges required to nurture children’s expressive and receptive language ability. Effects were unrelated to caregiver education or child age; however, positive outcomes were mediated by programme length. For example, interventions that offered several sessions and allowed instructors and caregivers adequate time to discuss strategies, resulted in improved child language ability. In contrast brief DBS interventions (i.e., single sessions) had no significant effect on children’s language ability. Another important finding was that group-based DBS interventions were significantly more effective in improving child language outcomes than one to one interventions. This may be because group-based DBS training provides a supportive environment and promotes active engagement, in which participants also benefit from the social capital of the group (Beschorner & Hutchison, 2016).

The Cooper and Murray Book Sharing Programme.

Origins

The Cooper and Murray DBS programme was initially developed at Reading University and trialled in South Africa in collaboration with Stellenbosch University. It was later added to the WHO (World Health Organization) supported Parenting for Lifelong Health suite of programmes developed to provide low-cost evidence informed support for

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parents in low- and middle-income countries. The initial programme was developed to improve child language and cognitive ability by enhancing sensitive and reciprocal caregiving during group-based book-sharing for parents of toddlers. It was trialled in highly deprived and vulnerable communities in Cape Town, South Africa (Cooper et al., 2014; Murray et al., 2016; Vally et al., 2015). Promising results led to the programme being further developed and adapted cross-culturally with more work undertaken with children of varying ages in several countries (e.g., South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia, Brazil, Turkey, Sweden, United Kingdom). There are versions of the programme for caregivers of babies/toddlers, and for young pre-school aged children. The strategies are taught to parents through discussion, power point slides, video-clips, and supervised practice with their own children. The aim is to give parents specific skills to enable them use regular brief book-sharing interactions to support their children’s language, cognitive, and socio-emotional development.

Components of the programme.

The programme involves caregivers meeting in small groups (between three and five parents and children) with a trainer over six to eight weeks. The trainer provides didactic instruction and. Each session begins with discussion of key book sharing principles that includes a PowerPoint presentation that models the skills required for caregivers to engage in DBS with their children via videotaped examples. The trainer then individually supports caregivers and children as they share a book. During this time, the trainer also shares the book with the child themselves to model the specific DBS behaviours that were earlier introduced. The content of each of the eight sessions is specified for trainers in a manual and supported by clips of videoed DBS interactions to illustrate each weeks learning objective. The programme includes the following fundamental components of DBS:

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1. Highlight the stimuli to which a child attends: A caregiver is taught to support a child’s interest by animating what is shown (e.g., moving hands up and down simultaneously to indicate driving a car).
2. Pointing and naming: A caregiver is encouraged to respond to a child’s interest during DBS by pointing and naming objects (or action or emotion for older children) in the book that holds their focus of attention.
3. Active child participation: Caregivers are trained to encourage active participation from children rather than allowing them to become passive listener of a story. Subsequently, caregivers are taught to follow a child’s focus of interest and cues to support them to familiarise themselves with the book and become actively involved in storytelling.
4. Active questioning using where, what, who, why, and how questions: Caregivers are encouraged to prompt children’s understanding by using active questioning to elicit responses and encourage higher order thinking skills.
5. Linking book content to a child’s world: Caregivers are encouraged to link book content to a child’s real-life experience, which is developmentally appropriate for their age (e.g., point at an animals’ nose and then point to a child or their own nose, or point to a dog and say “look just like grandmas’ dog).

Evidence from South Africa

Cooper et al., (2014) conducted a randomised controlled trial of the programme in an impoverished South African community with caregivers of children aged 15-17 months old. In the intervention group, caregivers were trained in seven weekly sessions over two hours. A different book and summary sheet focusing on the weekly concepts, was taken home

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following each session to encourage caregivers to practice the weekly strategies with their children. The comparison group received the same volume of training and individual support as those involved in the experimental group, however the emphasis was on toy play.

Caregivers and children were assessed in the same way prior to, and immediately after, intervention. More sensitive and responsive parenting was found in the intervention group, facilitating better child attention, language, and social development. Remarkably, the language gap and social ability differences between the best and worst performing children at the start of the programme had closed significantly or disappeared completely in the intervention group.

Following the successful piloting of the Cooper and Murray DBS programme, Vally et al. (2015) recruited from the same population for a randomised controlled trial. They assigned ninety-one caregivers of 14–16-month-old children to either the same DBS training intervention, or a control group of no intervention. Findings indicated increased children’s receptive and expressive language, that is, understanding of more words and the correct use of them in the experimental group, including enhanced infant attention and prosocial skills. In addition, caregivers became more aware of children’s interests and of how to respond appropriately, used more elaborations and gave children more positive support (sensitivity). Caregivers and infants also increased reciprocal exchanges which were facilitated through shared attention and turn taking during book-sharing. The improvements in caregiver sensitivity and reciprocity were also found to cross over to other contexts of interpersonal interactions, such as play tasks (Murray et al., 2016). These results suggest that the Cooper and Murray DBS programme for parents of 15–17-month-old children was effective in supporting communities at risk that have limited availability of the resources needed to encourage positive developmental outcomes for children. The findings of the initial Cooper and Murray book-sharing programme relate to a particular parenting culture and age of

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children therefore may not be generalisable to different cultural contexts or child ages.

However, the results concur with earlier findings, suggesting that training parents in DBS skills benefits child development in a range of different cultural contexts.

Development of the Cooper and Murray book-sharing programme in the UK

In 2018, Murray and Cooper adapted the programme into a seven-session group-based intervention, for groups of four to six caregivers of children aged between 3 and 5 years with the aim of exploring the effects of the programme for older preschool children in a different cultural context. For the adapted intervention they developed new video material and expanded the programme content to take children’s age into consideration, including sessions on emotions, intentions, perspectives, and relationships, as well as counting and comparisons. The main component is an hour-long presentation for the parents that demonstrates the strategy/topic of the week via a PowerPoint presentation, including video clips of parents sharing the book of the week with children. Parents are given the book to take home and a summary sheet with reminders of the key points from the session. Following the presentation, children join the session, and each parent receives brief personalised guidance from the group facilitator on using the strategies during active practice with their own child.

Components of the programme for parents of 3 – 5-year-old children

The first three sessions cover academic coaching and the last four social/emotional coaching. The programme aims to actively engage parents through group discussions, video examples of parent-child interactions during book sharing, role-plays, and active practice, home assignments, and collective problem-solving. Each session introduces one strategy, but facilitators continue to demonstrate how to use earlier skills with the different books as the programme continues. Parents are recruited with the message that ‘Book Sharing will help

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your child to concentrate, improve their language, understand other people, express themselves, develop thinking skills, and feel closer to you’. Weekly Programme Topics include:

Session 1: Introduces the main principles of dialogic book sharing including:

- Always **following** a child’s interest,
- **Pointing and labelling** things in the book,
- Using **who, what, and where** questions,
- Always being positive
- **Building on and enriching** what a child says

Session 2. Introduces elaborations and linking strategies including:

- Linking something in the story to **‘here and now’**
- Linking the story to children’s **everyday life**
- Linking the story to parental **values**
- Linking **parts of the story together** as it goes along
- Linking **the whole story together** from the beginning to the middle and end

Session 3. Introduces numeracy and comparison strategies including:

- Using the book to help children **practise counting** and to understand totals
- Encouraging children to **think about differences**
- **Introduce children to words** such as more, less, bigger, smaller, first, last, and altogether

Session 4. Introduces talking strategies to discuss feelings with children including:

- Pointing to characters and **describing their feelings**
- Encouraging children to think about **why a character feels a particular emotion** and how this affects their actions

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- Using **facial expressions** and **tone of voice** to convey feelings (e.g., sad voice, worried voice).
- **Linking the feelings** of the book characters to a child’s experience
- **Linking feelings** to **changes in the story**, and putting the whole story together

Session 5. Introduces strategies to discuss intentions with children including:

- Helping children understand **why** book characters behave in a certain way
- Supporting children’s curiosity and helping them to think of **different possible reasons**
- Making **links** between intentions in the book and a child’s own experience

Session 6. Introduces strategies to discuss perspectives with children including:

- Supporting children to understand why people may **behave differently**
- Helping children to learn about perspectives by talking about the characters’ **different points of view** in the story
- Helping children to be curious and think of **different possible reasons** for the characters behaviour

Session 7. Introduces strategies to discuss relationships and conflict resolution with children including:

- Talking to children about **how the characters feel** and how these **feelings affect what they do**
- Talking to children about the characters **different points of view** and how these can cause **disagreements**
- Talking to children about **intentions** in a relationship and **why** the characters do what they do
- Highlighting to children how characters may **feel or think about one another**

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- Discussing with children how the characters **close relationship** is important even when there is sometimes **conflict**

Evidence from the UK

Murray et al (2018) used this version of the programme in a randomised controlled trial with 164 caregivers of children aged 28-45 months old recruited through children’s centres in the most deprived areas of Reading (UK). Children’s centres aim to promote the pre-school parenting skills associated with children’s positive long-term adjustment and achievement. The study evaluated the impact of the intervention on child cognitive (language, attention, and executive function) and social/emotional development, and on parenting strategies. The study data were collected at baseline, post-intervention and 4–6 months post-intervention, however follow-up results showed no significant difference in child outcomes between trained and control groups (Murray et al., submitted). One possible explanation for this may be that targeting by geographical area alone is ineffective as children at risk do not live in small geographical subdivisions, and even when they do the majority do reasonably well and recruitment can enrol families whose children do not have problems (Hutchings, Griffith, Bywater, Williams, & Baker-Henningham, 2013; Scott, O'Connor, & Futh, 2006). Consequently, it may be more efficient to use screening measures to identify children at risk of poor outcomes and parents who may benefit from targeted interventions. There are, however, other possible explanations such as parents may consider that attending a parenting programme in a family centre means that they are a poor parent leading to feelings of indignity and shame that then serve as a barrier to accessing or completing parenting interventions (Priguda and Burke 2020; Weisenmuller & Hilton, 2021). Another possibility may be that the intervention delivery was unsuccessful due to the quality of delivery as the quality of facilitators delivery predicts intervention outcomes (Scott et al., 2006).

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Despite the lack of evidence for the Cooper and Murray programme for parents of 3 – 5-year-olds, the significant improvements to children’s language and social/emotional ability reported by the earlier Cooper and Murray studies with younger children and the results from other programmes with this age group suggest the importance of further development and evaluation of their programme with families of pre-school children.

Children’s school readiness skills are declining in the UK (You Gov, 2021), resulting in reduced life chances and perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage. Recognising the relevance of book sharing in promoting children’s language and school readiness competencies, pre-school-based DBS interventions may be useful in promote the healthy development of children during the earliest years of life. Further research should therefore explore how to improve the feasibility of, and satisfaction with, attendance at DBS interventions to further explore the potential practical and theoretical application of the programme in terms of the parenting skills needed to encourage children’s school readiness.

In the UK children start school in nursery classes when they are three so implementing DBS parenting interventions within school settings may help schools achieve their own goals of improved school readiness and more parental involvement. This may support efforts to build the good home/school links that will give children a good start in life. Delivering DBS programmes in, and through, educational settings may further disseminate the positive effects of DBS to improve school readiness outcomes.

Development of the ‘Books Together Programme’ in Wales

The need to develop children’s communication skills was identified in a Welsh Government report, Talk with Me (Welsh Government, 2020), highlighting that the speech, language, and communication needs of 2/3^{ths} of Welsh children were not being met, and that 50% of children living in low socio-economic areas had skill deficits in these areas when

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starting school. Based on this, it was concluded that preschools were potentially appropriate settings in which to address this need as they had the access to pre-school children and the staff who worked one-to-one with identified children with speech and language deficits. Therefore, they would be an ideal location in which to deliver a programme to encourage parents to improve children’s school readiness. This is particularly relevant in Wales given that Estyn (school inspectors) are required by the Welsh government to assess the extent to which schools provide workshops for parents on how to help their child to develop their reading skills and the extent to which schools support families of pupils with additional learning needs (Welsh Government, 2021). Recognising the relevance of DBS in promoting children’s language and school readiness competencies, the Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention (CEBEI) at Bangor University piloted the seven session Cooper and Murray DBS programme in a local primary school, with support from a classroom assistant, with parents of children in nursery and reception classes (3–5-year-olds). It was introduced to parents as a school readiness programme and delivery in school was ideal because it meant that parents could attend the one-hour PowerPoint and discussion session and their children could then join them for a one-to-one session, lasting up to half an hour during which parents were coached in sharing the book of the week by the programme leaders. An added benefit was that the school was able to encourage enrolment of parents of children who had additional language needs. Parents and teachers reported very positively about the programme and both reported improvements in the children who took part.

Following this small trial DBS programme development and research was needed to implement a training programme to fit with school and parents’ workloads and to obtain evidence of its effectiveness and fit with schools and parents

Conclusion

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Incorporating core DBS strategies into parenting programme supports early child development. Yet, the previous literature for the DBS parenting programmes is mainly limited to younger children and there is a shortage of evidence demonstrating its effectiveness for children aged 3-5 years old in relation to developing the skills needed for school-readiness. In Wales, the initial pilot delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’, delivered in one school setting, involved school-based staff recruiting parents and a member of school staff attending the programme. The programme was successful and well received and provided a model for future delivery. Further research was therefore needed to explore the potential practical and theoretical application of this method of programme delivery. Implementing DBS parenting interventions within school settings may additionally support efforts to build good home/school links, involving parents in helping their children’s educational development and providing opportunities for a more inclusive, participative approach developing positive lifelong trajectories for children (Cristofaro & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012; Vernon-Feagans, Bratsch-Hines, Reynolds, & Willoughby, 2020). However, further studies in the UK are required to determine whether school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ is feasible and satisfactory for schools and parents to optimise future engagement and improve children’s school readiness outcomes.

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Chapter 3

Exploring the Benefits, Satisfaction and Feasibility of School-Based Delivery of 'The Books Together Programme'

A Qualitative Study

Introduction

Home-school relationships are significant predictors of children’s academic success (Kingston, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013), and providing collaborative partnerships between schools and parents during the pre-school years may be useful at improving children’s school readiness. Schools that deliver dialogic book-sharing (DBS) interventions to parents during children’s pre-school years may promote the language, communication, and social/emotional skills associated with children’s school readiness (Cooper et al., 2015; Dowdell et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2021). Of particular concern is that the typically high attrition rates of parenting interventions negatively impact their success (Dadds et al., 2018). Therefore, qualitative research is needed to facilitate an understanding of the mechanisms that encourage/impede parental engagement in school-based interventions (Dorsey, Conover, & Cox, 2014).

This chapter reports data from the school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme (Chapter 3), a DBS intervention aimed at improving the parenting skills associated with children’s school readiness. Thematic analysis (TA) was used to provide a flexible framework to generate ideas and identify patterns within the data for analysis and interpretation. Braun and Clarke’s (2014) framework of TA provided a deliberative, reflective, and thorough examination of the subjective experiences of participants and identified the adaptations needed for future implementation.

Method

Design

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to interpret interview data collected from participants who engaged in the school-based ‘Books Together’ programme. TA is a method

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for classifying, analysing, and reporting themes within interview data to consolidate and describe the data set in richer detail.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Bangor School of Psychology Ethics committee (application number: 2019-16439). All study participants provided written informed consent which outlined their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (see Appendix N).

Participants

The participants in the study were the same as those reported in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

Procedures

For this study, the first researcher gathered data through semi-structured interviews from participants to explore the views, ideas, and experiences of school delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’. Each interview lasted approximately 10-20 minutes, participants were interviewed individually and invited to provide data in their preferred language however, all chose the medium of English. All interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and open-ended questions were utilised to provide a more contextual insight into the outcomes of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An external company transcribed the recordings of interviews into a word format which had identifying information excluded. Thematic analysis was then conducted by incorporating the stages as specified by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) gaining familiarity with your data; (2) generating initial codes or labels; (3) searching for themes or main ideas; (4) reviewing themes or main ideas; (5) defining and naming themes or main ideas; and (6) producing the report. During this process, a personal reflexivity approach to

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analysis (Finlay, 1998) was adopted, to identify any biases that might influence interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A second researcher analysed the data in a collaborative and reflective approach with the main researcher to explore multiple assumptions and achieve richer interpretations of meaning (Bryne, 2022). An extract of an interview transcription for schools and parents can be found in **Appendix O**.

Results

School Facilitators

An external transcribing company transcribed 34 minutes of audio recorded interview data from four school facilitators. The same seven interview questions were asked to all school facilitators with the focus as the following:

1. How was your experience of group delivery of the programme in your school?
2. What has been the most beneficial element of programme delivery for the school?
3. What challenges did you experience whilst delivering the programme in school?
4. What are your thoughts regarding the accompanying programme resources (delivery guidance manuals, video vignettes, books, and handouts)?
5. Which session topic did you find most beneficial for the families?
6. Who do you think would benefit most from delivering book-sharing parenting programme in schools?
7. Do you have any further comments or questions?

Four overall main themes were captured with twelve sub-themes from the four transcripts. This section will define the themes and contain extracts of the data to explain each subtheme. Anonymity was maintained by assigning individual identification numbers to each transcript. Themes are presented in **Figure 3.1**

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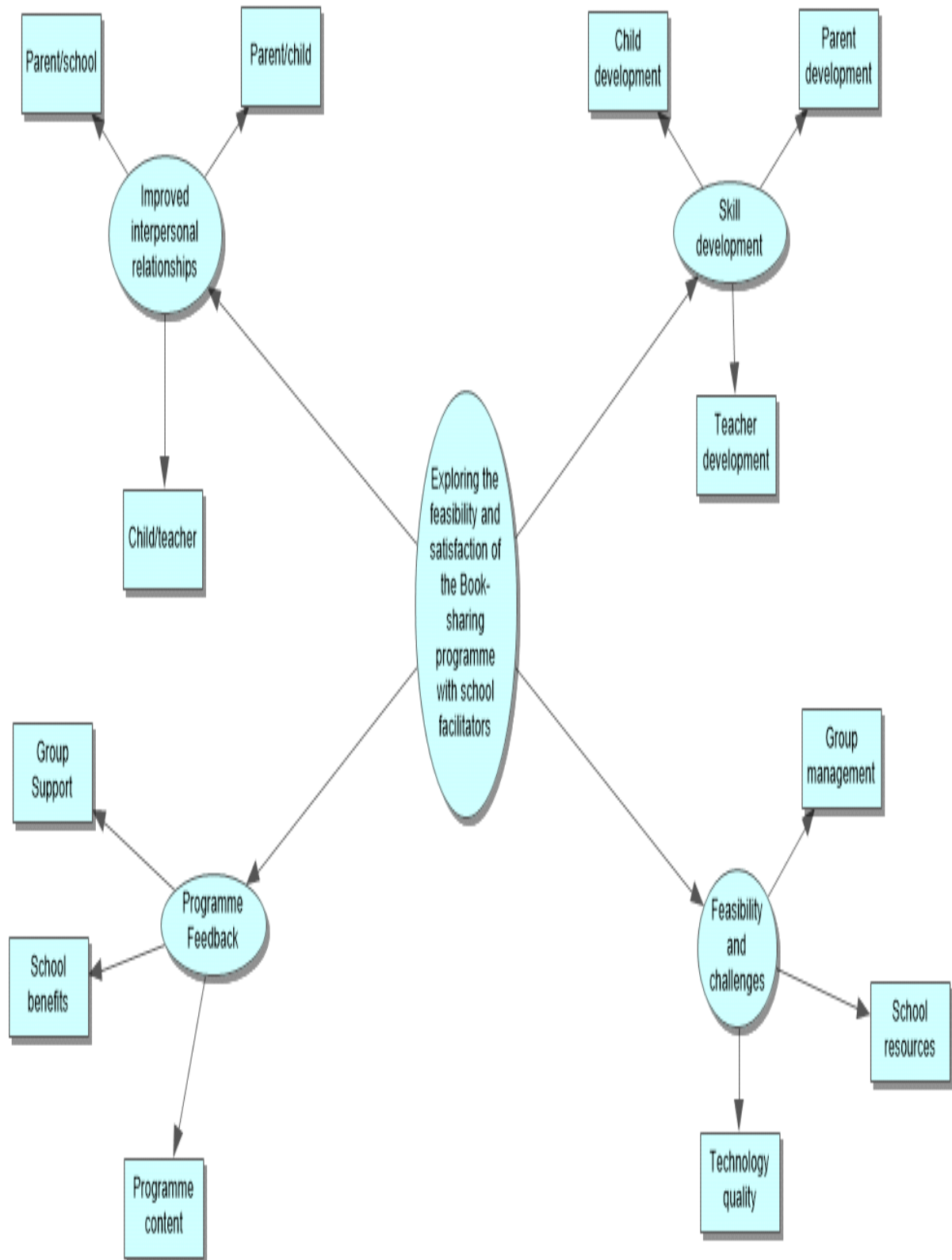


Figure 3.1: Thematic map of the four main themes (ovals) and twelve subthemes (rectangles).

Main theme 1: Improved interpersonal relationships

Sub-theme A: Improved parent/child relationship. Improved parent/child relationship was generally defined as increased interpersonal understanding and communication. School facilitators reported that the programme supported parents to communicate more effectively with their child. For example, facilitators reported that increased parent/child relationships developed as parents acquired the skills required to sit, talk, and share ideas and experiences with their child. This produced increased interpersonal warmth and affection, constructing a warm and enjoyable foundation to enhance parent/children's interpersonal connections. As such book-sharing was regarded as 'special one to one-time'.

School facilitator 1: "So I think they began to see things in a different light, as again one of the dads was illiterate, he said that (I didn't use to look at books with my daughter, but now I feel I can and as a result, I have bonded with her more)".

School facilitator 3: "You know interaction between children and the parents was you know nice to see that bond developing between them, some found it hard in the beginning to have that closeness between them with a book. But towards the end for like (parents name) for example, she found it difficult to begin with but towards the end, you know (child's name) was on her knee. You know they were having that closeness that I don't think was there before"

Sub-theme A) excerpts

Sub-theme B) Improved home/school links. All school facilitators credited the 'Books Together Programme' with cultivating improved home/school links. Improved

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home/school links were generally defined as a supportive environment for parents and schools to collaborate and problem solve.

School facilitator 1: “I think the main challenge was that some of the parents said that they couldn’t get their child to come and sit down but I think by talking and helping them to change what they did we resolved some of the problems”

School facilitator 2: “Book-sharing has been a really positive experience with parents. A much more sort of friendly, relaxed atmosphere where we have not only learnt to share books but how to solve problems, things that didn’t quite go so well you know”

Sub-theme B: excerpts

Three school facilitators said that the programme provided a sociable, relaxed environment for the school, parents, and children. School facilitators appreciated seeing parents play an active role in school activities, and school facilitator three thought that the programme should be made available for all parents to enhance home/school links. Here, school facilitator two conveys how she considers the programme an effective early intervention strategy to build home/school links.

School facilitator 2: “All parents have said that they are really going to miss the Book-sharing, so well done to every single one of them. Yeah, we have a drop in here for parents, but they only tend to come in when they have got problems that have become insurmountable, and it would be useful to have something like this that starts right at the very beginning of school.

Sub-theme B: excerpt

Sub-theme C) Improved child/teacher relationship. School facilitators valued the programme for providing an opportunity to build affinity with children. Sharing picture books with no or few words supported facilitators in encouraging active exchanges, led by the child through being attentive to their interests and communication. For example, school facilitator one considered book-sharing an open and friendly approach to actively engage children in learning and increase interpersonal understanding.

School facilitator 1: "We look at other things and flick through the book first and see what they can see, and I think that's quite important as it engages them and draws them in especially with some of our children as English is an additional language. Especially one little boy with the book 'Dirty dog' he got really involved in that book because he liked the cars and things and he is a quiet boy who has poor language and as a result, he was elated and spoke to me and as a teacher that helped me bond with him"

School facilitator 4: "I found that children could engage more with me during Book-sharing as they were looking at pictures and discussing"

School facilitator 2: "During Book-sharing I was finding out what the child's interest was"

Sub-theme C: excerpts

Main Theme 2: Skill Development

Subtheme A) Child development. As the programme progressed facilitators recognised that children's attention and engagement increased. This was commonly described as improved concentration and participation during book sharing. Facilitators noticed how children who were easily distracted, were less preoccupied and became more focused on task

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as they progressed through the ‘Books Together’ programme. School facilitator three was delighted to observe this occur in a short timeframe.

School facilitator 3: “But towards the end for like (parents name) for example, she found it difficult, to begin with, but towards the end, you know (child’s name) was on her knee”. You know at the beginning, some of them couldn’t even sit two pages and then they’d be running around so it was just lovely to see that happening in that short space of time really”

School facilitator 4: “She started off on each session when we sat down to read, she wouldn’t sit, she just quickly flicked through the book and there was a bit towards the end on that last book, she actually sat for the whole story which I can see an improvement”.

Sub-theme A) excerpts

Facilitators reported that children’s social interaction skills improved during programme engagement. It was generally believed that book-sharing fostered children’s confidence, thus improving their interpersonal communication skills with their teachers and peers.

School facilitator 4: “They’d, well as I said they’re getting that bond before they’ve even started school possibly and friendships”.

School facilitator 2: “Through the programme as such and you could see how they were coming out of their shells”.

School facilitator 1: “And especially one little boy with, with the book having a dirty dog, he got really involved in that book because he liked the cars and things and I

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found he’s quite a quiet boy who doesn’t have much language and as a result, he was very elated and spoke to me and I found as a teacher that helped me bond with him then”.

Subtheme A: excerpts

Subtheme B) Parent development. School facilitators reported that the programme offered parents the opportunity to develop confidence, knowledge, and an ability to use books to facilitate reciprocal communication with their child. The following quotations are a representative of this.

School facilitator 1: “These parents were learning something new you know, and they were quite happy to take things on board. Parents realised that you don’t have to read a book to get so much out of it.

School facilitator 4: “Some of them didn’t actually know what to do with the books. We had one little boy who had a present when he was one or two with no writing in it, there was only pictures, so a parent said she didn’t know what to do with it. They put it in a cupboard, but now they have done the book-sharing, they have brought the book out and know what to do with it”

School facilitator 3: “It’s been really creative, watching the difference and development in all the parents really in how they sit, talk and share ideas and experiences with their kids you know”

Subtheme B: excerpts

School facilitators reported that parents acquired new strategies to navigate parenting problems. Here, facilitators illustrate how the group setting offered mutual support to help overcome common parenting problems.

School facilitator 1: "The main challenge was that some of the parents couldn't get their children to sit, but I think by talking together and changing what they did or time of day, we sort of overcome these problems"

School facilitator 2: "It has been a really positive experience. Good with parents, much more sort of friendly relaxed atmosphere where they have learnt not only to share books but how to share problems, things that don't go so well you know|"

School facilitator 3: "I will use one parents as an example here, she had trouble with her eldest, I think he is in year 2, but she had difficulties with his behaviour, by talking about his feelings with others during book-sharing and she knocked down some of challenges and it has helped her gain a relationship with him"

Subtheme B) excerpts

Subtheme C) Teacher development. The programme offered new teaching skills to facilitators and inventive ideas when engaging children with books. In the following excerpt, school facilitator one explains how her newly acquired book-sharing techniques facilitated improved child engagement during lessons.

School facilitator 1: "It's actually raised my awareness. Even when we are reading stories in class, I don't go straight into the reading of the book you know. We look at other things and flick through it to see what they can see, and I think that's really important because it engages them and draws them in"

Subtheme C) excerpts.

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The following excerpts display how facilitators learned how to modify their typical teaching style to accommodate parental learning despite the challenges of group teaching.

School facilitator 1: “The more vociferous ones do most of the talking whereas initially some of the quiet ones may not say anything, but as the weeks went on and they gained in confidence, so did I actually and I would ask them by name, oh so and so’s mum what do you think of this. I did try to include everyone”.

School facilitator 3: “But you know if you have that one that’s quite negative, it’s hard to keep going and to remind the others that they are doing so well. But you know we carried on and they did well. Really good”

School facilitator 2: “You need to find a balance between being open and friendly and being steering back to what you are there to do, so it doesn’t all become about one person”.

Subtheme C: excerpts

Main Theme 3: Programme Feedback

Sub-theme A) Group support. School facilitators agreed that the programme played a vital role in the development of supportive parental friendships. This was facilitated through sharing ideas in a safe encouraging environment. It was generally reported that parents helped and encouraged one another during learning, and that this influenced group bonding.

School facilitator 1: “Day one sort of went off with a race. I found the parents really engaged, they found it interesting, there was a lot of conversations going on and I found particularly one of the dads was really keen to pull in the whole group and I

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found to my surprise and different from other groups I have ran, this little group seemed to have bonded really from the outset. So, it was fantastic”

School Facilitator 2: “It was really useful and nice to have a group dynamic because actually often I wasn’t having to say anything they were all telling each other which I found far more impactful”

Facilitator 3: “It helped them gain friendships I think and to bond with each other, help each other out, support each other”

Sub-theme A: excerpts

Subtheme B) School benefits. School facilitators enjoyed delivering the ‘Books Together Programme’ to groups of parents. It was generally agreed that the programme created a supportive shared environment to promote new child engagement strategies. Facilitators described how book-sharing improved their own teaching approaches, as well as those of the parents, enhancing learning experiences for children. School facilitator one was inspired to see effective teamwork and support amongst parents in the group. School facilitator two believed the programme created a friendly, relaxed atmosphere to nurture positive experiences. Indeed, most staff valued the programme as it provided an opportunity to invite parents to engage in children’s early learning experiences, and therefore believed it would be an asset to the school curriculum.

School facilitator 1 “...I found it amazing, to be honest, and I really think it needs to be done throughout schools”

School facilitator 2 “... It’s been a really positive experience and it is useful as it starts right at the beginning of school”

School facilitator 3 “... “I know (parent’s name) was struggling to be honest with work and stuff like that, so I think going into schools is so beneficial.

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School facilitator 3 “I found it amazing to be honest, especially seeing the bonds build between parents and children”

Subtheme B: excerpt

Sub-theme C) Programme content. The programme was described as easy to deliver in the school environment. It was generally agreed that the group setting created a friendly atmosphere to deliver the content, which was well-supported by the programme resources to create enjoyable learning experiences for children. Furthermore, it was reported that parental involvement during children’s early school experiences benefited child participation and satisfaction. In this excerpt, school facilitator two describes the ease of programme delivery, including how the programme produced a fun environment for children to learn.

School facilitator 2: “Can I say thank you for the box with tea and coffee. That was the most practical handy thing you could have because I could literally just turn up, slot the memory stick in and we had it all set up. And the kids absolutely loved the fact their mums were here. I mean it was such a treat for them and especially as it was Friday afternoon and then they could go home with them and it just, that worked really well”.

Subtheme C: excerpts

Main theme 4: Feasibility and challenges

Subtheme A) Group management. School facilitators 2 and 3 reported challenges in managing the dynamics of the group. For example, facilitators were concerned about parent pessimism obstructing the productivity of the programme as it prevented other parents from

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voicing their own ideas. Also, it was reported that it was difficult to ensure parents were following the programme at the correct pace:

School facilitator 3: “And another challenge that I faced was a parent that was quite negative towards the other parents and her problems used to take over the group. It was hard sometimes to rein it in, and you know to explain that we need to carry on, but she wanted to share her problems you know so it was hard to signpost, right we’ll do this and come back to that”

School facilitator 2: “Lots of different challenges you know trying to make sure everyone still wanted to come, you know that fine balance between saying look that’s ok just keep going and trying to offer solutions. There were a lot who were trying to go off onto different books at one point and sort of saying (does it matter that we read a comic instead?) just getting them to stick to the same books so we were all having the same book experiences was a bit of a challenge at times”

Subtheme A: excerpts

Subtheme B) School resources. Facilitators described difficulties in acquiring the resources needed to deliver the programme. The availability of rooms within schools to facilitate a group was generally problematic. Furthermore, access to the software required to deliver the PowerPoint content, such as overhead projectors and computers was scarce. Several facilitators utilised their own personal equipment to ensure content delivery.

Facilitator 2: “Obviously, there is always the fun and games of finding an available room”

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Facilitator 4: “I had to supply my own laptop, and my speaker didn’t work on the first session, we managed to get through it, we got the gist of it. That was challenging me because obviously, each class has their own laptop but it’s all being used during the day. I don’t know, that was the challenge. And if I could not use the training room at the top, I was using this room, but I don’t know if these rooms weren’t available, I wouldn’t have had anywhere to go”

Facilitator 1: “It didn’t help that I didn’t have the projector either”.

Sub-theme B: excerpt

Sub-theme C) Technology quality. All facilitators had challenges distributing PowerPoint presentations due to difficulties with the pen drives provided. Frequent obstacles included poor video and volume quality obstructing the effectiveness of delivery.

School facilitator 1: “And you felt sometimes when you were delivering, and you pressed the button you couldn’t really hear it; you just felt a bit awkward you know, especially if you’re trying to be professional”

School facilitator 2: “Not all of them played, but most of them”

School facilitator 3: “The parents had no interest in the videos, it didn’t help some didn’t work either”

School facilitator 4: “There were a couple that didn’t play”

Sub-theme C: excerpt

Parents

An external company transcribed 145 minutes of audio recording from parents into 16 transcripts. Four main themes were identified with 12 sub-themes. Themes identified are presented in **Figure 4.2**

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The same nine interview questions were asked to all parents with the focus as the following:

1. How was your experience of engagement with the 'Books Together Programme'?
2. What has been the most beneficial aspect of the programme?
3. Which weekly session was the most helpful for you and your child?
4. How helpful were the programme resources (books, handouts, and video examples)?
5. How did you find school delivery of the programme?
6. How did you find group delivery of the programme?
7. What challenges did you experience during programme engagement?
8. Who would benefit most from the 'Books Together Programme'?
9. Do you have any further questions or comments?

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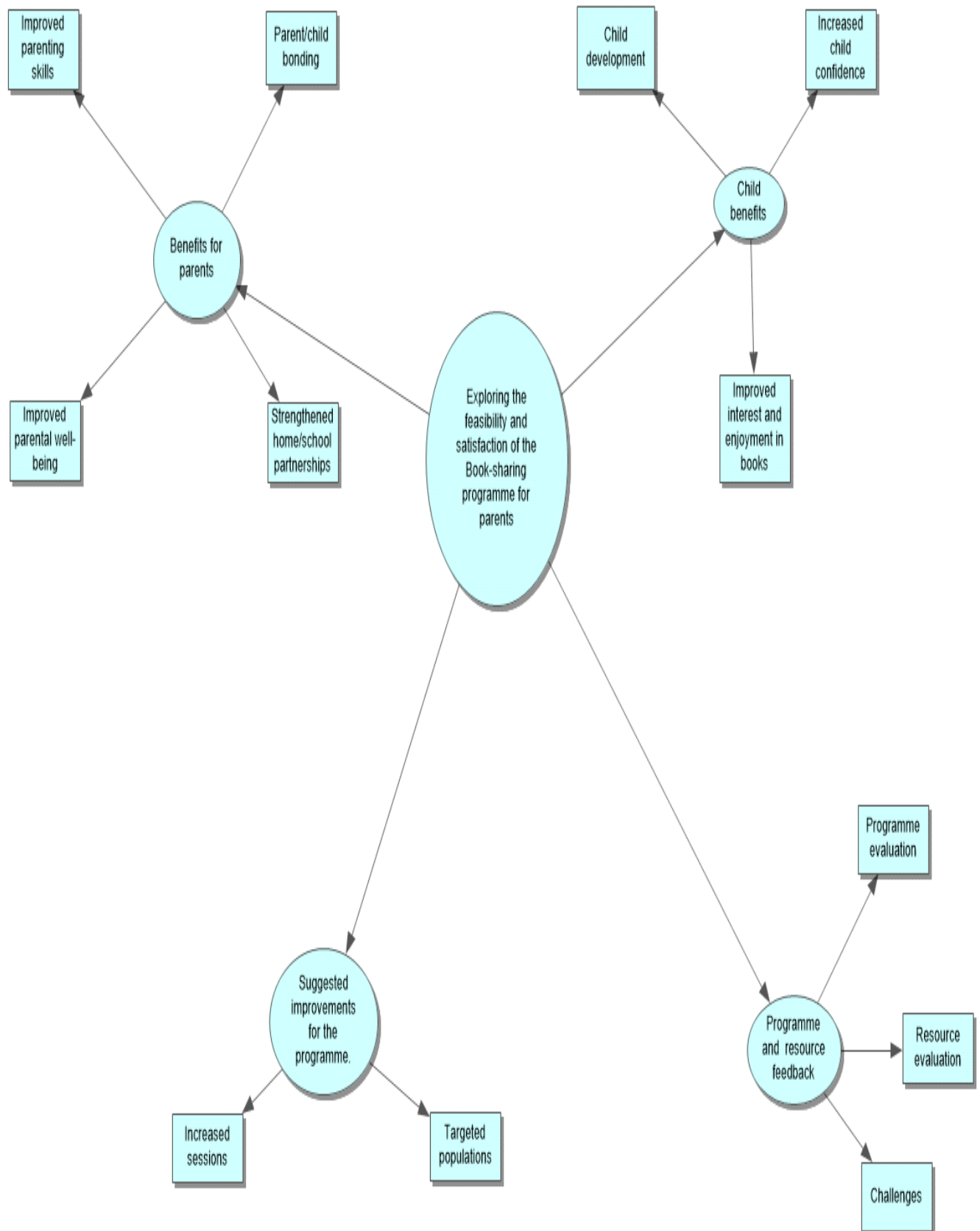


Figure 3.2: Thematic map of the four main themes (Ovals) and 12 sub-themes (rectangles).

Main Theme 1: Benefits for parents

Sub-theme A: Improved parenting skills. Parents reported that the programme gave them the skills required to communicate effectively with their children and enhance their responsiveness. Through actively engaging children using picture books, parents created an interactive learning experience through exploring the picture content of books, following the child's interest, active questioning, and linking picture content to the child's experience. In the following excerpts parents convey how these strategies promoted their effective communication skills, to reinforce their children's responsiveness.

Participant 103: "I think before I forced her to do what I wanted her to do but now I follow her interest and she can explain more"

Participant 201: "Having a book with no words is great because you get that bit more (out of the child). Whereas before I would just read the words, I would be in robot mode and that would be it, but it brings you and your child together more because you are creating the story together"

Participant 402: "I now focus on active rather than passive reading so instead of me just holding and reading the text, he (child) was actually taking part, saying 'what's this' and 'oh look at that', so it was sort of active engagement"

Participant 302: "It kind of reiterated things you know, like for instance before he would say something like 'the sky is green' and I would say 'no it's not it's blue' But now I will say 'it may look green but it's blue'. You know I am more conscious of the way I speak to him. And not just with books, in general, I am more conscious of how I respond to his questions and then, in turn, my partner has picked up on it as well and it has made us more patient with him which has made him more responsive"

Subtheme A: excerpt

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Most parents (75%) reported that they learned how to utilise books to coach their child’s social/emotional ability. For example, picture books were utilised to assist children to explore emotions and consider the differences between themselves and others. Several parents explained that this encouraged them to help children understand the perspectives and feelings of themselves and others.

Participant 303: “I didn’t know I could use books to link feelings. I never looked at it that way before. So, it opened my eyes really that there are more ways to use books than just reading”

Participant 302: “But what would it be like for so and so, how would you feel?’ I would cry. ‘Yeah mummy I see kind of thing’ That kind of building empathy and helping them see that not all people are the same, just because they like trains doesn’t mean everyone in the world likes trains”

Participant 401: “The feelings week was definitely for us and strengthening relationships. Anything with (child’s name) that helped her understand how she behaved effected other people”

Subtheme A: excerpts

Parental problem-solving capacity increased during programme engagement which enabled them to resolve child behaviour challenges more effectively. For example, parents described how the programme content and group support inspired them to utilise parenting techniques that reduced child behaviour problems. The following excerpts show how participants began to respond more effectively to parenting challenges during the programme.

Participant 303: "It helped us at home a lot more. It gave you a different perspective on how to talk to your children, like don't say 'no' to your children, rather you work your way around it or explain it could be something else, but without telling them 'No'. So, I realised how saying 'no' badly influenced the child as you are pointing out that they are wrong".

Participant 104: "There was one week, where obviously I am not going to mention names, but their little girl was rude to somebody at the door, and I thought she coped with it really nicely. Then it happened to me with my child, and I coped better, instead of going on about it I let it go and we spoke about it when we were level kind of thing"

Subtheme A: excerpt

Subtheme B) Group support. Parents reported that the group helped them to work together as a whole through shared identity, norms, values, and mutual relationships. For example, the group format offered a mutually supportive and comfortable environment to discuss personal matters, particularly shared parenting challenges. This collaborative problem-solving approach facilitated group bonding, creating the foundations for new friendships. For instance, participant 303 valued the interactive nature of the group as it provided an opportunity to share her views and opinions in a non-judgemental atmosphere, and participant 202 described her delight that she had established new friendships. In addition, the group setting offered a sense of belonging, nurturing, and increased parental confidence. For example, participant 201, who had experienced low self-esteem, and a sense of inferiority as he struggled with poor literacy, described how group support empowered him to 'go out and try new things' despite his difficulties. Here, participants describe how the social capital of the group provided reciprocal support networks and created friendships.

Participant 203: "At first I was anxious and didn't want to go because I didn't know the parents but after the first week it was fantastic and so nice to bond with the other parents"

Participant 402: "Some days one of us would be completely fed up, but it (the programme) was a nice break from things to be able to go into school, have some adult time, you know coffee and stuff, chat about garden sets and anything else do you know what I mean and then to have that time with your child"

Subtheme B: excerpt

Sub-theme C) Improved parent/child bonds. Parents described how improved parent/child bonds increased their sense of connection with their children. A common view was that book-sharing built and secured better-quality parent/child attachments through providing an opportunity to develop interpersonal understandings. For example, nine participants expressed how they had become 'closer' to their child as the one to one-time with books created an enjoyable child-centred context to improve reciprocal interactions. The following excerpts illustrate this viewpoint.

Participant 303 "I would definitely say the benefit that stands out is the relationship building between parent and child because it has brought us so much closer"

Participant 102 "My kids and I love it and enjoy"

Participant 101 "It helped me to be closer to my son, to improve our relationship"

Participant 201 "It brought me closer to (child's name)"

Subtheme C: excerpt

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The interpersonal time that book sharing created was particularly valued by parents with several children as their attention was often divided, limiting one to one parent/child time. This is explained in the following excerpts.

Participant 301: “Having that one-to-one time with (child’s name) was lovely as I didn’t have my other three children there so I could concentrate on (child’s name) whereas usually I can’t as they all demand my time at the same time. So that was the best part for me”

Participant 401 “It was really nice to have that one-to-one time and discuss emotions and things as usually her attention span is difficult, so it has been so nice to concentrate on (child’s name) as compared to (sibling) she is less emotionally balanced so worked really well as a single mum to twins definitely. To get that time alone with (child’s name) as I only get that when one of them is ill usually”

Subtheme C: excerpt

Subtheme D) Enhanced Home/School partnerships. Most parents valued the home/school partnerships that were created through attending the programme and satisfaction at engaging with the learning experiences of their children during pre-school. Parents began to feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting, which encouraged them to become more interested in school life and created a strong foundation for positive home/school partnerships in the future. In addition, eight parents indicated that they appreciated the knowledge and experience of school-staff and expressed gratitude to them for guidance, encouragement, and support during the programme.

Participant 104: “She explained it very well (the programme), and she (teacher) was like ‘if you have any extra questions’ and that. She always gave her best and even

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more; she gave 1000 per cent. I don't know about other parents, but I felt I was part of the school and it made me feel more comfortable”

Participant 201: “By the end of the sessions actually, I felt like she (teacher) was part of the group rather than teacher and student, she brought all the group together which worked for me. Made me more interested in what was going on in the school as well with doing it in the school, which is good”

Participant 202: “I speak more with Mrs (Teacher's name) now more than I used to which has helped”

Subtheme D: excerpt

Main theme 2: Child benefits

Subtheme A: Child development. Parents reported increases in children's cognitive and social/emotional development. Book-sharing was considered an age-appropriate social/emotional learning experience to support children in building empathy, recognising, and understanding their own feelings and those of others, managing emotions, and cultivating healthy relationships. One parent reported that the cultural diversity of the books allowed her son to build sensitivity towards other traditions. Another parent said that her son had noticed that not all people like the same things, suggesting increased social awareness. Parents illustrated this notion in the following excerpts.

Participant 202: “Up until then he had been having the occasional tantrum, but now he doesn't as much, so I think he's kind of thinking about how he's feeling and telling me instead of stamping his feet”

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Participant 203: "Yeah discussing feeling with her because she is starting to say sorry to me, and tell me she is feeling sad or happy and things that she never used to do"

Participant 304: "After book-sharing, I saw that she wasn't so horrible with me"

Participant 303: "Sometimes if I don't do as he wants, he gets angry at me and in that book in one situation a boy had upset his mum and then apologised at the end of the book and that hit home with him. He said 'why is he doing that he loves his mummy and shouldn't upset her'"

Sub-theme A: excerpt

Thirteen parents (81.25%) reported that their child's ability to attend was boosted during the programme and four parents described how children's expressive language improved. Parents believed that book-sharing created an interesting and enjoyable way of engaging children in conversations, increasing focused attention and the use of words. For example, one participant said that her child could not sit still for a minute before beginning book-sharing, however by the end of the programme was fully engaged with the books until the end. Participant 404 explained that book-sharing encouraged her child to use a wider range of words, and participant 202 said that it increased her child's language capacity so that he could express his feelings in words.

Participant 403: "I think learning the skills to be able to share books better because (child's name) attention span wasn't brilliant before but once we got him talking about himself it makes it better so he can share books better with us, rather than us reading to him it gets him involved in it also"

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Participant 404: “Sitting one to one with the story and having a conversation with her by myself about things, she was coming out with more words and learning a lot more things you know. It was getting her thinking”

Participant 202:” They went on a school trip to an old people’s home just down the road from the school and when he came back, I said how was it? He said it was excellent, I was so excited, and they were so lovely, and he would not have come out with those words before”

Subtheme A: excerpt

Sub-theme B) Increased child confidence. Three parents (18.75%) reported that children’s self-confidence increased. As noted previously, book-sharing was generally considered a good opportunity to discuss picture content and offer children positive interactive experiences. Parents described how this helped their children to become competent and comfortable, not only during book-sharing interactions, but also during shared interactions with others.

Participant 302 “‘Mummy can I read it to you?’. His confidence grew so much. He has come out of his shell a lot more, which I am happy about”.

Participant 303 “And it encouraged him to do a lot more reading, we read 3 or 4 books a night now, because all he wants is books you know. Once he got comfortable with-it confidence came out of nowhere, it shot up. It was like ‘mummy can we read again’.

Participant 404 “The kids got to sit with other kids from school. I think it made them feel a bit special. More comfortable as well you know”

Sub-theme B: Excerpt

Sub-theme C) Improved child interest and enjoyment with books. Eleven participants (68.75%) reported that book-sharing reinforced their child's interest in, and enjoyment of, books, strengthening their focused attention. This inspired children to share more books as it was a fun and pleasurable experience for them. In the following excerpts parents explain this concept.

Participant 303 "He enjoys storytime a lot more"

Participant 302 "He really enjoyed taking the books home, He didn't want to give them back"

Participant 104 "She was more interested (in books) and less bored"

Sub-theme C: excerpt

Parental involvement during children's learning in school facilitated their enjoyment in learning.

Participant 403 "He loved that, like oh my god mums in school, what's going on. So yeah, he absolutely loved it"

Participant 203 "I think it was really good that we went to school, we had a chat then Mrs (Teacher's name) brought the children up to read with us and that was really nice as their faces lit up. It was so cute. And even now (child's name) says 'are we doing books in school today?'"

Participant 402 "You know the kids got a kick out of coming out of class, they feel slightly special, our mums come in today you know"

Participant 201 "I like the fact they felt like it was something special because they were coming out of class. And they would come up the stairs and they would all be a bit nervous, like what's going on to start with and then as the sessions were going on

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they would come in and be really excited and hit the plate of biscuits and get cosy with their books”

Sub-themes C: excerpt

Main Theme 3: Programme content and resource evaluation

Sub-theme A) Programme evaluation. Parents described how the programme provided a positive new learning experience which was interesting and enjoyable for themselves and their children. Typically, parents valued book-sharing for cultivating special time with their child. For example, participant 102 thought it was ‘*a good new experience*’ and participant 403 revealed that ‘*it was absolutely amazing, me and (Child’s name) absolutely loved it*’ and participant 401 shared her pleasure ‘*I enjoyed it and found it very interesting, and I liked coming home and doing it with (child’s name)*’. One participant 301 said that it was hard to continue with the programme due to personal problems and another said that the programme was too lengthy.

Participant 104: “It was good, a real eye opener”

Participant 304: “Definitely amazing, it really helped us a lot”

Participant 103: “A brilliant programme, my child is completely different, so it’s the best thing”

Participant 104: “We really enjoyed it, very useful”

Sub-theme A: excerpt

Subtheme B) Resource evaluation. Most parents reported that the programme resources, primarily the books, supported learning. The books were positively evaluated for their lack of written content, variety, cultural sensitivity, and colourfulness which offered an

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enjoyable and entertaining context to build a story based on children’s interests. However, five parents (31.25%) considered the final sessions book ‘The wrong side of the bed’ was a barrier to child engagement as it was deficient in colour and picture clarity. These five parents reported that children did not like the book as it was dark in nature, therefore it was difficult for parents to engage them positively with the content.

Participant 201: “I liked the variation in the books.

Participant 202: I loved all of them apart from the last one, it was really sort of old fashioned.

Participant 303: I loved them. I really, really liked them.

Participant 401 Yeah, the books were fab. I’m not too keen on the last one, they weren’t fussed about that one.

Participant 403: Most of them were really good

Participant 104: “The books were really entertaining, and it was nice to totally ignore the writing and make up a story about what we wanted”

Participant 402: “The last book, he was not interested in. It has less colourful illustrations. You know I would be asking (child’s name) ‘what is this’? and you could see him looking at it is thinking ‘I have not the faintest idea’ as it wasn’t as clear as the other books’

Participant 403: “Yeah he wasn’t keen on that one (last book) because he likes bright colours and stuff like that”

Participant 203: “I found the last book a bit dark for her”

Participant 201: “The last book about the little boy who got out of the bed the wrong side. And then he was naggy throughout the day and happy at the end. Trying to

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understand and explain feelings whilst keeping it positive was quite difficult with that particular book”

Subtheme B: excerpt

Parents appreciated seeing the strategies presented in the videos, as they allowed them to observe other parents modelling the strategies and they opened discussion in the group. For example, participant 202 welcomed the videos as they allowed her to observe that parenting style could positively or negatively influence child responses. Unfortunately, learning was disrupted due to technical glitches with some of the videos. However, the take home handouts were seen as a valuable addition to weekly sessions, as they provided a reminder of key learning points for home practice.

Participant 402: “Watching them (videos) gives you tips on how to do things differently and I copied what they were doing”

Participant 401: “It was a bit of a struggle as they (videos) weren’t always working”

Participant 303: “I enjoyed them (video’s) as (teacher’s name) would ask us what the parents were doing right or wrong or if we had any views on it. In one of the videos at the beginning of the sessions, straight away the mother said ‘no, that’s not right’ and the daughter went very quiet, and it shut her up and you could see she didn’t want to try again then, she even tried to encourage her but she just didn’t want to carry on”

Participant 201: “The handouts definitely helped, so I had something to take home to refresh myself of what we did in group, and it didn’t feel like homework either which was good”

Subtheme B: excerpt

Sub-theme C) Challenges. Three participants reported timing as a barrier to engagement. For one participant, work commitments were an obstacle to active participation during weekly sessions and home practice, and participant 402 stated that her work schedule impeded her ability to attend all the weekly sessions in the school. Two participants said that the sessions did not coincide with start or end of the school day causing inconvenience. The following excerpts illustrate these viewpoints.

Participant 302: "Although it's only 10 minutes out of my time, but if you have had a bad day in work it (book-sharing) is the last thing you want to do. You just want to get home, have food, shower, and go to bed, you just have not got the mindset. That can get annoying because I enjoyed the time with him (child), and you get so much out of them"

Participant 402: "And by the time we had finished we had 30 minutes to hang around, so often had to pop back (to the school)"

Participant 401: "It was that half an hour gap before school finished, and some parents did not live local to the school, and they were a bit like 'what can I do now'. I mean I live close to the school, but I know a couple of the parents were kind of like 'what shall I do now'. So, there was a bit of hanging around"

Sub-theme C: excerpt

Main Theme 4: Suggested Improvements

Subtheme A) Targeted populations. As the programme nurtured positive interpersonal interactions, seven participants (43.75%) suggested that it should be targeted at children exposed to risk factors, such as poor parent/child attachments, abuse, behavioural challenges, learning disabilities and a lack of learning resources in the family home. This was

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because the programme was said to support children’s understanding of themselves and others and to produce secure attachments to caregivers.

Participant 302: “I think children who are on the child protection register would benefit the most. Especially for parents who do not spend any time with their children or have not got the confidence to read. Not all children have books at home, so it could be for a target audience”

Participant 104: “If you’ve a child with learning difficulties or behaviour problems then they would benefit a hell of a lot”

Participant 401: “I do see people who do not read to their children and often just stick them in front of the telly and my philosophy has always been that they can’t climb the wall if you take them away. So, we must give them the time to do things, so I think parents that don’t read to their children would see the benefits from it”

Participant 404: “Oh I hate using this word but disadvantaged children. So, something like this (book-sharing) may help as I bet most of the struggles, they have at school is to do with not having the bond and attachment at home. Just 10 minutes in the evening (book-sharing) could be a real benefit. Or even for children with learning difficulties. Because it’s so big and encourages them to participate with the book”

Sub-theme A: excerpt

Two parents (12.50%) suggested that the programme may be useful to younger children during playgroup provision to introduce them to sharing books prior to being taught to read words.

Participant 403 "Because we were saying in group that the playmates group (playgroup) in our school would benefit massively because they are younger like 2 or 3 (years old) so a good target age before they start learning words"

Participant 401 "It's been good, I think I would have liked to have done it when they were a bit younger"

Sub-theme A: excerpt

Sub-theme B) Increased sessions. Three parents (18.75%) felt that the programme should be extended to increase parental learning opportunities, motivate them to continue book-sharing, and to maintain the satisfaction created by the sessions for both parents and children. The following excerpts illustrate these views.

Participant 203: "I think there should be more of them, I don't think 7 sessions was enough. I needed a few more weeks I think"

Participant 201: "I'm kind of thinking that its finished now and its back to reality, everyone may stray back to what we did before. But if there was a little bit more to keep everyone motivated, I think it would work"

Participant 303: "I absolutely loved every minute of it. I really did enjoy it and (child's name) was getting into a routine. It was bringing us all together on a Friday to discuss our views on how it has helped us at home and everything. So yeah, I'm

Sub-theme B: excerpt

Discussion

This qualitative study was designed to provide insights into the benefits, satisfaction, and feasibility of the school delivered 'Books Together' programme. Thematic analysis provided a framework to explore the factors promoting/impeding parental engagement. This is important as the ability to retain parents in parenting programmes improves their outcomes (Dadds et al, 2018; Ingoldsby, 2010). The varied perspectives presented by the staff and parents suggest that the collective benefits for participants were skills development for both parents, staff, and children, improved interpersonal relationships and group support. In contrast, the barriers to engagement emerged as practical delivery considerations.

One of the main collective benefits reported was skills development. School facilitators gained the skills needed to train parents and children to use dialogic interactions whilst sharing picture books and, in some cases, their own skills in working with children. Trained parents then developed the ability to use active discourse to coach children's cognition and social/emotional ability during book sharing. This encouraged more effective communication between parents and children that gave them skills to manage child behaviour problems which they reported had reduced. Reported benefits for children included: improved language ability, focused attention, emotional regulation, and social communication. This is supported by well-established research showing that active communicative dialogues between adults and pre-school children promotes the healthy early cognitive development that benefits their healthy adjustment and longer-term academic attainment (Hart & Risley, 1995; Whittle, Vijayakumar, & Simmons, 2017). In contrast, a lack of communitive dialogues during children's pre-school years generates significant skill deficits in children's school readiness ability (Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg, & Peters, 2011).

The feedback suggests that school staff with the right resources, can be trained to develop parents' interactive skills needed to encourage children's school readiness. Another

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important benefit was improved interpersonal relationships, that is increased interactive understanding, connection, and communication. The ‘Books Together’ programme constructed a warm and enjoyable foundation to enhance communication and promote bonds between school facilitators, parents, and children. These enhanced relationships facilitated an understanding of children’s world view and assisted them with identifying, expressing, and managing feelings more effectively. These results support earlier research reporting that children with secure attachments are better able to develop social–emotional competence and cognitive functioning, whereas in contrast, children with insecure attachments are more at risk for negative outcomes in these domains (Ranson & Urichuk, 2008).

Other benefits for participants included improved home/school partnerships and group support. Firstly, delivery of the programme in a pre-school context created a warm and relaxed environment to promote home/school links and reinforced children’s enjoyment in learning. Strong home/school links provide a unity of purpose between home and school learning to support child development (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Wilder, 2014). This finding is consistent with the idea of ecological systems theory that acknowledges the contribution of multiple environments to child adjustment and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Secondly, the programme created an opportunity for participants to benefit the social capital of the group. Social capital is a general term broadly describing the norms and systems enabling shared achievement for reciprocal value (Gannon & Roberts, 2020). The group format of the programme helped cultivate trust, shared identity, norms, values, reciprocal support networks, and friendships, offering a sense of belonging for parents. This result is important given that social capital is associated with individuals social–emotional well-being and improved functioning societies (Johnson, 2016).

Despite the reported benefits, the highlighted barriers to programme engagement included practical considerations such as timing, lack of school resources, technical glitches,

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and group management difficulties. This suggests that school procedures and video software may need to be refined to address the practicalities of school-based delivery of the programme. Furthermore, school facilitators reported group management challenges suggesting that supervision with a skilled practitioner during programme delivery may address the gaps in the skill set required to manage the group setting more effectively (Falender, 2018).

Despite the barriers the context, simplicity, and content of the programme produced a fun and enjoyable experience for participants. This view is consistent with the null attrition rate and high parental engagement in this study. Typically, high attrition rates in parenting programmes, prior to intervention completion, remain a problem (Dadds et al., 2018). Therefore, the results of this study in which all participants were retained suggest that the ‘Books Together’ programme may be a satisfactory and feasible parenting intervention to positively engage schools, parents, and children. Nevertheless, parents believed that the programme may have a larger impact if it targeted younger children or those with greater risk factors. Also, there was some suggestion from parents that the programme should extend sessions to maintain learning, motivation, and satisfaction for school, parents, and children. However, generalisation of these results has limitations due to the small sample size and lack of a control group. Other limitations include that the lead researcher developed the semi-structured questions and performed the role of interviewer, increasing the possibility that personal bias may have informed the results of this study. However, thematic analysis provided a framework to handle the data and clearly disclose how analysis was conducted allowing the reader to decide whether the process is plausible enough to produce trustworthy and insightful findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Furthermore, a second researcher analysed the data in a collaborative and reflective approach

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with the main researcher to explore multiple assumptions and achieve richer interpretations of meaning (Bryne, 2022).

Currently, school readiness deficits among children when they first enrol in school are persisting and increasing in the UK, predisposing children to poor life trajectories, and producing further societal and economic problems (YouGov, 2021). Interventions that train adults to share picture books with pre-school children are associated with beneficial child development outcomes (Dowdall et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016). In this study, thematic analysis provided a platform to explore qualitative data through semi-structured interviews to help develop a real sense of the benefits, satisfaction and feasibility of the pre-school delivered the ‘Books Together’ programme. This study along with the quantitative findings (chapter 4) demonstrates that with minor adjustment, school delivery of the programme is an effective and mutually beneficial, satisfactory, and feasible intervention that may improve children’s school readiness skills. Subsequently, the current study justifies more rigorous research in a randomised controlled trial.

Chapter 4

Introducing and Evaluating School-Based Delivery of the 'Books Together Programme'

Abstract:

Growing numbers of children enter mainstream education with additional learning needs. Without additional support, they face poor long-term academic attainment, mental health difficulties and social problems. Parents of 3–5-year-old children ($n=16$) were recruited from four primary schools to investigate the feasibility of school-based delivery of a group dialogic Book-Sharing Programme (Books Together Programme), and to explore its impact on parental skills and children's school readiness. Measures of expressive child language, behaviour, and social-emotional ability and parenting competence were collected pre- and post-intervention. Thematic analysis of parent and school interviews explored programme satisfaction and feasibility (chapter 3). Significant post-intervention increases in child expressive language, prosocial behaviour and social/emotional ability and improved parenting competence were found. Thematic analysis showed staff and parent satisfaction and feasibility to deliver the programme in a school environment. The programme is low-cost and may increase the use of parenting strategies that build children's language and social/emotional skills and build home-school partnerships.

Keywords: Dialogic book-sharing; parent-child interactions; language; social/emotional ability; parent training.

Introduction

Growing numbers of children enter primary school with additional educational needs, especially those from socially disadvantaging circumstances (O'Connor et al, 2018). Approximately 30% of UK children fail to meet typical developmental milestones in communication and language, personal, social, or emotional development by the time that they start school and, consequently, are not equipped to prosper in school and achieve their full academic potential (Action for Children, 2017). These developmental delays occur more frequently among socially disadvantaged children and are evident by age 5 (Ofsted, 2014). This is a public health concern as poor cognitive and social/emotional development at age 5 is strongly correlated with longer term academic underachievement, mental and physical health difficulties, poor social skills, and unemployment (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015)

The Welsh Government has implemented several early intervention strategies including Flying Start, an initiative to improve the longer-term outcomes of children living in highly deprived Welsh communities (Flying Start: Welsh Government, 2019). This includes free part-time childcare for 2-3-year-olds, enhanced health visiting, access to parenting programmes and support for children's language and communication skills. However, although most low-income families reside in Flying Start areas many socially disadvantaged families cannot access these services due to living outside these areas (Shelter Cymru, 2018) so a significant number of at-risk children cannot access targeted early intervention support. Furthermore, even among those living in Flying Start areas many, particularly the socially disadvantaged families, are not engaging with services (Griffith, Bywater, Williams, & Baker-Henningham, 2013).

The Early Years Foundation Phase curriculum (EYFP, 2019) is a Welsh Government universal initiative targeting children's school readiness. This sets out statutory guidance that childminders, preschools, nurseries, and school reception classes must follow to promote

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children’s communication and language, physical, personal, social, and emotional development. It encourages play-based learning as the basis on which children learn most effectively (Waters, 2016). However, it lacks specific implementation guidance (EYFP, 2019) and alongside teachers, classroom support staff, generally not trained teachers, undertake most of the one-to-one work with children needing additional support despite evidence that more highly skilled adults working with children, achieve better outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Therefore, the EYFP strategic objectives may not be universally achieved.

An EYFP Profile assessment tool is completed by teaching staff within six weeks of a child entering the first statutory school year. The Profile assesses children’s knowledge, understanding and abilities against expected attainment levels at age 5 and identifies children with additional needs for individualised support. To date, the Welsh Government has not published data regarding the number of children meeting expected developmental levels. However, in England 29.3% of children have not achieved expected levels across all early learning goals (Department for Education, 2019) and given higher levels of social deprivation in Wales (Hughes and Davies, 2018), it is likely that figures in Wales are higher. Indeed, at age 15 Welsh students score lower on proficiency tests and have a smaller proportion of high achievers than those in England (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2014).

Several evidence-based school interventions are delivered in the UK, including Promoting Alternative Thinking Skills (PATHS; Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995) and Incredible Years ® Dinosaur School (Webster-Stratton, 2011). These programmes teach social/emotional regulation and problem-solving skills using teacher-led discussion, role play and modelling. However, they are not widespread and are primarily school lesson-

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based and, to date, little work has been done to include parents in children’s education (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019).

The pre-school home environment is the strongest predictor of school readiness (Hart & Risley, 1995) and children whose parents speak little to them (Gridley, Hutchings, & Baker-Henningham, 2013) or whose homes lack stimulation (Jeong, O, Pitchik, & Yousafzai, 2018) frequently start school with significant skill deficits (Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg, & Peters, 2011). Social disadvantage impacts parents’ ability to nurture their children, delaying their cognitive, language and social/emotional development, self-regulation, behaviour and self-esteem (Dearing et al., 2006). By contrast, interactive parenting buffers the negative effects of disadvantage, promoting healthy early cognitive development that benefits longer-term academic attainment (Whittle et al., 2017). However, although Government initiatives aim to enhance the development of pre-school children, many start schools without the skills to prosper in that environment (Action for Children, 2016).

Home-school relationships are significant predictors of children’s academic attainment (Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013). Strong home/school partnerships cultivate children’s academic and social-emotional capabilities and school support creates parental satisfaction, efficacy, and community bonds (Epstein, 2010). A lack of parental involvement in children’s education negatively affects their perception of school and ambition (Sheppard, 2009). Regrettably, parental motivation is often negatively impacted by financial hardship, time constraints and school procedures that discourage positive partnerships (Ucus, Garcia, Eserlaich, & Raikes, 2017). Children learn more when school, family, and community work collaboratively with shared objectives and responsibilities (Bryan & Henry, 2012) regardless of child age or ethnic origin (Wilder, 2014).

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Despite the need for parental involvement, research into ways of promoting home/school partnerships is limited and inconsistent (Welsh et al., 2014). Some work has been done in Wales using the Incredible Years ® school readiness programme (Hutchings, Pye, Bywater, and Williams, 2020). This four-session parenting programme builds children’s academic, social/emotional, and problem-solving skills (Webster-Stratton, 2011) through play and using books to aid discussion and was delivered by school staff to groups of parents. The first evaluation of the programme (Hutchings et al., 2020) demonstrated feasibility for school staff to deliver it and increased parent and child skills. However, the costly training and resources suggested the need for feasible, low cost, school-based interventions to support parents.

Parenting programmes that teach dialogic book-sharing strategies increase preschool children’s language skills (Dowdell, Melendez-Torres, Murray, Hartford, & Cooper, 2019). Adults use the picture content of books to encourage children’s participation by following their focus of interest, active listening, open questioning, reflecting on their utterances, and praising and encouraging them, creating a stimulating environment that reinforces children’s language. A meta-analysis of 19 book-sharing interventions with parents of children aged 1 to 6 years (Dowdell et al, 2019) found that reciprocal exchanges between parents and children encouraged children’s expressive and receptive language. Whitehurst and colleagues (1994) reported that teaching book-sharing through videotape modelling techniques and group role play were financially viable strategies to increase pre-school children’s language development.

Dialogic book-sharing encourages several school readiness skills. A South African randomised controlled trial (RCT) with socially disadvantaged mothers of 14–16-month-olds, at risk of developmental delay, demonstrated significant increases in children’s language skills and attention span (Cooper et al., 2015). Analysis of data from the same programme

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(Murray et al. 2016) reported that improvements in parental sensitivity, elaboration and reciprocity facilitated children’s language, attention, and pro-social behaviour. However, these studies were with parents of infants, and there is little research exploring the benefits of dialogic book-sharing with older children.

Given the number of children arriving at school with additional learning needs, the benefits of book sharing programmes for children language and social/emotional skills and the importance of parental involvement in children’s education, there is a need to evaluate a school delivered book sharing programme (Welsh, Bierman, & Mathis, 2014). Delivered during the preschool phase this could promote parent-school co-operation and children’s school readiness skills.

Aims

The current study was designed to:

- i) Test the feasibility and acceptability of the ‘Books Together’ programme delivered by school-based staff to parents of children aged 3-5 years.
- ii) Explore initial effectiveness of the programme in terms of its impact on child language and social-emotional competencies and parenting skills.

Method

Design

Data were collected for a pre-post pilot study using a mixed methods approach to explore the impact of school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme (Murray, Jennings, Mortimer, Prout, & Melhuish, 2018). Quantitative analysis assessed outcomes using a repeated measures design via questionnaires, a gaming format child language assessment, and direct observation of parent/child interactions. Qualitative interviews explored satisfaction with, and feasibility of, programme delivery for parents and school-

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based facilitators. The qualitative aspect of this study is reported in Chapter 4, however the full study including the qualitative and quantitative elements was submitted for publication and is currently under review (see Appendix A).

Recruitment

School recruitment. Study details were sent to North Wales primary schools in a monthly bulletin from the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service. Schools were invited to contact the research team with expressions of interest (See Appendix B). Five schools responded and were recruited by the researcher through direct telephone contact and school visits. Leaflets describing programme content, training and resources provision and expectations of school-based commitment were provided (See Appendix C). Two schools predominantly taught through the medium of Welsh and three predominantly English. One school failed to recruit parents and withdrew from the study. Four schools participated in the study, including the two Welsh medium schools.

Family recruitment. Information regarding the study was provided for schools to explain the study to parents (see Appendix D). Parents were recruited by the schools by sending letters home and/or directly contacting families of children needing support with language, behaviour, and/or social interactions. Families were included if they committed to the seven-week programme and had a child aged 3-5 years. Five parents from each school agreed to participate, however one parent from each school withdrew before programme delivery (See flow diagram in Figure 4.1).

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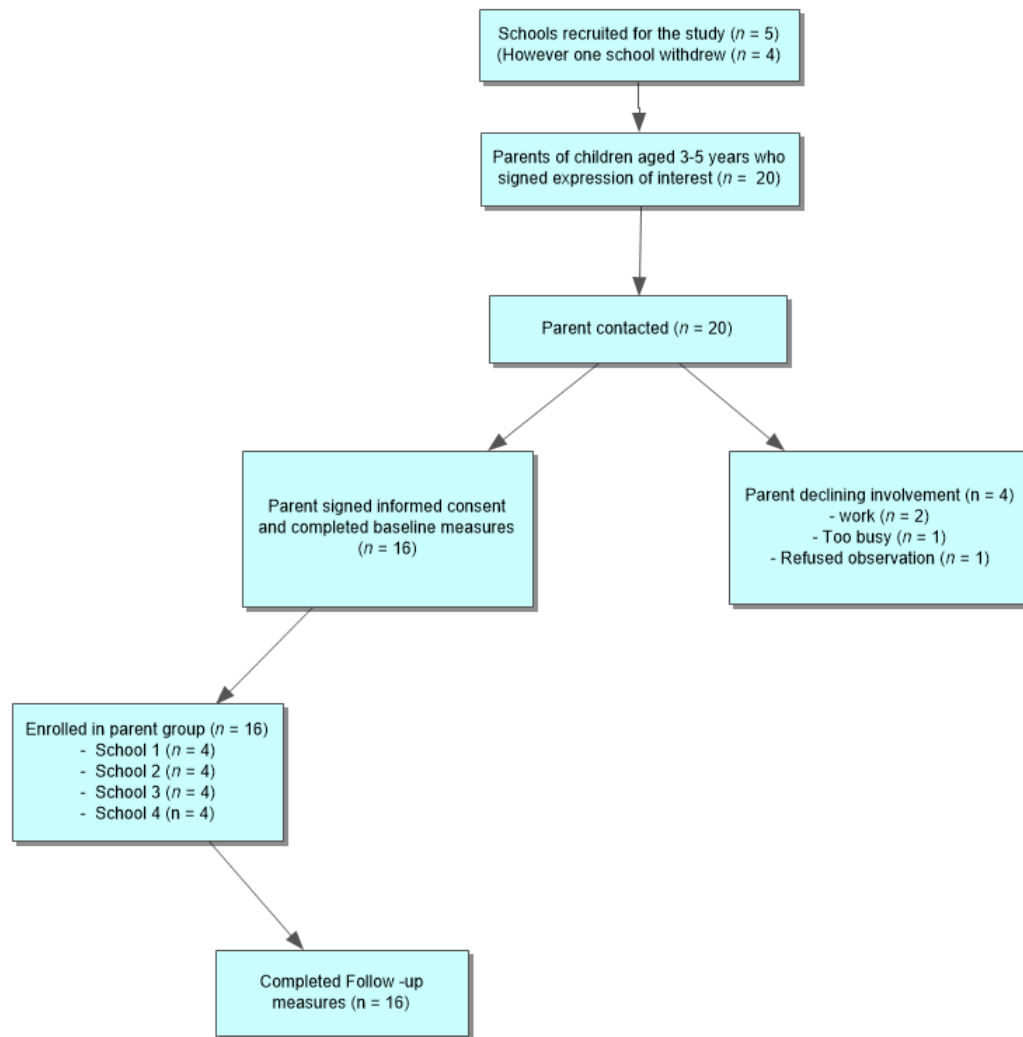


Figure 4.1: Participant flow diagram.

Measures

Data were collected using direct observation of parent-child interactions, well-established parent completed standardised questionnaires, recorded interviews with parents, and an assessment of expressive language developed for child responses on an iPad.

Family Demographics Questionnaire

This questionnaire captured information regarding basic socio-demographic details, including characteristics of the family structure, parental education, and participant age (See Appendix E).

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Feasibility outcomes. Feasibility outcomes were operationalised as programme satisfaction and acceptability and explored using semi-structured interviews with parents and school-based staff (reported in Chapter 4).

Parent/child interaction – based on the Dyadic Parent-Child Interaction Coding System (DPICS; Robinson & Eyberg, 1981). The observational coding tool was used to analyse parent/child interactions during a 10-minute home observation. Observations were video recorded for later analysis to obtain an account of the behaviours of interest and to improve external validity (Friman, et al., 2000). The observation was based on categories from the DPICS (Robinson & Eyberg, 1981) to assess parent/child interactions during a 10-minute shared reading activity. Nine verbal behaviour categories: unlabelled praise, labelled praise, encouragement, reflection, academic coaching, social-emotional coaching, linking to child experience, and negative parenting were used to capture parenting behaviours taught in the programme. Each coding sheet recorded the frequency of verbal behaviours over a five-minute interval, by scoring a mark in the applicable tally box each time that the behaviour occurred (See Appendix F). The DPICS is a widely researched measurement and has shown good reliability ($r = .91$ parent behaviour; $r = .92$ child behaviour; Robinson & Eyberg, 1981).

Child behaviour. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) is a brief parent-reported behavioural screening measure for 2-16-year-olds to detect social-emotional and behavioural problems (See Appendix G). It has five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour. There are two age versions, and it is available in many languages. The present study utilised the English language versions for children aged 2 to 4 years and children aged 4 to 16 years to cover the study child age range. The SDQ has 25 items measured on a 3-point Likert scale, with responses not true, somewhat true, and

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certainly true. A total difficulties score is attained by combining scores from the four problem subscales. Higher scores indicate greater levels of difficulties with 0-13 categorised as close to average, 14-16 as slightly raised, 17-19 as high, and 20-40 as very high. The SDQ has good internal consistency (mean $\alpha = .73$), test-retest stability ($r = .62$), and discriminant validity (Stone, Otten, Engels, Vermulst, & Janssens, 2010).

Child social-emotional ability. The Ages and Stages Social–Emotional questionnaire (ASQ:SE; Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001) is a parent-completed social-emotional screener for children aged between 1 and 6 years (See Appendix H). Age-appropriate versions were used for children aged 33-42 months, 42-54 months, or 54-72 months to cover the child age range. Each questionnaire contains 39 questions covering seven behavioural areas: self-regulation, compliance, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, social-communication, and interaction with people. Items score on a three-point Likert scale, often/always, sometimes, or rarely/never which are converted to points of 10, 5, and 0 respectively. Low scores (0-70) indicate expected levels of social-emotional competency, medium scores (70-85) indicate further monitoring is required, and higher scores (85 and above) indicate high risk of current social-emotional problems. The ASQ:SE has high internal consistency for all scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$) (Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001).

Parental competence. The Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnstone & Mash, 1989) is a 17 item self-report questionnaire that measures parents’ sense of their own competence using two broad scales: efficacy and satisfaction with their own parenting (See Appendix I). Responses are rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree, to 6 = strongly agree. The PSOC has strong internal consistency on both the efficacy and satisfaction scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.80$) (Ohan, Leung, & Johnson, 2000).

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Child language. The Early Years Toolbox (EYT; Howard & Melhuish, 2016) is a 45-item iPad-based assessment of children’s ability to identify and name objects to assess child language ability and takes around five minutes to complete. Children respond verbally to images on the iPad, and responses are recorded by the researcher on the iPad app by clicking one of three individual keys, correct response, specific response, or do not know. The measure displays excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$) (Howard & Melhuish, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consent was obtained from Bangor School of Psychology Ethics committee (application number: 2019-16439). All study participants provided written informed consent which outlined their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty (See Appendix J).

Procedures

School recruitment. Head teachers of five primary schools in North Wales who showed interest in the study were telephoned. The researcher then visited the school to discuss the study and outline participant expectations, including what would be provided for programme delivery (staff training, guidance manuals, see Appendix K), videos, books (see Appendix L), and weekly handouts, (see Appendix M). Schools released a staff member to attend the two-day Book-Sharing training in January 2019 and for two hours a week for seven-weeks to deliver the programme to parents of nursery and reception class children between February and April 2019. One school dropped-out before commencing programme delivery due to other school commitments restricting the time available to deliver the programme.

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Parent/family recruitment. Schools were asked to recruit the parents and children by distribution of letters, describing the programme and the study, requesting that parents complete and return a note of interest. As this generated few responses from parents, schools made direct contact with families of children whom they thought may benefit. Schools forwarded contact details of interested parents to the researcher who telephoned them to discuss the programme and expectations of involvement. Interested participants were then visited at home to obtain written informed consent to participation (See Appendix N).

Data collection. Data were collected from participants during two home visits, one following signed consent (baseline) and one immediately following programme completion. Semi-structured interviews with parents and school-based staff were also conducted after programme completion. Participants were invited to provide data in their preferred language however all chose the medium of English. Each parent/child dyad was observed, and video-recorded for 10 minutes in a reading observation for later analysis. An Usborne Farmyard Tales series book, for children aged between 3 and 6 years, was provided and parents asked to look at the book with their child for 10 minutes. The books include brief simple text in a bright and colourful context. To control for prior experience ‘The Naughty Sheep’ was used at baseline and ‘Pig got Stuck’ post-course. Following training, the first author (primary coder) coded all video observations, and the second author (the criterion coder) coded 25% of randomly selected videos for inter-rater reliability. Researchers achieved good inter-rater reliability (80%) across all scales. The interclass correlations (ICC) were between .795 and .987. Post-intervention semi-structured interviews with parents and school-staff were audio recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis (See Appendix O).

Intervention

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The ‘Books Together’ Programme was initially developed by Murray and Cooper (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016) to promote shared reading for parents of 14-18 months old children, in highly disadvantaged communities in South Africa. The seven-session programme teaches parents to have stimulating and rich interactions with children over a picture-book, and to engage them actively in conversation about the picture content, relating it to their own experience and encouraging curiosity and thinking skills. To date, the programme has mainly been trialled in South Africa where groups run by trained facilitators for four to six caregivers of children aged 14-28 months were highly successful (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016). Since then, several versions have been developed for children of different ages. The programme is included in the Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative to prevent or reduce violence against children by developing, testing and disseminating low-cost parenting interventions, led by the World Health Organisation and partner universities (Wessels et al., 2019).

In this study, school-based staff delivered the seven session 3–5-year-old programme, that was developed for delivery in the UK, in two-hour weekly sessions (Murray et al., 2018) to groups of four parents. A member of staff from each school (one teacher and four teaching assistants) was trained and provided with the resources needed to deliver the programme. Each session introduces specific parenting strategies. Topics include building and enriching language, numbers, and comparisons, linking to child experience, feelings, intentions, perceptions, and strengthening relationships. During the first hour PowerPoint slides, illustrative video clips and group discussion take place. During the second hour, children join their parents under the guidance of the facilitator, to practice the strategies taught that week. Parents receive feedback and instruction for continued practice. A new book and handout are provided each week for home practice which the families keep. Parents are encouraged to

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practice for 10-15 minutes a day with their child. Discussion on home practice is explored at the start of the following session.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative. Measures of parental competence, child behaviour, language, and social-emotional ability were analysed in the International Business Machine Corporation Statistical Package for Social Sciences 22 (IBM SPSS statistics 22). Data were scored according to the guidelines for each measure. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated. Paired samples *t*-tests were performed to determine intervention effects. The SDQ, ASQ:SE, and behavioural observation measures violated the assumption of normality and were therefore analysed using an equivalent non-parametric test (Wilcoxon Signed Rank).

Qualitative. Interviews were recorded to capture the ideas, views, and experiences of the parents who completed the programme and the staff who delivered it. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014) was used to establish the feasibility of, and satisfaction with, the programme from the school staff/parent interviews. The interviews were externally transcribed and then read and re-read to generate ideas for themes. These results are reported in Chapter 3.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Fifteen mothers and one father participated. Nine children (56%) were male and seven (44%) lived in single parent homes. Most children ($n = 11$, 69%) scored high or very high on the parent reported SDQ indicating significant behavioural concerns. Seven children (44%) scored as high-risk on the ASQ:SE suggesting significant social-emotional difficulties. Nine

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parents (56 %) were unemployed and four (25%) had left school without qualifications (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Sample characteristics at baseline

Demographics	All (N = 16)
Parent Age, years: <i>M (SD)</i>	33.44 (6.67)
Child Age, months: <i>M (SD)</i>	56.87 (6.89)
Parent Gender, male: <i>n (%)</i>	1 (6.25)
Child Gender, male: <i>n (%)</i>	9 (56.25)
Age Parent Left School, years: <i>M (SD)</i>	16.69 (2.24)
Further Education: <i>n (%)</i>	12 (75.0)

Programme Engagement

All participants completed the programme, with 12 parents (75%) attending at least six sessions and 10 (63%) attending all seven (*mean attendance* = 6.19, *SD* = 1.28).

Pre- and Post-course Results

Follow up measures were collected from all 16 parents (100%). Paired t-tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank nonparametric tests were conducted to explore the effects on children’s behaviour, social/emotional ability, and language capacity, as well as parenting self-efficacy and programme satisfaction.

Parent outcomes. For the observation outcomes, a Wilcoxon signed-rank nonparametric test showed significant increases in the frequency of use of the positive parenting strategies of *praise and encouragement*: $Z = -2.064, p = .039$; *reflection*, $Z = -2.323, p = .020$; *academic coaching*: $Z = -2.983, p = .003$; *social-emotional coaching*: $Z = -2.656, p = .008$; and *linking*: $Z = -2.380, p = 0.017$. There was also a reduction in use of

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negative parenting strategies: $Z = -2.012$, $p = .044$. There was no significant difference for the frequency of *questions*: $p = .222$.

A paired samples t -test on parental competence (PSOC) showed improved parenting competence and satisfaction $t(15) = -6.05$, $p = <.001$ (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for parent outcomes of 10 minutes (per category) observational data from the reading task and parenting competency (n = 14)

Observation Reading	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Praise and Encouragement	9.63 (7.03)	14.21 (8.98)	.039*	0.5
Reflection	14.43 (9.94)	20.07 (12.18)	.020*	0.6
Questions	4.86 (4.19)	3.07 (3.17)	.222	0.1
Academic Coaching	47.36 (18.67)	67.21 (22.04)	.003**	0.8
Social-Emotional Coaching	5.93 (5.34)	12.86 (7.57)	.008**	0.7
Linking	1.93 (2.01)	6.29 (6.71)	.017*	0.6
Negative Strategies	3.64 (4.05)	1.50 (2.53)	.044*	0.5
PSOC	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>d</i>
Parenting competency	70.94 (13.02)	84.31(10.67)	<.001**	1.12

PAROT observation reading, *PSOC* parenting sense of competence scale

* Sig at $p < .05$ **Sig at $p < .01$

Child outcomes. Child outcomes were assessed by parent report of child behaviour (SDQ) and social/emotional ability (ASQ:SE), and researcher collected language competence (EYT). Children displayed increased expressive language competence (EYT) $t(15) = -9.48$, $p = < .001$ and had reduced overall behaviour problems (SDQ) at follow-up compared to baseline $Z = -2.653$, $p = .008$. Furthermore, children had reduced overall social-emotional

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difficulties compared to baseline $Z = -3.521$, $p = < .001$. Taken together this indicates that the interventions improved children’s language ability, social-emotional competence, and behaviour (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for child outcomes of language, behaviour and social-emotional competencies (n = 16)

Child Outcomes	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p-values</i>	<i>d</i>
EYT	26.40 (10.32)	38.73 (11.19)	.001**	1.15
SDQ	12.88 (7.62)	9.06 (6.38)	.009*	0.7
ASQ - SE	73.13 (51.21)	35.94 (31.26)	.001**	0.9

EYT Early years Toolbox child language measure, SDQ Strengths and difficulties child behaviour scale, ASQ-SE measure of child social-emotional ability

* Sig at $p < .05$ **Sig at $p < .01$

Discussion

This paper reports on the first feasibility study of the ‘Books Together’ programme for parents of 3–5-year-olds (Murray et al., 2018) delivered in school by school-based staff. It explored whether it was feasible for staff to deliver the programme and satisfaction with, and acceptance of, the programme by staff and parents (chapter 3). In addition, it explored outcomes for children and parents. Attendance was high with over 75% attending at least six and 63% attending all seven sessions.

Parents were mostly recruited through direct contact by school-based staff with parents of children whom they believed might benefit. This approach recruited four parents in each school. Parenting programmes do not always reach the families who could most benefit,

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and collaborative approaches are needed to ensure that families most likely to benefit are recruited (Williams, Hoare, Owen, & Hutchings, 2019). For this study a proactive approach, targeting and contacting those whose children were considered most in need, produced successful recruitment. Given that parental engagement in children’s education is a key factor in school success (Kingston et al., 2013) establishing how to encourage increased parental involvement in programmes like this is important.

Similar to other book-sharing studies, this study reports significant improvements in children’s expressive language, pro-social behaviour, and social/emotional competence, (Murray et al., 2016; Dowdell et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2015). The study also reported a significant improvement in observed positive, and a significant reduction in observed negative, parenting strategies. These results are positive but not comprehensive as statistical significance is affected by the small sample size. Yet, the effect sizes ranged from medium to large demonstrating that the magnitude of the result transfers over from being statistically significant to effective in practice in the real world, representing real benefit for children and parents (Aarts, Akker & Winkens, 2014). Large effect sizes have been established for other group- based parent programmes (Furlong et al., 2012; Lundahl et al, 2006). For example, in a meta-analysis, Furlong et al (2012) estimated an effect size of 0.69 for child behaviour outcomes in individually delivered parent programmes. The outcome that the effect sizes for the current study were higher is very encouraging in regarding to benefits of the programme for families.

To compliment the practical findings of the benefit of the programme, it was well received by parents, and their parenting self-efficacy and satisfaction improved. High levels of parental self-efficacy are associated with increases in quality of parent/child interactions, including parental warmth, responsiveness, and involvement (Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010) and with reduced child behaviour problems, improved school performance, and social

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functioning (Pellitier & Brent, 2002). This study confirms the findings in Chapter 3 which indicated that school staff found the programme acceptable, enjoyable, and easy to deliver. Improved home/school links were established, with all schools welcoming parental involvement during the programme which they reported promoted increased children's engagement with learning. Parental learning was well-supported by the programme resources, the videos offered a model of the behavioural strategies taught, weekly handouts reinforced key learning points for home practice and the books focused children's attention and interest (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, thematic analyses implied increased parent/child bonding, parental confidence, and children's interest in, and enjoyment of, the books. The programme supported parents in assisting children's understanding of their own emotions and intentions, and the perspectives of others, resulting in reduced challenging child behaviour

Delivery barriers included group management challenges, a lack of school resources and technical difficulties. Facilitator training did not include group leadership skills training and no supervision was provided during programme delivery (see chapter 3). Given the complex needs of the families recruited, group leadership skills training and supervision could increase school facilitators confidence and skills in effectively managing the group (Flay et al. 2005). However, despite the challenges, parent retention was excellent, and the programme positively impacted on children's experience of school and motivation to achieve (Sheppard, 2009). School staff would like to continue to deliver the programme confirming that it is a feasible and acceptable intervention for school-based delivery (see Chapter 3).

The current study has strengths including the high rates of parental attendance, retention, and programme satisfaction. The use of a mixed method approach improved the likelihood of valid inferences. However, the study has several limitations including the small sample size and absence of control group. Another weakness was the absence of data regarding father's parenting behaviour. This is an under researched phenomenon (Panter-

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Brick et al., 2014) and fathers have a substantial impact on children’s developmental outcomes (McWayne, Downer, Campos, & Harris, 2013). However engaging fathers is challenging. Furthermore, since the study had a limited timescale, it was not possible to explore long-term programme impact.

Despite the limitations the preliminary findings are positive and justify a larger, more rigorous RCT trial. Low parenting satisfaction and competence reduce positive parent/child interaction during the pre-school phase and are associated with poor child development at aged five (Welsh et al., 2014). The process of delivering to parents during their children’s pre-school years has several benefits. It builds home-school links, it teaches skills to both parents and school-based staff, school-based staff can encourage parents of children with language and communication needs and the children are accessible for the second half of the session obviating the need for childcare. Therefore, current findings support the need for more rigorous future research to explore the benefits of school-based delivery of the programme on parental strategies and well-being, and children’s school readiness skills.

Chapter 5

Exploring the Benefits, Satisfaction and Feasibility of Online Delivery of the 'Books Together' programme

A Qualitative Study

Introduction

This chapter reports the qualitative findings from parent interviews following online engagement in the ‘Books Together’ programme’. This approach offered in depth findings to strengthen the likelihood of making valid inferences regarding the quantitative findings in Chapter 5. Recently, Covid -19 restrictions have elevated the risks of poor school readiness and made the direct delivery of parenting interventions impossible (Araujo, Veloso, Souza, Azevedo, & Tarro, 2021; YouGov, 2021). Parenting programmes that teach dialogic book-sharing (DBS) strategies are associated with children’s improved school readiness ability (Dowdell, Melendez-Torres, Murray, Hartford, & Cooper, 2019), yet to our knowledge, to date, there are no accessible evidence-based DBS online parenting programmes or evidence as to whether parents effectively engage with this mode of delivery. This chapter reports data from the qualitative data collected on the remote delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme (Chapter 6) aimed at improving the parenting skills associated with children’s school readiness to generate insights into the benefits and feasibility of, and satisfaction with, the remote delivery approach.

Method

Design

Thematic analysis (TA) was used to interpret interview data collected from participants who engaged in online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme. TA is a method for classifying, analysing, and reporting themes within interview data to consolidate and describe the data set in richer detail.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from Bangor School of Psychology Ethics committee

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(Application number: 2020-16699). All study participants provided informed consent which outlined their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Participants

A stratified random sample of 12 of the 35 parents who completed the main study (see chapter 5) were selected based on the number of weekly session surveys completed to provide a representative sample. Of the sample selected for interview, four (33.33%) parents completed six or more of the weekly session surveys and eight (66.66%) less than five, of whom two (16.67%) had not completed any, indicating varying degrees of programme engagement. The main researcher contacted the selected parents to determine their willingness and to obtain verbal consent to their participation in the audio recorded telephone interviews.

Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded to capture, in their own words, the idea's, views, and experiences of a selection of the parents who took part in the online study. Interviews were conducted by the main researcher, and all parents were asked the same open-ended questions to gain their views regarding the programme content, resources, accessibility, benefits, challenges, and recommendations for future directions.

Questions included:

- 1) ‘How have you found the Book-Sharing programme?’
- 2) ‘How much of the programme did you complete?’
- 3) ‘What (if any) problems did you experience that made it difficult for you to complete the programme?’
- 4) ‘What did you like most about the programme?’

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- 5) ‘What did you like least about the programme?’
- 6) ‘Which weekly session did you find most useful?’
- 7) ‘What are your thoughts about the course materials?’ (Books, videos, and handouts)
- 8) ‘How accessible was the online programme content and what electronic device did you use to access the material?’
- 9) ‘Who do you think would most benefit from the Book-Sharing programme?’
- 10) ‘Can you think of any way the programme could be improved?’

Each interview lasted approximately 10 minutes and was conducted over the telephone due to Covid-19 restrictions. Interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone. Open-ended questions were utilised to provide a more contextual insight into parent’s experiences of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once interviews had been conducted, TA was used to identify, analyse, and describe patterned meaning within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Firstly, a research assistant transcribed 80:39 minutes of audio recorded interview data into word format excluding any identifying information. Thematic analysis was then conducted by incorporating the stages as specified by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) gaining familiarity with your data; (2) generating initial codes or labels; (3) searching for themes or main ideas; (4) reviewing themes or main ideas; (5) defining and naming themes or main ideas; and (6) producing the report. During this process, a personal reflexivity approach to analysis (Finlay, 1998) was adopted, to identify any biases that might influence interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the main researcher had earlier analysed parent interviews in a school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme, therefore during the process of the coding and analysis of transcripts, an effort was made to limit the influence of earlier views (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A second researcher analysed the data in a collaborative and reflective approach with the main researcher to explore multiple

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assumptions and achieve richer interpretations of meaning (Bryne, 2022). An extract of an interview transcription can be found in **Appendix P**.

Results

Four main themes and ten subthemes were captured from the twelve transcripts. This section defines the themes and present extracts of descriptive data to illustrate each subtheme. Anonymity was maintained by assigning individual identification numbers to each transcript. Themes are presented in Figure 5.1.

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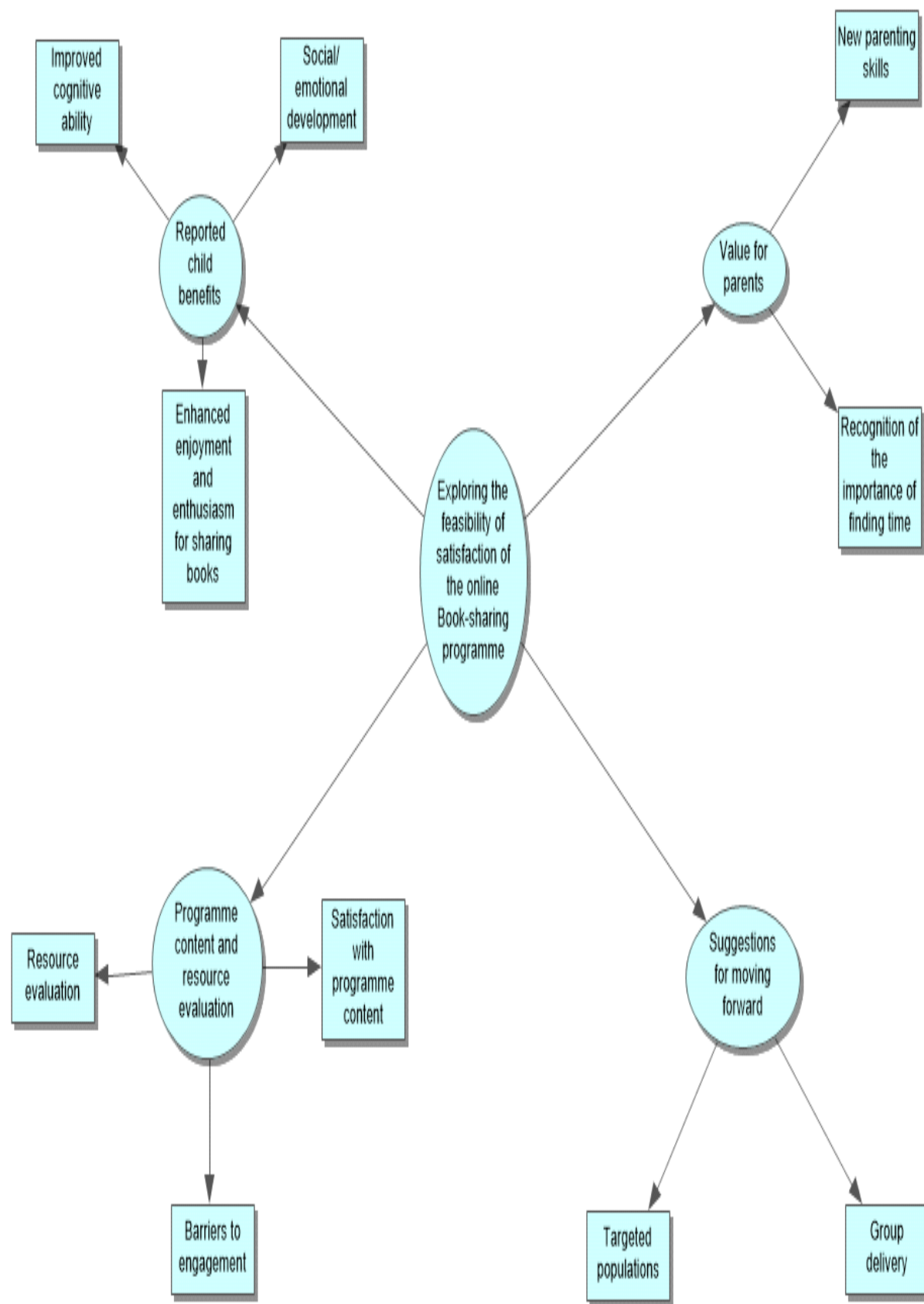


Figure 5.1: Thematic map of the four main themes (ovals) and ten subthemes (rectangles).

Main Theme 1: Reported Child benefits

Subtheme 1) Improved cognitive ability. It was reported that children's cognitive development improved during programme engagement. Five parents (41.66%) indicated that the behavioural strategies taught during the programme, such as expanding on child utterances, open questioning, rephrasing, and linking, facilitated increased imagination, retrieval of child memories, and recognition of similarities between the book characters and children's own personal experiences. One interviewee explained that her child began to identify, and name, a wider range of colours following programme engagement. Overall, this suggests that book-sharing positively influenced children's cognitive growth. The following excerpts illustrate this.

Parent 101: "It made me explore books more with her and ask more open-questions and relate it to experiences she had, so usually when she used to read a story we never used to kind of, "oh yeah do you remember that day out" and it brought back memories"

Parent 601: "I couldn't believe that she, cos she's only just turned four, so she's, you know... a little one for the year, that she could link so much, and then you know, even with some of the animal books she remembers when we had seen the animals before and when we went to the butterfly jungle in Anglesey, so she linked quite a lot you know"

Parent 602: "Yeah, and it's good that she's, we've been relating more to what we're seeing in the book, relating it more to, you know, her personal life and her experiences-which is something that we wouldn't have done before book share. Yeah so, the book-share has definitely opened that avenue, yeah, to us"

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Parent 204: “Very stimulating books, lots of pictures that he enjoys pointing at and looking for the finer details. They were really easy to follow, very easy for him to interpret and give out his interpretation of the stories”

Parent 502: “I think just, you know for him, for example, one of the books, I think it was ‘Handa’, I can’t remember the name of it, but where it was the colours. You know, ‘look at the colour of that hat’, you know, he now knows really good colours like purples and greens and turquoises and it’s almost like describing colours, you know, he’s picked that up”

Parent 602: “I found it quite astonishing that she could link pictures to people in her family and what she’s recognised family members doing and how they eat with their hands and not cutlery, and she linked all that”

Subtheme 1: excerpts

Subtheme 2) Social /emotional development. Most participants (75%) reported the programme provided a unique opportunity to reinforce children’s social/emotional development. Six parents (50%) reported that book-sharing created a rich environment to stimulate children’s empathetic capacity as it offered a chance for them to consider and discuss the experiences of the book characters and to identify with how they were feeling. Consequently, parents said children’s experience, expression, and capacity to manage a variety of feelings improved and increased their pro-social behaviour.

Parent 1204: “It was, err, it was really good. Erm, very helpful with dealing with emotional problems...erm, he was able to actually say what people were thinking, how they would be feeling at that time, how he’d be feeling, erm so, yeah really, really good”

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Parent 502: My child is much, much, calmer, initially we had concerns about his behaviour and outbursts – so much so that we had to call the health visitor in. However, during the weeks, we have been doing it, we’ve spent a lot more time with him, we have seen his behaviour and moods improve. Actually, calming him down has improved significantly, so much so that we have been able to get hold of the health visitor and say, ‘actually we don’t need help now’, we don’t need a home visit we have it under control”

Parent 503: “Erm...oooh...I’ll be honest, I think they’ve all been useful...erm, I think the one where it was learning him, teaching him how to sort of say sorry, because that’s something that [name] had nothing – he would not ever, ever apologise for anything, he would blow if we said ‘look you shouldn’t do this’. Erm, and all of a sudden, he’s come out now and started to say he’s sorry and genuinely mean it, and he uses it at the right moments as well, so you know it’s not just a word he’s picked up. Erm, I actually believe he knows what the word sorry means”

Parent 704: “It’s been really good, really helpful, I’ve seen a huge improvement in my child and it’s just been amazing. His concentration, his behaviour, he’s just become a different child really. Especially with the lockdown situation, it’s just been brilliant- he’s so much more loving, he’s more fun to be around. He’s, he’s just different, just brilliant now...compared to what he was”

Subtheme 2: excerpts

Subtheme 3) Enhanced enjoyment and enthusiasm for sharing books. Parents reported that children’s enthusiasm and enjoyment with books increased because of becoming the narrator of a story. For example, ten parents (83.33%) described how applying joint attention and following a child’s lead during book-sharing strengthened their child’s

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satisfaction with, and interest in, sharing books and enhanced their ability to focus attention on the task. The following excerpts illustrate this view.

Parent 505: “She has definitely benefited from it, in the respect that she will pick books up herself now and read them as we have been reading them. Not necessarily the words but telling the stories through the pictures to her teddies, which I think is a definite improvement. And just the development in, in how excited she got with the books. I’ve not really seen that before.

Parent 204: “It’s really, really improved his enthusiasm for reading and like I’ve said previously, he wants to read all the time now, he doesn’t not want to read. It’s part of his bedtime routine, he’ll pick books up throughout the day and bring them either to myself or his mother”

Parent 601: “But I yeah, it was quite a long book, but I think that was more down to [child’s name] because she wanted to look at every single-literally we were picking out every single detail. Erm, and I found that as the days went on...it, we were actually going more into depth with it, so it was taking a lot longer. Which was a good thing because it showed that, you know, asking the questions and giving her attention before, on certain things, it was definitely opening that up, but there is, yeah, you, you know there was a couple of occasions we spent an hour”

Parent 502: “erm, the little one’s really, really enjoyed it”

Subtheme 3) excerpts

Eleven parents (91.67%) reported that children’s enjoyment with, and enthusiasm for, books increased because of the one-to-one time it created and that this strengthened the parent/child relationship.

Parent 204: “It brought us closer together”

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Parent 502: "Just actually...seeing his little face when we spent time on him. When we got the book out, realising just how much he loved that one-on-one time, erm, and it was...it was, it was just that, actually thinking. Do you know what, it doesn't matter if I haven't hoovered, I'll just sit down with a book with him, and it's been brilliant seeing his reaction. Its lovely"

Parent 603: "Erm, I think, it was really nice to have erm, kind of like to have an excuse to have a bit of one on one, just with her. She enjoyed them all, just the fact she was sharing books"

Parent 602: "Erm, I'm just really pleased, pleased I took part, and I found the, it has really helped us bond a little bit more"

Parent 1204: "It was nice to see him actually interacting with a book rather than him sitting there listening to me reading. He was taking interest, actually in it, so it was nice to have that one-on-one time with him"

Parent 601: "Yes, which, which was a good thing because it showed that, you know, asking the questions and giving her attention on certain things, it was definitely opening that up, but there is, yeah, you, you know there was a couple of occasions when we spent an hour"

Parent 1204: "It was nice just to have that little one on one time with him"

 Subtheme 3) excerpt

Four parents (33.33%) reported that children's enthusiasm for, and enjoyment of books increased following programme engagement.

Parent 602: "Only just a big thank-you – we have loved it and seen a huge difference. Erm, especially where she'll go and find a book and bring it to me or her little sister, sort of trying her version of reading a story, and following the pictures and what she thinks happening. And its lovely to see, cos before she just used to flick through a

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book and maybe occasionally pick out something and ask about that, but now, it's you know, she's confident to go off, you know and look at books herself and share them with other people”

Parent 505: “Erm, yes, she's definitely, er, benefitted from it, in the respect that she will pick up books herself now, erm and you know, and read them like we have been reading them. So, not necessarily the words but telling the story through the pictures to her toys, which I think is a definite improvement”

Subtheme 3) excerpts

Five parents (41.66%) explained that book-sharing created predictable and positive experiences for children and that they intended to integrate it into their daily schedule following programme completion.

Parent 505 “And now sharing books every day is just part of what we do”

Parent 704: “We sit down for a good 10 minutes every evening after tea and share a book, and he enjoys doing that, it's just brilliant”

Subtheme 3) excerpts

Main Theme 2: Value for parents

Subtheme 1: New parenting skills. Most parents interviewed (11, 91.67%) valued the new parenting skills acquired during the programme. Firstly, parents welcomed the social/emotional coaching skills taught, as it developed their children's understanding of how emotions work and how to react to feelings in useful ways. For example, parents developed the ability to use the picture content of books to aid discussion regarding children's feelings and to guide them about appropriate expressive responses in the real world. Consequently, children's emotional regulation improved, promoting their prosocial behaviour. One parent

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explained that this was a valued aspect of the programme, as it supported her child’s emotional well-being during Covid-19 isolation restrictions.

Parent 204: “It helped to show emotion in pictures and discuss with my son and he seemed to get a lot out of it. Some of the topics don’t come up in day-to-day conversations, so if you have a book you can say to your child, what are your thoughts on this? What do you think of these emotions? Why do you think this person is feeling this way?”

Parent 502: “Erm...oooh...I’ll be honest, I think they’ve all been useful...erm, I think the one where it was learning him, teaching him how to sort of say sorry, because that’s something that [name] had nothing – he would not ever, ever apologise for anything, he would blow if we said ‘look you shouldn’t do this’. Erm, and all of a sudden, he’s come out now and started to say he’s sorry and genuinely mean it, and he uses it at the right moments as well, so you know it’s not just a word he’s picked up. Erm, I actually believe he knows what the word sorry means”

Parent 1204: “Erm, very helpful with dealing with emotional problems”

Subtheme 1) excerpts

Five parents (41.66%) said that the programme supported them in understanding their child’s world schemas. For example, parents discovered that children commonly generated rules and ideas regarding the book content based on their own individual experiences. Parents explained that they learned how to follow their child’s interest during book-sharing and elaborate on their utterances with open questions, to encourage them to elaborate on the book content and create an interactive learning experience. Consequently, parents began to recognise their children’s level of understanding and personal beliefs.

Parent 204: "I think parents get a great deal out of it, because it allows children to say their own thoughts freely and say what they think about the subject matter"

Parent 301: "Well it was really interesting and very helpful for, as a parent to understand how to make, make them read the book. It's not only reading it, it's interacting with them"

Parent 405: "It was actually sitting down and looking at the books and like making different scenarios and seeing a child's perspective on it"

Parent 301: "Now I know most of what [child's name] is happy or not happy about. This programme put us both in a situation for me to understand how [child's name] is feeling. I understand now that he doesn't like other children being poor or hungry, or if they have sad faces, he doesn't want it"

Parent 601: "Erm, it was very interesting, I thought and because I already read with my little girl anyway, erm, I just found it, like, encouraged us to read for longer. Erm, and I've noticed the biggest improvement with myself rather than my little one, is that I was encouraging, erm, you know like, with asking questions and, you know like, add on information. We've been relating more to what we're seeing in the book, relating it more to, you know, her personal life and her experiences-which is something that we wouldn't have done before book share"

Parent 602: "I just, I think that it was great, going over the books, seeing how she responded to a book, and, yeah, listening to what she had to say about it rather than me just reading the text how I normally would of"

Parent 1101: "some of the things I was doing and some of the things I weren't, I wasn't doing, but...err, to see it all kind of written down in a structured way...so you can appreciate what, what you are doing and what you could be doing, that's been the best part of it"

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Subtheme 1) excerpt

Subtheme 2) Recognition of the importance of finding time. The programme aided an understanding of the importance of increasing the quantity and quality of parent/child interactions. For example, seven parents (58.33%) reported developing an awareness of the importance of finding time to have one to one time with their children, as it strengthened parent/child bonds and improved children's learning experiences. Therefore, parents found the time to book-share with their children despite other commitments and this reinforced a sense of self-efficacy in their parenting role.

Parent 101: "You know like, if you weren't on the programme, you might just, if you were tired, you would just go, 'oh let's forget about it tonight' kind of thing. But it was making you more like, 'no, c'mon we need to do this'"

Parent 502: "Absolutely brilliant, we've loved spending time doing the books, erm, the little ones really really enjoyed it. Erm, at first, I thought that we wouldn't have time to do it. But we just made time and it made such a difference. Thoroughly enjoyed it. Realising just how much he loved having his books read to him and how much he likes that one-on-one time, erm, and it was ...it was, it was just that, actually thinking "Do you know what, it doesn't matter if I haven't hoovered, I'll just sit down and read a book with him" and it's been brilliant seeing his reaction. It's lovely"

Parent 505: "I was asking lots of questions to her, so she was able to elaborate more. So, I have seen the biggest difference with me and the amount of time I would spend with her"

Parent 601: "I thought and because I already read with my little girl anyway, erm, I just found it, like, encouraged us to read for longer"

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Parent 602: "Yeah, cos we made an effort to go 'oh let's go and do our books' she called it her homework, because my other son had homework, so she thought it was her homework, you know so we would go off into a quiet space and do it together, so yes I was bonding with her really"

Parent 603: "I think, it was really nice to have erm, kind of like to have an excuse to have a bit of one on one, just with her. Erm, because often her older sister gets a lot more of the attention"

Parent 704: "I think it would be useful for every child to be on this programme. I really do, it's really turned him around and made me feel so much better as a parent. Really, lifted my mood and made me feel so much better"

Parent 1101: "It's more just to be aware, and it's not only when you're reading a book either is it? It's, it's to be aware that you, you can turn all these situations into little learning experiences"

Parent 301: "The best thing was that I learnt how to read a book with him and to ask questions to make it interactive"

Parent 204: "Erm, and I've noticed the biggest improvement with myself rather than my little one, is that I was encouraging, erm, you know like, with asking questions and, you know like, add on information. You know, so like, it rather, rather than her going on asking questions, I was asking questions to her, so she was being able to elaborate on it more. So, I think I've, I've probably seen the biggest difference with me and the time that I would spend doing it with her".

Subtheme 2) excerpts

Main Theme 3: Programme evaluation

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Subtheme 1) Satisfaction with programme engagement. All parents interviewed (12, 100%) reported completing the seven-week programme with varying degrees of engagement and mostly expressed that they and their children enjoyed participation. Ten parents (83.33%) reported that they were pleased that they had accepted the online programme opportunity and described it as an interesting and fun experience. It was commonly agreed that the parenting strategies taught in the programme enhanced children’s learning experiences and parent/child bonds, and subsequently satisfaction and enjoyment.

Parent 301: “Um, well it was really interesting and helpful. I’m grateful that I got an opportunity to join the Book-sharing programme and I’m feeling quite happy that I took the right decision for it and the outcome is very good for both of us – for me and [child’s name]. It was a very good programme”

Parent 602: “We have really enjoyed it as a family. Erm, I’m just really pleased, pleased I took part, and I found it really made us bond a little bit more. Absolutely loved it thank you”

Parent 704: “I feel we have both really benefited from it”

Parent 505: “We’ve enjoyed it. There are nice tips in there, we have definitely benefited from it”

Parent 603: “I really enjoyed it; we both did. Erm, it was nice to have something relaxing and cuddly to do with her”

Parent 502: “Absolutely brilliant. We’ve loved spending time doing the books”

Parent 204 “I found it really enjoyable, and my son got a lot out of it. It brought us closer together”

Subtheme 1) excerpts

Parents valued the informative and straightforward nature of the online programme delivery. A welcome feature was the telephone contact received from the research team

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during engagement at the end of week 3, as it supported parents in addressing any complications that they were experiencing.

Parent 204: “It was all pretty straightforward, err, the hand-outs were self-explanatory, the videos were easy to follow”

Parent 505: “It was all really informative; it wasn’t difficult to follow and the instructions were very clear”

Parent 502: “There were no problems, it was really easy to complete”

Parent 101: “You were very good and you were there if we needed it and stuff”

Parent 704: I mean I had you to fall back on, I had, erm...I think it was your professor that called in week 3 or 4, Which was...yeah, which was really nice- so if I’d had any problems, I could have had a chat with her, but I had actually no problems at all. So, it was nice for her to touch base...erm, as I say, you were always there at the end of the phone or a text.

Subtheme 1) excerpts

Subtheme 2) Resource evaluation. Overall, all parents (100%) considered the books (apart from one) to be stimulating, colourful, interesting, and developmentally appropriate for engaging their children in book-sharing. A particular highlight of the programme for parents was that the children were able to keep the books. Half of the parents interviewed (50%) said that children engaged best with the intentions and perceptions book-sharing sessions as the accompanying ‘Harry the dog’ books were most popular with, and engaging for, their children. Three parents, 25%, found the feelings session and the accompanying book ‘Hug’ most useful as it provided an opportunity for children to consider and discuss their own feelings and those of others, promoting their emotional intelligence. Of the other parents, one found the linking session most useful and used the strategy to discuss the circumstances of

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the book characters and link this to similarities with her child’s experience to expand learning. Three parents (25%) did not specify a session preference. The following excerpts illustrate parent viewpoints when asked which session and accompanying book in the programme had been of most use to them.

Parent 1204: “Harry the Dirty Dog, yeah, and it was obviously how the family would feel and erm, he really liked that book...erm, he, I think he enjoyed that one the most and the one at the sea- ‘Harry at the Sea’.

Parent 601: “The feelings week, I just think, because with the current situation with like the Covid and the lockdown, I just thought there was...there was feelings- ‘The Hug’... and then there was the ‘The Little Monkey’ as well... And those two she really kind of like...yeah, you know, you could see the emotion with her, she’s a lot more, like, you know, like, her empathy and you know her, you know sympathy... Yeah, it was Bobo wasn’t it-the monkey? The little chimp, yeah. Erm...yeah, so I think those, yeah, feelings were the most helpful, yeah”.

Parent 602: “Erm...I think the linking, I think I really, really found it, it really...I found it quite astonishing that she could link pictures to people in her family and what she’s recognised family members doing and how they eat with their hands and not cutlery, and she linked all that and the book went on we, you know, that was our longest session I think with that book”

Parent 204: “The books were appropriate; we got a lot of use out of them. My son keeps going back to them and not going to get bored of them. Very stimulating books, lots of pictures that he enjoys pointing at and looking for finer details. They were really easy for him to follow, very easy for him to interpret, and give out his interpretation of the stories”

Parent 704: “He absolutely loved the books”

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Parent 601: "We got to keep the books, which is brilliant"

Parent 405: "The books are really nice, and you know, we are lucky we get to keep them as well"

Parent 602: "Oh, I thought they were fantastic. The books were a really good mix, really...erm, there was one that I found my least favourite, but it was actually one of her favourites, so erm, ha ha, she keeps bringing it back, so the books and handouts were fantastic. Erm, really pleased, and we are excited we get to keep them as well, to add to our collection"

Subtheme 2) excerpts

Four parents (33.33%) said that some of the books were not appealing for children and that this reduced their desire to book-share. Parents said that the final book "the wrong side of the bed" was devoid of colour and conveyed mainly negative emotions, consequently they found it hard to engage children with the content.

Parent 505: "On the odd occasion the book wasn't really stimulating enough. You know there were a couple of books which didn't really interest her, so they were more difficult. Because to read it every day, it was a little bit, you know to engage her in something I knew she wasn't that bothered about, was quite difficult"

Parent 601: "I'll touch on the books, I thought they were absolutely brilliant, erm, apart from obviously the 'Wrong side of the bed', I thought, yeah, I don't think it was age appropriate ... And it was quite negative and depressing. Erm, and I think, erm, maybe to a child that has siblings, erm, or if different circumstances to what we are in at home, you know, it could be good, it might be something that would be good, you know good for them to discuss, or, but I think for mine, because she's in a happy little bubble...yeah, I didn't want to kinda open her... to negative emotions"

Subtheme 2) excerpts

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All parents (100%) reported that the weekly videos were easy to access irrespective of the device used. Most parents (9, 75%) viewed the videos on mobile phone devices, and the others (3, 25%) on a laptop or tablet. Six parents (50%) valued the videos for modelling the behavioural instruction strategies in the programme, as they conveyed the learning principles through direct observation. This offered parents an opportunity to see the ways to use with their own children and to refer to if needed.

Parent 704: “It was just easy to do. Erm, I was able to watch the videos that were sent, on my phone... erm, I could always refer back to them if I needed to, and er, it was just simplicity really. To be honest I didn’t find any problems with it”

Parent 204: “The videos were easy to follow and helpful and explained how to go about doing the book-sharing session with your own child and interpret it yourself. They were easily accessible”

Parent 505: “They were easy to understand, and it was nice to have the interaction with the parents you know, watching the other parents, just for ideas really. Because there were a couple of books, particularly the one we talked about, that I just couldn’t think of erm, new things to engage her in conversation about it, so it was nice to listen to other parents and then think, oh, I’ll do that, yeah I will say that when it comes to it”

Parent 1204: “The, er, videos were really good – they gave me kind of ideas on what to ask, when watching other parents obviously doing it, you know, what, what to say, and what, you know, different things you could do with him, so yeah, it was good”

Subtheme 2) excerpts

Despite recognising their usefulness, most parents (9, 75%) described the videos as long-winded, and four parents (33.33%) as repetitive in that they explained the same behavioural concept repeatedly. Mostly, parents believed that the videos could have been

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condensed to summarise and demonstrate the behavioural strategies necessary to complete the programme. This was particularly important as they were often short of time due to other commitments.

Parent 603: “Erm yeah, they were good, erm, I, I liked the examples they gave... Erm, if I was to be really really picky... I would say that... Erm, maybe after the first couple of videos erm, they possibly didn’t need to be as long and have as many examples in because you kind of get the gist of it”

Parent 301: “The first video showed me how to do it, so maybe every time I do not need to see the videos”

Parent 601: “Think yeah, there were a couple, erm...yeah, there were a couple that, that the videos were handy but then there were, yeah, a couple, where you just thought yeah, the handouts would have been suffice. Erm, so yeah that’s the only thing and obviously what I’ve already said on a couple of occasions, the length of time”

Parent 602: “Yeah, it was the sorry to the – not the lady that did it at all, she was lovely, but I felt it was a bit long-winded. Maybe it’s because I got, when they said linking, I got the idea quite quickly, so what, listening for half an hour – I found finding half an hour on my own to concentrate and listen, hold the book and go over it, a bit of a faff”

Parent 101: “I didn’t like the videos; I’ve got to say I only watched like the first two. I didn’t bother watching the videos. I thought they were too long, and I haven’t got the patience to sit down and watch something then. Not being horrible but they sounded long and boring”

Subtheme 2) excerpts

Eight parents (66.67%) described the session handouts as a useful and practical summary of the weekly parenting strategies. Overall, parents believed the handouts were

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simple, clear, and self-explanatory. Handouts were typically described as a short convenient reminder of the weekly learning objective and contained useful strategies to prompt discussion during book-sharing.

Parent 1101: “Erm, yeah, I found the handouts really useful because it err, you know, it’s just err, a quick reminder isn’t it? To skim through quickly, just as a memory jog”

Parent 603: “Yeah erm, I thought the handouts were fab because it was a quick recap, of erm, basically the video... Erm, so that was really, really handy. Erm yeah”

Parent 405: “I liked the handouts, they were useful”

Parent 204 “The handouts were self-explanatory”

Parent 301; “The handouts were very very helpful for us to read and find out, what questions can I raise? What things can I point out”

Parent 505: “I had them on my knee for a bit of back-up if I got stuck you know, so yeah they were handy. There was just enough information on there to do that, you know. You wouldn’t be able to do that with a big handout of different information, but I could just have it on my knee and follow it if I needed to, so yeah they were good”

Subtheme 2) excerpts

Subtheme 3) Barriers to engagement. Six parents (50%) described time constraints and personal circumstances as barriers to programme engagement. Mostly work commitments and other life adversities obstructed the ability to fully engage in the programme. For example, parent 603 explained that a relationship breakdown had resulted in her home-schooling her children alone during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, and this interfered with her ability to consistently engage her son with the programme content.

Parent 405: “What I did struggle with was the time to fit it all in. But that was due to work and life”

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Parent 1204: "The only problem I had was working in the evenings, and actually being able to read with him then as he had gone to bed. Yeah, as we didn't do it in the daytime with having, erm, obviously another child, it was easier at night-time when he was by himself- a bit more relaxed. So, it was a little bit harder working in the evening's sometimes"

Parent 601: "I know week one was, erm, that was the book we probably spent the least time with, as I had an eye infection"

 Subtheme 3) excerpts

Seven parents (58.33%) commented on the design and delivery of the weekly video guidance. Primarily, the response was that watching the videos was a challenge as they were long and repetitive, and that a condensed version would have communicated the information more effectively.

Parent 101: "Not being horrible but... they sounded boring...erm, boring and long, haha. I'm the kind of person, I want things done yesterday, yeah? I didn't have the patience...and because I was working as well, I was just like, "I haven't got the time", so I would read the leaflet that came with the book and basically... that told you what the video told you and I was just reading that, and I was kind of getting on with it"

Parent 602: Yeah, it was the, sorry to the- not the lady who did it at all, she was lovely. But I felt like it was a bit long winded, maybe it's because I got, when they said linking, I got the idea quite quickly, so what, listening for half an hour- I found finding half an hour on my own to concentrate and listen, hold the book and go over it, 'cos I just, I found that bit, a bit of a faff. Yeah, but maybe for other parents that was helpful. So, it's just for me I've found it was a bit long winded, I just sort of,

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skipped over some parts towards the end, just 'cos I wasn't finding half an hour otherwise to go over it before we started, you know?

Parent 601: "Erm, what did I like least about it? Erm, I found the videos were quite long to watch...erm, a couple of them, where, you know the little snippets of the paper that you are given, actually gave me enough information on them, erm rather than watching the whole video"

 Subtheme 3) excerpts

Three parents (25%) reported difficulty in discussing the negative emotions of the book characters with their children. Firstly, it prompted children to remember their own negative experiences and obstructed their engagement. For example, parent 1101 explained that his daughter was reluctant to book-share when the characters in the story were mischievous or disobedient as it prompted her to recall periods when she had misbehaved, and this triggered adverse emotions for her. Another parent said that she was concerned that her child was emotionally vulnerable during the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore she was reluctant to discuss the negative behaviour of the book characters during isolation restrictions. Other parents said that they were disinclined to discuss negative emotional reactions of the book characters as they believed this was not developmentally appropriate.

Parent 301: "And some books he was very happy with and some books I mentioned in my feedback that er, the first or second week, the book we get, err, called I think 'Little Helpers' where the kids were hungry and had no food, [name] didn't like those feelings"

Parent 1101: "The book I enjoyed the least was the last one, or I, I quite enjoyed it but [Name] didn't because it was, because it dealt with negative emotions, it kind of, erm, she, she, d'ya know she...didn't enjoy the book as much. Erm, I think, when she sees, d'ya know, the little lad is misbehaving at the start, I think she just, you

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know it just reminds her of times when she’s done that. And she felt bad, you know, and she’s like reliving the emotions and so, you start the book off with a negative emotion then, so, she wasn’t so keen to read that one, yeah”

Parent 601: “I found the 7th book, erm “The wrong side of bed”, I just found it to be quite dark and gloomy... and the pictures and everything were really dark, erm, and because, because my little one is quite a confident girl, erm, quite happy-go-lucky and because obviously I’m a lone parent, she’s an only child and, yeah, especially during lockdown we’d created this little happy bubble- you know I just found that book number 7... was quite negative and I didn’t want to kinda like, open her to negative things, that she didn’t really need to worry herself over, because she’s quite a deep thinker and she is quite in tune with, you know like, people’s facial expressions and things like that. And I just thought that that book wasn’t age appropriate, or right for the situation that we are in”

Subtheme 3) excerpts

Main theme 4: Suggestions for moving forwards

Sub-theme 1) Group delivery. Seven parents (58.33%) said that while Covid-19 restrictions prevented group delivery, they would have liked to complete the programme in a group format. Although, parents appreciated the online delivery of the programme, they would have preferred direct face to face interaction with the group facilitator, to enable them to ask questions and receive ongoing direction and support. In addition, parents said that group delivery would have offered an opportunity for reciprocal practical and emotional support between parents in the group. One parent suggested that in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, it may have been helpful to connect with other participating parents via an online platform. Notably, these parents initially signed up for a group based programme

Parent 505: "I think it would have been nice to have that interaction with the lady teaching us, because halfway through the programme, I was a bit like, where is this going, I think I misunderstood the concept of it a bit"

Parent 602: "I think it was perfect, I would of liked it more classroom-based, but obviously owing to the situation that couldn't be helped"

Parent 204: "I think I would of enjoyed it talking to other parents and that would be beneficial, but unfortunately we have not been able to do it this time and I think that would have been good. And I like talking to people, and yeah, it's just... do you know liker, sometimes you think, like I just think, ah yeah, I'll just do this, and you talk with other people and they give you tips and examples and I'm like, ohh, I'll try this and maybe you try that"

Parent 101: "I would have enjoyed it speaking to other parents and that would be beneficial as well"

Parent 101: "Maybe what you could have done as well, is like, maybe done a zoom call every once a week or once every two weeks or something with the other parents. Just like a 15- or 20-minute chat. A kind of 'how are you going? What are you struggling with and what are you not?' Because we signed up thinking we were doing this as a group with parents and stuff. And yeah, it would have been nice to maybe... or even if it was just at the start, and the middle and the end or something"

Subtheme 1) excerpts

Subtheme 2) Targeted populations. Most parents (75%) believed that the programme could be targeted to address specific needs in particular populations of children. Overall, parents thought the programme would improve the developmental outcomes of all preschool children but believed it would be best directed at providing early support to

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children at risk of poor development. For example, parent 601 expressed her disappointment that her school had not targeted the parents of children she believed needed it the most, rather the children of parents they knew would engage with the programme. Mainly, parents thought that life stresses, including socioeconomic and career demands often obstructed the ability of parents to reflect on the importance of positive parent/child interactions.

Nevertheless, they thought that the programme could be a viable intervention to highlight the importance of increased quantity and quality of parent/child interactions. Six parents (50%) said that it may be useful to improve the skills of pre-school children with a learning disability or developmental delay and five (41.66%) thought that the programme may support children with social-emotional, language and behavioural deficits. Two parents (16.67%) believed it may be a useful programme to develop the social skills of their autistic children.

Parent 101: “Deprived kids... the more deprived children that don’t get that kind of attention, kids who don’t have an opinion and are not asked what they think, what they want, what they like, what they don’t”

Parent 505: “I think perhaps parents aren’t spending a lot of time with their children, it’s certainly a way to get them to engage with, you know, new strategies, I think would always benefit”

Parent 1101: “I think, erm, you know a lot of people we know would be in the same boat, they are, they are doing this [book-sharing] to a certain degree. But they are doing it without being conscious of it. So, it would certainly be useful to, to, yeah, have it all formalised. Just to show how valuable sharing books can be”

Parent 601: “Erm, but yeah there’s a lot of parents that I know, you know, who could’ve really benefited from it, when we have spoken, you know they didn’t know what the book-share was, they hadn’t heard anything of it. And I know, like I had a letter, so I didn’t know if it was a case of the parents who they knew erm, they would

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get a response from had been targeted. So, yeah, I don't think the right people were kind of like targeted"

Parent 602: "I would say, maybe children, definitely the age range is perfect, but I think maybe more children that are struggling socially or with language... To express themselves... cos I mean, I find that my little one understands a lot already and she's sort of still, she's really benefited from it, but there were a few children in her class that I feel like, would have been perfect for this programme because of their speech and social skills. It maybe would have helped"

Parent 603: "Maybe people, maybe children who erm, have got erm, emotional problems as well, that really need that one to one and a bit of... You know, without it being full on and maybe talking to them about their feelings"

Parent 704: "Yeah, to get them ready for school. I think its good because they'll be going into full time, they're going to need attention for school. Erm, it would highlight any problems, any behavioural problems, erm, any problems with concentration. I think it would be good for that prior to the start of school"

Parent 1204: "I think, probably, children who can't express their emotions...erm, probably children as well. Who are a bit more, a bit more lively, ha-ha... calm them down a bit and get them more grounded"

Subtheme 2) excerpts

Discussion

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the benefits and feasibility of, and satisfaction with, remote delivery of the 'Books Together' programme, a DBS parenting programme aimed at promoting children's school readiness. Thematic analysis was used to identify meaning and patterns across the dataset regarding the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to gain an understanding of the factors that obstruct/encourage

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programme engagement to support future implementation, as the ability to maintain parental engagement in behavioural interventions improves outcomes (Dadds et al., 2018; Ingoldsby, 2010). The findings suggest that the collective benefits for parents and children included: programme enjoyment; improved interpersonal interactions; and skills development whilst the barriers identified included practical delivery considerations and time restraints.

Programme engagement provided parents with DBS skills, which allowed richer discussions with their children, providing interactive learning experiences. This facilitated enriched reciprocal interactions, interpersonal understanding and increased parent/child bonds and reinforced children’s enthusiasm for learning. As a result, children’s social/emotional skills improved, facilitating reduced problem behaviour and increased prosocial behaviour. Consequently, parents recognised the importance of prioritising one to one time with their children and saw the programme as having increased their sense of self-efficacy in the parenting role. These results are unsurprising given that secure attachments are dependent on reciprocal interactions, which respond to children's verbal and non-verbal signals and influences their motivation to learn (Ambarwati, 2018; Bowlby, 1979). The findings also broadly support other studies in this area that link parental satisfaction and self-efficacy with healthy functioning for parents and children (Albanease, Russo, & Geller, 2019; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik, & MacKinnon, 2011).

As well as the benefits reported above, online delivery of the programme together with the complementary resources, provided an accessible and informative context in which to train DBS skills in parents. With the exception of one book, parents reported that the books were developmentally appropriate, with the children having a particular interest in the ‘Harry the dog’ books. The handouts provided a clear reminder of the weekly strategies to use during book sharing activities and the videos were easily accessible on electronic devices (laptops, mobile phone, tablets), and provided a practical demonstration of book sharing strategies to

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support home practice. However, most parents would have preferred shorter more focused videos as they indicated that they were long and repetitive. Although video-based learning is associated with enhanced skills development (Beheshti, Taspolat, Kaya, & Sapanca, 2018) shorter, more-focused pieces of material, when accompanying specific learning applications, generally result in increased learning outcomes (Guo, Kim, & Rubin, 2014; Monge, 2007).

Although most parents reported shared satisfaction and enjoyment with the programme for themselves and their children, barriers were also highlighted. Firstly, for some parent’s time constraints such as work commitments and personal circumstances hindered regular practice. Furthermore, a quarter of parents reported difficulty in discussing the adverse behaviour/emotions of the book characters as it reminded children of their own negative experiences, and this interfered with their engagement. This may have been because children were at risk of experiencing emotional vulnerability during the Covid-19 restrictions (Fosco, Sloan, Fang, & Feinberg, 2022). Despite this, qualitative analysis of the study (see Chapter 5) found that parental capacity in their ability to socially/emotionally coach their children improved following programme engagement which may have accounted for the significant results in improved child behaviour and social/emotional competencies. Indeed, research shows that if parents label children’s negative emotions and provide supportive discussion regarding their cause and effect, this is associated with better socio-emotional competencies, whereas minimising children’s expression of negative emotions reduces their ability for emotional regulation (Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Prior, & Kehoe, 2010; Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003). Therefore, teaching parents specific coaching skills to navigate negative child emotional states may serve as a protective function for their social/emotional development. Notwithstanding the barriers, this study had high parent engagement and a low attrition rate which contrasts with the typically higher attrition rates in online parenting programmes (Dadds et al., 2018).

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Despite the low attrition rate, parents indicated that programme modification may be beneficial. For example, several parents indicated that group delivery may have provided benefits in terms of reciprocal discussion and support between participants. Indeed, group delivered interventions provide the social norms which offer shared achievement for reciprocal value (Gannon & Roberts, 2020) and are also related to improved emotional well-being and functioning societies (Johnson, 2016). Another suggested modification included targeting programme delivery as early support for children exposed to biological/environmental risk factors. However, given that 40.9% of the family who engaged in the study lived in poor socioeconomic circumstances, with 38.6% displaying two or more risk factors associated with poor child school readiness suggests that schools did target a population exposed to risk factors. This is important given that several studies report that training parents in DBS skills improves child language and social/emotional abilities regardless of developmental delay, cultural diversity, or cognitive disabilities (Towson, Gallagher, & Bingham, 2016; Mol, Bus, & De Jong, 2009).

In this study, generalisation of the results is limited due to the small sample size and lack of a control group. Another limitation was that the lead researcher developed the semi-structured questions and performed the role of interviewer having earlier collected baseline and follow-up data from parents regarding school-delivery of the same programme which may have increased the possibility that prior personal expectations may have informed the results. Nevertheless, thematic analysis provided a framework for handling the data sensitively and supported reflection regarding underlying assumptions about the information (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, data analysis procedures have been clearly disclosed, allowing the reader to decide whether the process has generated reliable and insightful findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

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The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on children's school readiness outcomes in the UK is significant and created the need/opportunity for remote delivery of parenting interventions. The findings from this study provide insight into the parents' perceptions of their experiences with online delivery of the 'Books Together' programme aimed at improving children's school readiness. The results suggest that with minor adjustments the online programme may be an easily accessible, beneficial, satisfactory, and feasible parenting intervention. However, future implementation of the programme may benefit from the addition of online networking between parents in terms of social support and for sharing information and other resources during engagement.

Chapter 6

Introducing and Evaluating Online Delivery of the 'Books Together' programme

Abstract

Background: Since the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in school closures, the numbers of children entering mainstream education with additional learning needs, already a pre-COVID problem, has increased. Without additional support, they face poor long-term academic attainment, mental health difficulties and social problems.

Aim: To investigate the feasibility of online delivery of 'Books Together', a dialogic Book-Sharing Programme, and to explore its impact on parental skills and children's school readiness outcomes.

Methods: Parents of 3–5-year-old children ($n = 44$) were recruited from 13 primary schools. Measures of child language were collected at baseline, and child behaviour, social-emotional ability, and parenting competence were collected pre- and post-intervention. Thematic analysis of parent interviews explored programme feasibility and satisfaction.

Results: Significant post-intervention increases in parenting competence and well-being and child prosocial behaviour and social/emotional ability were found. Thematic analysis showed parental satisfaction with, and the feasibility of, delivery of the online programme.

Conclusions: The programme is low-cost and can increase the parenting strategies that build children's school readiness abilities.

Keywords: Dialogic book-sharing; parent-child interactions; child behaviour and social/emotional ability; online parent training.

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Over the past decade growing numbers of children are entering primary school with additional educational needs (O’Connor et al., 2018). These children are not equipped to prosper in school or achieve their full academic potential as they do not have the cognitive (e.g., language development and academic ability) and/or social-emotional ability (e.g., self-regulation, peer integration) required for school readiness (Action for Children, 2016). Developmental delays occur more frequently among socially disadvantaged children and are evident by age 5 (Ofsted, 2014; Juniper Education, 2021). Developmental delays that persist beyond the preschool years predict disengagement in the school environment (Bierman et al, 2008), and are associated with life-long limitations including underachievement, poor mental health, and social problems (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015).

Covid-19 restrictions have resulted in nursery closures and social restrictions resulting in a further ten percent decline in children’s school readiness skills (Araujo, Veloso, Souza, Azevedo, & Tarro, 2021; YouGov, 2021). Consequently, almost half of children in the United Kingdom (UK) are currently failing to meet typical developmental milestones by age 5 (Education Endowment Foundation, 2021; YouGov, 2021). When considering the multiple influences that underpin children’s school readiness and the longer-term poor outcomes for those children that start school with these deficits, family demographics and parenting behaviours feature predominantly (Welsh, Bierman, & Mathis, 2014). Therefore, early preventative measures that encourage the parenting behaviours that promote children’s school readiness are more effective than later attempts to prevent complications in adulthood (Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Tickell, 2011). For example, Cannon et al. (2018) investigated the outcomes, costs, and benefits of 115 early intervention programmes, for families and children aged 0-5 years, and found improved child development outcomes, lifelong health and well-being and increased economic returns especially for those children most at risk of poor outcomes. Therefore, research is currently needed to identify effective strategies for

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delivering parenting interventions aimed at improving school readiness outcomes to prevent the growing gap in children’s achievement that results in life-long educational, economic, and health disparities (Bierman et al, 2008; Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015).

Early language attainment is the strongest predictor of school readiness (Cakiroglu, 2018) and influences children’s executive function and social/emotional competencies (Slot & von Suchodoletz, 2018; Wolf & McCoy, 2019). Children who meet their developmental milestones in language and communication at age 5 can play, talk, listen, understand, and pay attention which allows them to fully engage in their learning environment (Adams, Baxendale, Lloyd, & Aldred, 2005). The development of language skills primarily depends on exposure to child directed speech from caregivers during the preschool years (Golinkoff, Hoff, Rowe, Tamis-LeMonda & Hirsh-Pasek, 2019; Hart & Risley, 1995; Zeanah, Gunnar, McCall, Kreppner, & Fox, 2011). Children whose parents speak little to them (Gridley, Hutchings, & Baker-Henningham, 2013) or whose homes lack stimulation (Jeong, O,Pitchik, & Yousafzai, 2018) frequently start school with significant skill deficits (Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg, & Peters, 2011). More frequent exposure to words and increased quality of language input from caregivers is associated with children’s vocabulary growth (Hart & Risley, 1992; Rowe, 2017) and child-directed speech quality is also a strong predictor of children’s vocabulary and language development (Hoff, 2013; Rowe, Leech, & Cabrera, 2017). Following the preschool period language and communication skills are more difficult to acquire (Khul, 2004). Given that language development takes place in a social context, parents who provide stimulating interpersonal interactive activities for preschool children can optimise their language skills as a safeguard against later psychosocial problems (Duff, 2018; Roseberry McKibben, 2013).

Parenting programmes that teach dialogic book-sharing (DBS) strategies have shown promise in increasing children’s language ability (Dowdell, Melendez-Torres, Murray,

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Hartford, & Cooper, 2019). Interestingly, evidence for DBS is so strong that it has been termed a ‘vocabulary acquisition device’ (Ninio, 1983; Barcroft et al., 2021), laying the groundwork for children’s successful social/emotional expression and understanding (Murray et al., 2016). During DBS, adults use the picture content of books to encourage children’s participation by following their focus of interest, active listening, open questioning, reflecting on their utterances, praising, and encouraging them, and linking book content to child experience. These reciprocal interactions facilitate young children’s comprehension and construction of language, increasing their vocabulary and verbal reasoning abilities (Rowe et al., 2017) and are positively associated with school-readiness ability, and further academic attainment (Crisofaro & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012; Reynolds, Vernon-Feagans, Bratsch-Hines, & Baker, 2019; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2020).

Arnold and colleagues (1994) reported that teaching DBS techniques to parents through videotape modelling techniques and group role play were financially viable strategies to increase pre-school children’s language development. A meta-analysis of 19 group-based parenting DBS interventions that used videotapes and role play with parents of children aged 1 to 6 years (Dowdell et al., 2019) found that reciprocal exchanges between parents and children improved children’s expressive and receptive language. One study, a South African randomised controlled trial (RCT) with socially disadvantaged mothers of 14–16-month-olds, at risk of developmental delay, demonstrated significant increases in children’s language skills and attention span (Cooper et al., 2015). Furthermore, analysis of data from the same programme (Murray et al., 2016) reported improvements in parental sensitivity, elaboration, and reciprocity that facilitated children’s language, attention, and pro-social behaviour. Subsequently the programme was included in the Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative to prevent or reduce violence against children by developing, testing, and disseminating low-cost parenting interventions, led by the World Health Organisation and partner universities

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(Wessels et al., 2019). A small pre-post study of a version of this DBS programme for older children aged 3-5 years entitled ‘Books Together’ investigated the feasibility of its school-based delivery to explore the associations between parental skills and children’s school readiness. The study found post-intervention increases in children’s expressive language, prosocial behaviour, and social/emotional ability and improved parenting competence and reductions in negative parenting (see Chapters 3 and 4; Owen, Hutchings, & Williams, 2022).

Low engagement and high attrition rates in group-based parenting programmes often reduce intervention impact (Ingoldsby, 2010). For example, parents typically attend 39%-50% of intervention sessions, with around 30% of those enrolled not attending a single session (Breitenstein & Gross, 2013). This is a key limitation of group-based parenting programmes as intervention dosage and the ability to engage and retain parents impact their success (Dadds et al., 2018) however this might not be entirely relevant to book sharing since a recent pilot the Books Together programme for parents of children aged 3-5 years old showed full parent retention, high parent attendance, and improved children’s school readiness ability (Owen et al., 2022). This demonstrated that DBS parenting programmes can engage parents and increase children’s school readiness, therefore, particularly given the challenges of supporting parents that emerged during COVID-19 restrictions, exploring new methods to recruit, engage and retain parents through online DBS interventions may be a fruitful area of research.

To our knowledge there are no accessible evidence-based DBS online parenting programmes or indication of who benefits. Online parenting programmes have the capacity to increase participation rates, expand reach to underserved populations of families, and reduce the resources and costs needed to deliver programme content (Sanders, 2019; Dadds et al., 2018). Around 96% of households in the UK have internet access (Office for National Statistics, 2020) with evidence to suggest that many parents prefer online learning and

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typically obtain parental knowledge and guidance from online sources (Tully et al., 2017). Parents, particularly those living with hardship, value guidance and support to develop new parenting skills (O'Brien & Daley, 2011). This is particularly important given that during Covid-19 restrictions parents have found home schooling complex, due to a lack of instruction from schools and demands of other responsibilities (Nani & Sibanda, 2020). Therefore, modelling DBS parenting strategies through online video links may provide an accessible, supportive, and engaging experience that could increase parental knowledge, behaviour, and competence associated with children's school readiness (Baumel & Faber, 2018; Corralejo & Rodriguez, 2018; Spencer, Topham, & King, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to introduce remote delivery of a DBS parenting intervention. Delivery of online parenting programmes shows promise in terms of ease of use, delivery, access, autonomy, and cost and time reductions for families (Breitenstein & Gross, 2013). Online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme, a DBS intervention with preliminary evidence of effectiveness, could help parents of preschool children to promote their school readiness skills.

Aims

The current study was designed to:

- i) Test the feasibility and acceptability of the online ‘Books Together’ programme delivered to parents of children aged 3-5 years.
- ii) Explore initial effectiveness of the programme in terms of its impact on child language and social-emotional competencies as well as parenting skills and overall well-being.

Method

Design

Data were collected during a pre-post pilot study using a mixed method approach to explore the impact of online delivery of the 'Books Together' programme (Owen et al., 2022). Quantitative analysis assessed outcomes using a repeated measures design via questionnaires, online surveys, direct/indirect observations of parent/child interactions and a follow up questionnaire exploring families' book sharing behaviours following programme engagement. Qualitative interviews explored satisfaction with, and feasibility of, programme delivery for parents.

Participants

The study was initially designed for school-based delivery to groups of parents of children in nursery and reception classes with the intention to undertake an RCT building on the results of the initial school-based pilot (see chapters 3 and 4). Recruitment to the initial RCT was undertaken by school-based staff in local infant/primary schools in North Wales with parents of pre-school children aged 3-5 years old. Eighteen schools responded and were recruited by the researcher through direct telephone contact and school visits. Five schools predominantly taught through the medium of Welsh and 13 predominantly through English. Thirteen schools (including the five Welsh medium schools) successfully recruited 57 parents before Covid-19 restrictions led to school closures. Of the 57 parents recruited for school-based delivery of the programme, 44 ($n = 4$ fathers) agreed to continue with the alternative online programme format during lockdown restrictions. Of these 35 completed the programme.

Intervention

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‘Books Together’ is based on a programme initially developed by Murray and Cooper (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016) to promote shared reading with parents of 14-18 months old children, in highly disadvantaged communities in South Africa. The seven-session programme teaches parents to have stimulating and rich interactions with children whilst looking at a picture-book, and to engage them actively in conversation about the picture content, relating it to their own experience and encouraging curiosity and thinking skills. The programme includes fundamental components of DBS to encourage active child engagement including following a child’s focus of interest, pointing and naming, open questioning and linking book content to the child’s experiences. To date, the programme has mainly been trialled in South Africa where groups run by trained facilitators for four to six caregivers of children aged 14-28 months were highly successful (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016). Since then, several versions have been developed for children of different ages and in this study, a 3–5-year-old version known as the ‘Books Together’ programme’ was used (Murray et al., 2018). ‘Books Together’ was initially designed, and previously trialled, for caregivers meeting in small groups (between three and five parents and their children) with a trainer over six to seven weeks. The first three sessions cover academic coaching and the last four social/emotional coaching. The strategies are taught to parents through discussion, power point slides, video-clips, role play, supervised practice with their own children, home assignments, and collective problem-solving. Although each session introduces one strategy, facilitators continue to encourage the use of earlier skills with the different books as the programme continues. Parents are given a different book (see Appendix L) to take home and a summary sheet with reminders of the key points from each session (See Appendix M). The aim is to give parents specific skills to enable them use regular brief book-sharing interactions to support their children’s language, cognition, and socio-emotional development.

Overview of changes to delivery format in response to Covid-19. Building on the successful pilot trial delivered to groups of parents in four north Wales schools (see Chapter 3), the initial plan was to recruit 18 schools for a 2:1 randomised controlled wait list trial. In all the schools a member of school-based staff would each receive training to deliver the programme to up to five parents ($n = 90$).

Despite having recruited the 18 schools and 57 of the intended parent participants, Covid-19 closures made this plan impossible, and all recruited parents were offered an online version of the intervention in June-July 2020 during lockdown restrictions. The study was changed to an evaluation of an online version of the programme for parents to access in their own homes. All schools were informed of the change in intervention delivery. The training videos were adapted to include the voiceover of a trainer outlining the DBS implementation guidance, and parents accessed the seven video sessions by email to complete at their own pace. The seven books and handouts were sent to parents by courier service in separate large envelopes entitled session 1, session 2, etc. to enable home practice. Families kept the books and were encouraged to practice the strategies presented in each session with the allocated book for 10-15 minutes a day with their child. Parents were encouraged to contact the researcher for support if they had any problems accessing the programme or implementing any of the different components. At the end of each week, parents were sent a link to an online survey requesting their opinion on that week's session, to gather information regarding the level of parent/child engagement, satisfaction, and usefulness of the strategies taught. Furthermore, midway through the programme (week 4) all parents were called by a researcher and given an opportunity to discuss programme engagement and to address any difficulties that they may be experiencing with participation.

Measures

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Data were collected using well-established parent completed standardised questionnaires, direct and video recorded observation of parent-child interactions, recorded interviews with a stratified selection of parents, and weekly surveys to explore the views of parents on each session.

Family Demographics Questionnaire. This questionnaire captured information regarding basic socio-demographic details, including characteristics of the family structure, parental education, employment status, and participant age (See Appendix E).

Feasibility outcomes. Feasibility outcomes were operationalised as programme satisfaction and acceptability and explored using semi-structured interviews (See chapter 6), online weekly surveys (See Appendix Q), and a final questionnaire exploring parent/child book-sharing behaviour following programme completion (see Appendix R).

Observed parent/child interaction – based on the Dyadic Parent-Child Interaction Coding System (DPICS; Robinson & Eyberg, 1981). The observation was based on categories from the DPICS (Robinson & Eyberg, 1981) to assess parent/child interactions during a 10-minute shared reading activity. Observations were video recorded for later analysis to obtain an account of the behaviour of interest and to improve external validity (Friman, et al., 2000). Nine verbal behaviour categories: unlabelled praise, labelled praise, encouragement, reflection, academic coaching, social-emotional coaching, linking to child experience, and negative parenting were used to capture parenting skills taught in the programme. Each coding sheet recorded the frequency of verbal behaviours over a five-minute period by scoring a mark in the applicable tally box each time that the behaviour occurred (See Appendix F). Baseline data were collected during home visits along with questionnaire data. However, since Covid 19 restrictions meant that live post-intervention data collection was not feasible, directly observed data were only collected from the whole sample of participants at baseline and parents were asked to record and return videos of

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themselves book sharing with their child at follow-up. The DPICS is a widely researched measurement and has shown good reliability ($r = .91$ parent behaviour; $r = .92$ child behaviour; Robinson & Eyberg, 1981).

Child behaviour. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) is a brief parent-reported behavioural screening measure for 3-16-year-olds to detect social-emotional and behavioural problems (See Appendix G). It has two age versions, is available in many languages and has five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour. The present study utilised the English language versions for children aged 2-4 years and children aged 4 to 16 years to cover the study child age range. The SDQ has 25 items measured on a 3-point Likert scale, with responses not true, somewhat true, and certainly true. A total difficulties score is attained by combining scores from the four problem subscales. Higher scores indicate greater levels of difficulties with 0-13 categorised as close to average, 14-16 as slightly raised, 17-19 as high, and 20-40 as very high. The SDQ has good internal consistency (mean $\alpha = .73$), test-retest stability ($r = .62$), and discriminant validity (Stone, Otten, Engels, Vermulst, & Janssens, 2010).

Child social-emotional ability. The Ages and Stages Social–Emotional questionnaire (ASQ:SE; Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001) is a parent-completed social-emotional screener for children aged between one and six years (See Appendix H). Age-appropriate versions were used for children aged 33-42 months, 42-54 months, or 54-72 months to cover the child age range. Each questionnaire contains 39 questions covering seven behavioural areas: self-regulation, compliance, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, social-communication, and interaction with people. Items score on a three-point Likert scale, often/always, sometimes, or rarely/never which are converted to points of 10, 5, and 0 respectively. Low scores (0-70) indicate expected levels of social-emotional competency,

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medium scores (70-85) indicate that further monitoring is required, and higher scores (85 and above) indicate a high risk of current social-emotional problems. The ASQ:SE has high internal consistency for all scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.82$) (Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001).

Parental competence. The Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnstone & Mash, 1989) is a 17 item self-report questionnaire that measures parents’ sense of their own competence using two broad scales: efficacy and satisfaction with their own parenting (See Appendix I). Responses are rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree, to 6 = strongly agree. Low scores on the self-efficacy scale (0-21) indicate a low personal sense of parenting self-efficacy, high scores (above 30) indicate a high personal sense of parenting self-efficacy. Low scores on the satisfaction scale (0-27) indicate poor parenting satisfaction and higher scores (40 and above) indicate a high sense of parenting satisfaction. Overall, a score of 0-65 indicates an overall poor sense of parenting competency with higher scores (70 and above) indicating a good sense of overall parenting competency. The PSOC has strong internal consistency on both the efficacy and satisfaction scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.80$) (Ohan, Leung, & Johnson, 2000).

Child language ability (baseline data only). The Schedule of Growing Skills (SOGS) II (Bellman et al., 1996) is a developmental screening tool used to assess the developmental trajectories of children from birth to five years of age (See Appendix S). The speech and language domain of the scale measures receptive language by direct observation on an 18 item checklist, and expressive language by direct observation of a 17 item checklist during play-based activities. The SOGS II displays high levels of internal consistency on all scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.91$) (Williams, Hutchings, Bywater, Daley, & Whitaker, 2013).

Parental wellbeing. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) (Tennant et al., 2007) has 14 positively worded items for assessing mental wellbeing (See

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Appendix T). Responses to statements regarding thoughts and feelings over the last two weeks are rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = None of the time, to 5 = All the time.

The national average mental well-being score is 51 (inter-quartile range 45- 56) with a score of 41-44 indicative of possible mild depression and a score of 41 or below indicative of probable clinical depression. The WEMWBS displays good internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.91) (Tennant et al, 2007).

The Conners Abbreviated Parent-Teacher Rating Scale. The Conners Abbreviated Scale (Conners et al., 1998) is a parent-reported, 10-item scale assessing the incidence of hyperactivity in children aged three to 17 years (See Appendix U). Responses range from 0 (not at all) to 3 (very much) with a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 30. The clinical cut-off score for hyperactivity is 15. The questionnaire contains the most highly loaded symptoms from the factor scales of the Conners Parent and Conners Teacher Rating Scales (Conners, 1994). It has shown good internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$; Parker, Sitarenios, & Conners, 1996) and good test-retest reliability ($r = .89$; Zentall & Barack, 1979).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consent, which outlined the amendments to the study protocol in response to Covid-19 restrictions, was obtained from Bangor University School of Psychology Ethics committee on 15th April 2020 (application number: 2020-16699-A14670) (see Appendix J). All study participants provided written and verbal informed consent which outlined their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Procedures

School recruitment. Details of the initially proposed RCT study were sent to North Wales primary schools in a monthly bulletin from the Regional School Effectiveness and

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Improvement Service and schools were invited to contact the research team with expressions of interest. Once expressions of interest were obtained, leaflets describing programme content, training, resource provision, and expectations of school-based commitment were provided (See Appendix C). The researcher then visited the school to discuss the study and outline participant expectations, including what would be provided for programme delivery (staff training, guidance manuals, videos, books, and weekly handouts). Eighteen primary schools in North Wales enrolled in the study and agreed to release a staff member to attend the two-day Book-Sharing training in April 2020 and to deliver the programme to five parents of nursery and reception class children for two hours a week over seven-weeks between June and July 2020. However, Covid-19 restrictions disrupted the plan making delivery by school-based staff no longer possible.

Family recruitment. Parents were initially recruited by the schools by sending letters home and/or directly contacting families of children identified as needing support with language, behaviour, and/or social interactions. The letters invited parents to enrol on a group programme delivered by a member of school staff. Families were included if they had a child aged 3-5 years and committed to the seven-week programme. Schools forwarded contact details of interested parents to the researcher who telephoned them to discuss the programme and explain what their involvement entailed. Interested parties were visited at home to obtain written participation consent (See Appendix N). Fifty-seven parents from 13 schools had agreed to participate in the school-based delivery of the programme before Covid-19 restrictions made this impossible. All 57 were contacted by the main researcher to explore whether they would like to continue to participate in the study in an online format. Forty-four parents agreed to participate in a trial of the online delivery of the programme during lockdown restrictions (see flow diagram in Figure 6.1).

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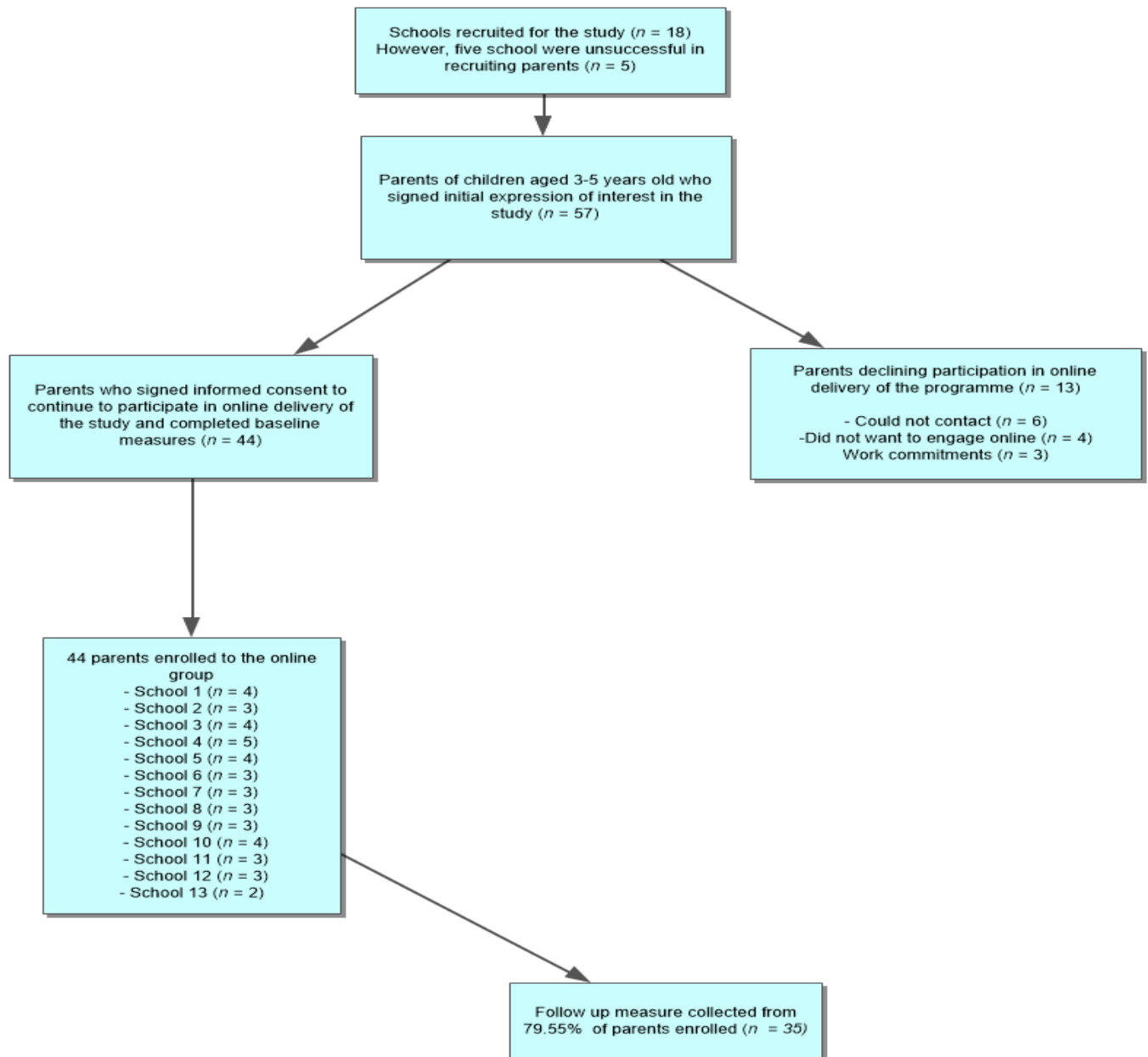


Figure 6.1: Participant flow diagram.

Data collection. After receiving signed informed consent, baseline data were collected from most participants ($n = 34$, 77.27%) during two home visits before Covid-19 restrictions made face to face contact impossible. Subsequently to complete the baseline data collection, data was collected over the phone from the remaining ten participants, including informed consent. Follow-up data collection (July-September 2020) was also conducted over the phone. As the SOGS data could not be collected in this manner, only baseline data from

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the 34 participants from whom live baseline data were collected was obtained regarding children’s language abilities and no follow-up SOGS data was obtained. Data collection included a 10-minute observation of parent-child book sharing activity at baseline and follow-up. An Usborne Farmyard Tales series book, for children aged between 3 and 6 years, was provided and parents asked to look at the book with their child for 10 minutes. The books include brief simple text in a bright and colourful context. ‘The Naughty Sheep’ was used at baseline and ‘Pig got Stuck’ for the post-course observations to control for prior experience. This was collected through direct observation at baseline for 34 of the parents, and the other parents ($n = 10$) were sent a book and recorded themselves sharing it with their child to upload to a secure OneDrive link as Covid-19 restrictions halted baseline face to face data collection. Participants were invited to provide data in their preferred language. At baseline 37 parents chose the medium of English, and 7 parents the medium of Welsh. The follow-up observation data was also collected in this way after programme delivery (if happy to do so) and obtained from 16 parents. The first author (primary coder) coded all video observations, and the second author (the criterion coder) coded 25% of randomly selected videos for inter-rater reliability. Researchers achieved good inter-rater reliability (80%) across all scales. The interclass correlations (ICC) were between .795 and .987. Post-intervention semi-structured interviews with 12 parents were conducted via telephone, audio recorded, and transcribed for thematic analysis (Appendix V)

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative. Measures of parental competence and well-being, and child behaviour, language, attention, and social-emotional ability were analysed using the International Business Machine Corporation Statistical Package for Social Sciences 22 (IBM SPSS statistics 22). Data were scored according to the guidelines for each measure. Descriptive

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statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated. Paired samples *t*-tests were performed to determine intervention effects. The SDQ, ASQ:SE, Connor’s abbreviated, and behavioural observation measures violated the assumption of normality and were analysed using a non-parametric equivalent test (Wilcoxon Signed Rank).

Qualitative. Interviews were recorded to capture the ideas, views, and experiences of a sub-sample of parents who completed the programme. A stratified random sample of 12 of the 35 parents (34.29%) who completed the main study were selected based on the number of weekly session surveys completed to provide to create a representative sample. Four (33.33%) of the selected parents completed six or more of the weekly session surveys and eight (66.66%) less than five, of which two (16.67%) had not completed any. Of the sample selected for interview, ten were mothers. The main researcher contacted the selected parents to determine their willingness to be interviewed and to obtain verbal consent to their participation in the audio recorded telephone interview. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014) was used to explore the feasibility of, and satisfaction with, the programme from the parent interviews. The interviews were transcribed and then read and re-read to generate ideas for themes to be identified. These results are reported separately in Chapter 6.

Qualitative data were also collected through the online weekly surveys sent via an email link to all parents which explored their opinions, experiences, and narratives using open ended questions and multiple choice closed questions which offered responses such as not at all, a little, sometimes, a lot, and very much to help to identify the usefulness of each session (See Appendix Q).

The main researcher also collected qualitative responses to a closed/open ended questionnaire from all the parents who completed the programme ($n = 35$) to explore patterns of book-sharing behaviour following programme completion (see Appendix R).

Results

Sample Characteristics

Forty female and four male caregivers agreed to participate. Half of the children (50%) were male, with a mean age of 48.49 months ($SD = 5.29$). The demographic questions showed that 18 (40.9%) caregivers reported living in poverty and over half of the children ($n = 27$, 61.4%) had at least one risk factor for deficits in school readiness (see Table 1) with over one third of the sample (38.6%) reporting two or more risk factors. Most parents (56.8%) reported low mental well-being, being below the general median score of 50, with nine of those (20.5%) scores indicating possible depression (Tennant et al., 2007) (see Table 6.1). Most of the children on whom baseline language ability was collected ($n = 21$, 61.76%) scored with delays in either expressive or receptive language ability or both on the SOGS measure.

Table 6.1

Sample characteristics at baseline

Demographics	All ($N = 44$)
<i>Child characteristics</i>	
Child age, months: M (SD)	48.49 (5.29)
Child gender, male: n (%)	22 (50.00)
Child behaviour problems: n (%)	10 (22.73)
Child social/emotional difficulties: n (%)	18 (40.91)
Child attention problems: n (%)	8 (18.18)
Child language delay: n (%)	27 (61.36)
<i>Parent characteristics</i>	
Parent Age, years: M (SD)	33.82 (5.86)
Age parent left school, years: M (SD)	16.69 (2.24)
Parent low education: n (%)	19 (43.19)
Parent unemployment: n (%)	25 (56.81)
Single parents: n (%)	13 (29.55)
Low parent mental wellbeing: M (SD)	49.12 (8.41)

Programme Engagement

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Follow-up data were collected from 35 (79.6%) of the 44 parents who provided baseline data, with most reporting that they had participated in all sessions (74.3%). The remaining participants reported that they engaged with at least four of the sessions (*mean session participation* = 6.06, *SD* = 1.25). Four participants (9.1%) withdrew during the study due to lack of time or personal issues, and five participants (11.4%) were lost to follow-up.

Pre-Post Programme Results

Paired *t*-tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank nonparametric tests were conducted on the data from the 35 participants who provided both baseline and follow-up questionnaire data and on 16 participants for whom both baseline and follow-up observation data were available, to explore the effects on children’s school readiness outcomes (behaviour, social/emotional competence, and attentional control), as well as parenting capacity, competence, and overall mental well-being.

Child outcomes. Due to Covid-19 restrictions the SOGS data on child language outcomes at follow-up could not be collected. The other child outcomes were assessed by parent report of child behaviour (SDQ), social/emotional ability (ASQ-SE), and attentional control (Connors Abbreviated Questionnaire). As the data on all measures violated the assumptions of normality, a Wilcoxon signed-rank non-parametric test was used. Children displayed significantly lower overall behaviour problems: $Z = -3.671, p = < .001$, and reduced overall social/emotional difficulties: $Z = -4.368, p = < .001$ at follow-up compared to baseline. There were no significant differences in child attentional control: $Z = -.817, p = .414$ (see Table 6.2).

Table 6.2

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for child outcomes of behaviour, social-emotional competencies, and attentional control (n = 35)

Child Outcomes	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i> -values	<i>d</i>
SDQ	12.40 (5.95)	8.40 (5.97)	.001**	0.6
ASQ-SE	65.30 (39.11)	32.70 (37.8)	.001**	0.8
Connor’s	11.27 (7.35)	9.05 (6.15)	.414	0.2

* Sig at $p < .05$ **Sig at $p < .01$

Parent outcomes. The results of the paired samples *t*-test on parental competence (PSOC) showed significant improvements in parental self-efficacy: $t(34) = -2.43$, $p = .021$; satisfaction $t(34) = -2.60$, $p = .014$; and overall sense of parenting competence: $t(34) = -3.21$, $p = .003$.

The results of the paired samples *t*-test on the WEMWBS showed improved overall parental well-being at follow-up: $t(34) = -3.27$, $p = .003$ (see Table 6.3).

Table 6.3

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for self-ratings of parenting competence and overall well-being (n = 35).

PSOC	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>d</i>
Parenting self-efficacy	31.23 (4.82)	33.26 (3.80)	.021*	0.5
Parenting satisfaction	33.29 (6.42)	36.26 (5.08)	.014*	0.5
Overall sense of parenting competency	49.14 (8.35)	52.54 (6.27)	.003*	0.5
WEMWBS	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i> -value	

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Parenting well-being	49.29 (8.33)	52.57 (6.27)	.003*	0.4
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* Sig at $p < .05$ **Sig at $p < .01$

At follow-up observation data of parent/child interactions were collected and uploaded by 16 parents of whom full 10 minutes of data were collected from only ten parents (28.57%) so data from the first five minutes of all recordings were coded. Significant increases were shown in the frequency of the use of positive parenting strategies of reflection: $Z = 2.17, p = .030$, academic coaching: $Z = 2.10, p = 0.36$, and social/emotional coaching: $Z = 3.16, p = .002$, at follow-up. There was no significant difference for the frequency of praise and encouragement: $Z = -.742, p = .458$, linking: $Z = 1.23, p = .220$; or negative parenting strategies: $Z = -1.71, p = .088$ (see Table 6.4)

Table 6.4

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for 5 minutes (per category) for all 16 parents who provided observational data for book sharing ($n = 16$).

Observational Reading	Baseline (5 Mins) <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow Up (5 Mins) <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i> - values	<i>d</i>
Praise and encouragement	2.19 (3.23)	1.56 (1.46)	.458	0.2
Reflection	4.81 (4.38)	8.44 (4.79)	.030*	0.5
Academic coaching	23.31 (10.04)	29.69 (12.03)	.036*	0.5
Social/emotional coaching	3.13 (2.30)	7.63 (3.24)	.002*	0.8
Linking	1.44 (1.79)	2.94 (3.70)	.220	0.3
Negative strategies	1.25 (1.06)	.813 (1.11)	.088	0.4

* Sig at $p < .050$ **Sig at $p < .01$

Qualitative Feedback

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Twelve parents (34.3%) who completed follow-up measures were interviewed and audio recorded following programme completion to enable thematic analysis of the data. A research assistant transcribed 80:39 minutes of audio recorded interview data. Four main themes and ten subthemes were captured from the 12 transcripts. These findings are reported in chapter 6.

Data provided by online weekly surveys returned a mean of 17 (48.57%) parental responses per week. Of these responses, on average parents responded positively ‘a lot/very much’ regarding the usefulness of the programme content and resources for engaging families in book-sharing activities (see Table 6.5).

Table 6.5

Weekly survey questions based on a mean of 17 parental’ responses per week and the percentage answering positively with ‘A lot or very much’

Qualitative weekly questions	<i>Percentage of responses rated a lot or very much</i>
How much did your child enjoy engaging in book-sharing this week?	87%
Did you find this week’s session useful?	80%
Were the videos clear and understandable?	93%
Were the handouts clear and understandable?	97%
How satisfied were you with the overall session?	90%

Responses on the questionnaire exploring patterns of engagement and book-sharing behaviour following programme completion were completed by 35 parents at the same time as providing follow-up data. Most parents ($n = 25$, 71.42%) reported that they completed all weekly programme sessions and all ($n = 35$, 100%) indicated that they have continued to book-share with their child to varying degrees following programme completion. Twenty-one parents (60%) reported that they book-shared daily, 18 parents (54.12%) reported that when

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they book shared, they did so for 30 minutes or more, and 25 parents (71.42%) reported that they had added book-sharing to their child’s bedtime routine.

Discussion

This paper reports on a feasibility study of online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme, a DBS parenting programme for parents of 3–5-year-olds and to explore its impact on parenting skills and children’s school readiness outcomes. School-based staff recruited a diverse range of parents with 40.9% living in conditions of socioeconomic disadvantage. In this study, more than three-quarters of enrolees completed the programme which is higher than typical attrition rates reported for many online parenting programmes of between 30% - 50% (Chacko et al., 2016; Dadds et al., 2018; Hall & Bierman, 2015) and most reported that they attended all seven sessions. This finding supports a recent small school-based delivery of the same programme which had full parent retention at follow-up (see chapter 3). Therefore, the ‘Books Together’ parenting programmes may be effective interventions to engage and retain parents.

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions resulted in school closures and brought unprecedented challenges to children’s school readiness (Araujo, Veloso, Souza, Azevedo, & Tarro, 2020; YouGov, 2020), parental concerns regarding their children’s educational progress (Booth, Villadsen, Goodman, & Emla, 2021) and interruption of face-to-face parenting interventions. Online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme provided the opportunity for parental engagement in the programme during lockdown and thematic analysis indicated that parents found the programme informative, straightforward, enjoyable, easy to access, and well-supported by the supplementary resources (see Chapter 5). The opportunity for telephone contact with the research team midway through the programme helped to address any issues with programme access or home practice (see Chapter 5). This is in accordance with research showing that remote facilitator contact and support increase the

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effectiveness and lower attrition rates of online parenting programmes (Hansen, Broomfield, & Yap, 2019; Richards & Richardson, 2012). The effectiveness of any parenting programme is contingent on its capacity to engage and retain parents (Dadds et al., 2018) therefore, online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme may be a helpful parenting intervention since retention was good, and overall engagement with the programme was described as a positive experience (See Chapter 6).

The current study reports improved parenting skills, in social/emotional and academic coaching ability and reflection, there were significant changes in three categories reflection, academic and social/emotional however there were no significant changes in the frequency of parental, praise and encouragement, linking, or negative talk at follow-up. However, these results may not have been representative of the sample given that that only ten parents (28.57%) completed and returned the full ten minutes of video observations of themselves and their child sharing a book at follow up. The reason for this is not clear but it may have something to do with parental concerns regarding the analysis of parenting skills, child’s behaviour, and development (Bennetts et al., 2017). Therefore, further studies regarding the role of self-recorded parent observations may be worthwhile. The significant results that were only obtained in the observed parenting social/emotional coaching category at follow up may be explained by parents reporting that their children were exposed to emotional vulnerability during Covid-19. Subsequently, parents may have been particularly attentive to the social/emotional coaching skills the programme offered.

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These results are in line with group-based DBS parenting interventions that show positive parent/child interactions, such as parenting sensitivity, reciprocity, and cognitive talk during book-sharing have meaningful impacts on child social/emotional development (Dowdell et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2022). In this study effect sizes ranged from large to medium in the child outcomes of behaviour and social/emotional which displays that the magnitude of the result transfers over from being statistically significant to effective in practice in the real world and represents real benefit for children (Aarts, Akker & Winkens, 2014).

The study reports significant increases in parenting self-efficacy, satisfaction, and overall mental wellbeing. High levels of parental self-efficacy and well-being are associated with increases in the quality of parent/child interactions, including parental warmth, responsiveness, and involvement (Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010) and with reduced child behaviour problems, improved school performance, and social functioning (Pellitier & Brent, 2002). Other studies confirm that parents' confidence in their capacity to promote their child development is a key factor in healthy functioning for parents and their children (Albanese, Russo, & Geller, 2019). Yet, the small to medium effect size for this finding suggest that the results are negligible, and more research is needed to establish statistically and clinically meaningful effects to increase the findings power (Aarts, Akker & Winkens, 2014).

Like other studies of group delivered DBS programmes, this small study reports significant improvements in children's prosocial behaviour and social/emotional competence, (Cooper et al., 2015; Dowdell et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016). There were no significant improvements in children's attentional control which may have been accounted for by low child attention problems (18.8%) at baseline. It was disappointing that Covid-19 restrictions made direct observation of children's language ability or live observations of book-sharing at follow-up possible given that evidence for DBS is so strong that it has been termed a

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‘vocabulary acquisition device’ (Ninio, 1983; Barcroft et al., 2021) and most children in the sample were observed to have delays in either expression or/and comprehension of language at baseline. However, thematic analysis indicated increased child imagination, prosocial behaviour, and enthusiasm and enjoyment of books (see chapter 5).

Despite the promising findings, limitations including the small sample size, loss of observational data at follow up, absence of a control group, small effect sizes, and the self-report method of data collection, which may be open to response bias. Another limitation was the inability to collect direct observations of child language at follow-up due to Covid-19 restrictions as it meant that it was not possible to establish whether the online programme demonstrated similar benefits to child language as group-based delivery of the programme for cohorts considered at-risk (Cooper et al., 2015; Dowdell et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2016; Owen et al., 2022). Furthermore, since the study had a limited timescale, it was not possible to explore long-term programme impact despite parents reporting continued use of book sharing. However, the study benefitted from qualitative findings to help understanding of the facilitators of, and barriers to, programme engagement and retention (see Chapter 5).

With a growing number of children in the UK arriving at school with delays in the language abilities that underpin school readiness and lead to later problems for individuals and society, it is important to establish well-evaluated interventions aimed at supporting lifelong trajectories. The current study shows that schools can recruit and engage parents to participate in the ‘Books Together’ parenting programme most of whom remained in the study when it was changed to an online programme. The study also adds preliminary evidence that online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme yields similar results to the group-based delivery of the same programme (Owen et al., 2022), providing a low-cost intervention that promotes outcomes of public health importance. Therefore, the preliminary findings are positive, despite the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, and now

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justify a larger, more rigorous RCT trial to further explore the association between parental capacity, self-efficacy, well-being, and children's school readiness skills.

Chapter 7

General Discussion

Thesis Summary and Objectives

This discussion starts with a summary of the main thesis objectives followed by a discussion of the findings and policy implications. The study's strengths and limitations including future research directions are also discussed. The main objective of the thesis was to evaluate school-based delivery of the 'Books Together' programme, a parenting programme aimed at improving children's school readiness. In studies one and two a pilot pre-post trial was conducted across North Wales in four schools that received training for a member of staff to deliver the programme to parents ($n = 16$) of 3–5-year-olds. The initial plan was to follow this with a randomised controlled trial (RCT) in 18 schools with an increased number of parents ($n = 90$). However, due to COVID-19 school closures, the project was amended to adhere to social restrictions and to comply with the PhD time scale. Consequently, the intervention was adapted and delivered as an online programme for parents and redesigned as a pre-post feasibility study. All the parents ($n = 57$) recruited at the time of school closures were offered the intervention to access at home during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, and seventy-seven percent ($n = 44$) agreed to participate in the revised trial (Chapters 6).

Four studies were conducted, the first used thematic analysis to report on the interview feedback provided by the parents and school staff who participated in the school-based trial to explore the feasibility of the study design (Chapter 3), The second study (Chapter 4) evaluated the effectiveness of school-based delivery of the programme and reported its main outcomes in terms of child language, behaviour, and social-emotional development, including parental verbal behaviour and sense of competency. The third study (Chapter 5) used thematic analysis to report on interview feedback provided by a stratified selection of 10 parents who participated in the online study to explore the study designs feasibility. The fourth study (Chapter 6) evaluated online delivery of the programme during

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Covid-19 social restrictions and reported its main outcomes in terms of child behaviour, attention, social/emotional development and parental verbal behaviours, sense of competency, and overall wellbeing. The following section provides an overview of the outcomes from each of these four studies.

Thesis Findings

Study one: Exploring the Benefits, Satisfaction and Feasibility of School-Based Delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’ A Qualitative Study.

The first study used thematic analysis to explore feedback from the parents and school staff who participated in the school-based study (see Chapter 3). The reported benefits included: skills development for school-staff, children and parents, mutual enjoyment, and improved interpersonal relationships. An additional promising finding included that the quality of the home/pre-school links improved following programme attendance. General programme feedback from the school facilitators in terms of ease of delivery, content and resources was also encouraging. There were however some suggestions for improvements, particularly from school-based staff that the availability and quality of software needed consideration to address the practicalities of delivery. In addition, there was a suggestion that clinical supervision during delivery may have provided school facilitators with the skills needed to manage the challenges of working with parents in a group setting more effectively, particularly managing digressions. Despite this, with minor suggested adjustments, the overall feedback from parents and school-staff in terms of programme benefits, satisfaction, and feasibility was positive with some suggestions that the programme should target younger children, or those children exposed to risk factors. Parents also suggested that schools should consider lengthening the programme in future implementation.

Study 2: Introducing and evaluating school-based delivery of the 'Books Together' programme

The second study (Chapter 4) reported on the main outcomes from the first evaluation of school-based delivery of the 'Books Together' programme. A pre-post pilot study was conducted in four primary schools across North Wales and school-staff each identified four families (N = 16) of children, aged 3-5 years old, and attending nursery or reception classes, who may benefit in terms of needing support with their developmental outcomes. At baseline, 69% of participating children scored at high risk of child behaviour problems and 44% at high risk of social/emotional difficulties. Well validated psychological measures evaluated the programme in terms of its influence on various aspects of parenting capacity and children's school readiness. Observed parent verbal behaviours (academic and social/emotional coaching, encouragement/praise, reflection, linking, and negative response) as coded by the Dyadic Parent-Child Interaction Coding System during an interactive reading activity at home and an interactive assessment of children's expressive language ability were the primary outcome measures. Secondary outcome measures included parent report of child behaviour and social/emotional competencies, and their own sense of parenting competency. Results suggested that parents who attended the programme, responded to their children with significantly increased positive verbal behaviour (praise/encouragement, reflection, linking and academic/social/emotional coaching skills). Parents also displayed significantly decreased use of negative verbal parenting behaviour following programme engagement and reported an increased sense of parenting competence in terms of both their own satisfaction and self-efficacy. Children demonstrated significantly improved expressive language ability, behaviour, and social/emotional competencies. Unlike similar studies, this trial maintained full parent retention both throughout the intervention and for follow-up data collection. Therefore, this small-scale study provided preliminary evidence that providing school-based

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support for parents through delivering the group based ‘Books Together’ programme can positively change parents’ capacity to support their children’s school readiness ability.

Study 3: Exploring the Benefits, Satisfaction and Feasibility of Online Delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme A Qualitative Study.

Study 3 was reported in Chapter 5 and analysed interview data from parents, using thematic analysis to explore the satisfaction with, and feasibility of, the online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme study reported in Chapter six. A stratified random sample was used to obtain an unbiased representative sample, 12 of the 35 parents who completed the main study were selected based on the number of weekly session surveys completed. The shared benefits for parents and children included: programme enjoyment; improved interpersonal interactions; and skills development, whilst the barriers for parents were practical delivery considerations and time restraints. General feedback in terms of the delivery method, content and resources were also positive, however there was some suggestions that parents would have preferred shorter more focused videos. Although seven, (58.33%), of the parents interviewed indicated that they would have preferred group delivery, study retention was good. Suggested programme modifications included online group collaboration and targeting children exposed to risk factors.

Study 4: Introducing and Evaluating Online Delivery of the ‘Books Together Programme’

The last study (Chapter 6) built on the successful pilot trial in four schools (Chapters 3 and 4) with an initial plan to recruit 18 schools for a 2:1 RCT across North Wales in which schools would recruit up to 5 parents each ($n = 90$). A member of school-based staff from each school was scheduled to receive training to deliver the intervention face to face to parents at the schools. Data collection started with parents who expressed an interest ($n = 57$) however, restrictions imposed by Covid-19 made this impossible. Therefore, a pre-post study

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was conducted with the 44 parents of 3–5-year-olds who agreed to continue with an online version of the intervention. To date, this was the first evaluation of online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme and aimed to investigate its impact on parental capacity and children’s school readiness. Outcomes planned for analysis included: parental competency and wellbeing and child language, behaviour, social/emotional ability, and attentional control, with data collected via parent interviews and a video recorded observation of parent/child interaction. Post-intervention findings reported significant increases in parenting competence, social/emotional coaching skills, and well-being as well as reduced child behaviour problems and social/emotional difficulties. However, there were no significant increases found in parents in other positive verbal parenting behaviours (praise, encouragement, reflection, linking and academic coaching) or reductions in negative verbal parenting behaviours. Baseline observations were recorded by the researcher but, due to COVID challenges, parents were asked to self-record and upload video observation data. Given that only (10, 28.57%) of parents provided the full 10 minutes of video observations at follow up for analysis of their verbal parenting behaviours and most parents (71.43%) did not, the results are not representative of the sample. Moreover, there were no significant differences in child attentional control and language outcomes at follow-up were inconclusive. Nevertheless, the trial reported high levels of parent retention for follow-up data collection, and this together with the other promising results suggest further exploration is warranted in a larger RCT study.

Relevance of Research Findings and Implications

Chapter two provided strong research evidence and practical applications for DBS parenting interventions which are referred to as a ‘vocabulary acquisition device’ laying the groundwork for children’s successful social/emotional expression and understanding (Barcroft et al., 2021; Ninio, 1983; Murray et al. 2016). The strongest evidence for DBS

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interventions comes from studies where instruction has been provided to carers to help them to improve the quality of their book sharing skills, either in one-to-one interventions, or in small groups. Many well controlled studies have demonstrated that carers can be trained to engage in high quality dialogic reading, and that, when such training is provided, there are significant benefits to child development (Dowdell et al., 2019; Vally, et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2014). Indeed, DBS parenting interventions demonstrate the ability to improve children’s school readiness (oral language skills, attentional control, and social/emotional understanding) for typically developing children and for those considered at risk (Dowdell et al., 2019; Vally, et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2014).

A significant and growing number of children enter schools in the UK with delays in the prime categories of development, and the loss of early years provision in response to Covid-19, has significantly escalated the problem (YouGov, 2021). Political interest should focus on early intervention, given that additional learning needs at school entry persist throughout children’s lives, widen inequalities, and predict long term adverse emotional and economic problems for individuals, families, and society (Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011). A review of the literature (Chapter 1) identified that the biggest determinants of children’s school readiness and smooth transition into school are contingent on the quality of reciprocal interactions in the pre-school home environment (Bowlby, 1979; Hart & Risley, 1995; Whittle, Vijayakumar, and Simmons, 2017), parent involvement with their child’s preschool (Kingston, et al., 2013), and family socioeconomic status (Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011). Therefore, parents play the most important role in the development of children’s school readiness (Bowlby, 1969; Hart & Risley, 1995; Whittle, Vijayakumar, and Simmons, 2017) and positive home-pre-school relationships cultivate children’s academic and social-emotional capabilities and creates parental satisfaction and efficacy (Epstein, 2010; Kingston, et al., 2013).

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The study in Chapter five provided evidence for school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme with parents meeting in schools and having live discussion providing a model for future delivery. Evidence for programmes that promote home/school partnerships through school-based parenting programmes is limited and inconsistent (Welsh, Bierman, & Mathis, 2014) and this programme is one of a relatively few that aimed at supporting parents as their children start school. The outcomes in chapter three and four suggest that pre-school staff are ideally placed to train parents in the skills needed to promote children’s school readiness, which further enhances parents own sense of competency (self-efficacy and satisfaction). This is important as high levels of parental self-efficacy and satisfaction are associated with reduced child behaviour problems, improved school performance, and social functioning (Pellitier & Brent, 2002; Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010). The findings in Chapter 4 support this idea with significantly improved child language ability and reduced child behaviour and social/emotional problems following programme engagement. The greater large effect sizes to earlier parent programmes (Lundahl et al., 2006) shows the potential power in improving outcomes for children and parents despite its small sample size in the real world by decreasing the margin of error regarding the findings of its statistical significance (Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019).

Reported barriers to participation in parenting programmes are often reported as lack of transportation or adequate childcare (Morawska et al., 2011). Given that school-based delivery of ‘Books Together’ reduces these barriers, and was reported by parents as acceptable and engaging, suggests that it may be a convenient and easily accessible intervention to encourage parent attendance. Therefore, is possible that the null attrition rate in the study may be attributed to the convenience of attendance, and improvements in home/school relationships, home environment, and peer support for the families who participated. Indeed, in the group, parents provided mutual emotional and practical support

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and valued the opportunity to enhance their book sharing skills as a partnership with others and the school. Consequently, school-based delivery of ‘Books Together’ may meet the specific needs of families and support them to provide stable environments for children’s school readiness.

The study in Chapter six was adapted to a pre-post study with the programme made available to parents online so that they could complete it at home during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. For some parents, especially working parents, this mode of delivery gave them flexibility to access the programme at a time suitable to themselves. Significantly, the results of the remotely administered Programme (Chapter six), were similar to those of the group-based delivery of the same programme. For example, reported parental social/emotional coaching ability, sense of competency (satisfaction and self-efficacy) and well-being improved and a significant reduction in child behaviour problems and social/emotional difficulties at follow up. However, no significant changes in the frequency of parental academic coaching skills, praise, encouragement, reflection, linking, or negative talk were observed at follow up and the small effect sizes in the parenting outcomes indicates limited practical applications in the real world (Lundahl, 2006). Still, the large effect sizes to earlier parent programmes (Lundahl et al., 2006) in the child social/emotional and behavioural outcomes shows the potential power in improving outcomes for children. Moreover, Covid restrictions on data collection meant that these findings may not be fully reflective of outcomes due to the significant loss of follow-up data. Therefore, it may be worthwhile that further online studies conduct live data collection, even in remotely delivered programmes. Furthermore, the small to medium effect sizes reported in this study may Moreover, given the strong evidence for DBS as influential for children’s language development, it was unfortunate that Covid-19 made the exploration of the effects of the remote programme on children’s language outcomes impossible, particularly since most children displayed language

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delays prior to intervention. Despite this, parents reported that the programme provided an enjoyable context to support children’s learning, secure attachments and interpersonal interactions, and parental engagement/retention in the trial was good. Therefore, the findings for the online delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme are promising and consistent with those of other dialogic book-sharing studies (Dowdell et al., 2019; Vally et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2014).

Chapters three and four provide evidence to support the training of pre-school staff to deliver behavioural interventions to parents particularly for those children experiencing developmental difficulties. The results of Chapters 5 and 6 support the remote delivery of the same programme and demonstrate that this method provides similar benefits despite Covid-19 limiting the exploration of its full effects in terms of child language and direct observations of parenting behaviours at follow-up. For school-based delivery, feedback from the school staff was positive with all reporting that they would like to deliver the programme in the future and, for some, reported skill development. The benefits of participation for parents included group support, improved home/school partnerships, skills development for themselves and their children and improved relationships with their children with some parents indicating that they would have appreciated additional sessions. Remote delivery of the programme provided similar benefits for parents including skills development, improved interpersonal interactions and attachments with their children, and an interesting, beneficial, enjoyable, and easily accessible intervention to support their children’s development.

It was interesting to compare effect sizes across the two studies which showed large effect sizes in child and parent outcomes in the school-based study and small/medium effect sizes in the parent outcomes in the online study. Consequently, one can reasonably argue that the school-based study effect size was large enough to be theoretically interesting in real world application given not only the outcome of effect sizes but that the findings were not the

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sole method of data collection from parents. For example, in the online study Covid-19 restrictions made direct observations of parent outcomes impossible increasing the margin of error of the practical and statistical findings due to the possibility of response bias from the sole collection of parent report. Previous studies of group-based delivery of a version of ‘The Book-Together Programme’ also display moderate to large effect sizes in relation to parenting behaviour and child development outcomes (Murray et al., 2016). Therefore, it is notable that there are significant direct effects of the intervention in both delivery contexts (school-based and online) on some child/parent outcomes, which remain to be explored. Descriptive factors may incorporate aspects of the parent/child relationship not covered in direct observations of book-sharing interactions, such as the general quantity of parental discourse to the child at home, or rather increases in parental sense of personal well-being and parenting efficacy, which could be beneficial to consider in future research.

Despite the above limitations, slight adjustments were suggested for both delivery contexts to ensure more efficient and effective delivery of the programme information. Core parenting strategies are fundamental to encourage optimum child development outcomes (Carneiro et al., 2019; Jelong et al., 2021) which suggests that group/remote based delivery of ‘Books Together’ may be potentially practical, cost effective, and influential parenting interventions aimed at improving children’s school readiness outcomes. Yet, more robust research is needed to increase the power of the findings.

The UK government provides guidelines to encourage school readiness (YouGov, 2020), yet growing numbers of children are starting school with additional learning needs predicting later problems for the individuals and for society (Araujo, et al., 2021; YouGov, 2021). Given that parenting behaviour predominantly predicts children’s school readiness, ‘Books Together’ is one of a few designed specifically to support parents as their children start school. Overall, the findings of studies in this thesis, are consistent with earlier DBS

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studies and provide preliminary evidence that school-based/remote delivery of ‘Books Together’, may be an effective and feasible intervention to support children’s school readiness skills. These findings may be timely and relevant given the negative impact of Covid-19 on children’s school readiness throughout the UK and, with slight adjustment to the programme, an RCT should replicate the studies in this thesis to further explore their effectiveness.

Thesis Policy Implications

Recognition that children with additional learning needs at school entry are associated with poor lifelong outcomes for children, families, and society has led to political interest (Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011). The Early Years Foundation Phase (EYFP) curriculum is a government initiative intended to provide provision aimed to support children to reach their full potential (YouGov, 2020). Despite these policies, almost half of the children in UK fail to meet typical developmental milestones in communication, language and personal, social, or emotional development at school entry (YouGov, 2021). Although Covid-19 has further negatively impacted children’s school readiness (Araujo, et al., 2021; YouGov, 2021), it was already a significant problem (Action for Children, 2016; O’Connor, & O’Connor, 2018). The strongest predictors of children’s school readiness are related to their home experiences and home-pre-school relationships are also significant predictors of children’s academic attainment (Kingston, et al., 2013) and smooth transition into school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). However, the EYFP curriculum that aims to support children’s school readiness does not collaboratively involve parents (YouGov, 2020). In Wales, Estyn (school inspectors) are required by the Welsh government to assess the extent to which schools provide workshops for parents on how to help their child to develop their reading skills, and the extent to which schools support families of pupils with additional learning

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needs (Welsh Government, 2021). However, currently there is limited exploration of evidence informed ways of developing home/school links.

The findings of this thesis show promising results from both group and remote based delivery of ‘Books Together’, a parenting intervention developed from evidence-based behavioural strategies. These findings suggest that this programme could be a beneficial strategy for schools to work with families in need (see Chapter 3 & 4) and remote delivery of the same programme may widen the reach of evidence-based parenting strategies underpinning children’s school readiness (see Chapter 5 & 6). Children’s school readiness in the UK is a public health concern and providing early years practitioners, schools, and parents with easily accessible evidence-based parenting strategies could be a collaborative and cost-effective solution. Common factors within successful DBS parenting interventions include the content, process, access, and collaborative working (see chapter 2). The ‘Books Together’ programme is based on these common factors, and the results and high rates of parent engagement, show that it is feasible to train early years practitioners and parents to ensure that more children can be supported to prepare well for starting schools. However, more definitive research (RCT) needs to be conducted to further establish the programme’s effectiveness in the two alternative delivery methods.

Study Strengths

The studies in the thesis have several strengths, they report on the first feasibility studies of pre-school and remote delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme aimed at improving children’s school readiness skills. Previous reported evaluations of the programme that this study is based on have reported a trainer delivered version of the intervention to parents of younger children (Vally, et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016). Despite a limited budget, the trials in this thesis demonstrated promising results for the programme (for parents of children aged 3–5-year-olds), that are consistent with other DBS studies across the globe.

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For example, both delivery contexts demonstrated promising results with significant improvements in various aspects of parenting competencies and aspects of child development associated with school readiness abilities. Consequently, ‘Books Together’ delivered in both the school and online context may provide a cost-effective intervention aimed at improving children school readiness outcomes. It may be useful for future randomised controlled trials to include cost effective studies.

The study trials used a variety of measures including direct observations, semi structured interviews, and parent self-report, to explore the effect of the programme on parenting skills, capacity, and well-being and on child development and behaviour. Furthermore, over 20% of the observations were coded by a second coder and inter-rater reliability was good with the intra-class correlations above 0.9 for the combined classifications. Multiple modes of data collection and analysis offered a multifaceted understanding of the benefits of the programme to show that DBS skills can be taught to parents in various delivery contexts, providing an enjoyable and simple activity for families that benefits children’s school readiness outcomes. This strength was reflected in the null attrition rate in the school-based study and low attrition rate in the online study.

Study Limitations

Conducting an RCT became unmanageable due to the restrictions imposed in response to Covid-19, and the timescale associated with the funded PhD project, consequently the second study was limited to a pre-post design. The gold standard for the exploration of effectiveness for any intervention is an RCT. When non-randomized pre-post studies evaluate public health interventions they are systematically challenging as they cannot demonstrate how distinctive design features are related to the evidence (Kuipers, 2020).

Many challenges were experienced that impacted the study and interpretation of the results. The challenges included study design, implementation fidelity, response bias based

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on primarily parent reported measures and an inability to collect the main data of interest (children’s language skills) in the online study following programme completion.

Inadequate implementation compromises the positive results in trials of educational interventions (Hill, & Erickson, 2019; Schoenwald, Garland, Chapman, Frazier, Sheidow, & Southam-Gerow, 2011). In the school-based study, all staff received two days training to deliver the intervention and a manual detailing intervention content and delivery. Although training provided some supervision as part of the process, there was no evaluation of adherence to the programme manual or clinical supervision provided during programme delivery. Clinical supervision is a key aspect of any intervention to ensure weekly practice completion; and implementation adherence and competence (Flay et al., 2005). Given that school facilitators reported group delivery challenges suggests that clinical supervision may have addressed the gaps in the skill set required for effective programme delivery (Falender, 2018).

Although most of the follow up data were collected, both studies have small samples which may increase the margin of error within the findings. Further limitations relate to the loss of observational data for the online study due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and that children’s language ability could not be explored following online programme engagement. Consequently, it was impossible to investigate whether remote delivery had similar benefits to children’s language as the group delivered programme. This is a specific limitation given the strong evidence for DBS on children’s language acceleration (Barcroft et al., 2021; Dowdell, et al., 2019; Ninio, 1983). Moreover, both studies used parent self-report questionnaires to investigate their sense of competency and well-being and children’s behaviour, social/emotional and attention skills. Furthermore, qualitative interviews were conducted by the main researcher following programme completion in both delivery contexts. Therefore, the findings may be open to response bias as parents may have offered positive

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views to the main researcher collecting the data, skewing the accuracy of the results.

Although, qualitative interviews provide a richer source of data, future studies should use an independent researcher to collect these data and reduce the risk of bias.

To conclude, this was a PhD project with inevitable resource and time restrictions, resulting in modifications to both intervention implementation, and data collection. These included limitations imposed on the study designs, problems with implementation, the possibility of response bias and an inability to collect the main data of interest (children’s language skills) in the online study. Nevertheless, the data found improvements in the parent/child skills in both delivery contexts that were in accordance with earlier dialogic book sharing interventions. To strengthen the findings, future research should integrate implementation fidelity measures and clinical supervision to assess the quality of delivery and more robust research needs to be conducted to further establish evidence for the programme, ideally in an RCT trial.

Future Directions

The preliminary findings of the school-based study report skills development, mutual enjoyment, and improved interpersonal relationships for school-staff, children, and parents. The second major finding was that parental retention and engagement was increased through delivering the programme in a school context through building positive home/school links which are associated with children’s subsequent school readiness (Bridgemohan, Van-Wyk, & Van- Staden, 2005). This together with the large effect sizes outcomes demonstrate that school-based delivery of the programme is practically and theoretically interesting. The results reflect those of other parent taught group-based book sharing programmes that demonstrates influence in the parenting capacity associated with improved child development outcomes in terms of language and social emotional domains (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016; Dowdall et al., 2019). Consequently, the present study has gone some way towards

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enhancing our understanding of how to extend the reach, engagement, and attrition of dialogic book sharing programmes to enhance the parenting capacity associated with children’s attainment and school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Ingoldsby, 2010; Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013).

It was important to report participant views and experiences regarding engagement in the ‘Books Together’ programme to explore the feasibility of delivery in a school-based and online context. The thematic analysis defined by Bruan & Clarke (2006) was used as I was a novice qualitative researcher, and they provided a clear stepped approach through the phases of analysis, to signify meaning within the data. This including reporting the active role I played in identifying patterns/themes to offer the opportunity for readers to consider if the results were thorough enough to be useful for future theoretical and practical application. Regardless of the delivery context, with minor adjustments the results suggested that the ‘Books Together’ programme may be an easily accessible, beneficial, satisfactory, and feasible intervention to encourage parent engagement (indicated by the low and null attrition rates reported). This is an important finding given that typical low levels of engagement in parenting interventions reduces their impact (Breitenstein & Gross, 2013; Dadds et al., 2018; Ingoldsby, 2010). Yet, the generalisability of the results is subject to limitations as thematic analysis is a flexible method which means that the proposed scope of finding may be broad, therefore what aspects of the data to focus on may be open to bias (Mackieson, Shlonsky, & Connolly, 2019). This needs considerable thought given that I conducted both the interviews with participants in these studies which may influence an unconscious bias to alternative interpretations of the data. Consequently, a natural progression of this work may be to analyse future interviews using the COREQ checklist outlined by Tong, Sainsbury, and Craig (2007) which offers explicit reporting of the study design to include characteristics of the research team, study methods, context of the study, findings, analysis, and interpretations to

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support increased rigor and comprehensive reporting. Notwithstanding its limitations, this work offers valuable insights by suggesting that easily accessible, beneficial, and satisfactory parenting interventions may influence increased levels of participant engagement.

A theory of change explains how interventions lead to behaviour changes through determining how different factors come together to create a desired outcome (Taplin, Clark, Collins, & Colby, 2013). According to Reinholz and Andrews (2020) a theory of change should describe the context and outcome of a study before backward mapping the preconditions that lead to the outcome. The studies in this thesis suggest that the ‘Books Together’ programme is an effective, enjoyable, and easily accessible approach to support children’s school readiness. The principal theoretical implication of the studies suggest that the preconditions needed to facilitate change was targeting and recruiting parents of pre-school children through proactive school approaches. Yet, delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme in the school-based context appears more efficient and effective in the real world given the large effect sizes of outcomes, full parent retention and high attendance rates, including reports that parents who engaged in the online study would have preferred group-based attendance. Indeed, a strong relationship exists between strong home-school relationships and children’s academic attainment (Kingston, Huang, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000), and the strongest evidence for dialogic book sharing comes group-based parenting programmes. These findings suggest that better decisions need to be made by government, about how to use their resources. For example, it may be fruitful to advocate for a policy change to an ecological perspective that features the contribution of multiple environments to child adjustment and development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In short, the outcomes suggests that the factors that came together to support children’s school readiness were creating positive home/school

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links through delivery of an enjoyable, supportive, and easily accessible evidence-based parenting intervention delivered in the school context.

To our knowledge no published studies have investigated pre-school delivered book-sharing training for parents. The positive effects of the programme for children, parents and schools including the null attrition rate in the school-based study suggests that school-based delivery of the programme may actively engage parents and be interesting for future implementation in the real world. Currently, it is fundamentally important for political interest to focus on early intervention in the UK, given that growing numbers of children are entering formal education not having met their developmental milestones which may persist throughout their lives (Allen, 2011; Field, 2010; Tickell, 2011). Therefore, the findings of this study will be of interest to policymakers who have identified the need for parental involvement in children’s education yet have limited exploration of developing such links (Welsh, et al., 2014). Given that engaging families in the learning process from the very beginning maximises children’s developmental outcomes (Bridgemohan, Van-Wyk, & Van-Staden, 2005) suggests strategies are needed to encourage parental involvement during pre-school. Books Together’ may be a potentially effective intervention to deliver to parents during children’s preschool phase to increase their developmental outcomes and associated school readiness ability. However, a much larger RCTs needs to be conducted to fully explore the effectiveness of school-based delivery of the ‘Books Together’ programme in terms of benefits, longer-term effects, and cost effectiveness analysis, paying close attention to the limitations above.

In short, the school-based study showed real mutual benefit for parents, schools, and children therefore to strengthen the evidence of effectiveness, future research should be designed as an RCT, sufficiently powered to address the strengths and weakness of the studies in this thesis. As child behaviour problems are one of the most common mental health

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disorders in childhood with few effective interventions for early childhood in public settings (O’Farrelly et al., 2021) it may be beneficial for larger RCT’s to explore the effectiveness of the ‘Books Together programme’ for children in typical preschools compared to preschools which specialise in emotional, behavioural and/or social difficulties. This would be a fruitful area for further work to establish a clearer picture if benefits are particularly more prominent as an effective intervention to safeguard children predisposed to future risk factors. A cluster randomised controlled trial here would need extensive planning given that such trials are costly in terms of finances, delivery resources and time, but may establish if the intervention outcomes are of particular benefit to children most in need of support. Despite the cost implications, it may offer a clearer picture of the programme’s effectiveness for real world application, whereby the costs may pale in comparison to the intervention and resources needed to support children and young people who experience significant difficulties in later life, many of which might have been prevented.

Final Reflections

Parents have the primary influence on their children’s school readiness and parenting interventions that enhance positive parenting behaviours represent the gold standard in improving child developmental attainments (Carneiro, et al., 2019; Dadds et al., 2018; Sanders, 2019). Interventions that train parents to share picture books with their pre-school children show promise in their ability to accelerate children’s development outcomes, particularly in the language domains that underpin other child development outcomes (Dowdall, et al., 2019; Murray et al, 2016).

Typically, high attrition rates in parenting programmes are associated with access barriers for parents, particularly those experiencing disadvantage who are more likely to experience finances and transport challenges needed to attend (Breitenstein & Gross, 2013; Lavigne et al., 2006). Delivering accessible parenting programmes can reduce related access

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barriers and therefore be more convenient for families (Dadds et al., 2018; Owen, Hutchings, & Williams, 2022).

These were the first feasibility trials of ‘Books Together’, a DBS parenting intervention delivered by school-based staff and remotely to parents of pre-school aged children (ages 3-5 years). This thesis explored the evidence for this programme and found strong evidence in terms of its positive effects on parenting and child development outcomes, in an area in which their influence on children’s overall school readiness ability is under researched. The thesis described the methodologies of the pilot feasibility of the school-based and online delivery of the programme and a description of the recruited families in terms of child, parental, and societal risk factors. The recruited participants displayed multidimensional predisposing factors associated with deficits in children’s school readiness, including high levels of child behaviour problems, social emotional difficulties, developmental delay, poverty, and low parent well-being. Findings from the evaluation of ‘Books Together’ delivered in the two different contexts (group and online) were promising with significant improvements in child language, behaviour, social/emotional competencies and parenting capacity, sense of competence and overall well-being. Furthermore, schools and parents rated the programme positively.

More research using randomised controlled trials is needed to confirm the findings from these pilot feasibility studies. Larger RCTs are required to confirm the value of the ‘Books Together’ programme in improving parenting capacity and children’s school readiness outcomes by means of both group and remote delivered versions. Consideration should be paid to the limitations of the present studies outlined in this chapter, including study design, implementation fidelity, and response bias.

This thesis has been challenging, particularly in response to the alterations to the initial plan as a result of the Covid-19 social restrictions. Despite its demanding nature, the

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inability to deliver the planned RCT offered an opportunity to explore the feasibility of delivering the programme remotely, widening its reach, and potentially generalising the results. The planning and conducting this research have been a positive, fulfilling, and enlightening experience for my own personal development and valuable for families in need.

I recognise that a sense of competency and satisfaction in the parenting role positively influences the home environment that supports children's development, school readiness, and subsequent life trajectories. I have also learned the importance of evaluating interventions of public health importance to ensure that public services and families receive the most cost effective, accessible, effective, and enjoyable experiences to support children's developmental needs.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Submitted paper under review for publication

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

Title: Introducing and evaluating school-based delivery of a Book-Sharing Programme for parents.

Authors: Claire Owen, Margiad Williams and Judy Hutchings

Abstract:

Growing numbers of children enter mainstream education with development skill deficits. Without additional support, they face poor long-term academic attainment, mental health difficulties and social problems. To investigate the feasibility of school-based delivery of a group dialogic Book-Sharing Programme (Books Together Programme), and to explore its impact on parental skills and children’s school readiness. Parents of 3–5-year-old children (n =16) were recruited from four primary schools. Measures of expressive child language, behaviour, and social-emotional ability and parenting competence were collected pre- and post-intervention. Thematic analysis of parent and school interviews explored programme satisfaction and feasibility. Significant post-intervention increases in child expressive language, prosocial behaviour and social/emotional ability and improved parenting competence were found. Thematic analysis showed staff and parent satisfaction and feasibility to deliver the programme in a school environment. The programme is low-cost and may increase the use of parenting strategies that build children’s language and social/emotional skills.

Keywords: Dialogic book-sharing; parent-child interactions; language; social/emotional ability; parent training.

Growing numbers of children enter primary school with additional educational needs, especially those from socially disadvantaging circumstances (O’Connor, O’Connor, 2018). Approximately 30% of UK children fail to meet typical developmental milestones in communication and language, personal, social, or emotional development when they start school and, consequently, are not equipped to prosper in school and achieve their full

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academic potential (Action for Children, 2016). These deficits occur more frequently among socially disadvantaged children and are evident by age five (Ofsted, 2014). This is a public health concern as poor cognitive and social/emotional development at age five is strongly correlated with longer term academic underachievement, mental and physical health difficulties, poor social skills, and unemployment (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015)

The Welsh Government has implemented several early intervention strategies including Flying Start, an initiative to improve the longer-term outcomes of children living in highly deprived Welsh communities (Flying Start: Welsh Government, 2019). This includes free part-time childcare for 2-3-year-olds, enhanced health visiting, access to parenting programmes and support for children’s language and communication skills. Although most low-income families reside in Flying Start areas many socially disadvantaged families cannot access these services due to living outside these areas (Shelter Cymru, 2018) so a significant number of at-risk children cannot access targeted early intervention support.

The Early Years Foundation Phase curriculum (EYFP, 2019) is a Welsh Government universal initiative targeting children’s school readiness. This sets out statutory guidance that childminders, preschools, nurseries, and school reception classes must follow to promote children’s communication and language, physical, personal, social, and emotional development. It encourages play-based learning as the basis on which children learn most effectively (Waters, 2016). However, it lacks specific implementation guidance (EYFP, 2019) and alongside teachers, classroom support staff, generally not trained teachers, undertake most of the one-to-one work with children needing additional support despite evidence that more highly skilled adults working with children, achieve better outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2010). Therefore, the EYFP strategic objectives may not be universally achieved.

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An EYFP Profile assessment tool is completed by teaching staff within six weeks of a child entering the first statutory school year. The Profile assesses children’s knowledge, understanding and abilities against expected attainment levels at age five and identifies children with additional needs for individualised support. To date, the Welsh Government has not published data regarding the number of children meeting expected developmental levels. However, in England 29.3% of children have not achieved expected levels across all early learning goals (Department for Education, 2019) and given higher levels of social deprivation in Wales (Hughes and Davies, 2018), it is likely that figures in Wales are higher. Indeed, at age 15 Welsh students score lower on proficiency tests and have a smaller proportion of high achievers than those in England (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2014).

Several evidence-based school interventions are delivered in the UK, including Promoting Alternative Thinking Skills (PATHS; Greenberg, Kusche, Cook, & Quamma, 1995) and Incredible Years ® Dinosaur School (Webster-Stratton, 2011). These programmes teach social/emotional regulation and problem-solving skills using teacher-led discussion, role play and modelling. However, they are not widespread and are primarily school lesson-based and, to date, little work has been done to include parents in children’s education (Education Endowment Foundation, 2019).

The pre-school home environment is the strongest predictor of school readiness (Hart & Risley, 1995) and children whose parents speak little to them (Gridley, Hutchings, & Baker-Henningham, 2013) or whose homes lack stimulation (Jeong, O’Pitchik, & Yousafzai, 2018) frequently start school with significant skill deficits (Roulstone, Law, Rush, Clegg, & Peters, 2011). Social disadvantage impacts parents’ ability to nurture their children, delaying their cognitive, language and social/emotional development, self-regulation, behaviour and self-esteem (Dearing et al., 2006). By contrast, interactive parenting buffers the negative

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effects of disadvantage, promoting healthy early cognitive development that benefits longer-term academic attainment (Whittle, Vijayakumar, and Simmons, 2017). However, although Government initiatives aim to enhance the development of pre-school children, many start schools without the skills to prosper in that environment (Action for Children, 2016).

Home-school relationships are significant predictors of children’s academic attainment (Kingston, Calzada, Dawson-McClure, & Brotman, 2013). Strong home/school partnerships cultivate children’s academic and social-emotional capabilities and school support creates parental satisfaction, efficacy and community bonds (Epstein, 2010). A lack of parental involvement in children’s education negatively affects their perception of school and ambition (Sheppard, 2009). Regrettably, parental motivation is often negatively impacted by financial hardship, time constraints and school procedures that discourage positive partnerships (Ucus, Garcia, Eserlaich, & Raikes, 2017). Children learn more when school, family, and community work collaboratively with shared objectives and responsibilities (Bryan & Henry, 2012) regardless of child age or ethnic origin (Wilder, 2014).

Despite the need for parental involvement, research into ways of promoting home/school partnerships is limited and inconsistent (Welsh, Bierman, & Mathis, 2014). Some work has been done in Wales using the Incredible Years ® school readiness programme (Hutchings, Pye, Bywater, and Williams, 2020). This four-session parenting programme builds children’s academic, social/emotional, and problem-solving skills (Webster-Stratton, 2011) through play and using books to aid discussion and was delivered by school-staff to groups of parents. The first evaluation of the programme, (Hutchings et al., 2020) demonstrated feasibility for school staff to deliver it and increased parent and child skills. However, the costly training and resources suggested the need for feasible, low cost, school-based interventions to support parents.

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Parenting programmes that teach dialogic book-sharing strategies increase preschool children’s language skills (Dowdell, Melendez-Torres, Murray, Hartford, & Cooper, 2019). Adults use the picture content of books to encourage children’s participation by following their focus of interest, active listening, open questioning, reflecting on their utterances, and praising and encouraging them, creating a stimulating environment that reinforces children’s language. A meta-analysis of 19 book-sharing interventions with parents of children aged 1 to 6 years (Dowdell et al, 2019) found that reciprocal exchanges between parents and children encouraged children’s expressive and receptive language. Whitehurst and colleagues (1994) reported that teaching book-sharing through videotape modelling techniques and group role play were financially viable strategies to increase pre-school children’s language development.

Dialogic book-sharing encourages several school readiness skills. A South African randomised controlled trial (RCT) with socially disadvantaged mothers of 14–16-month-olds, at risk of developmental delay, demonstrated significant increases in children’s language skills and attention span (Cooper et al., 2015). Analysis of data from the same programme, (Murray et al. 2016) reported that improvements in parental sensitivity, elaboration and reciprocity facilitated children’s language, attention, and pro-social behaviour. However, these studies were with parents of infants, and there is little research exploring the benefits of dialogic book-sharing with older children.

Given the number of children arriving at school with development deficits, the benefits of book sharing programmes for children language and social/emotional skills and the importance of parental involvement in children’s education, there is a need to evaluate a school delivered book sharing programme (Welsh, Bierman, & Mathis, 2014). Delivered during the preschool phase this could promote parent-school co-operation and children’s school readiness skills.

Aims

The current study was designed to:

- vi) Test the feasibility and acceptability of a book-sharing programme delivered by school-based staff to parents of children aged 3-5 years.
- vii) Explore initial effectiveness of the programme in terms of its impact on child language and social-emotional competencies and parenting skills.

Method

Design

Data were collected for a pre-post pilot study using a mixed methods approach to explore the impact of school-based delivery of a Book-Sharing Programme (Murray, Jennings, Mortimer, Prout, & Melhuish, 2018). Quantitative analysis assessed outcomes using a repeated measures design via questionnaires, a gaming format child language assessment, and direct observation of parent/child interactions. Qualitative interviews explored satisfaction with, and feasibility of, programme delivery for parents and school-based facilitators. The qualitative aspects of this study is reported in Chapter 4, however the full study including the qualitative and quantitative elements was submitted for publication and is currently under review.

Recruitment

School recruitment. Study details were sent to North Wales primary schools in a monthly bulletin from the Regional School Effectiveness and Improvement Service. Schools were invited to contact the research team with expressions of interest. Five schools responded and were recruited by the researcher through direct telephone contact and school visits. Leaflets describing programme content, training and resources provision and expectations of

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school-based commitment were provided. Two schools predominantly taught through the medium of Welsh and three predominantly English. One school failed to recruit parents and withdrew from the study. Four schools participated in the study, including the two Welsh medium schools.

Family recruitment. Parents were recruited by the schools by sending letters home and/or directly contacting families of children needing support with language, behaviour, and/or social interactions. Families were included if they committed to the seven-week programme and had a child aged 3-5 years. Five parents from each school agreed to participate, however one parent from each school withdrew before programme delivery (See flow diagram in Figure 1).

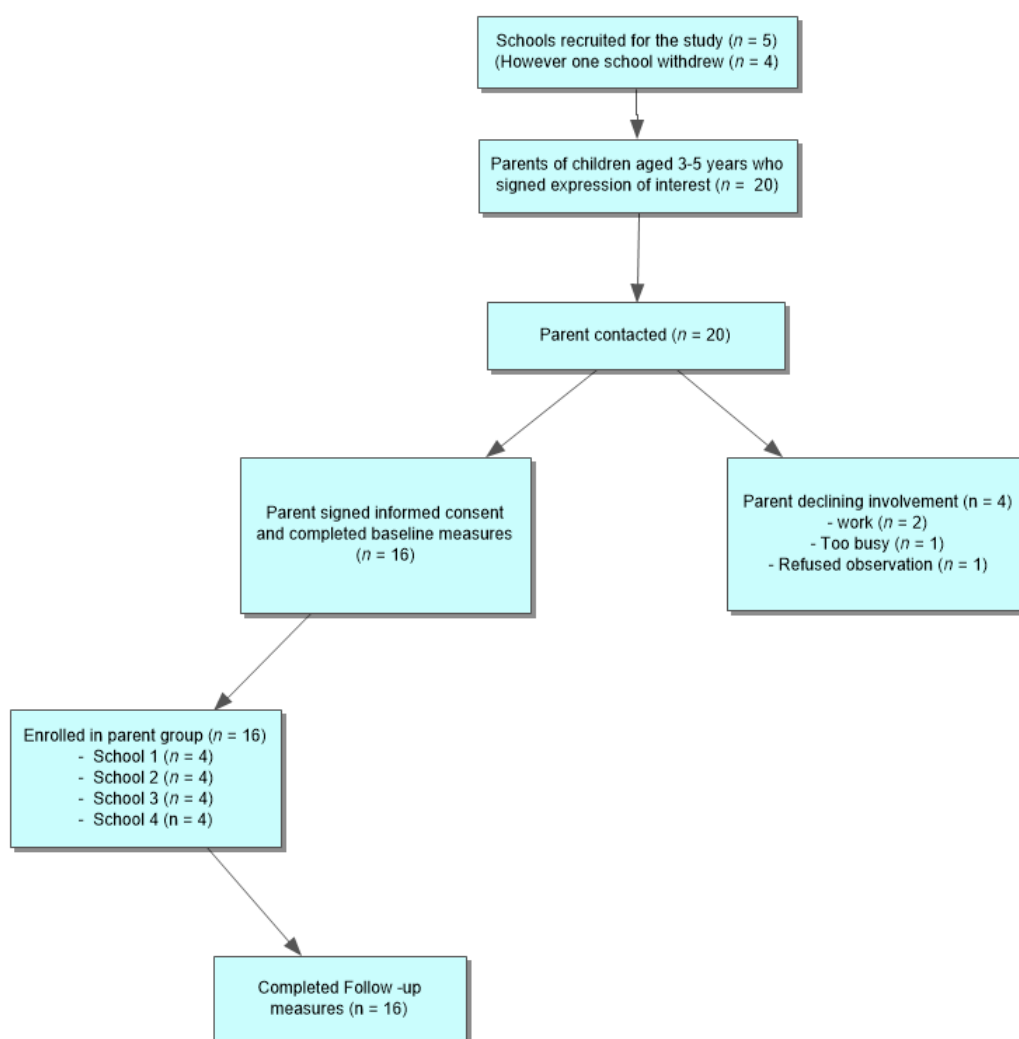


Figure 1. Participant flow diagram.

Measures

Data were collected using direct observation of parent-child interactions, well-established parent completed standardised questionnaires, recorded interviews with parents, and an assessment of expressive language developed for child responses on an iPad.

Family Demographics Questionnaire

This questionnaire captured information regarding basic socio-demographic details, including characteristics of the family structure, parental education, and participant age.

Feasibility outcomes. Feasibility outcomes were operationalised as programme satisfaction and acceptability and explored using semi-structured interviews with parents and school-based staff (Reported in Chapter 4).

Parent/child interaction – based on the Dyadic Parent-Child Interaction Coding System (DPICS; Robinson & Eyberg, 1981). The observational coding tool was used to analyse parent/child interactions during a 10-minute home observation. Observations were video recorded for later analysis to obtain an account of the behaviour of interest and to improve external validity (Friman, et al., 2000). The observation was based on categories from the DPICS (Robinson & Eyberg, 1981) to assess parent/child interactions during a 10-minute shared reading activity. Nine verbal behaviour categories: unlabelled praise, labelled praise, encouragement, reflection, academic coaching, social-emotional coaching, linking to child experience, and negative parenting were used to capture parenting behaviours taught in the programme. Each coding sheet recorded the frequency of verbal behaviours over a five-minute interlude, by scoring a mark in the applicable tally box each time that the behaviour occurred. The DPICS is a widely researched measurement and has shown good reliability ($r = .91$ parent behaviour; $r = .92$ child behaviour; Robinson & Eyberg, 1981).

Child behaviour. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997) is a brief parent-reported behavioural screening measure for 3-16-year-olds to detect social-emotional and behavioural problems. It has five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behaviour, two age versions and is available in many languages. The present study utilised the English language versions for children aged below 48 months and children aged 4 to 16 years to cover the study child age range. The SDQ has 25 items measured on a 3-point Likert scale, with responses not true, somewhat true, and certainly true. A total difficulties score is attained by combining scores from the four problem subscales. Higher scores indicate greater levels of difficulties with 0-13 categorised as close to average, 14-16 as slightly raised, 17-19 as high, and 20-40 as very high. The SDQ has good internal consistency (mean $\alpha = .73$), test-retest stability ($r = .62$), and discriminant validity (Stone, Otten, Engels, Vermulst, & Janssens, 2010).

Child social-emotional ability. The Ages and Stages Social-Emotional questionnaire (ASQ:SE; Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001) is a parent-completed social-emotional screener for children aged between one and six years. Age-appropriate versions were used for children aged 33-42 months, 42-54 months, or 54-72 months to cover the child age range. Each questionnaire contains 39 questions covering seven behavioural areas: self-regulation, compliance, adaptive functioning, autonomy, affect, social-communication, and interaction with people. Items score on a three-point Likert scale, often/always, sometimes, or rarely/never which are converted to points of 10, 5, and 0 respectively. Low scores (0-70) indicate expected levels of social-emotional competency, medium scores (70-85) indicate further monitoring is required, and higher scores (85 and above) indicate high risk of current social-emotional problems. The ASQ:SE has high internal consistency for all scales (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$) (Squires, Bricker, Heo, & Twombly, 2001).

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Parental competence. The Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnstone & Mash, 1989) is a 17 item self-report questionnaire that measures parents’ sense of their own competence using two broad scales: efficacy and satisfaction with their own parenting. Responses are rated on a six-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly disagree, to 6 = strongly agree. The PSOC has strong internal consistency on both the efficacy and satisfaction scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.80$) (Ohan, Leung, & Johnson, 2000).

Child language. The Early Years Toolbox (EYT; Howard & Melhuish, 2016) is a 45-item iPad-based assessment of children’s ability to identify and name objects to assess child language ability and takes around five minutes to complete. Children respond verbally to images on the iPad, and responses are recorded by the researcher on the iPad app by clicking one of three individual keys, correct response, specific response, or do not know. The measure displays excellent internal reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$) (Howard & Melhuish, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consent was obtained from Bangor School of Psychology Ethics committee (application number: 2019-16439). All study participants provided written informed consent which outlined their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Procedures

School recruitment. Head teachers of five primary schools in North Wales who showed interest in the study were telephoned. The researcher then visited the school to discuss the study and outline participant expectations, including what would be provided for programme delivery (staff training, guidance manuals, videos, books, and weekly handouts). Schools released a staff member to attend the two-day Book-Sharing training in January 2019

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

and for two hours a week for seven-weeks to deliver the programme to parents of nursery and reception class children between February and April 2019. One school dropped-out before commencing programme delivery.

Parent/family recruitment. Schools were asked to recruit the parents and children by distribution of letters, describing the programme and the study, requesting that parents complete and return a note of interest. As this generated few responses from parents, schools made direct contact with families of children whom they thought may benefit. Schools forwarded contact details of interested parents to the researcher who telephoned them to discuss the programme and expectations of involvement. Interested participants were then visited at home to obtain written consent to participation.

Data collection. Data were collected from participants during two home visits, one following signed consent (baseline) and one immediately following programme completion. Semi-structured interviews with parents and school-based staff were also conducted after programme completion. Participants were invited to provide data in their preferred language however all chose the medium of English. Each parent/child dyad was observed, and video-recorded for 10 minutes in a reading observation for later analysis. An Usborne Farmyard Tales series book, for children aged between 3 and 6 years, was provided and parents asked to look at the book with their child for 10 minutes. The books include brief simple text in a bright and colourful context. ‘The Naughty Sheep’ was used at baseline and ‘Pig got Stuck’, post-course to control for prior experience. Following training, the first author (primary coder) coded all video observations, and the second author (the criterion coder) coded 25% of randomly selected videos for inter-rater reliability. Researchers achieved good inter-rater reliability (80%) across all scales. The interclass correlations (ICC) were between .795 and .987. Post-intervention semi-structured interviews with parents and school-staff were audio recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Intervention

The Book Sharing Programme was initially developed by Murray and Cooper (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016) to promote shared reading for parents of 14-18 months old children, in highly disadvantaged communities in South Africa. The seven-session programme teaches parents to have stimulating and rich interactions with children over a picture-book, and to engage them actively in conversation about the picture content, relating it to their own experience and encouraging curiosity and thinking skills. To date, the programme has mainly been trialled in South Africa where groups run by trained facilitators for four to six caregivers of children aged 14-28 months were highly successful (Cooper et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2016). Since then, several versions have been developed for children of different ages. The programme is included in the Parenting for Lifelong Health initiative to prevent or reduce violence against children by developing, testing and disseminating low-cost parenting interventions, led by the World Health Organisation and partner universities (Wessels et al., 2019).

In this study, school-based staff delivered the seven session 3–5-year-old programme in two-hour weekly sessions (Murray et al., 2018) to groups of four parents. A member of staff from each school (one teacher and four teaching assistants) was trained and provided with the resources needed to deliver the programme. Each session introduces specific parenting strategies. Topics include building and enriching language, numbers and comparisons, linking to child experience, feelings, intentions, perceptions, and strengthening relationships. During the first hour PowerPoint slides, illustrative video clips and group discussion take place. During the second hour, children join their parents under the guidance of the facilitator, to practice the strategies taught that week. Parents receive feedback and instruction for continued practice. A new book and handout are provided each week for home

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

practice which the families keep. Parents are encouraged to practice for 10-15 minutes a day with their child. Discussion on home practice is explored at the start of the following session.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative. Measures of parental competence, child behaviour, language, and social-emotional ability were analysed in the International Business Machine Corporation Statistical Package for Social Sciences 22 (IBM SPSS statistics 22). Data were scored according to the guidelines for each measure. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were calculated. Paired samples *t*-tests were performed to determine intervention effects. The SDQ, ASQ:SE, and behavioural observation measures violated the assumption of normality and were analysed using a non-parametric test (Wilcoxon Signed Rank).

Qualitative. Interviews were recorded to capture the idea's, views, and experiences of the parents who completed the programme and the staff who delivered it. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014) was used to establish the feasibility of, and satisfaction with, the programme from the school staff/parent interviews. The interviews were externally transcribed and then read and re-read to generate ideas for themes. These results are reported in Chapter 4.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Fifteen mothers and one father participated. Nine children (56%) were male and seven (44%) lived in single parent homes. Most children ($n = 11$, 69%) scored high or very high on the parent reported SDQ indicating significant behavioural concerns. Seven children (44%) scored as high-risk on the ASQ:SE suggesting significant social-emotional difficulties. Nine

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

parents (56 %) were unemployed and four (25%) had left school without qualifications (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Sample characteristics at baseline

Demographics	All (N = 16)
Parent Age, years: <i>M (SD)</i>	33.44 (6.67)
Child Age, months: <i>M (SD)</i>	56.87 (6.89)
Parent Gender, male: <i>n (%)</i>	1 (6.25)
Child Gender, male: <i>n (%)</i>	9 (56.25)
Age Parent Left School, years: <i>M (SD)</i>	16.69 (2.24)
Further Education: <i>n (%)</i>	12 (75.0)

Programme Engagement

All participants completed the programme, with 12 parents (75%) attending at least six sessions and 10 (63%) attending all seven (*mean attendance* = 6.19, *SD* = 1.28).

Pre- and Post-course Results

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Follow up measures were collected from all 16 parents (100%). Paired t-tests and Wilcoxon signed-rank nonparametric tests were conducted to explore the effects on children’s behaviour, social/emotional ability, and language capacity, as well as parenting self-efficacy and programme satisfaction.

Parent outcomes. For the observation outcomes, a Wilcoxon signed-rank nonparametric test showed significant increases in the frequency of use of the positive parenting strategies of *praise and encouragement*: $Z = -2.064, p = .039$; *reflection*, $Z = -2.323, p = .020$; *academic coaching*: $Z = -2.983, p = .003$; *social-emotional coaching*: $Z = -2.656, p = .008$; and *linking*: $Z = -2.380, p = 0.017$. There was also a reduction in use of *negative parenting strategies*: $Z = -2.012, p = .044$. There was no significant difference for the frequency of *questions*: $p = .222$.

A paired samples *t*-test on parental competence (PSOC) showed improved parenting competence and satisfaction $t(15) = -6.05, p = <.001$. (see Table 2).

Table 2.

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for parent outcomes of 10 minutes (per category) observational data from the reading task and parenting competency (n = 14)

Observation Reading	Baseline <i>M (SD)</i>	Follow-up <i>M (SD)</i>	<i>p</i> -values
Praise and Encouragement	9.63 (7.03)	14.21 (8.98)	.039*
Reflection	14.43 (9.94)	20.07 (12.18)	.020*
Questions	4.86 (4.19)	3.07 (3.17)	.222
Academic Coaching	47.36 (18.67)	67.21 (22.04)	.003**
Social-Emotional Coaching	5.93 (5.34)	12.86 (7.57)	.008**
Linking	1.93 (2.01)	6.29 (6.71)	.017*
Negative Strategies	3.64 (4.05)	1.50 (2.53)	.044*

PSOC	Baseline	Follow-up	<i>p</i> -values
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
Parenting competency	70.94 (13.02)	84.31(10.67)	<.001**

PAROT observation reading, *PSOC* parenting sense of competence scale

* Sig at $p < .05$ **Sig at $p < .01$

Child outcomes. Child outcomes were assessed by parent report of child behaviour (SDQ) and social/emotional ability (ASQ:SE), and researcher collected language competence (EYT). Children displayed increased expressive language competence (EYT) $t(15) = -9.48$, $p = < .001$ and had reduced overall behaviour problems (SDQ) at follow-up compared to baseline $Z = -2.653$, $p = .008$. Furthermore, children had reduced overall social-emotional difficulties compared to baseline $Z = -3.521$, $p = < .001$. Taken together this indicates that the interventions improved children's language ability, social-emotional competence, and behaviour (see Table 3).

Table 3.

Baseline and follow-up mean and standard deviations for child outcomes of language, behaviour and social-emotional competencies (n = 16)

Child Outcomes	Baseline	Follow-up	<i>p</i> -values
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
EYT	26.40 (10.32)	38.73 (11.19)	.001**
SDQ	12.88 (7.62)	9.06 (6.38)	.009*
ASQ - SE	73.13 (51.21)	35.94 (31.26)	.001**

EYT Early years Toolbox child language measure, SDQ Strengths and difficulties child behaviour scale, ASQ-SE measure of child social-emotional ability

* Sig at $p < .05$ **Sig at $p < .01$

Discussion

This paper reports on the first feasibility study of the 'Books Together Programme' for parents of 3–5-year-olds (Murray et al, 2018) delivered in school by school-based staff. It explored whether it was feasible for staff to deliver the programme and satisfaction with, and acceptance of, the programme by staff and parents. In addition, it explored outcomes for children and parents. Attendance was high with over 75% attending at least six and 63% attending all seven sessions.

Parents were mostly recruited through direct contact by school-based staff with parents of children whom they believed might benefit. This approach recruited four parents in each school. Parenting programmes do not always reach the families who could most benefit, and collaborative approaches are needed to ensure that families most likely to benefit are recruited (Williams, Hoare, Owen, & Hutchings, 2019). For this study a proactive approach, targeting and contacting those whose children were considered most in need, improved recruitment. Given that parental engagement in children's education is a key factor in school success (Kingston et al., 2013) establishing how to encourage increased parental involvement in programmes like this is important.

School staff reported the programme as acceptable, enjoyable, and easy to deliver. Improved home/school links were established, with all schools welcoming parental involvement during the programme which they reported promoted increased children's engagement with learning. Parental learning was well-supported by the programme resources,

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

the videos offered a model of the behavioural strategies taught, weekly handouts reinforced key learning points for home practice and the books focused children’s attention and interest (see Chapter 4).

Delivery barriers included group management challenges, a lack of school resources and technical difficulties. Facilitator training did not include group leadership skills training and no supervision was provided during programme delivery. Given the complex needs of the families recruited, group leadership skills training and supervision could increase school facilitators confidence and skills in effectively managing the group (Flay et al. 2005). However, despite the challenges, parent retention was excellent, and the programme positively impacted on children’s experience of school and motivation to achieve (Sheppard, 2009). School staff would like to continue to deliver the programme confirming that it is a feasible and acceptable intervention for school-based delivery (see Chapter 4).

Similar to other book-sharing studies, this study reports significant improvements in children’s expressive language, pro-social behaviour, and social/emotional competence, (Murray et al., 2016; Dowdell et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2015). Thematic analyses indicated increased parent/child bonding, parental confidence, and children’s interest in, and enjoyment of, the books. The programme supported parents in assisting children’s understanding of their own emotions and intentions, and the perspectives of others, resulting in reduced challenging child behaviour.

The study reported a significant improvement in observed positive, and a significant reduction in observed negative, parenting strategies. The programme was well received by parents, and their parenting self-efficacy and satisfaction improved as did their wellbeing. High levels of parental self-efficacy and well-being are associated with increases in quality of parent/child interactions, including parental warmth, responsiveness, and involvement

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

(Trivette, Dunst, & Hamby, 2010) and with reduced child behaviour problems, improved school performance, and social functioning (Pellitier & Brent, 2002).

The current study has strengths including the high rates of parental attendance, retention, and programme satisfaction. The use of a mixed method approach improved the likelihood of valid inferences. However, the study has several limitations including the small sample size and absence of control group. Another weakness was the absence of data regarding father's parenting behaviour. This is an under researched phenomenon (Panter-Brick et al., 2014) and fathers have a substantial impact on children's developmental outcomes (McWayne, Downer, Campos, & Harris, 2013). However engaging fathers is challenging. Furthermore, since the study had a limited timescale, it was not possible to explore long-term programme impact.

Despite the limitations the preliminary findings are positive and justify a larger, more rigorous RCT trial. Low parenting satisfaction and competence reduce positive parent/child interaction during the pre-school phase and are associated with poor child development at aged five (Welsh et al, 2014). Delivering the programme during children's pre-school years could increase positive parent/child interactions and promote children's language, communication, and social/emotional skills, improving their school readiness. The current findings support the need for more rigorous future research to explore the benefits of school-based delivery of the programme on parental strategies and well-being, and children's school readiness skills.

APPENDIX B

Parent Note of Interest Form

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

COLEG GWYDDORAU IECHYD AC YMDDYGIAD
COLLEGE OF HEALTH & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

YSGOL SEICOLEG
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY



Introducing and evaluating a book sharing programme for parents

PARENT NOTE OF INTEREST

If you have discussed the research project with your child's school and are willing to learn more about this exciting research opportunity, please complete and sign this form and hand it to back to the staff member.

Name of School :	
Parent Name:	
Child Name:	
Address:	
Postcode:	
Telephone (Landline):	
Telephone (Mobile):	
First Language:	
Best Time to Contact:	

I consent for my child's school to forward my contact details to the research team at Bangor University. I understand that I will be contacted and provided with additional information about the study and the possibility of participating in the project at which time I will have the opportunity to decide whether or not to participate.

Signature:	Date:
------------	-------

Version 1 05/11/2018

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Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

COLLEGE OF HEALTH & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

YSGOL SEICOLEG
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY



Cyflwyno a dadansoddi rhaglen rhannu llyfrau gyda rhieni

NODYN O DDIDDORDEB I RIENI

Os ydych wedi trafod y prosiect ymchwil gydag ysgol eich plentyn ag eisiau gwybod mwy am y cyfle ymchwil cyffroes hwn, cwblwllhewch a llofnodwch y ffurflen hon a'i ddychwelyd i'r aelod staff os gwelwch yn dda.

Enw'r Ysgol:	
Enw Rhiant:	
Enw Plentyn:	
Cyfeiriad:	
Côd post:	
Ffôn (Cartref):	
Ffôn (Symudol):	
Iaith Cyntaf:	
Amser Gorau i Gysylltu:	

Rwyf yn caniatáu i ysgol fy mhlentyn yrru fy manylion cyswllt ymlaen i'r tîm ymchwil ym Mhrifysgol Bangor. Rwyf yn deall y bydd rhywun yn cysylltu â mi ag yn rhoi gwybodaeth ychwanegol am yr astudiaeth a'r posibilrwydd o gymryd rhan yn y prosiect a byddaf yn cael cyfle i benderfynu os wyf am gymryd rhan neu beidio.

Llofnod:	Dyddiad:
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APPENDIX C

Information leaflet for schools

Welsh and English language copies



Rhannu Llyfrau i Hybu Sgiliau Iaith a Chymdeithasol-Emosiynol 2020

**A yw eich ysgol gynradd eisiau gwellhau parodrwydd ysgol a'ch perthynas gyda rhieni?
Oes gennych ddiddordeb mewn bod yn rhan o ddadansoddiad peilot o raglen Rhannu
Llyfrau i rieni?**

Os felly, rydym yn eich gwahodd i ymuno a phrosiect cyffroes ...

Os oes gennych ddiddordeb ymuno a'r astudiaeth hon, gyrrwch ebost i Claire Owen
psu4ed@bangor.ac.uk neu ffoniwch 01248 383627

**Beth yw rhaglen
Rhannu Llyfrau a sut
y bydd o fudd i'm
hysgol?**

Mae'r rhaglen Rhannu Llyfrau yn cynnwys saith sesiwn:

- Adeiladu a chyfoethogi iaith
- Cysylltu'r cynnwys i brofiad y plentyn
- Rhifau a chymhariaethau
- Teimladau
- Bwriadau
- Safbwyntiau
- Cryfhau perthnasau

	<p>Nod y rhaglen yw i wellhau lefel sgiliau rhyngweithio rhieni trwy ddarparu sgiliau ymgysylltu positif; gall hyn o bosibl wellhau parodrwydd plentyn ar gyfer yr ysgol. Caiff sesiynau eu rhedeg pob wythnos am ddwy awr. Bydd yr awr gyntaf yn cynnwys gwybodaeth am bwnc yr wythnos gyda esiamplau fideo o strategaethau positif o rieni a plant yn edrych ar lyfrau. Yn ystod yr ail awr, ymunai plant yn y sesiwn i ymarfer y syniadau a derbyn awgrymiadau a chefnogaeth am sut i ymgysylltu ei plentyn mewn rhannu llyfrau, i atgyfnerthu dysgu. Caiff aseiniadau eu gosod wedyn am yr wythnos.</p> <p>Gall Rhannu Llyfrau fod o fudd i'ch ysgol yn y ffyrdd yma:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wellhau sgiliau iaith, sylw a deallusrwydd cymdeithasol/emosiynol. • I ddarparu sgiliau ychwanegol i staff ysgol a rhieni mewn hybu iaith a sylw. • I gryfhau y berthynas rhwng rhieni a'r ysgol er mwyn cefnogi'r disgyblion. • I hybu'r defnydd o ymyraethau ar sail tystiolaeth i godi safonau mewn parodrwydd ysgol.
Sut ydym yn gwybod bod Rhannu Llyfrau yn effeithiol?	<p>Mae Rhannu Llyfrau yn un o bedwar rhaglen o'r enw Rhiantu ar gyfer Iechyd Gydol Oes, a ddatblygwyd gan y Sefydliad Iechyd y Byd, sy'n disgrifio strategaethau allweddol ag offer i hybu perthnasau positif rhiant-plentyn. Mae'r rhaglen Rhannu Llyfrau wedi'i selio ar waith gyda theuluoedd plant mewn gwlad incwm canolog/isel (De Affrica) gydag unigolion mewn risg o oediad datblygiad gwybyddol, cymdeithasol, ag ymddygiadol oherwydd anfantais cymdeithasol. Dangosir ymchwil effeithiolrwydd y rhaglen mewn gwellhau datblygiad gwybyddol a sylw. Yn ddiweddar, mae'r rhaglen Rhannu Llyfrau wedi'i addasu ar gyfer rhieni plant 3-5 mlwydd oed a cafodd ei dreialu'n llwyddiannus mewn pedair ysgol ar draws Gogledd Cymru. Roedd y rhieni a'r ysgolion yn canmoladwy iawn o'r rhaglen a roedd canlyniadau calonogol yn nhermau gwelliannau mewn iaith, ymddygiad, a sgiliau cymdeithasol-emosiynol plant. Rydym nawr yn ymchwilio effeithiau'r rhaglen gyda sampl mwy. Byddem yn recriwtio ysgolion ar draws Gogledd Cymru erbyn Ionawr 2020. Bydd ysgolion yn cael eu didoli ar hap i unai dderbyn yr hyfforddiant yn syth (Mawrth 2020) neu nes ymlaen (Medi 2020). Bydd y rhai sy'n cael yr hyfforddiant ym Mawrth yn rhedeg y rhaglen ar ôl gwyliau'r Pasg.</p>
Pa ddisgyblion/staff wnaiff gael budd o Rannu Llyfrau?	<p>Mae'r rhaglen Rhannu Llyfrau wedi'i addasu ar gyfer aelodau staff ysgol sy'n gweithio gyda phlant oed cyn-ysgol. Mae'r rhaglen yn cael ei ddarparu ar gyfer rhieni plant 3-5 mlwydd oed.</p>

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Beth fydd angen i ysgolion gyfrannu?	<p>Er mwyn i'r prosiect redeg yn effeithiol, mae cyfraniadau pwysig i bob ysgol sy'n cymryd rhan yn yr astudiaeth. Bydd angen i bob ysgol:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adnabod un aelod o staff sydd efo diddordeb mewn rhedeg y rhaglen erbyn diwedd Rhagfyr 2020. • Adnabod rhieni/gofalwyr plant 3-5 mlwydd oed sydd efo diddordeb cymryd rhan a gyrru'i manylion i'r tîm ymchwil erbyn diwedd Ionawr 2020. • Sicrhau fod yr aelod staff yn cael amser i fynychu'r hyfforddiant dau ddiwrnod (Mawrth/Medi 2020) a dwy awr pob wythnos (saith wythnos) i redeg y rhaglen Rhannu Llyfrau (ar ôl gwyliau'r Pasg/tymor yr Hydref 2020).
Beth yw'r gost i bob ysgol?	Bydd DIM cost i'ch ysgol am gymryd rhan yn y prosiect hwn.
Sut y byddem yn mesur effaith?	Gofynnir i staff dysgu, rhieni a phlant gwbwlhau ychydig o holiaduron ag asesiadau sy'n mesur ymddygiad a chymhwysedd. Bydd hefyd arsylwad 20-munud o'r rhiant a'r plentyn yn y cartref. Bydd yr arsylwad yn cynnwys 10-munud o chwarae a 10-munud o rannu llyfr, a caiff ei recordio ar fideo ar gyfer dadansoddiad yn ddiweddarach. Mewn ymchwil diweddarach, adroddodd rhieni foddhad gyda'r arsylwadau a nad oeddem yn ymwythiol nag anghyffyrddus.
Beth sy'n digwydd nesaf?	Os oes gennych ddiddordeb ymuno a'r astudiaeth neu eisiau mwy o wybodaeth, gyrrwch ebost i psu4ed@bangor.ac.uk neu ffoniwch 01248 383758.

Tîm Prosiect

Enw	Rôl	Sefydliad	Manylion cyswllt
Yr Athro Judy Hutchings	Cyfarwyddwr	Canolfan Ymyrraeth Gynnar ar Sail Tystiolaeth (CYCST), Prifysgol Bangor	j.hutchings@bangor.ac.uk Swyddfa: 01248 383758
Dr Margiad Williams	Swyddog Ymchwil	CYCST, Prifysgol Bangor	margiad.williams@bangor.ac.uk Swyddfa: 01248 383627
Claire Owen	Myfyriwr PhD	CYCST, Prifysgol Bangor	psu4ed@bangor.ac.uk Swyddfa: 01248 383758



Book Sharing to Promote Language and Social-Emotional Skills 2020

Is your primary school looking to improve school readiness and relationships with parents?
Are you interested in becoming involved in a small pilot evaluation of a Book Sharing programme for parents?

If you are interested in joining this study, please email Claire Owen at psu4ed@bangor.ac.uk or telephone 01248 383758

What is the Book Sharing programme and how will it benefit my school?

The Book Sharing programme consists of seven sessions:

- Building and enriching language
- Linking content to the child's experience
- Numbers and comparisons
- Feelings
- Intentions
- Perspectives
- Strengthening relationships

The aim of the programme is to improve the level of interactive skills for parents by providing them with positive engagement strategies; this could potentially improve child readiness for school. Sessions are delivered weekly for two hours. The first

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

	<p>hour consists of information about the weekly topic with video examples of positive strategies of parents and children looking at books. For the second hour, parents are then joined by their children to practice the ideas and receive suggestions and support on how to engage their child in book sharing, to reinforce learning. Assignments are then set for the week.</p> <p>Book Sharing may benefit your school in the following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To improve language skills, attention and social/emotional understanding. • To provide additional skills to school staff and parents in promoting language and attention. • To strengthen the relationship between parents and the school in supporting pupils. • To promote the use of evidence-based interventions to raise standards in school readiness.
How do we know that Book Sharing is effective?	<p>Book Sharing is part of four programmes known as Parenting for Lifelong Health, developed by the World Health Organisation, that describes key strategies and tools for promoting positive parent-child relationships. The Book Sharing programme is based on work with families of children in a middle/low income country (South Africa), with individuals at risk of cognitive, social, and behavioural development delay due to social disadvantage. Research has shown the effectiveness of the programme in improving cognitive development and attention. The Book Sharing programme has recently been adapted for parents of children aged 3-5 years and was successfully delivered in four schools across North Wales. The programme was well-received by parents and schools and showed promising results in terms of improvements in child language, behaviour, and social-emotional skills. We are now researching the effects of the programme with a larger sample. We will be recruiting schools throughout North Wales by January 2020. Schools will be randomly allocated to either receive training immediately (March 2020) or later (September 2020). Those trained in March will be delivering the programme after the Easter holidays.</p>
Which pupils/staff will benefit from Book Sharing?	<p>The Book Sharing programme has been adapted for school staff who work with preschool children. The programme is delivered to parents of children aged 3-5 years.</p>
What will schools need to contribute?	<p>For the project to run effectively, there are important contributions for each school involved in the study. Each school will need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify one member of staff who are interested in delivering the programme by end of December 2020. • Identify parents/carers of a child aged 3-5 years who are interested in participating and forward their details to the research team by end of January 2020.

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the staff member is given time to attend the two-day training (March/September 2020) and two hours per week (seven weeks) to deliver the Book Sharing programme (after Easter holidays/Autumn term 2020).
What is the cost per school?	There would be NO cost to your school for taking part in this project.
How will we measure impact?	Teaching staff, parents and children will be asked to complete a number of questionnaires and measures examining behaviour and competence. There will also be a 20-minute observation of the parent with their child at home. The observation will consist of a 10-minute play session and 10-minute sharing a book, which will be video recorded for later analysis. In previous research, parents reported satisfaction with the observations and did not find them intrusive or uncomfortable.
What happens next?	If you are interested in joining this study or would like more information, please email Claire Owen at psu4ed@bangor.ac.uk or telephone 01248 383758.

Project Team

Name	Role	Organisation	Contact details
Professor Judy Hutchings	Director	Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention (CEBEI), Bangor University	j.hutchings@bangor.ac.uk Office: 01248 383758
Dr Margiad Williams	Research Officer	CEBEI, Bangor University	margiad.williams@bangor.ac.uk Office: 01248 383627
Claire Owen	PhD student	CEBEI, Bangor University	psu4ed@bangor.ac.uk Office: 01248 383758

APPENDIX D

Parent information sheet

COLEG GWYDDORAU IECHYD AC YMDDYGIAD
COLLEGE OF HEALTH & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

YSGOL SEICOLEG
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

Introducing and evaluating a book sharing programme for parents

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

A member of the research team will go through the information with you and answer any questions you may have.

Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your family and the school if you wish. If anything is unclear, or you would like more information, you are welcome to ask us any questions.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to evaluate a book sharing programme delivered by school staff to parents. The programme is designed for parents of children aged 3-5 years. It aims to teach parents to have a stimulating and rich interaction with their children using a picture book. Rather than reading to a passive listener, supportive book-sharing involves engaging the child actively in conversation about the picture content, relating it to their own experience, and encouraging the child's curiosity and thinking skills. In this study we are interested in knowing whether school staff are able to successfully deliver the programme to a group of parents, whether parents and staff like the programme, and whether there are any changes in child behaviour, language skills, social-emotional competence, and parent competence.

Why have I been asked to take part?

Your child's school have agreed to take part in this study. A member of staff will be delivering the programme to parents. You have been invited to take part because you have a child aged 3-5 years who attend school. With your permission, the school has forwarded your details to the research team.

What does the study involve?

A researcher will visit you within the next month and again two months later. At each visit, the researcher will ask you to complete some questionnaires about yourself and your child and to do an assessment of language with your child. She will also ask you and your child to interact together as you normally would so that she can observe how you and your child

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

interact during a short play and reading session. This observation will be video recorded so that it can be coded at a later time. After completing the book sharing programme, you will also be invited to take part in an interview to get your feedback on the programme. The interview will be audio recorded for later transcribing. All names, places etc will be anonymised. The visits should last no more than one hour. If you consent to take part in exchange for your time and effort, after the final data collection visit, we will give you a copy of an age appropriate book for your child.

Once the initial home visit is complete, you will be told by the school which day and at what time the programme will start. The programme will last seven weeks.

Are there any benefits or risks in taking part?

The benefits of taking part will be the opportunity to complete a seven-week programme to learn new skills that could potentially help you support your child. It could also strengthen your relationship with your child’s school. There are no obvious risks in taking part in this study. If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to complete questionnaires and a 20-minute video recorded observation session in a home visit by a researcher (10 minutes of reading and 10 minutes of play). You will also be invited to take part in an interview after completing the programme to get your opinions on the programme. These are the only possible inconvenience. A researcher will only visit with your permission and at a time that is convenient for you.

What will happen to my data?

All the information about you and your child collected by the researcher will remain strictly confidential and will be kept at the Centre for Evidence Based Early Intervention, Bangor University in a locked cabinet. The videos from the observations will be kept on a University, encrypted laptop and only the research team will have access to them.

Our procedures for handling, processing, storage and destruction of data are compliant with the Bangor University policies and procedures.

When the results of this study are reported, information provided by school support staff and families taking part will be reported as a group and not as individuals. At the end of the project, we will send a letter to all of the school support staff and families who participated outlining the results of the study. We will ensure confidentiality unless we have cause for concern regarding the child’s safety. If any child protection issues arise, the researchers will inform the primary supervisor who will pass on the information to the relevant service providers.

What if I don’t want to take part?

It is up to you whether or not you decide to take part in this research project. We will explain the study and go through this information sheet with you. If you do decide to take part, we will then ask you to sign a consent form. You will be given a copy of the information sheet and the signed consent form to keep for your records. You are free to withdraw from the research at any time and you do not need to give a reason. This will not affect your or your child’s access to other services.

Who do I contact about the study?

If you would like any further information about this study you could contact:

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

Name: Dr Margiad Elen Williams (Research Officer)

Email: margiad.williams@bangor.ac.uk; Tel: 01248 383627

Who do I contact with any concerns about the study?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you should ask to speak to the researchers who will do their best to answer your questions (tel: 01248 383627).

If you are unhappy with the conduct of this research and wish to complain formally, you should contact:

Name: Mr Huw Ellis (School Manager, School of Psychology, Bangor University)

Email: huw.ellis@bangor.ac.uk; Tel: 01248 383229

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

PENNAETH YR YSGOL/HEAD OF SCHOOL

EBOST: seicoleg@bangor.ac.uk

EMAIL: psychology@bangor.ac.uk

www.bangor.ac.uk www.bangor.ac.uk/psychology

APPENDIX E

Parent Demographic Questionnaire

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Participant ID:

Date:

Personal Data Questionnaire**1. Background Details**

1a. Child's DOB Child's Age Sex

1b. Carer DOB Carer's Age Sex

1c. What is your preferred language for speaking?

Welsh ☐ English ☐ other ☐ Please state

1d. Relationship to child:

Biological parent ☐ Parent's partner ☐Foster parent ☐ Stepparent ☐Adoptive parent ☐ Other (please state)1e. How old were you when your *first* child was born?

1f. How many children do you have?

2. Relationships

2a. are you currently?

Single ☐ Married ☐ Separated ☐Widowed ☐ Divorced ☐ Living Together ☐In a relationship but living apart ☐ N/A ☐

2b. Spouse / partner's relationship to child:

Biological parent ☐ Parents partner ☐ Adoptive parent ☐Foster parent ☐ Stepparent ☐ N/A ☐

Other (please state)

3. Employment

3a. Are you currently?

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Employed ☐ Self-employed ☐ Unemployed (looking for work) ☐
 Unemployed (not looking for work) ☐ Student ☐
 Military ☐ Retired ☐ Unable to work ☐

4. Qualifications

4a. Age you left school

4b. Did you obtain any qualifications before leaving school?

No ☐ Yes (GCSE's) ☐ Yes (AS levels) ☐

Yes (A levels) ☐

4c. Did you obtain any further qualifications after leaving school?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Thank you very much for completing this questionnaire

APPENDIX F

Dyadic parent-child interaction coding system coding sheet

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Family ID _____

Time 1 2

Coder initial _____

RC

A	D	Positive Parent	Total
		Unlabelled Praise	
		Labelled Praise	
		Encouragement	
A	D	Neutral Parent	Total
		Reflection	
		Question	
		Closed	
		Open-ended	
A	D	Coaching	Total
		Academic	
		Social-emotional	
A	D	Negative Parent	Total
		Critical Statement	

NOTES:

APPENDIX G

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire 2/4

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire**P 2-4**

For each item, please mark the box for Not True, Somewhat True or Certainly True. It would help us if you answered all items as best you can even if you are not absolutely certain or the item seems daft! Please give your answers on the basis of the child's behaviour over the last six months.

Child's Name

Male/Female

Date of Birth.....

	Not True	Somewhat True	Certainly True
Considerate of other people's feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shares readily with other children (treats, toys, pencils etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rather solitary, tends to play alone	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally obedient, usually does what adults request	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many worries, often seems worried	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helpful if someone is hurt, upset or feeling ill	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Constantly fidgeting or squirming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has at least one good friend	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often fights with other children or bullies them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often unhappy, down-hearted or tearful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Generally liked by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Easily distracted, concentration wanders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous or clingy in new situations, easily loses confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Kind to younger children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often argumentative with adults	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Picked on or bullied by other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Often volunteers to help others (parents, teachers, other children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can stop and think things out before acting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can be spiteful to others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gets on better with adults than with other children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Many fears, easily scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sees tasks through to the end, good attention span	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Do you have any other comments or concerns?

Please turn over - there are a few more questions on the other side

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Overall, do you think that your child has difficulties in one or more of the following areas: emotions, concentration, behaviour or being able to get on with other people?

No	Yes- minor difficulties	Yes- definite difficulties	Yes- severe difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you have answered "Yes", please answer the following questions about these difficulties:

- How long have these difficulties been present?

Less than a month	1-5 months	6-12 months	Over a year
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties upset or distress your child?

Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties interfere with your child's everyday life in the following areas?

	Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
HOME LIFE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FRIENDSHIPS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEARNING	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEISURE ACTIVITIES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do the difficulties put a burden on you or the family as a whole?

Not at all	Only a little	Quite a lot	A great deal
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature

Date

Mother/Father/Other (please specify:)

Thank you very much for your help

APPENDIX H

Ages and Stages Social/Emotional Questionnaire

33 - 41 months

Ages & Stages Questionnaires®: Social-Emotional
 A Parent-Completed, Child-Monitoring System for Social-Emotional Behaviors
 By **Jane Squires, Diane Bricker, & Elizabeth Twombly**
 with assistance from **Suzanne Yockelson, Maura Schoen Davis, & Younghee Kim**
 Copyright © 2002 by Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.



36 Month/3 Year Questionnaire

(For children ages 33 through 41 months)





Important Points to Remember:

- ☒ Please return this questionnaire by _____.
- ☒ If you have any questions or concerns about your child or about this questionnaire, please call: _____.
- ☒ Thank you and please look forward to filling out another ASQ:SE questionnaire in _____ months.



Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Please read each question carefully and		MOST OF THE TIME	SOMETIMES	RARELY OR NEVER	CHECK IF THIS IS A CONCERN
1. Check the box <input type="checkbox"/> that best describes your child's behavior <i>and</i> 2. Check the circle <input type="radio"/> if this behavior is a concern					
1. Does your child look at you when you talk to her?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
2. Does your child like to be hugged or cuddled?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
3. Does your child talk and/or play with adults he knows well?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
4. Does your child cling to you more than you expect?		<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
5. When upset, can your child calm down within 15 minutes?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
6. Does your child seem too friendly with strangers?		<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
7. Can your child settle herself down after periods of exciting activity?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
8. Can your child move from one activity to the next with little difficulty, such as from playtime to mealtime?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
9. Does your child seem happy?		<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
TOTAL POINTS ON PAGE ____					

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

	MOST OF THE TIME	SOMETIMES	RARELY OR NEVER	CHECK IF THIS IS A CONCERN
10. Is your child interested in things around him, such as people, toys, and foods?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
11. Does your child do what you ask her to do?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
12. Does your child seem more active than other children her age?	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
13. Can your child stay with activities she enjoys for at least 5 minutes (not including watching television)?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
14. Do you and your child enjoy mealtimes together?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
15. Does your child have eating problems, such as stuffing foods, vomiting, eating nonfood items, or _____ ? (You may write in another problem.)	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
16. Does your child sleep at least 8 hours in a 24-hour period?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
17. Does your child use words to tell you what he wants or needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
TOTAL POINTS ON PAGE ____				

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

	MOST OF THE TIME	SOMETIMES	RARELY OR NEVER	CHECK IF THIS IS A CONCERN
18. Does your child follow routine directions? For example, does she come to the table or help clean up her toys when asked?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
19. Does your child cry, scream, or have tantrums for long periods of time?	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
20. Does your child check to make sure you are near when exploring new places, such as a park or a friend's home?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
21. Does your child do things over and over and can't seem to stop? Examples are rocking, hand flapping, spinning, or _____ . (You may write in something else.)	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
22. Does your child hurt himself on purpose?	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
23. Does your child stay away from dangerous things, such as fire and moving cars?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
24. Does your child destroy or damage things on purpose?	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
25. Does your child use words to describe her feelings and the feelings of others, such as, "I'm happy," "I don't like that," or "She's sad"?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
TOTAL POINTS ON PAGE ____				

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

	MOST OF THE TIME	SOMETIMES	RARELY OR NEVER	CHECK IF THIS IS A CONCERN
26. Can your child name a friend?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
27. Do <i>other</i> children like to play with your child?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
28. Does <i>your child</i> like to play with other children?	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="radio"/>
29. Does your child try to hurt other children, adults, or animals (for example, by kicking or biting)?	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
30. Does your child show an interest in or knowledge of adult sexual language and activity?	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
31. Has anyone expressed concerns about your child's behaviors? If you checked "sometimes" or "most of the time," please explain:	<input type="checkbox"/> x	<input type="checkbox"/> v	<input type="checkbox"/> z	<input type="radio"/>
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>				
32. Do you have any concerns about your child's eating, sleeping, or toileting habits? If so, please explain:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>			
TOTAL POINTS ON PAGE ____				

33. Is there anything that worries you about your child? If so, please explain:

34. What things do you enjoy most about your child?

36 Month/3 Year ASQ:SE Information Summary

Child's name: _____	Child's date of birth: _____
Person filling out the ASQ:SE: _____	Relationship to child: _____
Mailing address: _____	City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____
Telephone: _____	Assisting in ASQ:SE completion: _____
Today's date: _____	Administering program/provider: _____

SCORING GUIDELINES

1. Make sure the parent has answered all questions and has checked the concern column as necessary. If all questions have been answered, go to Step 2. If not all questions have been answered, you should first try to contact the parent to obtain answers or, if necessary, calculate an average score (see pages 39 and 41 of *The ASQ:SE User's Guide*).
2. Review any parent comments. If there are no comments, go to Step 3. If a parent has written in a response, see the section titled "Parent Comments" on pages 39, 41, and 42 of *The ASQ:SE User's Guide* to determine if the response indicates a behavior that may be of concern.
3. Using the following point system:

Z (for zero) next to the checked box	= 0 points
V (for Roman numeral V) next to the checked box	= 5 points
X (for Roman numeral X) next to the checked box	= 10 points
Checked concern	= 5 points

Add together:

Total points on page 3	= _____
Total points on page 4	= _____
Total points on page 5	= _____
Total points on page 6	= _____

Child's total score = _____

SCORE INTERPRETATION

1. Review questionnaires

Review the parent's answers to questions. Give special consideration to any individual questions that score 10 or 15 points and any written or verbal comments that the parent shares. Offer guidance, support, and information to families, and refer if necessary, as indicated by score and referral considerations.

2. Transfer child's total score

In the table below, enter the child's total score (transfer total score from above).

Questionnaire interval	Cutoff score	Child's ASQ:SE score
36 months/3 years	59	

3. Referral criteria

Compare the child's total score with the cutoff in the table above. If the child's score falls above the cutoff and the factors in Step 4 have been considered, refer the child for a mental health evaluation.

4. Referral considerations

It is always important to look at assessment information in the context of other factors influencing a child's life. Consider the following variables prior to making referrals for a mental health evaluation. Refer to pages 44–46 in *The ASQ:SE User's Guide* for additional guidance related to these factors and for suggestions for follow-up.

- Setting/time factors
(e.g., Is the child's behavior the same at home as at school?, Have there been any stressful events in the child's life recently?)
- Development factors
(e.g., Is the child's behavior related to a developmental stage or a developmental delay?)
- Health factors
(e.g., Is the child's behavior related to health or biological factors?)
- Family/cultural factors
(e.g., Is the child's behavior acceptable given cultural or family context?)

APPENDIX I

Parents Sense of Competence Questionnaire

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale

(Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978)

Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6
1. The problems of taking care of a child are easy to solve once you know how your actions affect your child, an understanding I have acquired.	1	2	3	4	5 6
2. Even though being a parent could be rewarding, I am frustrated now while my child is at his / her present age.	1	2	3	4	5 6
3. I go to bed the same way I wake up in the morning, feeling I have not accomplished a whole lot.	1	2	3	4	5 6
4. I do not know why it is, but sometimes when I'm supposed to be in control, I feel more like the one being manipulated.	1	2	3	4	5 6
5. My mother was better prepared to be a good mother than I am.	1	2	3	4	5 6
6. I would make a fine model for a new mother to follow in order to learn what she would need to know in order to be a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5 6
7. Being a parent is manageable, and any problems are easily solved.	1	2	3	4	5 6
8. A difficult problem in being a parent is not knowing whether you're doing a good job or a bad one.	1	2	3	4	5 6
9. Sometimes I feel like I'm not getting anything done.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I meet by own personal expectations for expertise in caring for my child.	1	2	3	4	5 6
11. If anyone can find the answer to what is troubling my child, I am the one.	1	2	3	4	5 6
12. My talents and interests are in other areas, not being a parent.	1	2	3	4	5 6
13. Considering how long I've been a mother, I feel thoroughly familiar with this role.	1	2	3	4	5 6
14. If being a mother of a child were only more interesting, I would be motivated to do a better job as a parent.	1	2	3	4	5 6
15. I honestly believe I have all the skills necessary to be a good mother to my child.	1	2	3	4	5 6
16. Being a parent makes me tense and anxious.	1	2	3	4	5 6
17. Being a good mother is a reward in itself.	1	2	3	4	5 6

Parent Sense of Competency Scale (PSOC)

Scoring Instructions

The Parenting Sense of Competency Scale (PSOC) was developed by Gibaud-Wallston as part of her PhD dissertation and presented at the American Psychological Association by Gibaud-Wallston and Wandersman in 1978. The PSOC is a 17 item scale, with 2 subscales. Each item is rated on a 6 point Likert scale anchored by 1 = "Strongly Disagree" and 6 = "Strongly Agree". Nine (9) items (#s 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, and 16) on the PSOC are reverse coded.

Nine items on the PSOC are reverse coded, this is important for accurate scoring. Reverse coded means that a high score on the individual item is not indicative of having a sense of competency; essentially, the item is worded negatively.

Scoring Instructions:

To aid scoring, the score / number for each item can be written in the in the right hand margin of the questionnaire once completed.

For items 1, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15, and 17 simply write the number the participant indicated as their choice.

Reverse coding: For items 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 14, and 16 substitute the following numbers and write in right hand margin for totaling:

Answer	Score
6	1
5	2
4	3
3	4
2	5
1	6

Total all numbers you have written in the right hand margin; this is participants PSOC score.

A higher score indicates a higher parenting sense of competency. There are no average scores or 'cut-off's' for this tool.

APPENDIX J

Copies of Ethical Approval Emails

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Dear Claire,

2019-16439 Introducing and evaluating a book sharing programme for parents

Your research proposal number 2019-16439

has been reviewed by the School of Psychology Ethics and Research Committee and the committee are now able to confirm ethical and governance approval for the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation. This approval lasts for a maximum of three years from this date.

Ethical approval is granted for the study as it was explicitly described in the application

If you wish to make any non-trivial modifications to the research project, please submit an amendment form to the committee, and copies of any of the original documents reviewed which have been altered as a result of the amendment. Please also inform the committee immediately if participants experience any unanticipated harm as a result of taking part in your research, or if any adverse reactions are reported in subsequent literature using the same technique elsewhere.

Dear Claire,

2020-16699-A14670 Amendment to to Evaluating a book sharing programme for parents of children aged 3-5 years

Your research proposal number 2020-16699-A14670

has been reviewed by the School of Psychology Ethics and Research Committee and the committee are now able to confirm ethical and governance approval for the above research on the basis described in the application form, protocol and supporting documentation. This approval lasts for a maximum of three years from this date.

Ethical approval is granted for the study as it was explicitly described in the application

If you wish to make any non-trivial modifications to the research project, please submit an amendment form to the committee, and copies of any of the original documents reviewed which have been altered as a result of the amendment. Please also inform the committee immediately if participants experience any unanticipated harm as a result of taking part in your research, or if any adverse reactions are reported in subsequent literature using the same technique elsewhere.

APPENDIX K

Table of resources provided to schools

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Nos	Resource	Quantity
Set of 7	Weekly programme manuals (Leader files)	/
1	Pen drive with weekly book sharing vignettes	/
Set of 7 for each parent and master copy for schools	Books for families' ($n = 5$)	42 per school
Set of 7 for each parent and master copy for schools	Weekly handouts for parents	42 per school
5	Tea, coffee, sugar, and biscuits	/

APPENDIX L

Set of books provided to families

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'



APPENDIX M

Set of handouts provided for families

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'



APPENDIX N

Parent consent form

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'



COLEG GWYDDORAU IECHYD AC YMDDYGIAD
COLLEGE OF HEALTH & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

YSGOL SEICOLEG
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Participant Identification Number for this trial:

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: Introducing and evaluating a book sharing programme for parents

Name of Researcher:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated..... (version.....) for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected. ☐
3. I understand that participation will entail completing a seven-week programme at my child's school. ☐
4. I understand that the researcher will video record a 20-minute observation of myself and my child during a home visit. ☐
5. I understand that I will be asked to take part in an audio recorded interview about my opinions after completing the course. ☐
6. I understand that all information will be kept confidential unless any matter(s) regarding child protection issues arise. ☐
7. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature

_____	_____	_____
Name of Person taking consent	Date	Signature

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

PRIFYSGOL BANGOR
ADEILAD BRIGANTIA,
FFORDD PENRALLT,
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COLLEGE OF HEALTH & BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

YSGOL SEICOLEG
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Rhif Adnabod Cyfranogwr ar gyfer y treial:

FFURFLEN CANIATAD RHINI

Teitl y prosiect: Cyflwyno a dadansoddi rhaglen rhannu llyfrau i rieni

Enw yr Ymchwilydd:

Llythrennwyd y bocs plis

1. Rwyf yn cadarnhau fy mod wedi darllen y daflen wybodaeth, dyddiad (fersiwn) ar gyfer yr astudiaeth uchod. Rwyf wedi cael cyfle i ystyried y wybodaeth, i ofyn cwestiynnau ag wedi cael atebion boddhaol i'r rhain. ☐
2. Rwyf yn deall fod fy nghyfranogiad yn wirfoddol ag rwyf yn rhydd i dynnu yn ôl ar unrhyw adeg heb roi rheswm, ag heb gael unrhyw effaith ar fy ngofal meddygol nag fy hawliau cyfreithiol. ☐
3. Rwyf yn deall y bydd cymryd rhan yn golygu cyflawni rhaglen saith-wythnos yn ysgol fy mhlentyn. ☐
4. Rwyf yn deall y bydd yr ymchwilydd yn recordio fideo o arsylwad 20-munud o minnau a fy mhlentyn yn ystod ymweliad cartref. ☐
5. Rwyf yn deall y byddaf yn cael cynnig cymryd rhan mewn cyfweliad am fy marn ar ôl cwblhau'r rhaglen. ☐

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

6. Rwyf yn deall y bydd fy holl wybodaeth yn cael ei gadw yng nghyfrinachol oni bai fydd unrhyw fater(ion) amddiffyn plant yn codi.

☐

7. Rwyf i yn cytuno i gymryd han yn yr astudiaeth uchod.

☐

Enw Cyfranogwr

Dyddiad

Llofnod

Enw y Person sydd
yn cymryd caniatad

Dyddiad

Llofnod

APPENDIX O

Excerpt of parent interview transcription

(School-based study)

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

101

I So hi, how did you find the book sharing programme? How was it for you?

R I found the book programme sharing programme it's fantastic for all parents. But parents and as well kids, children and the it's, it's helped me to be closer to my son to improve our relationship and also, other parents I like our teacher Mrs [REDACTED] who provide this programme, who ran this programme

and I feel very welcome and yeah, yeah.

I Oh that's lovely. I'm just wondering because I'm just wondering which topic which week you found the best. Now I know you probably don't remember so I'll give the 7. We had building and enriching language, linking to the child's experience

R Yes.

I Numbers and comparisons, feelings, intentions, perspectives and strengthening relationships.

R I think there was one book about a dog

I Yeah

R Johnny who was who didn't want to be in the bath which was intentions yes?

I Yes

R And me and my child really enjoyed this book

I Ok

R I think [REDACTED] that just sometimes it could keep the goals good to care about ourselves about our hygiene

I Yeah

R And how it would happen so we then read the beginning part also middle part we really enjoy and the last time when he really want to be notice he close people

I Yeah

R He wasn't because he was really dirty so I think that's part was very enjoyable. Yeah and I shared the books with the other xxxxxx also

I Yeah, I can't remember what we had. We had Handers surprise,

R Oh right yeah and that was counting, counting was also good and very enjoy it so much so

I Great. And what did you think about the video clips? Do you remember the videos?

R Yeah especially the beginning because like the video clips something happened because the voice was very low

I Sorry about that

R Hear it but its useful how other parents managed and coped with it then how to now translate it

I Yeah

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

R and also about feelings it's really good.

I And what did you think about that practice time with your child every day? Just that one on one?

R I think it very, very good idea and it develop, develop several things develop emotion in the parents and children as well and also closeness to child and yeah. Better relationship and of course knowledge because by repeating one thing tried to establishing somethings like numbers and comparisons and other things.

I Yeah, great.

R and other things very well to just that I really like to be sensitive about other people about other cultures, traditions that's what I love about this book sharing.

I Ah lovely. Lovely I'm going to write that down. So, I'm just wondering what your feelings are about it being delivered at school? In the, that the book sharing it's in school

R Yes, yeah.

I Not at home. How did you feel about that? The programme, the sessions

R I would prefer it at school because it's proper environment and it's I quite like this school environment to see what the children do with their, how they are learning the environment and also other parents I enjoyed to be at school. Yes.

I Yeah lovely. I'm just wondering what your thoughts are on it being run in a group?

R Together yeah?

I Yes with other parents.

R I think it's very good. I think that parents who feel alienate or for some reason don't feel confident they might find it useful and also boost their confidence and yeah and make new friendship with other also with teachers Compare it with the in several ways

I Lovely.

R Yeah, I think very useful.

I I'm just wondering if you experienced any problems with the book sharing? If there was any problems at all?

R No, not at all. I felt very, very welcome and very I feel that also my our teacher was very sensitive about our differences, cultural difference yeah

I Yeah.

R Yeah, we feel very equalited you know how to say it's good way

I Taking in everybody's differences?

R Yeah.

I Lovely. I'm just wondering who you think would benefit most from the book sharing? Would it be parents, children or the schools? Who you think would get the most out of it?

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

R You mean parents who kind of balance?

I No, no I'm just wondering who you feel who benefits the most the children, the parents or the school?

R I think all of them might benefit yeah. The main I think that especially child would be more closer relationship to each other, to parents, to their teacher be better I think that's good for child.

I Yeah.

R For child development as well

I Yeah that's lovely.

R I think children would be most benefit if I must say who's most

I So what sorts of benefits do you think that really benefits would you say it was the child development?

R Yes.

I Or the relationship between the child and parent?

R Yeah.

I Or maybe the home school links?

R Oh yeah all of them and also behaviour of how to understand themselves and how to understand their own feelings, emotion and that sometimes they could feel bad or you know other ways.

I Yes.

R And how to deal with this

I Yes.

R And also improve their knowledge just general knowledge and I think feel good safe and comfortable with at school because some children could feel shy at school so it's a good when they have all parents among themselves so

I It makes them feel more comfortable?

R It's support with parents so that's good.

I Thank you ■■■ is there anything you want to add? Any questions or comments?

R No I really enjoy this book sharing and maybe so of books just are slightly up to date the design but everything is fantastic but

I Lovely

R To be more try to you know connect with some problems I think also is good in modern way

I Yes.

R Contemporary. The same, even the same drawing, the same bag to show modern child, I think.

I Ok.

R That a child could more relate to

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

I More updated for a child.

R Yeah correct.

I Ok.

R Which a child could relate that as himself or herself

I Yes.

R So you know

I Thank very much [REDACTED] that's brilliant, thank you.

I – Interviewer

R – Respondent

Xxxxxx – inaudible words

APPENDIX P

Excerpt of parent interview transcription

(Online study)

505

I: How have you found the book sharing programme?

P: Yeah good, we've enjoyed it, there's been some nice tips in there. Erm, yes, she's definitely, er, benefited from it, in the respect that she'll pick books up herself now, erm and you know, read them like we've been reading them. So not necessarily the words but telling the stories through the pictures herself to her toys, which I think is definitely a, an improvement.

I: Aw lovely, thank you for that. And did you complete the whole programme?

P: Yeah.

I: Did you experience any problems at all, which made it difficult for you to continue the programme?

P: Err, no, only, only on the odd occasion where the book wasn't really stimulating enough. You know I think there was a couple of books that didn't really interest her, so they were more difficult. Because to read it every day, it was a little bit, you know to engage her in something that I knew she wasn't really that bothered about, was quite, quite difficult. But erm, but no, other than that, it was all fine.

I: Ok, Ok. Er, and what did you like most about the book sharing programme?

P: ...Erm, I think just to, the, the excite, you know she got quite excited really, you know and certainly the last few, the ones about the dogs and she loves dogs and just the development in, in how excited she got with the books. I've not really seen that before.

I: Aw, lovely. And what would you say you liked least about it?

P: Erm...nothing really. Well it was quite, a couple with reading books every day, it's just, you know become part of what we do.

I: Brilliant. And what was the most useful weekly session for you? Do you remember?

P: erm...not really no. I think, erm, oh it's difficult really.

I: Yeah?

P: Yeah, I'm not really sure to be honest.

I: Don't worry, don't worry. Erm, what are your thoughts regarding the course materials? So, like the books, the videos, and the handouts?

P: Yeah, they were all informative, they wasn't difficult to follow and the instructions were very clear. I think it would have been nice to have that interaction with, you know the, the lady teaching us or yourself...

I: Yeah

P: You know, cos as I said, halfway through the programme, I was a little bit like "well where is this going?", because I felt myself, that it was going to develop, it was going to teach me how to teach her how to read.

I: Yeah.

P: So, I was probably, I misunderstood sort of the concept of it a bit, erm, but on saying that, you know, she has enjoyed it. She does enjoy books and I suppose anything like that is helping towards her development.

I: Great, great. What did you think of the videos?

P: Yea, fine, yeah. They were easy to understand and it was nice to have the interaction with the parents, you know, watching what other parents, just for ideas really. Because there were a couple of books, you know, particularly that one we talked about, that I just couldn't think of erm, new things to engage in the conversation with her about it, so it was nice to listen to other parents and then think "oh, I'll do that", "Yeah, I'll say that when it comes to reading it".

I: Yeah. And what about the handouts?

Introducing and Evaluating the ‘Books Together Parenting Programme’

P: Yeah I didn’t take a great deal of notice of the handouts, but I just had them on my knee for a little bit of backup if I got a little bit stuck on, you know that progress of it and getting her...

I: Yeah...

P: So yeah, they were handy. They were just enough information on there to do that, you know. You wouldn’t have been able to do it with a big handout of different information, but I could just have it on my knee and followed it if I needed to, so yeah. They were good.

I: Ah great. And, how accessible were the erm, the videos? Was it OK getting the videos? Could you get them OK?

P: Yeah. Yeah it was fine.

I: And what did you watch them on...

P: That first one, sorry...go on...

I: No, sorry, I interrupted you, that’s really rude...

P: You know the initial trying to get my video to you, we had quite a few problems with that...

I: Yeah, I remember.

P: And I was just like “I haven’t got time for this”, haha...

I: Yeah, yeah, of course.

P: But then after that it was fine. I think [name] did it in the end, to be honest, my husband.

I: Yeah, and how did you watch the videos? Was it, did you watch it on your phone, or a laptop, or...?

P: No, I watched it on a tablet, erm, while I was cooking dinner more often than not.

I: Yeah, yeah. And who do you think would benefit most from a programme like this?

P: I think, er, parents, you know maybe...I don’t like to say young parents, because that doesn’t sound fair, but because we’re all new, you know to, you know at one time we’re all new to it...

I: Yeah...

P: I think perhaps parents who, maybe aren’t spending a lot of time with their children, it certainly a way to get them to engage with, you know, new strategies, I think would always benefit, but I do think you’re right with perhaps with the under privileged children that don’t get that attention erm, at home would definitely benefit from it.

I: Ah brilliant. And, and erm, is there any way that you can see that this programme could be improved?

P: Erm, no, not that I can think of no.

I: OK, Any further comments or questions?

P: No, that’s everything.

I: Aw, thank you so much for being part. We really appreciate it.

P: Welcome.

Key

I: Interviewer

P: Parent

APPENDIX Q

Parent weekly satisfaction survey in online study

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Parent Initials _____

What school does your child attend?

Parent satisfaction survey

The following questions are about what you have done this week.

Q1. Have you shared this week's book with your child this week?

No	A little	Sometimes/Neutral	A little	A lot	Very much
----	----------	-------------------	----------	-------	-----------

Q2. Did your child enjoy/engage in book-sharing this week?

No	A little	Sometimes/Neutral	A little	A lot	Very much
----	----------	-------------------	----------	-------	-----------

Q3. Did you find this week's session useful?

No	A little	Sometimes/Neutral	A little	A lot	Very much
----	----------	-------------------	----------	-------	-----------

Q4. Were the videos clear and understandable?

No	A little	Sometimes/Neutral	A little	A lot	Very much
----	----------	-------------------	----------	-------	-----------

Q5. Were the handouts clear and understandable?

No	A little	Sometimes/Neutral	A little	A lot	Very much
----	----------	-------------------	----------	-------	-----------

Q6. How satisfied were you overall with this week's session?

No	A little	Sometimes/Neutral	A little	A lot	Very much
----	----------	-------------------	----------	-------	-----------

Q7. How many times did you manage to book-share with your child this week?

None	Once or twice	Three or four times	Five or six times	Everyday
------	---------------	---------------------	-------------------	----------

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Q8. What was the most useful part of the session?

Q9. What was the least useful part of the session?

Q10. Is there anything else you would have liked to see include?

APPENDIX R

Parent survey following programme

completion of online study

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Parent Initials _____

Q1. Do you and your child continue to book-share together?

Yes	No
-----	----

If yes, please answer the following questions

Q2. How many times a week do you and your child book-share ?

Once or twice	Three or four times	Five or six times	daily
---------------	---------------------	-------------------	-------

Q3. How much time do you generally spend book-sharing with your child per session?

10 mins or less	20-30 minutes	40-50 mins	Over an hour
-----------------	---------------	------------	--------------

Q4. At what time of day do you and your child generally book-share?

Morning	During the day	Bedtime	Anytime
---------	----------------	---------	---------

Q5. How many of the weekly programme sessions did you complete?

One or two	Three or four	Five or six	All sessions
------------	---------------	-------------	--------------

APPENDIX S

Schedule of Growing Skills

(Language measure)



RHESTR SGILIAU TYFU II SCHEDULE OF GROWING SKILLS II



Ffurflen Gofnod/Record Form

Rhif Achos/Rhif GIC

Enw

Cyfeiriad

Enw a Chyfeiriad Meddyg Teulu

Case / NHS No.

Name

Address

GP Name & Address

Dyddiad Geni

 / /
D M B

Dyddiad Geni Disgwyliedig

 / /
D M B

Date of Birth

 / /
D M Y

Expected Date of Birth

 / /
D M Y

Rhyw Gwryw / Benyw (cylchwch os gwelwch yn dda)

Grŵp ethnig

Dehonglwr (ticiwch os defnyddiwyd un)

Gender Male / Female (please circle)

Ethnic Group

Interpreter (tick if used)

	Asesiad Un Assessment One	Asesiad Dau Assessment Two	Asesiad Tri Assessment Three	Asesiad Pedwar Assessment Four
Aseswyd gan (ticiwch un) Assessed by (please tick one)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lleoliad Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Ymwelydd Iechyd Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Setting <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Health Visitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Lleoliad Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Ymwelydd Iechyd Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Setting <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Health Visitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Lleoliad Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Ymwelydd Iechyd Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Setting <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Health Visitor	<input type="checkbox"/> Lleoliad Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Ymwelydd Iechyd Dechrau'n Deg <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Setting <input type="checkbox"/> Flying Start Health Visitor
Dyddiad Date	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>
Oed Age	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> / <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>
Sylwadau Comments				
Gweithred Action				
Archwiliwr Examiner				

Gall llugopio anghyfreithlon arwain at erlyniad.

Illegal photocopying is theft and may result in prosecution.

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

The Schedule of Growing Skills II – Record Form

3

Screening Dates				
PASSIVE POSTURAL SKILLS				
Supine Position				
1. Head in midline	1			
2. Lifts legs into vertical position and grasps foot (foot regard)	2			
Ventral Suspension				
3. Head in line with body; hips semi-extended	1			
4. Head above line of body; hips and shoulders extended	2			
Pull to Sit				
5. Head lag on pulling, when body vertical; head held momentarily erect before falling forwards	1			
6. Little or no head lag	2			
7. Braces shoulders and pulls self up	3			
Sitting Position (supported by adult)				
8. Back curved	1			
9. Back straight	2			
PASSIVE POSTURAL SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
ACTIVE POSTURAL SKILLS				
Prone Position				
10. Head sideways, resting on cheeks, buttocks high with knees flexed under abdomen, arms close to chest with elbows flexed.	1			
11. Lifts head momentarily, buttocks high	2			
12. Holds up head and upper chest on forearms, with buttocks flat	3			
13. Supports weight on flattened palms and extended arms	4			
14. Gets into crawling position	5			
Sitting Position (unsupported)				
15. Sits alone momentarily without support	1			
16. Sits alone for prolonged periods (at least to the count of 10)	2			
17. Gets into sitting position from either prone or supine	3			
Standing				
18. Held standing, bears some weight on feet	1			
19. Held standing, takes full weight on feet	2			
20. Stands holding on	3			
21. Pulls self to stand	4			
ACTIVE POSTURAL SKILLS SCORE				

KEY

- Stimulus material needed for this item.
- ① This item contains a cognitive element.
- Q Use when quality of performance is questioned.
- Still score item.

Screening Dates				
LOCOMOTOR SKILLS				
Movement and Balance				
22. Rolls and squirms to move about	1			
23. Attempts to crawl, creep or shuffle	2			
24. Walks with hands held, taking full weight on feet	3			
25. Walks around furniture (or pushing wheeled toy)	4			
26. Walks alone, feet wide apart, arms up for balance	5			
27. Walks well, feet only slightly apart, arms up for balance	6			
28. Picks up objects from floor without falling	7			
29. Runs confidently, stopping and starting with care and avoiding obstacles	8			
30. Jumps taking both feet off the ground	9			
31. Walks tiptoe	10			
32. Runs tiptoe	11			
33. Hops on one foot for 3 steps	12			
34. Heel-to-toe walking forwards (for a minimum of 4 steps)	13			
35. Stands on each foot separately for a count of 8 seconds	14			
Stairs				
36. Crawls upstairs	1			
37. Walks upstairs with hand held, two feet to a step	2			
38. Walks up and down stairs confidently, two feet to a step	3			
39. Walks alone upstairs (with alternating feet) and downstairs (two feet to a step)	4			
40. Walks alone upstairs and downstairs – one foot per step (adult fashion)	5			
41. Runs upstairs	6			
LOCOMOTOR SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
MANIPULATIVE SKILLS				
Hand Skills				
42. Hands closed and thumb turned in	1			
43. Hand regard and finger play	2			
44. Clasps hands and presses palms together	3			
45. ■ Palmer grasp	4			
46. ■ Passes toys from one hand to another	5			
47. ■ Holds two cubes – one in each hand, bringing them together	6			
48. ■ Inferior pincer grasp	7			
49. ■ Neat pincer grasp	8			
50. ■ Throws toys to the floor deliberately (casting)	9			
51. ■ Turns page of a book, several at a time	10			
52. ■ Turns pages of a book, one at a time	11			
53. ■ Puts 10 pegs into the cup in 30 seconds	12			
54. ■ Puts 8 pegs into the pegboard in 30 seconds	13			

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(continued on page 5)

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

The Schedule of Growing Skills II – Record Form

5

Screening Dates				
MANIPULATIVE SKILLS (CONT)				
Bricks				
55	■ Tower of 2 bricks	1		
56	■ Tower of 3 bricks	2		
57	■ Tower of 4 to 6 bricks	3		
58	■ Tower of 7+ bricks	4		
59	■ Imitates bridge	5		
60	■ Builds 3 steps with 6 bricks after demonstration	6		
Drawing				
61	■ To and fro scribbles	1		
62	■ Circular scribbles	2		
63	■ Imitates vertical and/or horizontal line	3		
64	■ Imitates circle	4		
65	■ Imitates cross	5		
66	■ Imitates square	6		
Draw-a-Person Test				
67	■ Child draws head and one other part	1		
68	■ Child draws head, legs and arms (two)	2		
69	■ Child draws face, trunk, legs, arms	3		
MANIPULATIVE SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
VISUAL SKILLS				
Visual Function				
70	■ Turns towards diffuse light	1		
71	■ Briefly fixates on pom-pom at 30 cm	2		
72	■ Follows dangling object through 90°	3		
73	■ Follows dangling object through 180°	4		
74	■ Converges eyes on approaching object	5		
75	■ Finger points accurately at small object	6		
Visual Comprehension				
76	■ Watches falling toy, but does not look for it on the ground (no object permanence)	1		
77	■ Looks towards the correct place for fallen toy (object permanence)	2		
78	■ Searches for the lost toy	3		
79	■ Watches movements for people at distance or out of window with interest	4		
80	■ Finger points to distant objects	5		
81	■ Shows interest in pictures	6		
82	■ Recognizes details of Picture Book	7		
83	■ Completes shape formboard	8		
84	■ Completes fish formboard	9		
85	■ Recognizes minute details of the picture	10		
86	■ Matches 2 colours	11		
87	■ Matches 4 colours	12		
88	■ Matches all 10 colour cards	13		
89	■ Cooperates with linear chart vision test (6 metres)	14		
VISUAL SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
HEARING AND LANGUAGE SKILLS				
Hearing Function				
90	Startled by sudden noise	1		
91	Responds to voice	2		
92	Looks towards sound of parent's voice	3		
Comprehension of Language				
93	Turns head towards sound source	1		
94	Is attentive to everyday sounds	2		
95	Understands 'no'/'bye-bye'	3		
96	Recognizes own name	4		
97	Shows understanding of names of familiar objects or people	5		
98	■ Can select 2 out of 4 objects	6		
99	Can point to 2 named body parts (e.g. nose and hands)	7		
100	■ Can point to doll's body parts (e.g. eyes and tummy)	8		
101	■ Follows a two-step command	9		
102	■ Shows understanding of verbs, using action pictures	10		
103	■ Shows understanding of functions of objects, using pictures	11		
104	■ Shows understanding of prepositions	12		
105	■ Shows understanding of size adjectives	13		
106	■ Shows understanding of negatives	14		
107	■ Follows a command with two instructions	15		
108	■ Understands complicated questions	16		
109	■ Follows a command with three instructions	17		
110	■ Understands negatives in complex sentence statements	18		
HEARING AND LANGUAGE SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS				
Vocalization				
111	Makes occasional grunting sounds	1		
112	Vocalizes when pleased	2		
113	Laughs, chuckles and squeals in play	3		
114	Babbles continually and tunefully	4		
115	Imitates adults, playful sounds (coughs, 'brrr', smacks lips)	5		
Expressive Language				
116	Uses incessant jargon containing vowels and many consonants	1		
117	Uses one word with meaning	2		
118	Communicates by mixed gesture and vocalization	3		
119	Uses several words with meaning (at least 4)	4		
120	Uses more than 7 words with meaning	5		
121	Attempts to repeat words when used by others	6		

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Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

The Schedule of Growing Skills II – Record Form

7

Screening Dates				
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS (CONT)				
122. Puts 2 or more words together to form simple sentences	7			
123. Names familiar objects and pictures	8			
124. Speech usually understood by mother	9			
125. Uses question words (e.g. what, where?) and uses 2 personal pronouns (e.g. me, you)	10			
126. Able to carry on simple conversations and describe events	11			
127. Knows several nursery rhymes or pop songs or commercials	12			
128. Can give fuzzy account of recent events	13			
129. Speech fluent and clear	14			
130. ■ Can produce a sentence of 5 or more words	15			
131. ■ Can describe a sequence of events	16			
132. ■ Can give an explanation of events	17			
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
INTERACTIVE SOCIAL SKILLS				
Social Behaviour				
133. Smiles	1			
134. Responds to friendly handling	2			
135. Enjoys bathing and caring routines	3			
136. ■ Takes everything to mouth (mouthing)	4			
137. Shows annoyance when frustrated	5			
138. Plays clapping or waves 'bye-bye'	6			
139. Explores objects in immediate surroundings	7			
140. Imitates everyday activities	8			
141. Rebellious behaviour	9			
142. Plays with other children but will not share toys	10			
143. Shares toys	11			
144. Shows concern for siblings and playmates	12			
145. Actively helps siblings and playmates	13			
146. Chooses best friend	14			
Play				
147. ■ Shakes rattle	1			
148. ■ Finds toy that is partially, but not wholly, hidden	2			
149. ■ Quickly finds hidden toy	3			
150. ■ Explores properties and possibilities of toys and other objects with interest	4			
151. Plays contentedly alone or near familiar person	5			
152. Plays skilfully	6			
153. ■ Kicks a small ball	7			
154. ■ Throws small ball over-arm	8			
155. ■ Takes turns in play	9			
156. Engages in cooperative and imaginative play, observing rules	10			
INTERACTIVE SOCIAL SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
SELF-CARE SOCIAL SKILLS				
Feeding				
157. Puts hand up to bottle when feeding	1			
158. Grabs spoon	2			
159. Holds, bites and chews finger food	3			
160. Drinks from a feeder cup with assistance	4			
161. Holds spoon but does not feed	5			
162. Holds spoon and brings it to mouth but cannot prevent it turning over	6			
163. Holds cup with both hands and drinks without too much spilling	7			
164. Holds spoon and gets food safely to mouth	8			
165. Lifts cup with one hand, drinks and replaces it	9			
166. Eats skilfully with spoon	10			
167. Eats skilfully with fork and spoon	11			
168. Eats with fork and knife or hands/chopsticks (with a little help only)	12			
169. Copes with entire meal unaided	13			
Toileting and Dressing Skills				
170. Indicates wet or soiled pants by crying or wriggling	1			
171. Anticipates toilet needs by restlessness or vocalization	2			
172. Dry during the day	3			
173. Vocalization and/or attends toilet needs in reasonable time	4			
174. Usually dry at nights (understands concept)	5			
175. Washes hands	6			
176. Washes and dries hands, and attempts to brush teeth	7			
177. Washes and dries face and hands completely	8			
178. Dresses and undresses alone, excluding fastenings	9			
179. Dresses and undresses alone, including buttons and fastenings	10			
SELF-CARE SOCIAL SKILLS SCORE				

Screening Dates				
COGNITIVE SKILLS SCORE				
ADDITIONAL SKILLS				
Comprehension				
180. ■ Names all 4 colours (blue, red, green and yellow)	1			
181. ■ Names 3 shapes (square, circle and triangle)	1			
Play				
182. Accesses play equipment independently	1			
183. Clears away play equipment after use	1			
184. ■ Perseveres with challenging activities	1			
185. Respects the property of others	1			
Social Skills				
186. Wipes nose	1			
187. Puts shoes on correct feet	1			
ADDITIONAL SKILLS SCORE				

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Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

The Schedule of Growing Skills II – Record Form

7

Screening Dates					
SPEECH AND LANGUAGE SKILLS (CONT)					
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179. Dresses and undresses alone, including buttons and fastenings	10				
SELF-CARE SOCIAL SKILLS SCORE					

Screening Dates					
COGNITIVE SKILLS SCORE					
ADDITIONAL SKILLS					
Comprehension					
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181. ■ Names 3 shapes (square, circle and triangle)	1				
Play					
182. Accesses play equipment independently	1				
183. Clears away play equipment after use	1				
184. ■ Perseveres with challenging activities	1				
185. Respects the property of others	1				
Social Skills					
186. Wipes nose	1				
187. Puts shoes on correct feet	1				
ADDITIONAL SKILLS SCORE					

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Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

SCHEDULE OF GROWING SKILLS II**Profile Form**
 Child's name:(Surname).....
 (Forenames)

 Address:

 Date of Birth: Age:
 Case/NHS no.

Examined by:.....

Title:.....

 On:/...../.....
 Day Month Year

At: (name of clinic)

Signature:

I recommend the following action:

 a) To be seen in ☐ months for recall
☐ months for next routine examination

b) Referral to:

Age (months)	Skill Areas										Age (months)
	Passive Posture	Active Posture	Locomotor	Manipulative	Visual	Hearing & Language	Speech & Language	Interactive Social	Self-Care Social	Cognitive	
60 mths			20 19	28 27	20	21 20	22 21	24	23 22 21	34 33 32	60 mths
48 mths			18 17	26 25 24	19	19 18	20 19	23	20 19 18	31 30 29 28	48 mths
36 mths			16 15	23 22 21	18 17	17 16	18 17	22 21 20	17 16	27 26 25 24	36 mths
30 mths			14 13	20 19 18	16	15 14	16 15	19 18	15 14	23 22 21 20	30 mths
24 mths			12 11 10	17 16 15	15 14	13 12	14 13 12	17 16	13 12 11	19 18 17 16	24 mths
18 mths			9 8 7	14 13 12	13	11 10	11	15 14	10 9 8	15 14 13 12	18 mths
15 mths			6 5	11 10	12	9	10 9 8	13 12 11	7 6	11 10 9	15 mths
12 mths		12	4 3	9 8	11 10	8 7	7 6	10 9 8	5 4	8 7 6	12 mths
10 mths		11 10	2 1	7	9	6	5	7	3	5 4	10 mths
8 mths		9 8 7		6	8	5	4	6	2	3 2	8 mths
6 mths	9 8 7	6 5 4		5 4	7 6	4 3	3	5 4	1	1	6 mths
3 mths	6 5 4	3		3 2	5 4	2	2	3 2			3 mths
1 mth	3 2 1	2		1	3 2		1	1			1 mth
0 mths		1			1	1					0 mths
Skill areas	Passive Posture	Active Posture	Locomotor	Manipulative	Visual	Hearing & Language	Speech & Language	Interactive Social	Self-Care Social	Cognitive	
*Quality											

*Use a "Q" to indicate concern over quality of performance

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APPENDIX T

Warwick-Edinburgh Well -being Scale

Introducing and Evaluating the 'Books Together Parenting Programme'

Date: Time-point (circle): Baseline F1, F2

Family ID: School name/ID:

**The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale
(WEMWBS)**

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks

STATEMENTS	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been feeling interested in other people					
I've had energy to spare					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					
I've been feeling good about myself					
I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been feeling confident					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					
I've been feeling loved					
I've been interested in new things					
I've been feeling cheerful					

Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS)
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APPENDIX U

Connors Abbreviated Parent/teacher Questionnaire

Conners' Parent Rating Scale-Revised (S)

by C. Keith Conners, Ph.D.

Child's ID: _____ Gender: **M** **F**
(Circle One)

Birthdate: ____/____/____ Age: ____ School Grade: ____
Month Day Year

Parent's ID: _____ Today's Date: ____/____/____
Month Day Year

Instructions: Below are a number of common problems that children have. Please rate each item according to your child's behavior in the last month. For each item, ask yourself, "How much of a problem has this been in the last month?", and circle the best answer for each one. If none, not at all, seldom, or very infrequently, you would circle 0. If very much true, or it occurs very often or frequently, you would circle 3. You would circle 1 or 2 for ratings in between. Please respond to each item.

	NOT TRUE AT ALL (Never, Seldom)	JUST A LITTLE TRUE (Occasionally)	PRETTY MUCH TRUE (Often, Quite a Bit)	VERY MUCH TRUE (Very Often, Very Frequent)
1. Inattentive, easily distracted	0	1	2	3
2. Angry and resentful	0	1	2	3
3. Difficulty doing or completing homework	0	1	2	3
4. Is always "on the go" or acts as if driven by a motor	0	1	2	3
5. Short attention span	0	1	2	3
6. Argues with adults	0	1	2	3
7. Fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat	0	1	2	3
8. Fails to complete assignments	0	1	2	3
9. Hard to control in malls or while grocery shopping	0	1	2	3
10. Messy or disorganized at home or school	0	1	2	3
11. Loses temper	0	1	2	3
12. Needs close supervision to get through assignments	0	1	2	3
13. Only attends if it is something he/she is very interested in	0	1	2	3
14. Runs about or climbs excessively in situations where it is inappropriate ..	0	1	2	3
15. Distractibility or attention span a problem	0	1	2	3
16. Irritable	0	1	2	3
17. Avoids, expresses reluctance about, or has difficulties engaging in tasks that require sustained mental effort (such as schoolwork or homework) .	0	1	2	3
18. Restless in the "squirmy" sense	0	1	2	3
19. Gets distracted when given instructions to do something	0	1	2	3
20. Actively defies or refuses to comply with adults' requests	0	1	2	3
21. Has trouble concentrating in class	0	1	2	3
22. Has difficulty waiting in lines or awaiting turn in games or group situations	0	1	2	3
23. Leaves seat in classroom or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected	0	1	2	3
24. Deliberately does things that annoy other people	0	1	2	3
25. Does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)	0	1	2	3
26. Has difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly	0	1	2	3
27. Easily frustrated in efforts	0	1	2	3



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In Canada, 3770 Victoria Park Ave., Toronto, ON M2H 3M6, 1-800-268-6011, 1-416-492-2627, Fax 1-416-492-3343.

APPENDIX V

Question Guide for Parent/School Interviews Following School- Based Programme Delivery

Follow-up Interview Questions for Parents and Staff

1. How have you found the Book Sharing programme?
2. What has been the most beneficial element of the Book Sharing programme for you?
3. Have you experienced any challenges during the Book Sharing programme?
4. Which weekly session did you find most useful?
5. What are your thoughts about the course materials? (Books, videos, and handouts)
6. Who do you think would benefit from a programme like Book Sharing?
7. Can you think of any way the programme could be improved, or have any further comments or questions?

APPENDIX W

Question Guide for Parents Following Online Programme Delivery

Follow-up interview questions for parents

1. 'How have you found the Book-Sharing programme?'
2. 'How much of the programme did you complete?'
3. 'Did you experience any problems that made it difficult for you to complete the programme?'
4. 'What did you like most about the programme?'
5. 'What did you like least about the programme?'
6. 'Which weekly session did you find most useful?'
7. 'What are your thoughts about the course materials?' (Books, videos and handouts)
8. 'How accessible was the online programme content and what electronic device did you use to access the material?'
9. 'Who do you think would most benefit from the Book-Sharing programme?'
10. 'Can you think of any way the programme could be improved?'