

**SUMMARY OF AN EVALUATION OF THE SCHOOL AND FAMILY LINKS PROGRAMME
MA DISSERTATION 1996
OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY
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The School and Family Links Programme, by means of a whole-school approach, aims in the long term to develop confidence, responsibility and empathy, and in the short term to prevent bullying and anti-social behaviour, foster a positive atmosphere in the classroom and equip children with prosocial and assertiveness skills as well as nurturing attitudes. A course is also run for parents each week within the school, which seeks to promote the content and method of the Schools' Programme both on a cognitive level (i.e. teaching positive parenting skills) and an affective level (i.e. sharing emotional responses).

In January 1995 a pilot scheme was introduced into WF School, Oxford, for 5-to-8-year-olds. All the school staff; including lunch-time supervisors, received two days training so that the ethos, values and language could be applied continuously, specific activities taking place during a weekly two-hour 'Special Time'. In the following autumn term I began my evaluation of the School and Family Links Programme. Many positive testimonials had been expressed by parents, teachers and children. However, I wanted to measure quantitatively the effectiveness of the Programme in achieving its own specific objectives. Because of the limited time and numbers of children available, I focused upon the following two objectives:

1. The development of prosocial skills, which involves the qualities of altruism and empathy.
2. The development of assertiveness skills, which involves the use of appropriate language as well as giving evidence as to the children's level of self-esteem.

I then devised twenty-one questions which presented the child with various emotive situations. All but one of these questions placed the children and their peers within the situation, and I asked them to tell me what they thought they would do. Sixteen of the questions involved school-based situations and sought to establish whether the child knew what to do, in terms of choosing to use the appropriate assertive and prosocial skills. The five questions set outside school focused on the use of assertiveness skills. The last seven questions were facilitated by drawings, to maintain the child's concentration towards the end of the questionnaire, and only one of these was based solely upon the child's interpretation of the events shown within the drawing. Having asked a question, I would then explain the alternative responses (excluding those which were abusive), scoring their answers according to the following four categories: assertive=3 (confronting the person responsible appropriately), passive constructive=2 (devolving responsibility to another), passive unconstructive=1 (doing nothing) and aggressive=0 (being abusive or destructive). By this means I gained an overall score for each child's prosocial and assertiveness skills.

I was able to use the questionnaire with thirty children at WF School during the autumn term 1995, and then again six months later during the summer term 1996. By comparing the results for each child I would be able to ascertain whether any changes had occurred in their prosocial and assertiveness skills during this period. In order to eliminate changes brought about by the children's ordinary development, I was able to match each child in WF School, with regard to age, sex and gender, with a child in a control school, PF. The two schools were also matched, being within similarly economically disadvantaged areas with over 30% of their children receiving free school meals. In addition they both had positive and caring staffs, supportive head teachers, and had each received guidance from the LEA concerning behaviour management strategies. I asked the same questions, both before and after the six-month period, to the thirty matched children in PF School, scoring them in the same manner as those in WF School. A comparison of the *before* and *after* scores from each school would reveal any changes in the children's prosocial and assertiveness skills over the duration of the study.

A comparison of the scores between the two schools could then be attributed to the likely effects of the Schools and Family Links Programme.

The scatter graphs of the total scores from each school show that there is less of a spread of results in the study school, WF, compared with that of the control school, PF (Figure 1). The Spearman rank correlation coefficient shows that the scores are higher (higher intercept) and have improved more (larger slope) in WF School. This is attributable to the four pupils with low before scores (less than 25) at PF School. Ideally, in addition to the matched parameters previously described, the *before* scores should be matched to give equal means. This was not possible in this short study since all data was evaluated at the conclusion of the study. Application of the Wilcoxon Signed Rank test showed there to be a significant difference in the before scores of the schools ($p=0.018$), indicating a significantly higher score at WF School (Table 1). Nevertheless, a comparison of the before and after scores indicated a more significant increase at WF School ($p=0.0004$) compared to PF School ($p=0.017$). (The lower the value of p the more significant the difference between the scores).

The same test was used to ascertain whether there was any difference in the total mean scores for questions relating to situations outside of school (questions 1 to 5) compared to those within school (questions 6 to 21). There was a significant difference in the *before* and *after* scores for questions 1 to 5 for WF School only ($p=0.0039$). For questions 6 to 21, there was a significant improvement in both schools. However, for PF School $p=0.0184$ compared to WF School where $p=0.0071$. These data suggest that the children can apply their new skills appropriately in different situations and have, therefore, internalised the basic concepts of the Programme.

The study also shows that there is no significant difference between the test scores of the children in the different age groups (5/6, 6/7 and 7/8 years). However, with such small numbers involved, ten in each category, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions. The only question which involves the interpretation of a drawing (question 14) scored significantly lower in WF School both before ($p=0.0015$) and after ($p=0.0018$) the study.

No significant difference was seen in the PF School scores either before or after the study. Overall the inclusion of this question can be seen to have adversely affected the results of WF School. This question, as it is the only one which does not directly involve the child to act within the situation presented, may not give an accurate indication of their basic understanding and may merely reflect that the children at PF School are better at interpreting visual rather than verbal questions. It was not possible to evaluate the effects of the parenting course at WF School because four parents of the thirty children attended prior to the commencement of the study. This number is understandable at the commencement of a pilot scheme.

This evaluation has demonstrated the effectiveness of the School and Family Links Programme in improving the child's knowledge of prosocial and assertiveness skills and when to use them appropriately. Of particular significance is the children's ability to apply their skills effectively outside school. The situations presented in the questionnaire were emotive; such as having a person walk off with a football they were playing with, or finding a favourite toy damaged by a friend, and the children at WF School were better equipped to deal with these situations assertively and express their feelings appropriately. The success of this Programme lies not only in its cognitive content, which involves developing the appropriate language of such topics as Personal Power and Choices and Consequences, but also in its affective content. This consists of giving the children language to express their feelings, and the opportunity to use this language within a supportive school environment. For example, during the weekly two-hour 'Special

Time', which can begin with all the class sitting round together in a circle, the teacher may introduce a teddy which was given to him/her as a child by a relative and which now gives them 'Warm Fuzzy' feelings. As the teddy is passed around each child expresses a time when they also had such feelings. The exercise is then repeated with an object which feels cold and prickly to the touch, and the children then describe situations when they had 'Cold Prickly' feelings.

I found the children at WF School to be more reflective and expressive when answering my questions and they therefore individually took longer than those at PF School. Unfortunately this is not shown in these results, as I focused upon the child's proposed actions. The teachers at WF School not only teach the language and activities of the Programme, but also model positive, nurturing behaviour. The whole-school approach also facilitates the consistent and constant application of the Programme's principles and practice, reinforcing the 'Special Time' activities. This evaluation therefore shows the success not only of the Programme content but the methods used.

This research is described in detail in a thesis entitled 'An evaluation of the effectiveness of the School and Family Links Programme. M.A. in Education at Oxford Brookes University, 1996. Copyright M. Layton.

TABLE 1 STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF DATA ON ALL 60 CHILDREN

ANALYSIS	SCHOOL	
	PF	WF
QUESTIONS 1-21	Before	Before
means(sd)	35.26(10.2)	39.13(7.4)
	p=0.017*	p=0.0004*
	After	After
means(sd)	39.23(11.1)	44.13(6.0)
QUESTIONS 1-5	Before	Before
means(sd)	8.06(2.89)	8.43(3.07)
	p=0.718	p=0.0039*
	After	After
means(sd)	8.5(3.06)	10.23(2.16)
QUESTIONS 6-21	Before	Before
means(sd)	27.17(8.35)	31.03(6.02)
	p=0.0184*	p=0.0071*
	After	After
mean(sd)	30.73(8.83)	33.93(5.02)

sd=standard deviation

*=significant at the 95% level (p<0.05)

FIGURE 1.
SCATTER PLOTS OF THE TOTAL SCORES FROM BOTH SCHOOLS
BEFORE AND AFTER THE PROGRAMME

